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Anything but uniform

Classic Hollywood war movies of the past invariably featured a colorful, if stereotypical, assortment of soldiers: the raw recruit, the grizzled sergeant, the funny-talking immigrant who loves America, the tough-tawkin' guy from the Bronx or Brooklyn.

What audiences rarely saw, however, were characters truly representative of the American melting pot. But as historians have taught us that everyone from blacks to Indians to gays has fought and died in every U.S. conflict from the Revolutionary War to Iraq, movies have striven to reflect that in recent years.

Spike Lee's "Miracle at St. Anna," which opens Friday and tells the story of black soldiers fighting in Italy during World War II, is just the latest. Here are five more that show our fighting men — and women — in all their diverse glory.

STREAMERS (1983)

Who's been drafted? Gays. As if being sent off to Vietnam wasn't bad enough, violence ensues when four young recruits holed up in a barracks waiting to be deployed find out that one of them is homosexual.

Should they re-up? Judging by this film, based on a play by David Rabe, in the 1960s "Don't ask, don't tell" was the best way to

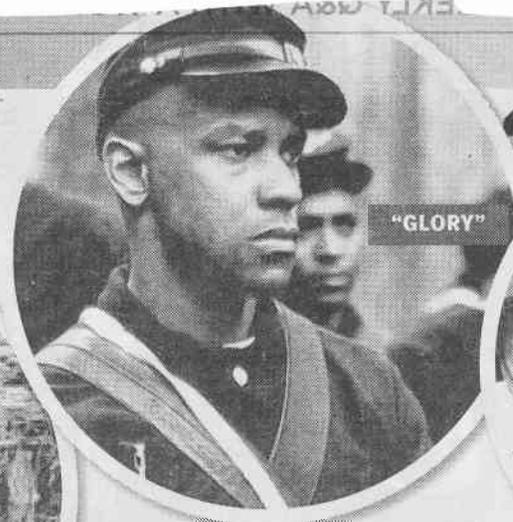


stay alive — against the threat of attacks by your own side.

WINDTALKERS (2002)

Who's been drafted? Indians. The United States shoved aside Native Americans when forming this country. But now it has the gall to ask Navajos to use their language as an unbreakable code for military secrets.

Should they re-up? Private Ben Yahzee (Adam Beach) and the other Navajos prove vital to the war effort — and they don't stop loving



their country just because their country never loved them.

GLORY (1989)

Who's been drafted? Blacks. The South was so desperate toward the end of the Civil War, it even put guns in the hands of slaves. The Northerners did the same — and with almost as much reluctance. Matthew Broderick and Oscar winner Denzel Washington bring this tale to light.

Should they re-up? Black soldiers get to shoot at slave owners and help free their brethren? You have to ask?

G.I. JANE (1997)

Who's been drafted? Women. In this super-glossy Ridley Scott bit of silliness, Demi Moore proves that women can be just as physically fit as men — and twice as hot getting there.



Should they re-up? Equal pay for equal work is a nice change from the outside world. Moore's buzz-cut Navy SEAL wanna-be, Jordan O'Neil, is clearly a lifer — Private Benjamin, she ain't.

SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (1998)

Who's been drafted? People of devout faith. Sure, there are no atheists in foxholes, and movies have shown characters like Gary Cooper's Sgt. York wrestle with the morality of going to war. But Barry Pepper's Scripture-quoting sniper in "Ryan" was a revelation.

Should they re-up? God only knows. But if all people of faith are as good a shot as Pepper's Pvt. Daniel Jackson, we'd better hope so.

Michael Giltz