

From Sidious to Nixon: The Parallels Between *Star Wars* and Vietnam

A Senior Project  
presented to  
the Faculty of the History Department  
California Polytechnic State University – San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Liberal Arts

By

Brennan Simpson

March, 2021

In the case of a film franchise that features twelve movies, five television series, and various other forms of media by the time this paper was written, many people may be surprised to hear that *Star Wars* was actually inspired by one of the most questionable moments in American history. However, the time period in which *Star Wars* creator George Lucas first wrote what became this world's "first step into a larger world" actually greatly reflected what ended up on the big screen. Even though the *Star Wars* movies take place "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away....," it has been publicly stated in interviews that Lucas based both *Star Wars* media on the Vietnam War and their main villain, Darth Sidious, on former U.S. President Richard Nixon. Though there have been a few scholarly works since the first *Star Wars* movie was released in theaters in 1977 that have attempted to explore these parallels, none of them has directly explored how Lucas's long-standing views on the Vietnam War affected certain key moments of the first six *Star Wars* movies. This thesis explores George Lucas' antiwar activism before creating *Star Wars* to demonstrate how remarkably similar the films and related media of this franchise truly are to both various aspects of the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon's rise to power.

### **Historiography**

In over forty years since the first *Star Wars* movie's release, there have surprisingly only been a select few scholarly works that have tried to explain how those movies may actually be connected to both the Vietnam War and U.S. President Richard Nixon. These scholarly works, while not always fully focused on just *Star Wars*, have taken the forms of both journal articles and chapters of scholarly volumes. With the earliest work having been released around the same time that *Episode V The Empire Strikes Back* premiered in 1980, one of the most common trends of these works was for them to analyze how these movies helped the American public deal with

controversial events like Vietnam and Watergate. Another common trend, however, also appeared by the mid-1980s in which scholars analyze how these movies actually gave American audiences an alternate and more uplifting portrayal of the Vietnam War. The third and perhaps most relevant trend goes a step further by arguing how these movies actually presented American audiences with certain themes and concepts that have often been seen throughout history. To put it more simply, regardless of any potential shortcomings, past academic scholars have focused on the supposed helpful intentions, delusional projections, and historical themes of the *Star Wars* film series to understand the exact effect that both the Vietnam War and U.S. President Richard Nixon had on them.

For the first trend for scholarly works that have tried to explain how the *Star Wars* movies were potentially connected to both Vietnam and Nixon, one example, a 1980 journal article by Carolyn Sumner, expressed how she believed that the first *Star Wars* movie allowed her and others to escape into a more uplifting reality because, most likely due to depressing events like the Vietnam War and Watergate, “it was the season of death here in this galaxy when I first walked into that other one.”<sup>1</sup> A similar 2005 article by Lincoln Geraghty of the University of Portsmouth also explored how *Star Wars* was able to become extremely popular because, due to events of the 1970s: “America was in definite need of a cultural tonic that would inspire people and speak to their concerns...”<sup>2</sup> Another journal article from 1997 by Andrew Lewis Conn argued that the original *Star Wars* trilogy also helped Americans deal with certain issues brought up by aforementioned events by sneaking them, “into a flagrantly entertaining popular framework and sold them to a huge popular audience of children (much like the medicine pill

---

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Sumner, “A Meditation on *Star Wars*,” *Southwest Review* 65, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 304, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43471310>.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln Geraghty, “Creating and Comparing Myth in Twentieth-Century Science Fiction: “*Star Trek*” and “*Star Wars*,”” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2005): 197, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43797228>.

served on a heaping spoonful of apple sauce)...”<sup>3</sup> In summary, these articles argue that the *Star Wars* movies supposedly helped the American public deal with the heavy issues from when they were created and released.

Other scholars have taken a step further by arguing that they additionally help people by presenting an alternate portrayal of the Vietnam War. For instance, a chapter from the 1986 book *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* by John Hellmann argued that the original three films were actually about, “the traumatic passage of the American self-concept through the self-discovery of the Vietnam horror, and its potential power is to energize Americans to move forward from that experience with a modified conception of their ideal character and destiny.”<sup>4</sup> This literacy provides this alternate portrayal of the Vietnam War when it explained how the scene from *Episode V The Empire Strikes Back* in which Luke Skywalker recklessly leaves his Jedi training with Yoda to try to rescue his friends, “duplicates the essence of the American error in Vietnam of making a momentous decision on the basis simply of right intention and past luck.”<sup>5</sup> A chapter in a 1999 book entitled *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* by Stephen Paul Miller additionally focused on how, not including the fact that the theft of the Death Star plans in the first movie calls to mind Watergate, “*Star Wars* concerns a fantastic ideological alternative to Vietnam.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, these book chapters highlight how certain academic scholars have shown how the *Star Wars* movies delighted American audiences with a more pleasurable portrayal of Vietnam.

Other scholars have argued that the *Star Wars* movies subtly expressed concepts of underdogs and injustice from certain events of the 1970s. For example, a 1980 journal article by

---

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Lewis Conn, “*Star Wars*: always,” *Film Comment* 33, no. 3 (May-June 1997): 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43455275>.

<sup>4</sup> John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 212.

<sup>5</sup> John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*, 216.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Paul Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (New York: Duke University Press, 1999), 99.

James M. Curtis of the University of Missouri expressed how he believed, “that the subliminal associations with Watergate had a good deal to do with the widespread, intense reaction to *Star Wars*.”<sup>7</sup> A chapter of a 2007 book entitled *American Cinema of the 1970s: Themes and Variations* additionally explained how the first *Star Wars* movie mixed various film genres, “to present a parable of the American myth of origins, in which a rebel army successfully fights against a vast Empire (overlooking, of course, that by this time America was the empire).”<sup>8</sup> A similar 2011 journal article by Carl Rubino of Hamilton College also argues that the struggle between the Rebel Alliance and evil Empire in the first three films, “recalls the opposition between the Roman republic and empire that animated the founders of the United States.”<sup>9</sup> A chapter of a 2015 book entitled *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* additionally made the bold statement that, “*Star Wars* is a parable about the Vietnam War, in which the Rebellion plays the part of the North Vietnamese, and the Empire takes the role of the United States.”<sup>10</sup> To put it simply, these works highlight how certain scholars have argued that the *Star Wars* movies were subtly expressing ideas from various historical events.

Despite the extensive scholarly literature, none of these scholarly works actually make direct connections between the *Star Wars* character Darth Sidious and U.S. President Richard Nixon. There was, however, a 1983 book entitled *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* by Dale Pollock that describes Sidious as always having been meant to be, “an elected

---

<sup>7</sup> James M. Curtis, “From American Graffiti to *Star Wars*,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 13, no. 4 (Spring 1980): 600, [https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1980.1304\\_590.x](https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1980.1304_590.x).

<sup>8</sup> Paula J. Massood, “1977: Movies and a Nation in Transformation,” in *American Cinema of the 1970s: Themes and Variations*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 187.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Rubino, “Long Ago, But Not So Far Away: Another Look at “*Star Wars*” and the Ancient World,” *The Classical Outlook* 89, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43940227>.

<sup>10</sup> Abigail De Kosnik, “*The Mask of Fu Manchu, Son of Sinbad, and Star Wars IV: A New Hope*: Techno-Orientalist Cinema as a Mnemotechnics of Twentieth-Century U.S.-Asian Conflicts,” in *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, ed. David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 98.

official who is corrupted by power and subverts the democratic process-Lucas modeled him after Richard Nixon.”<sup>11</sup> Besides the common lack of connections drawn between Nixon and Sidious, scholars have failed to examine how certain scenes throughout these movies actually represent specific aspects of both Vietnam and Nixon with the mere exception being Hellman’s aforementioned *Episode V* scene breakdown. Regardless of all these lacking areas, the examining of *Star Wars*’ reflection of history approach that has been used by James M. Curtis and Carl Rubino is perhaps the best one to help explain how these movies may actually be connected to the Vietnam War and Nixon. In summary, the fact that comparisons have hardly been made between either Richard Nixon and Darth Sidious or select scenes and select historical subjects demonstrates the need for a proper Rubino-inspired scholarly study.

There additionally has been other scholarly works that do not actually talk about *Star Wars* that can contribute to this study. For example, according to the twenty-eighth chapter of an online textbook known as *The American Yawp*, the United States was in a big uproar by the 1968 election because many Americans were angry and fearful at the fact that more and more American troops were fighting in Vietnam. Additionally presidential candidate Richard Nixon, similar to how Darth Sidious used people’s fear of both the Clone Wars and Jedi in *Episode III Revenge of the Sith* to assume absolute power, “played on these fears, running on a platform of “law and order” and a vague plan to end the war.”<sup>12</sup> A similar 2014 book entitled *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* by David F. Schmitz argued that Nixon believed that, similar to how Sidious claimed that he did not want the Galactic Republic to be split in two in *Episode II Attack of the Clones*, “Vietnam was indistinguishable from the rest of

---

<sup>11</sup> Dale Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 158-159.

<sup>12</sup> “The Unraveling,” in *The American Yawp* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press), <http://www.americanyawp.com/text/28-the-unraveling/>.

Asia and was significant due to the potential consequences of its loss to communism.”<sup>13</sup> Another book from 2007 entitled *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full* by Conrad Black can also further connect this U.S. President with dark side villain Sidious by claiming that, similar to how Yoda claimed that fear led to both the dark side and suffering in *Episode I The Phantom Menace*, “a piercing fear, a terror, that he was aspiring to too much, was already perceptible in Nixon as a boy, and it became more disruptive to his equanimity as he aged...”<sup>14</sup> These three scholarly works can help to further demonstrate how the *Star Wars* movies are actually influenced by both the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon.

Since the first *Star Wars* movie was released in theaters in 1977, there has been a limited amount of scholarly work done on what exact kind of influence both the Vietnam War and U.S. President Richard Nixon had on the *Star Wars* film series. One of the most common and earliest trends in these scholarly works was that they examined how these movies tried to help out American audiences in the 1970s. Another equally common trend was the approach first adopted by academic scholars by the mid-1980s which explores how these movies actually presented people with, “a fantastic ideological alternative to Vietnam.”<sup>15</sup> While the third and final trend of directly comparing these movies with certain historical events might be the best approach for a proper scholarly study, both it and the other two trends have failed to focus on the character Darth Sidious or how *Star Wars* creator George, “Lucas modeled him after Richard Nixon.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, to continue this project, it is only logical that one uses both the aforementioned third trend as highlighted by academic scholars such as Curtis and Rubino in addition to other non-*Star Wars* focused scholarly works on both Vietnam and Nixon.

---

<sup>13</sup> David F. Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Conrad Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 159.

## **Background: Lucas**

Before exploring how the *Star Wars* movies represent history, it is helpful to first explore how a young George Lucas openly expressed his displeasure with the ongoing war in Vietnam during his college years at the University of Southern California (USC) in the 1960s. For example, Lucas's USC roommate Randal Kleiser recalled in the 1983 book *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* by Dale Pollock, "that Lucas disliked USC students who felt it was necessary to die for one's country to defend democracy."<sup>17</sup> Anti-war notions would later appear to inspire the very similar ideals of famous *Star Wars* character Yoda. USC instructor Mel Sloan additionally argued that Lucas and his other students were greatly affected by Vietnam. He specifically claimed in Pollock's book that, "they had to grow up in a different way than other students had before, because this was the first time we were involved in an unpopular war. I think it influenced the kinds of films that they did and the seriousness with which they approached what they were doing."<sup>18</sup>

After graduating from the University of Southern California on August 6, 1966, with a bachelor of arts degree in Cinema, George Lucas' plans for the future were thrown a curveball due to the continued fighting in Vietnam. For starters, he was rejected when he tried to become an officer in the United States Air Force's photography unit due to his past racing experience. He, however, later reflected how he, "wasn't really that enthusiastic about going in the first place... I was just doing it out of desperation."<sup>19</sup> Lucas's experience is similar to how a young Han Solo in the 2018 movie *Solo: A Star Wars Story* only joined the Imperial Navy to get off of his home planet of Corellia and claim that he, "got kicked out of the Imperial Academy for

---

<sup>17</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 64.

having a mind of my own.”<sup>20</sup> Even when Lucas was eventually drafted, he was able to get out of fighting in Vietnam due to having diabetes. He was truly glad about this since he did not like the idea of government officials, “lining us up for the butcher block.”<sup>21</sup> This line of thinking strangely seems to connect to how, like the millions of Americans who were drafted during the Vietnam War, the genetically engineered clones troopers of the *Star Wars* prequels were forced to fight in a war to only later start to ask themselves things like, “where is the honor in marching blindly to our deaths?”<sup>22</sup> In summary, the Vietnam War nearly engulfed a young George Lucas in two different ways to only later appear to influence future forms of *Star Wars* media.

Even though he escaped the draft and entered the filmmaking business, George Lucas would continue to have an urge to comment on the Vietnam War through film. For instance, this is why Lucas originally insisted that the final image in his 1973 film *American Graffiti*, “be a title card detailing the fate of the characters, including the death of Milner and the disappearance of Toad in Vietnam.”<sup>23</sup> The other two screenwriters of this movie argued with him over this since they felt that this ending would be too depressing. Even though he really started to desire to make a movie on Vietnam after *American Graffiti*’s release, according to collaborator Walter Murch in 2010, “it was still too hot a topic, the war was still going on, and nobody wanted to finance something like that. So George . . . decided, ‘I’ll put the essence of the story in outer space and make it happen in a galaxy long ago and far away.’”<sup>24</sup> This desire to indirectly address Vietnam in what ultimately became *Star Wars* can be seen in a deleted scene in which the film’s protagonist Luke Skywalker is talking with his childhood friend Biggs Darklighter on the planet Tatooine. To explain why he decided to seek out the Alliance to Restore the Republic, Biggs told

---

<sup>20</sup> *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, directed by Ron Howard (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 64.

<sup>22</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 4, episode 9, directed by Kyle Dunlevy, aired November 11, 2011, on Cartoon Network.

<sup>23</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Kosnik, “*The Mask of Fu Manchu*,” 98.

Luke that he would not, “wait around for the Empire to draft me into service. The Rebellion is spreading, and I wanna be on the side I believe in.”<sup>25</sup> Considering both this indirect commentary on the U.S. draft during the Vietnam War and the aforementioned proposed ending for *American Graffiti*, it appears that George Lucas was very determined on commenting on the Vietnam War through film.

With this desire to make a very anti-Vietnam War film, it was not until after the successful release of *American Graffiti* in 1973 that Lucas really started to nourish the notice of what essentially became *Star Wars*. By the fall of 1973, he had a rough idea of what *Star Wars* would be since he described it in a newspaper article as being, “a big space opera-opera as in horse opera. It’s a combination of ‘2001,’ the Bond films and ‘Lawrence of Arabia.’”<sup>26</sup> Due to the untraditional and weird nature of *Star Wars*, both Lucas and his idea for this film were initially rejected by both Universal Pictures and United Artists. According to the 1992 book *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse* by Charles Champlin, however, “Alan Ladd, Jr., then a development executive at Twentieth Century-Fox, had seen a screening of *Graffiti* and was convinced it would be a huge hit. He gave Lucas \$15,000 to develop a *Star Wars* script.”<sup>27</sup> Ladd would further elaborate after *Star Wars*’ release that it was Lucas’s integrity that ultimately convinced him and others, “to commit \$8.5 million to a picture without a presold book, without stars, a picture that had nothing conventional about it, that would probably be one of the most unconventional pictures ever made. But I believed in Lucas.”<sup>28</sup> Having earned Ladd’s faith and financial support, Lucas would ultimately turn in the script for what became *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope* in, “the fall of 1974, a year and a half after he’d started work. Preproduction on

<sup>25</sup> *Andy Snowslayer*, “Star Wars EpIV - Deleted Biggs and Luke Scenes,” June 28, 2018, video, 3:35, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaS\\_0oVJvio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaS_0oVJvio), accessed March 16, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Wayne Warga, “‘Graffiti’s’ Lucas Sees Handwriting on Studio Wall: ‘Graffiti’s’ George Lucas Sees Handwriting on the Studio Wall,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1973, ProQuest.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Champlin, *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 42.

<sup>28</sup> Aljean Harmetz, “...And It Almost Didn't Get to the Screen,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1977, ProQuest.

*Star Wars* began in the spring of 1975.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, George Lucas was finally given his chance to address the Vietnam War through film by impressing Alan Ladd Jr. with his 1973 film *American Graffiti*.

Even though he was able to sell *Star Wars* to 20th Century Fox, Lucas always had another film in the back of his mind that more directly dealt with the Vietnam War. Specifically since his time at USC, according to Dale Pollock, “Lucas had wanted to make a movie about the bizarre media circus the Vietnam War had become. John Milius had also worked on the idea at USC, going so far as to interview returning veterans who told him fantastic and colorful stories.”<sup>30</sup> This similar interest between Lucas and Milius would eventually result in what became the 1979 movie *Apocalypse Now*. Like in *Star Wars*, Pollock additionally argued that Lucas originally saw *Apocalypse Now*, “as an updated *Dr. Strangelove*, a case of trying to kill an ant with a sledgehammer, only to discover that the ant is winning.”<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, due to having already agreed to make *Star Wars* for 20th Century Fox and feeling the pressure that this film needed to be made, Lucas reluctantly gave his friend and mentor Francis Ford Coppola the honor of bringing *Apocalypse Now* to the big screen. At the time, he felt upset about this chain of events since, “it was *my* picture, and I didn’t have any control over the situation...”.<sup>32</sup> Coppola, however, did seem to keep in mind some of Lucas’ anti-war intentions since it would later be argued in the 1999 book *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* by Stephen Paul Miller that this film, “can be seen as an analogue of the unassimilated political results of the Vietnam War and the wayward governmental decision-making processes implicit within the crimes and misjudgments of the Watergate affair...”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Champlin, *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 140.

<sup>31</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 140.

<sup>32</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 142.

<sup>33</sup> Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance*, 104.

While he was never actually able to make *Apocalypse Now* himself, there are several ways that this 1979 film has honored and influenced George Lucas' legacy. For example, Han Solo actor Harrison Ford briefly played an intelligence officer in only one scene in this movie. Besides featuring one of the main cast members of *Star Wars*, this appearance is significant since, "as the Ford character removes his glasses, Coppola zooms in for a closeup of Ford's green army shirt. The name tag clearly reads, "Col. G. Lucas.""<sup>34</sup> Many years later, this film's famous "Ride of the Valkyries" scene involving helicopters would also inspire a specific scene in the 2015 film *Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens*. Concept artist Doug Chiang explained that the film's scene featuring sun silhouetted TIE fighters was basically the crew's, "riff on 'Apocalypse Now.' Some of those moments are so powerful that all we have to do is put in something different like TIE fighters, and it totally works."<sup>35</sup> *Apocalypse Now* would additionally inspire a quick little scene in a 2019 episode of *The Mandalorian* television series in which the main character, Din Djarin, walked past a bunch of dirty Imperial stormtrooper helmets on pikes. In the premiere episode of the documentary series *Disney Gallery: The Mandalorian*, executive producer Jon Favreau revealed that the helmets were meant to be, "like *Apocalypse Now*. It adds a little menace. It also gives some backstory."<sup>36</sup>

Considering all of George Lucas' early anti-Vietnam sentiment during and after college, they ultimately resulted in the 1977 release of the unconventional and successful film *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*. Even though many people at 20th Century Fox did not seem to understand Lucas' vision, it quickly became one of the highest-grossing films of all time and was called by one critic as being, "the most elaborate, most expensive, most beautiful movie serial

---

<sup>34</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 142.

<sup>35</sup> Kirsten Acuna, "One brief scene in 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' is based on a shot from 'Apocalypse Now!'" *Business Insider*, December 29, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/star-wars-force-awakens-apocalypse-now-influence-2015-12>.

<sup>36</sup> *Disney Gallery: The Mandalorian*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Bradford Baruh, aired May 4, 2020, on Disney+.

ever made.”<sup>37</sup> As explained in greater detail below, Lucas’s intention of criticizing the Vietnam War through *Star Wars* appears to have been largely missed by the people who first watched it in 1977. This point was made perfectly clear after the release of the 2005 film *Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith* when one critic wrote how Lucas has been for decades, “blamed (unjustly) for helping to lead American movies away from their early-70's engagement with political matters, and he deserves credit for trying to bring them back.”<sup>38</sup> Also in 2005, however, Lucas explained in an interview that his 1977 film, “was really about the Vietnam War, and that was the period where Nixon was trying to run for a [second] term, which got me to thinking historically about how do democracies get turned into dictatorships? Because the democracies aren't overthrown; they're given away.”<sup>39</sup> Since this interview, other forms of *Star Wars* media have been created that appear to further stress Lucas’ anti-Vietnam views. For example, the famous *Star Wars* character Leia Organa was made to ponder in the 2016 novel *Aftermath: Life Debt* by Chuck Wendig, “how do you form an Empire? By stealing a Republic. And how do you steal a Republic? By convincing its people that they cannot govern themselves-that freedom is their enemy and that fear is their ally.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, even though the original release of *Star Wars* was very successful, it was not until a few decades later that the true intention behind it really started to come into focus.

While his 1977 film *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope* may be more subtle in criticizing Vietnam, George Lucas tried to be more direct with the 1979 sequel of his successful 1973 film *American Graffiti*. While neither the actual director or writer for this film, according to

---

<sup>37</sup> Vincent Canby, "'Star Wars' A Trip to a Far Galaxy That's Fun and Funny.," *New York Times*, May 26, 1977, ProQuest.

<sup>38</sup> A. O. Scott, "Some Surprises in That Galaxy Far, Far Away," *New York Times*, May 16, 2005, ProQuest.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Caro, "'Star Wars' inadvertently hits too close to U.S.'s role," *Chicago Tribune*, May 18, 2005, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-05-18-0505180309-story.html#:~:text=Bush's%20presidency%20is%20triggering,Empire%20ruled%20by%20him%20alone>.

<sup>40</sup> Chuck Wendig, *Aftermath: Life Debt* (New York: Del Rey, 2017), 219.

the aforementioned book by Dale Pollock, Lucas still, “wanted to film second-unit Vietnam action scenes, using a long camera lens for the rough-and-ready look of combat footage, thereby providing the film’s most dramatic moments. The Vietnam scenes became Lucas’s own little *Apocalypse Now*...”<sup>41</sup> Since Lucas was technically just the producer on a film that would eventually be called *More American Graffiti*, his actions would ultimately result in Lucas butting heads with actual director Bill Norton. Unfortunately for both Lucas and Norton, the film inevitably became a commercial failure due to, “the incongruity of the creator of *Star Wars* producing a movie about drugs, death, war, and promiscuous sex. Maybe audiences weren’t ready to laugh at LSD and the Vietnam War and the liberation of housewives.”<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to consider how the direct anti-Vietnam message of *More American Graffiti* was not well received in 1979 while the more indirect one of *Star Wars* made it extremely popular. It was best put in 1997 by Andrew Lewis Conn that *Star Wars* was able to basically sneak these, “complexities into a flagrantly entertaining popular framework and sold them to a huge popular audience of children (much like the medicine pill served on a heaping spoonful of apple sauce)...”<sup>43</sup>

### **The Original Trilogy**

Now that the story behind the creation of *Star Wars* has been explored, it is now time to explore just how wrong initial reactions about the original trilogy were in terms of its then-relevant connections to Vietnam. For example, a 1977 newspaper review of *Episode IV A New Hope* described it as being, “the first science-fiction film since, “Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe,” a 12-episode 1940 serial, that makes absolutely no meaningful comment on such contemporary concerns as nuclear war, overpopulation, environmental pollution,

---

<sup>41</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 222-223.

<sup>42</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 224.

<sup>43</sup> Conn, “*Star Wars*: always,” 7.

depersonalization, and sex.”<sup>44</sup> The then relevant connections to Vietnam were additionally overlooked by 20th Century Fox’s international distribution business affairs director Mark W. Pevers who felt that, “this film deals with the relationships between the humans and the robots and is strictly a good guy-vs.-bad guy film.”<sup>45</sup> The hidden meaning behind this epic movie additionally was missed by many of the people who worked on it. Han Solo actor Harrison Ford admitted in a 1977 *New York Times* article that he, “didn’t really know what we were doing, but the characters are clear.”<sup>46</sup> It is, however, interesting to note how Princess Leia Organa actress Carrie Fisher once challenged that this film had, “to be set in another time and place because we can find no heroes in our own.”<sup>47</sup>

It is now time to examine who exactly did each side of the galactic conflict in *Episode IV A New Hope* and its first two sequels represent in the real-life scenario of the Vietnam War. For starters, in the case of the heroic Rebel Alliance, George Lucas admitted during a 2018 interview with James Cameron that, when he first began to dream up *Star Wars*, these fictional rebels, “were “Viet Cong.””<sup>48</sup> As explained in the 2015 book *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese were highly undersupplied and funded during the Vietnam War but still, “triumphed over the United States by relentlessly using guerrilla and low-tech tactics that harassed, surprised, subverted, and demoralized the Americans sufficiently to make them withdraw their troops after a ten-year engagement.”<sup>49</sup> This underdog sense of the North Vietnamese can easily be seen in the Rebel

---

<sup>44</sup> Vincent Canby, "Film View: Not Since 'Flash Gordon Conquers The Universe'... Film View The Robot Stars Of 'Star Wars'," *New York Times*, June 5, 1977, ProQuest.

<sup>45</sup> Cecil Scaglione, "'Star Wars' Is Phenomenon," *Desert Sun*, November 22, 1977, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>46</sup> Robin Brantley, "New Face: Harrison Ford: A Star Warrior," *New York Times*, July 1, 1977, ProQuest.

<sup>47</sup> Anna Quindlen, "Carrie Didn't Get 'Carrie' But 'Star Wars' Makes Up for It," *New York Times*, July 13, 1977, ProQuest.

<sup>48</sup> *amc*, "George Lucas on Star Wars Being Anti-Authoritarian | James Cameron’s Story of Science Fiction," April 25, 2018, video, 1:12, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv9Jq\\_mCJEo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv9Jq_mCJEo), accessed March 16, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Kosnik, "*The Mask of Fu Manchu*," 98.

Alliance since they, according to Rebel Princess Leia Organa in the 2015 novel *Smuggler's Run: A Han Solo & Chewbacca Adventure* by Greg Rucka, “don’t have resources... And what we do have is never enough.”<sup>50</sup> Despite often lacking sufficient supplies or even great odds of winning, the Rebel Alliance continued to fight because, as explained by rebels Cassian Jeron Andor and Jyn Erso in the 2016 film *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, “rebellions are built on hope.”<sup>51</sup> This sense of unyielding hope was definitely present in the troops of the North Vietnamese since they felt that, according to General Vo Nguyen Giap, “it was a myth that we could not fight and win [against American combat forces] because they were so powerful.”<sup>52</sup>

This idea of underdog forces going up and ultimately defeating superior enemies is a common theme that continues to be seen in *Star Wars* media to this very day since the 1977 release of *Episode IV A New Hope*. For example, in the 2008 pilot episode of the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, famous Jedi Master, Yoda, was able to rally three clone troopers into using very little ammunition to defeat a battalion of numerous battle droids. He was able to do this by explaining to one of them that, “weapons do not win battles. Your mind, powerful it is. Hmm. Outthink the droids you can.”<sup>53</sup> Another group of highly disadvantaged fighters was the brave Resistance who only had by the climax of the 2017 movie *Episode VIII The Last Jedi*, “rotting munitions, rusted artillery, some half-gutted skim speeders.”<sup>54</sup> Despite their dire circumstances, the Resistance utilized both those ‘rusted artillery’ and ‘skim speeders’ against the evil First Order long enough for them to be saved by both the *Millennium Falcon* and a Force projection of Jedi Master Luke Skywalker.

---

<sup>50</sup> Greg Rucka, *Smuggler's Run: A Han Solo & Chewbacca Adventure* (Glendale: Disney–Lucasfilm Press, 2015), 27.

<sup>51</sup> *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, directed by Gareth Edwards (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2016).

<sup>52</sup> Kosnik, “*The Mask of Fu Manchu*,” 99.

<sup>53</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Dave Bullock, aired October 3, 2008, on Cartoon Network.

<sup>54</sup> *Star Wars: Episode VIII The Last Jedi*, directed by Rian Johnson (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2017).

If the North Vietnamese were actually the Rebel Alliance in *Star Wars*' original trilogy, it would stand to reason that this makes the United States the evil Galactic Empire. While some may think that an American trying to paint this country as being evil is unlikely, George Lucas admitted during the aforementioned interview with James Cameron that he believed that the U.S., "was the Empire during the Vietnam War."<sup>55</sup> With this in mind, the Galactic Empire's military superiority over the Rebel Alliance was similar to how, according to the 2015 book *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, "the North Vietnamese forces had only a small fraction of the armaments and funds of the American military..."<sup>56</sup> Considering how in the movies, all of the Empire's machinery such as star destroyers are clean and huge while the Rebellion has to utilize dirty and rundown machinery such as the *Millennium Falcon*, it can be argued that Lucas was able to express his view on the U.S. during Vietnam. This notion is made even clearer when considering how Lucas and others had, according to a 1977 newspaper article, "total freedom to come up with their own landscapes, housing, vehicles, weapons, religion, politics - all of which are variations on the familiar."<sup>57</sup> If this was not enough, this connection was further reinforced in a 2016 episode of the animated series *Star Wars Rebels* in which a character declines another character's offer to join the Rebellion because he believed that the Empire had, "the strength to defeat you and the resources to back it up."<sup>58</sup>

Beside similar physical and financial characteristics, there were additionally very similar philosophies behind both the evil Galactic Empire and the United States during the Vietnam War that further connect the two. For instance, to justify getting involved in Southeast Asia, the U.S.

---

<sup>55</sup> *amc*, "George Lucas on Star Wars Being Anti-Authoritarian | James Cameron's Story of Science Fiction," April 25, 2018, video, 2:17, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv9Jq\\_mCJEo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv9Jq_mCJEo), accessed March 16, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> Kosnik, "*The Mask of Fu Manchu*," 98.

<sup>57</sup> Vincent Canby, "'Star Wars' A Trip to a Far Galaxy That's Fun and Funny.," *New York Times*, May 26, 1977, ProQuest.

<sup>58</sup> *Star Wars Rebels*, season 2, episode 13, directed by Brad Rau, aired January 27, 2016, on Disney XD.

National Security Council declared in 1952 that they hoped to prevent the countries there, “from passing into the communist orbit, and to assist them to develop will and ability to resist communism from within and without and to contribute to the strengthening of the free world.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Imperial Lieutenant Bolandin explained in the 2018 movie *Solo: A Star Wars Story* that the Empire’s objective was to, “bring peace and prosperity to the galaxy, install a regime loyal to the Emperor, and eradicate the hostiles.”<sup>60</sup> While still speaking about Southeast Asia, the National Security Council additionally declared in 1952 that the U.S. should firstly, “strengthen propaganda and cultural activities, as appropriate, in relation to the area to foster increased alignment of the people with the free world.”<sup>61</sup> This notion of the importance of propaganda is also present within the Empire since Imperial officer Ferric Obdur expressed in the 2016 novel *Aftermath: Life Debt* by Chuck Wendig that the goal of their propaganda was, “to infer the connection between the rebels and criminal organizations. But we need to do *more* than infer. We need that connection to be clear, concise: a hard slap to the face. Dose of reality.”<sup>62</sup>

Since the evil Galactic Empire represented the U.S. during the Vietnam War, who exactly does that make its leader, Darth Sidious? Even though he looks nothing like the infamous president, George Lucas explained in a 1981 *Episode VI* story conference that Sidious, “was a politician. Richard M. Nixon was his name. He subverted the senate and finally took over and became an imperial guy and he was really evil. But he pretended to be a really nice guy. He sucked Luke’s father into the dark side.”<sup>63</sup> While this connection was not made very clear for audiences at first, he made sure that the people both behind and in front of the camera knew this

---

<sup>59</sup> Neil Sheehan, Hedrick Smith, E.W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield, *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Racehorse Publishing, 2017), 28.

<sup>60</sup> *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, directed by Ron Howard (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018).

<sup>61</sup> Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Wendig, *Aftermath: Life Debt*, 39.

<sup>63</sup> Mike Ryan, “‘Star Wars’ Prequels Were Mapped Out By George Lucas & Lawrence Kasdan In 1981: Exclusive Excerpt From ‘The Making Of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi’,” *HuffPost*, May 22, 2013, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/star-wars-prequels-return-of-the-jedi\\_n\\_3313793](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/star-wars-prequels-return-of-the-jedi_n_3313793).

presidential connection during the filming of *Episode VI*. For instance, Sidious actor Ian McDiarmid revealed in a 2005 interview that he remembered, “when I sat there in the Evil Emperor's swivel chair and George [Lucas] said things like 'does it remind you of the Oval office?' And I realised that at that time Richard Nixon was in his mind.”<sup>64</sup>

Even though Nixon was arguably not as evil as Sidious, Schmitz argued in his 2014 book *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* that:

From the time he was in Congress urging President Harry S. Truman to support France, through his 1953-1961 tenure as Dwight D. Eisenhower's vice president and then his years outside elected office as a critic of Presidents John F. Kennedy's and Lyndon B. Johnson's policies, until his candidacy for president in 1968, Nixon advocated an ever larger American commitment to Southeast Asia and role in the fighting in Vietnam.<sup>65</sup>

Considering that Nixon had such a powerful influence over American policy, it is really not that big of a stretch to compare him to a fictional leader who also greatly helped to shape another huge conflict. From playing both sides of the Clone Wars to finding a way to return from the dead, Sidious' role as the main villain of *Star Wars* is best summarized when the Resistance pilot Poe Dameron claimed in *Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker* that he had, “been out there all this time. Pulling the strings.”<sup>66</sup> An old Leia Organa quickly follows this up with, “always. In the shadows. From the very beginning.”<sup>67</sup> Similar to how Nixon had long affected how the United States chose to challenge communism in Vietnam, Sidious basically manipulated how both intergalactic politics and conflicts played out for over sixty years in a galaxy far, far away. In

---

<sup>64</sup> Lindesay Irvine, “In the shadow of Evil,” *The Guardian*, November 7, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/nov/07/theatre1>.

<sup>65</sup> Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*, 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Star Wars: Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker*, directed by J. J. Abrams (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019).

<sup>67</sup> *Star Wars: Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker*, directed by J. J. Abrams (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019).

short order, the three preceding quotes help to illustrate how remarkably similar the evil Darth Sidious and questionable Richard Nixon truly are based on each of their actions.

Beside the rebels' and Empire's connections to Vietnam, there is another important aspect of the original trilogy that helped to further stress Lucas's anti-Vietnam sentiment. To be more specific, it can easily be argued that the appearance of the ancient Jedi Master Yoda in *Episode V The Empire Strikes Back* is an indirect way to challenge the whole point of the war. Unfortunately, at the time, certain critics in 1980 felt that Yoda could only be taken, "in small doses, possibly because the lines of wisdom he must speak sound as if they should be sung to a tune by Jimmy Van Heusen."<sup>68</sup> They even continued to criticize Yoda and his philosophical messages even though Irvin Kershner, director of *Episode V*, claimed that he wanted the movie to have, "some Zen...because I don't want the kids to walk away just feeling that everything is shoot 'em up..."<sup>69</sup> Since these film critics ignored the intention of Yoda and judged him harshly based on his appearance and manner of speaking, they inadvertently made the same mistake as Luke Skywalker in seriously misinterpreting the true importance of this Jedi Master.

While some may have viewed Yoda as being a complete oddball at first, one should better see his true antiwar nature by examining his words and actions in 1980's *Episode V*. For example, after learning that Luke thinks that Yoda is 'a great warrior,' the old Jedi master responds by saying, "Ah! A great warrior. Ha ha ha! Wars not make one great."<sup>70</sup> Yoda is actually trying to teach both Luke and the audience at this moment that there is truly no glory to be gained by taking part in any war. Later in the movie, Yoda would further his pacifist philosophy when he pointed out to Luke, as he was entering the Cave of Evil on Dagobah, "your

---

<sup>68</sup> Vincent Canby, "Film View: 'The Empire Strikes Back' Strikes a Bland Note Film View A Bland 'Empire'," *New York Times*, June 15, 1980, ProQuest.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Wood, "The True Story of 'Star Wars': The Myths Strike Back," *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1980, ProQuest.

<sup>70</sup> *Star Wars: Episode V The Empire Strikes Back*, directed by Irvin Kershner (20th Century Fox, 1980).

weapons...you will not need them.”<sup>71</sup> Instead of heeding his advice, Luke, like many American politicians who were so fearful of communism gaining a foothold in Southeast Asia, would ultimately decide to face the unknown with violence and risk becoming even worse than what he’d feared.

Since the release of *Episode V The Empire Strikes Back* in 1980, Yoda has gone on to appear and spread his antiwar message in eight other *Star Wars* movies and four animated television series. For instance, after fellow Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi claimed that they had achieved victory by the end of the 2002 film *Episode II Attack of the Clones*, Yoda mournfully responded with, “Victory? Victory, you say? Master Obi-Wan, not victory. The shroud of the dark side has fallen. Begun the Clone War has.”<sup>72</sup> Speaking of the Clone Wars, in the aforementioned pilot episode of the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, Yoda tells a clone trooper named Thire to, “rush not into fights. Long is the war. Only by surviving it will you prevail.”<sup>73</sup> Despite being both strong in the Force and skilled in lightsaber combat as seen in *Episode II* and *Episode III Revenge of the Sith*, these quotes show that George Lucas still wanted antiwar messages in *Star Wars* media that chronologically takes place years before *Episode V*. It is also intriguing to note how the latter one seems to connect to how Lucas’s USC roommate Randal Kleiser recalled, “that Lucas disliked USC students who felt it was necessary to die for one’s country to defend democracy.”<sup>74</sup> To put it simply, the character of Yoda was always meant to be a personalization of Lucas’s antiwar sentiment as seen in the characters’ lines and actions since his 1980 debut.

Three years after Yoda’s debut in *Episode V*, the third and final film in *Star Wars*’ original trilogy, *Episode VI Return of the Jedi*, is released in theaters and introduces another

---

<sup>71</sup> *Star Wars: Episode V The Empire Strikes Back*, directed by Irvin Kershner (20th Century Fox, 1980).

<sup>72</sup> *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Dave Bullock, aired October 3, 2008, on Cartoon Network.

<sup>74</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 61.

group of characters called the Ewoks who were also wrongly judged by critics. For example, one critic challenged the intention behind the Ewoks, based on their cute teddy bear-like appearance, and other creatures in the movie by arguing that they were, “probably already in your corner toy store and will make a mint in subsidiary rights for Lucasfilm Ltd., the “Star Wars” parent company.”<sup>75</sup> Another critic, however, challenged the purpose of the Ewoks’ inclusion in *Episode VI* by commenting that, “the sight of the Ewoks, zipping around those huge, ancient trees on what appear to be jet-propelled air-sleds, is marvelous but, like the rest of the movie, it doesn’t lead anywhere.”<sup>76</sup> These critics failed to even consider how they may be another critical way that the *Star Wars* movies parallel the Vietnam War. This issue is also present ‘in a galaxy far, far away’ since the forces of the Empire underestimated the Ewoks by pondering, through an Imperial stormtrooper in a 2017 episode of the animated series *Star Wars: Forces of Destiny*, “can you believe it? These things are everywhere. Primitives. I’m surprised the Empire didn’t deal with them when we arrived.”<sup>77</sup>

The North Vietnamese were very much like the Ewoks during Vietnam since they also achieved victory over a more advanced military power, according to the 2015 book *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, “by relentlessly using guerrilla and low-tech tactics that harassed, surprised, subverted, demoralized the Americans sufficiently to make them withdraw their troops after a ten-year engagement.”<sup>78</sup> This connection becomes even stronger when one considers how *Episode VI* screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan recalled in the 1992 book *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse* that, “you can look at *Jedi* and see the Vietnam War there. You can see the Ewok guerillas hiding in the jungles, taking

---

<sup>75</sup> Vincent Canby, "Film: Lucas Returns With 'The Jedi,'" *New York Times*, May 25, 1983, ProQuest.

<sup>76</sup> Vincent Canby, "The Force Is With Them, But the Magic Is Gone: Film View Film View Where's the Magic?," *New York Times*, May 29, 1983, ProQuest.

<sup>77</sup> *Disney*, “Star Wars Forces of Destiny | Ewok Escape | Disney,” July 5, 2017, video, 1:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL6OPMp4IUY>, accessed March 16, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Kosnik, “*The Mask of Fu Manchu*,” 98.

on this improper force of mechanized bullies-and winning.”<sup>79</sup> The Ewoks were basically able to achieve the same thing that the North Vietnamese achieved in 1973 by utilizing rocks, ropes, and pieces of wood to defeat an evil and more technologically advanced intergalactic Empire.

Beside the Ewoks, it can be argued that George Lucas and other filmmakers introduced other underdog aliens in future *Star Wars* movies that were equally mighty and mocked initially by critics. For example, the amphibious Gungan race first appeared in the 1999 movie *Episode I The Phantom Menace* in which one member of this species, Jar Jar Binks, was criticized by supposedly being, “made noxious by his obsequious Caribbean-sounding patois.”<sup>80</sup> Having additionally been called ‘pathetic lifeforms’ and ‘primitive’ by other characters in this film, both Jar Jar and other Gungans certainly deserve some credit since they were able to distract the evil Trade Federation’s army long enough in order for their allies to fix everything. Another group of highly underestimated aliens are the porgs from the 2017 movie *Episode VIII The Last Jedi* who a critic described as being, “saucer-eyed mewling creatures with plump, puffinlike bodies that are mainly on hand for easy laughs.”<sup>81</sup> Even though many scenes involving the porgs in this movie are arguably very funny, it is the fact that a porg was able to spot where the last remaining members of the Resistance were at the end while neither powerful Rey nor resourceful R2-D2 could not simply prove their worth. In other words, the inclusion of aliens like Gungans and porgs in the later *Star Wars* films helps to continue the Vietnam message that underdogs can be victorious.

### **The Prequel Trilogy**

---

<sup>79</sup> Champlin, *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse*, 96.

<sup>80</sup> Janet Maslin, "In the Beginning, the Future: Star Wars: The Phantom Menace In the Beginning, the Future: 'Star Wars' as a Swashbuckling Genesis Story," *New York Times*, May 19, 1999, ProQuest.

<sup>81</sup> Manohla Dargis, "Old Friends, New Faces, Cute Critters: The latest 'Star Wars' finds peace elusive and the dark side strong," *New York Times*, December 13, 2017, ProQuest.

Before exploring in what ways the prequel trilogy represented the conflict in Vietnam before Richard Nixon came to office, it is now time to answer whether or not these films were actually about Vietnam. This is a fair question to ask since, while George Lucas created the original trilogy just as the Vietnam War was ending in the 1970s, the three prequel films were released in a six-year period from 1999 to 2005. Perhaps the best proof for this connection is when George Lucas expressed during the making of *Episode III Revenge of the Sith* in 2004 that Jedi Master Aayla Secura and a group of clone troopers should be walking in a certain scene like one would in, “well, Vietnam...”<sup>82</sup> This connected association with Vietnam can also be seen in the fact that he basically had the entire plot of *Episode III* in 1981 during the aforementioned *Episode VI* story conference since he explained that Darth Sidious, “was a politician. Richard M. Nixon was his name. He subverted the senate and finally took over and became an imperial guy and he was really evil. But he pretended to be a really nice guy. He sucked Luke’s father into the dark side.”<sup>83</sup> The reason behind how he could have possibly planned out the prequels years before their release is that, according to a 1995 interview with Leonard Maltin, the first script of *Episode IV* required him, “to write a backstory about where Darth Vader came from, uh, how the kids evolved, you know his wife, how Ben related to all that, how the emperor came to power and that ended up being the basis for the projects that I’m working on now.”<sup>84</sup>

With a better understanding of both how the original trilogy represented the Vietnam War during Nixon’s presidency and how the prequels are similarly connected, now would be a good time to explore in what ways they represent the conflict in Vietnam before this era. For starters, the origins of this war are very similar to the origins of the fictional conflict that began in

---

<sup>82</sup> J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars Revenge of the Sith* (New York: Del Rey, 2005), 168.

<sup>83</sup> Mike Ryan, “‘Star Wars’ Prequels Were Mapped Out By George Lucas & Lawrence Kasdan In 1981: Exclusive Excerpt From ‘The Making Of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi’,” *HuffPost*, May 22, 2013, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/star-wars-prequels-return-of-the-jedi\\_n\\_3313793](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/star-wars-prequels-return-of-the-jedi_n_3313793).

<sup>84</sup> *Star Wars*, “Leonard Maltin Interviews George Lucas, Part 1,” February 5, 2014, video, 2:58, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb0c\\_9zc7Zg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb0c_9zc7Zg), accessed March 16, 2021.

*Episode I* and ended in *Episode IX*; they each involved a foreign entity trying to control unwilling subjects. Having taken complete control of the Indochina area of Southeast Asia by 1893, France turned Vietnam into a colony, according to the 1965 book *Our Vietnam Nightmare* by Marguerite Higgins, “not by virtue of superior civilization, but superior gunpower.”<sup>85</sup> In a similar fashion, the evil Trade Federation took over the peaceful planet of Naboo in *Episode I* since the planet’s security volunteers were, according to a character named Quarsh Panaka, “no match against a battle-hardened Federation army.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally very similar to how the Trade Federation made the people of Naboo starve and destroyed parts of the planet’s forests, the aforementioned book by Higgins described that by the time that Vietnam’s French, “colonial regime ended, sixty-three percent of the peasants in the North were landless, and in the South, where land had been in far more plentiful supply, seventy-five percent of all peasants were landless.”<sup>87</sup>

Even though both France and the Trade Federation had taken control of very huge pieces of foreign territories, their control each came undone when the people of these territories desired to be independent. To be more specific, the Vietnamese desired to be free from French influence after World War II and this worried many American politicians who feared that Vietnam would fall under the influence of communism. Similar to how Darth Sidious disliked Naboo’s resistance and desired to make the Trade Federation’s invasion there legal, then U.S. vice president Richard Nixon started to advocate in 1953 for, “US involvement in Vietnam and inserted himself into the debate about the French presence in Indochina.”<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately for both Nixon and other politicians like him, according to the aforementioned book by Higgins, the

---

<sup>85</sup> Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 12.

<sup>86</sup> *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1999).

<sup>87</sup> Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, 11.

<sup>88</sup> Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*, 3.

French ultimately became, “fed up with Vietnam and determined to negotiate their way out.”<sup>89</sup>

The fact that France eventually lost interest in continuing to fight is similar to how the Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn claimed that members of the Trade Federation were, “cowards. The negotiations will be short.”<sup>90</sup> To put it simply, the main source of conflict at the beginning of both the conflict in Vietnam and the Skywalker Saga are remarkably similar.

Beside the Trade Federation, the 1999 movie *Episode I The Phantom Menace* additionally featured another important aspect of the origin of conflict in Vietnam in the form of a leader of questionable competence. In Vietnam, the U.S. ultimately decided that a man named Ngo Dinh Diem would be, “appointed premier of South Vietnam by Bao Dai on June 17, 1954.”<sup>91</sup> Since he was appointed with the intention of helping to carry out U.S. intentions in the area, according to the 2016 book *Vietnam: A New History* by Christopher Goscha, some individuals such as Pulitzer Prize winner Frances FitzGerald, “wrote Ngo Dinh Diem off as an American puppet, no more legitimate than the colonial emperor, Bao Dai, had been under the French.”<sup>92</sup> This notion of a puppet ruler connects to the *Star Wars* character Finis Valorum who is both the Supreme Chancellor of the Galactic Republic in *Episode I* and the person the heroes sought out to help free Naboo from the Trade Federation. Unfortunately, Sidious challenged the chancellor’s power in James Luceno’s 2014 novel *Tarkin* by claiming that he did not win the last election to become chancellor since, “he was merely *allowed* to win. The Senate’s special-interest groups require a chancellor who can be easily entangled in bureaucratic double-talk and arcane procedure.”<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1999).

<sup>91</sup> Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 312.

<sup>93</sup> James Luceno, “Tarkin,” in *The Rise of the Empire* (New York: Del Rey, 2015), 116-117.

Beside their perceived limitations of power by outsiders, Ngo Dinh Diem and Finis Valorum also were connected through similar ways in which they lost their political power. For Diem, the United States was starting to question the effectiveness of having him in charge of South Vietnam by 1963 that a cablegram from the White House claimed that, “there should...be urgent covert effort with closest security, under broad guidance of Ambassador to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears.”<sup>94</sup> This is very similar to how Padmé Amidala of Naboo brought about the end of Valorum’s political career by claiming that, “if this body is not capable of action, I suggest new leadership is needed. I move for a vote of no confidence...in Chancellor Valorum’s leadership.”<sup>95</sup> Fortunately for Valorum, Amidala’s radical proposal did not lead to the violent end that Diem experienced on 2 November 1963 when, “with a green light from Kennedy, Vietnamese military and security officers overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Nhu.”<sup>96</sup> Strangely enough, while Sidious encouraged Amidala to oust Valorum for a ‘stronger chancellor’, Nixon actually tried to defend Diem by arguing that, “the choice is not between President Diem and somebody better, it is between Diem and somebody infinitely worse.”<sup>97</sup> Regardless of this, the ways in which both Ngo Dinh Diem and Finis Valorum were ultimately betrayed by their political organizations further show how remarkably similar these expendable leaders truly are.

While Valorum’s inability to do anything about the Trade Federation’s invasion of Naboo was his undoing in *Episode I The Phantom Menace*, the origins of the issues that ultimately proved to be Diem’s undoing introduces sinister-sounding individuals to historians. To be more specific, what really undermined Diem’s rule was when on May 8th, 1963, according to the

---

<sup>94</sup> Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*, 222.

<sup>95</sup> *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1999).

<sup>96</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*, 318.

<sup>97</sup> Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*, 11.

aforementioned book by Christopher Goscha, “a clash between government forces and Buddhist demonstrators calling for religious equality resulted in the death of seven young Buddhists.”<sup>98</sup> This religious conflict eventually caused radical Buddhists to immolate themselves and their actions bothered other Buddhists since they believed, according to the aforementioned book by Higgins, “no true Buddhist would commit suicide. It is written in the verses of Buddha that suicide is wrong.”<sup>99</sup> This religious conflict that ultimately resulted in the death of Diem is similar to how the 2002 movie *Episode II Attack of the Clones* started with an assassination attempt on Padmé Amidala. She quickly made the assumption that the former Jedi Count Dooku was behind it while the Jedi Ki-Adi-Mundi dismissed Dooku as being just a political idealist. Similar to how the actions of the aforementioned Buddhist monks were treated with disbelief, another Jedi named Mace Windu reminded Amidala that, “Count Dooku was once a Jedi. He couldn't assassinate anyone. It's not in his character.”<sup>100</sup>

While the actions of the aforementioned group of self-immolating Buddhists were truly very disturbing, they had a leader named Thich Tri Quang who is very much like the aforementioned *Star Wars* character Count Dooku. In her 1965 book *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, Marguerite Higgins reflected how she had a two-and-a-half-hour-long interview with Thich Tri Quang in 1963 that left her feeling that, “he was, and is, a true demagogue. Hate emanates from the man.”<sup>101</sup> Dooku actor Christopher Lee similarly revealed in J. W. Rinzler's 2005 book *The Making of Star Wars Revenge of the Sith* that, “not many people realize that *dooku* is Japanese for ‘poison’... Which is very appropriate, really, because he's lethal.”<sup>102</sup> It is additionally interesting how Higgins recorded that Thich Tri Quang felt betrayed by the United States since,

---

<sup>98</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*, 317.

<sup>99</sup> Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 2002).

<sup>101</sup> Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, 30.

<sup>102</sup> Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars Revenge of the Sith*, 112.

“President Kennedy spoke far too favorably of President Diem. . . . We had reason to believe that President Kennedy was on our side.”<sup>103</sup> In a similar way, Count Dooku was completely caught off guard in the 2005 movie *Episode III Revenge of the Sith* when his Sith master, Darth Sideous, allowed the Jedi Anakin Skywalker to behead Dooku right in front of him. As explained by George Lucas, Sidious/Palpatine had told Dooku one plan to make Anakin evil when, “behind it, obviously, is Palpatine’s real intention: If Anakin is good enough, Anakin can kill Dooku and become Palpatine’s new apprentice. But he didn’t tell Dooku that.”<sup>104</sup> To put it simply, in terms of their similar personalities and sense of betrayal, radical Buddhist Thich Tri Quang is remarkably like the *Star Wars* character Count Dooku.

While Thich Tri Quang may have been delighted at the death of Ngo Dinh Diem, tensions in Vietnam would only continue to worsen in a way similar to how the actions of both Count Dooku and his allies affected the *Star Wars* universe. Things really came to a head when on 2 August 1964, according to the 2007 book *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full* by Conrad Black, the U.S. intelligence-gathering, “destroyer USS *Maddox* was attacked by three North Vietnam torpedo boats; three torpedoes and some machine-gun fire were aimed at the *Maddox*...”<sup>105</sup> The reason why the *Maddox* was attacked in an area called the Gulf of Tonkin is explained in the aforementioned 2016 book by Christopher Goscha when he mentioned that the U.S. by this time had, “increased their surveillance of the north by sending vessels into the Gulf of Tonkin...”<sup>106</sup> In a similar fashion, while seeking the bounty hunter who had tried to kill Padmé Amidala in the 2002 movie *Episode II Attack of the Clones*, Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi was able to tell his allies in the Galactic Republic that Count Dooku and his allies in the Confederacy

---

<sup>103</sup> Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, 27.

<sup>104</sup> Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars Revenge of the Sith*, 41.

<sup>105</sup> Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full*, 466.

<sup>106</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*, 322.

of Independent Systems was secretly building a massive droid army on the planet Geonosis before being captured. In response to these shocking revelations, it was declared by Sidious' loyal Vice Chair, Mas Amedda, that, "this is a crisis. The senate must vote the chancellor emergency powers. He can then approve the creation of an army."<sup>107</sup> This is very similar to how the attack on the USS *Maddox* eventually led the U.S. government to draft the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution a few days later which declared that this country was, in terms of responding to North Vietnam's actions, "prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force..."<sup>108</sup> There additionally was a memo by Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William P. Bundy from August 14th, 1964 that detailed how:

A solution in both South Viet-Nam and Laos will require a combination of *military* pressures and some form of communication under which Hanoi (and Peiping) eventually accept the idea of getting out. Negotiation without continued pressure, indeed without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in the foreseeable future.<sup>109</sup>

Like how Count Dooku's actions led to his secret master's gaining the power to create an army, the Gulf of Tonkin incident of 1964 additionally led to the U.S.'s determination to commit American troops to war in Vietnam.

While not exactly the same, the ways that both the Galactic Republic and American government decided to quickly create legions of troops additionally share some characteristics. For example, according to the aforementioned 2007 novel by Conrad Black, then U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson decided, "to intensify the war in Vietnam, believing the optimistic predictions of Robert McNamara and of the commander on the spot, General William

---

<sup>107</sup> *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 2002).

<sup>108</sup> "Transcript of Tonkin Gulf Resolution (1964)," *OurDocuments.gov*, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=98&page=transcript>.

<sup>109</sup> Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*, 303.

Westmoreland, that victory could be had by escalating.”<sup>110</sup> McNamara’s specific views about the importance of more American troops is similar to how the mysterious Jedi Sifo-Dyas secretly created an army of cloned soldiers on the planet Kamino because, according to fellow Jedi Plo Koon in a 2014 episode of the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, “he said he foresaw a great conflict, and that the Republic would need to raise an army.”<sup>111</sup> While Sifo-Dyas was killed a decade before the Republic’s new clone army was used, according to the aforementioned book by Christopher Goscha, President Johnson accepted in July 1965, “General Westmoreland’s request for more men, bringing the total to 125,000.”<sup>112</sup> Things only got worse when the government decided to seriously increase the number of American citizens being drafted into service. It was even described in a newspaper article from August 5th, 1966 that, “with enlistments lagging and Vietnam casualties mounting, the Defense Department issued a call Thursday for 46,200 draftees in October-the highest for any month since the Korean war.”<sup>113</sup> Like how American politicians started to rely more on unwilling citizens for Vietnam, it was the alien Republic senator Ask Aak who first claimed after learning about Obi-Wan’s aforementioned discovery in *Episode II* that, “the debate is over! Now we need that clone army.”<sup>114</sup> In summary, the ways that both the Galactic Republic and the American government decided to quickly create legions of troops were truly very similar.

Even though they were not exactly the same, both the clone troopers of the Grand Army of the Republic and drafted American soldiers during the Vietnam War were truly very much alike in several different ways. For instance, since the clone soldiers of the Republic were

---

<sup>110</sup> Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full*, 491.

<sup>111</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 6, episode 10, directed by Brian Kalin O’Connell, aired March 7, 2014, on Netflix.

<sup>112</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*, 325.

<sup>113</sup> Robert Barkdoll, “Viet Casualties Up Draft Call: Lag in Enlistment, Vietnam Casualties Boost Draft Call Draft,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1966, ProQuest.

<sup>114</sup> *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 2002).

genetically engineered to be just interchangeable soldiers without consent, certain people like the alien Republic senator Christo disregard the millions of clones who died during the ensuing Clone Wars by claiming that the Republic, “created them for just that purpose.”<sup>115</sup> In a very similar fashion, Presidential assistant for national security McGeorge Bundy seemed to fear communism more than losing American lives when he related in a 1965 memo that a certain policy:

Implies significant U.S. air losses even if no full air war is joined, and it seems likely that it would eventually require an extensive and costly effort against the whole air defense system of North Vietnam. U.S. casualties would be higher-and more visible to American feelings-than those sustained in the struggle in South Vietnam. Yet measured against the costs of defeat in Vietnam, this program seems cheap. And even if it fails to turn the tide-as it may-the value of the effort seems to us to exceed its costs.<sup>116</sup>

The fact that certain American politicians like Bundy would be perfectly willing to sacrifice American troops to try to keep communism from gaining a foothold in Southeast Asia truly connections them to equally heartless *Star Wars* characters such as Christo. With this military mindset exposed, it is truly of little wonder why many Americans like George Lucas would start to despise the draft due to not liking the idea of government officials, “lining us up for the butcher block.”<sup>117</sup> In a very similar fashion, various clones such as Cut Lawquane would start to see themselves as individuals over the course of the Clone Wars and reach the conclusion that each of them was, “just another expendable clone waiting for my turn to be slaughtered in a war that made no sense to me.”<sup>118</sup> It is additionally intriguing to consider that, like how communism

---

<sup>115</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 3, episode 11, directed by Duwayne Dunham, aired December 3, 2010, on Cartoon Network.

<sup>116</sup> Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*, 433.

<sup>117</sup> Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, 64.

<sup>118</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 2, episode 10, directed by Robert Dalva, aired January 1, 2010, on Cartoon Network.

would eventually take over Vietnam by 1975 despite the ultimate sacrifices made by thousands of American soldiers, retired clones after the Clone Wars would later question, “the point of the whole thing. All those men died and for what?”<sup>119</sup>

Despite occurring at different lengths of time, both the Clone Wars and the Vietnam War during Johnson’s presidency would continue to escalate until a single event would help bring about the end of these massive periods of conflict. In the case of Vietnam, as described in the aforementioned 2007 book by Conrad Black, American forces were completely caught off guard when in early 1968, “an enemy suicide squad had penetrated the U.S. embassy compound (but not the chancery itself) and fired at close range at the presidential palace. Intense fighting was under way, in what became known, after a local holiday, as the Tet Offensive, in almost every city and town in South Vietnam.”<sup>120</sup> Almost as shocking as the Tet Offensive was for Americans, *Episode III* begins with a word crawl that describes, “in a stunning move, the fiendish droid leader, General Grievous, has swept into the Republic capital and kidnapped Chancellor Palpatine, leader of the Galactic Senate.”<sup>121</sup> The Republic was completely caught off guard since, as explained in a 2020 episode of the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, they were already dealing with the Outer Rim Sieges which saw Separatist forces launch, “a major offensive. Led by the evil droid General Grievous, Republic forces are pushed to the brink. In response to this overwhelming attack, the Jedi Council has dispatched its Generals, sending them far from the Core Worlds to bolster the beleaguered clones.”<sup>122</sup> After the Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker were able to ‘rescue’ a disguised Sidious, he would describe how, “they killed Count Dooku, but General Grievous has escaped once again.”<sup>123</sup> While Johnston may have

---

<sup>119</sup> *Star Wars Rebels*, season 2, episode 3, directed by Dave Filoni and Sergio Paez, aired October 14, 2015, on Disney XD.

<sup>120</sup> Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full*, 511.

<sup>121</sup> *Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 2005).

<sup>122</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 7, episode 9, directed by Saul Ruiz, aired April 17, 2020, on Disney+.

<sup>123</sup> *Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 2005).

claimed victory after the North Vietnamese were eventually beaten back, similar criticisms were made about Vietnam since people such as General Earle G. Wheeler reported that although many of the enemy's, "units were badly hurt, the judgement is that he has the will and the capability to continue."<sup>124</sup> Even if these comparisons between the opening battle of *Episode III* and the Tet Offensive are purely coincidental, no one can deny the latter event's importance to George Lucas' vision for *Star Wars* since J. W. Rinzler's aforementioned 2005 book revealed that he believed that, "the entire opening sequence should last about twenty minutes."<sup>125</sup> Regardless of Lucas' vision, the ways in which both the Tet Offensive and *Episode III*'s opening played out shows just how remarkably similar these surprising events truly are.

By showing just how vulnerable and non-controlling their current military leaders truly were, the aforementioned events would help pave the way for certain political figures to amass power in a relatively fast manner. For example, American citizens really started to oppose the war after the Tet Offensive since Black explained that:

They had been assured that after the huge draft calls and the endless body bags returning at the rate of two to four hundred a week (spiking up to over eight hundred during Tet and a thousand in one week in May in post-Tet mopping-up operations), the United States would prevail, and yet it had barely been able to keep the enemy out of its own embassy.<sup>126</sup>

Having already announced his presidential candidacy in early 1968, according to the 2014 book *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* by David F. Schmitz, former Vice President Richard Nixon would begin his campaign by seizing on people's anger and criticizing President Johnson's leadership since this country, "could not defeat a fourth-rate

---

<sup>124</sup> Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*, 629.

<sup>125</sup> Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars Revenge of the Sith*, 30.

<sup>126</sup> Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full*, 515.

military power.”<sup>127</sup> Similar to how Johnston greatly encouraged and drove American involvement in Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, the Jedi would betray their ideals of being ‘keepers of the peace’ by leading the Republic’s clone army during the Clone Wars to only be villainized by Darth Sidious. Even before the events of *Episode III*, citizens of the Republic such as Letta Turmond were starting to feel that, “the Jedi Order is not what it used to be. The Jedi have become warmongers. They’ve become military weapons. And they’re killing when they should be keeping the peace.”<sup>128</sup> With the Jedi becoming warmongering monsters in the people’s eyes, Sidious was able to declare both himself Emperor and the Jedi enemies of the newly formed Galactic Empire because of, according to famous *Star Wars* character Leia Organa in the 2016 novel *Aftermath: Life Debt* by Chuck Wendig, “how easy it was for him to prey on the anxieties of the galaxy. How simple it was for him to turn system against system by stoking the fires of xenophobia, anger, selfishness.”<sup>129</sup> In a very similar fashion, according to the online textbook *The American Yawp*, Nixon was able to win the 1968 election by playing on people’s, “fears, running on a platform of “law and order” and a vague plan to end the war.”<sup>130</sup> In summary, the ways in which both Richard Nixon and Darth Sidious utilized people’s anxieties to achieve political power show how similar these questionable politicians are.

Once they each achieved ultimate political power, both Richard Nixon and Darth Sidious would each envision destructive strategies to make their enemies feel the need to surrender in a very quick fast. For example, according to the online textbook *The American Yawp*, “Nixon pursued a “madman strategy” of attacking communist supply lines across Laos and Cambodia,

---

<sup>127</sup> Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*, 27.

<sup>128</sup> *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, season 5, episode 18, directed by Danny Keller, aired February 16, 2013, on Cartoon Network.

<sup>129</sup> Wendig, *Aftermath: Life Debt*, 218.

<sup>130</sup> “The Unraveling,” in *The American Yawp* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press), <http://www.americanyawp.com/text/28-the-unraveling/>.

hoping to convince the North Vietnamese that he would do anything to stop the war.”<sup>131</sup> Even though he did this “madman strategy” with neither public knowledge nor congressional approval, according to the aforementioned 2014 book by David F. Schmitz, he simply desired:

To create as much doubt in the minds of the enemy about what we will do in Laos and Cambodia and complete doubt as to what South Vietnam will do. We won't be pinned down on what interdiction is. I want to be sure we give no signal to the enemy. We will continue the bombing in North and South Laos. . . . Leave the enemy concerned.<sup>132</sup>

Similar to how Nixon's strategy was very secretive and destructive, Darth Sidious secretly started building during the Clone Wars what the opening crawl of *Episode IV* called, “the Empire's ultimate weapon, the DEATH STAR, an armored space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet.”<sup>133</sup> Its exact purpose was explained when Imperial Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin expressed to other Imperial officers in this movie that, “fear will keep the local systems in line. Fear of this battle station.”<sup>134</sup> Like how the knowledge of the Death Star's existence made its main designer desire to build a fatal flaw in it, Americans were truly upset after learning about Nixon's “madman strategy” since a 1970 newspaper article called out his, “monumental blunder in reversing the whole course of what he said was his Vietnamese policy with the invasion of Cambodia and the reopening of the bombing of North Vietnam. That is real violence.”<sup>135</sup> Even though neither strategy really worked out, Darth Sidious and his allies would try out various other versions of his strategy to the point that Resistance pilot Poe Dameron realized in *Episode IX* that every ship in Sidious' new fleet, “has planet-killing weapons. Of course they do. All of

---

<sup>131</sup> “The Unraveling,” in *The American Yawp* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press), <http://www.americanyawp.com/text/28-the-unraveling/>.

<sup>132</sup> Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*, 105.

<sup>133</sup> *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1977).

<sup>134</sup> *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1977).

<sup>135</sup> Tom Wicker, “In The Nation: The Dead at Kent State,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1970, ProQuest.

them. This is how he finishes it.”<sup>136</sup> Regardless of this, the ways in which the strategies of both Richard Nixon and Darth Sidious focused on creating quick surrenders from their enemies shows how similar these strategic plans are.

While some people may have criticized both Richard Nixon and Darth Sidious for their questionable actions, the ‘thief’ and distribution of select sensitive material that would completely undermine their strategic plans additionally connected the two. In the case of Nixon, according to David F. Schmitz, *The New York Times* challenged him in 1971 when they:

Began publishing excerpts from the *Pentagon Papers*, a classified study of the Vietnam War from the Harry S. Truman administration until May 1968, containing over three thousand pages of analysis and four thousand pages of documents. Commissioned in 1967 by then secretary of defense Robert McNamara, the *Pentagon Papers* revealed the credibility gap between what four administrations had told the American public about Vietnam and their actual policies, actions, and knowledge of the war.<sup>137</sup>

Like how *The New York Times* used McNamara’s work to shed light on the government’s actions in Vietnam, the rebel Jyn Erso stole plans to the Death Star in the 2016 film *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* in order to fulfill her, “father’s revenge. He built a flaw in the Death Star. He put a fuse in the middle of your machine...and I’ve just told the entire galaxy how to light it.”<sup>138</sup> While Erso was not able to live long enough to see the Death Star’s destruction, *The New York Times* continued to publish excerpts from the *Pentagon Papers* even after the government tried to stop them in court on the grounds that, “the continued publication would cause “grave and irreparable injury” to the national interest.”<sup>139</sup> In a very similar way, Imperial General Cassio Tagge

---

<sup>136</sup> *Star Wars: Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker*, directed by J. J. Abrams (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019).

<sup>137</sup> Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*, 131.

<sup>138</sup> *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, directed by Gareth Edwards (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2016).

<sup>139</sup> "The Pentagon Papers Decision," *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1971, ProQuest.

expressed concern over the thief of the Death Star's plans in *Episode IV* when he explained that, "if the rebels have obtained a complete technical readout of this station, it is possible, however unlikely, that they might find a weakness and exploit it."<sup>140</sup> While the rebels were able to 'find a weakness and exploit it' to destroy Sidious' ultimate weapon, the *Pentagon Papers* helped to limit Nixon's ability to wage war with both the War Powers Resolution and the Paris Peace Accords in 1973 which marked, "the official end of U.S. force commitment to the Vietnam War."<sup>141</sup> Similar to how Sidious' Empire was officially brought to its knees with the destruction of its second Death Star in *Episode VI*, Nixon's political career would officially end due to the infamous Watergate scandal and how, "thanks largely to two persistent journalists at the *Washington Post*, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, information continued to surface that tied the burglaries ever closer to the CIA, the FBI, and the White House."<sup>142</sup> In other words, the ways in which the downfalls of both Richard Nixon and Darth Sidious occurred due to the unveiling of sensitive information shows how remarkably similar these questionable leaders truly are.

While the sci-fi fantasy *Star Wars* film series may at first appear to have no real relevance to any real-world events, this essay has shown how remarkably similar it truly is to both various aspects of the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon's rise to power after considering its creator's antiwar nature in the past. In order to explain such a phenomenon, based on similar past academic work, the looking for ways that history is reflected in these films approach that has been used by scholars like James M. Curtis and Carl Rubino has been proven to be most helpful in doing so. One could thus determine that the prominence of the conflict between the Rebel Alliance and the Galactic Empire, Jedi Master Yoda, and the Ewoks in the first three films

---

<sup>140</sup> *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1977).

<sup>141</sup> "The Unraveling," in *The American Yawp* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press), <http://www.americanyawp.com/text/28-the-unraveling/>.

<sup>142</sup> "The Unraveling," in *The American Yawp* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press), <http://www.americanyawp.com/text/28-the-unraveling/>.

released reflect how George Lucas had wanted to make an anti-Vietnam film since college to only eventually decide to, “put the essence of the story in outer space and make it happen in a galaxy long ago and far away.”<sup>143</sup> The following three prequel films and related media also help to explain how Lucas had intended them to show how two ambitious politicians eventually achieved ultimate power during wartime by playing on people’s, “fears, running on a platform of “law and order” and a vague plan to end the war.”<sup>144</sup> It is important for researchers of today to study such similarities in popular films in order to truly understand filmmakers’ original intentions for them.

### **Bibliography**

Acuna, Kirsten. “One brief scene in ‘Star Wars: The Force Awakens’ is based on a shot from

‘Apocalypse Now’.” *Business Insider*, December 29, 2015,

<https://www.businessinsider.com/star-wars-force-awakens-apocalypse-now-influence-2015-12>.

*amc*. “George Lucas on Star Wars Being Anti-Authoritarian | James Cameron’s Story of Science

Fiction.” April 25, 2018. Video, 1:12. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv9Jq\\_mCJEo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv9Jq_mCJEo).

*Andy Snowslayer*. “Star Wars EpIV - Deleted Biggs and Luke Scenes.” June 28, 2018. Video,

3:35. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaS\\_0oVJvio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaS_0oVJvio).

Barkdoll, Robert. “Viet Casualties Up Draft Call: Lag in Enlistment, Vietnam Casualties Boost

Draft Call Draft.” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1966.

Black, Conrad. *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2007.

---

<sup>143</sup> Kosnik, “*The Mask of Fu Manchu*,” 98.

<sup>144</sup> “The Unraveling,” in *The American Yawp* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press), <http://www.americanyawp.com/text/28-the-unraveling/>.

Brantley, Robin. "New Face: Harrison Ford: A Star Warrior." *New York Times*, July 1, 1977.

Canby, Vincent. "Film: Lucas Returns With 'The Jedi'." *New York Times*, May 25, 1983.

Canby, Vincent. "Film View: Not Since 'Flash Gordon Conquers The Universe'... Film View The Robot Stars Of 'Star Wars'." *New York Times*, June 5, 1977.

Canby, Vincent. "Film View: 'The Empire Strikes Back' Strikes a Bland Note Film View A Bland 'Empire'." *New York Times*, June 15, 1980.

Canby, Vincent. "'Star Wars' A Trip to a Far Galaxy That's Fun and Funny." *New York Times*, May 26, 1977.

Canby, Vincent. "The Force Is With Them, But the Magic Is Gone: Film View Film View Where's the Magic?." *New York Times*, May 29, 1983.

Caro, Mark. "'Star Wars' inadvertently hits too close to U.S.'s role." *Chicago Tribune*, May 18, 2005,  
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-05-18-0505180309-story.html#:~:text=Bush's%20presidency%20is%20triggering,Empire%20ruled%20by%20him%20alone>.

Champlin, Charles. *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992.

Conn, Andrew Lewis. "Star Wars: always." *Film Comment* 33, no. 3 (May-June 1997): 2, 7-8.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43455275>.

Curtis, James M. "From *American Graffiti* to *Star Wars*." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 13, no. 4 (Spring 1980): 590-601.

[https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1980.1304\\_590.x](https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1980.1304_590.x).

Dargis, Manohla. "Old Friends, New Faces, Cute Critters: The latest 'Star Wars' finds peace elusive and the dark side strong." *New York Times*, December 13, 2017.

*Disney Gallery: The Mandalorian*. Season 1, episode 1, "Directing." Directed by Bradford Baruh. Aired May 4, 2020, on Disney+.

Disney. "Star Wars Forces of Destiny | Ewok Escape | Disney." July 5, 2017. Video, 1:05.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL6OPMp4IUY>.

Geraghty, Lincoln. "Creating and Comparing Myth in Twentieth-Century Science Fiction: 'Star Trek' and 'Star Wars'." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2005): 191-200.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43797228>.

Goscha, Christopher. *Vietnam: A New History*. New York: Basic Books, 2016.

Harmetz, Aljean. "...And It Almost Didn't Get to the Screen." *New York Times*, May 26, 1977.

Hellmann, John. *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Higgins, Marguerite. *Our Vietnam Nightmare*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

Irvine, Lindesay. "In the shadow of Evil." *The Guardian*, November 7, 2005,

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/nov/07/theatre1>.

Kosnik, Abigail De. "The Mask of Fu Manchu, Son of Sinbad, and Star Wars IV: A New Hope: Techno-Orientalist Cinema as a Mnemotechnics of Twentieth-Century U.S.-Asian Conflicts." In *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, edited by David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, 89-100. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015.

Luceno, James. "Tarkin." In *The Rise of the Empire*, 25-282. New York: Del Rey, 2015.

Maslin, Janet. "In the Beginning, the Future: Star Wars: The Phantom Menace In the Beginning, the Future: 'Star Wars' as a Swashbuckling Genesis Story." *New York Times*, May 19, 1999.

Massood, Paula J. "1977: Movies and a Nation in Transformation." In *American Cinema of the 1970s: Themes and Variations*, edited by Lester D. Friedman, 182-204. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Miller, Stephen Paul. *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance*. New York: Duke University Press, 1999.

Pollock, Dale. *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1984.

Quindlen, Anna. "Carrie Didn't Get 'Carrie' But 'Star Wars' Makes Up for It." *New York Times*, July 13, 1977.

Rinzler, J. W. *The Making of Star Wars Revenge of the Sith*. New York: Del Rey, 2005.

*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. Directed by Gareth Edwards. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2016. 2 hr., 13 min.

Rubino, Carl. "Long Ago, But Not So Far Away: Another Look at "Star Wars" and the Ancient World." *The Classical Outlook* 89, no. 1 (FALL 2011): 1-4.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43940227>.

Rucka, Greg. *Smuggler's Run: A Han Solo & Chewbacca Adventure*. Glendale: Disney–Lucasfilm Press, 2015.

Ryan, Mike. "'Star Wars' Prequels Were Mapped Out By George Lucas & Lawrence Kasdan In 1981: Exclusive Excerpt From 'The Making Of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi'." *HuffPost*, May 22, 2013,  
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/star-wars-prequels-return-of-the-jedi\\_n\\_3313793](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/star-wars-prequels-return-of-the-jedi_n_3313793).

Scaglione, Cecil. "'Star Wars ' Is Phenomenon.'" *Desert Sun*, November 22, 1977.

Schmitz, David F. *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

Scott, A. O. "Some Surprises in That Galaxy Far, Far Away." *New York Times*, May 16, 2005.

Sheehan, Neil, Hedrick Smith, E.W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield. *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War*. New York: Racehorse Publishing, 2017.

*Solo: A Star Wars Story*. Directed by Ron Howard. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018.  
 2 hr., 15 min.

*Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace*. Directed by George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 1999.

2 hr., 16 min.

*Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones*. Directed by George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 2002.

2 hr., 22 min.

*Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith*. Directed by George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 2005.

2 hr., 20 min.

*Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope*. Directed by George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 1977. 2 hr., 1

min.

*Star Wars: Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker*. Directed by J. J. Abrams. Walt Disney Studios

Motion Pictures, 2019. 2 hr., 22 min.

*Star Wars: Episode V The Empire Strikes Back*. Directed by Irvin Kershner. 20th Century Fox,

1980. 2 hr., 4 min.

*Star Wars: Episode VIII The Last Jedi*. Directed by Rian Johnson. Walt Disney Studios Motion

Pictures, 2017. 2 hr., 32 min.

*Star Wars*. "Leonard Maltin Interviews George Lucas, Part 1." February 5, 2014. Video, 2:58.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb0c\\_9zc7Zg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb0c_9zc7Zg).

*Star Wars Rebels*. Season 2, episode 3, "The Lost Commanders." Directed by Dave Filoni and

Sergio Paez. Aired October 14, 2015, on Disney XD.

*Star Wars Rebels*. Season 2, episode 13, “The Protector of Concord Dawn.” Directed by Brad Rau. Aired January 27, 2016, on Disney XD.

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Season 1, episode 1, “Ambush.” Directed by Dave Bullock. Aired October 3, 2008, on Cartoon Network.

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Season 2, episode 10, “The Deserter.” Directed by Robert Dalva. Aired January 1, 2010, on Cartoon Network.

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Season 3, episode 11, “Pursuit of Peace.” Directed by Duwayne Dunham. Aired December 3, 2010, on Cartoon Network.

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Season 4, episode 10, “Plan of Dissent.” Directed by Kyle Dunlevy. Aired November 11, 2011, on Cartoon Network.

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Season 5, episode 18, “The Jedi Who Knew Too Much.” Directed by Danny Keller. Aired February 16, 2013, on Cartoon Network.

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Season 6, episode 10, “The Lost One.” Directed by Brian Kalin O’Connell. Aired March 7, 2014, on Netflix.

*Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Season 7, episode 9, “Old Friends Not Forgotten.” Directed by Saul Ruiz. Aired April 17, 2020, on Disney+.

Sumner, Carolyn. “A Meditation on *Star Wars*.” *Southwest Review* 65, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 304-310. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43471310>.

“The Pentagon Papers Decision.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1971.

“The Unraveling.” In *The American Yawp*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<http://www.americanyawp.com/text/28-the-unraveling/>.

“Transcript of Tonkin Gulf Resolution (1964).” *OurDocuments.gov*.

<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=98&page=transcript>.

Warga, Wayne. "'Graffiti's' Lucas Sees Handwriting on Studio Wall: 'Graffiti's' George Lucas Sees Handwriting on the Studio Wall." *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1973.

Wendig, Chuck. *Aftermath: Life Debt*. New York: Del Rey, 2017.

Wicker, Tom. "In The Nation: The Dead at Kent State." *New York Times*, May 7, 1970.

Wood, Michael. "The True Story of 'Star Wars': The Myths Strike Back." *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1980.