

"The film has no precedents that I know of"

The Thin Red Line

26 January 1999

Thank you, David Walsh, for your extraordinary review of *The Thin Red Line*.

I say "extraordinary" because in all the reviews I have read about the film, none has touched upon the themes you write about. More specifically, I am referring to the compassion of the film, not only for our soldiers, but for the Japanese as well. In its depiction of the madness of war, the humiliation of the defeated, and the emptiness of the victorious, this film has no precedents that I know of. The scenes portraying the captured Japanese were among the most touching I have ever seen in movies. Might it be that most critics have become such prisoners of our country's ideology and desensitization to human suffering that they can't see the beauty and compassion that Malick and his actors show us? Has our culture been so debased that this so-called intelligentsia can't even see these extraordinary scenes, much less write about them? Aren't these the same critics who went crazy over that other war picture, the jingoistic *Saving Private Ryan*, which now, after the release of *Red Line*, seems even more trite, banal, and downright stupid? Aren't these the same critics who fell over Spielberg's pyrotechnics during the opening war sequence and glorified its supposedly depiction of war's horrors? The American actors in *Red Line* and their counterparts depicted the real horror of war more clearly, more laceratingly, more movingly than all the technical wizardry of Spielberg ever could. The more I think of it, the more I hate Spielberg's film for what it is: the quintessence of banality and pettiness. I urge all your readers to see this film and dare be moved beyond their expectations.

By the way, much has been said about the confusion of the voice-over narration. True, sometimes you don't know who is speaking, but the fact is that many times you do know. In any event, after a while it doesn't matter who is speaking; Malick, you see, has humanity

speak as a whole.

R.N.R.



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