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CROSS WESTCHESTER

By DEBRA WEST (NYT) 848 words

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Fighting Words

If one goal of documentary filmmakers is to move hearts and change minds, then Eugene Jarecki scored this week with a screening of "Why We Fight" at the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville. On Tuesday morning, more than 200 students from New Rochelle, Sleepy Hollow and Mount Vernon high schools arrived at the theater to see Mr. Jarecki's documentary about the military-industrial complex.

"If you are between 15 and 18 right here in this room, then this film is about you," Mr. Jarecki, who grew up in Rye and attended the Hackley School in Tarrytown, said in his introduction. "Because you are the ones who will be asked to go to war."

Before the movie began, several teenagers admitted that they were more excited about missing a morning of school than about seeing a movie they forecast as "boring." But an hour and a half later, armed with phrases from the film, like "imperialism" and "American empire," the students engaged in a lively discussion that echoed Vietnam-era rallies.

Brian Fisher, a senior at Sleepy Hollow High School, was among the first to speak.

"I am going to college next year to study engineering," said Mr. Fisher, who is headed to Brown University in the fall. "You made me realize that I don't want to be part of the military-industrial complex. I was thinking that working at Lockheed Martin would be pretty exciting. It never really dawned on me before that there are going to be consequences to what I make."

Ines Martinno, another Sleepy Hollow senior, recounted how a 20-year-old friend enlisted in the Army and went from boot camp straight to Iraq, and was killed shortly afterward.

"I just feel like everyone is brainwashed," she said, adding that she is against the war but doesn't see how the United States could withdraw at this point.

The persuasiveness of "Why We Fight" was also revealed in a question from Marcel Reeves, a 10th grader at Mount Vernon High School who said he was not usually political.

"Do you think the government will go forward and deceive the people and go for world domination?" Mr. Reeves asked.

The filmmaker said coolly: " 'Imperialism' is a word that if you say it in polite company, people will yell at you. But if we are not an empire, what are we?"