

サーファー、犯罪そして戦争 ——映画『Point Break』から垣間見えるサブカルチャーが示 す権力への抵抗——

高島 美和

女子栄養大学専任講師

要旨

キャスリン・ビグロー監督の映画 *Point Break*(1991)では、若き FBI 捜査官が、ベテラン刑事と組み、銀行強盗事件を追う任務を命じられる。犯人は地元のサーファーであるとの予測のもと、若き捜査官は潜入捜査を命じられ、仲間になったサーファーが犯人たちであるということ突き止める。この作品はサーフィンという若者文化と犯罪をテーマにした娯楽映画としてみるのが可能であり、また、立場の違う男同士の友情が強調されていることも注目に値する。

しかし、この作品は、そのような男性の友情物語として片づけられない要素が、各所にちりばめられている。第一に、歴代大統領のマスクをかぶって銀行強盗をするサーファーたちの行動。第二に、作品中、強盗犯としてのサーファーたちの役割。第三に、国家権力の象徴として現れる FBI 捜査官の身勝手な行動から、犠牲者を多量に出す点。

Point Break は、国家権力の身勝手な行いが、無意味な闘争や不必要な死を招くことを批判的にとらえた作品であると考えられないだろうか。現在、スポーツとしてのサーフィンは社会において一定の地位を築き、若者文化の一つとみなされている。しかし、そのスポーツが発展した歴史は、闘争と深いつながりがある。とくに、ベトナム戦争とのかかわりが注目に値する。そのようなスポーツ文化として発展したサーフィンの歴史背景を作品分析に用いることによって、映画 *Point Break* が暗に反戦を示す作品になっていると考えられる。本発表では、近代サーフィンの発展の歴史とベトナム戦争との関係を踏まえながら、戦争国家アメリカがどの映画のように描かれているのかを探っていくつもりである。

Surfers, Criminals, and Wars :

Resistance of the Subculture to Power in *Point Break*

Miwa Takashima

Abstract

Point Break (1991), a film directed by Kathryn Bigelow, is about a young FBI agent who is ordered to investigate a series of bank robberies along with an experienced agent. The experienced agent suspects local surfers of the crimes and commands the young agent to conduct an undercover investigation. Fortunately, he is able to penetrate one of the surfer groups, whom we can easily recognize as the criminals by the middle of the film. However, the film does not end with the discovery of the robbers. After he identifies the criminals, the young agent is caught in an emotional struggle because he has become close friends with the robbers. We encounter various types of male-male friendships during the course of the film.

However, when we consider the history of modern surfing, we realize that the film is not simply about male-male friendship. Today, surfing is one of the most popular sports in the world. However, the rise of surfer culture was connected to certain struggles—in particular, the Vietnam War. This is because some of the Vietnam War veterans were unable to adjust to ordinary life after returning from the war. This historical background helps us to understand why the criminals wore masks of ex-presidents when committing bank robberies. The criminals do not appear to have chosen their masks at random. Two of the masks they wear are those of ex-presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. These presidents were in power during the Vietnam War. During bank robberies, the criminals make certain rules to justify their crimes. It can be said that their ruthlessness was in line with the general foreign policy of the United States during the Vietnam War. Therefore, in this film, the context of surfing culture seems to be used to criticize the national policy of the United States. In this presentation, I will explore how the United States, a global peacekeeper, is depicted, focusing on the history of surfing and the Vietnam War.

Introduction

Many films have been produced on the Vietnam War, particularly in the United States in the 1980s. The themes and depictions of war in these films are diverse. Some of the most famous films on the war are: *Apocalypse Now* (1979), directed by Francis Ford Coppola; *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), both directed by Oliver Stone; and *First Blood* (1982), starring Sylvester Stallone. The first two films portray the war itself. However, *First Blood* and *Born on the Fourth of July* illustrate the trauma suffered by a Vietnam veteran, so the film's theme is more about the effect that the war had on soldiers than about the war itself. Therefore, while some films depict the bravery of US soldiers who fought in the war, others draw attention to the negative connotations of the war. There is yet another class of films that do not focus on the Vietnam War but referring to it in oblique ways, serve to cast irony on the historical event. In this paper, I consider the case of *Point Break* (1991), which is directed by Kathryn Bigelow and generally regarded as an action film. In particular, I examine how the film criticises US foreign policy and show the relationship between the Vietnam War and surfing culture.

Surfing as a Filmography

Various dimensions of surfing in *Point Break*

Surfing is often used as a theme in films. For example, in *Point Break* (1991), the protagonist takes up surfing in the line of duty. Johnny Utah, a rookie FBI agent and former American footballer, joins a surfer gang during an undercover investigation of a serial bank robbery. He is thus forced to learn surfing to do his job well. Another aspect of surfing in the film is reflective of life itself. Bodhi, a stereotypical young surfer, does not surf simply to pass time; he shuns involvement in conventional life. His real aim is to be a master of life. Moreover, he enjoys danger and excitement, which is why he loves surfing and skydiving. To achieve his ideal life, however, he commits crime, that is, the bank robberies. Indeed, his goal with the bank robberies is as much flirtation with excitement and danger as it is monetary gain. A third aspect of surfing in the film is that it serves as a medium for establishing male-male friendship and bonding. Johnny becomes a member of Bodhi's surfing gang through his relationship with Bodhi's ex-girlfriend, Tyler. However, Johnny becomes deeply involved in the adrenaline-charged lifestyle that Bodhi and his gang continually seek. At the end of the movie, Bodhi is finally arrested and handcuffed by Johnny at the beach, where he found Bodhi waiting to surf some enormous waves caused by a storm,

his lifelong dream. Johnny's strong emotional attachment to Bodhi leads him to release the criminal to allow him to surf the waves. Bodhi ultimately disappears in the huge waves, presumably to his death. Thus, through these two characters, surfing is shown not only as a popular sport but also as a powerful medium of bonding.

Although *Point Break* is widely regarded as an action film, this might be a simplistic judgement of the film. Pappas, an experienced FBI agent and Johnny's partner, used to be a surfer himself in his youth. Although he is not shown to ride the waves in the film, his involvement in surfing is revealed when his colleagues tease him about his surfing career. In fact, it is his surfing experience that allows them to successfully proceed with the criminal investigation, since it leads him to suspect that a surfer gang is involved in the bank robberies. Thus, the three main characters of the film all have some connection to surfing. Additionally, in response to provocative statements by Johnny, Pappas tells him that he had been living in California for 22 years, allowing for the possibility that used to surf there. Thus, *Point Break* shows us the richness of the various dimensions of surfing culture.

Surfing and the Vietnam War

In *Point Break*, Pappas also mentions that he had fought in Khe Sanh, in one of the hardest fought battles in North Vietnam in 1967. In other words, he is revealed to be a veteran of the Vietnam War. In the film, Pappas only seems to refer to the Vietnam War to deflect criticism of his career by his rookie partner. Since his unexpected reference to the war seems incongruous and insignificant, this statement is little considered in reviews. However, when considered in relation to some other films, we can perceive another dimension to it.

The 2008 documentary film called *Between the Lines* is based on archival pictures and silent video recordings from the Vietnam War and interviews with surfers who fought in the war. According to the film, a number of soldiers in Vietnam took temporary refuge from the front by going surfing. Several of the soldiers were already surfers before they arrived in Vietnam, while others simply went to enjoy the beautiful shores in the area and then took up surfing. The film depicts the soldiers' enjoyment of surfing despite the war going on around them. Indeed, from their smiling faces, it is sometimes difficult to believe that they were fighting a war. In this context, Pappas's statements take on a deeper meaning and no longer seem just a casual aside; they conjure the very real link between surfing culture and the Vietnam War.

Indeed, the relationship between surfing culture and the Vietnam War is illustrated in greater depth in other entertainment films. In *Apocalypse Now* (1979), one of the most famous films on the Vietnam War, a lieutenant colonel orders the

burning of a Vietnamese village because he wants to ride the enormous waves in the shore near the village. The film, which is based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, depicts shocking and spectacular battle scenes; therefore, the reference to surfing may seem minor. However, given that it was a desire to surf that initially motivated the attacks, it seems an important element in the film.

On the other hand, *Big Wednesday* (1978), a very popular and classical American film, is centred on surfers facing the reality of being drafted for the Vietnam War. In the film, the three central characters—Matt, Jack, and Leroy—greatly enjoy their surfer life styles, similar to Bodhi. Their lives revolve around surfing and enjoying their youth, and they don't engage in any productive work. Set between 1962 and 1974, the film describes the call to join the Vietnam War as a turning point for the characters.

The turning point is depicted in a serious yet comical scene in *Big Wednesday*. To avoid the draft, many surfers in the film go to various, sometimes extreme, lengths to prove that they are unfit for war. For example, one pretends to be a mad man, while another poses as a homosexual. Matt, one of the main characters, asks his friend to hit his leg with a baseball bat before going to the physical check-up, and then pretends to be disabled. The doctor, observing a protuberance on the knee, certifies him as disabled, and Matt is not sent to the battlefield. Although authority is illustrated satirically and the scene looks fictional and ridiculous, according to *Between the Lines*, many hardcore surfers had such a protuberance, which they often used as physical evidence to avoid the draft. *Big Wednesday* may be a fictional story, but it is also highly reflective of the time during the Vietnam War, particularly from the perspective of surfers.

We have thus seen that surfing plays a vital role in several films. Further, some of these films illustrate the close link that existed between surfing culture and the Vietnam War. Even in an entertainment film like *Point Break*, the connection between surfing and the Vietnam War can be inferred. Therefore, Surfing culture has many rich dimensions that bear further exploration in filmography.

The Significance of the Masks

It seems important to consider why rubber masks of ex-presidents are used in the film. Bodhi and his gang wear masks of Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. Hinton, a film critic of *Washington Post* (1991), regards the rubber masks as an ironic take on US society:

The joke is that presidents have been ripping us off four years, so now they're [the Ex-Presidents] just being more straightforward about it.

Wearing masks of ex-presidents seems to give expression to the criminals' 'work'. For the Ex-Presidents, the bank robberies are a means of survival. As Hinton points out in his review, presidents are considered by many to exploit the money that people pay as tax. On the other hand, in the film, the Ex-Presidents rob money that people save in the bank. This mimicry lends itself to irony in implying that US presidents commit a similar crime. As a result, the presidents are implicated as criminals. Additionally, in view of the fact that the gang's robberies are very efficient and organised, the robbery scenes are both comical and ironic.

In addition, as I have shown in a previous chapter, we can infer the relationship between surfer culture and the Vietnam War in the film. Therefore, it seems only natural that the bank robbers have chosen the range from one of the four ex-presidents with associations to the Vietnam War to the president at that time. Lyndon B Johnson was deeply involved in the Vietnam War. When Johnson was the vice president in the Kennedy administration, they decided to increase the number of soldiers and expand their military power in Vietnam. After Kennedy's assassination, Johnson became the 36th US President and built the war in Vietnam, deeply involving the US. It seems ironic that the man wearing Johnson's mask is shot to death by a police officer in the last bank robbery, as if to punish the president for his war crimes.

Obeying the Rules

To survive in critical circumstances, soldiers are normally trained both physically and mentally to defeat their enemies. Additionally, their minds are disciplined so that they do not break down under duress. However, during the Vietnam War, it is believed that US soldiers were trained to not only withstand but also despise their enemies as a strategy to win the war. As a result of such education, soldiers used racial slurs such as 'Indian', 'slopes', and 'gooks' to refer to the Vietnamese and thus show their superiority. The underlying reason for this was that dehumanising the enemy was considered a very effective strategy. It also served to convince them of their own superiority. There is some similarity between the US policy and Bodhi's philosophy for inducing obedience among victims:

It's basic dog psychology. If you scare them and get them peeing down their leg, they submit. Yet if you project weakness, you draw aggression. That's how people get hurt. You see fear causes hesitation. And hesitation will cause your worst fears to come true.

Thus, their key to success in bank robberies is control over their own mentalities.

They need to be strong enough to project their superiority. The Ex-Presidents dehumanise the people at the bank by regarding people as dogs and frightening them, while driving away any fear they may feel of their victims. The gang's response following this edict by Bodhi is, 'You project strength to avoid conflict. Peace through superior firepower'. This suggests that the gang is strictly controlled by rules. In fact, the importance of following rules seems to be rooted in surfing culture.

The surfer community has its own language and culture. In their culture, the most important rule is to follow the rules of the surfer community, which are not well known outside the community. For example, bystanders watching surfers riding waves may think that surfers can catch any wave they wish. However, this is not the case. Surfers are not allowed to share a wave; rather, a wave is possessed by the first surfer who is ready to ride it. This simple rule, formed by consensus, is strictly followed among the community, and non-conformance is punished. Similarly, during the robberies, sticking to the rules enable the gang to successfully carry out many robberies. Moreover, their failure to control the situation during the final bank robbery leads their 'worst fears to come true'. In sum, although they seem to act and live freely, they follow self-imposed rules, which are ironically and coincidentally similar to those based on the mainstream policy of the US army. In addition, the criminals' wearing of rubber masks of ex-presidents during the bank robberies heightens their mimicry of US army policy and serves to justify their crimes.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have pointed out hitherto unmentioned aspects of *Point Break* that criticise US foreign policy. On reading the film intertextually, we can see that the Ex-Presidents' masks are chosen intentionally, and the gang wearing the masks repeat US foreign policy in the Vietnam War during their crimes. The historical connection between surfing culture and the Vietnam War are useful contexts in which to appreciate the film.