

although it does suggest their influence is not quite as overarching (or uncontested) as Saba insists. Saba's overreach should not, however, detract from *American Mirror's* impressive strengths. The book is exhaustingly researched, with material from national and local archives in Brazil and the United States. Saba's central argument, that many elite reformers chose capitalism over a more egalitarian post-emancipation society, is undoubtedly correct, as are his perceptive insights on the transformation of capitalism in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Warrior Queens of the Silver Screen

Clarke, Liz. *The American Girl Goes to War: Women and National Identity in U.S. Silent Film*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022. ix + 169 pp. \$29.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1978810150.

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The war film is often imagined as a manly affair. Such movies conjure images of soldier boys on the battlefield adhering to a “jungle law” of kill or be killed. Combat tests the limits of their endurance while camaraderie reaffirms the bonds of their brotherhood. When women enter the frame (if at all), they typically do so as anguished mothers, wives, or sweethearts. Their role, on the whole, remains decidedly domestic. But as Liz Clarke reveals in this engaging study, those conventions did not characterize the earliest war films. It took time for certain tropes to crystallize, and before this occurred, women often played a far more active part in the plots of martial movies. Silent Era cinema therefore becomes a fascinating laboratory within which to examine the connections between femininity, nationalism, militarism, and imperialism.

One of Clarke's several significant (and salutary) interventions involves a reconsideration of what we mean by the term “war film.” We are reminded that in the earliest years of the industry, genre norms remained in flux. Myriad artistic sensibilities and diverse thematic content characterized the war films of the 1910s. Short serial pictures, non-narrative proto-documentaries, comedies, and melodramas were all discussed at the time as fundamentally war films. And within that expansive cinematic catalog, women played a pivotal series of roles. The author, in other words, moves far beyond the handful of D.W. Griffith productions and 1920s World War I retrospectives typically heralded as the genre's progenitors. Instead, *The American Girl Goes to War* is to be commended for its exploration of silent films that, while rarely seen today, were enormously influential during the first years of the American movie industry. The stills and promotional material that Clarke uses to illustrate the book, moreover, provide compelling visual evidence of women's centrality to the earliest war films.

Of course, there was a good deal of variety within what the author justifiably refers to as the “feminized” genre pictures of the 1900s and 1910s (9). Over three hundred of them, for example, were set during the Civil War. Heroines were often depicted as southern, loyal to the Confederacy, and lively contributors to the war effort. Movies showed women as saboteurs, spies, and soldiers. They brandished weapons and spoke plainly about patriotic duty. But, as Clarke notes, female protagonists were also portrayed as instrumental to the process of postbellum reconciliation. It was common to dramatize love affairs across sectional lines so that the cinematic romance of Blue and Gray could help foster a broader national reunification. These films were also meticulous in their efforts to erase Black involvement in the war. Neither slaves nor slavery appeared on the screen, making actresses complicit in the push to maintain white supremacy.

A lesser (but not inconsiderable) number of silent films took the Revolutionary War, wars against Native Americans, and border skirmishes with Mexico as their subjects. Here, too, women played leading parts. As Clarke theorizes, the messaging was twofold. First, films were heavily invested in portraying American wars as principally defensive: the United States, unlike other nations, could not be seen as an aggressor. Second, war films featuring male and female protagonists suggested that America would remain invincible precisely because both sexes rallied to the flag during national emergencies. These themes received particular emphasis in the multiple Joan of Arc movies released by various studios during the early twentieth century. Clarke includes some particularly intriguing analysis of those films, which “Americanized” a female, foreign warrior for the sake of the country’s sizeable cohort of immigrant moviegoers. Those among the audience who had recently arrived to the United States, it was implied, could find inspiration in an “ethnic” story of patriotic self-sacrifice.

Costumed Joans of Arc who stalked street corners and theater lobbies, however, were also mustered into service by multiple production companies as part of a larger push to boost military recruitment during World War I. And it was that bloody European conflict more generally that began to reshape the role of women in war films, contributing to what Clarke calls the “gradual masculinization” of the genre (101). Slowly but surely, films about combat “over there” in the trenches on the Western Front began to fixate on the battlefield heroics of men. Women, on the other hand, either played more docile roles or appeared as the misguided proponents of pacifism. While “the active woman of the early and mid-1910s did not disappear during World War I,” Clarke writes, “she was tamed, controlled, and redirected for home-front mobilization” (101). The “dangers” posed by New Women, suffragists, and prominent peace activists required the reimagining of war film heroines as nonthreatening denizens of the domestic sphere. With the displacement of their female costars, men became the war film’s privileged actors. Soon enough, promotional materials began to portray martial movies as hardboiled “he-man” pictures, likely unsuitable for a lady’s supposedly delicate cinematic sensibilities.

A short summary such as this does little justice to the complexity of Clarke’s argument. More than anything, the book helps to demonstrate why movies ought to be more regularly explored and deployed by historians of the Progressive Era. Crucial political debates and cultural developments often received filmic treatment at the time. More serious engagement with what was already, by the 1910s, a wildly popular medium will therefore pay (and has here paid) rich interpretive dividends. Future scholars would do well to follow in the footsteps of *The American Girl Goes to War*.