American Sniper. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Perf. Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller, Kyle Gallner. Warner Brothers. 2014. Film.

When a movie opens with a father taking off his belt and slapping it on the dinner table there tends to be an audible gasp in the theatre. In *American Sniper* the response was no different. Of course this childhood memory, juxtaposed with Kyle's (Bradley Cooper's) father telling him he had a special gift for being talented with a rifle while hunting, sets up the mood and atmosphere of this war honor flick. From the first chords of the story the viewer is alerted that this tale is not entirely complex. It centers on the American flag, white men, and without a doubt, power and Christianity.

Chris Kyle's route to the military is not that uncommon . . . a man wandering and a bit lost, without an educational background, from simple and conservative roots makes for good literary and non-fiction character blocks. More pointedly, Kyle is from Texas, a state synonymous with rebel rousing far right Republican ideals and the "home" state of the 43rd president. Before joining the Navy, Kyle rode the rodeo circuit, and with a literary pen we can say this path was a misnomer for his road to national redemption. Perhaps it was, in a storybook way, but in terms of this movie the real culprit is the blind faith and war monger culture it celebrates. Kyle rallies and joins the armed forces in a passionate moment to serve and protect after watching news footage of the 1998 truck bombings in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, and in later years as clips of the Twin Towers fall he breathes flames of red, white and blue, perversely poetic his unit is called to battle during his wedding reception, and he and his comrades gallantly suit up for their voyage with nothing short of absolute devotion. The characters never stop and ponder what they will miss, if they are really needed, and why they are invading a country far removed from American borders.

By now we all know the *story* of the movie: Chris Kyle's legendary career as a sniper, his encompassing of military camaraderie and internal prestige, and his—to be blunt—kill power. Yet, the promise of this flick is more deeply embedded in propaganda of reminding the American public that the white, Christian, male has a sense of duty, honor, and international calling to usurp upon perceived foes and—well—take them out in name of the better cause. The movie never shows the Iraqi side of the story, never asks why they are fighting back, what long term damage is done, and why

the American military must take on this heavy weight of liberating people who appear to not want the aide. Yet, most powerfully omitted—aside from the obvious lack of non-white military personnel, making this one a white man's honor roll—is the heart of what makes Kyle a candidate for social redemption. His battles with PTSD are healed with a near magician's wand.

Impassioned scenes with his wife (Sienna Miller) either pregnant or holding a swaddled baby play these moments with her begging him to open up and tell her what is in his head. His blood pressure is high, his physical body shows tension, on the return from one deployment they don't leave the house for over a week on his reluctance. Of course, astute—or well-reasoned—viewers can detect that Kyle has adjustment issues immobilizing him from fully engaging and interacting with his non battlefield reality. Even more shameful is how the movie provides a quick white and sweet frosting to the issue. Kyle's wife calls the Veteran's Administration and seeks help for him to see a psychiatrist, which this quick access and wife's usurping the system is a bit dubious. His wife's cries fall on open ears, Kyle sees his doctor, but instead of seeking medical aid or counseling, he is immediately ascended to the role of community surrogate. Mind you, Kyle was engaged with his fellow veterans and did good work that should not be discarded, but Hollywood has clearly done a "history by Hollywood" move here and omitted the struggle, human factor, and real elements. Instead, Kyle's self-healing comes across like a country song in that a good man can be saved and succeed with the love of a good women. Pretty simplistic, yes. Spot on for the current social discourse, even more so.

American Sniper is another work, in a long and tawdry list, of material promoting and near demanding a culture that blindly, unselfishly, and foolishly sacrifices its men, and women, in the name of national honor. Technology brings home more war vets than in any previous decade, as severed limbs are repairable and brain injuries are no longer instant death. Yet, the cost of war is still not weighed. The injuries of the mind, those that we poetically and justly cannot see, are still eluding our collective conscious as we continue to praise productions showing a little bourbon, inner strength, and some good sex on the side will heal your honor wounds from war and bring you back into the national folds of redemption and so-called salvation.

Annessa Ann Babic
New York Institute of Technology