“AND HELL'S COMING WITH ME”:
WYATT EARP ENCOUNTERS
THE COLD WAR

by
David Drysdale
B.A., University of Victoria, 2003

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 2006

© David Drysdale, 2006
NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.
ABSTRACT

Wyatt Earp has been depicted in print and on film numerous times since his most infamous exploits in Dodge City, Kansas and Tombstone, Arizona in the late nineteenth century. However, such depictions are hardly uniform. Rather, Wyatt Earp has proven to be a particularly mercurial figure: at times, he is a noble paragon of virtue, and others, a corrupt authoritarian. This thesis analyzes depictions of Wyatt Earp in five Cold War films—My Darling Clementine (1946), Gunfight at the O.K. Corral (1957), Hour of the Gun (1967), Doc (1971), and Tombstone (1993)—in terms of their shifting depictions of Wyatt Earp, arguing that Earp serves as a figure through which American audiences are able to deal with particular historical anxieties borne out their nation’s foreign policy with regard to the Cold War.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract  
Table of Contents  
Acknowledgment  
Chapter One  
Chapter Two  
Chapter Three  
Chapter Four  
Chapter Five  
Conclusion  
Works Cited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;If Everything Isn't Black and White, I Say 'Why the Hell Not?'&quot;: Theorizing the Western</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Significance of Wyatt Earp in American History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Dawn: My Darling Clementine, Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, and the Anxiety of Influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Indochina was Dodge City&quot;: Hour of the Gun, Doc, and the Demoralization of Wyatt Earp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Last Charge of Wyatt Earp and His Immortals&quot;: Tombstone, Popular Memory, and the New World Order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To satisfactorily list every person who assisted in the development of this thesis would be an undertaking at least as considerable as the project itself. In short, I would like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for their guidance, support, and infinite patience.
1. "If Everything Isn't Black and White, I Say 'Why the Hell Not?'": Theorizing the Western

On August 12 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner presented his paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” at a session of the American Historical Association in Chicago, at the World Columbian Exhibition. In his paper Turner articulated his now-famous “frontier thesis”: the idea that the frontier experience is what defined America and Americans. According to Turner, the frontier was the space at which the European colonist became an American. Turner argued, “the peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people . . . developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic conditions of the frontier and into the complexity of city life” (2). For Turner, the American character was created by “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of the American settlement westward” (2). The frontier experience, according to Turner, is peculiar to America, which is set apart from Europe by the virtues the frontier instills in its people. America, Turner argued, was continually reborn at the line where “civilization” met “savagery”; the frontier was a crucible in which the Americans and their nation were forged time and time again.

But the Columbian Exhibition is not significant to scholars for Turner’s presentation alone, as influential as it has been. For, while Turner was ruminating on the American frontier experience, elsewhere in Chicago equally significant cultural events were taking place. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, replete with
daring rescues, runaway stagecoaches, and fancy gunplay, presented a far more romantic vision of the West than Turner's paper suggested. Bill Cody's presentation, as mythological as it may have been, has become ingrained in American culture as the epitome of the "Wild West." Meanwhile, other visitors to the Exhibition turned out to see Thomas Edison demonstrate his new invention, the Kinetoscope. With Edison's invention, "moving pictures" became a viable medium of information exchange.

Neither Turner, Cody, nor Edison could have realized it, but the World Columbian Exhibition presented a unique convergence of events that would influence the way Americans would view their past and themselves for generations to come. Indeed, the chance intersection of these events foreshadowed the emergence of a cultural phenomenon that would develop into a particularly American set of myths: the Western film. The Western would borrow Turner's conceptions of the West and American identity and fuse them with the aesthetics of Cody, and then transmit this combination through Edison's new medium, creating a film genre that American audiences could use, if unconsciously, to examine their own historical and contemporary culture.

Since the time of Turner, Cody, and Edison, the Western film has developed into one of the most enduring and popular genres in American cinema. Only ten years elapsed between Edison's Kinetoscope demonstration and the production of Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, considered by some to be the first true Western film (Wright 5). Westerns have been a part of American film culture ever
since. Though the popularity of the genre has waxed and waned, western films have never vanished completely; indeed, it seems as though whenever scholars and critics begin to draft elegies for the genre, the Western immediately makes a resurgence. For example, Anthony Lejeune's 1989 lamentation that the number of Westerns appearing on screen was dwindling and the few that did appear "[possessed] qualities incompatible with the traditional form" (23) was followed by *Dances with Wolves*, (1990), a major box office success and the first Western to win the Academy Award for Best Picture since *Cimarron* (1931). Only two years later, Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* repeated the feat. Similarly, in 2004 Gary Hoppenstand wrote in *The Journal of Popular Culture* that the Western was all but dead and that filmmakers had to "trick" audiences into seeing Western films by fusing the genre with another (3). Hoppenstand's comments were followed by the premiere of the HBO series *Deadwood*, which became an instant popular and critical success in spite of its clear generic alignment, as well as the film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which received numerous accolades as well as eight Academy Award nominations.

The Western's enduring popularity and significance in American culture can be attributed to its role as a unique American myth. Various scholars, including Slotkin, Wright, and Parks have commented in great detail on the Western's mythic status and, while their arguments are certainly enlightening and valid, their analyses miss the polysemic nature of the genre, which is a major contributor to its success. Indeed, while the Western is a mythic genre, it is not through this alone that the genre maintains its relevance. Rather, it is through the combination of the Western's
role as a foundation myth of the United States and its polysemic encounter with
American history that the Western survives. The Western addresses American birth
and growth but does not do so in a way that is necessarily triumphal or repentant.
Instead the Western acts as what Newcomb and Hirsch have referred to as a
“cultural forum” in which a variety of points of view are expressed. The cultural
forum model is complemented by the Western’s role as a “bad faith” narrative, as
described by Forrest G. Robinson in his essay “The New Historicism and the Old
West.”1 The Western does not offer a solitary vision of America’s past or future.
Instead, the genre serves as a liminal space in which its apparently progressive
historical narrative is tempered by a subtextual acknowledgment of anxiety-
inducing contemporary circumstances.

Analyzing what is meant by “the Western as myth” can be problematic.
Traditionally, scholars of the Western have focused on a concept of myth that
emphasizes the Western’s status as a constructed narrative that communicates some
meaning to society. Rita Parks has argued that a “myth . . . refers to . . . a metaphoric
depiction of human experience” (14). According to Parks, myth serves to articulate
certain ideas and concepts that are beyond the ability of standard human language
to address. Consequently, mythical discourses rely on “archetypal elements—

1 Robinson’s term is similar to Sartre’s concept of mauvaise foi in that both involve
self-deception. However, Sartre’s bad faith supposes that the subject conceives him
or herself as an object in order to justify certain attitudes and actions. For Sartre,
someone engages in bad faith in order to transfer guilt onto some supposedly
uncontrollable aspect of the character; in Robinson, the “bad faith narrative” is also a
means of comfort but is rather faith in a positive quality of the society at large rather
than a controlling component to one’s personality.
patterns of character, action, or structure that have recurred in verbal and visual storytelling since ancient times" (14). The "archetypal elements" contain a meaning beyond what they literally depict and translate abstract experiences or thoughts that are difficult to clearly express into concepts that are more readily understandable and communicable for a society and its members.

Parks' concept of myth as a means of communicating within a society is similar to the approach adopted by Will Wright in *Six Guns and Society.* Wright argues that myths are simply "communication[s] from a society to its members" (16). Wright emphasizes that myths, like any other language, must necessarily have rules of grammar and diction in order to be understood. The rules roughly correspond to the archetypes referred to by Parks. The myth, for Wright, communicates "the social concepts and attitudes determined by the history and institutions of a society" (16). Thus, the myth is a means of integration, communicating a socializing message that contributes to the development of a more ordered and unified society.

This idea is articulated and modified by Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation.* Slotkin agrees with Wright's suggestion that myths serve as socializing agents, arguing that myths symbolize "the society's ideology" and "[dramatize] its moral consciousness" (5). For Slotkin, as for Wright, myth serves a hegemonic purpose as a means to disseminate social ideology. However, Slotkin rejects Parks' notion of

---

2 Wright's approach is largely based on the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. For a discussion of Wright's approach in relation to Levi-Strauss' work, see the appendix of *Six Guns and Society.*
myth being based on universal archetypes. Rather, Slotkin suggests that the development of a particular society's myth is entirely based on that society's history: myth is shaped by "historical contingencies rather than archetypes generated by either 'the nature of things' or 'the nature of language'" (8). Though he rejects the notion of any monomythical archetypes that arose from "human nature," Slotkin does recognize that mythmaking is an organic process within a society, through which a given society develops its own language of myth. Thus, like Parks and Wright, Slotkin essentially argues that myth functions as an abstract form of communication that bears special significance for a society. Slotkin writes that "through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, 'icons,' 'keywords,' or historical clichés" (5). These icons and clichés are roughly analogous to Parks' archetypes, though derived from a different source.

Westerns are able to fit this role as a cultural carrier of myth by virtue of their nature as popular generic texts. In contemporary North American society, popular genre texts, whether the Western, the space opera, or the Harlequin-style romance, seem to be the texts that exemplify the qualities of myth as suggested by Slotkin, Wright, and Parks. As John Cawelti argues in *The Six-Gun Mystique*, "a popular form, like the Western, may encompass a number of standard plots. Indeed, one important reason for the continued use of a formula is its very ability to change and develop in response to the changing interests of audiences" (52). Cawelti argues
that due to the heterogeneous nature of contemporary cultures, the role of primary
distributor of social thought and values has fallen to the mass media (59).
Furthermore, Cawelti suggests, formulaic expressions of mass media—like the
Western film—play a particularly essential role in the mass media:

"Formula stories seem to be the one way in which the individuals in a
culture act out certain unconscious or repressed needs, or express in an
overt and symbolic fashion certain latent motives which they then
must give expression to, but cannot face openly." (60)

The Western film is an appropriate example of Cawelti’s formula story. The
Western, as most generic “formula texts,” is often analyzed in terms of the strict
formulas to which they adhere. Many scholars have examined the Western in terms
of these structures. In his study of the most popular Western films released between
1950 and 1970, Will Wright, for example, has identified several strict Western plot
structures, including “the classical plot,” “the professional plot,” and “the
transitional Western.” Cawelti, meanwhile, paraphrases Western pulp writer Frank
Gruber’s identification of seven essential Western plots (61). The structure of
Western films is reminiscent of the structure attributed to classical myths by scholars
such as Claude Levi-Strauss and Joseph Campbell. Thus, the formulaic nature of
generic popular texts is ideal for the transmission of myth; indeed, formulaic texts
such as the Western play a similar role in contemporary American culture as myths
of gods and heroes might have played in the cultures that produced those tales.
Cawelti’s suggestion that generic texts act as a medium in which a culture’s “unconscious or repressed needs” are expressed is also supported by the cultural forum model of television proposed by Newcomb and Hirsch. Newcomb and Hirsch cite Fishe and Hartley’s argument that that television fulfills a “bardic function” in contemporary societies (564), adding that in this capacity television presents the audience with “a multiplicity of meanings” that focus on “our most prevalent concerns, or deepest dilemmas” (564). Newcomb and Hirsch posit that television functions as a “cultural forum,” presenting a polysemic narrative that allows the “multiplicity of meanings” to engage in a dialogue with one another and with the audience. A variety of messages and meanings can be extrapolated from the televisual text, allowing audience members to encounter not only their own points-of-view but also contradictory perspectives, permitting an essential, if unconscious, exchange of ideas and information. The polysemic nature of television does not provide any resolution to the televisual forum debate, and thus no dominant ideology emerges. As Newcomb and Hirsch put it, “television does not present firm ideological conclusions—despite its formal conclusions—so much as it comments on ideological problems” (565–6; emphasis original).

The cultural forum model is complemented by Forrest G. Robinson’s concept of “bad faith,” which similarly echoes Cawelti’s argument. In “the New Historicism and the Old West,” Robinson suggests that in the most popular texts, there are often multiple available readings that may appear to be contradictory. Robinson argues that this network of meanings often takes the form of an explicit and triumphal
surface narrative that is countered by a more subtle, subversive counternarrative (78). The dominant narrative serves to comfort the audience with an adulating story and thus allows the audience to safely address uncomfortable cultural issues—Robinson specifically mentions issues of gender and race—in a way that minimizes the fear of reprisal that addressing the subjects openly might entail. Thus, Robinson argues, the society—which is burdened by guilt through its members’ roles as self-identified enfranchised citizens—may encounter and psychologically come to terms with various injustices ingrained in itself.

Though neither Newcomb and Hirsch nor Robinson are specifically addressing film with their arguments, their theses are certainly relevant to a discussion of films. Like Newcomb and Hirsch’s television programs, films—especially those of the mass-market, “Hollywood” variety—are the product not of a single auteur but instead a group of people ranging from writers to producers to directors to marketers. Thus, the filmed text is a collective creation that avoids representing the ideology of any single mind. Furthermore, the mythic aspects of film are suggested by the ritualistic nature of viewing a film. Films can be viewed in theatres with large groups of people, and such a group engagement, combined with a following discussion of a film’s merits or deficiencies as well as consumption of related materials from film reviews to merchandise, suggests that for many people the viewing of a film is far from passive entertainment. Additionally, film audiences actively support films directly through the purchase of tickets or rentals, and film-going often plays a role in other human rituals, such as courtship.
However, this is not to say that all popular generic texts are dealing with the same social anxieties. Rather, texts of a particular genre are especially apt for the discussion of certain social anxieties. These issues are encoded into the genre of the text: the peculiar trappings of one genre suggest to the audience that it is a space in which one social problem can be examined. The shifts in generic elements signal shifts of language. The spy story, for example, might be best suited to discuss issues of privacy by virtue of the genre's typical narrative involving concealed information and privacy as well as the power associated with such things. When audience members recognize the narrative as a spy story, they are able to prepare themselves, unconsciously or not, for such a discursive shift and then are capable of entering the cultural forum debate that the text will present to them.

When discussing the Western, John Cawelti points to the genre's "historical setting" and "thematic emphasis on the establishment of law and order, and its resolution of the conflict between civilization and savagery on the frontier" as indicators that the Western is "a kind of foundation myth" (100). Cawelti compares the Western film to American Independence Day celebrations, but suggests that, unlike a July 4th celebration which "has no room for dramatic conflict and ambiguity of values, the Western is able to explore not only what was gained, but what was lost" (100). Cawelti, further suggesting the cultural forum and bad faith models, argues that the Western succeeds due to its confrontation with essential American social conflicts, but in particular, issues of faith:
By creating a marginal hero whose style of behavior and mode of life identified him with those individuals and groups who, like the cowboy, belonged to a class that was rapidly becoming obsolete through social progress, these writers created a hero whose predicament reflected ambiguities of these ideals. (105)

The ideals Cawelti refers to are concepts such as manifest destiny and the “special historical mission of the country” (103), both of which are central to American self-conception and Exceptionalism.

Garry Watson, in his analysis of Cawelti’s work, suggests that what Cawelti is truly pointing at is that the Western is a depiction of sacrifice. According to Watson, “the western is the genre that typically dramatizes a sacrificial crisis, the violent resolution of which founds or refounds a community or nation” (1). This analysis alludes to both Frederick Jackson Turner’s notion that the American nation is forged anew at the frontier and Richard Slotkin’s titular phrase “regeneration through violence.” The Western, as these arguments suggest, sanctifies the use of violence as a foundation of community, but also depicts the troubling nature of such a foundational narrative.

However, an identification of the Western as a narrative of faith and sacrifice is rather broad. One must also consider the historical setting of the Western. Both Rita Parks and John Lenihan have argued for a consideration of setting in any attempt to define what is meant by “Western” (Parks 27; Lenihan 12). Lenihan argues that the setting is a crucial part of Western iconography, and should “suggest
the trans-Mississippi West from the Civil War to the turn of the century” (12). Lenihan goes on to articulate his idea that a key component of the Western is its dichotomous setting, or the inherent contrast between the land “that both threatened the pioneer society and promised future greatness” and the beginnings of civilization “that promised human fulfillment if immediate dangers could be met” (12). Lenihan’s observation of the Western’s primary dichotomy—the contrast between “civilization” and “the land”—is similar to aspects of the genre identified by Wright and Slotkin (14). Furthermore, this opposition is not only expressed through the setting. The binarism is also expressed through characterizations and representations of morality in Westerns. Many Westerns feature the opposition of the citizenry of the frontier town and some form of Other, whether Native American, lawless, anarchic bandit gangs, or rapacious businessmen run amok.

With such a variety of generic conventions as suggested by Lenihan, Slotkin, Wright, and others, settling on a single definition of “Western” is difficult at best. Emphasizing a geographical setting is unsatisfactory, as even the definition of what constitutes “the West” is a matter of debate. Indeed, Lenihan’s insistence that the genre depicts “the trans-Mississippi West” is far too limiting and omits texts that are foundational to the genre, such as James Fenimore Cooper’s frontier romances, not to mention the Westerns of other nations, including the Ned Kelly stories of Australia. On the other hand, a definition based on a fixed time period is also too limiting; it is entirely conceivable to see a Western set in contemporary times or even in the future. A reliance on a plot-based definition is also insufficient; in spite of the
identifications of “essential plots” by Wright and others, some texts that are most assuredly Westerns fall outside of their rather rigid prescriptivism. Rather, the definition should be somewhat conceptual. The Western, then, is, broadly defined, a popular genre that depicts the conflict between forces of the wilderness—figurative or literal—and forces of incorporation—whether pioneers, ranchers, soldiers, or businesspeople—in a historical frontier setting.

However, the true generic essence of the Western is not located in such binary oppositions. Rather, it is found in the genre’s concern with the liminal state between the dichotomies. The Western offers its audience a third, liminal space between the two opposing camps of civilization and wilderness. Furthermore, the gunfighter hero is not a “savage” Other as represented by cattle rustlers or American Indians, but neither is he as civilized as the schoolmarm for whom he must make the frontier safe. Thus, the Western and its heroes serve as spaces wherein the varying idealizations of the wild country and civilization can be placed in dialogue with each other. In this respect, the Western fulfills a function similar to that of the pastoral as described by Leo Marx. For Marx, the American pastoral setting is rural and has been touched by human influence, but maintains an idealized vision of nature. The human touch allows the audience of the American pastoral to submit to the myth of American progressivism while still addressing what is lost through industrial expansion (49). Marx links the pastoral to the essential myth of American origins and its emphasis on the redemptive possibility of “virgin land” (49). Ultimately, Marx suggests, the pastoral’s status as a middle ground between the
urban and the wild make it an ideal space in which a particular American audience is able to acknowledge the positive qualities of progressivism while expressing a deep anxiety about what has been lost in the march toward American capitalism (40).

The Western fulfills a nearly identical purpose, to the point where it is attractive to refer to the genre as the popular form of American pastoralism. Like the pastoral setting described by Marx, the Western exists in a state of "in-betweenness"—the Western town has experienced the influence of progressive development but is still removed from the industrial "civilized" cities of the East. The Western town carries with it all the potential that the myth of American Progressivism would offer; however, the town is simultaneously threatened by the encroaching civilization and the capitalism that it involves, whether through a monopolizing cattle baron or unscrupulous railroad developers. Similarly, the Western town presents a natural environment that has been "improved" by settlers. The townsfolk are putting the previously unused resources to good use, and some mode of law, if somewhat rudimentary, has accompanied property rights. Nevertheless, the town still survives only under the threat of violence from some unpredictable force that civilization and its laws are incapable of handling on their own.

Therefore, many of Marx's additional arguments concerning the pastoral can be applied to the Western. Marx especially emphasizes the pastoral's role as a location of dissension, identifying the genre as one that is consistently used as a
symbol by dissident minorities. The pastoral is especially well-suited for this purpose because of its status as a liminal genre, and the genre’s characters provide excellent fodder for issues of anxiety due to their status as liminal figures who exist in a stage between civilization and savagery. The Western performs a similar function: the precarious position of the Western town between the progressive East and the wild makes it an ideal location for dialogues of social anxiety. The Western’s status as a historical genre, however, lends it a special significance that the pastoral cannot carry: it emphasizes the Western’s role as a foundational tale as well as one that, even moreso than the pastoral, carries the burden of the failure of the Progressive myth, as well as reminding its audience of the cost of the sacrifice that went into its realization.

As Slotkin writes, “the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it has been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic policy, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and progressive civilization” (10). He adds, “the original ideological task of the [Western] Myth was to explain and justify the establishment of American colonies” (10). Certainly this is true; the Western can, as Coyne says, “[sanctify] territorial expansion [and justify] dispossession of the Indian” (3). However, it would be glib to suggest that the Western deals only with American expansion westward across the North American continent and the related subjugation of Native American peoples. The timing of the genre’s peak in popularity problematizes this argument, which did not take
place during a period of explicit colonization of aboriginal people but rather during
a time of ideological colonialism at the height of the Cold War. Slotkin does offer
some explanation for this, suggesting that after World War II the Western’s
ideological task had changed to provide a mythic explanation for “radical economic
growth[,] . . . [the United States’] emergence as a powerful nation and . . . [a]
distinctively American approach to modernization” (10). However, this argument
contradicts common perceptions regarding the function of the Western myth prior
to World War II. The Western never abandoned its colonial concern; it merely
transformed it. The elements that the Western purportedly accounted for as Coyne
and Slotkin see it are all the result of American imperialism after World War II, and
America’s emergence as a superpower and economic titan corresponds with the
rising popularity of the Western from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s. The territorial
expansion that the Western in this period alludes to, then, is not merely expansion
westward, but also expansion to the south and to the east. The Western is concerned
not only with the birth and rebirth of the American in North America, but also
worldwide. Indeed, the story of the Western is not necessarily limited to dealing
with wagon trains moving to California or silver rushes in Arizona, but may also be
about helicopters landing in Vietnam and Coca Cola becoming a popular soft drink
in China or other more recent expressions of colonialism or imperialism. Thus, it is
no surprise that the Western’s popularity peaked at the height of the Cold War; the
genre’s emphasis on binary oppositions was ideal for a nation that sought to portray
the world as a battlefield between diametrically opposed ideologies. The Native
Americans, misunderstood by many Americans, became an ideal Other onto which the perceived differences between the United States and its Communist foes could be projected.

However, given the polysemic nature of the Western, arguing with such absolutism is dangerous. Indeed, it should not be suggested that a colonial reading of the Western is the only available interpretation. However, given the genre’s explicit concerns with history and American expansion, it is fair to suggest that colonialism is a dominant allegorical concern of the Western. The Western does not seek to “sanctify” colonialism, as Slotkin or Coyne might argue. Rather, through its status as a liminal myth, the genre merely seeks to address colonialism as but one of its multiple concerns. As Newcomb and Hirsch have suggested, a popular text such as the Western film does not provide any definitive ideological statement; rather, the genre presents a multiplicity of meanings through which its American audience is able to encounter various perspectives on American colonialism. Indeed, if the genre seems triumphal—if it seems to justify violent displacement of the Other and forceful interventionism abroad—it is only to fulfill Robinson’s bad faith principle. The text must accommodate multiple viewpoints and provide its audience with a safe place in which to encounter ideas that may be objectionable or subversive alongside the adulation of the foundation and regeneration of the nation in violence. If the sacrifice presented in the Western is celebrated, it is also mourned through its recognition that the growth of the nation was irrigated with the blood of the innocent.
In the following thesis, I will examine a number of Westerns in terms of the ways they encounter the United States’ shifting position in foreign affairs during the Cold War. However, the following interpretations should not be understood as being the only available reading of the subjects. Indeed, as per the cultural forum model, the films that will be examined—My Darling Clementine, Gunfight at the OK Corral, Hour of the Gun, Doc, and Tombstone—constitute expressions of a variety of discourses. What follows, then, is a reading of what I believe to be one of the dominant concerns of these films, and the Wyatt Earp myth general, insofar as it functions during the Cold War.
2. The Significance of Wyatt Earp in American History

The challenge of any study of the Western genre is that the concept of the "Western" is manifold and mercurial. As Philip French has eloquently written,

The Western is a great grab bag, a hungry cuckoo of a genre, a voracious bastard of a form, open equally to visionaries and opportunists, ready to seize anything that's in the thin air from juvenile delinquency to ecology. (24)

Thus, the problem for the scholar who seeks to explore the genre is how to best approach this "hungry cuckoo" that is capable of ingesting such a variety of themes and subjects. One cannot attempt to examine the entire body of Western film and expect to arrive at a singular conclusion. Instead, it is preferable to identify a particular trait, plot device, or character and explore how the single item functions within the genre. In this manner, it becomes possible to see general trends in the treatment of Western subjects that may be elusive with other methods of limiting sources. For example, Will Wright's examination of the genre in *Six Guns and Society* that includes only those Westerns that topped the box office during his period of focus is problematic for many analytical purposes. One issue that arises from Wright's selection is the fact that what contributed to a film's popularity is often difficult to locate and, indeed, may be located outside of the film text itself. As Coyne points out in his discussion of Wright's method, "One always needs to be

---

3 However, his delineation is appropriate for his own study.
aware of the possibility that a very high popularity may reflect the influences of factors which are not necessarily a result of the genre itself” (8). While Wright argues that the films he examines were popular because they articulated certain mythical elements that their audience craved, he ignores the existence of the Hollywood star system and differences in marketing between films. Additionally, an approach such as Wright’s forces the scholar to ask only why a film is popular, without addressing why another is not. In contrast, employing an approach to the genre that examines a particular aspect of the genre provides the scholar with a fixed variable that may be examined diachronically in light of issues related to context, filmography, or any other approach that the scholar believes will be illuminating.

With this in mind, I will continue my examination of the use of the Western as a cultural forum through the analysis of one figure—Wyatt Earp—and his role in the event that has contributed most to his infamy: the so-called “Gunfight at the O.K. Corral.” The story of Wyatt Earp and the gunfight has been translated to film many times, but it gained particular currency with American audiences in the years after World War II. Wyatt was an ideal locus for the cultural forum because, above all, he embodied conflict. Through Wyatt Earp, multiple conflicting ideologies and discourses could be projected onto the screen, permitting the audiences to simultaneously engage in the bad faith narrative of American Progressivism and “uplifting” colonialism while encountering troubling issues of authority and morality. Specifically, I will examine the way Wyatt Earp fulfills this role in five
films: My Darling Clementine (1946); Gunfight at the O.K. Corral (1957); Hour of the Gun (1967); Doc (1971); and Tombstone (1993). A study of these films will not only trace the mercurial nature of fictional translations of a historical figure, but will also provide insight into shifting American attitudes toward the nation's role in the world, particularly in regard to imperialism and colonialism.

Wyatt Earp is a figure in the Western mythological pantheon that is particularly resonant in American culture. His legend has become indelibly etched into American popular memory, in spite of the fact that over one hundred years have passed since he undertook his most famous exploits. The story of his career and references to it still manifest themselves throughout American culture, sometimes in unexpected places: people still talk about "getting out of Dodge"; an episode of the television series The Simpsons features a car lot named the "O.K. Corral"; and foreign officials have criticized the United States for exhibiting a "Wyatt Earp attitude" in foreign relations (Barra, Inventing). Earp has also appeared in video games—Tombstone 1882 (2003) offers a player the opportunity to "claim [his or her] fortune in the boomtown of Tombstone as part of the Earps or Clantons"—as well as in novels, comic books, and, of course, films. A cursory search on the

---

4 Conspicuous by its absence is Wyatt Earp (1994). I have consciously omitted this film from my study as its plot subordinates the Gunfight at the OK Corral and the vendetta ride to being mere chapters in the larger story of Wyatt's life. The other films in my study all center either on the Gunfight or its aftermath; by shifting its focus, Wyatt Earp develops a different intertextual resonance that eliminates the polarized ideological conflict that is of utmost significance in the other films and to the Cold War.

5 By "Western mythological pantheon," I mean simply figures from American frontier history who are better known for the deeds and characterizations attributed to them through fiction than for their historical reality.
Internet Movie Database yields twenty-nine films that feature a character named "Wyatt Earp," and these results do not include the countless characters that have been inspired by his legend or films that have borrowed plots from Wyatt’s life and legend. As Allen Barra argues, “the streetfight in Tombstone touched something in America’s collective unconscious. Whenever showdowns or confrontations are thought to be epic, Americans will always refer to the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral” (Inventing 398).

Clearly, Wyatt Earp’s story is important to American culture. However, there is no consistent portrayal of Wyatt Earp. In one film Wyatt may be an American Western incarnation of a noble cavalier, righting injustices and winning the love of the fair schoolmarm. In others he may be quite the opposite, possessing qualities that qualify him as little more than a bully. The contrasts between some portrayals is striking; one need only compare the upright, moralistic Wyatt in My Darling Clementine to the sadistic madman in Doc to wonder if the films are based on the same historical figure. However, this adaptability and malleability is, in fact, possibly the most accurate part of any portrayal of Wyatt Earp.

Nineteenth-century accounts of Wyatt Earp are equally antithetical as later adaptations of his story. From very early on, accounts of Wyatt’s life were coloured by partisan rhetoric. The most readily apparent examples are contemporary newspaper accounts of “gunfight at the O.K Corral,” or, as it was known prior to the release of the film of that name, the gunfight in the streets of Tombstone. The shoot-out, which pitted Wyatt, his brothers Virgil and Morgan, and his friend John Henry
“Doc” Holliday against Ike and Billy Clanton, Tom and Frank McLaury, and Billy Claiborne, left three—all from the Clanton side—dead, and only Wyatt walked away untouched by gunfire.

The coverage of the event by the Tombstone newspapers could not have been more polarized. The Tombstone Epitaph sided with the Earps and Doc Holliday. Not long after the shootout, John Clum, editor of the Epitaph, wrote that the feeling among the best class of our citizens is that the Marshal [Virgil Earp] was entirely justified in his efforts to disarm these men, and that being fired upon they had to defend themselves, which they did most bravely. So long as our peace officers make effort to preserve the peace and put down highway robbery—which the Earp brothers have done, having engaged in the pursuit and capture, where capture [has] been made, of every gang of stage robbers in the country—they will have the support of all good citizens. (qtd. in Tefertiller 125).

The Daily Nugget, meanwhile, noted the overwhelming turnout for the funerals of Billy Clanton and the McLaury brothers, reporting that it was “the largest [funeral] ever witnessed in Tombstone” (qtd. in Tefertiller 126). Indeed, the funeral was considerable enough to prompt Tombstone resident Clara Brown to write that “a stranger . . . would have thought that some person esteemed by the entire camp was being conveyed to his final resting place” (qtd. in Tefertiller 126). In the aftermath of the gunfight and funeral, the discrepancies between various reports of the gunfight became increasingly stark. On November 3, 1881, the Arizona Star painted the
gunfight as a clear-cut case of murder, suggesting that "it is claimed by many that the killing of the McLowrys [sic] and Clanton was cold-blooded and premeditated" and corroborating the claim by reporting that "when the shooting occurred the boys who were killed were preparing to leave Tombstone; two of them were unarmed and . . . showed no disposition whatever to quarrel or create a public disturbance" (qtd. in Tefertiller 132). After the Earps and Holliday were put on trial and ultimately vindicated by Judge Wells Spicer, who attested that he could "attach no criminality" to the Earps' actions (qtd. in Tefertiller 52), Spicer was discredited by various parties and rumours of judicial bias turned public opinion against the Earps (Tefertiller 157).

The apparent cause of these conflicting accounts is political and personal partisanship. Richard Maxwell Brown argues that "In Cochise County, the incorporating trend was spearheaded by a Tombstone faction of mining industry entrepreneurs and engineers and their allies among the town's business and professional elite. Resisting them were the 'Cowboys' of rural Cochise County. Among the members of the incorporating faction was Wyatt Earp" (66). Tombstone was a town deeply divided along ideological lines, and the newspapers were no better. The two newspapers—the Epitaph and the Daily Nugget—fell on either side of the gulf between the county's Republicans and Democrats. The Epitaph was the Republican voice in Tombstone, and so favoured the Earps' side in the conflict. Furthermore, editor John Clum was a personal friend of Wyatt. The Daily Nugget, on the other hand, was aligned with the Democrats and carried some grudge against
the Earp family, possibly arising from Wyatt’s political struggles against Democrat John Behan over the Cochise County sheriff’s office.

Other available primary sources relating to the conflict are equally problematic. George Parson’s diary, an invaluable source of information on daily life in Tombstone, is coloured by Parson’s friendship and obvious allegiance to Wyatt Earp. Other accounts of the feud, however, are no more reliable; those involved in the conflict had long memories, and even decades after the gunfight they had strong emotional reactions to the parties involved. Frank Waters’ account of the events, which he claimed he had based on conversations with Virgil Earp’s wife Allie, clearly project Allie Earp’s dislike of her brother-in-law, to the point that Allen Barra was compelled to wryly suggest that Waters’ book *I Married Virgil Earp* would have been more aptly titled *I Married Virgil Earp — But I hated Wyatt Even More than I Loved Virgil* (*Inventing* 234). Of course, the book that is supposedly based on Wyatt’s own statements is no better. Stuart M. Lake’s *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal* is a lionizing biography of Wyatt and positions its subject in mythic terms, to the extent that Lake bestows upon Wyatt his own Excalibur—the “Buntline Special,” a Colt Revolver with an extended twelve-inch barrel. Lake later admitted that the material in the book that he originally claimed was based on a series of interviews he conducted with Wyatt was largely fabricated, but it was too late: *Frontier Marshal* had become the biography that would have the greatest influence on Earp scholars and filmmakers. Subsequent Earp debunkers all respond to Lake’s adulatory text on
some level, and for many the biography has become the worst kind of fiction-masquerading-as-history.

Perhaps as a result, subsequent historiography that deals with Wyatt Earp has fared no better. All historians who wish to study Wyatt are forced to work in the shadow of these questionable primary sources. Working with accounts like those published in the Epitaph, the Daily Nugget, Frontier Marshal and I Married Wyatt Earp, it is no surprise that few serious academic biographies of Wyatt Earp of any notable quality have emerged. Rather, the majority of the available biographies fall victim to the polarization of the primary sources. Even those that are well researched and capably argued must deal with the conundrum of these conflicting and often completely contradictory reports and assess how best to deal with them. If there is any privileging of one source over another, a particular image of Wyatt Earp may emerge that is a far cry from the complexities of the actual man and the events in which he actually participated.

Still, by analyzing such conflicting accounts and considering the sources of such disputes, it is possible to glean from the historical evidence some information that will be useful for a study of explicitly fictional accounts of Wyatt Earp. Richard Maxwell Brown has examined the conflict in Tombstone as a struggle between forces of urban incorporation, represented by Earp and his Republican allies, and rural pastoralism, represented by the Democratic 'Cowboys' (69). Earp, “as a Northerner reared in a Unionist family . . . reflected and adhered to the social ideal of the Republican party in Gilded-Age America: an allegiance to conservative values
and enterprising capitalism” (Brown 66). Brown identifies Wyatt as a “glorified
gunfighter,” one of those “historically significant figures” who “were violent
protagonists in the great social, economic, and cultural conflicts that rocked the West
in the late nineteenth century” (40). Brown’s glorified gunfighters were often
“strongly partisan” and were “players in a social drama in which conservative
forces consolidated authority in the West in the interest of property, order, and law”
(40). The divide between the Republicans and the Democrats was exacerbated by
the economic stratification in the county. Brown goes on to argue that the gunfight
in the streets of Tombstone was an “outgrowth of the highly conflicted social,
economic, and political situation in Cochise County and its county seat, Tombstone”
(67).

Wyatt Earp’s significance to American popular culture in the years following
World War II is appropriate, then, given his status as a figure for incorporation and
capitalism. Stanley Corkin has argued that after World War II

the United States needed to expand its economy endlessly, constantly
incorporating more nations into the global system. If we look back to
the late nineteenth century we can see roots of this strategy in the
westward expansion of the nation; in short, Arizona in the late
nineteenth century played a role in the U.S. national economy similar
to that played by Saudi Arabia in the mid twentieth century. (37)

Both regions are peripheral to the seat of power, but offer the potential for great
economic growth through the mining of silver, in Arizona’s case, or through the
drilling oil in the Middle East. American interests sought to secure and incorporate both regions in order to achieve greater financial security. Thus, Corkin clearly draws a link between the historical Wyatt Earp and the American situation in the early years of the Cold War, explaining at least in part the repeated usage of the figure. Corkin's argument suggests that American audiences created a link between the conflict in Cochise County and American involvement abroad, and, as a result, Wyatt Earp films were reflective of the international stage. Wyatt represented America; in viewing him on screen, the audience was taking part in a triumphal narrative about the spread of American capital abroad. Luhr, meanwhile, has emphasized issues of class in the Earp narratives: "The Earp-Clanton conflict often takes on the iconographic coloring of a class war, with the Earp faction represented as four dignified men in frock coats and the Clantons as a roughly dressed, surly mob gathered in a dark cabin by their malevolent old father" (39).

Luhr has also noted that Wyatt Earp "represents a certain phase in the development of the frontier hero," noting a shift in the structure of the genre that is typified in the Wyatt Earp narrative: "Prior to [Wyatt Earp] and his type, many American frontier heroes drew a significant part of their identity from their relations with other races" (39). With the dawn of the Cold War, the essential binarism of the Western hero and villain shifted from being one of race to one of ideology. The dichotomy was not drawn between Euro-American / Indian any longer but rather between capitalist / socialist. Cohen adds, "With the emergence of the Iron Curtain
as part of international discourse, [Wyatt] had come to represent the Cold Warriors who held the line against the enemies of democracy” (207).

However, as Cohen has argued, “for those in our society who reject government action that interferes with individual freedom, the symbolism of what happened is different. They see the law enforcers not as representatives of the public good, but as oppressors” (205). For this segment of the audience, the Earp films offered a tale that was not adulatory of the American nation but instead presented its faults. Luhr notes the shifting depiction of Wyatt and his friends, commenting that by the 1970s, “Earp’s suit and the Clanton’s rough work clothes made him less appealing and them less repulsive, at least to counterculture sympathizers” (40).

Clearly there are multiple available readings of the Wyatt Earp story. As Cohen suggests, “That the gunfight at the O.K. Corral can embody such opposing views goes a long way in explaining why the incident remains a vital presence” (204). The gunfight behind the OK Corral was itself a conflict of ideologies, between the Democratic values of the Cowboys and the Republican aims of the Earps and their allies. Cohen argues that “the seeming clarity of the shoot-out at the O.K. Corral has become a ready and justifying symbol, notably in the government quashing threats to law and order” (204 - 5). But it is far too simplistic to say that Wyatt Earp only represented forces of incorporation and progressivism while the Cowboys were a catch-all group for Communists, counterculturists, or anti-
capitalists. The Wyatt Earp story is much more complicated than the black and white issue painted by Cohen and others.

Indeed, Wyatt Earp himself was not simply a Republican businessman. Richard Maxwell Brown identifies a conflict within Earp between his status as a conservative and his role as a “rounder” (67) who enjoyed gambling, drinking, and other Western saloon-fare. These characteristics were opposed by his Republican desire to consolidate towns into the American capitalist system. Wyatt himself is a conflicted character who does not fully subscribe to a single ideology. Furthermore, Wyatt’s role as the idealized lawman is compromised by his “vendetta ride,” Wyatt’s campaign after the O.K. Corral to eliminate the whole of the cowboy gang, whom he blamed for the death of his younger brother Morgan and the maiming of his elder brother, Virgil. Though the vendetta ride is rarely depicted in film—*Hour of the Gun* was the first to do so—the intertextual connection between the filmic Wyatt Earp and the historical Wyatt Earp necessarily alludes not only to the integration of Tombstone into American commerce through the “just war” that resulted in the gunfight behind the O.K. Corral, but also the aftermath of that event, in which Wyatt’s power and authority were pushed to excess in the name of personal vengeance.

Finally, the conclusion that Wyatt Earp represents a positive good in American culture, even in the 1940s and 1950s, is complicated by the fact that Wyatt is the agent through whom the rural ideal will be destroyed. While the Western certainly suggests the myth of progressivism—that the incorporation and eventual
industrialization of the town and its growth into the city is an improvement—the genre is ultimately akin to Leo Marx's conception of the American pastoral. The Western champions economic expansion while simultaneously elegizing the way of life that it is replacing. Part and parcel of this is the sense that the older way of life that Wyatt Earp is replacing is, in fact, better than the one he heralds in. In the Western, the incorporation of the town represents not only an influx of capital, but also the death of an age of heroism (REF—Brown?). The archetypal gunfighter hero rarely stays in the town he has civilized as there is no further need for his heroism; Wyatt Earp is no exception.

Ultimately, the story of Wyatt Earp, whether historical or fictional, is one of conflict. Initially there is the ideological conflict between the Republican Earp and the Democratic Cowboys, as well as Wyatt Earp's internal struggle between his "rounder" inclinations and his drive to be a successful businessman. There is the additional conflict between the rule of law as represented by the supposedly "good" war that should have ended behind the O.K. Corral and the one that did not, but culminated in Wyatt Earp's "vendetta ride." Finally, there is the schism between the competing ideals of American progressivism and the American concept of the idealized frontier. These competing ideologies are all essential to the story of Wyatt Earp in any of its incarnations, and, indeed, are the source of its endurance and popularity. The story of Tombstone and Wyatt Earp presents its audience with an ideal cultural forum to explore these competing ideologies: the audience is able to participate in the pleasing, triumphant narrative of the progression of American
capitalism while engaging in their guilt regarding what is lost in its name. Additionally, the legend of Tombstone offers special significance to an American audience in the Cold War. Tombstone’s embroilment in a war of ideology where class distinctions were paramount bore striking familiarity for Americans who were being faced with an Iron Curtain and a divided world. Tombstone offered them not only a location upon which to focus their anxiety regarding the direction of America at a time of renewed economic prosperity but also a forum in which their fears regarding power, violence, and authority could be set into discourse with one another.

The first two Wyatt Earp films to appear during the Cold War were *My Darling Clementine* and *Hour of the Gun*. Both of these films were major prestige pictures for their respective studios, and each featured a number of major Hollywood stars of the time. More significantly, both *My Darling Clementine* and *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* depict a version of Wyatt Earp that is overwhelmingly positive. The Wyatt Earp in these films is most akin to the marshal from Stuart Lake's book and embodies the Western lawman ideal: he is honest, honourable, and seeks to dispel the agents of chaos from Tombstone in order to make the town safe for the people who live there. However, in spite of these idealistic depictions of Wyatt Earp, both films contain subtle but significant undercurrents that undermine the triumphal surface narrative. While there is undoubtedly a triumphal aspect to both of these films that sanctifies and glorifies the United States’ position in the post-war order, both stories develop a discourse of anxiety regarding the very same subject. In the case of *My Darling Clementine*, the overt narrative that suggests the foundation of a community made safe by Wyatt Earp is tempered by a contradictory narrative that betrays an overwhelming discomfort with the obligations of power and the abandonment of isolationism. In *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, the impetus for the social anxiety has shifted focus to examine the means of such power, meditating
on the contemporary foreign policy discourses of containment, massive retaliation and Eisenhower's "New Look" diplomacy.

At the time of the release of John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* in December 1946, the American public was in the throes of a dramatic shift in its government's approach to foreign policy. In spite of movements toward internationalism prior to World War I with the establishment of the Samoan protectorate, annexation of Hawaii, possession of the Philippines, and the Roosevelt Corollary, the inter-war years had been, for the United States, a period of what historian William G. Carleton termed "pathological isolation" (18). With World War II, such isolationism no longer seemed possible for the United States. The war had precipitated American involvement in world affairs even prior to America's entry into the actual fighting: the nation had expanded its navy, loaned money to China, placed embargoes on steel and iron not destined for Britain or the Western hemisphere, and enacted the Lend-Lease Act. American involvement deepened significantly with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Soon the United States took a lead role in wartime decision-making and adopted the goal of shaping the "ideological world of the future" through international cooperation (Carleton 38). Even with the Axis defeated, there was small chance that the United States would be able to return to insularity. The balance of power system, which had long shielded the United States from the necessity of taking an active role in international issues, had been drastically altered, with the United States occupying a much more significant position (Almond 13); additionally, military technology developed in the early 1940s—particularly the
atomic bomb—had “transformed war from a limited to an unlimited risk” (Almond 14).

In spite of the United States’ ascendancy and decisive role in the victory over the Axis, such a shift in the world order did not result in the optimism and confidence commonly attributed to the 1950s by popular culture. Rather, the opposite was true. Carleton notes that this “revolution in foreign policy” was “difficult for most Americans to grasp” (90). Involvement in world affairs to such a degree was a marked sea change for an American public that had been fed the rhetoric of the interwar years that promoted isolationism. For years, Americans had been told that involvement in organizations such as the League of Nations would result in the United States’ hand being forced to inserting itself in obligations that served no interest of America. Now, the nation was in a position where it was, by virtue of the postwar power structure, a part of most international negotiations, without an option to extract itself.

However, Americans were further troubled by the enigmatic role of the Soviet Union in the world’s power structure (Carleton 44). Though the nations were still technically allies, the Soviet Union was a nation with very different values than the United States. Furthermore, Russia had a considerable force left in Eastern Europe at the end of the war. To make matters worst, in the rest of Europe, collectivism and Communism were catching on in more and more countries in the face of postwar economic uncertainty—even the old powers of Britain and France.
In Britain, the Labour Party rose to power, while the French government nationalized a number of utilities.

In the years immediately following World War II, an increasing number of conflicts began to arise between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States was troubled by the Soviet Union's failure to participate in United Nations-mandated programs such as UNESCO and the trusteeship system, and was additionally concerned by Russia's use of its Security Council veto over the Iran dispute in 1946. Atomic weapons were another sticking point between the powers; as long as the United States was the sole possessor of nuclear weapons in the world, the Soviet Union argued passionately for the destruction and ban of all atomic armaments. The United States, meanwhile, supported the Baruch Plan to create an independent body that would have control over all world nuclear supplies as well as the mining of uranium and plutonium (Carleton 131). The events in Korea in 1945 and 1946 also contributed to a sense of anxiety. At the end of 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to put Korea under provisional trusteeship, controlled by a joint effort of these two nations as well as Britain and Nationalist China. The Korean Communists had accepted this proposal, but the United States balked, instead proposing free elections. The two nations could not agree on what should be done. After the United States proposed free elections, Russia went before the United Nations to request the withdrawal of all troops, a proposal that the United States feared would lead to civil war.
During this period, the suspicious attitude toward Communism entered the public discourse more and more frequently. The Truman Administration’s foreign policy toward the Soviet Union was a major issue of the midterm elections in 1946. Republican politicians, led by John Foster Dulles, focused their rhetoric on accusing Truman of being “soft on communism.” On October 25 1945, Republican candidates Karl Mundt and Francis Bolton wrote that the president was “lacking on the side of firmness” (qtd. in Woods and Jones 100) and called for a more confrontational stance toward the Soviets. A December 1945 proposal of a loan to Britain was met with clamorous opposition; Republican Jesse Sumner accused the Administration of advancing the cause of socialism in Britain by funding the “Labour Party’s social experiments” (Woods and Jones 122). By March 1946, polls were reporting that seventy-one percent of Americans were opposed to Soviet foreign affairs policies, while sixty percent believed that the United States was too soft on Russia (Woods and Jones 117). Perhaps more strikingly, another poll, conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion the National Opinion Research Center, found that between March 1945 and September 1946, the percentage of Americans anticipating the United States to be at war within the next twenty-five years ballooned from thirty-eight percent to sixty-two percent (Almond 90). In March 1946, the number of people expecting war within ten years sat at forty-nine percent. In July 1946, Fortune reported that fifty percent of a national sample believed that Russia was out to dominate the world (Almond 95), a position echoed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who
believed that the Soviets had “a commitment to world revolution and a renewed
determination to undermine capitalism” (Woods and Jones 128).

With such alarmism so prevalent in the national discourse, it should not be surprising that similar anxieties manifested themselves in cultural productions of the time. Yet, most critics who have analyzed films like My Darling Clementine have instead focused on the film’s triumphal quality. Stanley Corkin, Richard Slotkin, and others have focused their analyses on the ways in which My Darling Clementine champions and mythologizes the United States’ new role in the world. However, such a reading is confounded by the film’s sub-textual acknowledgment of the worrisome aspects of this role. In particular, these readings have emphasized My Darling Clementine as a story about the arrival of “civilization” in Tombstone. I will argue, however, that instead of Wyatt Earp integrating Tombstone into the Eastern order, it is rather Tombstone that integrates Wyatt Earp into its already extant order. Thus, My Darling Clementine offers a narrative that allegorizes the United States’ entry onto the world stage, replete with the anxieties that this circumstance entails. This is not to say that the triumphalist readings of My Darling Clementine are invalid; instead, the competing available readings are complementary, each contributing to the film’s function as a cultural forum.

Stanley Corkin’s position on My Darling Clementine emphasizes American foreign policy’s turn toward economic imperialism. Corkin argues that after World War II, American policy ceased to be defined “simply by the goal of occupying contiguous lands but also by the imperative of reordering them according to a
distinctly U.S. vision of society” (10). The goal of such endeavours was not to merely access the resources of other nations and regions but also to ideologically convert their inhabitants to the American way of life, thus creating an optimal location for trade relations. Corkin argues that “Westerns played some role in this cultural shift as they reflected it. [Westerns] articulated the necessity of engaged heroes who morally ensure the role of right” (10). This assertion provides the basis for Corkin’s ultimate argument that Westerns in the early Cold War period—including My Darling Clementine—are parables of the spread of American values and ideologies, a dissemination that ultimately results in the creation of new free markets for American commerce. However, Corkin’s argument that these films are unabashed exhortations for the spread of American capitalism assumes that such discourses are rendered unproblematically. While Corkin’s reading of the texts is certainly valid and indeed may be the most readily available close reading of the film, his interpretation glosses over several important aspects.

John Ford’s My Darling Clementine was the first Wyatt Earp film to appear in the wake of World War II. The film was a prestige picture, and Ford cast Hollywood star Henry Fonda, who had previously portrayed American folk heroes Abraham Lincoln and Tom Joad, in the role of Wyatt Earp. My Darling Clementine is loosely based on Stuart Lake’s Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal, but departs drastically from that text. An additional source of Ford’s version of the Wyatt Earp myth was Wyatt Earp himself; Ford claimed to have met Earp during Earp’s time in Hollywood and the director based his version of the climactic gunfight on Earp’s
own account of the event. The film followed a general trend that had developed in Ford’s filmmaking whereby the director “often used the rural community to act as a microcosm embodying the tradition and the plain moral values of the pioneering life in nineteenth-century America” (Böhnke 48). Corkin notes that

Ford was apparently drawn to seize the opportunity that the [Western] genre afforded for social commentary that did not necessarily fall distinctly into categories of left and right. That is, Westerns allowed the politically complex director to explore ideas that more contemporary plots would have made politically controversial. (17) It is likely, however, that Ford himself would have likely vehemently denied that any such decision consciously took place, as he had been cited by those who knew him, including some of the cast and crew of My Darling Clementine, as being resistant to interpretations of his films as anything more than just films.

In spite of Ford’s expected protests, My Darling Clementine is most frequently read as an apology for American progressivism that champions the United States’ new role as a world super power. In this reading Tombstone is a synecdoche for the world, and Wyatt Earp for America; his expulsion of Tombstone’s undesirable elements is analogous to the United States freeing the world from undemocratic and anti-capitalist elements. In Gunfighter Nation, Richard Slotkin argues that My Darling Clementine is a classic example of the town-tamer Western in which “social injustice is imposed by powerful criminals; the hero must defeat them and thus empower the ‘decent folks’ who bring progress to the Frontier” (379).
Stanley Corkin's convincing reading of *My Darling Clementine* in *Cowboys as Cold Warriors* is perhaps the most exemplary instance of the progressive reading of the film. According to Corkin, *My Darling Clementine* "[tells] of the moment when the peripheral territories that either were or about to become a part of the political sphere of the United States actively embrace their destiny" (32). Corkin adds that the film encourages "a view of the United States that allows for acts of empire or hegemony to be seen as the expression of a rational and moral imperative that will ensure progress and promote the development of civilization" (29). Corkin also suggests that *My Darling Clementine* serves a purpose similar to what Richard Slotkin details in *Gunfighter Nation*, whereby the Western film uses a mythic past to lend mythic resonance to contemporary events, allowing the audience to comprehend and justify events that may otherwise be considered extreme, alarming, or even confusing:

When considered within [its] historical context as [an early version] of the postwar Western, [*My Darling Clementine*] articulate[s] a means of understanding the phenomenon of general assent to the extremes of Cold War ideology and government policy. (28)

Corkin especially emphasizes the economic aspects of this reading; as previously mentioned, he connects the American necessity to continually expand its economic influence with westward expansion and identifies continuity between frontier Arizona and the oil-rich nations of the Middle East in the twentieth century. Thus, for Slotkin and Corkin and most other critics who have examined *My Darling*
Clementine, the film is a triumphal narrative communicating and justifying to its audience the necessity of American imperialism by portraying such hegemony in abstraction, allegorizing American economic expansion through a narrative featuring a legendary national hero.

This allegorical reading is undoubtedly convincing. Indeed, My Darling Clementine does function as a narrative that celebrates the ascendant American state and its global economic and political power. However, a close reading of the film reveals an alternate counter-discourse that undermines a reading of My Darling Clementine as a laudatory narrative. A number of aspects of the text instead suggest the anxiety that dominated political discourse of the time. Primary among these is the fact that Wyatt Earp does little to integrate Tombstone into the eastern “civilized” order; the town appears to be attaining this stage on its own. Rather, it is Wyatt Earp who becomes integrated into Tombstone’s social order.

Initially, My Darling Clementine establishes a clear connection to the American public anxiety that the nation’s new role as a super power will involve it in conflicts that may bear no relation to the interests of the United States. In the film, Wyatt Earp and his brothers are drawn into a feud with the Clanton family by pure happenstance: the Earps are passing near Tombstone with their herd of cattle and encounter Old Man Clanton and his sons, who offer to buy the cattle. Wyatt Earp refuses, and that evening visits Tombstone with his brothers Morgan and Virgil, leaving young James behind to watch over the herd. Wyatt Earp is almost immediately drawn into a conflict that he has no interest in: his visit to the
barbershop is interrupted by shooting and shouting from a nearby saloon, where a drunken man is causing trouble. When the marshal refuses to intervene because he is not paid enough, Wyatt Earp feels morally obligated to put himself in danger to deal with the problem. After Wyatt expels the drunkard Charlie from the saloon and chastises the town for "selling liquor to Indians" he is asked to accept the now-vacant position of marshal. Wyatt refuses and returns to his camp to find that his cattle have been rustled and his brother James has been shot in the back. At this point, Wyatt accepts the position of marshal and assigns Morgan and Virgil as deputies in order to avenge his brother's death. The Clanton family is, of course, behind James' murder.

These events emphasize the obligations that power carries with it. Wyatt Earp has no interest in becoming involved in Tombstone's troubles, but he is forced into battle simply due to his presence in Tombstone. If Tombstone is indeed a microcosm for the world and Wyatt Earp a synecdoche for America, Wyatt Earp's arrival in Tombstone is a symbol for the United States' entry into world politics from its interwar period of isolation. Significantly, Wyatt Earp is forced into his involvement in Tombstone's local affairs. His economic strength—represented by his herd of cattle—makes him a target for the "undesirable elements" of Tombstone in the form of the Clanton gang. He is a victim of his own power. Following this initial problem, he is further pulled into Tombstone's world through the inability of the existing authority to handle the town's problems, creating an analog with the shifting balance of power in the world following World War II. Suddenly, Wyatt is
the head of a new order in Tombstone and quickly ascends to a position of power and influence in Tombstone.

However, Wyatt Earp does not, in fact, bring order to Tombstone. Aside from his expulsion of Charlie from the saloon early in the film, there is little to suggest that the town is in any sort of trouble. Nor is there any indication that integration into the order of the East—or, in Slotkin and Corkin's terms, the American economic order—will benefit the community. In fact, there is a number of symbols of civilization in Tombstone already. One of these is the chair that Wyatt sits in to have his shave during his first night in Tombstone. The barber proudly tells Wyatt Earp that the chair came from Chicago, but admits that he does not know how to work it after the chair throws Wyatt onto the floor. This event emphasizes that civilization—and commerce—is already present in Tombstone. However, the civilization is imperfect. While the barber's admission that he does not know how to work the chair implies that Tombstone is the deficient party in the relationship, it is nevertheless Wyatt who is expelled from the chair, suggesting an incompatibility between Tombstone, Wyatt Earp, and eastern commerce. This tension is developed to appeal to the anxiety of the film's American audience, which, while pleased with post-war American affluence, is uncertain about the implications of such influence.

A second example of civilization's arrival in Tombstone prior to Wyatt Earp's appearance is the presence of the actor Granville Thorndyke. Thorndyke is immediately identified as a drunkard as he stumbles into Doc Holliday's saloon. He accepts an escort to the Birdcage Theater where a throng of rowdy citizens
awaits his much-anticipated performance, but still manages to get waylaid by the Clanton family who force him to perform under duress until Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday intervene. Nevertheless, Thorndyke is able to recite most of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy, and when he is unable to remember the words—he claims it is because it has been “such a long time”—Doc Holliday completes his performance. Thorndyke’s characterization as a pompous Shakespearean identifies him with British high culture, and, by extension, established civilization. Clearly, civilization has already established some presence in Tombstone. Although Thorndyke’s expression of civilization is hardly ideal—he is unable to complete his recitation of what is perhaps the most famous speech in Shakespeare’s œuvre, and he is characterized as a drunken buffoon—significantly it is a Tombstone institution, Doc Holliday, who is capable of completing the monologue.

The final significant expression of civilization in Tombstone is the foundation of the First Church of Tombstone. Though the church is not completed at the close of the film, the parishioners are able to celebrate the advent of religion into their town. The arrival of Christianity in Tombstone signals its integration into the civilized world. However, the creation of the church has little to do with the actions of Wyatt Earp. Indeed, the Earps seem oblivious to the existence of any sort of religion in Tombstone. Their experience with religion seems limited to camp meetings. When the congregation of the First Church of Tombstone parades past en route to the site where the church is being constructed, Virgil comments, “If we wasn’t in this territory, I’d swear we were back home on a Sunday morning.” His
brothers agree, but the head of the church group corrects him, insulted by the notion that the gathering is a camp meeting. Interestingly, the Earps are identified with a folksier, more informal, and more rustic expression of religion than the one the Tombstone citizens have built on their own. The Earp’s conception of religion is in fact less “civilized” than the one represented by the population of Tombstone.

But, the meeting of the parishioners is not significant only for its contrast concerning civilized religion. The meeting of the First Church of Tombstone also represents the moment of Wyatt Earp’s complete integration into the community of Tombstone. After the procession passes by the Earp brothers, Morgan and Virgil speculate that they should go visit James’ grave. Wyatt agrees, but as he is waiting for his brothers, he is approached by Clementine Carter, who asks him if he will accompany her to the church service. Wyatt’s agreement represents his conscious decision to forsake his past life and his family in favour of greater integration into the community of Tombstone: he has rejected his brothers and his past in favour of participating in a community foundation event. Furthermore, it is Tombstone that must accept Wyatt, not Wyatt who must accept Tombstone. This acceptance is best symbolized by his dance with Clementine: as they dance, the church leader calls on the congregation to “Make room for the marshal and his girl.” The parishioners move aside and form a circle around Wyatt and Clementine, signaling their ultimate adoption by the community of Tombstone. Wyatt’s decision to participate in the community rather than attending to his familial obligation is but the final step in a larger process in the narrative of My Darling Clementine. Wyatt is morally obligated
to enter the community through the violence of the Clanton family, but ultimately
elects to maintain his presence there by choice. Indeed, the plotline featuring his
vengeance is all but abandoned for most of the film, shifting instead to the
relationships between Wyatt, Doc, and Clementine.

However, the community that Wyatt has entered is not perfect. Eventually
he must deal with the Clanton family, and he does, at the cost of another brother’s
life. The world that Wyatt has become integrated into is a violent one, and is further
complicated by the presence of Doc Holliday in Tombstone. Doc Holliday is, if
anything, an even better representative of civilization than the Earp brothers. While
Ford has, in My Darling Clementine, ignored the Earps’ northern upbringing, he
deliberately shifts Doc Holliday’s origin from the aristocratic south to Boston,
Massachusetts. Boston’s history and role in the American Revolution creates an
additional analogue between Holliday and the United States as an ideal. Yet,
Holliday has all but rejected civilization, leaving the nurse and schoolmarm
Clementine for the Mexican dance hall girl Chihuahua and, at one point, smashing
his medical diploma with a bottle and derisively scoffing at his former name,
"Doctor John Holliday." Holliday’s presence seems to suggest that the "civilization"
that is being brought to Tombstone by the easterners is fractured.

Ultimately, My Darling Clementine recounts not the integration of Tombstone
into the American system, but instead the integration of the American system into
Tombstone. Allegorically, the film tells the story of the United States’ ascendance to
power after World War II. However, this power is not without its perils. Wyatt
Earp is drawn into battle with the Clanton family, at the cost of two of his brothers. The Clantons, ruled by their autocratic patriarch, represent Soviet Russia in relation to the Earps’ America. *My Darling Clementine* thus becomes a tale reflecting the anxieties of American audiences related to the United States’ newfound dominance of the balance of power and the obligations that such authority might carry with it. For decades, politicians and pundits had told Americans that involvement in international organizations like the League of Nations would force the United States’ hand in foreign affairs, and now the nation found itself in a position where it was facing a rival that was being portrayed as an ideological enemy bent on world domination. The fear of being drawn into a war, made all the more frightening by the existence of atomic weaponry, weighed heavily on American minds as it circulated in the discourse of politicians, especially leading up to the midterm election of 1946. *My Darling Clementine* offered a cultural forum reflecting both sides of the argument: Wyatt’s success against the Clanton family and reciprocated love for Clementine support the triumphal reading of Slotkin and Corkin; however, the counter-narrative of Wyatt Earp’s integration into Tombstone’s community challenges the progressive allegory. Thus, *My Darling Clementine* fulfills Robinson’s bad faith principle by providing a forum wherein such competing discourses are offered so that the audience may address its anxieties while being lauded for its society’s successes.

By the time *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* was released in 1957, such anxieties had been amplified. Russian rearmament and nuclear capabilities intensified American
fears that the nation’s position of power would compromise national security, with
the additional threat of incredible destruction as a result of a nuclear war rather than
conventional war. Moreover, conflicts had been arising across the world that
seemed to confirm that America’s fate was to involve itself in foreign wars that
seemed to have little direct relevance for Americans living in the United States. The
rules of war had become blurred. No longer was war fought on a battlefield oceans
away. Rather, American rhetoricians emphasized an ideological threat that worked
through “infiltration and intimidation” (NSC-68 VII). The Eisenhower
administration’s “New Look” approach to foreign policy aggravated American
angst as John Foster Dulles and others advocated a policy of “massive retaliation”—
a strategy that advocated a massive arms race as a form of deterrence. As the Soviet
Union developed its own atomic weapons program and worked on perfecting inter-
continental ballistic missiles, the possibility of a nuclear war hitting American soil
became a very real threat. *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* provided a forum wherein
these fears could be placed in currency with the prevailing discourse of the
Eisenhower administration, which suggested that a massive build-up of atomic
armaments was an effective deterrent to the outbreak of nuclear war.

After campaigning against the Democratic Party’s perceived “soft” stance
toward Communism, Eisenhower’s Republican administration was obligated to
adopt a new approach. To this end, the Republicans took the terms of the NSC-68
and NSC 162/2 documents to heart. NSC-68 articulated a Manichean approach to
foreign policy: on one side, there was the United States and its allies, and on the
other, the Soviet bloc (Brands 32). The Soviet Union was characterized by “a new fanatic faith, anti-thetical to our own, and seeks to impose its elaborate authority over the rest of the world” (NSC-68 I). The document additionally suggested that Soviet designs called “for the complete subversion or forcible destruction of the machinery of government and structure of society in the countries of the non-Soviet world and their replacement by an apparatus and structure subservient to and controlled from the Kremlin” (NSC-68 III). Furthermore, NSC-68 emphasized the Soviet capability to render devastating damage to the United States: “The Kremlin’s possession of atomic weapons puts new power behind its design, and increases the jeopardy to our system” (NSC-68 VII). As H. W. Brands notes, “For the first time in American history, an enemy would possess the capacity to strike quickly and devastatingly at America’s industrial resources and population. Previous military technology had allowed America the luxury of waiting until wars became imminent, or had begun, before mobilizing” (33).

NSC 162/2, released in 1953, elaborated on such notions and emphasized the purported Soviet plan for world domination. “The basic Soviet objectives,” the document noted, “continue to be consolidation and expansion of their own sphere of power and eventual domination of the non-communist world” (2). NSC 162/2 also expressed alarm over the Soviets’ recent development of hydrogen weapons and conventional military build up: “The USSR has sufficient bombs and aircraft, using one-way missions, to inflict serious damage on the United States, especially by surprise attack. The USSR soon may have the capability of dealing a crippling blow
to our industrial base and our continued ability to prosecute a war. . . . Within the
next two years, the Soviet bloc is not expected to increase the size of its forces, but
will strengthen them with improved equipment and training and the larger atomic
stockpile” (2). The National Security Council recommended that, in response, the
United States develop “[a] strong military posture, with emphasis on the capability
of inflicting massive retaliatory damage by offensive power” (5). Furthermore, NSC
162/2 advocated American involvement in nations that were not already aligned
with the United States, as “their vast manpower, their essential raw materials and
their potential for growth are such that their absorption within the Soviet system
would greatly, perhaps decisively, alter the world balance of power to [American]
detriment” (13). The document continued to speak in economic terms, promoting
economic growth as a foundation for defense development and security, while
advocating that the nation “maintain retaliatory power sufficient to insure [sic]
unacceptable damage to the Soviet system should the USSR resort to general war,
and prove that the free world can prosper despite Soviet pressures, or if for any
reason Soviet stability and influence are reduced” (24) and “take feasible political
economic, propaganda and covert measures designed to create and exploit
troublesome problems for the USSR” (25).

Though these documents were initially classified, they entered the public
mind through the rhetoric of several people involved with the Truman and
Eisenhower administrations, most notably Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles.
During the 1950 campaign season, Acheson, responding to Republican accusations
of a weak position toward the Soviets, delivered speeches that emphasized "the
Soviet enemy as an expansionist imperialist state that relied on 'threats, infiltration,
planned chaos, despair, and confusion'" (Carey 661), and Newsweek followed with
speculation that Congress had been mulling over the option of preventative war.
Americans responded by indicating their support for an increased military build-up.
During the 1950 midterm elections, some seventy percent of respondents in a Gallup
Poll said that they supported raising taxes to fund the military, leaving the poll
takers to comment that "Rarely has the Institute in its fifteen years of measuring
public opinion found such heavy majorities expressing a willingness to pay more
taxes for any public purpose" (qtd. in Carey 672).

After the defeat of the Democrats in the 1952 presidential election, the
Republicans continued their strong anti-Communist rhetoric. In a response to an
interviewer on April 7, 1954, Eisenhower sought to explain the importance of
Southeast Asia to American interests through an articulation of the "domino
theory," arguing that the loss of any nations in the region from the American sphere
of interest would result in a "falling domino principle" (LaFeber 96) that would
force Japan "toward the Communist areas" for trade (97). Secretary of State John
Foster Dulles advanced another depiction of the imperialistic machinations of the
Soviet Union on June 30, 1954, in a speech explaining American involvement in
Guatemala. Dulles suggested that the events in Guatemala "expose[d] the evil
purpose of the Kremlin to destroy the inter-American system, and [tested] the ability
of the American states to maintain the peaceful integrity of this hemisphere" (118).
This speech came six months after Dulles had told a New York audience that massive retaliation was the only course of action that could result in peaceful liberation from their oppressors. Dulles stated that the President and his advisors had agreed "to depend upon a great capacity to retaliate, by means and at places of our choosing . . . reinforced by the striking power of a strategic air force based on internationally agreed positions" (Dulles, "Speech in New York" 169 - 70). The logic of the administration, as forwarded by Dulles, was that the threat of such massive retaliation would keep the increasingly powerful Soviet state in check.

Thus, the American mind was being bombarded by images of a tyrannical enemy that could only be stopped through a massive buildup of arms that, it seemed, would inevitably lead to war. John E. Mueller's summary of Cold War opinion polls notes that American belief that a third world war was imminent peaked with the outbreak of war in Korea, but arose again in the mid 1950s (303). In 1955, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology predicted that a nuclear war would result in "death and destruction on a scale almost beyond knowing and certainly beyond any sensibility to shock and horror that men have so far experienced" (qtd. in Brands 65). This dire warning was followed by the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles and the realization that were such technology also in Soviet hands, the Communists would be able to strike, leaving only fifteen minutes warning.

---

6 The polls that Mueller cites were discontinued after 1963 and were not conducted in 1958 - 59.
Such was the climate when John Sturges released *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*. Americans were being bombarded by threats of an expanding enemy that seemed bent on their destruction while being told that the only way to deter such an enemy was to stockpile weapons with the capability of destruction on an unprecedented scale—weapons that their enemies also possessed. This anxiety was coupled with the fallout from a sense of paranoia that rose from the McCarthy hearings and Alger Hiss trial. Americans were beset from all sides by fear and mistrust. Whether the threats were realistic or exaggerated, the mid-1950s developed a culture of fear. Such disquiet is developed as an alternate allegorical discourse in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*. The primary narrative, like *My Darling Clementine’s*, deals with the arrival of law in Tombstone in 1882, culminating in the titular battle. However, an analysis of sub-textual elements reveals the text’s function as a cultural forum where the narrative that champions American might is tempered by a fear of powerlessness in the face of an enemy that is equipped to render great destruction on the nation.

Corkin’s reading of *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* in *Cowboys as Cold Warriors* focuses on the film’s discourse of containment. Corkin draws attention to the emphasis of borders and lines in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, such as the “dead line” in Dodge City: “In no other Western that I know of is there such an obsession with delineating a proper sphere of behavior and influence. In Dodge, guns may not be worn above the ‘dead line,’ a geographical distinction symbolizing the zone of anarchy versus that of law and order” (173). Corkin links this to an economic
reading of *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, suggesting that the threat of the Clantons is not to “civilization,” as he argued it was in *My Darling Clementine*, but rather to economic ethics. The Clantons are cattle rustlers, but Sturges’s Tombstone is a well-developed city. The problem with the Clantons, then, is that they are limiting the ability of good business people in Tombstone to compete on an even footing with the rustlers, representing an illegal infringement on free markets. This circumstance is linked to complaints of business interests in the 1950s that manufacturers from communist nations used slave labour and ignored copyright law, actions that limited the ability of western concerns to compete (167).

Wyatt Earp, Corkin argues, represents American authority in such a world. Wyatt’s task is to police this region and prevent the spread of influences like the Clantons. Corkin notes that Wyatt moves about the west freely with little concern for jurisdiction (173); in this light, the entire west becomes a microcosm for the world after the Korean War. The various levels of development of the cities Wyatt visits, from backwater Griffin, Texas to the relatively cosmopolitan Dodge City, are analogous to the various regions in which containment policy would involve the United States. As Corkin notes,

> containment did not necessarily mean reining in the nations that formed the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. It also meant constraining or thwarting nationalist or leftist initiatives all over the world, whether in Asia, Western Europe, or Africa. This might take the form of thwarting Arab nationalists in the Middle East, countering the
nonaligned India with a U.S.-supported Pakistan, or infiltrating leftist
organizations in Western Europe. (168)

Gorkin’s reading hinges on his depiction of Wyatt’s authority and range as
being unproblematic. Indeed, there is little in Gunfight at the O.K. Corral to suggest
that Wyatt’s movement is morally or ethically wrong. Nobody questions his
authority, and he is ready, willing, and able to cross geographic and legal
boundaries in order to perform his role as a peace officer. Rather, what is troubling
in Gunfight at the O.K. Corral is the overall ineffectuality of this policy. Ultimately,
the policy of containment as enacted by Wyatt Earp fails. Ostensibly, in the theatre
of contemporary politics, the goal of both the containment policy and the New Look
diplomacy was to prevent an outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and the
United States. However, Wyatt Earp is unable to prevent a “hot” conflict, as
represented in the film by the climactic gunfight. The gunfight results not because
of any deficiency in Wyatt, but rather through the inadequacies of the containment
system and the alliances that it necessitates. The result is an outbreak of a prolonged
gun battle, which realizes the fears of Americans who had been inundated with the
rhetoric of the New Look and massive retaliation.

Throughout Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, Wyatt Earp is loath to utilize violence,
instead preferring to talk his way out of troublesome situations. He is not a pacifist;
he will resort to violence when necessary, whether it be “buffaloing” a man with the
butt of his gun or looking for deputies who can handle a firearm to assist him in the
apprehension of Luke Short. However, above all, Wyatt Earp prefers to rely on his
potential for violence to overcome obstacles. This is best illustrated through his handling of Shanghai Pierce’s invasion of the church social in Dodge City. Despite facing overwhelming numbers, Wyatt is able to overcome his foes by targeting their leader. Pierce, confident in his superiority, asks Wyatt to shoot it out. Wyatt, however, cleverly replies, “Go ahead, but you get it first, Shanghai.” In this scene, Wyatt succinctly articulates the policy of massive retaliation: though in a long, drawn-out war, the United States might not survive, it can, as Dulles put it, “depend upon a great capacity to retaliate” (Dulles, “Speech in New York” 169). In this instance, the ploy works, thanks in part to Doc Holliday keeping his own gun on the mercenary Johnny Ringo, whom Pierce had hired to help him eliminate Earp.

Whenever Wyatt ventures out of the relative safety of his home community of Dodge City, however, he is routinely compromised, as Hubert I. Cohen puts it, by “misplaced trust” (210). The audience’s first encounter with Wyatt is when he is learning from his former friend and fellow lawman Cotton Wilson that Ike Clanton and Johnny Ringo have been allowed to ride through Griffin, Texas, without being held, as Wyatt had asked. Furthermore, in Wyatt’s initial meeting with Doc Holliday, he is cheated again when he promises Doc information about Ed Bailey in exchange for the whereabouts of Clanton and Ringo. Doc accepts Wyatt’s information but then reminds Wyatt that he never agreed to an exchange. Wyatt’s inability to rely on other people in the film is perhaps most poignantly expressed toward the end of the film when, in a gesture alluding to High Noon, Wyatt casts down his badge in disgust. Over time, Wyatt becomes decreasingly confident in his
abilities. As Cohen has noted, the night before the gunfight at the O.K. Corral his calm exterior has been abandoned:

Whereas Ford's Wyatt carries out his revenge with steely resolve,

Sturges's Wyatt shows his fear the night before the fight. He seeks out the unconscious Doc Holliday and pleads, "Doc, wake up. I need you."

This from the man who heretofore has been unflappable, the epitome of justice and law, and who has felt invulnerable. Evidence of the latter is shown early in the film when Wyatt walked up to a drunk cowboy who had a gun pointed at Wyatt's chest and talked him into handing it over. (210-11).

Thus, Wyatt's reliance on deterrence through reputation and alliances with other parties has resulted in the collapse of Wyatt's earlier status as the omniscient authority. Instead, he is reduced to a mere man like any other, who is now beholden to his alliance with Doc Holliday to stay alive.

But Wyatt's alliances, reputation, and tactical skills are not enough to keep him out of a battle with the Clantons. While his methods may have worked with less significant enemies, from the drunk cowboy Cohen mentions to Shanghai Pierce, they fail against the Clantons. Though he is able to talk his way out of tense situations with the gang on a number of occasions, they are ultimately spoiling for a fight and kill Wyatt's brother James. At this stage, Wyatt abandons any pretense that he is fighting for some moral imperative, and, as the Clantons had planned, falls into a personal fight. When Doc admonishes him that he is dooming himself by
fighting Ike Clanton's way, Wyatt retorts, "To hell with logic. That's my brother lying there."

Ultimately, Wyatt's strategy of deterrence through his reputation and diplomacy fails. As the audience knows from the beginning, the gun battle is inevitable. Sturges directs the gunfight so that it is long and drawn out, and strategy wins the day. Nevertheless, it is a bloody fight. Virgil Earp is shot in the leg, and every Clanton to a man is killed. The epic battle at the end of the film allegorizes the outbreak of the hot war that so many Americans feared. The policies of massive retaliation and containment failed. Wyatt is unable to scare the Clantons into ceasing their transgressions, and he is unable to avoid an armed conflict through force of personality alone. Earp wins the day, but it is again at the cost of his brother and, possibly, Doc Holliday, who rose from what may have been his death bed to help his friend. In *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, the policies of massive retaliation and containment are unable to avoid the inevitable conflict that must arise between the two oppositional forces. Wyatt's force of personality only carries him so far.

Thus, both *My Darling Clementine* and *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* present triumphal narratives that apparently sanctify America's new role as a superpower. In *My Darling Clementine*, Wyatt Earp ostensibly eliminates the undesirable elements in Tombstone and makes the town safe for people like Clementine Carter, in an allegory about the rise of the American superpower and its potential to combat totalitarianism in the world and make the world free for the spread of American commerce and progressivism. Eleven years later, *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* also has
Wyatt Earp ridding Tombstone of transgressors and seems to argue for the policy of containment. However, both narratives are tempered by a veiled anxiety. In *My Darling Clementine*, a close analysis suggests that the film is not only dealing with the integration of foreign markets into an American sphere of influence, but that it is also addressing the American shift from isolationism to internationalism which leads inexorably toward conflict with its ideological enemy, the Soviet Union. In *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, the adoption of policies such as containment and massive retaliation, as exemplified by Wyatt Earp, ultimately fail. These films both reflect and speak to the American attitude in the 1940s and 1950s that a hot war was inevitable and articulate the anxiety that American policy would be unable to avoid such a conflict; thus the films function as cultural forums where these themes are hidden beneath the surface "bad faith" narrative in order to make them more palatable for their audiences.
Prior to the 1960s, depictions of Wyatt Earp on film had been largely positive. In spite of the subtle critiques of American foreign policy that were based on criticisms of certain aspects of Wyatt’s character, the dominant narrative in films like *My Darling Clementine* and *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* presented Wyatt as an admirable figure, if only superficially. However, by the late 1960s, the filmic character of Wyatt Earp changed drastically. As the United States became increasingly embroiled in external conflicts and, in particular, the Vietnam War, the darker side of the historical Wyatt Earp became more popular fodder for filmmakers. Filmmakers began to emphasize some of the more problematic aspects of Wyatt Earp, painting him as an obsessive bully, and, in some cases, a wholly evil monomaniac. There were two major films released between the time the American role in Vietnam shifted from an “advisory” one and the adoption of Nixon’s policy of “Vietnamization”: *Hour of the Gun* (1967) and *Doc* (1971). Though both films adopted a counter-cultural reckoning of institutional American heroes, they did so in very different ways. In *Hour of the Gun*, John Sturges appended the Wyatt Earp story he began with *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* by presenting the first filmic depiction of Wyatt’s “vendetta ride,” a series of events that problematized Wyatt’s search for justice by turning it into a case of personal vengeance. Meanwhile, *Doc* abandoned
any pretense of grey morality by presenting a Wyatt Earp who is completely corrupt and undoubtedly the villain of the piece. In doing so, each film offered a critique of the American foreign policy by presenting Wyatt Earp as a synecdoche of the United States.

The mid- to late-1960s were marked by increased American involvement in Vietnam. Between the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in August 1964 and April 1965, the American approach to Vietnam shifted drastically. In previous years, Americans had been present in Vietnam only as “advisors”; however, by 1965, American troops were facing direct fire from Vietcong forces. Prior to 1965, John McNaughton, a trusted advisor of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, had declared that American intentions in Vietnam were “to permit the people of South Vietnam to enjoy a better, freer way of life” (qtd. in Farber 142). But, by 1965, McNaughton recognized that the goal of the operation in Vietnam had shifted “to avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat” (qtd. in Farber 143). American forces implemented a concentrated bombing campaign in mid-1965 and began attempts to rally international support, with only limited success. A tally of American numbers in Vietnam reveals the astounding rate of the escalation. In 1961, the Americans had deployed some 3200 “advisors” to Vietnam; by 1963 this number had increased to 16,300; and, in 1964, there were 23,300 advisors. By 1965, however, the Americans had 184,300 troops stationed in Vietnam (Farber 146).

In spite of increased American presence in Vietnam, the war was not going well. In 1968, the CIA reported that American forces were able to find and engage
Vietcong forces in only one of every hundred attempts (Farber 147). These difficulties abroad were exacerbated as the operation began to lose credibility in the American media. There was a marked shift in coverage. As David Stiegerwald observes,

Before late 1967, the typical war story detailed the adventures or misadventures of American soldiers; similarly, stories about the air war focused on the pilots’ skill with their high-tech weaponry. The enemy remained faceless, nameless, and for the most part evil; indeed, U.S. reporting was dominated by stereotypes about both the Asians and guerilla fighters. (98)

Prior to 1967, there had been general assent amongst the press to such coverage, in spite of the occasional troubling report, such as CBS’s coverage of marines destroying the village of Came Ne in August 1965. However, as the futility of the war and the ineffectiveness of American tactics in the jungle became difficult to ignore, a “credibility gap” developed (Stiegerwald 99). The press began to legitimize anti-war sentiments through coverage of events such as J. William Fulbright’s rhetoric at the Senate Foreign Relations hearings and some officials began to disseminate to the press the doubts that existed within the administration (Stiegerwald 100).

The press’s growing dissatisfaction with the war reflected growing public discontent with events abroad. The first major anti-war protest occurred in April of 1965, when the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) held a rally at the
Washington monument. At the protest, SDS president Paul Potter said that “The incredible war in Vietnam has provided the razor . . . that has finally severed the last vestiges of the illusion that morality and democracy are the guiding principles of American foreign policy” (qtd. in Farber 138 - 9). Potter’s speech articulated a growing anxiety that American intervention abroad was running contrary to essential American values. Just as the American ascendancy to power in the 1950s had caused concern for Americans who had been brought up to view their nation as an independent actor, the Vietnam War sparked an anxiety that this new America had departed from the values that American cultural rhetoric had held dear.

After 1965, opposition to the war grew. As Farber observes, “Many people, in a phrase from their time, learned to ‘question authority.’ They started with their national leaders but extended their questioning to those who produced the ‘news,’ ran their schools, who claimed to teach them about values and morality” (140). Farber also notes that in the context of the Vietnam war, there was no “patriotic fervor” to enlist; rather, the primary impetus of those who did join up was to better their socioeconomic standing or to avoid being drafted (148). The protests soon moved from being characterized as fringe activities to including academics and other respected members of society. Some universities held “teach-ins,” where students and their professors could discuss the war. Additionally, numerous church groups began to involve themselves in the anti-war movement. In 1966, Lutheran pastor Richard Neuhaus founded a group called Clergy and Laymen Concerned
about Vietnam, and in 1967, the *New York Times* editorial page had similarly turned against the war (Farber 163). As Stiegerwald notes,

> [the opponents of the war] were a widely varied group of citizens, gathered together in numerous groups and often at odds with one another over strategy and analysis. There was no single leader and no group dominated . . . Those who flocked into or associated with one or several of the organizations were just as varied and hailed from all ranks and areas of American life: clergy, teachers, suburban housewives, students, union members, country folk. (105)

April rallies in New York and San Francisco drew over a quarter of a million people, while an October march on the Pentagon saw the attendance of 100,000. The reverberations of the Vietnam experience also directly affected those in power: a number of President Johnson’s advisors including George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Bill Moyers, and Robert McNamara resigned over the war.

In this climate, John Sturges felt moved to create a sequel to his earlier *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*. Although in 1962 Sturges had asserted his belief that “Western characters must not be glamorized” and claimed that he “[didn’t] go in for that Stuart Lake baloney” (qtd. in Hutton, “Showdown” 21), there are still strong elements of the heroic Earp of earlier films in Sturges’ sequel, *Hour of the Gun*. As Cohen notes, the audience of this film is trained to sympathize with Wyatt Earp and his allies simply because these characters are initially fleshed out far more completely than their enemies (212). Additionally, this version of Wyatt has casting
on his side; he is portrayed by James Garner, who had attained some fame for his portrayal of the likeable Maverick on the television series of the same name (213). Furthermore, the audience is presented early on with the facts that Wyatt’s brothers Virgil and Morgan have been attacked; Virgil is maimed and Morgan killed, lending some credibility to Wyatt’s desire for justice.

Thus, there is some sense that Wyatt’s revenge is justified. As he systematically hunts down and kills the Clanton gang, some members of the audience likely sympathized with Wyatt and his quest. Sturges makes it clear that the audience is supposed to dislike Ike Clanton, and the contrast between the nattily attired Earps and the rag-tag Clanton family on the film’s poster allows the audience to see in Earp a representation of American authority that was being forced, on the home front, to deal with the anti-establishmentarian behaviour of the anti-war movement and the counterculture. While many Americans from many walks of life did indeed support the protests, there was anything but public consensus over the war. Indeed, even as late as 1969, some public opinion polls found that a majority of Americans felt that protestors were “harmful to American life” for refusing to support the nation (Farber 167). As Cohen argues, “Sturges might well have expected that some members of his audience—those who were growing impatient with the radicals in the streets and on college campuses—would align with the lawmen” (214).

However, these attempts to lead the audience into identifying with Wyatt Earp at the expense of Ike Clanton and his gang generally fail. Rather, the dominant
discourse in the film would suggest that Wyatt Earp—and the American establishment that he represents—is morally problematic. Ultimately, *Hour of the Gun* traces what Andrew Paul Hutton refers to as Wyatt Earp’s “moral suicide” (“Showdown” 24). In this reading, Wyatt is associated with excessive violence and abuse of authority.

The first indication that *Hour of the Gun* is offering an alternate primary discourse to those presented in the 1950s depictions of Wyatt Earp is that the film begins—not ends—with the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. The effect of this device is manifold. On one hand, this shift in structure emphasizes that the physical conflict itself is not of utmost significance; rather, the key problem at hand is the moral issues that the film will present to its audience. As Cohen argues, “the basis for the confrontation [between Earp and Clanton], it turns out, is a political and economic struggle: Ike is for ‘freedom of the range’ and control of this area of the west before the arrival of other eastern interests, designs that the Earps are not wholly aware of” (212). Additionally, the structural shift immediately associates Wyatt Earp with violence and disregard for legitimate authority: in the opening scenes of the film, the audience’s first glimpses into Wyatt’s personality are offered by the gunfight itself as well as his refusal to comply with Sheriff Bryan’s attempts to arrest him (Cohen 214).

However, perhaps most importantly, the positioning of the gunfight at the beginning of the film allows Sturges to depict the events that historically occurred after the gunfight, which had been ignored by previous filmmakers. These events, often referred to as Wyatt Earp’s “vendetta ride” or “ride of vengeance,” involved
Wyatt Earp engaging in a personal extra-legal mission to hunt down those whom he felt were responsible for acts of violence perpetrated against his brothers Virgil and Morgan. Though earlier films had utilized Virgil’s maiming and Morgan’s death as a plot device to justify Wyatt’s personal stake in the Tombstone gunfight and to develop the animosity between Earp and the Clanton gang beyond a simple political feud, *Hour of the Gun* attempts to depict these events in a fashion more similar to the actual events. In doing so, Sturges challenges Earp’s status as a representation of American values and more closely connects him to the Vietnam quagmire.

The actual events of the vendetta ride are complicated by various conflicting accounts from both sides of the feud. Virgil Earp had been shot in the streets of Tombstone on December 28, 1881, while Morgan was killed on March 18, 1882. According to historian Paula Mitchell Parks, at this point Wyatt Earp engaged in a war that saw him abandon any legal means of justice: “Wyatt Earp looked at his dead brother, the one intimates called his favourite, and decided that he was tired of all the political and legal maneuvering. From here on out, he would have no regard for any law but his own” (341). The first salvo in Wyatt Earp’s war came just days after the death of Morgan. Wyatt, Doc Holliday, and two others, who have been inconclusively identified as Warren Earp and Sherman McMasters, were at the Tucson train depot, ostensibly to see brother Virgil off on the train. Most accounts have Earp and his allies carrying arms, though Tucson deputy J.W. Evans disagreed. At the depot, the Earps encountered Ike Clanton and Frank Stilwell, a member of the
cowboy gang.\footnote{Like nearly everything else related to the vendetta ride, Stilwell's purpose at the depot is disputed. Some have him meeting a deputy whom he hoped would testify on his behalf on a stage robbery charge; the \textit{Epitaph} suggested that he was either sent there by the cowboys to be killed, trying to get away himself, or seeking to kill the remaining Earps (Marks 346).} The Earps killed Stilwell, while Clanton managed to escape. After this, Wyatt Earp and his gang were wanted men. Tombstone sheriff John Behan soon attempted to speak to Wyatt—presumably to arrest him—but Wyatt refused to speak to him. Again, accounts of this exchange vary; the Earp-supporting \textit{Epitaph} reported that Earp and the others simply walked away from Behan, while according to the \textit{Daily Nugget}, Earp drew his gun on the outnumbered sheriff (Marks 349). At this point, Wyatt left town, and Behan formed a posse, comprised mainly of members of the cowboy gang, including John Ringo and Ike Clanton, to hunt him down.

On March 22 the second gun battle of the vendetta ride took place in the South Pass of the Dragoon Mountains. This time the victim was Florentino Cruz. According to George Goodfellow, who examined the body, Cruz was shot four times. The fourth shot, Goodfellow believed, “had been received after Cruz died” (Marks 354). At this point, some began to question Earp’s motives and methods. Pima County Republican sheriff Bob Paul, who Marks notes was believed to have been a staunch Earp supporter, said that “[t]he so-called Earp gang, or faction if you please, was composed entirely of gamblers, who preyed upon the cowboys, and at the same time in order to keep up a show of having a legitimate calling, was organized into a sort of vigilance committee” (qtd. in Marks 354 - 5; emphasis added). Two
days later, another gunfight took place at either Iron Springs or Mescal Springs, depending on the source of the information. Once again, accounts of the event conflict with each other. The *Epitaph* claimed that six members of Earp's faction had been ambushed by nine cowboys, numbers that Wyatt himself verified in 1896. However, the *Daily Nugget* reported that in fact the Earps were forced to retreat after encountering just four cowboys, and that both sides opened fire simultaneously (Marks 357). Billy Breakenridge, one of Behan's deputies, later published an account that claimed that the Cowboys were hiding from the Earps and asserting that Wyatt had instigated the gunplay. Nevertheless, as Marks notes, "[m]ore important than the actual details of the fight . . . were the roles of the participants. The Earp party maintained that it was acting as a duly constituted posse trying to serve warrants on stage-robbing cowboys and killing one such notorious miscreant [Curly Bill Brocious] in the process" (359 – 60). However, Marks goes on to point out that "no stage robbery charge against Curly Bill has ever been uncovered" (360).

Ultimately, Wyatt Earp was forced to live on the run. He and his gang hid at the ranch of cattle baron Henry Hooker for a time, who protected the Earp faction from Behan's posse, which arrived on March 27th to arrest the fugitives. The conflict went far enough to prompt presidential attention; on May 3rd, Chester A. Arthur threatened to place southeastern Arizona under martial law, believing that "it [had] become impracticable to enforce by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings the laws of the United States" and invoking his duty to "use the military forces for the purpose of enforcing . . . the laws" (qtd. in Marks 377). Not long afterward, Wyatt's
faction rode for Colorado and split up. Wyatt was never apprehended for the murder of Stilwell, though Doc Holliday was arrested in Denver on May 15th.

Sturges' decision to depict a fictionalization of these events in *Hour of the Gun* suggests a radical departure from previous accounts of Wyatt Earp's life. In doing so, Sturges highlights the moral dilemma that Earp's actions raised. Marks, writing on contemporary perceptions of the vendetta, observes that

Wyatt Earp's adherents at the time depicted him as a fugitive only because of an unjust legal machinery, a man earnestly trying to do the right (i.e. lawful) thing, but forced to hide out and assess his chances of receiving any kind of justice. His detractors saw him as a troublemaker whose machinations had caught up with him, forcing him to show his true colors by eluding the legal process. (371)

Parks' canny assessment, and Sturges' decision to depict such a divisive issue, helps to place *Hour of the Gun* within the framework of the cultural forum and bad faith models. Given Wyatt Earp's continuing status as a symbol of the United States and its foreign policy, Wyatt's actions can be read either as an ugly but necessary campaign for justice, or a morally reprehensible attempt to advance a personal agenda — allegorically, combating the rise of Communism in East Asia. Of course, *Hour of the Gun* places its support firmly in the latter camp. As Allen Barra has argued, "As [Hour of the Gun] progresses, [Wyatt's] ideals are stripped away one by one until he can no longer deny that his purpose is anything but vengeance" (*Inventing* 357). Wyatt's means to his end are appropriately troubling, given this
reading; he uses a phony bounty to expose the whereabouts of his enemies so he can kill them himself, and violates international boundaries by chasing Ike Clanton into Mexico to finish what he has started. Thus, given this interpretation as well as *Hour of the Gun*'s status as a revisionist sequel to *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, the film functions as a space wherein the audience can confront a depreciation of American ideals. The anxieties that were introduced in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* concerning the corrupting influence of America's rise to power had come to fruition. As the audience of Sturges' first take on Wyatt Earp feared, America's new position in the world had impelled it to abandon the ideals that formed the foundation of its culture, allowing it to sink into a new status as a bully who exercised its international muscle with complete disregard of its own professed morals.

*Hour of the Gun* was no runaway success at the box office. In spite of its star power, its presentation of the discomforting discourse as its primary narrative undoubtedly troubled many filmgoers. While there is certainly an adulatory narrative in the film—the audience is, after all, encouraged to despise Ike Clanton and perhaps choose to sympathize with Wyatt Earp if only as the lesser of two evils—the film stretches the bounds of the bad faith and cultural forum models nearly to their breaking point. However, the next major Hollywood Wyatt Earp film, *Doc*, would go even further.

By the time *Doc* was released in 1971, the United States had, if anything, become even more firmly entrenched in the Vietnam conflict. Richard Nixon was
elected in 1968 after campaigning on his policy of "Vietnamization," but in truth had no practical exit strategy. Instead, Nixon proposed to force negotiations by escalating American air raid campaigns (Farber 229). Enlistment rates fell as incidents of desertion rose; additionally, there were an estimated 800 cases of "fragging"—the shooting of unpopular officers (Farber 230). The strength of the anti-war movement grew as well and began to involve many returning GIs, some of whom took to publishing pamphlets condemning the war. In 1967 there had been just three such underground papers published, but by 1972, the number had grown to nearly 250 (Farber 230). The mainstream press also began to view the anti-war movement in a different light, and even conservative publications were portraying the anti-war movement more positively (Slotkin 580). The revelation of the Mylai massacre by the New York Times and Life magazine in 1969 further galvanized the nation against the war in Vietnam. According to Slotkin, "More than any other single event, the revelation transformed the terms of the ideological and political debates on the war, lending authority to the idea that American society was in the grip of a 'madness' whose sources might be endemic to our national character" (581). In 1971, the Pentagon Papers were leaked. According to Farber, these documents "detailed the pattern of deception that characterized the presidential administrations' portrayals of the war to the American people" (233). Polls taken in 1968 had suggested that Americans viewed the war as a "mistake" (Slotkin 579); by

---

8 Nixon’s Vietnamization policy sought to reduce American involvement in the war by increasing the South Vietnamese capability to defend itself against North Vietnam and the Vietcong.
1972, a poll suggested that a majority of Americans not only were opposed to the war but viewed it as “immoral” (Farber 259).

Western films reflected the vehement anti-war attitude that was beginning to dominate the national mind. This period saw the development of films that depicted what Slotkin calls the “demoralization” of the Western. According to Slotkin, “the negative aspects of the adventure . . . now form[ed] the center of the narrative and suggest[ed] an implicit rejection of the ideological projects that motivated counterinsurgency” (592). For Slotkin, the “guiding myth” of the Western had, in the 1960s and 1970s, been called into question, and the chaotic America of this period was unable to renew its belief in this myth (626). Michael Coyne similarly argues that the Vietnam War sounded the death knell of the Western myth. The genre, Coyne suggests, had died with American optimism and had been replaced by dark Vietnam narratives as the war replaced the Western experience as the “most resonant” American historical experience (191). The films of the 1970 no longer mythicized the nation’s Western heroes; rather they depicted figures such as Wyatt Earp as personifications of the worst aspects of the American establishment.

Though Slotkin cites Sam Peckinpah’s bloody film *The Wild Bunch* as the exemplum of this trend, *Doc* provides what is possibly an even more overt case of the demonization of the Western hero and the “demoralization” of the Western. The poster for the film proclaimed that “on a good day, [Wyatt Earp] might pistol-whip a drunk, shoot an unarmed man, bribe a politician, and get paid off by an outlaw.
He was a U.S. Marshal" (Hutton, “Showdown” 24). This Wyatt Earp is a “self-righteous, hypocritical sadist with a delightfully Nixonian vision of law that is totally self-serving” (Hutton, “Showdown” 24). In this film, the Cowboys are clearly meant to be analogous with the Vietcong. They are helpless before the overwhelmingly superior firepower of Wyatt and his gang. In addition, the long hair of the Cowboy gang connects them to the hippie movement. The screenwriter, Pete Hamill, made explicit the connection between this portrayal of Wyatt Earp and his own experience in Vietnam:

I went to Vietnam in 1966, and it was evident to almost everyone except the military that the war was wrong, but that we were continuing to fight because of some peculiar notions of national macho pride, self-righteousness, and the missionary spirit. I started to realize that within Lyndon Johnson there was a western unspooling. In that western the world was broken down into White Hats and Black Hats. Indochina was Dodge City, and the Americans were some collective version of Wyatt Earp. (qtd. in Hutton, “Showdown” 24)

Thus, in Doc, Wyatt Earp becomes the symbol of American authoritarianism abroad. He represents the most profane excesses of American foreign policy in the early 1970s. Doc’s Wyatt is emasculated through his latent homosexuality as well as his impotence in a fistfight with Ike Clanton. He has ceased to be the robust model of American masculinity. Wyatt’s ruthlessness is a product of his unrequited feelings for Doc Holliday, and through this presentation, Doc serves a scathing
critique of the United States that suggests the country has completely lost its way. As Wyatt, the synecdoche for contemporary America, is completely stripped of American ideals of masculinity, so too is the United States stripped of any admirable qualities for the film’s audience (Cohen 214-5).

*Doc* offers no subtle counter-narrative; its attention to these angst-inducing issues is explicit and unrelenting. Thus, the film fails to support the bad faith and cultural forum models. However, in doing so, the film becomes the exception that proves the rule. Indeed, the more vilified Wyatt becomes, the less successful the film becomes. *Doc* is a case in point. Of all the films, it fared by far the poorest at the box office, and is nearly universally disparaged by critics. Hutton notes that “*Doc* was a total failure at the box office,” in contrast to “[f]ilms such as *My Darling Clementine* and *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* [which] won great public acceptance, both at the time of their release and since in television rebroadcasts and on videotape” (“Showdown” 25). By refusing to conceal its discourse of moral outrage beneath a counter-discourse, *Doc* offended its audience’s sensibilities: it offered no comfort in the face of its onslaught against Wyatt Earp and the Vietnam War. Instead, the film forced its American audience to gaze directly into a mirror that highlighted only the nation’s most disturbing qualities, a visage that was not an appealing one for filmgoers.

Both *Hour of the Gun* and *Doc* presented its audiences with an alternate take on the Wyatt Earp legend. *Hour of the Gun*’s depiction of the vendetta ride and the film’s status as a sequel to *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* served as a recognition that the
fears of *Gunfight*'s 1957 audience had indeed come to pass: with the United States' new powers and responsibility, the nation had abandoned its adherence to the ideals that served as a basis for its culture, including those of free-will, democracy, justice, and self-determination. This film was far more overt with its depiction of the troubling aspects of American foreign policies than Sturges' previous take on Wyatt Earp had been, and suffered at the box office, perhaps as a result. Nevertheless, its ticket sales were far greater than the sales of tickets to *Doc*, which confronted its audience with the hideous visage of the worst excesses of the American establishment in Vietnam. *Doc* offered no respite from this portrait, and provided no safe haven from the implicit guilt of the enfranchised American citizen. *Doc*’s Nixonian Earp was an apt shift for a post-Mylai, post-Pentagon Papers America, but was perhaps too grim an indictment to be palatable for its intended audience. In any case, Harris Yulin’s portrayal of Earp in *Doc* would be the last depiction of Wyatt on film for over fifteen years.
5. “The Last Charge of Wyatt Earp and His Immortals”: Tombstone, Popular Memory, and The New World Order

The gunfight at the O.K. Corral would not be depicted on movie theatre screens again until 1993. In that year, director George P. Cosomatos brought Wyatt Earp to life once again in Tombstone, a major Hollywood picture with a strong cast that included Kurt Russell as Wyatt Earp, Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday, Powers Boothe as Curly Bill Brocius, and cameo appearances by Charlton Heston and Robert Mitchum. The film was highly regarded by many film goers and grossed over $55 million in its theatrical release. Apparently, film audiences were once again finding currency in the Wyatt Earp myth, to the point that they were able to stomach the somewhat less successful Wyatt Earp within less than a year of Tombstone’s release. The reasoning behind the revival in the story of the gunfight at the O.K. Corral and the success of Tombstone speaks to a new set of American anxieties regarding the nation’s role in the world. By 1993, the Cold War was over. However, any optimism that Americans had about the collapse of Soviet Russia was tempered once again by an unease about what shape the world of the future was to take. While the Cold War had taken with it the tensions of mutually assured destruction and evil empires, in its wake it left a new set of problems. For over forty years, American foreign policy had been relatively static with a single enemy to focus on. With the crumbling of enemy’s empire, a new approach was necessary, and it was
unclear what form that approach would take. Additionally, the ascendance of other nations—notably Japan and Germany—as economic powers intensified American anxiety regarding the sustainability of its empire. As the ideological war came to a close and the potential for an economic one developed, fears regarding the American ability to remain an economic powerhouse without the impetus of a massive defense build-up weighed heavily on some peoples' minds. With 
*
Tombstone,
*
audiences were able once again to look to the American past for solace. The film rendered American history in mythic terms and allowed audiences to psychologically deal with their anxieties in a narrative that is in many ways supremely triumphal. To this end, *Tombstone* functions as a narrative that mythologizes not only Wyatt Earp but also American Cold War history, while simultaneously articulating the anxieties of the new world order.

*Tombstone* was but the latest in a series of Western films that appeared toward the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s. Prior to this period, the Western had not been a popular genre among filmgoers, nor had it been since the early 1970s. As the United States in 1980 elected a president who marked himself as a Western actor, some filmmakers hoped for a revival in the genre, but the three Westerns released that year—*The Long Riders*, *Tom Horn*, and the epic *Heaven's Gate*, all flopped (Coyne 185). The distaste for the genre continued throughout the 1980s, prompting Anthony Lejeune's 1989 lamentation that the genre was as good as dead (23). Western films no longer had the cultural power that they once did. After Vietnam, the casting of American expansion and subjugation of an Other was far more
problematic a myth than it once had been. However, as Richard Slotkin has argued, while the Western had been pushed to the periphery of Hollywood genre films, this “did not entail the disappearance of those underlying structures of myth and ideology that had given the genre its culture force” (633). Instead, the tropes and structures of the Western “were abstracted from the elaborately historicized context of the Western and parceled out among genres that used their relationship to the Western to define both the disillusioning losses and the extravagant potential of the new [post-Vietnam] era” (633). Slotkin attributes the necessity of this abstraction to the failure of “the progressive historical myth of westward expansion” to rationalize the necessity of violence. Thus, a number of films did appear in the 1980s that while not being explicitly Westerns did borrow heavily from the Western form. Many of these were science fiction, horror, or “urban vigilante” films. Slotkin pays special attention to the urban vigilante genre, which is typified by films such as Clint Eastwood’s “Dirty Harry” series. According to Slotkin,

[w]hat makes the urban vigilante genre different from the Western is its ‘post-frontier’ setting. Its world is urbanized, and its possibilities for progress and redemption are constricted by vastly ramified corporate conspiracies, and by monstrous accumulations of wealth, power, and corruption. Its heroes draw energy from the same rage that draws the paranoids, psychopaths, mass murderers, and terrorists of the mean streets, and their victories are almost never socially redemptive in the Western mode. (634)
This genre, like the slasher horror film, inverts the myth of the frontier: "[t]he borders their heroes confront are impermeable to the forces of progress and civilized enlightenment; if anything, the flow of aggressive power runs in the opposite direction, with the civilized world threatened with subjugation to or colonization by the forces of darkness" (Slotkin 635). Meanwhile, Slotkin notes, science fiction films like *Star Wars* "allegorize the condition and imaginative freedom—the power to imagine the most magical or utopian possibilities—by keeping real historical references at a distance" (636).

Ultimately, Slotkin suggests that this rejection of the Western points to a “reaction against the myth / ideology of liberal progressivism in the backwash of the 1960s,” and notes that “other factors, operating more subtly and over the longer term, seem likely to prolong the eclipse of the Western and promote other historically oriented genres in its place” (638). As an exemplar of this trend, Slotkin points to Brian De Palma’s *The Untouchables*. Set in Chicago, this film narrates the conflict between Eliot Ness and Al Capone. However, in spite of its urban setting and apparent generic alignment as a gangster film, structurally, the film has much in common with the Western. In this film, Michael Coyne notes,

Kevin Costner’s Eliot Ness effectively ran the gamut of movie Wyatt Earps, starting as an idealistic lawman akin to Henry Fonda in *My Darling Clementine*, becoming buddy to Sean Connery’s Irish cop in the style of Burt Lancaster to Kirk Douglas in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* . . .
and ending as a cold blooded killer similar to James Garner in *Hour of the Gun*. (187)

Slotkin, too, points out links between *The Untouchables* and the Western, identifying it with "the town-tamer and counter insurgency Westerns of the 1960s. Eliot Ness . . . is the stranger in town, a Puritan with a hidden gift for violence who has to clean up a city ruled by criminals who have corrupted the authorities" (641). Slotkin continues to note that *The Untouchables* "[conflates] the 'historical' space of the Depression with the 'Mythic' space of Westerns," resulting in "a radical departure from the nominal historical source and the ideological limitations of the TV series—a departure that allows them to make a powerful case for the political necessity of 'extraordinary violence'" (641-2).

These films—which cast the Western mythic space in an alternate historical or pseudo-historical framework, constitute what Slotkin terms the "post-Western." The post-Western emphasizes the necessity of the mythic structure of the Western for American audiences while suggesting that "the Western may no longer provide the most important of our ideologically symbolic languages" (642). Thus, the essential generic trappings of the Western—the open frontier and the settlement of that liminal space—ceased to be of significant value to the audiences of the 1980s. This rejection may indicate that the essential discourse of the Western, dealing with the anxieties of America’s role in the world, had similarly ceased to be the most pressing concern of film audiences. The thawing of the Cold War and the apparent American victory over its ideological nemesis stripped the American public of the
overwhelming anxiety regarding their role in the world. In some ways, the success in the Cold War ultimately justified the angst-inducing elements of American diplomacy, mollifying the audiences for the time being. The disconcertion that Americans felt shifted from being related to the external — represented by the wide open spaces — to the internal, metaphorically realized by the enclosed urban settings of Chicago or the suburban landscape of the slasher film.

However, this comfort with America's status in the international community could not last. Indeed, as the Soviet Union went through its death throes in 1989 and 1990, the Western appeared to be regaining its audience. A number of Westerns appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s that marked a return to the standard form, albeit with some modifications. The most notable of these were *Dances With Wolves* (1990) and *Unforgiven* (1992), which not only garnered financial success but became the first and second Western films since *Cimarron* (1931) to win the Academy Award for Best Picture. Significantly, both of these films were in many ways metafictive: *Dances With Wolves* was a flimsy attempt to invert the “typical” roles of Native Americans and the Cavalry in the Western, though Coyne has observed that the film merely reworks themes that had been previously dealt with in *Broken Arrow, Run of the Arrow* and *Little Big Man* and ultimately communicates “a conservative message at the core of its countercultural idyll” by purposefully avoiding the issue of miscegenation, resulting in “a hymn to an attractive (and ecologically harmonious) culture in which nice young WASP couples might find a home” (188).
Unforgiven, meanwhile, presented audiences with a “dark, savage tale” with “much contemplation on the nature and psychology of violence” (Coyne 188).

These films were followed by Tombstone, which similarly developed metafictive qualities, though in a considerably different way. While Dances with Wolves and Unforgiven examined the Western through some degree of inversion or generic manipulation, Tombstone moved in the other direction by adhering fairly closely to the conventions of the town-tamer Western. Nevertheless, the metafictive trend is developed through the use of intertextuality and a conscious effort to fabricate authenticity. The effect of this is that Tombstone is capable of combining a reconsideration of the western myth with a simultaneous reinforcement of the values that the myth entails. In doing so, Tombstone serves as an expression of the cultural forum that works to address the audience’s anxiety about the new world order following the Cold War while providing an adulatory narrative that champions the gunfighter hero and the values he represents.

Like My Darling Clementine and Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, Tombstone reflects a sea change in American foreign policy; however, while My Darling Clementine and Gunfight at the O.K. Corral represented the troubling nature of the arrival of Cold War diplomacy, Tombstone dramatizes the uncertainty associated with the end of those same policies. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, foreign policy had remained relatively static for over forty years. As Kenneth A. Oye has argued, “[t]he boundary between the Eastern and Western blocs came to define mutually exclusive zones of military protection, economic production, and relative political
homogeneity. In subsequent years, this core system was projected onto the periphery as the Soviet-American rivalry infused civil wars and regional conflicts throughout the Third World. Routinized geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union operated largely in defense of the postwar status quo" (3). However, with the collapse of one of the poles of the Cold War order, this structure was no longer a reliable one. As James E. Winkates notes, “the premises underlying that extraordinary consistency have now perished or have so fundamentally changed as to require new rationales, priorities, and approaches to ensure the defense of the United States” (31; Oye 3). Even in his moderate study of the implications of this shift in the American position, historian Stephen Burman felt compelled to observe that

the euphoria surrounding American-inspired and led victory in the Gulf war has, paradoxically, given rise to visions, or nightmares, of a resurgent, militaristic America dominating the new world order to an extent that will make its hegemonic role in the post-1945 era look pale by comparison. (ix)

In the wake of this shift in the world balance of power, it seemed as though the world might return to some of the conflicts that had dominated the inter-war years. Oye observes that in the early 1990s, the liberalization of the former Soviet bloc resulted in a resurgence in cultural, territorial, and political struggles that had festered between the World Wars (18). Furthermore, the economies of Germany and Japan ascended to a position of power once more, compelling the neighbours of
those nations to recall their rise to power after World War I and think apprehensively of the historical results of those labours (Oye 18). Such maneuverings did not go unnoticed in the United States, and the acquisition of American businesses by German and Japanese interests spawned a "resurgence of nativism" and "activated latent xenophobia" in America (Oye 22). Additionally, there was some concern that the reduction or withdrawal of American and Soviet forces in the Third World could create a power vacuum that would lead to renewed conflict, especially in Europe: "To state the obvious," Oye comments, "the effects [of the postwar order] must hinge in part on preexisting levels of violence. On the one hand, a Europe that has been at peace for forty years may become less militarized but cannot become more peaceful" (18 – 19). There also existed concern about the potential for conflicts in Russia itself, as Moscow continued to use force to stifle independence movements in former Soviet states (Oye 22).

Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War did produce some signs that pointed to a rosier future for the world. In addition to these potential crises, there was also the outbreak of a hot war in the Persian Gulf as Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The United States was able to muster an international coalition to combat the dictator. Oye notes, "The scope of economic sanctions, the effective use of the United Nations, the formulation of a multinational deterrent force in Saudi Arabia, and the coalition-wide attack on Iraqi forces in Kuwait would have been impossible only two years ago" (20). In this respect, at least, the breakdown of Communist Russia provided some hope for the future.
Under these circumstances, it is appropriate that a film like *Tombstone* would be released. *Tombstone* in many ways marked a return to the Westerns that were released in the 1950s: it is a clear example of the “town-tamer” Western wherein an outsider arrives in a chaotic town that is plagued by an autocratic power center in the Cowboy gang and ineffectual law enforcement in the corrupt Sheriff Behan and the elderly Marshal Fred White. Marshal Fred White tells Wyatt that Sheriff John Behan “ain’t no law. The only law around here is the Cowboys,” while White himself is somewhat decrepit and incapable of any physical enforcement of the law. Like the settlements in many town-tamer Westerns, Tombstone straddles the line between civilization and savagery. Upon arriving in town, Wyatt and his brothers marvel at the bustling mining town—“Hot damn, this burg’s jumping” comments Morgan—and are told by Behan that Tombstone will be bigger than San Francisco in just a few years. However, Tombstone’s pretension to metropolitan status is immediately undercut: just as Behan lauds Wyatt’s suggestion of building a racetrack to “send a signal [Tombstone is] growing up,” their discussion is interrupted by a shooting in the street, prompting Doc Holliday to observe sarcastically, “Very cosmopolitan.”

Wyatt is soon, but reluctantly, forced into the role of the town’s saviour. He resists this position but is compelled to act for the sake of his brothers who volunteer to serve as the law after Fred White is killed by Curly Bill Brocius. The Earps inevitably come into conflict with the Cowboys, leading to the confrontation at the O.K. Corral. Subsequently, after Virgil Earp is shot, costing him the use of his arm,
and Morgan Earp is murdered while playing billiards, Wyatt takes up the mantle of United States Marshal and commences his “vendetta ride” to eliminate the Cowboy menace from Tombstone.

As a town-tamer Western, *Tombstone* may be the most mythicized representation of Wyatt Earp to date. In this reading, Wyatt is not merely a gunfighter hero, but is positioned as an avenging agent of God. The film opens with the Cowboy gang murdering a Mexican lawman at his wedding. After this deed they are accosted by a priest, who warns them about a coming judgment by quoting the Biblical book of Revelation. As Ringo translates for the rest of the Cowboys, “There came the pale horse, and the man who sat on him was death. And hell followed with him.” The scene then immediately cuts to Wyatt’s arrival in Tucson on an “iron horse” (Cohen 219). Wyatt’s supernatural qualities are further emphasized later in the film during the vendetta ride (Cohen 219). When Wyatt begins exacting his vengeance at the Tucson train station by killing Stilwell, he allows Ike Clanton to escape, though not before admonishing him to tell the Cowboys that “I’m coming! And hell’s coming with me!” Wyatt’s hunt is excessively stylized as he and his posse perform acrobatic feats of riding and combat while the Cowboys scatter ahead of them. After the Cowboys catch Wyatt’s posse in a crossfire, Wyatt marches out of his hiding place to confront Curly Bill one-on-one. Curly Bill raises his gun to fire, but, providentially, is out of bullets. Wyatt raises his own rifle and kills the Cowboy as an off-screen voice cries out “Jesus Christ!”

Afterward, when Wyatt’s posse is recuperating near a stream, Doc Holliday declares
that Wyatt is “Down by the creek, walking on water.” Morgan Earp similarly positions Wyatt in divine terms, repeatedly telling Wyatt that he is “the one.”

This reading, in spite of director George P. Cosomatos’ assertions that the film is “as accurate as possible,” positions Tombstone as an allegory for the recent Iraq war. As Colleen Coughlin has argued, “[l]aw in Tombstone provides a vehicle for addressing the problem of vengeance and civil order in a community. Law is also a ready fool to be manipulated for purposes of power and control of capital. It is about sanctioned violence, who can use it and in what situations it will be accepted” (150). Wyatt Earp’s quest in Tombstone is, in this reading, absolutely justified; the contrast between him and the Cowboys could not be more explicit. While the Cowboys are initially presented to the audience as destroying a wedding by murdering the groom and priest, raping the bride, and then consuming the wedding feast, Wyatt’s first appearance involves protecting a horse from an abusive stable hand. The Cowboys are drunken and slovenly, while the Earps are impeccably attired; indeed, Wyatt’s long black frock coat and white collar is reminiscent of a priest’s garb. Finally, while the Cowboys are adversarial in response to being punished for their transgressions of the law, Wyatt’s vendetta is spurred by the ambushes perpetrated against his family. Even Wyatt’s most obvious transgression—his abandonment of his common-law wife Mattie in favour of the actress Josephine Marcus—is rendered unproblematically through the depiction of Mattie as a completely unlikable drug addict who all but drives Wyatt away. In this reading, Wyatt once again functions as a synecdoche for the United States and his
"reckoning," as Doc Holliday calls it, as a just retribution for the attack on his allies, who are analogous to Kuwait. Thus, the Cowboy gang, autocratic and wholly evil, serves as an apt symbol of Saddam Hussein. As Slotkin has suggested, "Hussein . . . was the perfect enemy for a modern Frontier-Myth scenario, combining the barbaric cruelty of a 'Geronimo' with the political power and ambition of a Hitler" (651). This depiction of Hussein was emphasized in the discourse of President George Bush, who suggested that "the violence of the Gulf War . . . regenerated the national spirit and moral character by expiating the defeat in Vietnam" (Slotkin 652). Thus, Slotkin's notion of "regeneration through violence" is exercised in the national discourse once again.9

However, *Tombstone* functions not only as an allegorization of present-day conflicts but also as a meditation on America's recent past. While George Cosmatos' commentary on the digital video disc release of *Tombstone* emphasizes the film's supposed authenticity, extolling the virtues of the cast's "real moustaches" and the process of aging the clothing and using photographs and newspaper reports of the times to develop the "atmosphere of the period," the film contains a strong element of retrospection. To this end, *Tombstone* hearkens back not only to the past of the American West, but also to the Cold War through repeated allusions to older

---

9 An alternate reading, suggested by Allen Barra, would paint *Tombstone* as being an allegory for a shift in national attention from foreign to domestic affairs. In this interpretation, the Cowboys are analogous with gangs, complete with their colours (the red sashes) and Wyatt Earp is American authority being forced to move from one conflict to another (*Inventing* 364). Wyatt's reluctance to involve himself in the conflict and his interest in money may thus be read as a meditation on class issues that might contribute to rises in gang activity, such as poverty and ghettoization.
films. The first such allusion comes in the opening pseudo-documentary, which splices together footage of early newsreels, older Western films, and footage of Tombstone's incarnations of Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday. This prefatory material is punctuated by a scene from the earliest example of a Western film, The Great Train Robbery. The effect of this faux newsreel at the beginning of the film is a suggestion that mythical depictions of the American past contain some truth. The newsreel conflates the fictional past with the real past, thus providing the older Westerns with an authority as records of events. Tombstone's recollective reading is also reinforced casting and narrative allusion. Actors with strong lineages in the Western genre fill a number of small roles in the film: Charlton Heston plays ranch owner Henry Hooker; John Ford's godson Harry Carey, Jr. portrays Fred White; and Robert Mitchum narrates the opening and closing of the film. But more striking than even these allusions is Tombstone's repeated use of scenes modeled nearly directly from older Westerns, many of which come from older depictions of Wyatt Earp. The most blatant of such scenes is the standoff between Wyatt Earp and Ike Clanton after Curly Bill kills Fred White. As Ike, confident in his superior numbers, orders Wyatt to turn Bill loose, Wyatt turns his gun on the Cowboy and warns him, "You're first, get it? Your friends might get me in a rush but not before I turn your head into a canoe." This scene is a clear allusion to Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, save for the fact that in Gunfight, Shanghai Pierce is the recipient of Wyatt's warning. The Earps' and Doc Holliday's walk to the O.K. Corral in Tombstone similarly recalls Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, though in Tombstone the walk is interrupted by a gang of kids who run
past playing at guns themselves—an event that alludes to an encounter of Marshal Kane's in *High Noon*. Thus, *Tombstone* bolsters the mythic depiction of the West in American history, and in doing so simultaneously sanctifies the past it represents which, in their overt narratives sanctifies American intervention overseas and Cold War foreign policy, lending additional support to the laudatory reading of the text as an abstraction of the Persian Gulf War.

Clearly, the dominant discourse in *Tombstone* is one that sanctifies the use of lethal force in certain situations. The film mythologizes the use of violence in nineteenth-century America as a way for its audience to understand violence in twentieth-century America and the nation's recent battles against dictatorial enemies in the Soviet Union and Iraq. However, this reading is problematized by a subtle but nevertheless significant counter-discourse that challenges the motivations of Wyatt and his brothers. This reading emphasizes that Wyatt's sole motivation in *Tombstone* is financial gain. As Colleen Coughlin argues, "Wyatt is not in *Tombstone* to act as a lawman. The film makes clear that Wyatt, his brothers Morgan and Virgil, and all three of their wives are in town to make their fortune" (148). Coughlin additionally notes that, in *Tombstone*, Wyatt is never motivated by any sort of altruism. He absolutely refuses to accept any position in law enforcement, and even when the dangerous Curly Bill is shooting up the main streets of Tombstone, his suggestion is to "let it alone." He is unswayed by his brother Virgil's decision to take up the badge of United States marshal, even when Virgil angrily argues that they are making money off of the suffering of the
townspeople. Wyatt is only coerced into action when the battle becomes personal and his brothers are in danger; he acts not out of a genuine sense of justice but rather out of a quest for personal vengeance. As Hutton notes, “none of the writers or directors working on the latest Earp films had an ideological axe to grind, but they were determined to expose the darker truth regarding Earp’s career” (“Showdown” 30).

Thus, the subtle reminder that conflicts cannot be cast in such a Manichean light compromises the narrative that would sanctify violence as a means of combating an evil dictator. While the Cowboys in Tombstone are undoubtedly the villains of the piece, Wyatt is not opposed to them for the chaos that they impose on the town, but rather because they have attacked him personally. Furthermore, Wyatt’s motivation to be in Tombstone—he tells his brothers that in Tombstone they are going to “make their fortunes”—can be connected with the possibility of ulterior motives in the United States’ intervention in Iraq that would conflate the American leadership’s interest in the national integrity of Kuwait with their interest in Kuwaiti oil.

Ultimately, Tombstone fulfills its purpose as a cultural forum and a bad faith narrative. While there is a clear dominant narrative that would justify the use of force in extreme circumstances and that mythologizes American foreign policy in the Cold War and beyond, Tombstone simultaneously, but subtly, questions the motivations of the United States in its continued interventionism. Tombstone articulates an unease in the American population. While the nation might, like
Wyatt Earp in *Tombstone*, prefer to retire from its role as an international police force, it is drawn back into the conflict by its status as a superpower as well as its greed. In this reflection of American anxiety, *Tombstone* continues the thrust of Wyatt Earp films throughout the Cold War. Since World War II, Wyatt has continued to operate as a symbol of the United States and its changing role in the world. *Tombstone* brings this depiction full circle. While Henry Fonda's portrayal allegorized American uneasiness about its newfound position as a world superpower, Kurt Russell's performance accentuated once again the anxieties of a nation in the midst of a new liminal state. The anxieties at the dawn of the Cold War had seen fruition in the Vietnam War, and, twenty years after that bloody conflict, *Tombstone* once again expresses a fear of the discontinuity between an ideal America and the real America.
6. Conclusion

Wyatt Earp remains one of the most resonant figures in American historical mythology. At the time of the writing of this thesis, American cable network HBO announced the casting of the latest actor to step into Earp's spurs, to be featured in a limited number of episodes in its gritty Western series Deadwood. Given the history of Earp's appearances on film prior as outlined in this thesis, it should come as no surprise that Wyatt Earp should ride again; as the United States continues its War on Terror and rattles its saber at new ideological enemies, Wyatt Earp has once again become a relevant cultural symbol.

Indeed, the myth of Wyatt Earp is likely to remain a powerful and useful one for American culture. As this thesis has proved, Wyatt Earp occupies a particular space in the American pantheon. His conflicted position as both a “rounder” and a businessman and his tenuous position between legitimate authority and vigilante justice has made Wyatt a remarkably potent symbol to American culture. Wyatt Earp offers American audiences a space wherein their own anxieties about issues such as hegemony and imperialism can be tacitly addressed in an environment that offers no threat of reprisals. Above all, Wyatt is a figure through which Americans can project their own views as well as entertain alternative views whenever the reality of American involvement in the world seems to run contrary to American ideals of individualism and democracy. He serves as a figure that at once champions American intervention—he is the one who is capable of making
Tombstone safe for the schoolmarm and religion— but also symbolizes the dangers that are inherent to such endeavors. While Wyatt may indeed make the frontier town safe for “civilization,” he does so only at great cost and often with morally troubling methods. Therefore, Wyatt Earp occupies a very particular space in the American Western myth. In a genre that draws its popular strength from its liminality and ability to allegorize transitions, Wyatt Earp is capable of personifying the United States as it negotiates sea changes in American culture.

Through the Cold War, the Wyatt Earp legend gained particular currency. As the United States emerged from World War II as a superpower, Wyatt Earp provided a cultural forum wherein the nation could examine its newfound power and the anxieties associated with that power. Through the films My Darling Clementine and Gunfight at the OK Corral, audience members engaged in the adulatory narrative of American strength and power, while simultaneously dealing with a discourse that problematized that power and the obligations it entailed.

Years later, as the United States became embroiled in the Vietnam conflict, Wyatt Earp became an allegorical figure that articulated the nation’s questions about its role as an international authority and the moral questions associated with its exercising of this power to advance its own political agenda of making the world safe from Communism. Twenty years later, Wyatt Earp would ride again in Tombstone, a film that reexamined American foreign policy during the Cold War while turning an eye to the new world order where American capitalism had ostensibly won out over Russian Communism.
There is little doubt that the Wyatt Earp myth will continue to be relevant to American audiences; the only question is which Wyatt will be depicted next: the noble cavalier of *My Darling Clementine*, the sadistic bully of *Doc*, or a new version? In any event, it is clear that the myth of Wyatt Earp has not yet ridden off into its last sunset.
Works Cited

"The Internet Movie Database." The Internet Movie Database Ltd. July 5 2005.


Martin, Douglas D. *Tombstone's Epitaph*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico
Press, 1951.


Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."


