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“Southern by the grace of God:” religion
and race in Hollywood’s South since the
1960s.

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PhD, History: American Studies
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**“Southern by the grace of God:” religion
and race in Hollywood’s South since the
1960s.**

Megan Hunt

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the requirements of the University of
Northumbria at Newcastle for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the presentation and functions of Protestant Christianity in cinematic depictions of the American South, focusing primarily on Hollywood's civil rights narratives, from the 1960s to the present. It argues that religion is an understudied signifier of the South on film, used to define the region's presumed exceptionalism. Rooted in close textual analysis and primary research into the production and reception of over a dozen films, the thesis deploys methodologies drawn from history, film, literary, and cultural studies. It questions why scholars have seldom acknowledged the role of religion in popular, especially cinematic, constructions of the South, before providing detailed case studies of specific films that utilize southern religiosity to negotiate regional and national anxieties around race, class, and gender.

Though scholars have recognized the intersections of race, class, and gender evident in the media's construction of southern white segregationist, this thesis contends that religion adds further interrogative value to existing analyses of civil rights cinema in particular, and of Hollywood's representations of southern race, class, and gender identities more generally. The thesis argues that the perceived religious zealotry of many segregationists supports Hollywood's recurring presentation of the South as an irrational region, where religiosity and rabid racism cloud all judgment.

The perceived 'southernization' of America through the culture wars of the late twentieth-century encouraged many Americans to reconsider the legacy of the civil rights era, a movement that was being concurrently reshaped in the popular imagination by Hollywood dramas such as *Mississippi Burning*, *A Time to Kill*, and *Ghosts of Mississippi* among many other films. Examining the presentation of both white and black Christianity in these films, the thesis illuminates how cinema has routinely fabricated a simplistic binary of good and evil that pits a noble, yet reductive and static, religious African American community against zealous white trash and fundamentalists operating on the margins of society. So often to blame for the incendiary racial violence that marks such movies, these white villains are often associated with fundamentalism, in both rhetoric and actions, enabling filmmakers to offer a clear culprit for the South's, and therefore the nation's, legacy of racial intolerance and violence.

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Candidate declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on February 25, 2014.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 80, 438.

Name: Megan Hunt

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M Hunt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date: 27/09/2017

Introduction

Acknowledging the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s as a pivotal moment in modern southern history, this thesis focuses primarily on Hollywood's presentation of southern Protestantism in civil rights narratives, from the 1960s to the present. Though historians continue to debate the periodization and geographical specificity of the civil rights movement or era, most would agree that its 'master narrative' – 'the one popularized by the media, national celebrations, and high school textbooks,' according to Steven F. Lawson – starts with the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed segregation in public schools, and ends with the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.¹ It 'contain[s] all the elements to inspire creative writers,' Sharon Monteith writes: 'courage in the face of violence, conflict in the face of social change, a moment in history when an old order fell.'² It also offers the obvious heroes and villains so crucial to Hollywood's simplified moral narratives, as bitter white southerners, embarrassing a nation under Cold War scrutiny, brutalize peaceful black activists.

That the media has proven reluctant to reconfigure a master narrative that 'no historian who has read the literature on civil rights since the mid-1970s' would accept, according to Lawson, is testament to the power of consensus memory.³ As such, Leigh

¹ Steven F. Lawson, 'Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968,' in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Danielle L. McGuire & John Dittmer, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 10.

² Sharon Monteith, 'Civil Rights Movement Film,' in, *The Cambridge Companion to American Civil Rights Literature*, ed. Julie Buckner Armstrong (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 123. It is important to note that Monteith submitted this essay to the publisher under the title 'Civil Rights Fiction Film.' Because of this alteration, the distinction between films documenting the civil rights movement as it occurred and those that reimagine its events or memory for entertainment is lost (in the title at least). For debates surrounding the periodization or geography of the civil rights movement, see Lawson, 'Long Origins;' Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,' *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005), 1233-63; Lawson, 'Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement,' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No.2 (April 1991), 456-71; Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009); Jeanne Theoharis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement outside the South,' in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, eds. Matthew D. Lassiter & Joseph Crespino, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 49-73; Theoharis & Komosi Woodard (eds.), *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting till the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Holt, 2007); Charles Eagles, 'Towards New Histories of the Civil Rights Era,' *Journal of Southern History* 66 (November 2000), 815-48; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2009).

³ Lawson, 'Long Origins,' 11.

Raiford and Renee C. Romano write, narratives that help sustain and produce this prevailing public understanding ‘beg us to ask what is at stake in these dominant representations of the past. What kind of civil rights movement is produced through this consensus memory and what vision of the present does it help legitimate, valorize, or condemn?’⁴

In scapegoating poor white southerners, Hollywood’s late-twentieth century civil rights dramas reinforced regional stereotypes of race, class, gender, and religiosity in order to redeem the wider nation from the implications of systemic racism. This thesis argues that this demonization of southern poor whites, so rooted in the media coverage of the civil rights movement, proved essential to late twentieth-century cinema, as Hollywood’s focus shifted to the ongoing culture wars and the United States’ perceived ‘southernization.’⁵ In this era, films such as *Mississippi Burning* (Alan Parker, 1988) and *Ghosts of Mississippi* (Rob Reiner, 1996) reshaped popular understandings of the civil rights movement, while more contemporary narratives such as *A Time to Kill* (Joel Schumacher, 1996) and Martin Scorsese’s remake of *Cape Fear* (1991) demonstrated that the South’s uneducated and often violent white underclass could still be relied upon to undermine liberal commitment to the ‘New South’ of racial equality.

Films addressing civil rights issues existed prior to the release of *Mississippi Burning*, from the ‘social problem pictures’ that emerged in the 1940s to the exploitation movies of the 1960s and 1970s. The latter ‘were quick to exploit and risk offense,’ Monteith writes, ‘capitalizing as they did on tragic racist murders.’ Now largely forgotten, they have been ‘dismissed by civil rights historians as a banal or bizarre window on history and marginalized by film criticism until relatively recently.’⁶ By not making any specific reference to the movement, ‘social problem pictures’ also defied ‘genrification’ as ‘civil rights cinema, to use Rick Altman’s term.’⁷ As a result, civil rights analogies

⁴ Leigh Raiford & Renee C. Romano (eds.), ‘Introduction,’ *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), xv.

⁵ For the original ‘southernization’ hypothesis, see Howard Zinn, *The Southern Mystique* (New York: Knopf, 1964); John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper’s Magazine Press, 1974). For its specific development later in the century, see Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics and Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996); Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, Second Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

⁶ Sharon Monteith, ‘Exploitation Movies and the Freedom Struggle of the 1960s,’ in *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*, eds. Deborah E. Barker & Kathryn McKee (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 2011, 196.

⁷ Altman argued that genre ‘provides a specific set of intertexts (the other films identified by the film industry as belonging to the same genre),’ and thus links filmmakers and audiences in ‘a self-contained equivalent of an interpretive community.’ Over time, genres become ‘agents of a

‘could turn up in any popular genre from westerns to courtroom dramas, and even comedies.’ It was only by the end of the 1990s, Monteith writes, that a distinct body of films had emerged that ‘reduc[ed] larger historical events to personal histories, domesticating public memory of the Civil Rights Movement.’⁸ Centered in stories of white redemption and interracial coalition, these films, which Jennifer Fuller designates as ‘civil rights melodramas,’ refracted contemporary concerns about growing racial tensions by foregrounding individual stories of racial reconciliation, rather than exploring enduring structural inequalities.⁹ Such films are a principal focus of this thesis.

Linda Williams argues that melodrama is a powerful manifestation of the ‘moral, wish-fulfilling impulse towards the achievement of justice that gives American popular culture its strength and appeal.’ It is thus ‘structured upon the “dual recognition” of how things are and how they should be.’ As such, melodrama is not a genre, but what Williams calls a ‘pervasive mode with its own rhetoric and aesthetic.’¹⁰ It promptly introduces conflicting social forces, Ralph Poole and Ilka Saal write, in order to eliminate or reconstruct those ‘that impose suffering on the “true” representatives of virtue.’ As such, it is under the ‘conditions of social duress,’ that ‘melodrama reveals its unique capacity to record social problems and to resolve them in the spirit of an ideal morality.’¹¹ In the context of the civil rights melodrama, brutalised African American activists and recalcitrant southern racists appear as obvious opponents, reflecting the obvious political tremors that movement leaders and individuals strategically deployed throughout the freedom struggle, courting and utilizing the media to grasp white attention.¹²

quite specific and effective ideological project: to control the audience’s reaction to any specific film by providing the context in which that film must be interpreted.’ Altman, ‘An Introduction to the Theory of Genre Analysis,’ *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 4.

⁸ Sharon Monteith, ‘The movie-made Movement: civil rites of passage,’ in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainge (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 121.

⁹ Jennifer Fuller, ‘Debating the Present through the Past: Representations of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1990s,’ in Romano & Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, 176.

¹⁰ Linda Williams, ‘Melodrama Revised,’ *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 48.

¹¹ Ralph J. Poole & Ilka Saal (eds.), ‘Passionate Politics: An Introduction,’ *Passionate Politics: The Cultural Work of American Melodrama from the Early Republic to the Present* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 2.

¹² Discussing Mamie Till’s 1955 decision to display her son Emmett’s mutilated body after his brutal murder in Mississippi, Monteith notes that Till ‘was not the first to recognize the power of the expressively tragic in the service of civil rights; W.E.B. DuBois had used the cover of the *Crisis* to display a gruesome picture of Jesse Washington castrated and burned in Waco, Texas in 1916.’ See Sharon Monteith, ‘The Murder of Emmett Till in the Melodramatic Imagination: William Bradford Huie and Vin Packer in the 1950s,’ in *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and*

However, within Hollywood's southern melodrama, there exists another central dichotomy, which, when resolved, cleanses and redeems white Americans of their shame and guilt over race relations, by highlighting racism as a class-based problem. As Allison Graham summarises, 'diseased whiteness' – the white (and usually always male) cracker – 'would initiate and complicate the action,' only to be 'vanquished at the movie's end by the only character capable of driving a stake through the heart of a Delta racist: his alter-ego, the man of law, the redeemed southern white man.'¹³ Like other melodramas, then, the civil rights melodrama thus 'return[s] the inhabitants of its universe (and with them us, as their spectators)' to what Poole and Saal call 'a locus of innocence,' restoring faith in the ever-perfecting United States.¹⁴ Accordingly, the term 'civil rights melodrama' will be used throughout this thesis to describe films that use the backdrop of the civil rights movement or its legacy to portray interpersonal stories of white redemption.

Despite these and other genre conventions, there have been very few surveys of civil rights cinema. Monteith's work on the subject is foundational to this thesis, as is Graham's *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle*.¹⁵ Kelly J. Madison's work on the 'anti-racist-white-hero' is also influential.¹⁶ However, none of the works in this admittedly small pool have interrogated religion's significant role in the cinematic construction of the civil rights era. This thesis adopts methodologies from history, film and cultural studies, and ultimately argues that paying scholarly attention to Hollywood's representation of southern Protestantism adds further interrogative value to existing analyses of civil rights-themed cinema in particular, but also to accounts of the South on film more generally. Rooted in close textual analysis of over a dozen films, it posits religion as an undervalued and yet consistent component of civil rights filmmaking.

'Civil rights cinema' can refer to a multitude of forms: from documentaries to the docudrama made-for-TV-movie that became popular in the late twentieth-century. This thesis explores feature films, produced within the conventions of 'mainstream

Imagination, eds. Harriet Pollack & Christopher Metress (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 33.

¹³ Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 154, 148.

¹⁴ Poole & Saal, 'Passionate Politics,' 2.

¹⁵ Monteith, 'Civil Rights Movement Film;' Monteith, 'Exploitation Movies and the Freedom Struggle;' Monteith, 'The movie-made Movement;' Graham, *Framing the South*.

¹⁶ Kelly J. Madison, 'Legitimation crisis and containment: The "anti-racist-white-hero" film,' *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Volume 16, Issue 4 (1999), 399-416.

Hollywood.’ Designed to draw maximum audiences in traditional movie theaters and later through the rental/streaming and sales markets, each of the films analyzed in this thesis interact with the civil rights era, either because they were released contemporaneously, or because they attempt to interpret its legacy in an implicit or explicit manner. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan) and the original *Cape Fear* (J. Lee Thompson), for example, were both produced in 1962 and use various cinematic techniques to both comment upon and avoid the controversies of the movement. In their imagining of actual events, *Mississippi Burning*; *The Long Walk Home* (Richard Pearce, 1990); and *Selma* (Ava DuVernay, 2014) contribute to Hollywood’s own interpretation of history, influencing how cinemagoers around the world comprehend the civil rights movement and its legacies. In a related fashion, *A Time to Kill* and Martin Scorsese’s remake of *Cape Fear* contribute to a more recent indictment of the South as a region that has, on the whole, failed to live up to the promises of the movement. Because so many civil rights dramas are based on real events or adapted from novels, this thesis carefully explores which religious elements were excised or abridged for the big screen, thereby enhancing our understanding of how southern religiosity functions in cinema and popular culture.

With the exception of *Selma*, the films listed above are testament to the white-centric focus of the civil rights drama that endures in Hollywood, despite a body of more reflective, black- and southern-focused narratives in made-for-TV movies that began in the 1970s. Notwithstanding twenty-first century concerns about the ‘slow and protracted’ death of the made-for-TV movie in the era of Netflix and other instant streaming sites, the genre has had an interesting, if relatively short, career.¹⁷ Following accusations of low production values upon its emergence in the mid-1960s, the medium gradually emerged as ‘a privileged site for the negotiation of problematic social issues,’ according to media scholar Laurie Schulze.¹⁸ Writing in 1981, Robert S. Alley argued that ‘[w]hat the

¹⁷ See Matt Brennan, ‘The regrettable demise of the made-for-TV movie,’ *The Week*, September 9, 2015, accessed June 28, 2017, <http://theweek.com/articles/575340/regrettable-demise-madefortv-movie>

¹⁸ Laurie Schulze, ‘The Made-for-TV Movie: Industrial Practice, Cultural Form, Popular Reception,’ in *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (Cambridge, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 364. Elayne Rapping argued in 1985 that the made-for-TV movie is an important component of ‘TV’s socializing and educational role.’ While primarily governed by advertising, TV is also regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which requires what Rapping called ‘a certain amount of “public interest” material...and to present a “balanced” view of political issues.’ Television shows flow from one into another, interspersed by commercials. ‘We don’t watch a show,’ Rapping writes; rather, ‘we experience a flow of images and functions as we sit before the TV set.’ Rapping argued that the birth of the blockbuster film had transformed the cinema into the place of bold spectacle, and television the

documentary of the sixties failed to do, the social dramas and comedies of the seventies accomplished.’¹⁹

NBC’s *My Sweet Charlie* (Lamont Johnson, 1970), about a platonic relationship between a young, white southern woman and an African American male civil rights lawyer from New York, was originally pitched as a theatrical release with Sidney Poitier and Mia Farrow in the lead roles.²⁰ However, the eventual producer-screenwriter team of Richard Levinson and William Link believed that ‘television can usually deal with an intimate personal story better than a large-scale event.’²¹ Based on a David Westheimer’s 1965 novel and subsequent play, *My Sweet Charlie* was the first made-for-TV movie to be recognized by the Television Academy of Arts and Sciences, winning three Emmys.

The film was ‘as close to being an interracial romance as possible in 1970,’ Kathleen Fearn-Banks and Anne Burford-Johnson write, ‘even though there was no sex or romance in the interactions of the couple.’²² On the run after murdering a white racist in Mississippi, Charlie (Al Freeman, Jr.) meets Marlene (Patty Duke) in an abandoned house on the Texas Gulf coast. Shunned by her boyfriend and father after becoming pregnant out of wedlock, Marlene too is on the run. She and Charlie clash instantly, speak openly about issues of race, class, and gender, and after airing their many prejudices, come to support and respect one another.

While Duke received an Emmy for her performance, Freeman walked away empty-handed: an injustice lamented at the time by *Jet* magazine.²³ *My Sweet Charlie* focuses on Marlene’s redemption and developing affection for Charlie – a new tolerance that she will presumably pass on to her child. However, it does not shy from the dangers of white racism: the local sheriff kills Charlie when he seeks help for Marlene as the teenager goes into labor. ‘I just thought he was robbing [the] store,’ the sheriff explains.

site of more thought-provoking entertainment, designed to address a particular social issue. See Elayne Rapping, ‘Made for TV Movies: The Domestication of Social Issues,’ *Cineaste*, Vol. 14, No.2 (1985), 30.

¹⁹ Robert S. Alley, ‘Foreword’ to Richard Levinson & William Link, *Stay Tuned: An Inside Look at the Making of Prime-Time Television* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), xiv.

²⁰ See Levinson & Link, *Ibid*, 46.

²¹ *Ibid*, 27.

²² Kathleen Fearn-Banks & Anne Burford-Johnson, *Historical Dictionary of African American Television*, Second Edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 321. Writing in 1990, twenty years after the film’s first broadcast, Schulze mentions Marlene and Charlie’s ‘intimate relationship,’ and the unlikelihood of television shows exploring ‘interracial sexual relationships’ in the 1990s. However, there is no evidence in *My Sweet Charlie* of any romantic involvement between Charlie and Marlene. See Schulze, ‘The Made-for-TV Movie,’ 364.

²³ ‘Gail Fisher Only Black TV Star to Win an Emmy,’ *Jet*, June 25, 1970, 57. Fisher won ‘Best Supporting Actress in a Dramatic Series’ for her role in another Levinson and Link production: the detective series *Mannix* (CBS, 1967-75).

Attracting forty-one million viewers on its premiere, the success of *My Sweet Charlie* proved that dramatizations of social issues could attract significant audiences.²⁴ As Levinson and Link recalled, '[t]he word "nigger" had been uttered on the air and irate viewers had not stormed the battlements of NBC . . . Those in charge were momentarily bewildered enough to listen to ideas they would have previously rejected.'²⁵ Four years later, in 1974, fifty million Americans watched *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (John Korty, CBS), a fictional story of a black woman born into slavery who lives long enough to witness the development of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and early 1960s. It received nine Emmy Awards, despite initial funding concerns. 'Nobody wanted to buy the story of an old Black woman talking into a tape recorder about her past life,' according to the author of the original novel, Ernest J. Gaines.²⁶ Eventual sponsors Xerox would interrupt the narrative only once during the entire two hour broadcast, which Pauline Kael – in a rare television review that merely enhanced the TV movie's credentials – designated 'quite possibly the finest movie ever made for television.'²⁷

As the result of these successes, Graham and Monteith write, 'the southern TV movie coalesced into a generic form that not only [told] stories of social movements and southern communities, but also generate[d] public recognition of their members.'²⁸ Dramatically different from the images of hyper-masculine, violent resistance that characterized the 1970s blaxploitation genre, TV films like *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and theatrical release *Sounder* (Martin Ritt, 1972) were rooted in a rural, southern black past that counterbalanced sensationalized, controversial visions of the contemporary urban North. Jesse Jackson was one of several civil rights leaders to praise *Sounder* – a story of family love and racial repression in Depression-era Louisiana – on its release, arguing that the early 1970s was 'a time when it [was] crucial for positive black imagery to be projected on the screen.'²⁹ While critical debates raged as to which form of cinematic representation was more 'authentically black,' Lonne Elder, the

²⁴ Gary Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, e-book (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 246.

²⁵ Levinson & Link, *Stay Tuned*, 64.

²⁶ Quoted in Tom Carter, 'Ernest Gaines,' *Essence Magazine*, July 1975, 53.

²⁷ Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 159; Pauline Kael, 'The Current Cinema: Cicely Tyson Goes to the Fountain,' *New Yorker*, January 28, 1974, 74. Quotations from Kael's review were used to promote the film.

²⁸ Allison Graham & Sharon Monteith (eds.), 'Southern Media Cultures,' *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Volume 18: Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 7.

²⁹ Quoted in Tom Symmons, *The New Hollywood Historical Film: 1967-78* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 59.

African American author of *Sounder*'s screenplay, concluded that perhaps African American audiences wanted to see themselves represented in a variety of ways on screen after "sixty years" of being "starved for any kind of image at all."³⁰

Cicely Tyson played the lead in both *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *Sounder*. Exuding what Feldstein calls 'the qualities of dignity, racial authenticity, and a certain type of female strength,' Tyson became a 'stand in for her characters living in the past.'³¹ Indeed, Tyson's was the first character seen in the phenomenally successful 1977 miniseries *Roots*, which depicts a family's history from enslavement in Africa to eventual emancipation in America. Producers were concerned with attracting a white audience, and identified Tyson as a recognizable face, 'with whom whites felt comfortable.'³² Years later, in the 1980s, ABC executive Stu Samuels argued that it was still 'very hard to find properties about blacks that can also be appreciated by whites . . . It's a white country and a commercial business.'³³

While there was a slowly developing portfolio of black-centric stories on television, networks were evidently limiting those narratives to singular, two-hour events, and rarely risking an entire series. Produced and aired under very different conditions, TV films are considerably cheaper to produce than Hollywood features or lengthy television series. As a result, the 'motion picture based on fact,' as Todd Gitlin summarizes the television docudrama, 'has taken on subjects foreclosed to series.'³⁴ In 1975, CBS aired *Attack on Terror*, the first reconstruction of the FBI's investigation into the 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. A decade after the success of *My Sweet Charlie*, Levinson and Link would reunite with director Lamont Johnson for *Crisis at Central High* (1981), which focused on the 1957 Little Rock, Arkansas desegregation crisis, but omitted lead organizer Daisy Bates. Focused instead on the memoirs of white teacher Elizabeth P. Huckaby, *Crisis at Central High* presents the personal transformation of a white conservative into an advocate for desegregation, pre-empting many of the white-centric, interpersonal narratives that would come to characterize Hollywood's representations of the civil rights

³⁰ 'Says Lonne Elder: "Sounder" Movie is Not Like the Book,' *New York Amsterdam News*, September 23, 1972, 2.

³¹ Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free*, 176. Tyson would also play emancipationist Harriet Tubman in *A Woman Called Moses*, a two-part miniseries that aired on NBC in 1978.

³² Tom Symmons has noted that Twentieth-Century Fox's slow burn release strategy for *Sounder* omitted cinemas showing blaxploitation movies. As such, it was 'not primarily aimed at a young, black working-class audience.' See Symmons, *The New Hollywood Historical Film*, 59, nt. 7.

³³ Stu Samuels, quoted in Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (London: Routledge, 1994), 181.

³⁴ Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 138.

movement later in the 1980s and 1990s. ‘To foreground blackness is often to withhold blackness,’ Monteith writes, allowing ‘partial stories [to] masquerade as objective understatement.’³⁵

Since the mid-1990s and 2000s in particular, a catalogue of TV-movies centered around civil rights stories has emerged, including *Murder in Mississippi* (Roger Young, 1990); *The Road to Freedom: The Vernon Johns Story* (Kenneth Fink, 1994); *Ruby Bridges* (Euzhan Palcy, 1998); *Boycott* (Clark Johnson, 2001); *The Rosa Parks Story* (Julie Dash, 2002); and *Betty and Coretta* (Yves Simoneau, 2013). Seemingly testament to Gitlin’s 1994 assessment that ‘singular’ and ‘transitory’ made-for-TV movies ‘have less chance to offend that offendable public that the networks are always so keen to protect,’ networks have tended to commission TV movies with a civil rights focus as part of their Black History Month scheduling each February.³⁶ Black History Month thus provides a cultural backdrop, with viewers expecting African American narratives, as well as vehicles for high profile black stars, such as Angela Bassett (*The Rosa Parks Story*, *Betty and Coretta*). Although these depictions deserve further examination, fundamental differences of production and intent between television and Hollywood movies mean that they fall outside the scope of this thesis.

Ultimately, this thesis explores the unacknowledged role of religion in mainstream Hollywood pictures focused on the civil rights movement and/or its legacy. It posits that religion is an integral trope of the South in popular culture, and especially crucial to the dichotomies essential in Hollywood film. Furthermore, the thesis shows how this perceived religiosity illuminates other key debates surrounding the civil rights movement in popular memory, but also the South in film more generally. The project explores the relationships between the South as reality and the South as representation, and illustrates how cinematic representations of white southern Protestantism connect to other cultural stereotypes regarding violence, educational attainment, and racism, delineating divisions within whiteness.

My understanding of the South is broadly limited to those states that once formed the Confederate States of America. Yet, as historian Joseph Crespino notes, any attempt ‘to define the edges of the region’ usually only serves to reinforce its status as ‘an imagined place.’ Peripheral states like Texas, Oklahoma, and Kentucky, for example, have each stimulated numerous and seemingly endless debates about the geographical

³⁵ Monteith, ‘The movie-made movement,’ 124.

³⁶ Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 138.

and cultural limits of ‘the South.’³⁷ Texas was a member of the Confederacy, but is now usually considered to be part of the Southwest. Once a ‘border state,’ Kentucky remained officially neutral during the Civil War, despite deep divisions amongst its people and politicians. Oklahoma did not become a state until 1907, though many native tribes owned slaves and signed treaties with the Confederate army. Yet, all remain clear components of the contemporary Bible Belt and exhibit many other social and political similarities to their southern neighbors. The fact that ‘the South’ can be considered to ‘have a periphery,’ religious historian Samuel Hill argues, simply shows how much it stands out as a region.’³⁸

While I accept that all states considered ‘southern’ contain a broad range of variables, from demographic make-up, to economics and physical geography, this thesis contributes to ideas of the region as a symbolic rather than a material entity. Echoing David L. Carlton, Crespino writes that,

The American South has existed never so much as a literal place than as a figurative one. Yet, it is a location on the map, a collection of states and localities that have shared an economic, political, and cultural logic, one that in the nineteenth century was sufficient to lead eleven of those states to secede from the Union and wage the bloodiest war the United States has ever known. Yet that fact says as much about the power of the imagination as it does about the “reality” of the South.³⁹

The region is ‘an imagined space,’ Crespino continues, long essential to ‘how Americans have thought about their nation.’⁴⁰ Cinema plays a vital role in this constructed regionalism; Graham and Monteith write that southern settings and tropes ‘tend to intensify [a film’s] moral texture as well as its shock value.’⁴¹ As a result, this thesis is not primarily concerned with fact checking the presentation of southern worship or denominational practice (though it is salutary to note major errors and frequent tropes). Rather, I hope to demonstrate how southern Protestantism’s appearance and presentation onscreen contribute to this constructed southern imaginary. Building upon this analysis,

³⁷ Joseph Crespino, ‘Mississippi as Metaphor: Civil Rights, the South, and the Nation in the Historical Imagination,’ in Lassiter & Crespino, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, 99.

³⁸ Samuel S. Hill, ‘The Peripheral South: Florida and Appalachia,’ in *Religion & Public Life in the South: In the Evangelical Mode*, eds. Charles Reagan Wilson & Mark Silk (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 141.

³⁹ Crespino, ‘Mississippi as Metaphor,’ 99. See also David L. Carlton, ‘How American is the American South?’, in *The South as an American Problem*, eds. Larry J. Griffin & Don H. Doyle (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 33.

⁴⁰ Crespino, ‘Mississippi as Metaphor,’ 99.

⁴¹ Graham & Monteith, ‘Southern Media Cultures,’ 5.

I contend that the intensity of religion reported from this ‘South’ constitutes a distinctiveness that popular cinema has both employed and expanded. Denominational diversity within evangelical Protestantism is not of primary concern, as it is the wider division of religious South/rest of the nation that is important to this projected dichotomy.⁴² Though strong in the Midwest, evangelical Protestantism’s permeating language, symbols, and rituals are more common signifiers of southern distinctiveness. Thus, these cultural constructions of religious life in the South ultimately come to shape ideas about the South, forming a pattern of semiotics, which can then continue to quickly communicate that perceived South to a national and international audience.

The extended or even cursory use of southern religious iconography can alert viewers to a southern setting. ‘From gaunt preachers pointing skyward in eighteenth-century Virginia,’ historian Beth Barton Schweiger writes, ‘to the spectacular folly of the Scopes Trial [and] the eccentric rituals of Appalachian snake handlers, religion has served as a shorthand for southern exceptionalism.’⁴³ Apparently immune to secularization, the South’s religiosity, whether real or imagined, is crucial to a cinematic site of exoticized premodernism.

Recent HBO series *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *True Detective* (Season 1, originally aired 2014) both employ religious imagery in their surreal opening credit sequences that ‘welcome’ viewers to Louisiana. A clear example of how the South is ‘othered’ in popular culture, *True Blood*’s title sequence – more overt than *True Detective*’s – offers a voyeuristic montage of increasingly aggressive images of violence, sex, and decay, resulting in a climactic night-time river baptism. ‘It is a cathartic release,’ according to lead designer Rama Allen, ‘that allows both sinners and saints to begin the next day anew and is intimately tied to the core of several belief systems in the south, from Christian mysticism to voodoo.’⁴⁴

The sequence also contains archival scenes that suggest racial unrest, including footage of the Ku Klux Klan. Here, like so many other works discussed in this project, *True Blood* reduces historical specifics of white supremacy and the civil rights era to a

⁴² Throughout this thesis, religious movements such as Evangelicalism, or Pentecostalism will be capitalized, while individual adherents or rhetoric will be simply ‘evangelical,’ or ‘pentecostal.’ Exceptions will occur when quoting other authors who prefer to capitalize any reference to religious movements and groups.

⁴³ Beth Barton Schweiger, ‘Max Weber in Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South,’ in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, eds. Beth Barton Schweiger & Donald G. Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 32.

⁴⁴ Rama Allen, interview conducted by Remco Vlaanderen, March 2009 for ‘Watch the Titles,’ accessed March 18, 2016, http://www.watchthetitles.com/articles/00131-true_blood

semiotic trope. Described by creative director Matt Mulder as a ‘patchwork quilt of images stitched together by the fervor of religious fanaticism and repressed sexual imagery,’ the opening credits of *True Blood* ‘expose the soft pink underbelly of rural stereotypes’ through a ‘delicate balance of the sacred and profane.’⁴⁵ Like *True Detective*, *True Blood* presents a South populated by highly sexualized, poor, violent whites. ‘After dipping ourselves in southern gothic,’ Allen recalled:

One of the biggest ideas we latched onto was “the whore in the house of prayer”. This delicate balance of the sacred and profane co-existing creates powerful imagery. Editorially we collided the seething behind-the-curtains sexuality of the south into the fist pounding spirituality of Pentacostal [sic] healings... Holy rollers flirt with perversion while godless creatures seek redemption.⁴⁶

Religious fanaticism exists, Allen suggests, because it offers another outlet for untameable passions.

While this thesis will explore Hollywood cinema’s depictions of the South, rather than those on television, *True Detective* and *True Blood* reflect the ease with which the region’s problematic cultural legacy continues to manifest through an apparently perverse southern present. The South’s ‘criminal past is impossible to ignore,’ Graham and Monteith write, and so the region serves as a regular backdrop for ‘social conscience dramas and thrillers.’⁴⁷ Gothic elements both explore and evoke social and cultural issues, rather than simply provoking shock and creating suspense. In *True Detective*, for example, the sinister backwoods hide incest, evil, and abuse that has spanned generations. ‘[I]nbred, misogynistic, and give to spouting messianic messages,’ *True Detective*’s villain is what David Greven calls, ‘the embodiment of the degenerate southerner.’⁴⁸

Despite the frequency of such unflattering depictions, religion’s centrality to cinematic southern identity has not been widely explored, though anthropologists Gary McDonogh and Cindy Wong briefly acknowledged it in the early 1990s. ‘[O]rganized religion [operates] a web of signifiers’ that are essential to the ‘hegemonic perspective’ that Hollywood provides, they argued: an outlook that encourages filmmakers and viewers to understand the South – ‘and those who practice religion’ - as ‘fictional

⁴⁵ Matt Mulder quoted *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Rama Allen, quoted *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Graham & Monteith, ‘Southern Media Cultures,’ 5.

⁴⁸ David Greven, ‘The Southern Gothic in Film: An Overview,’ in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, eds. Susan Castillo Street & Charles L. Crow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 480.

others.⁴⁹ Often a ‘negative signifier from the outsider’s gaze,’ as McDonagh and Wong noted, Hollywood’s performance of white southern religiosity bolsters the existing sectional binary of North/South, constructed by regional polarities of race, class, gender, education, and violence.⁵⁰ ‘Building on various cultural myths of insularity and perversion, religious fanaticism conveys the South’s disparity from the wider nation in films as varied as *Inherit the Wind* (Stanley Kramer, 1960) and *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991). As Bradley Shaw has noted in his discussion of *Sling Blade* (Billy Bob Thornton, 1996), the South often functions cinematically as ‘a theological landscape, haunted by an inescapable religious culture.’⁵¹ He references Flannery O’Connor’s understanding of the ‘Christ-haunted’ South and William Faulkner’s expression that religion was ‘just there’ in his own Mississippi upbringing to reinforce this point.⁵²

This thesis examines the specific role that religion plays in Hollywood’s construction of the civil rights era and its legacy in the South. Chapter One offers an introduction to the disciplines and methodologies that have shaped this project. It presents statistical data that confirms the regional strength and cultural sway of evangelical Protestants in the American South, and explores the role of ‘southern exceptionalism’ in both traditional and contemporary southern studies. The chapter notes that even W. J. Cash and C. Vann Woodward proved reluctant to engage with southern religion, despite the fact that such interrogation would have reinforced their ideas of the region’s exceptionalism. Chapter One therefore examines methodological parallels between film studies, history, and the new southern studies, all of which largely neglect white southern religion, but display unhesitating admiration for African American Protestantism, especially during the civil rights era. Acknowledging the scholarship of Paul Harvey and Kevin Schultz, the chapter posits that (white) scholars and filmmakers are frequently more comfortable reflecting the religious enthusiasm of ‘outsiders’ – in this case African

⁴⁹ Gary W. McDonagh and Cindy Hing-Yak Wong, ‘Religion and Representation in the Filmic South,’ in *Images of the South: Constructing a Regional Culture on Film and Video*, ed. Karl G. Heider (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵¹ Bradley Shaw, ‘Baptizing Boo: Religion in the Cinematic Southern Gothic,’ *Mississippi Quarterly* (Summer-Fall 2010), Vol. 63, Issue 3-4, 463.

⁵² Flannery O’Connor, ‘Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction,’ *Mystery & Manners: Occasional Prose*, eds. Robert & Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1970), 44. ‘[T]he Christian legend is a part of—of any Christian’s background, especially the background of . . . a southern country boy,’ Faulkner told an audience at the University of Virginia in 1957. ‘I grew up with that. I assimilated that, took in that without even knowing it. It’s just – just there. It has nothing to do with how much I believe or disbelieve. It’s just there.’ William Faulkner, remarks at the Virginia Colleges Conference, April 15 1957, tape 2, emphasis added. Audio and transcript available via Faulkner at Virginia Collection, accessed December 14, 2016. http://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/display/wfaudio07_2

Americans or poor white southerners – than amongst normatively white, middle class, non-southern Americans.⁵³

Chapter Two explores many of these themes in greater detail, in order to demonstrate how the legacy of the 1960s – and particularly the southern civil rights movement – manifested through late twentieth-century cinema. Based on archival research at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, it provides a study of Martin Scorsese’s 1991 remake of the 1962 film *Cape Fear*, highlighting explicit evidence that the filmmakers employed known stereotypes to re-conceptualize villain Max Cady as a pentecostal Christian and ‘monster of the South.’⁵⁴ Examining the specifics and the connotations of Cady’s reincarnation, this chapter reflects recent scholarship on the continuing and pervasive culture wars as a backlash to the gains of the civil rights movement, and argues that the film’s presentation of Pentecostalism reflects both the ‘social deprivation’ theories of the 1980s and the distinctly southern accent of the newly dominant Religious Right. Pentecostalism is thus cast as non-conformist and extreme, updating the racial and class tensions of the original 1962 film without featuring a single black character. It is also used to indicate and enhance Cady’s ‘white trash’ identity, intersecting with other negative stereotypes frequently employed to indicate the poor white South, such as illiteracy, sexual deviancy, and propensity to violence. While the original Max Cady reflected white anxieties around social and racial change in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Scorsese’s film implies that the ‘New South’ is little more than a consumerist myth, where contemporary concerns about shifting demographics and religious conservatism blend with much older racial and class anxieties.

Chapter Three builds on Chapter Two’s analysis of the late 1980s and 1990s as a period of considerable racial and political tension, which many commentators attributed to the nation’s ‘southernization.’ As the new millennium approached, the South was home to around thirty-five percent of the U.S. population.⁵⁵ By far the nation’s most populous region, it proved essential to the rise of the Religious Right and the Republican Congressional takeover in 1994. Amidst this heightened political atmosphere, Hollywood

⁵³ Kevin M. Schultz & Paul Harvey, ‘Everywhere and Nowhere: Recent Trends in American Religious History and Historiography,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 78, No.1 (March 2010), 129-62.

⁵⁴ Wesley Strick (screenwriter), interviewed in ‘The Making of the 1991 *Cape Fear*,’ DVD Special Features, *Cape Fear* Boxset, J. Lee Thompson, Martin Scorsese (dir.), Universal Pictures UK, 2001.

⁵⁵ Frank Hobbs & Nicole Stoops, ‘Demographic Trends in the 20th Century,’ Census 2000 Special Reports, November 2002: <https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>, 18-19, accessed November 13, 2016.

studios appeared increasingly committed to exploring the legacy of the civil rights movement, offering a reassuring reminder, perhaps, of the days when white supremacists were more instantly recognizable. Chapters Three and Four examine Hollywood's specific attempts to instill the legacy of the civil rights movement with what Scott Romine calls 'moral legibility' from the late 1980s to the present.⁵⁶ These chapters present religion as a fundamental, yet understudied, component of the civil rights melodrama: crucial to the genre's attempt to construct tangible heroes and villains. Therefore, while Chapter Three examines the demonization of southern white Christianity in these films, Chapter Four explores cinema's construction of an uplifting, yet patronizing African American Protestantism during the movement.

Strongly criticized for its focus on white FBI agents, rather than African American activists and communities, *Mississippi Burning's* white-centric narrative has been the subject of several scholarly critiques.⁵⁷ Yet, while these analyses are justified, they fail to examine how director Alan Parker constructs divisions of whiteness along regional, class, and religious lines. Like so many of his successors in the civil rights genre, Parker sidelines minority experiences, but he also flattens the diversity of white responses to the African American freedom struggle, conflating southern white religiosity with reactionary, even racist politics. Chapter Three, then, explores this strategy, while providing evidence of the often-incongruent responses of white southern Protestants to civil rights activism. The chapter also acknowledges that while many southern whites conflated their ideas of biblically sanctioned segregation with their constitutional commitment to states' rights, others felt compelled by their Christian faith to join the movement.

Overall, mainstream white churches rejected violence and illegal activity in defense of segregation, just as many opposed the protests that aimed to bring about

⁵⁶ Scott Romine, *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 132.

⁵⁷ 'Our film cannot be the definitive film of the black civil rights struggle, our heroes were still white and, in truth, the film would probably have never been made if they weren't. This is, perhaps, as much a sad reflection on present day society as it is on the film industry.' Alan Parker 'The Making of *Mississippi Burning* Essay, accessed November 25, 2016: <http://alanparker.com/film/mississippi-burning/making/>. See Henry Bourgeois, 'Hollywood and the Civil Rights Movement: The Case of *Mississippi Burning*,' *Howard Journal of Communications*, Vol. 4, Iss. 1-2 (1992), 157-63; Robert Brent Toplin, '*Mississippi Burning*: "A Standard to which We Couldn't Live Up,"' *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Champaign: University Press of Illinois, 1996), 25-44; David R. Jansson, "'A Geography of Racism": Internal Orientalism and the Construction of American National Identity in the Film *Mississippi Burning*,' *National Identities*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (September 2005), 265-85.

meaningful integration. Yet, as white redemption narratives, few civil rights films contain any reference to white mainstream Christianity, as religious preoccupations would presumably complicate the heroes' claims to secular righteousness. As such, late-twentieth-century films that take the civil rights movement or its legacy as a backdrop, including *Mississippi Burning*, *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *A Time to Kill*, offer little room for political or theological complexity. Overlapping extreme racial views with vengeful religious preoccupations, each of these films contributes to Hollywood's consistently negative portrayal of white southern religion.

It is only recently that Ava DuVernay's *Selma* (2014) became the first civil rights drama to acknowledge white Christian involvement in direct action against Jim Crow. Indeed, the film portrays a broad landscape of religious thought, as clergy from across the United States answer Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call to march across Alabama in pursuit of voting rights. Raising an unprecedented discussion about the role of religion in the civil rights movement, *Selma* demonstrates film's power to shape popular narratives, encouraging white evangelicals to note their denominational forbearers' absence in the voting rights campaign and the civil rights movement, more generally. As such, in presenting but not centralizing white involvement in the Selma to Montgomery marches, *Selma* manages to disrupt the dominant narrative that white Christians opposed the civil rights movement, without simply rewriting history to alleviate white guilt. It moves deftly from the pulpit to the strategy meeting, presenting King as both a spiritual and political leader, and provides a welcome alternative to the dominant presentation of African Americans in the majority of the films discussed in Chapter 3 and 4. Unlike the blacks of *Mississippi Burning*, whose 'faces reveal them as martyrs, sanctified by centuries of suffering' according to Richard Corliss, *Selma's* activists challenge Hollywood's depoliticization of the southern black church.⁵⁸

Contrasting *Selma's* soundtrack with that of other civil rights films, Chapter Four explores why sorrowful hymns so often accompany southern African American communities on film. Historians and musicologists have long argued that freedom songs and secular hits reveal the oppositional nature of activism in the 1950s and 1960s, yet the dominant image is of a fearful African American congregation that takes solace in low-tempo hymns. While spirituals feature on *Selma's* soundtrack, they are accompanied by tracks from Curtis Mayfield and Otis Redding, reflecting the growing acceptance of the

⁵⁸ Richard Corliss, 'Fire This Time,' *Time*, January 9, 1989, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,956683,00.html>

often-interlocking secular-spiritual impulses evident in African American music in the mid-twentieth century.

The fact that the civil rights movement celebrated in Hollywood film is one of eminently respectable and patient black Protestants is central to Chapter Four. This image denies the overtly political rhetoric and actions of many African American religious leaders and congregations, as well as the later work of groups that disassociated themselves from the church, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the black power movement. The chapter explores how films such as *A Time to Kill* have disregarded church-organized black political activity in favor of a more static and unthreatening spirituality that suggests racial change happened naturally, or through the work of secular, liberal whites.

In most civil rights melodramas, African American places of worship are little more than a refuge where blacks await eventual liberation, but also but never attempt to initiate earthly change. Negating the grassroots organizing so central to the movement, such constructions present southern religious blacks as the natural, hapless victims of the zealous white supremacists discussed in Chapter Three. Rooted in ideas of an innate, natural spirituality, this overarching southern blackness was first evident in the minstrelsy and cinema of the early twentieth-century. Here, religion served as an important indicator of difference, indulging white fantasies about a decadent and uneducated Christianity that had traveled north during the Great Migration. '[A] sign and a symptom of the perpetual backwardness and outsider status of African Americans,' according to Judith Weisenfeld, African American religion as portrayed in films such as *The Green Pastures* (Marc Connelly, 1936) cemented ideas of the childlike, innocent black believer, who waited dutifully for heavenly redemption, rather than lashing out at his tormentors.⁵⁹

But while *The Green Pastures* reflected broader discussions about the impact of the Great Migration, late twentieth-century civil rights melodramas also offered reassuringly rural black southern communities that had seemingly eluded secularism and the racial tensions of the late 1980s and 1990s. Chapter Four posits that while scholars have lamented the lack of black agency evident in films such as *Mississippi Burning*, they have neglected to acknowledge religion's central role in the cinematic construction of a submissive community. Hollywood consistently attaches value to this church-led, depoliticized African American population and readily discredits alternative visions of

⁵⁹ Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 235.

racial reform – especially Black Power – in films as recent as *The Butler* (Lee Daniels, 2013).

Reflecting on the deep roots of Hollywood’s racialized motifs, Chapter Five challenges media scholar Kelly J. Madison’s argument that the key tropes of the civil rights drama evolved in the latter decades of the twentieth-century.⁶⁰ Rather, the chapter argues that tropes at work in Robert Mulligan’s 1962 adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* have proven inspirational and enduring, helping to shape the late twentieth-century white hero narrative. Fundamentally, the chapter argues that director Robert Mulligan omitted much of Harper Lee’s nuanced religious landscape, in order that the narrative might build towards Tom Robinson’s case in a more streamlined manner.

The film provided a welcome parable within the civil rights era, dedicating twice as much narrative time to Tom Robinson’s trial than the novel does. Mulligan’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* enjoyed enormous critical success, but by examining it in light of the films that followed it, rather than the other way round, as is conventional, Chapter Five questions *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s continued cultural power. Why it has not faced the criticisms that marked the release of subsequent films that owe much to its framing of white-black relations in the American South? Obvious parallels between the characterization of Atticus Finch (played by Gregory Peck), Bobby DeLaughter (played by Alec Baldwin in *Ghosts of Mississippi*), and Jake Brigance (Matthew McConaughey in *A Time to Kill*) reflect the continuing significance and marketability of the secular civil rights hero narrative in the latter decades of the twentieth century. These later films have come under significant scholarly and journalistic criticism for their failure to develop black characters and for scapegoating the southern white poor (as discussed in Chapters Three and Four), and yet, they are in many ways reinterpreting cinematic tropes most prominent in Mulligan’s adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Hollywood’s continued ‘refusal to indict social and political institutions for racial injustice’ in the 1990s reflected ‘the astounding popularity of a narrative and iconographic system that developed [at midcentury] precisely for the *evasion* of contemporary political realities,’ Graham writes.⁶¹ In the wake of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which rendered segregation in public schools unconstitutional, ‘blackness all but disappeared from the screen as *intraracial* confrontation assumed interracial connotations, and white battled white for cultural supremacy.’ The enduring appeal of

⁶⁰ Madison, ‘Legitimation crisis and containment.’

⁶¹ Graham, *Framing the South*, 14.

this image, Graham concludes, ‘suggests that our national understanding of race and social class has changed little since 1954.’⁶²

Lee’s novel offered a host of middle-class Christian hypocrites and bigots, as part of a broader religious and social landscape. By contrast, Mulligan’s film isolated the villainous Bob Ewell (played by James Anderson) as a low-class, racist and religious anomaly, whose appeals to Christianity were as misguided as his investment in white supremacy. Dean Shackelford writes that the film is ‘[c]areful not to suggest that the Finches are churchgoers (for what reason?) as they are in the novel.’⁶³ Omitting a number of scenes and characters, Mulligan’s film simplifies Lee’s fictional Alabama town, Maycomb, as host to liberal middle-class whites and an irredeemable line of racist white trash, bolstering a dichotomous cinematic trope that has endured through the later films discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

Given the huge influence the film has had on the civil rights genre, it might seem counterintuitive to examine Mulligan’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the end of the thesis. However, Chapter Five situates the film within wider trends of both civil rights cinema and the presentation of southern religion. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is rarely discussed in relation to the representation of southern religious customs in American popular culture, perhaps because Mulligan’s film differs so greatly from the novel. It is therefore an intriguing example of how southern religion has been paradoxically crystallized in and ignored by popular culture. And yet, as Chapter Five demonstrates, Lee’s Maycomb is endowed with a distinct and pervasive religious tradition. Therefore, by exploring *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the end of the thesis, this chapter can reinsert this seemingly ubiquitous novel and film within the history of southern religiosity in popular culture. The chapter shows how the journey from the novel to the film is part of a broader Hollywood commitment to the idea of secular southern heroes and zealously religious white trash that continues to influence popular perceptions of religion in the region. Exploring Mulligan’s decision to omit much of the religious content of Lee’s novel within the context of the rest of the thesis helps to reinforce many of the arguments made in previous chapters. It also draws attention to the social and political forces that influenced their omission in the first place. Therefore, in critiquing the continued reverence bestowed upon *To Kill a Mockingbird* as both literary and cinematic phenomena, I aim to broaden

⁶² Ibid, 13.

⁶³ Dean Shackelford, ‘The Female Voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Narrative Strategies in Film and Novel,’ *Mississippi Quarterly*, Vol. 50, Iss. 1 (Winter 1996/7), 104.

the critical conversation about the key tropes of civil rights cinema and the place of southern religious cultures in film history.

Chapter 1: ‘Just [not] there’: searching for religion in southern studies.

Advancing religion as an essential signifier of the South raises the question of why something that is so prominent in popular consciousness has been largely absent from scholarly debates. This chapter therefore offers a critique of existing cultural and historical scholarship on the region, while presenting ways in which religion adds further insight to an already lively field. It also examines statistical data that attests to the exceptional dominance of evangelical Protestantism in the region, before examining the South’s position in film studies to ask why religion has rarely figured in discussions of the cinematic South.

Traditionally, scholarship regarding the South has focused on the region’s perceived ‘exceptionalism.’ In his 2005 book *Away Down South*, historian James Cobb recognizes that ideas of southern distinctiveness have long sustained southern studies. He recalls his own graduate training, beginning in 1969, which specifically encouraged him to seek out the sources of this distinctiveness, always in relation to the North. This oppositional definition proved immensely popular and there is no shortage of works attesting to an essential and coherent regional identity that can be traced through secession, Civil War defeat, Reconstruction, Lost Cause ideology, Agrarianism, and the era of Jim Crow.⁶⁴ Seminal southern journalist W. J. Cash summarized such understandings in his 1941 book, *The Mind of the South*, in which he claimed that the region’s ‘peculiar history . . . has so greatly modified it from the general American norm’ that it is ‘not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it.’⁶⁵

Cobb argues that the original foundations of an exceptional ‘Southern identity’ were steeped in the ideology of the white ruling class of the pre-Civil War era, and therefore laced with white supremacy. Though he fails to account for class distinctions between African American southerners, Cobb nevertheless acknowledges that dominant ideas of ‘the South’ and ‘southerners’ privilege white experiences. This projected identity has a long legacy and Cobb echoes George Washington Cable’s 1885 essay ‘The Silent South,’ which identified ‘Southernness’ as the ideological manifestation of black subordination. ‘By Cable’s logic,’ literary scholar Kenneth Warren observes ‘the

⁶⁴ James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93-4.

⁶⁵ Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), viii.

continued production of “Southernness” signaled the persistence of the nation’s black population in the status of second-class citizens’ after the failings of Reconstruction.⁶⁶

Writing in the mid-1960s, southern religious historian Samuel Hill shared this oppositional view of Southern identity. However, Hill’s understanding of southernness centered on what he deemed the ‘Baptist/Methodist syndrome’ of the first half of the twentieth-century.⁶⁷ The intensely personal religious devotion Hill found in the South was matched only by dedication to the social norms of white supremacy. The son of a Baptist preacher, a vocation he briefly undertook himself as a young man, Hill understood the intricate links between these strands of white southern identity. Through his respectful analysis, Hill opened the religious nature of the white South to serious scholarly inquiry, and his work has remained influential. Indeed, Charles Reagan Wilson’s 1983 book *Baptized in Blood* owes much to Hill’s scholarship and presents the Lost Cause as a key component of a southern civil religion fostered through the Civil War and defeat.⁶⁸ In contrast to the overarching American civil religion first examined by sociologist Robert Bellah in 1967, white southerners began to understand their history as distinct from that of the wider United States, as Confederate monuments and other commemorations or celebrations of a distinctly white southern heritage became defining features of the post-Civil War South.⁶⁹

Civil religion in the South never professed to be as wide-ranging and comprehensive as the national creed, and southern evangelical denominational life and worship became much more intertwined with regional and indeed racial specificity. Many, though it is important to add not all, white southern ministers mediated between their denominations and other local white, Protestant institutions, ensuring a considerable overlap between church and civil life for many post-Civil War white southerners. White politicians, who frequently merged white southern political interests with religious rhetoric, reproduced this relationship.

Southern civil religion, though not a term Hill would have used in 1966, was essentially linked to a lost, white, southern past. The memorialization of that past became sacred, recognized in part through individual commitment to, and celebration of, an ‘old-time religion,’ where the *perception* of holiness was more important than actual

⁶⁶ Kenneth W. Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 58.

⁶⁷ Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 33.

⁶⁸ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983).

⁶⁹ Robert N. Bellah, ‘Civil Religion in America,’ *Daedalus*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Winter 1967), 1-21.

theological underpinning. Confederate nationalism infused white southern Protestantism and encouraged congregations to believe that they lived in a morally superior region. Thus, an overwhelming majority of white southern churches and religious groups failed to recognize or repeal the social and racial injustices of the twentieth century.

An extreme focus on personal conversion and purity fostered southern evangelical insularity. Hill argues that this focus on the self and the family often led southern evangelicals to avoid pressing social issues in the wider community and nation. To many churchgoers, the preservation of white supremacy appeared to be a moral and social obligation, while the conversion of individual souls remained the focus and responsibility of evangelical churches. Hill's *Southern Churches in Crisis* (1966) concluded that white denominations in the South needed to change dramatically to acknowledge their ethical responsibilities. '[P]reviously unbelievable alterations are now visible in southern life,' Hill wrote; 'the southern church must either reconceive its ministry in terms of the social change swirling around it, or abdicate its responsibility.'⁷⁰ Complacency equaled complicity, Hill argued. Yet, he was proved wrong on the issue of social significance. Evangelicalism continued to attract millions of followers throughout the late twentieth century, especially in the South where it remains a considerable cultural force.

Hill later regretted his cursory attention to the roles of Catholics, white women, and African American men and women in southern religious culture, as well as his overemphasis of evangelical hegemony in the region.⁷¹ In the 1999 preface to *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited*, Hill accepts Schweiger's insistence that he was one of a generation of 'accidental pioneers.' He acknowledged that his findings, many of which Schweiger discredits as generalizations, have been blindly accepted 'by a good many historians (including C. Vann Woodward) who, not having made religion an integral part of their research, may not be especially informed about the work being done in this quite new field.'⁷²

The peculiar omission of religion from so much southern historical study is at odds with – or avoids – the frequent surveys that evidence the sheer scale of religious adherence in the region. As Hill wrote in 2009, '[e]very poll of the last half-century or so has shown the South to be the most religious region in the nation, not just in size but also in intensity.' This is particularly intriguing, Hill argues, when one considers that most major cities, from the Northeast to the Southwest, boast large Catholic populations,

⁷⁰ Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis*, 175.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, xx.

⁷² *Ibid*, xxi.

reflecting immigration patterns beginning in the early nineteenth century. However, as Hill asserts, ‘the South, anything but a Catholic stronghold, turns out to be more self-consciously religious than any area of that historic communion’s deep penetration.’⁷³ Though Catholics are more evenly distributed across the country, the concentration of white evangelicals and historically African American congregations in the South has a profound influence on the American religious landscape more broadly.⁷⁴

However, large evangelical groups like the Southern Baptist Convention have recorded declining numbers in recent years. Robert P. Jones of the Public Religion Research Institute cites ‘the growth of non-black ethnic minorities’ as a causal factor, as well as ‘the growth of the religiously unaffiliated across the South.’⁷⁵ Yet, the extensive U.S. Religious Landscape Study conducted by the Pew Research Center states that, as a whole, evangelicals lost less than one percent of their share of the national population between 2007 and 2014. Declining numbers at historically black churches were so minor that figures remain within the margin of error.⁷⁶

According to the Pew data, 50 percent of evangelical church members and 60 percent of Americans in historically black Protestant congregations reside in the South, more than double the next largest region (the Midwest with 23 percent of evangelicals and 19 percent of historically black church adherents).⁷⁷ Likewise, with the exception of Utah, all of the states featured in Gallup’s 2013 top ten most religious states are in the South.⁷⁸ Therefore, despite the suggestion of general religious decline in the United

⁷³ Hill, ‘Tell About the South: Why Are They So Religious?’, The Inaugural Sam Hill Lecture in Southern Religious History, The University of North Carolina Asheville, April 2009. Printed in the *Journal of Southern Religion*, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume12/Sam%20Hill%20Lecture.html>

⁷⁴ The variant to this trend is Louisiana, which, unlike its southern neighbors, had similar numbers of evangelicals and Catholics: 27% and 26%, respectively. Historically black churches made up 22%. See Pew Research Center for Religion in American Life, Religious Landscape Study 2014, ‘Religious tradition by state (2014)’: <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>, accessed December 2, 2016.

⁷⁵ Robert P. Jones, ‘Southern Evangelicals: Dwindling – and Taking the GOP Edge With Them,’ *The Atlantic*, October 17, 2014: http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/10/the-shrieking-evangelical-voter-pool/381560/#disqus_thread, accessed April 13, 2016.

⁷⁶ Pew Religious Landscape Study 2014, ‘America’s Changing Religious Landscape,’ Table: ‘Christians Decline as Share of U.S. Population; Other Faiths and the Unaffiliated Are Growing’: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>, accessed December 2, 2016.

⁷⁷ Pew Religious Landscape Study 2014, Chapter 3: Demographic Profiles of Religious Groups, Regional Distribution of Religious Groups: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-3-demographic-profiles-of-religious-groups/>, accessed November 30, 2016.

⁷⁸ Frank Newport, ‘Mississippi Most Religious State, Vermont Least Religious,’ February 3 2014: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/167267/mississippi-religious-vermont-least-religious-state.aspx>, accessed February 25, 2014.

States, the South's statistics remain considerably above the national average. Evangelical churches accounted for 25.3 percent of the national adult population in 2014. In the South, this figure rose to 34 percent of the population. But in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Alabama, and Arkansas, evangelicals made up more than 45 percent of the total adult population. This figure rose above 50 percent in Tennessee.⁷⁹ The Pew Study also confirmed that the Southern Baptist Convention remained the largest denomination in the nation, with over fifteen million members.⁸⁰

Equally important to the Pew Survey were its non-denominational questions, which attempted to assess the overall intensity of religious feeling in a state. Whilst 63 percent of Americans were 'absolutely certain' of the existence of God, this figure was between 10 and 20 percent higher in ten southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, West Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina), peaking at 82 percent in Alabama and Mississippi. The importance of religion in one's life was again up to 24 percent higher in the South, with 77 percent of Alabamians saying that religion was 'very' important in their lives, compared to just 53 percent of Americans.⁸¹

Such non-denominational questions have helped to ensure that religiosity in the South was more broadly accounted for, since previous surveys, such as the Glenmary Congregations and Membership Surveys have depended upon denominational records of their own membership. As southern historian Ted Ownby argues, this has often resulted in high numbers of 'uncounted' members of 'countless evangelical Protestant churches that are part of no denomination,' particularly in rural Appalachia.⁸²

Despite the difficulties of drawing regional boundaries, evangelical intensity appears to be an effective way of demarcating the South. Data like the Pew Study produce a prototypical Deep South model of substantial black and white evangelical Protestant denominations that peaks in Mississippi and Alabama, but permeates across a wider South encompassing the Carolinas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, and the

⁷⁹ Pew Religious Landscape Study, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>; Map: 'Percentage of U.S. adults who are affiliated with the Evangelical Protestant Tradition': <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>, both accessed May 27, 2016.

⁸⁰ As of the 2014 Study, Southern Baptists make up 5.3% of the American population. See also 'Fast Facts About the SBC,' Southern Baptist Convention: <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp>, accessed December 2, 2016.

⁸¹ Pew Religious Landscape Study, Geography: <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/#geography>, accessed March 11, 2016.

⁸² Ted Ownby, 'Evangelical But Differentiated: Religion by the Numbers,' in Wilson & Silk (eds.), *Religion and Public Life in the South*, 39.

Florida panhandle. Florida's peninsula boasts considerable religious diversity due to its popularity with migrants from northern states and Cuba in the twentieth century, long after other regional patterns were set. According to James Shortridge, Philip Barlow, and Roger Stump, southern Florida also 'contains the largest Southern concentrations of Jews.'⁸³ Both 'Southern and not Southern,' in Hill's words, Florida's regional status remains an 'abiding question.'⁸⁴ Equally complex is Louisiana, where a more historically diverse population continues to manifest through closely matched numbers of evangelical Protestants, historically black congregations, and Catholics.⁸⁵

These statistics surely support Hill's observation 'that religion has some kind of "independent variable" status, that it is a force in its own right' and not simply reactive to politics and economics. Rather, as Hill asserts, it is probable that 'what southern Evangelicals have believed about God, people, and the world on the basis of the Bible's teaching has been a contributing factor to their behavior.'⁸⁶ In examining this continuing relationship between religion and regional culture, scholars can determine the extent to which religion has helped define the nature of the South's real, perceived, or projected exceptionalism.

That said, southern religion has never been a static or homogenous phenomenon, nor has it always exercised the same purchase across all aspects of southern culture at all times. Schweiger contests the notion that religious southerners have historically been more 'southern' than they have religious, an understanding that encourages historians to assume that all white southern behavior is tied to some inimitable religious/cultural experience that has 'crippled benevolence' in the South. 'According to this view,' Schweiger writes, southern Protestants experiencing the great revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries 'differed from their northern kin chiefly because of their preoccupation with personal salvation.' This 'inward turn' explains 'why women demanded the vote in Seneca Falls and not Savannah,' Schweiger contends. Above all, it 'meant that slavery stood unchallenged by southern Christians who valued faith over works of benevolence.'⁸⁷

⁸³ James R. Shortridge, Philip Barlow & Roger Stump, 'Geography of Southern Religion,' in *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, eds. Samuel Hill, Charles H. Lippy & Charles Reagan Wilson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 345.

⁸⁴ Samuel Hill (ed.), 'Florida,' *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 70, 57.

⁸⁵ Pew Religious Landscape Study, 'Adults in Louisiana': <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/louisiana/>, accessed November 25, 2016.

⁸⁶ Samuel Hill, *The South and North in American Religion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 8.

⁸⁷ Schweiger, 'Max Weber in Mount Airy,' 36.

Through her research into nineteenth-century church life, Schweiger undermines these assumptions of consensus and continuity, demonstrating the adaptations churches underwent in response to the changing needs and preoccupations of their congregations. Ultimately, she argues that the white resistance to the mid-twentieth century civil rights movement has retrospectively shaped understanding of Protestant individualism in the Old South, as scholars like Sam Hill wrestled to explain the moral complacency of the 1950s and 1960s. Looking to the past to explain the present, historians failed to explore the religious culture of the antebellum South in its own right, conflating white southern behaviors and identities across the antebellum period, through the Civil War, segregation and beyond.⁸⁸

Through this attempt to situate her work, Schweiger acknowledges the centrality of the civil rights movement to constructed ideas of the South, past and present, echoing Allison Graham's argument that current patterns of representation have been 'firmly in place' since the mid-1960s.⁸⁹ Exploring 'graphic news footage,' television programming, and cinema, Graham's *Framing the South* dissects productions of the region that were contemporary to the upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s alongside late-twentieth-century depictions.⁹⁰ She argues that the 'ambiguity and irony' of civil rights stand-offs in 1950s and 1960s 'have tended to dissolve into stereotype,' astutely recognizing the intersections of race, class, and gender essential to the construction of the redneck menace. Graham analyzes the 'persistence of such stereotypes not just in national representations of the South but in southerners' perceptions of their own history,' with especial focus on the poor white southern male, who has long absorbed America's racial guilt.⁹¹ His rabid segregationist rhetoric, and the lengths to which he was prepared to go in maintaining Jim Crow law, were not only anathema to liberals, but downright terrifying, demonstrating divisions that incited a second, if psychic civil war.

Race was undoubtedly central to this southern image crisis, with the overt segregationist rhetoric of many whites seemingly unshakeable. Brutal lynchings, the lasting visual imagery of the Ku Klux Klan and televised white resistance to the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s help to form what Charles Reagan Wilson has identified as a 'broader ideological view of the South as irredeemably evil.'⁹² 'The

⁸⁸ Ibid, 36-7.

⁸⁹ Graham, *Framing the South*, 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁹¹ Ibid, 11.

⁹² Charles Reagan Wilson, *Flashes of a Southern Spirit: Meanings of the Spirit in the U.S. South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 95.

standard image of the white South in the civil rights struggle,' according to historian David Chappell, 'is a mob – united in anger against nine black students at Little Rock in 1957 or against James Meredith at the University of Mississippi in 1962.'⁹³

However, by drawing attention to Hollywood's 'refinement and perpetuation' of these images, Graham foregrounds class as much as race, arguing that the southern cracker's 'class-bound vulgarity consistently repres[ents his] contaminated whiteness.' As a 'stain on the race, a moral half-breed,' the southern redneck reconfigures the cinematic South until it can both 'accept responsibility for racism . . . and deny it,' by 'depicting criminality as an inherent characteristic of class rather than race.' As such, 'the twentieth-century South [becomes] an arena of white – not black – heroism,' where 'the expulsion of the lawless redneck [reaffirms] the moral purity of whiteness itself.'⁹⁴

Such discussions of class and race are vitally important to this project. However, Graham is noticeably reluctant to engage with the religious landscape of the South in this period. In its focus on religion, this thesis adds further interrogative value to Graham's arguments surrounding the construction of the malignant, poor white southerner. Readily forming another charge of excessive backwardness, religious enthusiasm contributes significantly to this image of a racial and socio-economic group historically opposed to modernity and rationality.

According to historians Jon Butler and John McGreevy, the scholarly neglect of religion is not unique to the study of the South. In 2004, Butler argued that '[i]t has seldom been possible, much less wise, to assess American history before the Civil War without taking religion seriously.'⁹⁵ However, he compares the disjointed and sporadic inclusion of religion's influence on American culture since the Civil War to a child's jack-in-the-box toy, which offers surprise but 'is seldom followed by extended performance, much less substance.'⁹⁶ Religion's role in much antebellum reform, 'from abolitionism to women's rights, education, and still more, temperance' is well documented, and figures in nearly every study of the period produced since the 1950s, as well as children's textbooks.⁹⁷ Scholarship that takes post-Civil War religious history seriously is, however,

⁹³ David Chappell, *Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 105.

⁹⁴ Graham, *Framing the South*, 13.

⁹⁵ Jon Butler, 'Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History,' *Journal of American History*, Vo. 90, No. 4 (March 2004): 1357.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 1359.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 1357.

much less mainstream, and certainly not reflected in popular textbooks.⁹⁸ As McGreevy argues, ‘historians of the most religious nation in the industrial world understand their country’s immediate past with little reference to religion.’⁹⁹ This obscures connections between centuries of American religious life, and as a result, Butler claims:

Religion pops up colorfully on occasion in textbooks – the Social Gospel, Billy Sunday, Aimee Semple-McPherson, the 1925 Scopes Trial, Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, and Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority . . . Figures and events appear as momentary, idiosyncratic thrustings up of impulses from a more distant American past or as foils for a more persistent secular history.¹⁰⁰

As such, it is easy to see the narrative power of a religious South on film, as the intense religiosity so often depicted there appears further removed from the American mainstream than is perhaps the case, becoming ‘a fixed embodiment of a premodern culture and “tradition.”’¹⁰¹

Such historiographical practice seems to suggest that religion has receded from American public life, whilst personal ‘expression has been largely innocuous and irrelevant to public affairs.’¹⁰² Butler strongly opposes this hypothesis, and cites Gallup surveys, amongst others, that demonstrate the undeniable religious preoccupations of much of the American nation. In 2010, religious historians Kevin Schultz and Paul Harvey echoed Butler’s concerns, arguing that Americans are now more religious than they were during the Civil War era, and that ‘evangelical and even Fundamentalist Christians (depending on how you define such terms) are politically more powerful today than they were 150 years ago.’¹⁰³ However, despite this rise in American religiosity, Schultz and Harvey recognize that ‘scholars outside the specific field of American religious history basically have failed to notice’ religion’s penetration of ‘almost all aspects of modern American life.’¹⁰⁴ With frustration, they argue that ‘religion is everywhere in American history, but nowhere in American historiography.’¹⁰⁵ Its

⁹⁸ James Patterson’s award-winning *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) reduces fundamentalism to the last cry of the oppressed and marginalized.

⁹⁹ John T. McGreevy, ‘Faith and Morals in the United States, 1865-Present,’ *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1998): 239.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, ‘Jack-in-the-Box Faith,’ 1359.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 1377.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 1360.

¹⁰³ Schultz & Harvey, ‘Everywhere and Nowhere,’ 130.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 131.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 132.

sporadic inclusion in modern American history is often reduced to just two aspects – ‘the civil rights movement and the rise of the Religious Right – [which] both emerged from sources marginal to mainstream academia. Religion, it seems, is acceptable for outsiders, not for “us.”’¹⁰⁶

Such a mindset derides important religious figures, such as Aimee Semple McPherson, who Schultz and Harvey argue has been consistently categorized as ‘a sexualized simpleton who quickly faded from the scene.’¹⁰⁷ On the contrary, historian Matthew Avery Sutton has argued that McPherson changed the way Americans practiced religion.¹⁰⁸ Frequently advocating that faith and patriotism were inseparable, McPherson’s ‘style of publicity and personally sensational politics’ created a model that Schultz and Harvey argue was ‘picked up several decades later by the likes of Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson, and James and Tammy Faye Baker.’¹⁰⁹ Yet, the lasting image of McPherson, shaped by Hollywood films including *The Miracle Woman* (Frank Capra, 1931) and *Elmer Gantry* (Richard Brooks, 1960), is of a fraudulent hypocrite, who used the burgeoning media to foster an immense following of vulnerable dupes searching for meaning following World War I and America’s descent into the Great Depression. This trivialization of McPherson’s fame and influence distorts how religion is viewed during the interwar years, but also obscures the continuing popularity of evangelical conservatism in the United States.

In noticing that religion ‘is acceptable for outsiders, not for “us,”’ Schultz and Harvey point to an interesting contradiction.¹¹⁰ Despite continuing evidence of religion’s significance to the American past and present, historians and filmmakers alike have predominantly presented the religious as individualists whose preoccupations, good or bad, seem distant from the American mainstream. Overlooking American religious thought therefore fits neatly within an existing cultural narrative that designates the South as ‘an internal spatial “other.”’ Echoing Edward Said’s framework of Orientalism, Daniel Jansson recognizes the South as ‘the repository of a set of negative characteristics (such as poverty, racism, violence, and backwardness).’¹¹¹ In popular culture, this South readily

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 134-5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 147.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁹ Schultz & Harvey, ‘Everywhere and Nowhere,’ 147.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 135.

¹¹¹ ‘[T]he Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.’ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 1-2. While Said centralizes the idea that ‘the other’ is external to the state doing the ‘othering,’ scholars in the 1990s began to examine the production of internal, or intra-state, Orientalist discourses. See

absorbs the religiosity that seems so at odds with the current construction of recent U.S. history and identity. This lasting projection of southern religious exceptionalism has perhaps prevented more robust analysis of southern religious culture. Though often credited as an influence on southern musicians – notably Elvis Presley and Little Richard – and in the literature of writers such as William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor, the manifestations and projections of southern religion in popular culture made both inside and outside the region remains largely unexplored.

It is important to remember, however, that there has been a vibrant subfield of historians and religious scholars exploring southern religious history for some time now and rightly so. The *Journal of Southern Religion* was established in 1998, the same year that four leading scholars reflected on a decade of considerable growth in the field for a roundtable published in *Religion in American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*. Here, Sam Hill concluded that ‘the study of southern religious history is now taken for granted,’ noting important new work by Paul Harvey and Beth Barton Schweiger.¹¹²

Despite this scholarly upsurge, religion’s marginal role in broader American historiography remains problematic. ‘With the exception of the distinctive black religious experience in the South, there is little that is qualitatively unique about southern Evangelicalism,’ David Harrell argues. Many of the issues raised and explored by historians of southern religion – including race, gender, Evangelicalism, and civil religion – are by no means restricted to the region. Yet, as Harrell asserts, the proliferation of scholars working in southern religious history is testament to the quantitative, if not qualitative, distinctions of ‘the southern religious experience . . . The Bible Belt was a well-entrenched stereotype by the early twentieth century, and it was one with clear substance to it.’¹¹³

This is not to say that all southern religious experience is the same, in practice or in principle. However, Evangelicalism’s saturation of southern culture remains significant, especially when considering the region in relation to other areas of the United

David R. Jansson, ‘Internal Orientalism in America: W. J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South* and the Spatial Construction of American National Identity,’ *Political Geography*, Vol. 22, Iss. 3 (March 2003), 293, 296-8.

¹¹² Samuel S. Hill, quoted in Mathews et al, ‘Forum: Southern Religion,’ *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 157. See Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹¹³ David Edwin Harrell, Jr. (ed.), Introduction, *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981), 2.

States. It also influences how outsiders think about the region. Hollywood studios are seemingly confident that audiences will identify the U.S. as a modern and secular nation, despite the statistical probability that a large percentage of audiences hold religious beliefs and/or live in the South. This confidence in the nation's symbolic secularity makes the presentation of southern religious intensity appear all the more distant and exotic.

Frustrated by the surprising endurance of methodological enquiries rooted in national and regional exceptionalism, Jon Smith relegates both traditional American studies and what he calls 'old southern studies' to disciplinary fantasy' and designates "the South" as 'a meaningless term.' It is, he writes, 'either a great, 100-million-resident void at the heart of American studies, or a ridiculously strained attempt at identity politics at the heart of old southern studies.'¹¹⁴ This disconnect, Smith contends, has understandably limited understanding of huge aspects of U.S. history, culture and politics. According to Smith's logic, a truly successful 'new southern studies' would paradoxically render itself obsolete, by generating an American studies nuanced enough to properly absorb the South, and acknowledge its complexities as key contributions to the American narrative, rather than as regional anomalies.¹¹⁵

More than a decade earlier, literary scholars Houston Baker and Dana Nelson invited a shift away from 'exceptionalist' approaches to the South in a special edition of the journal *American Literature*. They stressed a linguistic transition from 'southern literature' to 'southern studies,' and presented the possibility of a more inclusive 'Southern' identity that reconciles multiple experiences and perceptions.¹¹⁶ However, despite figuring in a list of 'viscous dynamics...that characterize life in the deep South,' religion was granted no further space in Baker and Nelson's short analysis of the developing 'new' southern studies, nor were any of the essays in their special issue dedicated to religion.¹¹⁷

Much of the 'new' southern studies seeks what literary scholar Michael Kreyling identifies as 'a common language in public debates over globalization of identities,' thus

¹¹⁴ Jon Smith, *Finding Purple America: The South and the Future of American Cultural Studies*, E-book (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 31.

¹¹⁵ Jon Smith, 'The New Southern Studies: An Interview with Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn,' *Society for the Study of Southern Literature Newsletter*, 47, 1 (Spring 2013), accessed March 31, 2014. <http://southernlit.org/society-for-the-study-of-southern-literature-newsletter-47-1-spring-2013/>

¹¹⁶ Houston A. Baker, Dana D. Nelson, 'Preface: Violence, the Body and "The South,"' *American Literature*, Vol. 73, No. 2, (June 2001), pp. 231-244.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 235.

surrendering ‘its traditional claim to regional and historical distinctiveness.’¹¹⁸ As Coleman Hutchison has argued, ‘southern studies scholars seem particularly well situated to explain the persistence of regionalism in an increasingly interconnected world.’¹¹⁹ In the last fifteen years the discipline has absorbed multiple ‘new’ discourses, in an effort to demonstrate the inherent performativity of experiencing or communicating ‘southern distinctiveness.’ Scholars engaged in this field recognized that southern identity, in all its forms, was in large part an ideological construct, and were especially helpful in demonstrating the historical tendency to equate ‘southern’ and ‘white’ identities.

As Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer noted in 2006, centralizing global, rather than regional patterns, ‘help[s] us break out of habitual ways of seeing the South in opposition to the North, a perspective that has traditionally contrasted a rural, backward South – Mencken’s famous “Sahara of the Bozart” – to an urban, culturally significant North.’¹²⁰ Arguing that southern studies has always been, by necessity, interdisciplinary, McKee and Trefzer noted that ‘theoretical approaches that focus on the process of globalization and transnationalism have increasingly entered [the disciplines that make up southern studies] to bring about paradigm shifts.’¹²¹ However, as Monteith argues, in complicating the South’s ‘positioning in a global nexus, some critics are choosing to (re)connect to a more traditional nostalgic South, often with an emphasis on the autobiographical. The narrative glue remains past and ancestry.’ She points to this ‘disconcerting return to the autochthonous’ in influential ‘new southern’ texts, such as Tara McPherson’s *Reconstructing Dixie* (2003) and Baker’s *Turning South Again* (2001), both of which emphasize ‘an “American” disregard for Southern studies.’¹²²

Much of this recent scholarship focuses on how Americans perceive the region: an ‘imagined South’ invented by a wider national culture. Although the formations of this projection are undoubtedly important, such discussions do little to account for the self-identification of southerners themselves. The white South has been largely complicit in its construction, with many white southerners embracing their perceived distinctiveness,

¹¹⁸ Michael Kreyling, ‘Toward “A New Southern Studies.”’ *South Central Review*, Vol.22, Iss. 1 (2005), 18.

¹¹⁹ Coleman Hutchison, ‘The Brand New Southern Studies Waltz,’ in Brian Ward et al. ‘Forum: What’s New in Southern Studies – And Why Should We Care?’ *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 48, Issue 3 (Aug. 2014), 697.

¹²⁰ Kathryn McKee & Annette Trefzer, ‘Preface: Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies,’ *American Literature*, Vol. 78, Issue 4 (2006), 679.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 680.

¹²² Sharon Monteith, ‘Southern Like US?’ *The Global South*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2007), 67-8. See Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Houston A. Baker, *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

for numerous political, economic, or personal reasons. Committed to an idea of a maligned region, many scholars seem to struggle with the notion that southern distinctiveness, however constructed and superficial, may actually be a source of pride for some. Religion surely plays a significant role here. It is probable that many evangelical southerners are proud to be associated with a region that consistently, and often overtly, shares their preoccupations and values.

A pattern has therefore emerged in ‘new’ southern studies, with scholars seemingly hesitant to explore religion’s role in southern exceptionalism, real or imagined. Indeed, Charles Reagan Wilson has argued that important twenty-first century works by historians of religion have remained entrenched in theory, and therefore ‘have not worked their way into recent discussions of interdisciplinary approaches to the South.’¹²³ As a result, both cultural studies and religious studies have failed to demonstrate the wider cultural implications of the South’s religiosity. However, despite Wilson’s observations, not one monograph about southern religion appears in the University of North Carolina Press’s ‘New Southern Studies’ series, published under his editorship since 2007.¹²⁴ Of the twenty-two volumes that make up the UNC series and the University of Georgia Press’s ‘New Southern Studies’ collection, only one volume - Arthur Remillard’s *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era* (Georgia, 2011) - makes any overt attempt to understand the South from an even vaguely religious standpoint. Here, Remillard examines how competing religious visions – not just those of dominant white Protestants – shaped southern attitudes to race and social exclusion in the post-Reconstruction era, defining the ‘good society.’ Following on from Wilson’s *Baptized in Blood*, Remillard’s book attempts to understand southern civil religious discourse in a broader sense, acknowledging the concerns and influence of more economically and politically disenfranchised groups. *Southern Civil Religions* reflects the democratization of civil religion scholarship: what Remillard calls ‘the plural realities of civil religious discourse.’ In Remillard’s narrative, the Lost Cause ideology competes for

¹²³ Wilson, *Flashes of a Southern Spirit*, xv.

¹²⁴ This ‘series seeks works on the twentieth century that address the cultural dimensions of such areas as literature, music, art, folklife, documentary studies, race relations, gender, religion, ethnicity, the environment, language, and social class’ (emphasis mine). University of North Carolina Press, "New Directions in Southern Studies," accessed July 27, 2017, https://www.uncpress.org/series/new-directions-southern-studies/?page_number=1 John Hayes’ *Hard, Hard Religion: Interracial Faith in the Poor South* will be published in October 2017.

space amidst a plethora of civic religious frameworks, and he presents both ‘the South’ and ‘civil religion’ in quotation marks, as if to acknowledge their ambiguity.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, understanding the South to be a distinct region bolstered the nation’s acceptance of segregation, as documented in Leigh Anne Duck’s *The Nation’s Region* (Georgia, 2006). U.S nationalism was considerably invested in the projection of the South as a racist anomaly during the early twentieth century, Duck argues, enabling southern segregation to not merely endure, but reproduce.¹²⁶ However, while religious practices surely shaped some of this perceived regional difference, Duck does not offer any analysis of the South’s religious culture. Nor does she acknowledge its role within popular culture’s ‘imagined South.’

Yet, as historian Carole Emberton has recently demonstrated, ‘[w]hite supremacists in the 1870s did not choose the name of their movement haphazardly, but ‘called themselves the Redeemers because of the important religious connotations the word held and the depth of commitment it inspired.’¹²⁷ ‘In Christian theology,’ Emberton explains, ‘redemption signified both the promise of deliverance from suffering and violence as well as the wrath of God’s punishment for sin and corruption.’¹²⁸ Vengeful white southerners used redemptive language to ‘forge the spiritual with the political’ in order to ‘legitimize their armed assault on freedpeople and Republican officials as a kind of punishment for the corruption unleashed by emancipation and Union victory.’¹²⁹

By the 1950s and 1960s, this ideology became increasingly synonymous with white supremacy. States began to incorporate the Confederate battle flag into their state flags, as Georgia did in 1956, or simply place the battle flag above official state buildings. The Confederate flag flew above the South Carolina Capitol from April 1961 until 2000 when it was moved to a monument honoring fallen Confederate soldiers in front of the State House. It was finally removed from state grounds in July 2015, following the murder of nine African Americans in a Charleston church by a white supremacist and neo-Confederate.¹³⁰ However, while recent events have stimulated fresh debate on the flag’s

¹²⁵ Arthur Remillard: *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

¹²⁶ Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation’s Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 9.

¹²⁷ Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 5. See also Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South*.

¹²⁸ Emberton, *Beyond Redemption*, 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

¹³⁰ On June 15, 2015, Dylann Roof opened fire on a Bible study class at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston. He killed nine people, including state senator Clementa Pinckney. In the aftermath of the attack, Roof’s online presence was examined, revealing his interest in American white supremacist movements, racially segregated

meaning, there is little doubt that mid-twentieth century decisions to reclaim this symbol of southern secessionism were sure signs of white southern defiance in the face of federal desegregation rulings. Thus, many of the South's cultural symbols were again overt statements of white supremacy, as advocates fought a vicious battle with an insurgent southern black population, their supporters, and eventually federal leaders, who had finally declared this 'Southern Way of Life' to be unlawful.

Many denominational leaders sought to avoid confrontation by quietly complying with desegregation rulings. However, Paul Harvey argues that lower clergymen and 'laypeople in the South articulated, defended, and enforced the theology of segregation' in all aspects of everyday life.¹³¹ As Harvey and Edward Blum show, many white southerners 'asserted the whiteness of Christ's blood as part of their defense of the justness of segregation.' Their faith in God's justice made compromise less likely, and drove an even deeper wedge between the region and the nation. Pamphlets such as 'God the Original Segregationist' by Rev. Carey Daniel of the West Dallas First Baptist Church were widely reprinted, and 'rehashed the familiar racial genealogy that linked African Americans to the Canaanites.'¹³² 'The frequent references to "filth" and "social disease"' that Harvey finds 'pervading white supremacist literature' of this time, 'suggests that segregationism was something deeper than custom. The social ordering of the races had been sanctified, and a properly religious cloak thrown over Jim Crow's skeleton.'¹³³

Investigating religion's role in the civil rights movement has easily proven the most popular way for contemporary historians to engage with southern religion. Many have argued that the black church provided more than simply the practical institutional tools through which to organize the community. Most importantly, it offered the prophetic framework essential to an ideological campaign. In *Stone of Hope*, David

Rhodesia (modern-day Zimbabwe), and apartheid South Africa. Roof had often posed with a Confederate flag, stimulating a fresh debate about the prominence of the flag at the State Capitol in Columbia. On July 10, twenty-three days after the shooting, the flag was removed following legislation signed by Governor Nikki Haley ordered that the flag be brought down within twenty-four hours and displayed in the Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum, just blocks from the Capitol. The South Carolina House of Representatives approved the bill 93-27, following a mammoth debate that lasted over thirteen hours. See Amanda Holpuch, Tom McCarthy & Oliver Laughland, 'South Carolina governor signs law ordering removal of Confederate flag,' *The Guardian*, July 9th 2015, accessed July 12, 2016.

<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jul/09/south-carolina-confederate-flag-friday>
¹³¹ Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 230.

¹³² Edward J. Blum & Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God & the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 215.

¹³³ Harvey, *Freedom's Coming*, 229.

Chappell ‘isolates and magnifies’ the fact that ‘black southern activists got strength from old-time religion.’ He argues that civil rights activists were successful because they used prophetic ‘religion to inspire solidarity and self-sacrificial devotion to their cause.’¹³⁴ Martin Luther King Jr.’s Christian rhetoric established segregation as a ‘theological as well as a social and political fallacy,’ Jane Dailey argues.¹³⁵ King’s appeal to clergy during the 1965 Selma voting rights campaign signified what Dailey calls a ‘rhetorical shift,’ in which ‘a secular campaign for civil rights became a holy crusade to redeem the blood spilt.’¹³⁶

Most scholarly output on this era ‘emphasizes the central role that religion played in articulating the challenge that the civil rights movement offered to the existing order of segregation,’ Dailey writes. Although scholarship by Paul Harvey, Wayne Flynt, and Andrew Manis has worked to further understanding of the role that religion played in segregationist activism and rhetoric,¹³⁷ Dailey shows that, on the whole, the religious foundations of much segregationist have been neglected or simply derided by scholars.¹³⁷ Most historians – and here I would add filmmakers as well – are committed to the ‘prophetic’ nature of the civil rights movement, and consider ‘religious segregationists dupes at best.’¹³⁸ Indeed, Chappell claims that segregationists failed ‘to inspire solidarity and self-sacrificial devotion to their cause,’ and dismisses their rhetoric as the pragmatic ramblings of an embittered, racist few.¹³⁹

The uncritical respect that many historians and filmmakers display towards African American Christianity during the civil rights movement renders the black church a wholly unproblematic resource. Schultz and Harvey ask if the ‘racialized and/or marginalized’ status of black activists in this period makes ‘it “safer” [for white historians] to incorporate religion more centrally into intellectual trajectories?’ Like the Religious Right after them, civil rights activists used theological approaches to comprehend and communicate their marginalization, and indeed their triumphs. Is it

¹³⁴ Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 8.

¹³⁵ Jane Dailey, ‘Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,’ *Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, Issue 1, (June 2004) 120.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 139.

¹³⁷ See Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South*; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998); Andrew M. Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

¹³⁸ Dailey, ‘Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred,’ 120.

¹³⁹ Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 8.

therefore ‘safer to introduce religion as a central actor in people’s lives’ when these people self-identify as being outside mainstream American society?¹⁴⁰

The validity of these questions in relation to general American historiography is clear, but there are implications for film studies also. Clear distinctions exist between the ways in which Hollywood portrays African American and white Evangelicalism, particularly in the South, where the black church is often presented as a consistent and life-affirming resource for a long-suffering population. Religious historian Judith Weisenfeld has demonstrated that religion has been considered ‘a prominent feature of black public life and culture’ since ‘the first decades of sound film.’¹⁴¹ Though Weisenfeld’s research is concentrated on this earlier Hollywood period, she captures the centrality of black religion to films that hoped to present “authentic” African American culture. Ryan Jay Friedman writes that, in associating blacks with an exotic, “natural” expressivity, early films like *Hallelujah* (King Vidor, 1929) and *The Green Pastures* ‘situate African Americans outside of history and in the realm of myth.’¹⁴² From *Hallelujah* to *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985), James Snead has argued, film has reinforced ‘the code of the “eternal” or “static” black.’¹⁴³ Religion is a key component of this intrinsic ‘African American experience.’ Supporting Schultz and Harvey’s argument, Weisenfeld argues that through film, ‘black religion becomes a sign and symptom of the perpetual backwardness and outsider status of African Americans.’ White audiences viewed these films as ‘innocuous entertainment,’ Weisenfeld suggests, the practices and preoccupations harmlessly divergent from their own white American normative identity.¹⁴⁴

Religious practice remains a fundamental indicator of the African American experience in Hollywood cinema, particularly in films set in the South. Respectfully presented as an integral resource from which black southerners draw strength and dignity, African American Christianity exhibits an onscreen positivity that is frequently denied to white evangelical practice. Failing to even attempt to understand the religious foundations of the white South, filmmakers have helped cement popular presentations of the region’s whites as bitter racists, who pragmatically utilize religious rhetoric to further their own advancement. Attempting to distance oneself from the orchestrators and perpetuators of

¹⁴⁰ Schultz & Harvey, ‘Everywhere and Nowhere,’ 150.

¹⁴¹ Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name*, 235.

¹⁴² Ryan Jay Friedman, *Hollywood’s African American Films: The Transition to Sound* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 145.

¹⁴³ James Snead, *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, edited by Colin McCabe & Cornel West (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

¹⁴⁴ Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name*, 236.

racial violence and subordination is understandable, but such displacement enables Hollywood to consistently present segregation and racism as purely southern phenomena, relying on the region's religiosity to further cement the characterization.

This displacement is also at odds with recent American history, which has seen evangelicals wield tremendous power. Political scientists Geoffrey Layman and Laura Hussey have argued that, since 1980, 'committed evangelicals have become the most loyal component of the Republican electoral coalition.'¹⁴⁵ Conservative candidates and supporters alike have frequently cited religious reasons for their opinions and policies, especially hardline approaches to 'moral issues' such as abortion and homosexuality. This visibility, especially prominent during George W. Bush's presidency and the subsequent rise of the Tea Party, perhaps explains recent scholarly fascination with the Religious Right. Historian Uta Balbier argues that the predominantly secular vantage point many historians and political theorists write from – especially those in Western Europe – helps render the American Religious Right particularly intriguing.¹⁴⁶ Yet while many books have been written documenting the Religious Right's role in pretty much every presidential election since the 1970s, failure to examine earlier intersections of evangelicalism and politics make its seemingly random up thrust in the early 1970s appear all the more dysfunctional and disruptive.¹⁴⁷

It is not without consequence that much of the Religious Right's support and many of its key figures in the 1970s and 1980s were centered in the South. Indeed, although many of the white southerners who defected from the Democrats to the Republican Party in the 1960s and 1970s held Christian views, this was a mostly reactionary movement, based on political responses to civil rights legislation rather than religion. However, as E.J. Dionne argues, considerable political shift in the 1960s made it easy for liberal

¹⁴⁵ Geoffrey C. Layman & Laura S. Hussey, 'George W. Bush and the Evangelicals: Religious Commitment and Partisan Change among Evangelical Protestants, 1960-2004,' *A Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election*, ed. David E. Campbell (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007), 180.

¹⁴⁶ Uta Balbier, "'The City upon a Hill and the World': Diplomatic History, Religious Studies, and the Transnationalization of U.S. Religious History,' 'America in the World: Roundtable,' British Association of American Studies 59th Annual Conference, April 12, 2014, University of Birmingham, U.K.

¹⁴⁷ See Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born Again Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) is particularly helpful in illuminating the seemingly forgotten years of the fundamentalist political movement: the 1930s-40s. Carpenter's work provides a welcome antidote to the more traditional historical chronology, which had presented the Scopes Trial of 1925 as the end of fundamentalism as a serious factor in American history.

politicians and journalists to blame two conflated southern white preoccupations – political conservatism and evangelical Christianity – for almost every subsequent Democratic election defeat.¹⁴⁸ The apparent intersection of these preoccupations is therefore central to how the South is presented and perceived in the wider U.S. and abroad, compelling a more nuanced understanding of white Evangelicalism’s role in continued efforts to project and understand the South.

However, it is not just contemporary studies that have avoided religion when attempting to make sense of the South. Ralph Wood shows that even the Nashville Agrarians of the 1920s and 1930s, authors of the seminal regional collection *I’ll Take My Stand*, ‘ignored what [H.L.] Mencken rightly saw as the heart of Southern culture – its fundamentalist Christianity.’ A ‘brittle secularist,’ Mencken was a journalist of considerable national influence and his writings about the South were by no means complimentary.¹⁴⁹ Yet, his critiques remain some of the few works to attempt to communicate the tenacious cultural significance of southern fundamentalism.

Much of Mencken’s scorn and mockery has survived in some form through stereotype, cultural derision, and projections of irrationality. ‘From the vantage point of Mencken’s desk in Baltimore,’ historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage notes, ‘most of the South was rife with snake-handling religious zealotry, lynch mob barbarism, and unspeakable cultural ignorance.’¹⁵⁰ The journalist’s role in the media spectacle that surrounded the Scopes (or Monkey) trial of 1925 ensured that ‘it became fashionable to dismiss fundamentalists as Southern rubes and obscurantists,’ Wood writes.¹⁵¹

The trial demonstrated Evangelicalism’s consistency in the South, specifically Dayton, Tennessee. Schoolteacher John Scopes agreed to be tried for violating a Tennessee law that prevented the teaching of evolution in state-funded schools, his defense financed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Immortalized on stage (Broadway debut 1955) and in the later Hollywood production *Inherit the Wind* (Stanley Kramer, 1960), the trial stamped the fundamentalist movement with what religious historian George Marsden calls ‘an indelible image.’ ‘In the popular imagination,’ Marsden continues, ‘there were . . . the small town, the backwoods, half-educated yokels,

¹⁴⁸ E. J. Dionne, Jr., *Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics after the Religious Right* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 54.

¹⁴⁹ Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 52.

¹⁵⁰ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Review of Wilson, *Flashes of a Southern Spirit*, *Church History*, Vol. 81, Issue 3 (Sept. 2012), 731.

¹⁵¹ Wood, *Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*, 34.

obscurantism, crackpot hawkers of religion, fundamentalism, the South, and the personification of the myth himself, [prosecution lawyer] William Jennings Bryan.’¹⁵²

Three-time presidential candidate Bryan was a prominent populist and former Secretary of State. Nicknamed ‘The Great Commoner,’ he was a devout Presbyterian and opposed to the theories of evolution. However, like many religious conservatives of the era, Bryan was actually more concerned about the threat of Social Darwinism than in arguing about the specifics of man’s creation. ‘[B]y paralyzing the hope of reform,’ evolution ‘discourages those who labor for the improvement of man’s condition,’ Bryan argued in a speech delivered in the days following the Scopes Trial.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, many of Bryan’s supporters ‘did not share his progressive reasoning,’ according to biographer Michael Kazin: ‘Like today’s creationists, they opposed Darwinism simply because it threatened the foundation of their faith. The fact that the ACLU hired Clarence Darrow, an avowed agnostic, to defend the teaching of modern biology made them suspicious about the motives of every secular liberal.’¹⁵⁴ When Bryan died just days after the Scopes Trial, Mencken characterized the deceased as ‘a poor clod like those around him, deluded by a childish theology . . . a peasant come back to the dung pile.’¹⁵⁵ He advised Darrow before the trial began that ‘[n]obody gives a damn about that yap schoolteacher. The thing to do is make a fool out of Bryan.’¹⁵⁶

Mencken biographer Vincent Fitzpatrick describes the trial as ‘a windfall for [the journalist],’ and his columns from and about Dayton remain some of Mencken’s best known.¹⁵⁷ They have shaped collective memory surrounding the trial and surely influenced Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee when writing *Inherit the Wind*. In the play and movie, Matthew Harrison Brady (Fredric March), the character based on Bryan, attempts to deliver his closing speech as spectators leave the courtroom after the trial. Increasingly frustrated and flustered, the fictional Brady drops dead. In reality, Bryan delivered his speech many times in the days after the trial ended on July 21, 1925, before dying in his sleep on July 26. As such, Lawrence and Lee’s story reflects what Marsden

¹⁵² George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 184.

¹⁵³ William Jennings Bryan, ‘Who Shall Control?’ (speech prepared June 1925), *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1971), 548.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Kazin, ‘The Other Bryan,’ *The American Prospect*, Vol. 17, Iss. 1 (Jan 2006), 44-45.

¹⁵⁵ Mencken, ‘Bryan,’ *Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 27, 1925. Quoted in Vincent Fitzpatrick, *H.L. Mencken* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 80.

¹⁵⁶ Mencken, quoted in William Manchester, *Disturber of the Peace: The Life of H. L. Mencken* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 164.

¹⁵⁷ Fitzgerald, *H.L. Mencken*, 81.

calls ‘the outpouring of derision’ generated by the trial, as the fundamentalist movement appeared to fulfill common stereotypes of reactionary anti-intellectualism.¹⁵⁸

Post-World War II American history textbooks have tended to explain fundamentalism through the Scopes trial alone. According to research by Edward Larson, many textbooks lump the episode with other reactionary forces of the 1920s including the Red Scare and the re-ascendance of the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁵⁹ He describes how a ‘grim fascination with the Scopes trial as a foreshadowing of McCarthyism’ inspired Lawrence and Lee when writing *Inherit the Wind* in the 1950s, just as Arthur Miller would use the 1692-3 Salem Witch Trials as the backdrop for his 1953 play *The Crucible*.¹⁶⁰ Lawrence and Lee changed the names of all major figures, and Dayton, here Hillsboro, acquired what Larson calls a ‘fire-breathing Fundamentalist pastor who subjugated townspeople until Darrow came to set them free with his cool reason.’¹⁶¹

Inherit the Wind was not a historical documentary, as the authors stressed in their introduction to the play. Nevertheless, critics expressed concern about its characterizations, especially when it was adapted into a motion picture in 1960. ‘The script wildly and unjustly caricatures the fundamentalists as vicious and narrow-minded hypocrites,’ *Time* magazine argued, before it ‘just as wildly and unjustly idealizes their opponents.’¹⁶² Trial correspondent Joseph Wood Krutch reflected in 1967 that the events of Dayton ‘are more a part of the folklore of liberalism than of history.’¹⁶³ Culminating in instructional standards published in 1994 by the National Center for History in Schools, *Inherit the Wind*’s representation of heroes and villains has proven integral to teaching and remembering twentieth-century fundamentalism, and it remains entrenched in the popular memory as a key to understanding the small town South.¹⁶⁴ ‘Most people who have any notions about the trial get them from the play, *Inherit the Wind*, or the movie,’ Krutch concluded.¹⁶⁵

Inherit the Wind reflected Mencken’s ‘savage South:’ populated by ‘hordes of barbarous peasants.’ With the region’s aristocracy culturally and economically devastated by the Civil War, Mencken argued that ‘native stock of excellent blood’ had been forced

¹⁵⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 184-5.

¹⁵⁹ Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 236.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 239.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 240.

¹⁶² ‘The New Pictures,’ *Time*, October 17, 1960, 95.

¹⁶³ Joseph Wood Krutch, ‘The Monkey Trial,’ *Commentary*, May 1, 1967, accessed June 24, 2015, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-monkey-trial/>

¹⁶⁴ Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 244.

¹⁶⁵ Krutch, ‘The Monkey Trial.’

to move elsewhere, rendering Dixie the domain of poor whites.¹⁶⁶ Their vulgarity, Mencken argued, was the product of ignorance and religious excess.

Prone to flagrant exaggeration, much of Mencken's output would 'make pedagogues wince,' Doug Cumming writes. The journalist's 'sentimental and racist assumptions about the South's antebellum gentry, blacks, and "white trash"' are rarely taken seriously by historians.¹⁶⁷ And yet, as Fred Hobson writes, Mencken's indictments of the South, especially the infamous 1917 essay 'The Sahara of the Bozart,' forced 'professional southerners to speak up from the Potomac to the Rio Grande,' proving that while southerners 'did not write, they at least read.'¹⁶⁸ Mencken therefore 'played a leading role in the first phase of the southern literary renaissance' of the 1920s and 1930s, Hobson argues, inspiring a generation of southern iconoclasts to critically examine the region and its alleged cultural deficit.¹⁶⁹ Mencken's acidic style and wit stirred various talents, including the sociologist Howard Odum, the African American novelist Richard Wright, and perhaps most obviously, W. J. Cash, whose early journalism was distinctly Menckenesque, conducted under Mencken's editorship at the *American Mercury*. Cash's final article for the paper in May 1935 was entitled 'Genesis of the Southern Cracker,' and featured such characterizations as:

To fiddle, to dance all night, to down a pint of raw whiskey at a gulp, to bite off the nose or gouge out the eye of a favorite enemy, to father a brood of bastards to fight harder and love harder than the next man, to be known eventually far and wide as a hell of a fellow – such would be the pattern he would frame for himself. And if this left him a little uneasy, if it bred in him a sense of sin, well, there was escape in orgiastic religion.¹⁷⁰

Here Cash honed many of his ideas about the role of the poor white in southern history and culture in the style of his editor, Mencken; ideas that would be developed further and take on a more personal voice in his influential book *The Mind of the South* (1941). According to Hobson, Cash's book, 'still the classic work on the poor white southerner,

¹⁶⁶ Charles Angoff & H.L. Mencken, 'The Worst American State: Part III,' *The American Mercury*, November 1931, 371.

¹⁶⁷ Doug Cumming, *The Southern Press: Literary Legacies and the Challenge of Modernity* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 106.

¹⁶⁸ Fred Hobson, "'This Hellawful South": Mencken and the Late Confederacy,' *A Southern Enigma: Essays on the U.S. South* (Valencia, Spain: Publicacions de la Universitat de Valencia, 2008), 38. Hobson also notes that until the Scopes Trial, Mencken had never been further south than Virginia (46).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ W. J. Cash, 'Genesis of the Southern Cracker,' *American Mercury*, May 1935, accessed March 25, 2014.

<http://www.wjcash.org/WJCash1/WJCash/WJCash/Genesis.of.the.Southern.Cracker.html>

was nonetheless characterized by Menckonian assumptions: that southern history was essentially a struggle between aristocrats and poor whites, that puritanism and hedonism in fact ran parallel in southern society, and that the South was essentially an uncultured land.¹⁷¹ As John Boles argued in the 1980s, despite its title, Cash's book implied that 'the South has no mind, only feeling.'¹⁷²

Writing on the fiftieth anniversary of *The Mind of the South*, historian Edward Ayers argued that 'Cash had plenty to say about religion, all of it bad.' However, as Ayers continues, 'most modern historians of the New South grant no more autonomy for religion than Cash granted.' Ayers argued that C. Vann Woodward's *Origins of the New South* (1951), for example, maintained 'a sort of embarrassed silence on the subject; Woodward admitted that churches grew rapidly in the post-reconstruction era, but he did not dwell on the meaning of that growth.' Woodward's seminal *The Burden of Southern History* (1960) only mentions religion in relation to a theological dialogue with the ideas of Reinhold Neibuhr in the final essay.¹⁷³

Rather than simply an 'inadequate' oversight, as Ayers suggests, Woodward's omission of religion appears more intentional, based on the author's recognition that this was something he knew little about.¹⁷⁴ In 1940, Woodward recognized that 'if I am going to make the hillbilly and the cracker understandable, I must not neglect his religion.' However, in the same letter, Woodward lamented that he was 'stumped,' as '[t]he hillbilly's religion, like his politics, has left few memorials and documents.' Southern white religion was indeed 'something interesting,' that Woodward, at least in 1940, did not want to neglect.¹⁷⁵ However, upon reading *The Burden of Southern History* it is hard to counter Wilson's argument that Woodward 'made no effort to gain insight on southern identity from the region's distinctive religious tradition.' Wilson contends that this continued throughout Woodward's career, 'despite a wide-ranging appreciation for the significance of other forces shaping the region.'¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Hobson, "This Hellawful South", 46.

¹⁷² John B. Boles, 'The Discovery of Southern Religious History,' in Boles & Evelyn Thomas Nolen (eds.) *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1987), 511.

¹⁷³ Edward L. Ayers, 'W. J. Cash, The New South, and the Rhetoric of History,' in Charles W. Eagles (ed.) *The Mind of the South: Fifty Years Later* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 125. See C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 1960 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 126.

¹⁷⁵ C. Van Woodward, letter to Hunter D. Farish, Feb. 5th 1940, published in *The Letters of C. Vann Woodward*, edited by Michael O'Brien (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 76.

¹⁷⁶ Wilson, *Flashes of a Southern Spirit*, 51.

Woodward was particularly preoccupied by the ‘hillbilly:’ a long-standing stereotype of rural whiteness whose supposedly apolitical nature has ensured its continued reproduction despite the pressures that have rendered other ethnic stereotypes unacceptable. As Anthony Harkins explains, the hillbilly has enabled film producers to ‘portray images of poverty, ignorance, and backwardness without raising cries of bigotry and racism from civil rights advocates and the black minority communities.’¹⁷⁷ Appalachia in particular, Nahem Yousaf writes, endures in the popular imagination as ‘one of the most hermetically sealed and least cosmopolitan areas in America; made up of poor white mountain people, predominantly “Scotch-Irish,” it is supposedly empty of ethnic diversity.’ Whiteness remains the lasting ‘raw material for fiction’ set in the Appalachians, despite three decades of scholarship that works to diversify our understanding of the region.¹⁷⁸

While there have been several book-length studies on the (white) hillbilly, including Harkins’s *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (2004), few make any mention of religion, despite the unique fascination snake-handling pentecostals and other Appalachian groups hold in the popular imagination. Harkins argues that the long-running cartoon *Li’l Abner*, created by Al Capp, presents an ‘unrealistic’ image of the South because of the ‘absence of such central aspects of southern life as organized religion,’ and yet religion forms no role in his own study.¹⁷⁹

In 1995, J.W. Williamson investigated the depiction of the ‘hillbilly’ in American cinema in *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies*. Documenting the development of terms such as ‘white trash,’ ‘redneck,’ and ‘cracker,’ Williamson offers critical insight, concluding that the lingering pervasiveness of this figure depends on two seemingly contradictory and yet mutually entwined middle-class white American preoccupations. The ‘hillbilly’ in popular culture simultaneously reflects both the patronizing adoption of rural stereotypes as a humorous form of regional pride and nostalgia, but also reveals anxieties about the nation’s humble beginnings, and the potential disarray that lurks on the periphery of white America. As such, hillbilly stereotypes of ignorance, drunkenness and sexual depravity can be

¹⁷⁷ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

¹⁷⁸ Nahem Yousaf, ‘The Local and the Global: Gina Nahai and the Taking up of Serpents and Stereotypes,’ *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 41, Iss. 2 (2007), 309. See also William H. Turner & Edward J. Cabbell (eds.) *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985); John C. Inscoe, *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

¹⁷⁹ Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 127-8.

constructed for laughs, as in *Raising Arizona*, (Joel and Ethan Cohen, 1987), or descend into horror, as in *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972) or *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991).¹⁸⁰

Yet, as Chad Berry noted in the *Journal of American History*, Williamson ‘sometimes veers off course,’ forgetting his apparent commitment to cultural specificity.¹⁸¹ Arguing that Appalachian stereotypes are essentially applicable to pretty much any mountain community in the world, Williamson actually denies many cultural specifics of the Appalachian ‘hillbilly,’ including popular perceptions of his (because it is almost always a he) religious practices and integral whiteness – or more specifically his inherent threat to middle-class whiteness. Harkins is more sensitive to the unique racial classification of the American hillbilly, recognizing that for many middle-class white Americans, hillbillies were ‘a fascinating and exotic “other” akin to Native Americans or Blacks, while at the same time [they could] sympathize with them as poorer and less modern versions of themselves.’¹⁸²

Ultimately, as John Inscoe argues, Williamson fails to extricate anything ‘inherent in the Appalachian experience to distinguish it from the rest of the South, the Midwest, or the Southwest.’¹⁸³ Yet, many of the films Williamson references represent the South as a specifically degenerative region, the dark heart of America where excessive violence, religiosity, and sexuality are communicated through racism, superstition, or genetic deficiency. Although Jack Temple Kirby predicted ‘Dixie’s imminent demise as a distinctive region’ in 1978, Hollywood’s continued construction of the South as a distinct region has cemented its place within film studies.¹⁸⁴

Two volumes specifically dedicated to the South on film followed Kirby’s admittedly triumphal prediction in 1981: Edward Campbell’s *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth* and Warren French’s edited collection *The South and Film*. Both testified to the ‘evident mystique’ of the Old South in Hollywood, providing obligatory overviews of classics such as *Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915), *Jezebel*

¹⁸⁰ J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and what the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

¹⁸¹ Chad Berry, Review of Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (June 1996), 300.

¹⁸² Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 7.

¹⁸³ John C. Inscoe, Review of *Hillbillyland*, *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (August 1996), 610.

¹⁸⁴ Jack Temple Kirby, ‘Preface to the Revised Edition,’ *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), xi. Kirby admits that he ‘euphorically passed evidence’ when concluding that ‘yankees had accepted the region at last,’ following the growing popularity of country music, the election of President Jimmy Carter, and the television broadcast of Alex Haley’s *Roots* in 1977.

(William Wyler, 1938), and, of course, *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939). Tracing the construction and effect of Hollywood's South from the 1900s to his contemporary 1980s, Campbell studies film as a 'reflection of popular perceptions of the South,' which he argues continue to restrain the region to its mythical past.¹⁸⁵ A study somewhat narrowed by this intense focus on pictures of the late antebellum period through the Civil War and Reconstruction, Campbell's book is almost exclusively interested in the Old South plantation myth alluded to in his subtitle. Likewise, French's volume offers interesting considerations of the South as projected by auteurs such as Robert Altman, but remains firmly cemented in presentations of a flamboyant, historical South. Though both books offer interesting arguments regarding the power of cinematic narrative to inform, or at least reinforce popular attitudes, they offer little insight into the rationale behind the South's specific and continuing mythology, and certainly no recognition of the South's distinct religious culture.¹⁸⁶

Focusing on more contemporary southern films, *Images of the South: Constructing a Regional Culture on Film and Video*, edited by Karl Heider in 1993, traversed many disciplinary boundaries. Individual essays negotiated connections between anthropology and visual culture, while others reinforced more obvious links between southern studies and wider American studies. Perhaps what was most interesting about Heider's volume – for this project at least – was its inclusion of religion as a crucial signifier of the South on film. Gary McDonogh and Cindy Wong's pioneering article, 'Religion and Representation in the Filmic South,' provides a refreshing attempt to understand religion's role in the southern filmic setting, as well as a more inclusive sense of what this means for 'southern identity,' a term they, unlike their predecessors, do not reduce to an exclusively white identity. McDonogh and Wong present an interesting survey of the presence, or lack, of religion in different subgenres of the southern film, including the plantation romance, 'plain folk' movies, and those that take an overtly African American subject. However, perhaps unsurprisingly given the originality of their article at this time, it admittedly raises more questions than it actually answers. Such a broad survey does demonstrate links and preoccupations in many films about the South, but offers little extended analysis.¹⁸⁷

Later in the same volume, anthropologist Jim Birkhead's article "'Bizarre Snake Handlers": Popular Media and a Southern Stereotype' argues that sensationalized

¹⁸⁵ Edward D. C. Campbell, *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), xi.

¹⁸⁶ Warren French (ed.), *The South and Film* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1981).

¹⁸⁷ McDonogh & Wong, 'Religion and Representation.'

depictions of southern Evangelicalism in the news media often intersect with ahistorical stereotypes presented in Hollywood film. Birckhead demonstrates that for many people across the world, Hollywood films are their first and perhaps only introduction to the South, and he cements his argument with anecdotal evidence of viewing a staging of Jane Martin's play *Talking With...* (1983) in New South Wales, Australia in 1986. Whilst gazing with 'postmodern amusement' at what he describes as a 'parodic rendition of Caro, the Handler,' Birckhead found that the production, 'its performance, and the audience reaction revealed the workings of popular typifications and stereotypes about "the South.'" As news passed through the crowd of the author's first-hand experience watching Appalachian snake-handling, Birckhead was bombarded with questions that interlinked genuine curiosity about a little known aspect of pentecostal-Holiness worship with stereotypes from Hollywood films that have absolutely no evidence or reference to the practice: "What is it really like?" "Are snake handlers inbred like in *Deliverance*?" "How backward are they?"¹⁸⁸ It became apparent through these conversations that the cast and crew of the production had been unable to find any literature relating to Holiness practice and culture. As a result, they 'had fabricated the characterization from popularly held images and stereotypes of stock Appalachian and southern types...modeled largely on filmic and media images of the South, especially *Deliverance*, which conjured up for them lurid images of bizarre, grotesque, inbred "hillbillies.'" Interestingly, Birckhead adds, 'the actress's intuitive sense of Caro had led her to project an affective tone of "extreme fanaticism and sexuality.'"¹⁸⁹

Birckhead's experience demonstrates the immense power of narrative film, but also the unique ways in which the South's religious cultures are interwoven with other cultural signifiers. Because white southern religiosity is so often presented alongside, or perhaps indistinguishable from, a southern white depravity signified through intolerance and violence, lasting intersections linger in the popular mind. Birckhead equates lurid Hollywood productions with the supposedly more insightful documentaries regarding snake handling, and concludes that both 'amplify and distort the meaning' of the practice, whilst making 'implicit and explicit suggestions of hillbilly moonshining, inbreeding, and low intelligence.'¹⁹⁰ Many people, like the Australian theater group, know little about the actual theological and cultural intricacies of Holiness snake handling, but they do know that it happens in the South, a region that already holds a special mythological place in

¹⁸⁸ Jim Birckhead, "'Bizarre Snake Handlers': Popular Media and a Southern Stereotype,' in Heider, *Images of the South*, 165.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 168,

their mind. Like Birckhead, I suspect these stereotypes bias audience reaction to even the anthropological presentations of Appalachian culture, and specifically religious practice in the region.

Despite such interesting work attesting to religion's role in many southern narratives, the next volume covering the South in film – Larry Laughman and David Ebner's *Hollywood's Image of the South* (2001) – makes no reference to religion. A comprehensive reference guide to a century of films set in the South, Laughman and Ebner's volume is organized into twenty subject areas, including 'Plantation Life and the Cotton Fields Back Home,' 'Discrimination,' 'Family Survival' and 'Economics in the New South'. Religion does not form one of these categorizations, however, and the book serves more as a bibliographical list than as a critical analysis.¹⁹¹ The next collection of essays devoted exclusively to the South, Andrew Leiter's *Southerners on Film: Essays on Hollywood Portrayals Since the 1970s* was published a decade later in 2011. Despite featuring a baptism scene from *The Apostle* (Robert Duvall, 1997) on its cover, it does not contain a single essay focused on religion. None of the essays even emphasizes Duvall's film at all, though it is named in the introduction. *The Apostle* probably has the most references to southern religiosity of any major picture since *Wise Blood* (John Huston, 1979), as a deep faith permeates everything that preacher Sonny (played by Duvall) does. Much of the film's dialogue consists of Sonny speaking aloud to the Lord, constantly seeking guidance, or offering praise.¹⁹² By placing an image from this film – an image that so clearly represents an evangelical baptism – on the cover, the publishers of this book have referenced an apparently recognizable image of the South, or the southerner, that forms no part of the book's actual scholarship. Indeed the word 'religion' appears just twenty-two times in the volume's two hundred and fifty two pages.¹⁹³

In the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Media* (2011), Donna Bowman explores several functions of southern religiosity in Hollywood film, from the hypocritical 'salesman-turned-preacher' of *Elmer Gantry* and *The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, 1955), to 'the purity and redemptive potential of a simple southern Christian faith' in teen movies such as *A Walk to Remember* (Adam Shankman, 2002). Bowman also notes the importance of music to the representation of the religious South

¹⁹¹ Larry Langman & David Ebner, *Hollywood's Image of the South: A Century of Southern Films* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001).

¹⁹² For an appraisal of Duvall's presentation of Pentecostalism, see Patton Dodd, 'How *The Apostle* Gets Religion,' *CrossCurrents*, Vol. 65, Iss. 2 (June 2015), 188-197.

¹⁹³ Andrew B. Leiter, *Southerners on Film: Essays on Hollywood Portrayals Since the 1970s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011).

and the development of Christian cinema, alongside the distinctive portrayal of voodoo and the southern gothic – usually centered in New Orleans – in films such as *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987).¹⁹⁴ However, there is no mention of civil rights or race in relation to southern religion on screen, but rather, civil rights and race form separate chapters within the encyclopedia.

A collection of essays focused entirely on the cinematic South, *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary* was also published in 2011, and explored Hollywood's representation of southern roots music, labor relations, and Native Americans, amongst other things. Sharon Monteith's essay, 'Exploitation Movies and the Freedom Struggle of the 1960s,' highlights the 'ideological divisions' evident in civil rights history and its subsequent depiction on screen. She also extends our understanding of what constitutes civil rights cinema, by highlighting the low-budget, exploitation movies of the 1960s that were so quick to capitalize on what she calls 'the terror and hysteria of the freedom struggle.'¹⁹⁵ Part of the University of Georgia's New Southern Studies series, *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary* reflected the importance of engaging with the South's commodification and consumption in an increasingly media-saturated world. The scholarly silence on the South's religiosity was, however, continued, and religion formed no part in any of the fourteen essays. In the volume's introduction, Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee recognize the shift in southern studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century, acknowledging that although '[r]ecent scholarship is not invested in denying the particularities of place' there has been a 'paradigm shift away from the model of regional exceptionalism.'¹⁹⁶ This globalized, postcolonial approach, as McKee has argued elsewhere with Trefzer, understands the region 'not [as] an enclave of hyperregionalism but a porous space through which other places have always circulated.'¹⁹⁷

Barker and McKee's introduction certainly reflects developments in contemporary southern scholarship, and as this chapter has documented, the absence of religion from their volume is hardly exceptional. However, the South's religious culture is undeniably more intense and pervasive than it is in other parts of the country, and indeed much of the developed world. It seems somewhat misleading, therefore, to deny religion's role in southern culture, perhaps because it does not fit with a recently accepted

¹⁹⁴ Donna Bowman, 'Film, Religion in,' in Graham & Monteith (eds.), *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Volume 18: Media*, 100.

¹⁹⁵ Monteith, 'Exploitation Movies and the Freedom Struggle of the 1960s,' 196.

¹⁹⁶ Barker & McKee, 'Introduction,' *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*, 2.

¹⁹⁷ McKee & Trefzer, 'Preface: Global Contexts, Local Literatures,' 679.

shift in the focus of southern studies from exceptionalism to national or even global connections.

Such approaches have undoubtedly expanded our understanding of regional identification and its functionality. They have also prompted many scholars to think more deeply about how cultures reciprocally influence and permeate one another. Circum-Caribbean narratives, for example, have complicated the overwhelming understanding of Southern history as white history. They provide considerable complexity, and force us to acknowledge the postcolonial reality that the South shares with other sites of racial slavery and vast African displacement. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, such scholarship often denies the shifting meaning of U.S. nationalism and the South's integral role in this. As historian Natalie Ring argues: 'Just because we realize that the South is not now, or never was distinctive doesn't mean that the discourse about its distinctiveness didn't shape national policies and people's lives inside and outside the South.'¹⁹⁸ Whether real or performed, popular understanding of the South remains important in a U.S. context, but also way beyond those borders. Despite scholarly attempts to grapple with the realities of a globalized modernity, individuals continue to refer to history to make sense of their own existence and identity. Cultural studies scholars need to find ways to question existing ideologies, their origins, and indeed their omissions, and show their findings in a way that illuminates and reinvigorates our understanding of how they operate. Dismissal simply denies their power and permeability, replaces one ideology with another, and obscures this need for greater understanding.

'Religion and the American South belong together,' Donald Mathews writes – 'literature, memory, stereotype, and public opinion all agree on this much even if historians have not convincingly explained why.' Indeed, as Beth Barton Schweiger writes, southern religious scholars 'have been predisposed toward social and cultural history, applied mainly to the problem of race and slavery.'¹⁹⁹ The wealth of studies relating to the religious foundations of the southern civil rights movement and the racial attitudes of the region's numerous white denominations is testament to this impulse.²⁰⁰ However, scholars such as Mark Newman and Randall Stephens, whose meticulously researched denominational histories highlight religion's intersections with social and

¹⁹⁸ Natalie J. Ring, 'An Irony of Ironies: The Discipline of History in the New Southern Studies,' in Ward, 'Forum: What's New in Southern Studies,' 710.

¹⁹⁹ Mathews & Schweiger in Mathews et al, 'Forum: Southern Religion,' 147 & 165.

²⁰⁰ See Chapell, *Stone of Hope*; Dailey, 'Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred'; Carolyn Renee Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975* (New York University Press, 2013); Harvey, *Redeeming the South*; Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*; Manis, *Southern Civil Religions*.

political developments in the South, have reinforced the developing body of work in southern religious history noted previously in relation to the 1998 launch of the *Journal of Southern Religion*.²⁰¹

The South continues to be dominated by an Evangelicalism centered on personal testimony and expression; ‘new southern studies’ has failed to properly acknowledge this statistical fact. It would appear that the region’s religiosity is accepted as a given; it is so ubiquitous that many scholars have overlooked its cultural significance. Perhaps those outside of religious history are conscious of giving too much credence to something that can easily descend into crude stereotype. The evident uniqueness of the southern religious landscape can undermine attempts to cement the region within wider national, and international, patterns. Perhaps this is why there is such a lively subfield of southern religious history, but few efforts to absorb the issues raised in to more general or American historiography and/or cultural studies?

A deeply undervalued signifier of Southern exceptionalism, whether real or imagined, religion is essential to the shifting perceptions of the region. In subsequent chapters I shall provide case studies that document the manipulation of these stereotypes, and the way in which they allow Hollywood filmmakers to quickly indicate the South. However distorted or truncated, Hollywood’s depiction of southern religiosity feeds back into how the South is perceived, but also how the South perceives itself.

²⁰¹ Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001); Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Chapter 2: ‘I ain’t no white trash piece of shit’: *Cape Fear*’s ‘monster of the South.’

Released in 1991, Martin Scorsese’s *Cape Fear* is a remake of J. Lee Thompson’s 1962 film of the same name. A tale of revenge, the film revolves around Sam Bowden (Nick Nolte), a lawyer terrorized by a former client Max Cady (Robert De Niro). The story is based on *The Executioners*, a 1957 novel by John MacDonal, but as Brian McFarlane has argued, Scorsese’s vision is ‘infinitely darker.’²⁰² Dismissed by many critics as a genre film thriller, Scorsese’s *Cape Fear* is undoubtedly a melodrama. However, the ways in which it works to unravel the apparent security of white middle-class American suburban identity are deeply rooted in divisions of education, class, race, and gender that continue to shape the field of southern studies.

This chapter will offer a close reading of the film, using De Niro’s papers at the University of Texas at Austin to document the reconceptualization of villain Max Cady as a pentecostal Christian. Examining this projection of southern religiosity, the chapter argues that De Niro’s portrayal of Cady makes explicit links between rural poverty, religion, and violence, employing stereotypes that screenwriter Wesley Strick candidly admits rendered Cady a ‘monster of the South.’²⁰³ The chapter also argues that this religious reconfiguration connects Scorsese’s film to a much older ‘southern gothic’ continuum, building upon the racial anxieties palpable in Thompson’s original film, whilst acknowledging more contemporary anxieties about the role of evangelical Christianity in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

While De Niro’s physical preparation for *Cape Fear* has become legendary – he paid to have his teeth ground down to appear more menacing and undertook an extreme fitness regime – the expansive studies undertaken by a team of researchers for the film are less well-known. These researchers investigated the most overt elements of Cady’s re-characterization - serial criminality and Pentecostalism – and helped to construct an

²⁰² Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 171. Scorsese’s is ‘a film of 1991,’ McFarlane continues, ‘rather than a “faithful” rendering of a novel written thirty-odd years before.’

²⁰³ Wesley Strick, interviewed in ‘The Making of the 1991 *Cape Fear*,’ DVD Special Features, *Cape Fear* Boxset, J. Lee Thompson, Martin Scorsese (dir.), Universal Pictures UK, 2001. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to Max Cady simply as ‘Cady,’ and other characters by their first names. This reflects how they are commonly referred to in the film, and magnifies the sense of ‘otherness’ constructed around Cady.

almost burlesque ‘southerner.’²⁰⁴ They made contact with a host of experts - academics, filmmakers, folklorists, and medical professionals. Perhaps because of this meticulous planning, letters detailing the appointment and placement of these researchers in the South often give the impression that they were navigating uncharted territory, rather than documenting features of a highly populated region within their own nation. One researcher, Melanie Friesen, compared her experience talking to southerners to the ‘healthcare work [her] dad did in developing countries and growing up in places where suspicion of the outside region reigned.’²⁰⁵ Renowned North Carolina folklorist George Holt had apparently warned Friesen ‘that it’s very hard to go into these communities for research cold – that someone familiar needs to accompany an outsider.’²⁰⁶

As a result of this research, the new Cady bore little resemblance to his predecessor, played by Robert Mitchum. While Mitchum’s Cady is ‘a fairly conventional filmic psychopath,’ according to literary scholar Robert Casillo, ‘De Niro’s Cady is far more disturbing in his bewildering assortment of kinetic, mimetic, and sadistic traits, which make him seem less a human being than a demonic incarnation.’²⁰⁷ However, like other critics, Casillo does not probe this portrayal any further. By contrast, the analysis of the film in this chapter primarily revolves around the following questions, each of which examines the coordinates and meanings of Cady’s religious reincarnation: What is the significance of Cady’s specific religious upbringing within a pentecostal mountain community in Appalachia? Does this reflect specific understandings of the pentecostal movement, or is this distinct identity simply shorthand for all ‘religiosity’ in the poor white South? Finally, how does the presentation of this disturbed and misdirected Pentecostalism intersect with other facets of Cady’s character, such as his criminality?

Because the film provides very little insight into Cady’s life prior to the film’s narrative, I have relied on the collated *Cape Fear* materials housed at the Harry Ransom Center, which determine that the vengeful nature of Cady’s religiosity was fostered *during* his incarceration, when, frustrated and angry, Cady reevaluated the ‘old time’ religion of his childhood: Holiness Pentecostalism. Presented to De Niro by researcher

²⁰⁴ ‘Burlesque’ here reflects the derisive and overblown nature of De Niro’s characterization of Cady. As Linda Hutcheon has noted, burlesque, unlike parody, ‘necessitates the inclusion or concept of ridicule.’ See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (Urbana; University of Illinois Press, 2000), 32.

²⁰⁵ Melanie Friesen, letter to Martin Scorsese cc. De Niro, August 20 1990, box 29, file 5: ‘Melanie Friesen: memoranda and associated research material,’ Robert De Niro Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, 1.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰⁷ Robert Casillo, ‘School for Skandalon: Scorsese and Girard at *Cape Fear*,’ *Italian Americana*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 1994), 202.

Jem Cohen as ‘hard core stuff,’ and ‘snake-handling in particular,’ Pentecostalism apparently reflected ‘not so much a set of customs as a world view wherein every aspect of one’s life is affected by the drive towards “Holiness.”’ Cady was unlikely, therefore, to ever fully repress this aspect of his upbringing. But when faced with the insecurity of a prison existence, he actively embraced a form of worship that, in Cohen’s words, ‘demands a rejection of most worldly diversions and “pleasures.”’ Now a celebrated independent filmmaker, Cohen argued that there is a ‘down home intimacy and even a renegade spirit in Pentecostalism that aligns well with the Appalachian “mountain” people, who are fiercely independent, and frequently very poor’ (emphasis Cohen’s). Thus, as Cohen asserts, ‘Pentecostal living would greatly increase one’s sense of separation from the outside world.’²⁰⁸

According to historian Randall Stephens, pentecostal religious traditions ‘first entered the South through the northern revival of perfectionism in the late nineteenth century and then through an exuberant 1906 revival in Los Angeles.’ Early adherents in the South, many of whom were already involved in the ‘holiness movement’ that emerged from Methodism after the Civil War, ‘suffered the scorn of mainline Protestants [and hence] played profoundly countercultural roles in the South in this early period.’²⁰⁹ Pentecostals incorporated a theology of ‘premillennialism,’ believing that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was imminent. They also exhibited a uniquely enthusiastic worship style, including faith healing and speaking in tongues. ‘Because holiness people were less bound by prevailing social codes than members of mainline churches,’ Stephens continues, ‘their meetings were often racially integrated, wild, and loud.’²¹⁰

Cohen’s interpretation of how Cady’s Pentecostalism might manifest itself reflected the work of folklorist Elaine Lawless in the 1980s, which argued that ‘anti-Pentecostal sentiment from outsiders only feeds the fire of Pentecostalism’ and that this negativity is often ‘proof enough for [believers] that they are a special religious group.’²¹¹ Rejection of the world, Lawless contended, becomes a ‘sure path to salvation,’ as Pentecostals embrace their marginalized status as a reflection of their unique relationship with God.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Jem Cohen, ‘Research Materials: Pentecostal,’ box 30, folder 8, Robert De Niro Papers.

²⁰⁹ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 5.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹¹ Elaine J. Lawless, ‘Brothers and Sisters: Pentecostals as a Religious Folk Group,’ *Western Folklore*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Apr. 1983), 85.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

‘When it comes to tying class to religion,’ Richard Callahan, Jr. writes, ‘central Appalachia has been something of a laboratory for the application of explanatory models.’ First ‘discovered,’ (or ‘invented’) ‘as a region with an identifiably distinct culture in the 1880s, when “mountain whites” also came to be identified by outsiders as “poor white trash,”’ Appalachia came to be signified by three factors: religion, poverty, and coalmining. The source of endless studies and theories, Appalachia has been characterized in the popular media as a ‘culture of poverty,’ Callahan writes, where “deviant” religious practices such as serpent handling, faith healing, emotional preaching, and biblical literalism [provided a] compensatory response to economic, social, and psychological deprivation.’²¹³ An illiterate criminal, Cady finds purpose in religion, and seeks Old Testament-style revenge on the privileged few who he believes have abandoned or undermined him.

Yet, as Callahan also notes, opposing critics ‘have asserted that the “fatalism” of Appalachian religion has been largely to blame for a lack of social and economic motivation.’ This presumably explains why Cady was illiterate before entering prison: because he was brought up in a community that did not value education and interaction with the outside world. ‘In short,’ Callahan concludes, ‘the religious practices of Appalachia are either the cause or the effect of poverty.’²¹⁴

Hoping to elevate the study of Pentecostalism from such polemics, religious historian Grant Wacker argues that pentecostals, like other Americans, have constantly evolved and adapted.²¹⁵ Pentecostals accounted for approximately eleven million Americans by 2000, while the global Pentecostal movement was estimated to represent around half a billion people.²¹⁶ Mirroring many of the social, cultural and economic forces that shape other lives/communities, pentecostals reflect a cross-section of society. ‘As the faith grew,’ Stephens writes, ‘many adherents adopted the lifestyles of the middle class. In such cases the extravagant religious exercises and heterodox views of earlier years softened or faded.’²¹⁷ By the mid-twentieth century, Stephens continues, southern pentecostals ranged from wealthy businessmen in bustling Atlanta to Alabama sharecroppers. Many would emigrate from the region during the Depression and Great

²¹³ Richard J. Callahan, Jr., ‘The Work of Class in Southern Religion,’ *Journal of Southern Religion*, Vol. 13 (2011), accessed December 5, 2016, <http://jsreligion.org/issues/vol13/callahan.html>.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²¹⁶ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 230.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

Migration, ‘carrying their religious beliefs with them.’²¹⁸ Like millions of other American Christians after World War II, countless pentecostals would come to embrace the ‘prosperity gospel,’ which Kate Bowler summarizes as ‘an American gospel of pragmatism, individualism, and upward mobility.’²¹⁹ A ‘deification and ritualization of the American Dream,’ the prosperity gospel promoted ‘upward mobility, accumulation, hard work, and moral fiber.’ It reflected ‘a country soaring with confidence in the possibility of human transformation.’²²⁰ Thus, as a pentecostal, Cady is by no means immune to the influence of modernity. His penchant for cigars, for example, would not be tolerated in a devout Holiness sect. A vice picked up in prison, Cady smoked ‘to remind me I was human.’

The conflicting ideologies guiding Cady’s character prove central to his introductory scenes, as the camera pans across the images that adorn his prison wall – including Stalin, Confederate General Robert E. Lee, and Christian martyrs – but also a bookshelf that contains Nietzsche and the Bible. As Casillo has recognized, this collection of images, alongside a bookshelf containing legal guides, nihilistic philosophy, vocabulary exercises, and healthy eating guides simultaneously suggests ‘pacifism, masochism, sadism, totalitarianism, and the therapeutic.’²²¹

Cady also professes a literary commitment to Henry Miller, whose vivid sexual descriptions would certainly complicate any notion that Cady is directed entirely by fundamentalist dogma. Thomas Nesbit argues that Miller’s novels were framed as pornography in the early 1990s: ‘books that will somehow contaminate the beholder.’²²² Cady implores Sam’s fifteen-year old daughter Danielle (Juliette Lewis) to rebel against her parents and read Miller’s *Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy (1949-59). Although unfamiliar with the trilogy, Danielle admits that she has read ‘parts of’ another Miller novel, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934). Like *Rosy Crucifixion*, *Tropic of Cancer* was banned in the United States until the 1960s, and Danielle admits that even in the early 1990s, she had to ‘sneak it off my parents’ shelf.’

After alerting Danielle to Miller’s description of an erection as ‘a piece of lead with wings,’ Cady advises Danielle that she is ‘not allowed to read the book’ because ‘your parents don’t want you to achieve adulthood.’ Having earlier encouraged the

²¹⁸ Ibid, 232.

²¹⁹ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

²²⁰ Ibid, 226.

²²¹ Casillo, ‘School for Skandalon,’ 214.

²²² Thomas Nesbit, *Henry Miller and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 24.

troubled teenager to ‘be yourself and be a woman,’ Cady’s investment in Danielle’s burgeoning adulthood is distinctly sexual. Indeed, Danielle’s entirely white clothing underlines her virginal status in her first meeting with Cady.

Presented as ‘a literature of defilement,’ according to Nesbit, Miller’s novels become a symbol for Cady and Danielle’s illicit connection, and a factor in Cady’s attempt to ‘contaminate and corrupt the innocent.’ The copy of *Sexus* that Cady leaves for Danielle on the Bowden doorstep is indicative of the sexual relationship he hopes to develop with her. That Danielle hides the book from her parents and housekeeper demonstrates her awareness of its unseemliness – both as a gift exchanged between an adult man and teenage girl and as a piece of literature. ‘On a level accessible to general audiences,’ Nesbit concludes, ‘Scorsese’s film suggests that criminals, including those who rape young girls, read Henry Miller.’²²³

Cady uses Miller’s novels as a titillating example of the freedoms of adulthood, in order to tempt Danielle away from the confines of her parents’ control. However, once he has her attention and trust, he launches into a more recognizably Christian sermon on the power of forgiveness and salvation. When Danielle asks why Cady hates her father, Sam, Cady responds,

I don’t hate him at all. Oh, no, I pray for him. I’m here to help him. I mean, we all make mistakes, Danielle. You and I have. At least we try to admit it. But your daddy, he don’t . . . Every man has to go through hell to reach his paradise. You know what paradise is? . . . Salvation.

Implying that he and Danielle are better people than her parents, Cady asserts, ‘You know I think I might have found a companion, a companion for that long walk into the light.’ This deeply uncomfortable scene, then reaches its climax, as Cady approaches Danielle and puts his thumb in her mouth before kissing her.

One of the movie’s pivotal scenes, this ten-minute exchange between Cady and Danielle frames one of the film’s most disturbing elements: the ever-present threat of sexual violence, which becomes all the more perverse and frightening because the potential victim is a child. But scholars and critics have failed to note the manner in which Cady shifts from overtly grooming and sexually assaulting a child, to a profound discussion of the pentecostal tenets of salvation and redemption. Like many of the disgraced televangelists of the late 1980s, Cady appears to tread a fine line between the divine and the depraved.

²²³ Ibid.

Screenwriter Wesley Strick appeared confident that Hollywood audiences would share his anxieties about southern evangelicals, and following the damaging sexual and financial scandals that rocked American televangelism in the late 1980s he had considerably more reason to channel a specifically anti-evangelical feeling. Americans were ‘spellbound,’ Michael Giuliano writes, as they glimpsed ‘into this sometimes seedy world of religious television, a world that many had ignored up to that point.’²²⁴ The most publicized scandals included Pat Robertson’s false claims about his marriage and military service during his run for the Republican Party’s 1988 presidential nomination and Oral Roberts’s ‘divinely ordained’ fundraising methods. In January 1987, Roberts announced that God told him ‘in a vision’ that he had to raise \$4.5 million for medical missionaries by March 31, or God would ‘take him home.’ A letter was sent to supporters asking them to ‘come into agreement with [Roberts] concerning [his] life being extended beyond March.’²²⁵ That same March, Jim Bakker resigned his leadership of the PTL (Praise the Lord) Network amidst allegations of sexual and financial impropriety.²²⁶ Handing over control to Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell, Bakker claimed that Falwell was a safe pair of hands in the wake of a takeover plot by Jimmy Swaggart, a fellow Assemblies of God televangelist based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.²²⁷

Dubbed ‘the Protestant pope,’ Swaggart publicly condemned the actions of both Roberts and Bakker, before eventually revealing that it was indeed him who had revealed the name of Bakker’s mistress to church officials. Swaggart’s own liaisons with prostitutes were subsequently revealed when the son of a disgruntled New Orleans preacher, against whom Swaggart had also conspired, followed Swaggart and a prostitute to a motel in the city. Photographs showing Swaggart’s misdemeanors reached Assemblies of God headquarters, but the denomination supported Swaggart’s emotional plea for forgiveness, subject to his enrolment in a rehabilitation program and a three-month break from preaching.²²⁸ Swaggart’s now-infamous apology sermon ‘was fabulous television,’ Quentin Schultze writes, ‘more compelling than most made-for-TV films and more dramatic than any evening soap opera.’²²⁹

²²⁴ Michael J. Giuliano, *Thrice Born: The Rhetorical Comeback of Jimmy Swaggart* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 29.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

²²⁶ Though Bakker was originally from Michigan, PTL was established in Charlotte, North Carolina. With his wife Tammy Faye, Bakker also opened a religious theme park and television production facility in Fort Mill, South Carolina.

²²⁷ Giuliano, *Thrice Born*, 30.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

²²⁹ Quentin Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 39.

It was the inherent hypocrisy revealed by the scandals that seemed to rile the secular press, Giuliano argues, rather than the sexual or financial nature of the indiscretions.²³⁰ The in-fighting between the televangelists – especially Bakker and Swaggart who belonged to the same pentecostal denomination – revealed what sociologist Joshua Gamson refers to as ‘a *turf war*, in which feuding preachers use scandal as a weapon in their fight for a share of the religious market.’ These revelations sparked further discussions about the inherent theatricality of evangelism and what Gamson calls ‘the workings of market-centered religious institutions.’²³¹

Extensively documented by the media, Swaggart’s 1988 fall from grace appeared particularly fresh in the minds of Strick, De Niro, and their researchers as they began working on *Cape Fear* the following year. The televangelist’s name appears frequently in their materials. By the time the film premiered on November 6th 1991, Swaggart had been found in the company of a prostitute for the second time on October 11, and in contrast to his previous emotional pleas for forgiveness in 1988, had stunned his declining congregation by announcing ‘The Lord told me it’s flat none of your business.’²³²

De Niro was advised to read a *Penthouse* article exposing the preacher’s ‘secret sex life,’ receiving the magazine in an envelope that also contained music from professionally recorded church choirs.²³³ According to his researchers, the *Penthouse* piece was ‘an appropriate accompaniment to the enclosed cassette about fundamentalism since it includes the TV preachers,’ thus giving a broader picture of the movement.²³⁴ By this point, ‘TV preachers’ was shorthand for the fallen televangelists: ministers who had boasted huge followings and staggering church profits, but had been disgraced as frauds and hypocrites.

Given the attention these scandals received in the American media, it is hardly surprising that the Princeton Religion Research Center recorded a considerable shift in the nation’s attitudes towards evangelicalism during the 1980s. Data collected in 1980 suggested that Americans were actually more likely to vote for a candidate who was a born-again Christian, but by 1987 voters were *less* likely to vote for an evangelical

²³⁰ Giuliano, *Thrice Born* 31 & 29.

²³¹ Joshua Gamson, ‘Normal Sins: Sex Scandal Narratives as Institutional Morality Tales,’ *Social Problems*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (May 2001), 189.

²³² ‘Scandals: No Apologies This Time,’ *Time* (October 28th 1991), accessed June 13, 2014, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,974120,00.html>

²³³ The article was: Art Harris & Jason Berry, ‘Jimmy Swaggart’s Secret Sex Life,’ *Penthouse*, July 1988, 104-7.

²³⁴ Melanie Friesen, letter to Robert De Niro, November 10th 1990. Box 29, folder 5, Robert De Niro Papers.

candidate and demonstrated increasing intolerance and hostility towards fundamentalists and evangelists.²³⁵ Pat Robertson stood down from his ministry during his campaign for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination after the *New York Times* reported that ‘large numbers of voters were opposed to a minister’s running for President.’²³⁶ Robertson subsequently threatened to sue any media outlet that referred to him as a televangelist, hoping to reinvent himself as a ‘businessman,’ claiming in December 1987, ‘I have never been an Evangelist in my life.’²³⁷

The emphasis placed on televangelists by De Niro’s researchers demonstrates a clear indictment of the pentecostal, even fundamentalist, movement as one filled with what the Bible rendered ‘false prophets’ who preyed on the weak.²³⁸ Although this was undoubtedly a response to the high profile scandals in the late 1980s, it also had a long history in Hollywood. Films such as *The Miracle Woman*, *Night of the Hunter*, and *Elmer Gantry* all warned of the manipulative power of persuasive, money-hungry ‘preachers.’ *Cape Fear* tapped into this tradition, but also managed to participate in a specifically southern dialogue about the profound significance of Protestantism on even the most secular aspects of southern life. The grotesque form of this religiosity tied contemporary concerns surrounding hypocritical televangelists to a much older, almost satirical presentation of the ‘gothic’ South that was popularized in the mid-twentieth century by

²³⁵ In 1980, 19 percent of respondents were ‘more likely’ to vote for an evangelical candidate, compared with 9 percent claimed to be ‘less likely.’ By 1987, 15 percent were ‘more likely’ to vote for an evangelical candidate, but 29 percent were ‘less likely.’ Thirteen percent of those interviewed in 1987 did not want fundamentalists as neighbors, a figure ten percent higher than those who did not want to live beside Jews, a more traditional target of religious prejudice. Published in *Emerging Trends*, Princeton Religion Research Center (April 1987), 5. *Emerging Trends* is a magazine published monthly by PRRC.

²³⁶ Wayne King, ‘Pat Robertson: A Candidate of Contradictions,’ *New York Times*, February 27 1988, accessed December 9 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/27/us/pat-robertson-a-candidate-of-contradictions.html>,

²³⁷ ‘I’m the head of the fifth largest cable network in America,’ Robertson continued. Failing to mention that this network was CBN - the Christian Broadcasting Network that reached 30 million homes - Robertson found that his past life in the ministry was difficult to hide, as he had appeared on television daily for the last twenty-five years, expressing his controversial views on everything from women, homosexuals and American foreign policy. These sound bites proved fundamental in limiting Robertson’s appeal as a presidential candidate, and he withdrew before the end of the primaries. Pat Robertson, on NBC News, report by Lisa Myers, ‘Miracle Man,’ December 21 1987, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJsgAEQAvi8>; Wayne King, ‘The Record of Pat Robertson On Religion and Government,’ *New York Times*, December 27 1987, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/12/27/us/the-record-of-pat-robertson-on-religion-and-government.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>, both accessed December 9 2014.

²³⁸ ‘Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.’ Matthew: 7:15. Quoted at the beginning of the *Penthouse* article, and also the opening sequences of *The Night of the Hunter* and *The Miracle Woman*.

authors including William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and Erskine Caldwell.²³⁹ Cady's religiosity is just one, but perhaps the most important way, in which Scorsese makes these connections. In the new Max Cady, he achieves an enduringly sinister hillbilly face of horror, whose upbringing around snake-handlers has made him immune to pain and empathy.

A growing faith, pentecostal congregations reflected the increasing wealth evident in many southern neighborhoods since World War II, with many claiming middle- or even upper- class status. Having recently inherited \$30,000 from the sale of his deceased mother's farm, Cady cannot be ignored or simply 'busted for vagrancy,' as Sam and his friends at the police would prefer. Rather, Cady represents Pentecostalism's increasingly conspicuous presence in late twentieth-century public life. Wacker points to the transformation of previously tiny Bible institutes into fully accredited colleges and universities during this period, and the 'warm welcome' pentecostals offered Republican presidential candidates to as evidence of this new visibility.²⁴⁰ Cady, on the other hand, exhibits his newfound wealth through his ostentatious Cadillac. Coupled with his lurid clothes, Cady's car evidences the undeniable economic clout of many southern pentecostals in the 1980s, personified by televangelists like Jimmy Swaggart and Oral Roberts.

Despite their considerable visibility, mainstream pentecostal denominations remained concerned that their reputations were tarnished through common conflation with Pentecostalism's more extreme factions: the snake-handling 'Signs Following' groups that boasted far fewer members, but attracted considerable publicity and

²³⁹ Teresa A. Goddu has argued that the twentieth century southern gothic renaissance reveals that 'the American gothic is most recognizable as a regional form. Identified with gothic doom and gloom, the American South serves as the nation's "other," becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wants to disassociate itself. The benighted South is able to support the irrational impulses of the gothic that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideals, cannot. America's self-mythologization as a nation of hope and harmony directly contradicts the gothic's most basic impulses.' See Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3-4; Susan Castillo Street & Charles L. Crow (eds.), 'Introduction: Down at the Crossroads,' *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1-7. For the discomfort some authors felt at being labeled 'southern gothic,' see Susan V. Donaldson, 'Making a Spectacle: Welty, Faulkner, and Southern Gothic,' *The Mississippi Quarterly* 50.4 (Fall 1997), pp. 567-584. Flannery O'Connor insisted that 'anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic.' (O'Connor, 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction,' 40.) Critics, she suggested, were too quick to link the Southern and the gothic, assuming the grotesque, often inappropriately. Despite this frequently paraphrased assertion from O'Connor, which shows her discomfort with such marketing, scholars continue to be overwhelmingly pre-occupied by the apparent tangibility of the South of O'Connor's fiction.

²⁴⁰ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 267.

contributed to the consistent association of Pentecostalism with poverty. In 1983, Lawless reported that ‘Pentecostals are associated with poor people everywhere who wear old clothes out of necessity and who do not sport fashionable hair-styles because of a lack of opportunity or sophistication.’²⁴¹

Cady’s fashion choices are clearly designed to render him outdated and unfashionable, but their garish colors and prints present a considerable departure from the muted styles Lawless associated with rural Appalachia. Likewise, Cady wears his hair long and slicked back, in contrast with the shorter pentecostal styles Lawless identified. Film scholar Kirsten Thompson argues that Cady’s hairstyle, which he blackens with mascara, aligns him with the feminine, reflecting his oppression as a member of a white underclass and his sexual victimization in prison.²⁴²

As a result of this harassment, and his increasing awareness of the class prejudice that cost him so many years of freedom, Cady became determined to use his prison time to improve himself physically and mentally. As he does so, he begins to judge others, resenting his place amongst undisciplined criminals, but recognizing the need to become a more commanding figure: both verbally and physically. ‘I spent fourteen years in an eight by nine cell,’ Cady remembers, ‘surrounded by people who were less than human. My mission in that time was to become more than human.’ Cady’s Pentecostalism, as it is presented, works to reinforce many of these developing feelings of superiority. The film thus merges an intense religiosity with a criminality that is bolstered, rather than deterred, through a lengthy prison sentence. Unaffected by loneliness or other anxieties, Cady has been ‘neither dazed nor dulled’ by prison, according to an early draft of Strick’s script.²⁴³ Rather, upon his release, Cady is extremely fit, intellectually quick, and ‘[h]is eyes have a sharp glint.’²⁴⁴ He believes he has ‘a leg up, genetically speakin,’ because ‘Granddaddy used to handle snakes in church, Granny drank strychnine.’ It is here that Cady personally aligns himself with ‘Signs Following’ churches, mostly found in the

²⁴¹ Lawless, ‘Brothers and Sisters,’ 86.

²⁴² Kirsten Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 162, note 20. Cady makes several allusions to being raped in prison and there is considerable literature regarding prison rape amongst De Niro’s research materials, including: Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1975), Richard T. Rada: ‘Psychological Factors in Rapist Behavior’ from *Clinical Aspects of the Rapist* (NY: Grune & Stratton, 1978), Timothy Beneke, ‘Rape Language’ from *Men on Rape: What They Have to Say About Sexual Violence* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983). Most of this literature implies that rape was a prevalent and almost inevitable experience for many incarcerated men, especially younger and less physically threatening inmates.

²⁴³ Original screenplay by Wesley Strick, 2 November 1989, Box folder 22.4, Robert De Niro Papers, 1.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Appalachian states and known to handle snakes and fire, as well as occasionally ingesting poisons such as strychnine.

More than simply clearing up Cady's denominational loyalties, this scene is evidently designed to be particularly menacing. Cady's voice is suddenly strengthened. As he makes his speech, booming like a preacher, the camera moves gradually until the audience is positioned submissively beneath him. Perhaps most disturbingly, Cady appears unmoved by the hot wax that is streaming on to his hand, confirming his superior immunity to pain.

The devotional practices to which Cady alludes reflect a literal reading of a passage in the Book of Mark, which many 'Signs Following' churches identify as the words of the resurrected Jesus. The passage states: 'In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.'²⁴⁵ As Cohen suggests, groups that advocate such teachings as mandates for the conduct of worship often find themselves at odds with a more mainstream American Pentecostalism, especially as there are specific laws against snake-handling in almost all the Appalachian states.²⁴⁶

Anthropologist Jim Birkhead argues that this sense of difference has been amplified and distorted by the mainstream media.²⁴⁷ As religious historian Michael McVicar has argued, '[m]any Americans are familiar with grainy black and white photographs or jerky videos of sweaty, wild-eyed worshippers, who cram into hot,

²⁴⁵ Mark 16:17-18, (King James Version).

²⁴⁶ Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee have passed laws against the use of venomous snakes in a manner that might cause harm to any persons. Passed in 1942, Kentucky's ruling on snake handling made specific reference to religious services, but has recently come under criticism for the low value of its proscribed fine. KY Revised Statute § 437.060: 'Use of reptiles in religious services. Any person who displays, handles or uses any kind of reptile in connection with any religious service or gathering shall be fined not less than fifty dollars (\$50) nor more than one hundred dollars (\$100).' Following the death of Pastor Jamie Coots of Kentucky's Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name - the star of National Geographic's *Snake Salvation* - in February 2014, many journalists questioned the effectiveness of the law. 'The Kentucky legislature has sent a message: poisonous snake-handling is marginally illegal -- but not as illegal as drugs or other crimes. The legislature's assigned penalty appears to fall somewhere between a speeding ticket and an overdue library book. This illegal practice persists so openly that a reality TV show flouts the law by filming a crime in progress. When a network has a series based primarily on filming people breaking the law in your state, it's fair to say your law has lost some of its bite.' Danny Cevallos, 'Snakes and church vs. state,' CNN.com, May 28 2014, accessed December 10 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/26/opinion/cevallos-snake-handling-law/>

²⁴⁷ Birkhead, "Bizarre Snake Handlers," 168.

rundown rural churches.’²⁴⁸ A media fascination, numerous articles and documentary films have been produced about Appalachian pentecostals, interest always roused following the injury or death of a believer.²⁴⁹

Despite the popular preoccupation with the more extreme and esoteric strains of Pentecostalism, Cohen notes that ‘[a]ll Pentecostals do not handle snakes;’ in fact, very few do. Many ‘have renounced it as demonic,’ Cohen continues, while ‘the more subdued church denominations have long been embarrassed by the wild behavior of some “Holiness” branches.’²⁵⁰ Randall Stephens has shown that both the Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Church of God (Cleveland) had explicitly condemned the practice by 1920, as they moved towards what psychologists Ralph Wood and W. Paul Williamson call ‘greater worldly success.’²⁵¹ Academics have tended to focus on these organized denominations, a scholarly omission that Wood and Williamson argue contributes to ‘the notion’ that ‘fringe’ or ‘splinter’ groups ‘are pathological.’²⁵² The fact that practices such as snake-handling can so easily be relegated to a very specific area of Appalachia only adds to the sense of both religious and cultural ‘otherness’ that is integral to Cady’s characterization.

Perhaps because of this tendency to stereotype Holiness worshippers, Cohen expressed concerns about mistakes in one of Strick’s earlier scripts. In one draft, Cady simply said: ‘Every Easter, my Grandpa handled snakes. Granny drank strychnine,’ but Cohen objected to the suggestion that such worship styles would be associated with certain holidays.²⁵³ He expressed his concerns in a note dated November 1 1990, a year before the film’s release, referencing his conversations with Dr. Tom Burton of East

²⁴⁸ Michael J. McVicar, “Take Away the Serpents from Us: The Sign of Serpent Handling and the Development of Southern Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Southern Religion*, Vol. 15 (2013), accessed May 13, 2016, <http://jsreligion.org/issues/vol15/mcvicar.html>

²⁴⁹ Recent examples include aforementioned *Snake Salvation*, 2013. See media coverage: Joel Christie, ‘Reality TV snake pastor died of snake bite after refusing treatment because ‘it was God’s plan’: *Daily Mail*, February 16, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2560727/Kentucky-Pastor-famous-practicing-rare-Christian-snake-handling-tradition-KILLED-bitten-rattlesnake-refusing-treatment-Gods-plan.html>; Anugrah Kumar, ‘Snake Salvation Church to Continue Snake Handling After Pastor Coots’ Death From Bite; Son Takes Over,’ *The Christian Post*, February 23, 2014: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/snake-salvation-church-to-continue-snake-handling-after-pastor-coots-death-from-bite-son-takes-over-115068/>, both accessed December 10, 2016.

²⁵⁰ Cohen, note dated November 1 1990, ‘Research Materials: Pentecostal,’ box 30, folder 8, Robert De Niro Papers.

²⁵¹ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 254; Ralph H. Wood, Jr. & W. Paul Williamson, *Them That Believe: The Power and Meaning of the Christian Serpent- Handling Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 8.

²⁵² *Ibid*, 8-9.

²⁵³ Strick, Screenplay: *Cape Fear*, October 24th 1990, box 23, folder 8, Robert De Niro Papers.

Tennessee State University, ‘an acknowledged expert on the subject.’²⁵⁴ Cohen continued that,

For a Holiness snake handler, faith is meant to be a constant, and the handling of serpents is a proof of faith, which should come “when the spirit moves”, rather than on a particular holiday. According to Dr. Burton...many of these churches have “homecomings”, where congregations gather from near and far and snake handling would be highly likely to take place...but of course those days are simply chosen by the various Pentecostal churches, and would have no specific significance for the viewing public.²⁵⁵

Cohen’s comments suggest that he was embarrassed at the prospect of the film containing something blatantly wrong about Holiness Pentecostalism, but also that he recognized the importance of maintaining simple allusions that could be understood by all viewers.

The first time audiences hear the word ‘pentecostal’ in *Cape Fear*, it is loaded with assumptions. Describing Cady to his wife, Leigh (Jessica Lange), Sam says simply: ‘He’s from the hills. Pentecostal crackers, y’know?’ Inextricably linking the geographical and religious distinctions of Cady’s background, Sam’s concise description acknowledges Cady’s origins and spiritual predilections in a manner afforded no other character in the film. These classifications seem to define Cady completely, at least in the eyes of his middle-class, secular, and suburban opponents. Sam’s casual use of the derogatory term ‘crackers’ undoubtedly indicates his negative reaction to Cady’s background, which is built upon stereotypes that enable Sam to feel culturally superior to his enemy.

A disconnect exists, then, between the level of research conducted in preparation for shooting and the depiction of ‘Signs Following’ Pentecostalism in the final film. By overtly linking very distinctive worship practices with a fanatical criminal, Scorsese’s film suggests that Cady’s misconduct and religiosity are both the result of a poor, rural background, reflecting the ‘Social Deprivation’ theories that have been so often used by sociologists, historians and psychologists when studying Pentecostalism. Theologian Kenneth Archer acknowledges this tendency, making specific reference to Robert Anderson’s *Vision of the Disinherited* (1979), which in title and content essentially argues that ‘the root source of Pentecostalism was social discontent’ and that association with

²⁵⁴ Jem Cohen, note dated November 1 1990, ‘Research Materials: Pentecostal,’ box 30, folder 8, Robert De Niro Papers.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the movement reflects personal weakness rather than genuine spiritual interest or faith.²⁵⁶ And yet, Cady's behaviors and practices are so often at odds with this supposedly destitute and devout demographic.

Cape Fear's investment in Cady's Pentecostalism is thus twofold. Primarily, it allows the Bowdens and the audience, to 'understand' Cady's place within American society. His position within a marginalized group, maligned through its religious and regional allegiances, ensures that Cady is figured as 'other.' Secondly, however, rather than indicate Cady's vulnerability within American culture, this 'otherness' ensures he is a character to be feared, because his motives and preoccupations can never be pre-empted by the more cosmopolitan American national character that the Bowdens represent. Despite Scorsese's efforts to morally compromise Sam, the lawyer remains exemplary of suburban, middle-class white existence. Indeed, the fact Sam is a practicing lawyer represents his secure and privileged place within his society: he literally interprets and implements the rules of his culture.

Ignored by society and betrayed by Sam, Cady is not remotely concerned with the preservation of his family, of his reputation, or his earthly life. Even when he begins to drown, Cady shows no fear, but sings 'I'm bound for the promised land' and speaks in tongues. His religiosity thus delivers him, he believes, from the extremely limited life opportunities he has been offered. If Sam has been granted earthly privilege - money, influence, and a family - Cady is sure he will be rewarded in the next world. While Sam effectively sacrificed Cady to prison, Cady's sense of himself as God's avenging angel enables him to sentence Sam 'to the kingdom of Hell,' a responsibility that he takes very seriously. His power, limited on earth, is mighty in the kingdom of God, summarized in his bumper sticker: 'You're a V.I.P. on Earth; I'm a V.I.P. in Heaven.' 'I ain't no white trash piece of shit,' he warns Bowden:

I'm better than you all. I can outlearn you, I can out-read you, I can out-think you, I can out-philosophize you, and I'm gonna outlast you. You think a coupla whacks to my good ol'boy gut's gonna get me down? It's gonna take a hell of a lot more than that counselor, to prove you're better'n me.

"I am like God and God like me.
I am as Large as God, He is as small as I.
He cannot above me, nor I beneath him be."
Silesius, seventeenth century.

²⁵⁶ Kenneth Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 23; Robert M. Anderson, *Visions of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992).

Cady delivers this monologue in a loud, preaching voice that helps associate him with an older time. Alongside suggestions of his rural background, Cady's consistent stream of 'old-time religion' is crucial to his oppositional status and helps to cast him against the Bowdens, whose professions and values seem to suggest that they are educated liberals. In conversations with Leigh, Sam shows a disdain for guns, and also questions the punishment Danielle receives when caught with marijuana at school.²⁵⁷

It is evident from the beginning of the film that Sam often bends the rules to suit his own mindset. In his first scene, he is leaving court having clearly performed a favor for a friend.²⁵⁸ During Cady's original case, Sam buried a report that detailed Cady's teenage victim's promiscuity, hoping to alleviate the misogyny characteristic to the legal process.²⁵⁹ Bowden's decision was morally understandable, but professionally unacceptable: a manipulation of the privileged position he holds within the film's projection of the American justice system. Compromising Cady's rights under the sixth amendment, Bowden also violated the American Bar Association's Ethical Considerations, which require a lawyer to 'represent his client zealously.'²⁶⁰

Literary scholar Philip Wegner has argued that Cady and Sam are therefore the same, as both have acted immorally and caused considerable pain to their victims, albeit in very different ways. For Wegner, Sam represents the political class of the 1980s, 'whose often criminal manipulations of the economy exacerbated the growing inequities of the current economic and social arrangement.'²⁶¹ He refers specifically to insider

²⁵⁷ 'Why'd they have to make such a stink?' Sam asks, referring to Danielle's school. 'It's like she was on heroin or something. I mean, what's marijuana? You and I smoked dope in our time. In some cultures, it's considered almost a sacrament. I realize in ours it's forbidden.' 'Right up there with incest and necrophilia and bestiality,' Leigh concurs, sarcastically.

²⁵⁸ 'I got the judge to postpone the alimony hearing for another twenty-one days,' Sam tells Tom Broadbent (Fred Dalton Thompson), who replies 'I've still got 'til Monday to find out which S&L, in which municipality my son-in-law stashed all that money...But I thank you, and my daughter thanks you.'

²⁵⁹ This ensures Cady receives the maximum possible sentence, and is vindicated later in the film when another of Cady's victims, Lori Davis (Ileana Douglas), refuses to testify because, as a clerk at the county court house, Lori 'see[s] it every day.' Lawyers 'cross-examining people on the stands, crucifying them...I don't wanna explain why I was in a bar, why I had so much to drink, what I was wearing.'

²⁶⁰ American Bar Association, *Model Code of Professional Responsibility* (1964), Ethical Consideration 7-1: 'The duty of a lawyer, both to his client and to the legal system, is to represent his client zealously within the bounds of the law... The professional responsibility of a lawyer derives from his membership in a profession which has the duty of assisting members of the public to secure and protect available legal rights and benefits.' Accessed December 4 2014, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/ethics/aba/mcpr/MCPR.HTM>

²⁶¹ Philip E. Wegner, 'A Fine Tradition: The Remaking of the United States in *Cape Fear*,' chapter in *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), 114.

trading and corporate buyouts, and suggests that Cady's arrival in the Bowdens' fictional small town of New Essex reflects growing anxiety on the part of the middle and upper classes 'about what would happen when their victims begin to come to consciousness about the crimes committed against them.'²⁶²

Despite this convincing argument, Wegner makes no real reference to Cady's religiosity, or indeed to his criminal status. In doing so, Wegner has not only missed two of the most significant elements of Cady's re-characterization, but also failed to acknowledge two of the fundamental political and social debates of the film's era: the place of evangelical Christians in late twentieth-century American politics (which will be explored later in this chapter) and the racial, political, and moral economy of mass incarceration.

Stretching from 1977 through 1991, Cady's sentence coincides with the dramatic increase in America's prison population, primarily the result of the so-called 'War on Drugs,' officially launched in 1982 by President Ronald Reagan. Introducing mandatory minimum sentences for many previously minor drug offenses, the War on Drugs dramatically transformed America's criminal justice system and saw the prison population quadruple in less than two decades, from roughly 300,000 in 1980 to over two million in 2000.²⁶³ A significant media campaign in the 1980s and 1990s ensured public and legislative support, while most politicians became keen to prove they were 'tough on crime.' Sweeping millions into a permanent underclass without voting, educational or employment rights, the resulting criminal justice system has been criticized by groups like the Sentencing Project, who argue that it is little more than a renamed form of social, racial, and class control.²⁶⁴ A 'white trash' criminal, Cady joins this underclass, though he too was placed there long before he reaches the courtroom. Illiterate and unaware of his legal entitlements, Cady has no choice but to entrust Sam with his future: a future Sam has already rendered worthless.

²⁶² Ibid, 115.

²⁶³ See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Revised Edition (New York: The New Press, 2012), 59.

²⁶⁴ In 2010, legal scholar Alexander designated the War on Drugs the 'New Jim Crow,' presenting evidence that the 'War' has been disproportionately conducted in African American and Hispanic urban ghettos. 'When the War on Drugs gained full steam in mid-1980s, prison admissions for African Americans skyrocketed, nearly quadrupling in three years, and then increasing steadily until it reached in 2000 a level more than twenty six times the level in 1983. The number of 2000 drug admissions for Latinos was twenty-two times the number of 1983 admissions.' White rates of incarceration also rose during this period, but only by eight percent. See *ibid*, 96; Nicole D. Porter, 'Unfinished Project of Civil Rights in the Era of Mass Incarceration and the Movement for Black Lives,' *Wake Forest Journal of Law and Policy*, Vol. 6, Iss. 1 (2016), 1-34.

Thus, as in Thompson's film, Scorsese shows the timeless ability of lawyers and other legally or politically powerful people to, in the words of police Lieutenant Elgart (Robert Mitchum in an amusing role reversal), 'lean on an undesirable.' However, with Cady now well versed in the law, and buffered by his recent inheritance, Scorsese conveys the horror that would ensue if the criminal underclass were suddenly able to manipulate the law in the way the privileged can. Obviously, the film suggests, they would use it to achieve violent and unsavory ends. The Bowdens' apparent vulnerability at the hands of this previously illiterate, rural religious fanatic delivers Scorsese's bleak message about what lies just beyond the peripheries of the 'New' South's suburbia. J. W. Williamson argues that Cady's 'hillbilly face of horror' is actually a mirror, a stark reminder of the other - poorer, rural - white America.²⁶⁵ Unlike the invasion of the mountains by unprepared city folks, as in *Deliverance* (1972), *Cape Fear* suggests that the hillbilly could attack the suburban sprawl.

Because of this freedom of movement, Cady often confronts the Bowdens in public spaces: at the cinema, the ice cream parlor, at school, and during a Fourth of July parade. However, it is his ability to enter their inner sanctum - a huge white southern mansion that suggests antebellum fears of slave rebellion - that really scares the Bowdens. Retreating into their home, which sits apart from any other building or community, the family literally seeks sanctuary within their moneyed whiteness. Using Danielle and Leigh as bait, Sam hopes to lure Cady to the house, knowing that the 'white southern woman in peril' narrative will warrant any injury he wishes to inflict upon Cady. In a specific reference to white southern history, Private Detective Kersek (Joe Don Baker) educates Sam and the audience: 'You know, the South evolved on fear - fear of the Indian, fear of the slave, fear of the damned Union. The South has a fine tradition of savoring fear.'²⁶⁶ According to Kersek, Sam too must 'savor that fear' if he is to defeat Cady.

Whilst Kersek's comment acknowledges the changing targets of white southern aggression, it also demonstrates the consistent nature of fear and anxiety that can be triggered by the latest threat or perceived threat. Thus, as Wegner suggests, the South's 'fine tradition' may be built on fear, but it is underlined by the 'deep anxiety that the

²⁶⁵ Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 156.

²⁶⁶ Baker would go on to play Jim Folsom, two-time liberal populist Alabama governor, in John Frankenheimer's docudrama *George Wallace* (1998), in a performance Dan Carter described as 'histrionic.' See 'Fact, Fiction, and Film: Frankenheimer's George Wallace,' *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, January 1998, accessed June 29, 2017: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-1998/fact-fiction-and-film-frankenheimers-george-wallace>

violence exerted on the bodies of others will be returned in kind – a nightmare that literally has come true with Cady’s appearance.²⁶⁷ Returning to terrorize the Bowdens, Cady is not simply a former client on a revenge mission, but the latest manifestation of southern white anxiety. Indeed, when there is no logical explanation for how Cady enters the house, the suggestion lingers that perhaps he has been there all along. ‘I just had the weirdest feeling he was already in the house,’ Sam gasps during the stake-out.

Yet, despite his unsettling omnipresence, Cady is rarely introduced subtly. Reinforced by Elmer Bernstein’s reworking of Bernard Hermann’s original score, which is reminiscent of Hermann’s work for Alfred Hitchcock, De Niro’s Cady is always presented with menacing significance. Whereas Thompson’s film introduces Mitchum’s Cady simply walking in the street, the first shots of De Niro provide a deeply personal insight into Cady’s physical and mental space. As the camera pans away from Cady’s walls and bookshelf, he appears in the foreground, stripped to the waist and doing push-ups. The bars of his prison cell also come into view. His criminality, as well as his immense physical strength is thrust upon the audience, providing glimpses of his elaborate, expansive religious tattoos. Lines of biblical verse mark his arms and torso, whilst his back displays a huge cross that is also a set of scales, bearing the words ‘TRUTH’ and ‘JUSTICE,’ the first signified by a Bible, the latter, a knife.

The development of Cady’s tattoos is evident in De Niro’s research materials, mainly through his correspondence with make-up artist Ilona Herman and several volumes of prison photography: many of which are annotated with comments that acknowledge the visible tattoos of many prisoners. Most of Herman’s notes stress the need for the tattoos to be ‘crude,’ having been applied in prison. She also suggests that certain words be misspelt, indicative of Cady’s previous illiteracy.²⁶⁸ Using a Bible concordance, De Niro and Herman searched for words or passages that would best communicate Cady’s sense of injustice, while reflecting his faith that God’s will would prevail. Passages that were finally selected include ‘The Lord is the Avenger,’ ‘My time is not yet at hand,’ and ‘Vengeance is mine’. Suggestions were made for tattoos across the hands, ‘GOOD’ and ‘EVIL,’ or ‘LOVE’ and ‘HATE,’ reminiscent of Mitchum’s tattooed preacher in *The Night of the Hunter*, a performance that greatly influenced De Niro when preparing to play Cady and will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Although De Niro’s Cady admits ‘there’s not a whole lot to do in prison except

²⁶⁷ Wegner, ‘A Fine Tradition,’ 86.

²⁶⁸ Ilona Herman, notes and designs sent to Robert De Niro, ‘Tattoo Design & Correspondence,’ box 28, file 1, Robert De Niro Papers.

desecrate your flesh,' his tattoos ensure that he is an active participant in the way his body is read. Despite a later strip search designed to make Cady to 'feel about as welcome around here as a case of yellow fever,' any attempt to render Cady vulnerable quickly turns in his favor, revealing his threatening physique and tattoos. Cady is never so much victimized, as glorified. He consistently evades legal control, whilst his greatest weapon – his physique – is frequently cast center stage.

As 'self-imposed scars,' tattoos have been crucial 'within formations of masculinity,' according to Helen Stoddart.²⁶⁹ Indeed, as she explains, the wounding of men 'has been a persistent source of cinematic spectacle,' integral to 'a kind of machismo-driven heroism.'²⁷⁰ Scars and tattoos thus indicate a 'tough sadomasochism' that signals a character's unique ability to endure pain.²⁷¹ This is particularly apparent in *Cape Fear*, Stoddart continues, because of the way in which De Niro's commitment to 'Method' acting and almost 'masochistic' bodily transformation has been 'fetishised in press coverage.'²⁷²

It is clear then that Cady's tattoos are not only a reflection of his religious preoccupations; they are also designed to reflect his criminal, violently disturbed nature, and his sadomasochistic enjoyment of pain. The disdain other characters display towards them is also distinctly class-based. Cady blames his tattoos when Leigh calls him 'repulsive,' recognizing that he's not 'her type,' that prison has left him a little 'coarse.' Lamenting the fact that such an undesirable could have such protection under the law, Sam becomes more and more disillusioned with the legal system and eventually resorts to vigilantism. He lures Cady to his home hoping to entrap and presumably kill him for trespassing. Perhaps more worryingly, Sam is encouraged at every point by other supposed men of the law, including the police.

Eventually launching a boulder at Cady's head, Sam undergoes what Kirsten Thompson recognizes as 'regression to a brutal defender of his family, a man who uses rocks, not the law, as his weapons.'²⁷³ However, as Kersek reminds Sam, he is not the first white southerner to take the law into his own hands. Indeed, at this point, the film

²⁶⁹ Helen Stoddart, "'I Don't Know Whether to Look at Him or Read Him": *Cape Fear* and Male Scarification,' in Pat Kirkham & Janet Thumin (eds.) *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), 194.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 195.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*.

²⁷² *Ibid*, 196.

²⁷³ Kirsten Thompson, 'Cape Fear and Trembling: Familial Dread,' in Robert Stam & Alessandra Raengo (eds.), *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (New York: Blackwell, 2004), 144.

enters into a dialogue with its own cinematic predecessor, the 1962 film, in which the Bowden family pondered the dangers associated with extending the rights of blacks and ‘other undesirables.’ Mitchum’s Cady blurs the rigidity of segregated life in the South, in part due to the actor’s own criminal record, including a high profile arrest for marijuana possession in 1948.²⁷⁴ Like Norman Mailer’s ‘White Negro,’ Mitchum’s Cady rebels against the ‘totalitarian tissues of American society.’²⁷⁵ Although he is white, he represents a class of people that the Bowdens would never associate with, until changes in the law render them unable to be so selective. Facilitating the film’s producers to enact what Wegner recognizes as ‘the nightmares of racial conflict allegorically staged,’ Mitchum’s Cady operates on the underside of their small-town South, picking up women in jazz bars and using an entirely different vernacular (the film’s first line of dialogue sees Cady greet an African American janitor with ‘Hey, daddy’).²⁷⁶

It is surely no coincidence that Cady’s pursuit of the Bowden daughter, named Nancy (Lori Martin) in the 1962 film, occurs in the school, reflecting acute white fears of ‘miscegenation’ following the 1954 *Brown* decision. Indeed, in reducing Cady’s sentence from fourteen years in the original novel to eight years in the 1962 film, J. Lee Thompson ensured that Cady was sentenced in 1954, the same year as the *Brown* decision. Kirsten Thompson argues that Cady’s specific targeting of Bowden’s wife and young daughter ‘recall[s] the paranoid racist fantasies of white women in peril, from the captivity narrative to *Birth of a Nation*.’²⁷⁷

Acknowledging this base appeal to the black rapist myth, Allison Graham argues that the earlier *Cape Fear* ‘could easily have been the product of a state sovereignty commission, except for one point: the unwanted element in *Cape Fear* was neither a black agitator nor a white troublemaker from the North.’²⁷⁸ Instead, Cady is a poor white

²⁷⁴ Never completing high school, Mitchum rode the trains during the Depression and was arrested for vagrancy in Savannah, Georgia aged just fourteen. Sentenced to hard labor on a chain gang, he escaped, and would have several other brushes with the law. Mentioned by much of the press surrounding the release of *Cape Fear*, Mitchum’s criminal record proved instrumental to the movie’s promotion. When asked by a Savannah native if he had come far from his days as a Georgia fugitive, Mitchum knowingly answered, ‘Not necessarily.’ (Quoted in Graham, *Framing the South*, 162) Director J. Lee Thompson admitted that Mitchum had something of a ‘chip on his shoulder’ when filming in Savannah, demonstrating ‘a bitterness against the whole place, against the community . . . He was explosive, always ready to explode, which was great for the picture. I mean, I didn’t try to stop that (laughs).’ (Interview, *The Making of the 1962 Cape Fear*, DVD Special Features)

²⁷⁵ Norman Mailer, ‘The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,’ *Dissent* (Fall 1957), 278.

²⁷⁶ Wegner, ‘A Fine Tradition,’ 88.

²⁷⁷ Kirsten Thompson, ‘*Cape Fear* and Trembling,’ 127.

²⁷⁸ Graham, *Framing the South*, 162.

southerner with a violent history. Graham and Monteith point out that he wears the straw hat and shirtsleeves of many a working-class segregationist captured by photographers on the civil rights beat.²⁷⁹ Despite this visual and cultural commonality, Cady openly utilizes civil rights law while harassing an idealized, middle-class, suburban, nuclear white family. ‘A man like that doesn’t deserve civil rights,’ Sam’s wife, Peggy (Polly Bergen) in the 1962 film, argues: a comment that suggests it is middle-class white people who are now unprotected by the law. ‘Don’t the police have the right to interrogate a subject anymore?’ an exasperated Sam (Gregory Peck) asks when Cady’s lawyer argues that the police have ‘persecuted’ his client.²⁸⁰

Dave Grafton’s (Jack Kruschen) list of violations against his client’s civil rights in the 1962 film resonated with the damning claims of police brutality and a racially-biased criminal justice system that were streaming from the South at this time. Considered a nuisance by the police, Grafton is described by chief Mark Dutton (Martin Balsam) as ‘one of them ardent types,’ known for ‘rallying the bleeding-heart squad.’ Wegner has argued Grafton thus serves ‘as a figure for those federal civil rights agents who by the early 1960s [were present in the South] under the direction of Attorney General Robert Kennedy.’²⁸¹ However, whilst liberal lawyers like Grafton were certainly frustrating resistant white southerners by 1962, Neil McMillen notes that, in the early years of the Kennedy administration, the Justice Department was largely focused on ‘organized crime and labor corruption,’ rather than civil rights.²⁸² Although ‘the brothers Kennedy managed from the outset to project a mood of executive engagement in civil rights not apparent during the Eisenhower years,’ Justice Department attention did not truly shift to ‘racial injustice’ until 1963, McMillen writes, when the conviction of corrupt Teamster Union boss Jimmy Hoffa seemed imminent.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Graham & Monteith, ‘Southern Media Cultures,’ 14. Pete Daniel contradicts contemporary reports from the 1957 Little Rock desegregation crisis, arguing that ‘few in the crowd fit the redneck mold.’ Studying photographs and television coverage, Daniel concludes that ‘[m]ost of the men and women were dressed casually but neatly; it was, at its core, a respectable-looking working-class crowd.’ Regardless, Graham and Monteith continue, it was the ‘unrespectable crowd, however, [that] would prove to be a durable cinematic image, providing climatic scenes to movies as different as Roger Corman’s *The Intruder* (1961) and CBS’s *Crisis at Central High* (1981).’ (18) See also, Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 265.

²⁸⁰ Peck’s righteous indignation in *Cape Fear* would be reinforced later that same year, when he brought that other upstanding southern lawyer, Atticus Finch, to screens in Robert Mulligan’s adaptation of Harper Lee’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

²⁸¹ Wegner, ‘A Fine Tradition,’ 100.

²⁸² Neil R. McMillen, ‘Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi: Federal Enforcement and Black Protest in the 1960s,’ *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 43, No. 3 (August 1977), 356.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* RFK had been determined to bring Hoffa to justice since his work with the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in Labor and Management (also known as the

While the Kennedy administration responded to civil rights crises including the desegregation of the Universities of Mississippi and Alabama, these responses were often late and designed to avoid further embarrassment. They were not the executive action JFK had alluded to in his election campaign. ‘There is a good deal that can be done by the Executive branch without legislation,’ he said in October 1960. ‘For example, the President could sign an executive order ending discrimination in housing tomorrow...In addition, the Department of Justice can pursue the right to vote with far more vigor...So I would say that the greater opportunity [for civil rights reform] is in the Executive branch without Congressional action.’²⁸⁴

Black activists in the early 1960s were therefore often understandably disappointed by limited federal efforts, culminating in a 1963 lawsuit filed by SNCC workers in Mississippi against Robert Kennedy and J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI Director, for failing ‘to protect plaintiffs and their class from the deprivation of their constitutional rights.’²⁸⁵ The plaintiffs argued that Kennedy and Hoover ‘have in effect sanctioned and perpetuated a consistent pattern on the part of the law enforcement officials of the state of Mississippi.’²⁸⁶ Harold C. Fleming, the director of the Potomac Institute, noted in 1965 that the Civil Rights Commission was often at odds with the Justice Department and indeed the President himself. The Attorney General objected to the Commission’s request for public hearings in Mississippi, while President Kennedy balked at the idea of withholding federal grants-in-aid to the state in 1963.²⁸⁷

Thus, Wegner’s impression that Robert Kennedy’s Justice Department was spearheading civil rights efforts in the South in 1962 seems mistaken and anachronistic, and judges events in the earlier *Cape Fear* by later executive action secured by the

McClellan Committee), 1957-60. He recorded his time on the Committee in his 1960 book *The Enemy Within: The McClellan Committee’s Crusade against Jimmy Hoffa and Corrupt Labor Unions*, 1960 (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009).

²⁸⁴ See ‘Question and Answer Period Following Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy,’ Bean Feed, Minneapolis, MN, October 1, 1960. *The American Presidency Project*, edited by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25899>

²⁸⁵ *Moses v. Kennedy*, 219 F. Supp. 762 (D.D.C. 1963).

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁸⁷ Harold C. Fleming, ‘The Federal Executive and Civil Rights: 1961-1965,’ *Daedalus*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (Fall 1965), 927. Fleming had worked for the Southern Regional Council before helping to form the Potomac Institute in 1961 with New York philanthropist Stephen Currier. Currier and Fleming believed that the incoming Kennedy administration would have to act on civil rights issues and in securing a place in Washington D.C., they hoped to influence this executive action. From its formation until its closure in 1987, the Institute worked to eliminate racist practices within the United States, culminating in efforts to protect affirmative action in the 1980s. See Harold C. Fleming & Virginia Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicle: Public Policy and Civil Rights from Kennedy to Reagan* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of 1964 and 1965, respectively. Nevertheless, the Bowdens' frustration and horror in the face of Cady's civil rights demands certainly 'stands in for a whole set of entitlements that the conservative white establishment felt to be under assault by a national civil rights movement,' as Wegner continues.²⁸⁸

This self-righteous indignation is parodied in Scorsese's court scene, as Cady's lawyer Lee Heller (played with camp gusto by a much older Peck) calls upon the Judge (played by Martin Balsam, who, in another role reversal from the original film, is now 'an ardent type' himself) to act – '[j]ust as God arose to judgment to save all the meek of the earth' – and prosecute Sam for his use of vigilante violence. The Judge responds in his favor, concluding:

This court does not condone feuds, vendettas or vigilantism. Let me quote our great Negro educator, Mr. Booker T. Washington: "I will let no man drag me down so low as to make me hate him." Yes. I will grant the restraining order not to validate the malice between you but in the interest of, er, Christian harmony.

The irony of this scene is undeniable. Kirsten Thompson points out 'the dissonance between the words of a former slave espousing a Christian demand for equality and justice, and their enunciation by a representative of the Southern judiciary known for its racist opposition to desegregation in the sixties.'²⁸⁹ Cady, whose poor white heritage aligns him with thousands of other southerners effectively 'blamed' for the violence of the civil rights movement, can now manipulate the color-blind logic of civil rights legislation to suit his own agenda, endorsed by a pompous southern judiciary. The judge's plea for 'Christian harmony' suggests a conservative and sanctimoniously religious white South that speaks to Cady's understanding of divine justice, best exemplified by Heller's assurance to the judge that 'King Solomon could not have adjudicated more wisely.' Continuing his elevated, religious rhetoric, Heller concludes that he is 'so offended at the philistine tactics of Mr. Bowden, I petition the A.B.A. for his disbarment on the grounds of moral turpitude.'

This deliberate and ironic use of stereotypes about white southern manipulation of the legal system reflects continued understandings of the region as ideologically removed from the rest of the nation. Little has changed, this scene suggests, since the early 1960s. Similarly, despite Sam's morally upstanding decision to protect Cady's

²⁸⁸ Wegner, 'A Fine Tradition,' 101.

²⁸⁹ Kirsten Thompson, 'Cape Fear and Trembling,' 131.

victim back in 1977, reflecting the contemporaneous adoption of rape shield laws across the United States, the second *Cape Fear* suggests that sexual politics is also no more sophisticated than in the 1960s.²⁹⁰ Despite the passage of thirty years, Lori repeats Diane Taylor's (Barrie Chase) refusal to testify when raped by Cady.

Cady's seduction of Diane in the jazz bar in the 1962 film also reveals the true root of white fears of miscegenation: that white women would actively seek African American sexual partners. Cady's later attempt to draw up a sexual contract with Peggy reflects this 'anxiety,' as he specifically requires her 'consent.' However, more important than Peggy's autonomy, or lack thereof, is the perceived effect her actions would have on her husband. According to Cady, Sam may appreciate Peggy's 'noble gesture,' offering herself in order to protect her daughter, but 'he ain't ever gonna forget it.' Similarly, when Sam suggests that he would never put his daughter through the 'ordeal' of testifying in a rape trial, one wonders whether it is actually he who would struggle in the courtroom. When Diane refuses to press charges against Cady, she reminds the police that she is 'somebody's daughter too.' The law, the film suggests, is therefore balanced in the favor of the degenerate, who knows that even the most brutalized (white) girl would never face the indignity of a rape trial, or more importantly drag her family through it. In both versions of the film, Sam's descent into vigilantism reflects his reactionary adoption of traditional southern honor codes around gender, jealously protecting 'his' women from Cady's sexual threat.

The fact that all of *Cape Fear*'s sexual crimes seem to be constructed to test Sam rather than as violations and even mutilations of the individual female bodies demonstrates a complete disavowal of female experience in the film. Possibly a symbolic representation of the South's history of denying women full agency, it is more likely that this marginalization of women is a result of the film's inherently masculine outlook. DeNiro's annotations on the original 1962 script imply that he was most intrigued by the original Cady's violent manipulation of women when it was likely to encourage an emotional response from another man. For example, when Mitchum's Cady describes abducting and raping his former wife, he mentions that he made her 'sit down and write me a love note...askin' me to invite her on a second honeymoon,' a tactic clearly designed to torment her new husband. According to De Niro's annotations, Cady's ex-wife's new husband would 'always think she might a liked it just a little' [sic].²⁹¹ Thus, male sexual

²⁹⁰ Rape shield laws limit the cross-examination of rape victims, specifically their previous sexual history and were adopted by all U.S. jurisdictions across the 1970s and 1980s. In Georgia, where Cady was tried and convicted, a rape shield law was adopted in 1976.

²⁹¹ Box 22, folder 1 Robert De Niro Papers.

jealousy is perceived to be more a more powerful narrative construct than the rape of a woman, reflecting the hyper-masculinity for which Scorsese has been frequently criticized.²⁹² What remains a constant source of fascination for film critics and scholars is whether Scorsese himself is comfortable with the appalling treatment of women in so many of his films, or whether, as Annette Wernblad argues, their mistreatment reflects ‘the emotional state of his male characters, which is often unhealthy and infantile.’²⁹³ Either way, in Scorsese’s *Cape Fear*, women are depicted purely to establish and magnify male behavior.

Without Sam’s protection, the women of Scorsese’s *Cape Fear* appear vulnerable and easily duped. Although they are all initially drawn to Cady as a result of their own disappointment with Sam - Lori as a jilted lover, Leigh as the sexually unsatisfied victim of marital infidelity and Danielle as a bored teenager resentful of her father’s attempts to police her behavior - they are each punished for their attempts to understand Cady on their own terms. However, their penalties are merely collateral damage from the real battle, between Sam and Cady. Cady plans to teach *Sam* a lesson by raping Leigh, Danielle, and Lori. Unlike in the previous *Cape Fear*, all of Cady’s victims are connected to Sam, thus expanding the film’s emphasis on women as property, or the spoils of war. In many ways reflecting Eve Sedgwick’s thesis of ‘male homosocial desire,’ Stoddart has noted that women exist in *Cape Fear* ‘insofar as they may be mobilized as the conduits of male/male fear and desire’.²⁹⁴

While the suggestion of sexual peril was central to Thompson’s original movie, it is only in Scorsese’s remake that it is conflated with spiritual preoccupations and therefore rendered even more sinister. Here, Cady’s behavior evokes a psychopathic desire to rape women and girls in the name of divine justice. As Cady moves towards Leigh on the houseboat, he asks her, ‘Ready to be born again, Miz Bowden? A few moments alone with me and you’ll be speaking in tongues.’ Seeing himself as an avenging angel, Cady’s religious inspirations encourage him to violate and dispose of

²⁹² Accusations of misogyny reached fever pitch with the recent release *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), which many critics argued glamorized irresponsible financial practice and the degradation of women. See Ben Child, ‘*The Wolf of Wall Street* criticized for “glorifying psychopathic behavior,”’ *The Guardian*, December 30, 2013, accessed November 23, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/dec/30/wolf-of-wall-street-christina-mcdowell-letter-martin-scorsese>

²⁹³ Annette Wernblad, *The Passion of Martin Scorsese: A Critical Study of the Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 14.

²⁹⁴ Stoddart, “‘I Don’t Know Whether to Look at Him or Read Him’”, 198-9. See also Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

human life that does not fit his vision of a God-fearing world. By conflating evangelicalism with sexual violence, Scorsese's film reinforces a host of southern stereotypes developed around the charismatic nature of many southern faith traditions and was undoubtedly influenced by *The Night of the Hunter*, Charles Laughton's 1955 adaptation of Davis Grubb's novel of the same name.

Grubb's critics lamented his novel's 'moron-haunted, neo-romantic countryside.'²⁹⁵ His story was little more 'than an anecdotal fairy-tale,' Walter Allen argued, 'about a singularly barbarous community miles off the road of civilization.'²⁹⁶ In *Commonweal*, Jean Holzhauer argued that Grubb's book was 'populated wholly by the simple and the mad. However, faithfully such portraits may reflect reality in his setting, the bottom lands of West Virginia.'²⁹⁷

An unsettling vision of rural, Depression-era Appalachia, Laughton's *Night of the Hunter* sees 'Preacher' Harry Powell (Mitchum) stalking the landscape, marrying and then murdering women in the name of the 'religion the Almighty and me worked out betwixt us.' Committed to the belief that God hates 'perfume-smelling things; lacy things; things with curly hair,' Powell displays an irrational, fanatical disdain for female sexuality, to which he is at the same time strangely drawn. Early in the film we see him at a burlesque club, watching the dancer with a disgusted, yet fixated stare. As his expression develops into a grimace he clenches his tattooed left hand, which bears the word 'HATE,' before reaching into his pocket, and releasing his pocket knife, which tears through the fabric of his jacket, providing phallic release. 'There's too many of them,' he sighs, looking towards the sky. 'Can't kill a world.'

When Powell marries Willa Harper (Shelley Winters), he refuses to consummate the marriage, and chastises his new wife for her sexual advances whilst he was 'praying.' 'You thought, Willa, that the moment you walked in that door that I'd start to paw at you in that abominable way that men are supposed to do on their wedding night,' he goads her. Forcing her to look in the mirror, and see herself for what she truly is, 'the flesh of Eve that man since Adam has profaned,' Powell shames Willa until she looks up, as in prayer, and implores God: 'Help me get clean, so I can be what Harry wants me to be.'

²⁹⁵ Anthony West, 'Arcadia Run to Seed,' review of *The Night of the Hunter* by Davis Grubb, *New Yorker*, March 20, 1954, 120.

²⁹⁶ Walter Allen, 'New Novels,' review of *The Night of the Hunter* by Davis Grubb, *New Statesman and Nation* (UK, now *New Statesman*), July 10 1954, 51-2.

²⁹⁷ Jean Holzhauer, 'Children of the Night,' review of *The Night of the Hunter* by Davis Grubb, *Commonweal* 60, no. 5 (1954), 123.

Denied sex, Willa redirects her passion into evangelicalism, hysterically testifying at Harry's tent revivals, repenting her former 'sins' of lust and greed.

Stuck between two paradigms, both Cady and Powell seem to crave total isolation from a fallen world, whilst paradoxically feeling compelled to 'redeem' it. Both are happy to enact violence and even murder in the name of religion: 'Not that you mind the killins,' Powell prays, 'Your book is full of killins.' Many religious organizations found Powell's characterization offensive, especially his haunting renditions of the hymn 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms' and direct assertions that he is 'a man of God.'²⁹⁸ Ultimately, though, Powell is defeated by the angelic Rachel Cooper (Lillian Gish), whose own rendition of 'Leaning' will triumph over Powell's more sinister intonation and reclaim the hymn for its true purpose, inserting the refrain 'Leaning on Jesus.' Rachel's faith is pure and will be passed on to the children, enabling John (Billy Chapin) to overcome his understandable mistrust of religion.

Cape Fear offers no such alternative to Cady's religious vision and the viewer witnesses his appropriately violent death at Sam's hand. According to Strick, 'Cady has planned for 14 years to make Sam Bowden suffer acutely, but he truly believes that Bowden's suffering will end in salvation.'²⁹⁹ When Danielle asks Cady why he hates her father, Cady responds, 'I don't hate him at all. Oh no, I pray for him. I'm here to help him...Every man has to go through hell to reach his paradise.' Like The Misfit in Flannery O'Connor's short story 'A Good Man is Hard to Find,' Cady will 'shoot [Sam] every minute of [his] life,' until he reaches his salvation, his moment of grace.³⁰⁰ 'Remember this,' Cady warns Sam in Strick's first draft of the script:

I'm the best thing that ever happened to you. I bring meaning to your spiritless life. What's the New South, anyway? It's the Old South with air conditioning instead of religion. Well you need a baptism! Not that polite sprinkling you Episcopalian-types call a baptism. I'm talking total immersion! Or you'll never get to heaven, counselor.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ According to George A. Heimrich of the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, 'the association of Preacher with [popular hymns] will be offensive to millions of Protestants, as these hymns have a deep spiritual significance.' Letter to Paul Gregory (Producer), August 23 1954, quoted in Jeffrey Couchman, *The Night of the Hunter: A Biography of a Film* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 72.

²⁹⁹ Strick, Production Notes, *Cape Fear* Press Kit, November 1991, box 29, folder 1, Robert De Niro Papers.

³⁰⁰ Flannery O'Connor, 'A Good Man is Hard to Find,' *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1971), 133.

³⁰¹ Strick, original screenplay, 2 November 1989, p. 64.

Cady's embodiment of an 'Old South' is explicit here, as he chastises the Bowdens for neglecting their spiritual obligations and for their embrace of a consumerist 'New' South. Cady's presence is designed to remind them of this religious heritage, just as the crude roadside sign they pass on route to the Cape Fear River asks 'WHERE WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?' Yet, like Cady's message, this sign goes unnoticed by the Bowdens, as they speed towards their escape: their houseboat. However, Cady has penetrated their ranks; attached to the underneath of the car, he rides with them to the river, where he will make his final attempt to baptize them.

The grotesque lengths to which Cady is prepared to go reflects his disturbed religiosity, a faith that permeates Scorsese's southern landscape, perpetuating O'Connor's description of the South as 'Christ-haunted.'³⁰² Thus Cady is both cause and effect; fashioned by his rural pentecostal upbringing, but determined to deliver that message to a broader southern audience. Cady's almost supernatural ubiquity thus contributes to *Cape Fear*'s regional aesthetic, echoing tropes of the southern gothic to render Cady 'a monster of the South.'

'Religious enthusiasm is accepted as one of the South's more grotesque features,' O'Connor once wrote and so, as screenwriter Wesley Strick noted, the 'evangelical fervor' with which Cady quotes from the Bible consistently terrifies the secular Bowdens.³⁰³ Long before Cady actually descends into glossolalia at the end of the film, his religious rhetoric has proven indecipherable to the Bowdens. The incarnation of the white South's unfettered, politically powerful, and culturally influential Evangelicalism, Cady invokes fear because his attempts to communicate prove indecipherable to the secular Bowdens. They, and by extension the audience, view him as a grotesque, overblown personification of some of the South's most distinctive tropes, terrifyingly removed from American norms and values.

'[A] fine hamlet of the New South,' according to Strick, New Essex serves as a reminder of the New South's promise, with large family homes and contemporary facilities.³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Scorsese is keen to look behind this façade, and assess the real tensions and anxieties that manifest in this quintessentially American small town. Beyond its limits, he suggests, an older South continues, where people exist as they have done for decades, even centuries, without the technological and cultural advances that are taken for granted in New Essex.

³⁰² O'Connor, 'Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction,' 44.

³⁰³ O'Connor, 'The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South,' *Mystery & Manners*, 204; Strick, Production Notes, *Cape Fear* Press Kit.

³⁰⁴ Strick, Original Screenplay, 2 November 1989, box 22, folder 4, 4.

This fear of the unknown, of the repressed identity that lies beyond the city limits is a cinematic trope as old as Hollywood itself, constantly adapting to reflect the social issues of the day. As Wegner notes, in redeveloping an older film, Scorsese's film 'creates a narrative space in which *current* anxieties and contradictions...can become, to use Fredric Jameson's phrase, *figurable* [my emphasis].'³⁰⁵ Whilst the previous Bowdens' anxieties offered an interesting response to the civil rights gains of the 1950s and 1960s, Scorsese's Bowdens see something different, but not completely removed, in the new Cady. His ability to manipulate divisions already at work within the family shows the extent to which suburban family existence has changed since 1962.

Like their predecessors, Scorsese's Bowdens succeed in killing the Cady that haunts them but, unable or unwilling to recognize their own prejudices and anxieties, they suppress rather than acknowledge the reasons they fear him in the first place. Throughout the film, daughter Danielle is constantly told 'don't look,' or 'go to your room' by her parents. They encourage her to avoid that which scares her, a process confirmed at both the beginning and the end of the film in Danielle's monologues. As the film begins, she reminisces about her idyllic childhood, reflecting; 'the only thing to fear on those enchanted summer nights was that the magic would end and real life would come crashing in.' As soon as this line is delivered, the music shifts to the menacing horns of Bernstein's score that will so often accompany Cady's appearance. The camera shifts immediately to our first shot of Cady and it is clear that he represents 'real life,' about to 'come crashing in.' However, at the film's end, Danielle confirms that the family 'never spoke about what happened [with Cady], at least not to each other. Fear, I suppose, that to remember his name and what he did would mean letting him in to our dreams.' '[I]f you hang onto the past you die a little every day,' she concludes. Amnesia allows characters to 'live.'

Cady's religious devotion, constructed in lewd, unrestrained terms, has presented the Bowdens with existential questions that they choose to ignore, allowing Scorsese to leave the lingering sense that their issues - individually, as a family, and even as a nation - have not been fully confronted, let alone resolved. A morally compromised, yet in many ways archetypal American family, the Bowdens are tormented by the inheritance of their ancestors' repressions.

Refusing to acknowledge their problems, the Bowdens exist in a state of denial. That a southern religious zealot should act as agent and focus for their anxieties betrays the film's links to the social and political milieu of the 1980s and 1990s. For Strick, the

³⁰⁵ Wegner, 'A Fine Tradition,' 87.

presentation of Cady's 'Pentecostalism' reflected years of liberal outcry about the dominant political position evangelical Christians were enjoying, having entered the public consciousness in the late-1970s. Highly visible and militant, the Religious Right was a politically active movement as well as a religious one. Historian George Marsden's shorthand - that a fundamentalist (or 'fundamentalistic evangelical') is 'an evangelical who is angry about something' - was later adopted by Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell, and reflects the political and cultural agenda of the fundamentalist movement, as opposed to broader, more culturally liberal evangelical groups.³⁰⁶ Regardless of these qualifications, Marsden recognizes, 'the news in the decades since the 1960s is that a wide variety of evangelical traditions that earlier would have been thought of as culturally marginal...have been mobilized into a significant mainstream national political force' with a 'conspicuously southern leadership best exemplified by Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and James Robison.'³⁰⁷

Following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, issues that had been previously dwarfed by campaigns to defend racial segregation were now at the forefront of conservative Christian agendas. The undoubtedly southern accent of this shift only helped to further embed existing, intersecting stereotypes of southern religiosity and intolerance. Southern white prejudice, it seemed, extended beyond African Americans, as the Religious Right publicly defended their moral crusade in the name of the nuclear 'American family,' and proved strong opponents to campaigns for gay rights, abortion, and a host of other issues that apparently compromised 'family values.' Transplanted southerners who had left the region both before and after World War II added to this sense of a southern-led movement, and contributed to evangelical success across the Midwest and southern California.³⁰⁸

It is likely that Strick had these conservative religious groups in mind when he spoke of how Cady's Pentecostalism rendered him 'the most kind of primitive [sic] and to me, as a New York Jew, the most terrifying.'³⁰⁹ To Strick, rural southern evangelicals represented a unique threat to his personal liberty; they symbolized excessive intolerance, racism and ignorance. In making such a statement, Strick ensured there was no ambiguity over Cady's southern Pentecostalism; in essence, it is the point of the film. Here, 'pentecostal' does not simply indicate denominational preference, but suggests zealous

³⁰⁶ Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture*, 235.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 236-237.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 237-239; Mark Shibley, 'The Southernization of American Religion: Testing a Hypothesis,' *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), pp. 159-174.

³⁰⁹ Strick, Interview, 'The Making of the 1991 *Cape Fear*.'

fanaticism. As Thomas Long has argued, “Evangelism”, a broader term, is for many people a frankly ‘nose wrinkling word, a term they hold in approximately the same regard as “professional wrestling.” Both are considered to be activities that draw large uncritical crowds, involve a measure of sham, work on irrational emotions and could end up hurting somebody.’³¹⁰ Indeed, Long suggests that the suffix ‘ism’ probably produced some of these image problems, as ‘ism words [often] refer to social movements and have about them the aroma of ideological strife and party politics:’ as in sectarianism, elitism, or communism. ‘Moreover,’ Long continues, ““isms” imply “ists”, cells of true believers who devotedly practice the ism, such as anarchists, Maoists, terrorists, or fundamentalists.’³¹¹ It is not surprising then, Long concludes, that even ‘many church people come to think of evangelism as a kind of partisan activity practiced only by a cadre of special zealots called evangelists.’³¹²

In an early draft of his screenplay, Strick describes Cady’s passionate verbal deliveries as ‘Jimmy Swaggart meets Huey Long in hell,’ a description that fuses the disgraced pentecostal evangelist with a charismatic, populist politician.³¹³ According to this characterization, there is little distinction between how a southern preacher might deliver his sermon and the overt revanchism of some of the white South’s most notorious politicians. This similarity, as least as it is represented in popular culture, reflects a more symbolic manifestation of the constructed ‘southern demagogue,’ whose origins in racial politics have become conflated with the urgency and passion of the fundamentalist preacher, forming a deeply gendered and class-based understanding of how white southerners have used rhetoric to influence public life in the region.

Over time, the word ‘demagogue,’ which in Ancient Greece and Rome simply referred to any ‘leader of the people,’ has come to mean a class agitator: someone who seeks power and support through appeals to people’s basest prejudices rather than through rational and controlled argument. According to *Safire’s Political Dictionary*, ‘demagogue’ has proven to be ‘one of the enduring, slashing attack words of politics, in use since the American republic began.’³¹⁴ Accusations of demagoguery have not been limited to the South, but the region’s rural and economic conditions following the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the later struggles over desegregation provided fertile

³¹⁰ Thomas G. Long, ‘Preaching About Evangelism – Faith Finding its Voice,’ in Long & Neely Dixon McCarter (eds.), *Preaching In and Out of Season* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 77.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 77-8.

³¹² *Ibid*, 78.

³¹³ Strick, Original Screenplay, 2 November 1989, box 22, folder 4, 109.

³¹⁴ William Safire, *Safire’s Political Dictionary* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 174

ground for some of the nation's most inflammatory populists, including Ben Tillman, Theodore G. Bilbo, and George Wallace. The power of the southern racial demagogue archetype has ensured that even southern populists who did not seek to antagonize racial tensions, most notably Huey Long himself, have been absorbed into a characterization that continues to contribute to the constructions of southern race, gender, class and religiosity.

Dubbed 'the Messiah of the rednecks' by renowned historian Arthur Schlesinger, Long's appeal amongst the lower classes has ensured his longevity as 'the poster child for an especially insidious brand of demagoguery,' as noted by J. Michael Hogan and Glen Williams.³¹⁵ Serving as governor and then senator for Louisiana in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Long divided political opinion. He claimed that his wealth-distribution policies came directly from God and regularly read Biblical passages aloud. Despite never descending into the incendiary racial rhetoric of many of his contemporaries, Long and his supporters have been chastised and even ridiculed by historians and rhetoricians, terms such as 'peasants,' 'peanut-fed people' and 'hillbillies' all indicative of a class-based rather than ideological disdain for Long's populism.³¹⁶

Cady's characterization reflects this cultural bias. Though Cady is a criminal, the Bowdens judge him long before they know his history. They are repelled by his garish clothes, crude tattoos and his general demeanor, all of which they consider vulgar. Long was famous for adopting styles and behaviors considered entirely inappropriate in politics, from wearing pajamas in diplomatic meetings, to his central role in a 1931 national debate over cornpone and potlikker.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "The Messiah of the Rednecks," in Hugh Davis Graham (ed.) *Huey Long*, ed (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 146 & J. Michael Hogan & Glen Williams, 'The Rusticity and Religiosity of Huey P. Long,' *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7.2 (2004), 151.

³¹⁶ Elton Abernathy, 'Huey Long: Oratorical "Wealth Sharing,"' *The Southern Speech Journal* 21 (1955), 102 & Schlesinger, "Messiah of the Rednecks", 48. For a more nuanced account of Long's career, see Anthony J. Badger, 'Huey Long and the New Deal,' in Stephen W. Baskerville & Ralph Willett (eds.) *Nothing Else to Fear: New Perspectives on America in the Thirties* (Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 65-103.

³¹⁷ Liquid that remains in the pot after boiling greens or other vegetables, potlikker was a staple meal amongst impoverished rural southerners during the Great Depression. When Huey Long attributed the sale of highway bonds to a meal of cornbread and potlikker he had served to a prominent investor, Julian Harris of the Atlanta *Constitution* questioned Long's eating habits. While Long dunked his cornbread in the potlikker, Harris preferred to crumble the bread into the broth. Presidential candidate and New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt was also what Garry Boulard calls 'a confirmed crumbler,' prompting Long to stage a very public demonstration of the merits of 'dunking' at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. In less than a month, the *Constitution* received over six hundred letters on the subject, including one from an eighty-five year old Confederate veteran who suggested that the merits of dunking or crumbling were surely relative to the number of teeth the eater possessed. In 1935, Long engaged in a

Like the politician, Cady is acutely self-aware. He takes the very insults he knows will be thrown at him – white trash, hillbilly, cracker – and actually amplifies those aspects of his appearance and behavior. When the Bowdens first encounter Cady in the cinema he is loud and obnoxious, actively courting their revulsion without revealing his actual identity. In an early draft of the script, Cady describes his prison sentence amongst the ‘rednecks.’ ‘Comic books and cornpone music all day,’ he remembers. ‘And I don’t wanna say what at night.’³¹⁸

This early version of the script is more explicit in its negative characterization of Cady, as he comments to Sam about his reasons for settling in New Essex: ‘Boy, the South...Always loved the pace. Slow, but anything can happen. Confederate folk invented supermarkets, Coca-Cola, lynchings...’³¹⁹ Cady’s apparent pride in his region’s simultaneous histories of racial violence and consumer innovation was seemingly considered too overt for the final script, as was Danielle’s designation of Cady as a ‘revolting redneck’ after he disturbs them in the cinema with his raucous laughter. Judging Cady by his appearance and behavior, Danielle imagines what she would have said, if she were less polite: ‘I wanted to say, “Even if it was that funny, *you* wouldn’t get it.”’³²⁰ The family’s understanding of the word ‘redneck’ is clarified moments later when Danielle and Sam belt out Johnny Russell’s 1973 country hit ‘Rednecks, White Socks and Blue Ribbon Beer.’³²¹ It is not clear whether Strick decided to remove these passages himself, or whether he faced pressure from other people working on the film, but there is a consistent pattern of Strick’s more overt characterizations disappearing as the script developed.

The Cady evident in the final screenplay is far too self-aware to associate himself with racial violence of any kind. Yet, despite his intelligence Cady’s conversation remains colloquial and at times ungrammatical, echoing that of Huey Long. Just as historians have argued Long’s public persona was surely cultivated, Cady shows that he can adopt alternate personas if and when it aids his mission. Ben Tillman, Governor and later

fifteen-hour filibuster while opposing FDR’s bill designed to weaken Senate involvement in appointing National Recovery Association Leadership. Long’s recipe for potlikker formed part of this marathon filibuster. See Garry Boulard, *Huey Long: His Life in Photos, Drawings, and Cartoons* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), 42; John T. Edge, ‘The State of the Broth,’ *Oxford American*, Iss. 84 (Spring 2014): <http://www.oxfordamerican.org/magazine/item/143-the-state-of-the-broth>, accessed December 10, 2016.

³¹⁸ Wesley Strick, ‘Original screenplay,’ 2 November 1989, Box folder 22.4, Robert De Niro Papers, 8.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 8-9.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 9.

Senator for South Carolina at the turn of the twentieth century, admitted that he ‘acted the demagogue at times’ out of ‘sheer necessity.’ ‘I was opposed so unscrupulously,’ Tillman continued, ‘I had to defend myself and fight the devil with fire.’³²² Similarly, there is no reason to believe Cady’s ‘natural,’ criminal white-trash self is any less consciously constructed than the other roles he fulfills whilst terrorizing the Bowdens. Indeed, as Kirsten Thompson recognizes:

Cady is a master impersonator of class, race, and gender, and as part of his dramaturgy of terror, he performs multiple roles: innocent citizen, accident victim, pot-smoking drama teacher, nuclear power protestor, Danny’s father, sympathetic guidance counselor, and in literal drag, Graciella, the Bowdens’ maid.³²³

Cady thus furthers his own cause by manipulating existing societal roles.

By drawing attention to, rather than attempting to hide his rural roots, Cady is able to take pride in the progress he believes he has made, both physically and intellectually. When he rapes and tortures Lori, he is not only attempting to punish Sam, but to showcase his ‘superiority’ over a woman who has patronized and mocked him.³²⁴ Indeed, rather than resent the existence of the term ‘white trash,’ Cady actually uses it to abuse others. In an attempt to validate his newly acquired education and money, Cady demeans those who rape him in prison as ‘hairy hillbillies:’ an image that Wegner argues ‘brings to mind the infamous rape scene in John Boorman’s *Deliverance* and one of the classic American fantasies about the menace of the white rural South. But here, Cady identifies himself with the earlier film’s urban victims, rather than with its mountain-men perpetrators.’³²⁵

Cady also takes extra pleasure in murdering Kersek, who has previously referred to him as a ‘white trash piece of shit’ and a ‘six-foot Palmetto bug:’ a species of cockroach common in the southeastern United States. When Cady murders Kersek, he relishes in returning the insult; standing over his latest victim he asks, ‘How do you like that, you white trash piece of shit?’ At this point Cady is still disguised as the Bowdens’ Hispanic maid Graciella (Zully Montero), adding a further complexity to the racial and class-based significance of this epithet. If Cady’s threat is mostly communicated through religious

³²² Benjamin Tillman, quoted in Waldo W. Braden, *The Oral Tradition in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 90.

³²³ Kirsten Thompson, ‘Cape Fear and Trembling,’ 139.

³²⁴ ‘Debauchery, it’s a three syllable word,’ Lori patronizes Cady in the bar. ‘You making fun of me? Ok, no problem,’ he responds. ‘I’m drinking a Sea Breeze. I hope you can afford them,’ she says later. Diane Taylor had also demeaned Cady in the 1962 film, calling him ‘an animal – coarse, rough, barbaric... You’re rock bottom... it’s a great comfort to a girl to know she can’t possibly sink any lower.’

³²⁵ Wegner, ‘A Fine Tradition,’ 107.

and class distinctions, Kirsten Thompson argues that his impersonation of the maid suggests that figuratively it is also Graciella who ‘rises up and tries to slaughter her class oppressors.’³²⁶

Whereas the original film was cast in purely black and white racial terms, the addition of Graciella to the story, and indeed the fact that Cady can literally become her and dispose of her, helps reflect the evolving demographics of the modern South. Between 1970 and 2010, African Americans maintained a remarkably stable percentage of the southern population, between 19-20 percent. However, while the southern Hispanic community grew from 7 percent to 17.6 percent in the same period, white populations declined from 79.3 percent to 58.3 percent.³²⁷ Thus, although the anxieties evident in the later *Cape Fear* reflect an increasingly complex response to the political and social climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s, they perhaps reflect a ‘new’ source of white racial anxiety. Cady never expresses any racial prejudice, but the suggestion is always there because the film encourages viewers to connect him to other white southern archetypes whose racial intolerance has become legendary. Through Cady’s construction, Scorsese is able to communicate a white southerner whose intersecting poverty, religiosity and criminality can suggest traditional black/white southern racial anxieties in a film that contains no African American characters.

In many ways, Cady’s manipulation of the law in the later *Cape Fear* suggests that many ‘ordinary,’ white middle-class Americans in the late 1980s and early 1990s were as concerned about the political rise of evangelicals as their predecessors had been about the dismantling of racial segregation. Acknowledging the 1960s as a period of immense cultural change, Scorsese’s *Cape Fear*, like so many other cultural products, divides Americans over their interpretation of, and commitment to, the legacy of the 1960s. Despite being overtly repackaged and manipulated by capitalism, as Thomas Frank has argued, the popular understanding of ‘the sixties’ is ‘as the decade of the big change, the birthplace of our own culture, the homeland of hip, an era of which the tastes and discoveries and passions, however obscure their origins, have somehow determined the world in which we are condemned to live.’³²⁸ For many conservatives, however, the sixties, counterculture, and the New Left are often interchangeably responsible for the

³²⁶ Kirsten Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread*, 49.

³²⁷ See M. V. Hood III, Quentin Kidd & Irwin L. Morris, *The Rational Southerner: Black Mobilization, Republican Growth, and the Partisan Transformation of the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 182, Table 9.1, based on Decennial U. S. Census Data.

³²⁸ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1.

decline of traditional ‘American identity.’

Engaged in an intertextual dialogue with Thompson’s original film, Scorsese’s *Cape Fear* uses these debates over the legacy of the 1960s to explore social, racial, gender, and religious change in the United States. The film’s references to Henry Miller contribute to this dialogue. Banned until the 1960s, the original Cady could not have gifted the book to a child, or anyone for that matter. However, because of anti-censorship hearings, the apparently corrupting novels are now freely available. Though Sam and Leigh would undoubtedly have welcomed such decisions, the consequences of the liberalizing forces of the 1960s seemingly make it harder for them to protect their daughter. In the film’s conservative outlook, the legacy of the 1960s has come back to haunt the Bowdens, despite their personal liberalism.

This difference of opinion when remembering – or imagining – the 1960s is crucial to the way the nation understands its liberal/conservative divide, a gulf that was consistently reinforced by both sides through the 1960s and the subsequent culture wars. Because Republicans and Democrats have taken such consistently opposing stances since the 1960s, scholars and analysts often argue that there is no middle ground. We know “what goes with what” in American politics, as Carsey and Layman have pointed out.³²⁹ ‘For example,’ they continue, ‘opposition to tax increases and opposition to abortion go together as “conservative” positions in our current politics because the Republican Party put them together. Of course, the Democratic Party has done so for the opposite sides of these issues as well.’³³⁰ Broader cultural divisions are easily built upon these foundations, especially given the moral, or highly emotive, charge with which so many issues are discussed and presented to the electorate. Carsey and Layman provide the example of abortion, which they argue is ‘a fairly complex issue about which many people have rather ambivalent feelings.’ However, the fact that it ‘is nearly always presented as a pro-life versus pro-choice dichotomy’ ensures ‘overheated rhetoric,’ often with ‘moral and religious underpinnings.’³³¹

In his book *The Great Divide*, Layman attempts to create what Gregory L. Schneider summarized as ‘a model to understand how cultural issues, like abortion,

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ See Thomas Carsey & Geoffrey Layman, ‘How Our Partisan Loyalties are Driving Polarization,’ *Washington Post*, January 27, 2014, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/27/how-our-partisan-loyalties-are-driving-polarization/>

³³¹ Ibid, see also Bill Scher, ‘How the Republicans Lost the Culture War,’ *Politico*, October 12 2014: http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/how-republicans-lost-the-culture-war-111822_Page2.html#.VIbSnKSsWnM, accessed December 9 2014.

develop from a traditionalist-modernist religious cleavage.’³³² Layman recognizes ‘strategic politicians’ rather than grassroots demands have resulted in the reorientation of the two major American political parties and provides evidence that media coverage of divisive issues such as abortion increased as the result of political rhetoric rather than grassroots activism. Examining public opinion surveys and newspaper coverage in publications such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, Layman argues that these issues became more rather than less salient as time passed. Media coverage of divisive issues first raised in the 1960s and 1970s actually increased most rapidly through the 1980s and 1990s.³³³ This amplified sense of polarization helps to explain the very clear distinctions at the beginning of Scorsese’s *Cape Fear*. The Bowdens appear secular, liberal, educated. We can quite easily assume their political leanings, even before they are pitted against a rural, religious fanatic. Like the white southerners who murder the counterculture bikers at the end of *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), Cady is a grotesque manifestation of the conservative backlash against supposedly decadent, irresponsible liberalism, constantly reminding the Bowdens that their smug complicity with contemporary consumerism contributes to an illusion of social change that has left millions of Americans in the cold. ‘You think you’re better than me,’ Cady observes, before forcing them to face the hypocrisy he sees in their lifestyle.

The film’s burlesque, overblown presentation of an exceptional South often renders Cady’s professed religious concerns absurd, just as *Night of the Hunter* works to discredit its tattooed, demonic ‘preacher.’ The overt influence of this film on Scorsese’s *Cape Fear* provides an interesting insight into the particularly southern and religious aspects of the project. Extrapolating his own concerns about the rise of the Religious Right, screenwriter Wesley Strick presented a contemporary indictment of evangelical Christians within a timeless southern landscape scarred by racial terrorism and religious extremism: a land of demagogues and vigilantism.

Despite the considerable research undertaken, the film offers little nuance in its presentation of Pentecostalism, or Appalachia. Indeed, both of these things, irreparably linked through the narrative, exist entirely within Cady: their wider geographical and cultural significance denied. Pentecostalism serves as an indicator of a world the film’s producers do not wish to understand, and yet it offers visual and rhetorical tropes that they can use to indicate the rural horrors of unknown America. Thus, the film manages

³³² Gregory L. Schneider, review of Geoffrey Layman, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (June 2002), 909.

³³³ Layman, *The Great Divide*, 33.

to discredit Pentecostalism without ever engaging in a theological or even political debate.

Chapter 3: Hollywood's southern strategy: portraying white Christianity in civil rights melodramas.

In June 1996, President Bill Clinton stood before a burned African Methodist Episcopal church in rural South Carolina to announce a federal investigation into what the *Washington Post* referred to as 'a string of suspicious fires at predominantly black churches' across the South.³³⁴ Described as 'an epidemic of terror' by Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Deval L. Patrick, this wave of destruction brought back painful memories of the civil rights era, when African American churches were frequently targeted by white supremacists.³³⁵ 'They're not burning down black barbeque joints [or] pool halls,' Randolph Scott-McLaughlin of the Center for Constitutional Rights observed, '[t]hey're burning down black churches. It's like they're burning a cross in my front yard. They're burning down symbols of resistance and community and hope and refuge.'³³⁶

In the same month, Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition met with black pastors in Atlanta, offering 'ready hands to fight this senseless violence.' Pledging to raise a special fund of up to \$1 million for the rebuilding of damaged churches, Reed acknowledged that his predominantly white evangelical following had seldom committed to bridging racial divides, but argued that 'we come today bearing the burden of that history with broken hearts [and] a repentant spirit.'³³⁷ Not all were convinced by Reed's contrition. Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), boycotted the meeting along with several other black leaders, arguing that Reed's outreach was little more than a cynical effort to boost the Christian Coalition's conservative agenda amongst black Christians. It was this very agenda, Lowery contended, that was responsible for the rise in racial violence.³³⁸

Despite initial attempts to link the crimes with known white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, federal investigators later concluded that much of the recent vandalism was random, instigated by racist individuals who were unlikely to be associated with an organized group. The images of burning churches were admittedly

³³⁴ Michael A. Fletcher, 'U.S. Investigates Suspicious Fires at Southern Black Churches,' *Washington Post*, February 8, 1996, p. A03.

³³⁵ Deval L. Patrick, quoted in Kevin Sack, 'Links Sought in an "Epidemic of terror",' *New York Times*, May 21st 1996, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/21/us/links-sought-in-an-epidemic-of-terror.html>

³³⁶ Randolph Scott-McLaughlin, quoted Ibid.

³³⁷ Ralph Reed quoted in Michael A. Fletcher, 'Christian Coalition Plans to Cooperate with Black Churches to Squelch Fires,' *Washington Post*, June 19, 1996, p. A06.

³³⁸ Joseph Lowery quoted Ibid.

‘frightening,’ the Associated Press reported in July 1996, but there was ‘little hard evidence’ to suggest that ‘the seventy-three black church fires recorded since 1995 can be blamed on a conspiracy or a general climate of racial hatred.’³³⁹ Yet, as historian Jim Campbell wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, ‘the absence of any organized conspiracy may make the phenomenon of church burning more, rather than less disturbing.’ It is ‘[f]ar easier to abide the idea of a tight-knit group of racist fanatics than to accept the alternative that we live in a time when a substantial number of [unconnected] individuals...regard burning black churches as a plausible act,’ Campbell argued.³⁴⁰ ‘These attacks are not happening in a vacuum,’ journalist Bob Herbert contended. ‘They are the work of twisted individuals who flourish in an atmosphere that is inflamed, in [Congressman John Conyer’s] words, by “the rhetoric of blame and hate.”’³⁴¹

As consecutive Republican presidential candidates failed to secure more than 14 percent of the African American vote in the 1980s and early 1990s, concerns grew about a deepening racial divide and America’s failure to live up to the promises of the 1960s.³⁴² ‘After all the high hopes and genuine progress of the past 30 years, people on both sides of the color line feel they’ve reached an impasse,’ Mark Whitaker reported for *Newsweek* in 1991. Many Americans, he concluded, believe ‘things are getting worse.’³⁴³ Whitaker cited a *Newsweek* poll that showed that between 1989 and 1991 alone, the number of whites who felt blacks were better off than they were five years ago had fallen from 49 percent to 38 percent; amongst African Americans asked the same question numbers had dwindled from 33 percent to just 21 percent.³⁴⁴

³³⁹ Fred Bayles, ‘Burning Churches,’ *The Free-Lance Star* (Fredericksburg, VA), July 5, 1996, p. A4. For a retrospective analysis of the rise of hate groups in the 1990s, see Carol M. Swain, *The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenge to Integration* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 75-6.

³⁴⁰ Jim Campbell, ‘America’s Long History of Black Churches Burning,’ *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1996: http://articles.latimes.com/1996-06-16/opinion/op-15599_1_separate-black-churches

³⁴¹ Bob Herbert, ‘In America; A Church Destroyed by Hate,’ *New York Times*, May 24th 1996, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/24/opinion/in-america-a-church-destroyed-by-hate.html>

³⁴² According to consecutive exit surveys by CBS News and the *New York Times*, incumbent Democratic President Jimmy Carter received 83 percent of the African American vote in 1980, Reagan just 14 percent. In 1984, Walter Mondale received 91 percent of the black vote, Reagan just 9 percent. In 1988, Michael Dukakis received 89 percent, Bush 11. Data stored by the Roper Center Public Opinion Archives: Cornell University, accessed February 23, 2016, <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/how-groups-voted-1980/>; <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/how-groups-voted-1984/>; <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/how-groups-voted-1988/>

³⁴³ Mark Whitaker, ‘A Crisis of Shattered Dreams,’ *Newsweek*, May 6, 1991, Accessed May 3, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/crisis-shattered-dreams-203930>

³⁴⁴ *Newsweek* Poll of April 23-25, 1991, quoted *ibid.*

Unsurprisingly, journalists described a tangible rise in racial tensions, best exemplified by debates surrounding campaign videos promoting George H. W. Bush's 1988 presidential campaign, which attacked Democratic opponent Michael Dukakis' record on crime – particularly a prison furlough program in place while Dukakis was Governor of Massachusetts. Dukakis had not introduced the program, rather his Republican predecessor Francis Sargent had. Nevertheless, a Bush campaign advertisement featured the mugshot of Willie Horton, a black convicted murderer who had committed rape and assault after being furloughed during Dukakis's governorship. Although the publicity was not paid for by the Bush campaign, but by an 'independent expenditure' group 'Americans for Bush,' it was credited with drastically improving Bush's polling scores. Many critics argued that it had racial connotations, a charge that is still leveled today. Tim Newburn and Trevor Jones have argued that 'Bush effectively turned the name "Willie Horton" into a key condensation symbol in the election; standing in for all fears about crime and, in particular, for white fears of black crime.'³⁴⁵

'[T]he marker for ostensible deterioration in race relations,' according to Josephine Metcalf and Carina Spaulding, was the internationally publicized Rodney King beating by members of the Los Angeles Police Department in 1991. When King's assailants were acquitted the following year, Los Angeles erupted into six days of rioting, providing 'palpable evidence of racialized police brutality, media stereotyping of African Americans, and unsanctioned racial segregation.'³⁴⁶ Fifty-five people were killed during the unrest, and over 2000 injured. Amidst this heightened racial atmosphere, 1990s audiences saw more television and cinema depictions of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s than viewers in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s combined. '[C]onstantly used as a reference point for judging the state of contemporary race relations and for defining what constituted racial progress,' Jennifer Fuller writes, '[c]ivil rights drama became an arena to explore these issues and to articulate competing political ideologies.'³⁴⁷ The perceived 'Southernization' of America through the culture wars of the late twentieth-century pitted an Arkansan-born liberal president against an emboldened conservative political and religious coalition with a distinctly southern drawl. It also encouraged many Americans to reconsider the legacy of the civil rights

³⁴⁵ Tim Newburn & Trevor Jones, 'Symbolic Politics and Penal Populism: The Long Shadow of Willie Horton,' *Crime Media Culture*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2005), 76.

³⁴⁶ Josephine Metcalf & Carina Spaulding (eds.), 'Introduction: "Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire,"' *African American Culture and Society After Rodney King: Provocations and Protests, Progression and Post-Racialism* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 1-2.

³⁴⁷ Fuller, 'Debating the Present through the Past,' 167.

movement, an era that Hollywood film – fascinated by the seemingly timeless divisions of southern whiteness - was concurrently reshaping.

By 1980, the South was the U.S.'s largest electoral region and Republican gains there proved essential to the 1994 Republican takeover of the House of Representatives headed by Georgia Congressman Newt Gingrich. All but one of the new Congressional leaders appointed during the 'Republican Revolution' were Southern Baptists, including Strom Thurmond (South Carolina), Trent Lott (Mississippi), and Gingrich himself. By 1997, Oran P. Smith argued that '[t]he Republican party and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) are not only in firm alliance, they are sometimes indistinguishable from each other.'³⁴⁸ The fact that President Clinton was himself a Southern Baptist only seemed to rile his conservative opponents more. Andrew Manis argues that for many members of the SBC, Clinton's stance on many moral issues was deeply alarming. 'His co-religionists believed that as a Southern Baptist he should have known better...Hence, eight years of a white southerner and moderate Southern Baptist in the White House, especially the two years during which the nation was embroiled in the Lewinsky scandal and the impeachment process, saw perhaps the most vigorous prosecution of the culture war since its inception.'³⁴⁹

The nation's largest Protestant denomination, SBC issued a 'Resolution on Racial Reconciliation' on the 150th anniversary of its formation in June 1995. Acknowledging that the SBC had broken away from northern Baptists as a result of the former's proslavery convictions, the Resolution asked African Americans for forgiveness and vowed the Convention's commitment to the eradication of racism 'in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry.'³⁵⁰

Just months earlier, white and black pentecostals came together to form the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA). Following the announcement of a 'Racial Reconciliation Manifesto,' Donald Evans, a white pastor from Florida, approached the platform and tearfully explained that he had been called by God to wash the feet of African American bishop Ithiel Clemmons. In what became known as

³⁴⁸ Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York University Press, 1997), 2. With the exception of Tom Daschle and Richard Arme, Smith continues, 'our nation's leaders are entirely Southern Baptist...This is particularly noteworthy considering few Southern Baptists have ever held any of these positions at any other point in our nation's history, much less simultaneously.'

³⁴⁹ Manis, *Southern Civil Religions*, 171-2

³⁵⁰ Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of The Southern Baptist Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, 1995, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention>

the ‘Memphis Miracle,’ Evans proceeded to wash Clemmons’ feet while begging for forgiveness for the racial sins of white pentecostals.³⁵¹

Both attempts at reconciliation were met with ridicule in the liberal media, as journalists and critics derided the denominations’ incredibly delayed admission that slavery was wrong and that racial divides remained a barrier in religious worship and many other aspects of American life. ‘Forgive me for being underwhelmed by this astonishingly belated act of contrition,’ Jack E. White wrote of the SBC’s actions, but ‘I would have been more impressed if the revelation had come a generation ago, when prominent Southern Baptists like George Wallace were standing in the schoolhouse door and never-miss-a-Sunday Ku Klux Klansmen were murdering fellow Christians who believed in civil rights.’³⁵² Like Ralph Reed’s attempt to reach out to black congregations whose churches had been torched, SBC’s tardy change of policy was considered little more than a cynical attempt to raise African American attendance at affiliated churches, White suggested, echoing distinguished black scholars such as John Hope Franklin and C. Eric Lincoln.³⁵³ Despite their gesture, SBC had yet to ‘lay out a real plan in which you say we are going to do certain, specific things to demonstrate our good faith and rectify our relationship with blacks,’ Franklin argued.³⁵⁴

Acknowledging the late 1980s and early 1990s as a period of intense racial and religious tension, this chapter and the next argue that religious language and iconography proved essential to late twentieth-century Hollywood’s attempts to construct and communicate the legacy of the civil rights movement. Looking first at white and then black Christianity, the chapters will focus on how representations of the legacy of the civil rights movement - including *A Time to Kill* (Joel Schumacher, 1996), *Ghosts of Mississippi* (Rob Reiner, 1996), and the earlier but hugely controversial *Mississippi Burning* (Alan Parker, 1988) - fashioned a simplistic binary of good and evil, reinforced by Hollywood’s consistent conflation of southern white religiosity with reactionary, even racist politics. This chapter argues that the perceived religious backwardness of many segregationists supports Hollywood’s presentation of the South as an irrational region, where a zealous religiosity and rabid racism clouds all judgment.

³⁵¹ See Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 186.

³⁵² Jack E. White, ‘Forgive Us Our Sins,’ *Time*, Vol. 146, Iss. 1, July 3rd 1995, p. 29.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ John Hope Franklin, quoted *ibid.*

Bolstered by their electoral success in 1994, many Republicans displayed considerable hostility towards the left-liberal elite, articulating attitudes that columnist Fred Barnes argued had been forged in the 1960s. ‘Team Gingrich’ was ‘the flip side of the ‘60s generation’ personified by Bill and Hillary Clinton, Barnes observed.³⁵⁵ While liberals echoed Wini Breines’s assertion that ‘[m]ost of the democratic and hopeful elements in American society even today have roots in the sixties,’ George Rising notes the ‘fiery metaphors’ that ‘stoked the hellish, apocalyptic vision of the sixties for recent conservatives, especially the religious right.’³⁵⁶ From “‘criminal, Black Power rioters’” burning inner-city ghettos,’ to “‘spoiled, ungrateful” college students burning college buildings,’ the contested memory of the 1960s was perhaps most famously examined in the highest-grossing film of 1994, *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis).³⁵⁷

Lauren Berlant writes that Gingrich’s *Contract with America* articulated the views of the “‘angry white male” voter who feels that his destiny has been stolen from him by a coalition of feminists, people of color, and social radicals.’³⁵⁸ In the same year, *Forrest Gump* led audiences through post- World War II American history, using what Graham calls ‘the befuddled homilies of an Alabama idiot.’³⁵⁹ By literally placing Forrest (Tom Hanks) in news footage of, amongst other things, the desegregation crisis at the University of Alabama, the Vietnam war, and the Watergate scandal, Zemeckis presents his protagonist as the thread that held ‘the tapestry of American history’ together.³⁶⁰ ‘[N]ot generally regarded as a “civil rights film,”’ Graham writes, *Forrest Gump* makes no mention of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, or Medgar Evers when lamenting those lost in the 1960s, as Berlant has demonstrated.³⁶¹ However, from the film’s first scene, when Forrest (named for a Confederate general and the founder of the Ku Klux

³⁵⁵ Fred Barnes, ‘Revenge of the Squares: Newt Gingrich and Pals Rewrite the 60s,’ *New Republic*, March 13th 1995, 23-9.

³⁵⁶ Winifred Breines, ‘Whose New Left?’ *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Sept. 1988), 544; George Rising, *Stuck in the Sixties: Conservatives and the Legacies of the 1960s* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010), 5.

³⁵⁷ Rising, *Stuck in the Sixties*, 5. See Thomas B. Byers, ‘History Re-Membered: *Forrest Gump*, Postfeminist Masculinity, and the Burial of the Counterculture,’ *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 42, Iss. 2 (1996), pp. 419-444. Lauren Berlant points out that in the novel, Forrest uses his speech at the antiwar march on Washington to ‘heave’ his medal of honor into the crowd. In Zemeckis’s adaptation, Forrest’s speech is interrupted by a police officer, censoring what Berlant calls ‘the one moment when Forrest’s virtue might come into critical contact with the nation. See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 281, nt. 15.

³⁵⁸ Berlant, 180.

³⁵⁹ Graham, *Framing the South*, 14.

³⁶⁰ Robert Zemeckis, *Through the Eyes of Forrest Gump*, documentary directed by Peyton Reed, 1994. Available on *Forrest Gump*, 2 disc Special Collector’s Edition (2001).

³⁶¹ Berlant, *The Queen of America*, 183.

Klan) begins to tell his life story to an African American woman at the bus stop, it offers what Graham calls ‘an apologia for southern racism.’³⁶² As audiences move through the film, Graham continues, ‘we see that all along, obscured by the thunder and violence of race-related narratives, a kind and decent spirit haunted our screens – Forrest leading the Klan in silly bedsheets, Forrest following Vivian Malone through the schoolhouse door in Tuscaloosa like a guardian angel.’ Graham likens Forrest to Harper Lee’s Boo Radley: ‘a gentle gray ghost in the machinery of southern racism,’ who acquires considerable wealth and improves his worthiness further by ‘bulldoz[ing] down the last vestige of crackerdom in the film: the shack of Jenny’s white-trash demon father.’³⁶³

However, if Zemeckis used *Forrest Gump* to usher in what Graham calls ‘a culturally cleansed South,’ Alan Parker proved less optimistic about the region.³⁶⁴ On the release of his 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*, a fictionalization of the FBI’s involvement in the search for missing civil rights workers Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner in Neshoba County, Mississippi in 1964, Parker asserted that his was ‘not a film about the past. I don’t think anything is ever about the past. I use the past to point out how things are now.’³⁶⁵ ‘America is still a desperately divided society, racially and economically,’ London-born Parker continued, specifically noting Mississippi as ‘a poor depressing place.’³⁶⁶ David Gonthier and Timothy O’Brien argue that Parker ‘was always more interested than making powerful narrative films as opposed to polemical “political” films,’ while Robert Niemi condescendingly describes Parker as ‘a white Englishman not deeply conversant with Civil Rights history or America’s racial politics.’³⁶⁷ As a result, Niemi continues, ‘*Mississippi Burning* makes basic representational mistakes that never would have been made by Henry Hampton,’ executive producer of the path breaking civil rights documentary series, *Eyes on the Prize*,

³⁶² ‘Although the scene is set in present day Savannah, the Rosa Parks connotations are unmistakable,’ Graham writes, especially when the woman complains of her tired feet. Graham, *Framing the South*, 191.

³⁶³ *Ibid*, 192.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 193.

³⁶⁵ Alan Parker, quoted by Jack Kroll, ‘Rerunning the Racial Gauntlet,’ *Newsweek*, June 6, 1988, 68. Here, Parker echoes Faulkner’s assertion: ‘The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past,’ *Requiem for a Nun* 1950 (London: Vintage, 2015), 85.

³⁶⁶ Parker, quoted in Kroll, ‘Rerunning the Racial Gauntlet,’ & Patrick Goldstein, ‘It’s only a movie...’ *Empire*, June 1989, accessed November 3, 2014, <http://www.empireonline.com/features/empire-mississippi-burning>

³⁶⁷ David F. Gonthier, Jr., Timothy M. O’Brien, *The Films of Alan Parker, 1976-2003* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2015), 163; Robert Niemi, *History in the Media: Film and Television* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 368.

which aired on PBS between 1987 and 1990.³⁶⁸ While it is unfair to compare a mainstream Hollywood release with a 14-part documentary series, scholars and activists have found numerous issues in *Mississippi Burning*, not least its centralization of the FBI at the expense of local blacks and civil rights workers. ‘Perhaps Parker thought that it would have diverted too much from the narrative thrust of the film to suggest, much less show, that FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was an arch-enemy of the movement,’ Richard King writes, before noting that ‘[p]erhaps Parker and company didn’t really know this or consider it that important.’³⁶⁹ Parker himself admitted that his real purpose was to make people ‘question the racism that exists in all of us now – and not just in 1964 among a bunch of Mississippi rednecks.’ As Graham notes, ‘Parker’s “all of us” said it all. The film was a fable for, by, and *about* white characters (primarily FBI men), an irresponsible representation at best.’³⁷⁰

Unconvinced that racial attitudes had changed in the Deep South, Parker contended that white southerners ‘may have stopped calling blacks “niggers” in public, but you hear that word so often down here that it’s clear that it no longer embarrasses them.’³⁷¹ Parker’s cynicism towards white southerners was surely influenced by journalistic critiques of the ‘symbolic’ racism that had gradually replaced the overt segregation undermined by the civil rights victories of the mid-twentieth century. ‘[T]he defense of white identity, domination and privilege has become more and more expressed as policy disagreements, concerns about “reverse discrimination,” and assertions that racism is a thing of the past,’ media scholar Kelly J. Madison argued in her exploration of *Mississippi Burning* and other ‘anti-racist-white-hero films.’³⁷²

Yet, despite this noticeable trend, screenwriter Chris Gerolmo remained deeply critical of Parker’s motives in creating *Mississippi Burning*. Arguing that the Englishman ‘pretends to be a Marxist but he’s actually a Fascist,’ Gerolmo contended that Parker had removed ‘any lyricism I had in the story and painted all the white people to be ugly, oafish, stupid and drunk.’³⁷³ Parker ‘doesn’t like Americans at all,’ Gerolmo continued

³⁶⁸ Niemi, *ibid.* *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-65* (Season 1), *America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-1985* (Season 2). Broadcast on PBS, 1987 & 1990, respectively.

³⁶⁹ Richard H. King, ‘How long? Not long’: *Selma*, Martin Luther King and civil rights narratives,’ *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 49, No. 5, 2015, 469.

³⁷⁰ Graham, *Framing the South*, 151.

³⁷¹ Parker, quoted in Goldstein, ‘It’s only a movie.’

³⁷² Madison, ‘Legitimation crisis and containment,’ 404. For detailed examinations of the coded political rhetoric that replaced overt white supremacy see Michael Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 1996); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998).

³⁷³ Chris Gerolmo, quoted in Goldstein, ‘It’s only a movie.’

so he wanted the script to really whack it to us.’³⁷⁴ As a result, Richard Corliss notes, Parker’s ‘redneck conspirators are drawn as goofy genetic trash...there’s not a three-digit IQ in the lot.’³⁷⁵

Mississippi Burning, *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *A Time to Kill* exemplify late twentieth century civil rights melodrama because they focus on secular ‘white saviors.’ However, the films’ toxic white trash, so often to blame for the incendiary racial violence that marks such movies, are often associated with evangelicalism, in both rhetoric and actions, enabling filmmakers to offer a clear culprit for the South’s, and therefore the nation’s, legacy of racial intolerance and violence. Such displacement denies the structures that have continually enabled America’s mistreatment of minorities, reinforcing misconceptions that segregation and racism are simply southern, largely lower class, male phenomena.

In general terms, Hollywood flattens the diversity of white involvement in civil rights discourse. More specifically, it denies the complex and disparate nature of white evangelical responses to the African American struggle for equal rights, from those who were inspired to join the movement for racial justice, to those whose segregationist values manifested through organizations other than the Ku Klux Klan, but was no less pernicious. By limiting its portrayal of white religious expression in this period to the margins of segregationist society, Hollywood not only denies considerable white religious activism in the pursuit of civil rights, but it also overlooks what Carolyn Dupont recognizes as ‘the racial hierarchy’s powerful but often subtle articulation by more polished religious leaders and prominent laymen.’³⁷⁶

The future of the South was a nationwide debate in the mid-twentieth century; transcending regional or religious divisions, it was discussed by Americans of all faiths, as well as secular citizens. Reflecting on the otherwise sporadic inclusion of religion in American history, Schultz and Harvey conclude that it is because both civil rights activists and the Religious Right emerged from sources “‘outside the mainstream,’” that historians have seen fit to prioritise their religious preoccupations. ‘[E]ither because of America’s history of racial exclusion (as in the case of the civil rights movement) or because they identify as marginalized (as in the case of the Religious Right),’ both groups emerged to challenge the contemporary status quo.³⁷⁷ For vindicated civil rights leaders, this ensured

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Richard Corliss, ‘Fire This Time,’ *Time*, January 9, 1989, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,956683,00.html>

³⁷⁶ Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 6.

³⁷⁷ Schultz & Harvey, ‘Everywhere and Nowhere,’ 148.

their memorialization as ‘prophets,’ leading America to a better tomorrow through the biblical concept of equality before God. However, many key figures of the Religious Right have been understood as demagogues, conflating politics with a self-serving understanding of biblical teachings in order to lead America in a very different direction to that proposed by civil rights leaders and other cultural liberals in the 1960s. Accepting historian Matthew J. Hall’s understanding of evangelicalism as ‘a broad and unwieldy’ canopy, this chapter provides evidence that white southern Protestant responses to the civil rights movement were often incongruent: a complexity that rarely figures in Hollywood’s constructions of the era and its legacy.³⁷⁸

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In a manner uncommon amongst southern politicians of his generation, Florida Governor LeRoy Collins chastised the inaction of southern Christians when addressing a Southern Presbyterian Men’s Convention in 1957. Recalling how a white doctor in his state had been fired for sharing a meal with a black nurse under her supervision, Collins asked provocatively, ‘Where in that situation were our Presbyterians? Where were our Methodists? Our Episcopalians? Where were all of our churchmen?’³⁷⁹

Social passivity was common, though some white evangelicals believed integration required more visible resistance. Conflating their theological understanding of biblically sanctioned segregation with their constitutional commitment to states’ rights, many evangelical white southerners implied that the Supreme Court had somehow overstepped its jurisdiction with the *Brown* decision. ‘If Chief Justice Warren and his associates had known God's word and had desired to do the Lord's will, I am quite confident that the 1954 decision would never have been made,’ Jerry Falwell advised in 1958.³⁸⁰ According to a 1954 Gallup poll, 81 percent of southerners agreed that the

³⁷⁸ Matthew J. Hall, quoted in Justin Taylor, ‘Jim Crow, Civil Rights, and Southern White Evangelicals: A Historian’s Forum,’ *The Gospel Coalition*, February 5, 2015, accessed May 3, 2015, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2015/02/05/jim-crow-civil-rights-and-southern-white-evangelicals-a-historians-forum-matthew-j-hall/>.

³⁷⁹ Governor LeRoy Collins, quoted in Benjamin Muse, *Ten Years of Prelude: The Story of Integration Since the Supreme Court’s 1954 Decision* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 167.

³⁸⁰ Jerry Falwell, ‘Segregation or Integration: Which?’, sermon delivered at Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, TN, 1958, quoted in Max Blumenthal, ‘Agent of Intolerance,’ *The Nation*, May 16, 2007, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/agent-intolerance#>

Supreme Court was wrong to mandate desegregation, as opposed to just 40 percent of Americans.³⁸¹

Despite the SBC's recommendation that *Brown* was 'in harmony with the constitutional guarantee of equal freedom to all citizens,' to many lay members it was a blatant violation of the separation of church and state.³⁸² Mark Newman writes that the denomination 'did not adopt any further resolutions regarding segregation during the remainder of the decade as Southern Baptist hostility to desegregation intensified.'³⁸³ Those disappointed at the Convention's acceptance of *Brown* wrote to their state SBC newspapers in their thousands, while others donated all that they could to help support the private schools that sprang up across the South to deliberately avoid desegregation rulings. 'We have reached the point,' Rev. Marion A. Woodson of Olanta, South Carolina told the Hartsville Citizens Council in October 1958, 'where we must be willing to give up the second car, cancel a vacation trip and buy less clothing in order to provide private schools for our children.'³⁸⁴

Many local church leaders took this opportunity to remind their congregations that they were not bound by SBC or other organizational regulations and that congregational autonomy remained crucial to their identity. In 1958 the South Carolina Methodist Men's Club openly praised Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus' defiance of the 'un-Christian and evil forces of the Supreme Court and federal government,' while Baptist state conventions in Alabama and Louisiana expressly endorsed segregation following the desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School, reflecting what Andrew Manis recognizes as a 'significant schism between the views of the Southern Baptist laity and much of the ministerial leadership.'³⁸⁵

In an April 1963 letter published in the Birmingham and later national press, a group of white clergymen including prominent Alabama Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and a Rabbi argued that black protests in Birmingham were 'unwise and untimely.' Such 'extreme measures' were not justified in 'these days of new hope,' they

³⁸¹ See Gary Orfield, 'Unexpected Costs and Uncertain Gains of Dismantling Desegregation,' in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, eds. Gary Orfield & Susan E. Eaton (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 108.

³⁸² Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention, June 2-5 1954, St Louis, Missouri, accessed May 5, 2016, http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1954.pdf, 56.

³⁸³ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 136.

³⁸⁴ Rev. Marion A. Woodson, quoted in 'Give Up Vacation,' South Carolina, *Southern Schools News*, November 1958, accessed May 5, 2015, http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/gua_ssn/pdfs/ssnvol5no5.pdf, 5.

³⁸⁵ Ibid; Manis, *Southern Civil Religions*, 108.

stressed.³⁸⁶ In response, Martin Luther King, Jr. constructed his ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’ arguing that Jesus Christ himself ‘was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists. I had hoped that the white moderate would see this need.’³⁸⁷

King went on to note the importance of certain whites in the movement, admitting they were ‘all too few in quantity, but they are big in quality.’ King included Presbyterian James McBride Dabbs and devout Episcopalian Anne Braden in his list of white southerners who ‘have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it...Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful "action" antidotes to combat the disease of segregation.’³⁸⁸

By the early 1960s, several mainline national church groups had committed themselves to progressive social action, including the National Council of Churches, the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and the United Church of Christ.³⁸⁹ Activist Joan C. Browning writes that ‘the Freedom Movement was the all-inclusive true church, and the church was the logical center of the movement.’³⁹⁰ The journey from all-white to all-black churches ‘seemed natural’ to Browning and she was welcomed in the latter in Albany, Georgia following her release from prison for participating in the Freedom Rides.³⁹¹ She was not alone; numerous whites were compelled to work for racial justice as a result of strong religious faith. In *Personal Politics*, Sara Evans argues that ‘virtually without exception white southern women who joined the civil rights movement came to it first through the church.’³⁹² Many were from strong religious backgrounds and

³⁸⁶ The letter appeared on in the *Birmingham News* and *Birmingham Post-Herald* on April 13th 1963. The following day it appeared in *The New York Times*. See S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2001), Appendix 2: 235-6 & 279, note 19.

³⁸⁷ Martin Luther King Jr., ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’ *The Christian Century*, June 12, 1963, p. 771, accessed May 4, 2014, <http://www.christiancentury.org/sites/default/files/downloads/resources/mlk-letter.pdf>

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ See James Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

³⁹⁰ Joan C. Browning, ‘Shiloh Witness,’ in *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*, Constance Curry et al (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 41.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 39-40.

³⁹² Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 35.

extended their political and social consciousness on college campuses across the country.³⁹³

Reviewing white women's accounts of the civil rights movement, Wini Breines concluded in 2005 that 'it is difficult to imagine that religion functioned in such a democratic political manner, encouraging so many young people, white and black, to become active in social change for racial justice.'³⁹⁴ Reflecting on the religious views of many activists through a twenty-first century lens, Breines displays a restricted understanding of spirituality. She effectively argues that those religious white southerners who fought for racial justice are as much a product of their time as are the racists they opposed, the supposedly timeless nature of their preoccupations frozen in a very specific historical moment, where the conflation of Christian dogma and social activism was apparently not as 'odd' as it appears now.

More contemporary white evangelicalism, Breines suggests, is associated with anything but tolerance and social activism. It is the domain of zealots and bigots, attempting to reinstate the pre-civil rights nation. Our historical understanding of white Christianity, especially the socially active branches, has clearly been affected by the culture wars, making it hard for secular critics and scholars to appreciate the religious dimensions of a movement that was spiritual in nature for so many of its white actors. Most significantly, it is hard to imagine such a comment being levelled at an account documenting the significance of Christianity to African American activists. Certainly, black spirituality has proven to be a consistent and seemingly unproblematic trope in civil rights historiography and cinema.

Of all the films discussed in this chapter, only *A Time to Kill* features a mainstream white church (briefly) in its narrative, while only *Ghosts of Mississippi* fails to portray a black church. *Mississippi Burning* is more representative of the civil rights genre in its depiction of solely African American church worship, a trope that has been repeated in other successful films, including *The Long Walk Home* and *The Help* (Tate Taylor, 2011). As white redemption narratives, none of these films contain any reference to mainstream

³⁹³ Campus groups such as the Methodist Student Movement (MSM) promoted Christianity as a radical faith that required its followers to act in the face of discrimination and oppression. MSM sent a delegation, to the Selma to Montgomery marches and its members worked in mixed racial groups throughout the 1960s to forward their vision of religion: what Charlotte Bunch calls 'an ecumenical and political community.' See Charlotte Bunch, in *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers: Women who Changed American Religion*, ed. Ann Braude (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 212.

³⁹⁴ Wini Breines, Review of Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* & Curry, *Deep in Our Hearts, Signs*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2005), 1673.

white Christianity. Religious preoccupations would seemingly complicate the protagonists' claims to liberal righteousness.

In direct contrast to this trend, the recent release *Selma* (Ava DuVernay, 2014) offers an unparalleled presentation of white religious involvement in the civil rights movement, through its depiction of the 1965 voting rights campaign in Alabama. Perhaps the exception that proves the rule, *Selma*'s departure from the patterns of bias and misrepresentation so prominent in earlier films makes their shortcomings all the clearer. Most importantly, *Selma* has encouraged critics, scholars, and southern evangelicals themselves to notice and discuss religion in civil rights dramas in an unprecedented fashion.

Selma provoked difficult conversations for white evangelicals, forcing them to acknowledge the conspicuous absence of their denominational forbearers in this and other episodes of the civil rights movement. In this respect, the film diverged from its predecessors in the civil rights genre, which appeared much more concerned with eliciting positive audience responses than engaging in any meaningful debate about the legacy of the movement. While *Selma* ends with the song 'Glory,' a duet between John Legend and rapper Common that equates the struggles of the civil rights movement with contemporary racial injustices in the U.S., the more conventional civil rights dramas of the late twentieth-century often gave the impression that America's racial turmoil had been laid to rest by resolutely secular white heroes.³⁹⁵

'Alan Parker purposefully rewrites history,' Monteith argues, 'when he decides that the FBI bribing a Klansman to give up the details of the Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner murders (Delmar Dennis was paid \$30,000) does not fit the ideological project that is *Mississippi Burning*.'³⁹⁶ Instead, Parker centers his film's morality in Mrs. Pell

³⁹⁵ 'The movement is a rhythm to us, Freedom is like religion to us... That's why Rosa sat on the bus, That's why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up,' Common & John Legend, 'Glory,' *Selma – Music from the Motion Picture*, Paramount Pictures/Pathé Productions, ARTium/Def Jam/Columbia Records, 2015.

³⁹⁶ Monteith, 'The movie-made Movement,' 130. See Jerry Mitchell, 'New details on the FBI paying \$30K to solve the Mississippi Burning case,' *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, February 15, 2010, accessed March 6, 2016, http://blogs.clarionledger.com/jmitchell/2010/02/15/did-the-fbi-pay-30k-to-locate-the-bodies-of-the-three-missing-civil-rights-workers/?nlick_check=1 Dennis, a Methodist minister and Klan chaplain turned FBI informant testified during the 1967 court proceedings that *Mississippi Burning* avoids altogether. For an account of Dennis's activities during this time see Maryanne Vollers, *Ghosts of Mississippi* (Boston, MA: Back Bay Books, 1995), 221-2 & 227-8. Dennis does appear in *Ghosts of Mississippi*, played by Jim Harley. Having heard Byron De La Beckwith boast in 1965 about murdering NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers two years earlier, Dennis proves vital to Bobby DeLaughter's efforts to finally convict Beckwith in the 1990s. In this sense, *Ghosts of Mississippi* is much closer to the truth of the Beckwith case than *Mississippi Burning* ever tried to be in relaying the story of the Neshoba murders and subsequent trial.

(Frances McDormand), the downtrodden deputy sheriff's wife who finally stands up to the hyper-masculine, segregationist mind-set that rules the town and implicates her husband Clinton (Brad Dourif) in the murder of the missing activists.

Unable to hate blacks as she has been taught to do, Mrs. Pell has been forced to toe the line by her abusive husband, whose treatment of her provides yet another indictment of his already despicable character. Defined entirely by her husband, Mrs. Pell is never granted a first name. When, on their first meeting, Agent Anderson refers to her simply as 'Miss,' he is quickly corrected by others in the beauty salon that she is 'Mrs. Pell. Her old man's Ray Stuckey's deputy.' The suggestion of romance and mutual trust that exists between Mrs. Pell and Anderson shows that she is drawn, however platonically, to a more tolerant man who has managed to escape the South (Anderson's previous career as a sheriff in a small Mississippi town equates him with her husband). An empathetic woman, Mrs. Pell can see through the racial hierarchies constructed by her neighbors, recognizing the consequences of a hatred that is taught from an early age, and biblically sanctioned: 'They said segregation what's said in the Bible . . . Genesis 9, Verse 27.' She is sympathetic towards blacks and displays a critical awareness that the FBI's motivation is much more about locating white New Yorkers Goodman and Schwerner than it is about black Mississippian James Chaney. 'Do you honestly think you people would be down here at all if it wasn't for those two white boys?' she asks Agent Anderson on their first meeting.³⁹⁷

Historians have increasingly examined white women's efforts to eradicate racial injustice from the 19th century onwards in volumes such as *Throwing off the Cloak of Privilege*, edited by Gail Murray in 2004.³⁹⁸ Though many of these women were far from radical, scholars have tended to argue that their position within a deeply gendered society ensured that they were perhaps more sympathetic to racial injustice and certainly less invested in the status quo than white men were.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Here, Mrs Pell echoes the words of Rita Schwerner, the wife of murdered activist Mickey Schwerner, which feature in Episode Five of *Eyes on the Prize: 'Mississippi: Is This America? (1963-1964)'* (aired PBS, February 18, 1987): 'It's tragic, as far as I'm concerned, that white northerners have to be caught up in the machinery of injustice and indifference in the South before the American people register concern. I personally suspect that if Mr. Chaney, who is a native Mississippian Negro, had been alone at the time of the disappearance, that this case, like so many others that have come before, would have gone completely unnoticed.'

³⁹⁸ Gail Murray, *Throwing off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women Activists in the Civil Rights Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

³⁹⁹ This narrative has also proven popular in film, where many civil rights melodramas prioritise 'everyday' female relationships as a means to present (or ignore) the realities of the civil rights movement. The soothing interracial friendship, as discussed by Jennifer Fuller, remains popular, evidenced by the huge success of *The Help*. Films such as *The Long Walk Home* were 'generally

Thirty years later, *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *A Time to Kill* deviate considerably from this narrative, as the wives of the films' white hero protagonists – Dixie DeLaughter (Virginia Madsen) and Carla Brigance (Ashley Judd) – express varying levels of commitment to the racial hierarchies of the 1990s. Though neither is overtly racist, their reactions to their husbands' legal work in the pursuit of racial justice suggest unwillingness to part with their inherent racial and class privilege. Clinging to old southern values in the 1990s, Carla and Dixie differ considerably from a dominant historical narrative that suggests that white women, especially religious white women, were often the first whites to question Jim Crow practices. Thus, their characterizations differ considerably from Mrs Pell's emotional torment at the knowledge of her husband's murderous hatred of African Americans in *Mississippi Burning*.

Though women are present at a rally speech delivered by Grand Wizard Clayton Townley (Stephen Tobolowsky) in *Mississippi Burning*, there is no other suggestion in the film that women took a prominent role in segregationist activities. Though historians including Katherine Blee and Nancy MacClean have worked to show the importance of women to the Klan's original and lasting preoccupations and activities, Hollywood is yet to portray a woman with strong personal involvement with the far right.⁴⁰⁰ Extensive female membership of the Klan was confined to the organization's most active period in the 1920s, but female activity, like male commitment, did not die out altogether following this peak. Thus Allison Graham's understanding of 'the cracker vigilante, the white trash thug, the Redneck' is an acutely gendered construct, but also inseparable from Hollywood's zealously religious southerner.⁴⁰¹

Despite being 'historically coded as feminine and contrasted to reason,' as Linda Kintz has argued, emotion in the context of 'patriotism, desire for property and gun ownership, and regional identification, for example, are likely to be unapologetically

liberal and often feminist,' Fuller writes. However, 'they also fit conservative efforts to assert the continuity and primacy of the middle-class nuclear family, and they often placed the impetus for social change on the individual and the family rather than on social movements and institutions.' Television series such as *I'll Fly Away* (NBC 1991-3) and *Any Day Now* (Lifetime, 1998-2002) also promoted emotional, interpersonal healing. Fuller, 'Debating the Present through the Past,' 177. For an exploration of white-black female friendship in literature, see Sharon Monteith, *Advancing Sisterhood?: Interracial Friendships in Contemporary Southern Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

⁴⁰⁰ See Katherine Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Glenn Feldman, 'Home and Hearth: Women, the Klan, Conservative Religion and Traditional Family Values,' in *Politics and Religion in the White South*, ed. Glenn Feldman (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), pp. 57-99.

⁴⁰¹ Graham, *Framing the South*, 154.

male' in an American context.⁴⁰² Similarly, emotion often characterizes charismatic religious expression, especially when compared to a more stoic, northern Protestantism. But popular constructions of southern religious enthusiasm often take a considerably masculine tone, especially through the figure of the preacher and the Klansman, two characterizations that feature prominently in Hollywood's explorations of the South. '[T]he pulpit is a gendered location,' as rhetorician Roxanne Mountford asserts, while Klan propaganda had always promoted masculine ideals.⁴⁰³ Its continued obligation to 'protect white womanhood' needs little introduction.

With her husband and his fellow Klansmen behind bars, Mrs. Pell is determined to rebuild her life in her hometown, where her popularity in the female-sphere of the beauty shop is crucial to her survival. Knowing she's '[g]ot enough ladies who like the way I fix their hair,' Mrs Pell cements her place in a truly feminized space, removed from the rest of the town. Like the domestic sphere of the home, so crucial to racial reconciliation in films such as *The Long Walk Home*, *Mississippi Burning*'s salon, while not visibly integrated, is a space where white women can express their own views away from local masculine control. As such, it figures more as a site of white feminist awakening than one of racial reconciliation, but is nevertheless a much more welcoming place for the FBI outsiders than the typically male environments of the Sheriff's office and the 'social club.' It also mirrors the efforts of African American women who organized communities from the relative sanctity of their beauty shops. Activist Sheila Michaels recalled a 1963 SNCC meeting in Atlanta, in which a participant noted, 'When you organize a town, you have to have two people on your side, the beautician and the midwife.'⁴⁰⁴ Francoise Hamlin writes that black beauticians and hairdressers were not dependent on the white community for income, and so often rose to prominence in their communities. Activist women like Vera Pigeo of Clarksdale, Mississippi 'could literally hold clients hostage to a continuous barrage of information and persuasion while working on their hair.'⁴⁰⁵

Myles Horton, the director of the Highlander Folk School, an activist training center in the Tennessee hills, noted a large proportion of beauticians attending workshops

⁴⁰² Linda Kintz, 'Culture and the Religious Right,' in *Media, Culture, and the Religious Right*, eds. Linda Kintz & Julia Lesage (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 9.

⁴⁰³ Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 17.

⁴⁰⁴ Quoted in Francoise Hamlin, 'Vera Mae Pigeo: Mothering the Movement,' in *Mississippi Women: Their Histories, Their Lives, Volume 1*, eds. Martha H. Swain, Elizabeth Anne Payne and Marjorie Julian Spruill (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 290.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 291.

at the School, and began running sessions solely for these women. ‘They thought that I was bringing in these beauticians together to talk about straightening hair or whatever the hell they do,’ Horton recalled, but ‘I was just using them because they were community leaders and they were independent . . . We used beauticians’ shops all over the South to distribute Highlander literature on integration.’⁴⁰⁶

‘Beauty shop culture aids the dissemination of news,’ Hamlin argues. ‘For working-class women in particular, the beauty shop is a space for economic, political, and social empowerment outside of the man’s world.’⁴⁰⁷ Although masked as harmless flirtation, the women in *Mississippi Burning*’s salon are intrigued by and responsive to the FBI agents, and express the white community’s only genuine concern for the missing civil rights workers. Their attitudes are cast in sharp contrast to the reaction of the town’s men, who appear hostile and defensive because of their obvious involvement in Klan activity.

In tying the South’s history of racial trauma to an easily recognized group, *Mississippi Burning* established a cinematic trend centered around a lineage of an intolerance that is apparently southern rather than American, poor rather than middle class, rural rather than urban, and – most importantly for this project - religious rather than secular. Denied the protection of the white middle-class establishment exemplified by the Presbyterian congregation that Jake Brigance (Matthew McConaughey) attends in *A Time to Kill*, the poorer members of white society are, in Hollywood’s logic, attracted to the more extreme white theology that manifests outside the mainstream church. ‘Ten years ago, that nigger’d be hanging from the end of a rope...now you tell me what’s wrong with this country?’ Freddie Lee Cobb (Kiefer Sutherland) laments. ‘Good God-fearing Klan would know what to do,’ he continues, making a specific distinction between the Klan as a religious organization and ‘skinheads who want to blow up the government.’ Cobb makes contact with Stump Sisson (Kurtwood Smith), the Grand Wizard of Mississippi, who is happy to assist in forming the Klavern of Madison County. ‘The Klan’s always been here,’ Stump advises, ‘just waiting for the opportunity to deliver God’s justice.’

Based upon John Grisham’s 1989 novel of the same name, Schumacher’s film presents an instantly recognisable, ideologically coherent Klan within a contemporary courtroom drama, as young white lawyer Jake defends Carl Lee Hailey (Samuel L.

⁴⁰⁶ Myles Horton, quoted in Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 145-6.

⁴⁰⁷ Hamlin, ‘Vera Mae Pigeo,’ 291.

Jackson), a black man who murdered the drunken rednecks who raped his daughter, Tonya (RaéVen Larrymore Kelly). Proving ‘likeable – maybe even lovable,’ Richard Schickel argued in *Time* magazine, *A Time to Kill* featured a ‘revived Ku Klux Klan [that] employs the full range of its all-too –familiar terrorist tactics as it tries to prevent justice from being done.’⁴⁰⁸

In light of more contemporary acts of arbitrary racial terrorism, *A Time to Kill* thus provided a reassuring reminder of days when racial fanatics were readily identifiable by their white hoods and burning crosses. ‘It’s no longer clear in white America who the good guys are,’ sociologist Bernard Beck argued in 1997, concluding that contemporary race relations made many white liberals ‘pessimistic [and] confused. They like to remember a time when things made sense, when we were the good guys.’⁴⁰⁹

And yet, though Schumacher’s scenes of the Klan marching through the streets in broad daylight in their full regalia may seem somewhat anachronistic, they are true to Grisham’s novel and more credible when one considers that the Klan did march in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1987, garnering some national press coverage.⁴¹⁰ They had also opened fire on anti-Klan protesters in 1979, killing five in what became known as the Greensboro Massacre. Events in Greensboro reignited debates about the Klan’s role in the South, discussions that were further stimulated by the subsequent spate of church burnings, the retrial of Byron De La Beckwith for the 1963 murder of NAACP Mississippi Field Secretary Medgar Evers (depicted in *Ghosts of Mississippi*), and the numerous political escapades of David Duke, a former Grand Wizard.⁴¹¹

Though there was no chance Duke could win his 1988 presidential campaign, he was the subject of frequent publicity; one biographer argued that he had become ‘a political rock star of sorts, despite a racist and anti-Semitic past.’⁴¹² For many, a vote for

⁴⁰⁸ Richard Schickel, ‘Summons to Justice: A Courtroom Drama with Old-Fashioned Appeal,’ *Time*, July 29, 1996, 76.

⁴⁰⁹ Bernard Beck quoted in Teresa Wiltz, ‘Whose History?’ *Chicago Tribune*, January 13th 1997, accessed December 12, 2015, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-01-13/features/9701130093_1_medgar-evers-beckwith-myrlie-evers

⁴¹⁰ Perhaps reflecting the largely negative public opinion of the Klan in the 1980s, most coverage of the rally focuses on the pre-empted anti-Klan demonstrations. See unknown author, ‘600 March in North Carolina to Protest Klan’s Rally Today,’ *Los Angeles Times*, June 7th 1987, accessed December 5, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-06-07/news/mn-1091_1_klan-s-rally-today; William E. Schmidt, ‘Klan’s Carolina March Kindling Fear and Unity,’ *New York Times*, June 5th 1987, accessed June 12, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/05/us/klan-s-carolina-march-kindling-fear-and-unity.html>

⁴¹¹ Duke’s first unsuccessful run for the Louisiana Senate was in 1975. He ran again in 1979 and was eventually elected in 1989. In 1988 he had also ran for President, losing the Democratic primary and running instead for the right-wing Populist party.

⁴¹² Michael Zatarain, *David Duke: Evolution of a Klansman* (Gretna: LA: Pelican Publishing, 1990), 10.

Duke was a protest vote: ‘the only way to let Washington know I’m pissed,’ according to one voter in suburban New Orleans.⁴¹³ Human rights activist Leonard Zeskind writes that ‘ironically, Duke’s success owed much to the fact that he was not the stereotypical Klansman of popular imagination.’ Duke was middle-class, educated, ‘handsome, well-mannered and articulate.’⁴¹⁴ Rather than performing secret rituals under the cloak of darkness, Duke actively sought media attention, perfecting what journalist Tyler Bridges defines as ‘looking good and sounding reasonable.’⁴¹⁵ ‘The media can’t resist me,’ Duke claimed in 1978, because ‘I don’t fit the stereotype of a Klansman. I don’t have hair cropped so close to my head my ears stick out...I’m not chewing tobacco, and I don’t have manure on the bottom of my shoes.’⁴¹⁶ Duke opened up full Klan membership to women and Catholics for the first time and was also deeply critical of Christianity, informing many that he was an atheist and that Christianity was a controlling mechanism developed by Jews.⁴¹⁷

As such, Duke proves an interesting contrast to the poor, religious white males who swell the ranks of the Klan in Hollywood’s imagination, supporting Nancy Bishop Dessommes’s argument that, ‘in contemporary film, directors seem more concerned with evoking an acceptable audience response than with adhering to historical accuracy.’ There is a timeless understanding of the Klan as little more than a band of ignorant bigots, which Dessommes argues ‘often contributes to a misrepresentation of Southerners in general, as well as a misrepresentation of the Klan.’ ‘[I]nitiating into violence,’ Dessommes continues, contemporary audiences have come to expect Klan extremism in presentations of a racially volatile South.⁴¹⁸

While adapting *Gone with the Wind* in the late-1930s, David O. Selznick became concerned that Margaret Mitchell’s references to the Klan might prove an ‘unintentional advertisement for intolerant societies in [the] fascist-ridden’ decade.⁴¹⁹ As such, aspects of Margaret Mitchell’s original narrative, including the Klan’s attempt to avenge an attack

⁴¹³ Whitaker, ‘Crisis of Shattered Dreams.’

⁴¹⁴ Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2009), 35.

⁴¹⁵ Tyler Bridges, *The Rise of David Duke* (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 45.

⁴¹⁶ David Duke, quoted *ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ Duke was keen to attract Catholics in home state of Louisiana, as well as blue collar white workers in the North East. He was also keen to attract women to the movement to ensure they ‘raise their children to become Klan members and exert their great moral force to make the rest of the nation see our purpose.’ See Bridges, *The Rise of David Duke*, 42-44.

⁴¹⁸ Nancy Bishop Dessommes, ‘Hollywood in Hoods: The Portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan in Popular Film,’ *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 32, Iss. 4 (Spring 1999), 18.

⁴¹⁹ David O. Selznick, quoted in Jenny Woodley, *Art for Equality: The NAACP’s Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2014), 133.

on Scarlett in Shantytown, are steeped in misdirection in Selznick's film. Here, the narrative focuses instead on the women, who sew to calm their nerves while the men are gone. The Klan is never mentioned by name, but Selznick nevertheless encourages his audience to sympathise with the vigilantes, and root for them when the Yankees start asking questions. In contrast, more recent films have seldom shied away from portraying white racist violence, and the Klan has become an essential signifier of southern white intransigence on film, regardless of whether or not the period reflected saw large-scale Klan activity.

As prominent businessmen and members of the Sherriff's Office, the Klansmen of *Mississippi Burning* are hardly marginal figures, as they are in *A Time to Kill*. Yet, *Mississippi Burning* offers no theological, social, or political alternative to the Klan in fictional Jessup County (really Neshoba County). Mississippi was and remains a deeply religious state and while historians' and activists' accounts have shown that mainstream denominations were often quietly complicit with segregation, they seldom supported Klan vigilantism. Instead of contrasting the Klan against a more liberal or even mainstream religious or political organization, *Mississippi Burning* pits the Klan entirely against the secular, federal power of the FBI, ensuring that the film's heroes and villains are starkly projected, with little room for theological or political complexity. White churches and other institutions seemingly do not exist.

Although scholars and critics have dissected the film's presentation of its white heroes and subjugated, silent blacks, the film's construction of its villains rarely figures in the critical literature.⁴²⁰ There has certainly been no discussion of religion in the film. *Mississippi Burning* does not, as some critics suggest, simply celebrate whiteness at the expense of black activism; rather it creates divisions within whiteness along regional, class and religious boundaries, projecting the idea that dominant, secular, consensus liberalism is stronger and more resilient than the values of an anomalous, racist region.

Although *Mississippi Burning* presents no mainstream religious community, Reverend Clay F. Lee, minister at First Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1964, recalled that religious worship was profoundly important to several of the FBI agents stationed in the town during the investigation into Chaney, Schwerner and

⁴²⁰ For the typical reading of *Mississippi Burning* – white FBI agents responsible for civil rights victories, African Americans as powerless victims – see Bourgeois, 'Hollywood and the Civil Rights Movement;' Toplin, '*Mississippi Burning*: "A Standard to which We Couldn't Live Up,"' chapter in *History by Hollywood*, 25-44.

Goodman's disappearance.⁴²¹ According to Lee, several of the agents attended local churches whilst stationed in Philadelphia and experienced varying degrees of hospitality:

One [agent] was from Cincinnati, he was a very faithful Presbyterian... he went to the Presbyterian prayer meeting, and he nearly gave them all a heart attack. [laughter] It was really very funny. Another was a young Methodist man from Dallas. Another was a young single man from North Carolina, a member of the Church of Christ. The Presbyterian man went to the Presbyterian Church regularly on Sundays. The other two came to our church regularly on Sundays, and my wife and I befriended them just as human beings.⁴²²

It is interesting to imagine *Mississippi Burning* presenting this religious bond between agents and members of the local community, but evidence confirms that no mainline church group expressed 'even perfunctory sympathy for the missing young men or concern for their welfare.'⁴²³ Florence Mars, an active member of Lee's First Methodist Church, describes how her congregation had planned to raise money to rebuild the burned Mt. Zion Methodist Church. However, fearful of Klan reprisals, First Methodist offered the money on the grounds that 'the [new Mt. Zion] building would never be used for anything other than church activities.'⁴²⁴ Refusing to 'relinquish control of the church in exchange for white support,' the African American congregation of Mt. Zion worked alone.⁴²⁵ Mars' account demonstrates the real level of Klan intimidation in the area and its determination to extinguish any hope of racial cooperation.

Internal politics at First Methodist eventually forced Mars to resign from her teaching roles, suggesting that the reconciliatory wing of the church was more limited than she first suspected. She was, in the eyes of the congregation, 'irrefutably connected with "Communist civil rights agitation."' '[P]eople were angered by the civil rights movement and afraid of being branded "integrationists,"' Mars recalls.⁴²⁶ 'There was a

⁴²¹ Though *Mississippi Burning* never specifies the town in which it is set, Philadelphia is the seat of Neshoba County (renamed Jessup County in the film). Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner were held at the county jail in Philadelphia for an alleged speeding offence before being released, chased, and eventually murdered on the road towards Meridian.

⁴²² Reverend Clay F. Lee, interviewed by Orley B. Caudill, July 1980, Mississippi Oral History Program, University of Southern Mississippi, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/coh/id/4521>, p. 17-8.

⁴²³ Florence Mars (with the assistance of Lynne Eden), *Witness in Philadelphia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 88.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*, 180. See also Lee, Oral History, pg. 23: 'two of the men were associated with lumber companies, high up in the lumber companies, family type things. And, really, the success of the whole thing of rebuilding that church depended upon those two men. And before night came [following a visit to the site of the burned church], both of them had been called and told that their mills would be burned down.'

⁴²⁵ Mars, *Witness in Philadelphia*, 180.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid*, xv.

‘prevailing attitude towards hoax and federal conspiracy’ in the town, while groups such as Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR) circulated fliers urging citizens not to ‘cooperate in any way with any agents of the National Government.’⁴²⁷ Thus, though *Mississippi Burning* elects not to depict any mainstream white congregations in Philadelphia, Mars’s testimony suggests that there was little support for the movement within First Methodist.

Mississippi Burning fails to communicate these non-violent strands of white resistance to civil rights activity, presenting only the extreme violence of Klansmen. As R. Milton Winter has argued, few Mississippi church leaders advocated the rhetoric of the Ku Klux Klan or even Governor Ross Barnett, though Dr. Horace Villee of First Presbyterian Church, Columbus, Mississippi did thank God for men of courage ‘like St. Paul and Governor Barnett.’⁴²⁸ On the whole though, ‘Mississippi Presbyterians rejected violent and illegal opposition to civil rights,’ Winter writes, ‘but condemned marches, protests, and other strident efforts to achieve integration.’⁴²⁹ In an article for the *Christian Century* in September 1964, Richard Marius described Mississippi as both ‘embarrassing and enraging,’ a simultaneously violent and devout place that forced him to ‘wonder how the church there can stand its own shame and cowardice.’⁴³⁰

However, as Dupont shows, Marius’s critique of the Magnolia State was somewhat ‘softened’ by his conclusion that “the problems of the church in Mississippi are but warped and distorted reflections of the problems of the church in American society.”⁴³¹ Yet, it was unlikely that many of Marius’s readers welcomed this analysis, preferring, as Dupont recognises, to ‘hone in on the apparently yawning chasm between conditions in Mississippi and those in the rest of the country, rather than to believe that America shared the South’s racial dilemma.’⁴³²

This commitment to southern racial exceptionalism endures through *Mississippi Burning*’s narrative, which sees the all-American righteousness of the FBI agents displace the Klan’s southern bigotry. ‘[J]uxtaposing the brutality of white Southerners with the morality of two FBI agents,’ Jansson writes, *Mississippi Burning* ‘reproduces an

⁴²⁷ Ibid, 90.

⁴²⁸ R. Milton Winter, ‘Division & Reunion in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.: A Mississippi Retrospective,’ *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 78:1 (Spring 2000), 70.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 71.

⁴³⁰ Richard C. Marius, ‘Ruleville, Reminiscence, Reflection,’ *The Christian Century*, January 23, 1964, reprinted in *Wrestling with God: The Mediations of Richard Marius*, edited by Nancy Grisham Anderson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), Appendix, 133.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 182.

American national identity that stands for tolerance, justice and peace' that is very much at odds with the historical record of the Bureau under J. Edgar Hoover's leadership.⁴³³ Deputy Sherriff Pell even jokes that FBI stands for 'Federal Bureau of Integration,' only to be referred to by Agent Anderson as a 'backwoods shit ass.' When Sherriff Ray Stuckey (Gailard Sartain) arrives to greet the 'Hoover boys,' he advises them that the missing civil rights workers are simply part of 'a publicity stunt cooked up by that Martin Luther King fella.' 'We're ten miles from Memphis and a million miles from the rest of the world,' Anderson concludes.

Presenting the Klan as the natural manifestation of a pathologized town, *Mississippi Burning* does not even attempt to account for the men's radicalization. Unlike in *A Time to Kill*, we do not see the initial development of a Klavern, or any presentation of the how the Klan recruited its membership. As such, the Klan of *Mississippi Burning* can simply be eradicated – the roots of their organization - religious, political or otherwise - never truly explored. Adhering to the conventions of a crime film or a Western, *Mississippi Burning* 'grants [its heroes] the moral right to abandon the restrictions of law,' to use Christopher Ames' understanding of crime dramas.⁴³⁴ When Agent Alan Ward (Willem Dafoe) finally lets native Mississippian Agent Anderson take control of the investigation, as a result of the latter's previous experience with the Klan, the FBI's tactics become increasingly suspect: they are now 'in the gutter' with the enemy, as Ward and Anderson acknowledge.⁴³⁵ In a team of northern, Ivy-league, by-the-book investigators, only Anderson knows 'how to "talk southern" to Klan members,' Graham writes. And yet in teaching the FBI how to 'play as dirty as the enemy,' as Graham continues, Anderson is eventually invited to join what Jansson notes as 'the American fold.'⁴³⁶ Graham also points out that it is as a result of the Klan's attack on Mrs. Pell that Ward succumbs to Anderson's alternative leadership. As such the film employs another trope of the Western, 'exploiting enemy violence against white women to justify barbaric revenge.'⁴³⁷ Jake Brigance also appeals to this sentiment when he encourages the jury at

⁴³³ Jansson, "'A Geography of Racism,'" 265.

⁴³⁴ Christopher Ames, 'Restoring the Black Man's Lethal Weapon: Race and Sexuality in Contemporary Cop Films,' *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 20, Iss. 3 (1992), 52.

⁴³⁵ Anderson's days as a sheriff in his home state ensure that he can understand the local mentality better than his superior, Agent Ward. Anderson ridicules the Klan from the beginning of the movie with his comic rendition of an old rallying song and concludes that the organization was 'better with lynchings than with lyrics.'

⁴³⁶ Graham, *Framing the South*, 152; Jansson, "'A Geography of Racism'", 275. Upholding the Bureau's sense of distance from the people of Philadelphia, Mississippi, Anderson, like Ward, often refers to the townsfolk as 'these people,' separating them from wider American patterns.

⁴³⁷ Graham, *Framing the South*, 152.

Carl Lee's trial to think about the horrific assault Tonya endured, and then imagine she was white. 'It's too easy to root for Carl Lee,' Rob Dreher wrote on *A Time to Kill*'s release, 'because the rednecks are so thoroughly subhuman and the Klan so utterly vile.'⁴³⁸

Cinematic villains, Ames writes, take actions that 'place them outside the pale of civilization,' enabling 'their pursuers' to curtail them by any means necessary.⁴³⁹ In *A Time to Kill*, this logic justifies double murder, just as Atticus Finch sanctions Boo Radley's murder of Bob Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In *Mississippi Burning*, this apparently means a black FBI agent threatening the mayor with castration, despite the fact that there were no black FBI agents in 1964.⁴⁴⁰ Alan Parker admitted that the studio, Orion Pictures, wanted the film to be 'a detective story that just *happened* to be set against the civil rights struggle' (emphasis Parker's).⁴⁴¹ Thus, *Mississippi Burning* not only offers no judgement or punishment for the FBI's aggressive behaviour, but actually engages in a Tarantino-esque redemptive fantasy.

Rather like Nazis, Klansmen offer Hollywood easy villains whose distinctive regalia and iconography is unmistakable. The clearest representation of evil in the modern world, Nazism granted Hollywood its most obvious and reoccurring villains.⁴⁴² Both the Nazi occupation of Europe and the Klan's dominance in parts of the South allows Hollywood to present the American liberation of communities previously denied

⁴³⁸ Rob Dreher, 'Time to Star: Moral Tale, Memorable Performances,' *Sun Sentinel*, July 24th 1996, accessed May 25, 2015, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1996-07-24/lifestyle/9607230183_1_carl-lee-hailey-jake-brigance-gas-chamber

⁴³⁹ Ames, 'Restoring the Black Man's Lethal Weapon,' 52.

⁴⁴⁰ James D. Williams, 'Mississippi Burning Offers Distorted View of History' (NAACP Focus), *The Crisis*, Vol. 96, No. 4, April 1989, 27.

⁴⁴¹ Alan Parker, 'A Conviction in Mississippi,' *The Times*, June 2005, accessed May 6, 2014, available at <http://alanparker.com/essay/a-conviction-in-mississippi/>

⁴⁴² In the first decade of the twenty-first century there were 180 films produced about World War II, considerably more than in the 1990s, which saw just 86. With over fifty produced between 2010 and 2014 alone, it is likely that 'we are on course for a similar figure this decade,' as Andrew Pulver has argued. Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) provided audiences with what broadcaster Matthew Sweet calls "a fantasy of how the Holocaust should have worked out," as Jewish U.S. soldiers assassinate Nazi leaders in occupied France. See Andrew Pulver, 'Why are we so obsessed with films about the second world war?' *The Guardian*, July 17, 2014, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/17/why-so-obsessed-second-world-war-films>. Even the villains of more conventional crime/action films often prove 'extraordinarily Aryan,' Christopher Ames argues. From the vampire-like, underworld mobster Ballin Mundson (George Macready) of Charles Vidor's *Gilda* (1946) to *Die Hard*'s 'bloodless conspiracy of technocratic Germans' and *Lethal Weapon 2*'s 'drug-dealing white supremacist South Africans... variations on evil whiteness represent a search for inoffensive villains who can be characterized as monsters requiring extra-legal extermination.' See Ames, 'Restoring the Black Man's Lethal Weapon,' 52.

freedom.⁴⁴³ Byron De La Beckwith's 1994 conviction for the 1963 murder of Medgar Evers was '[i]n a sense, a Nuremberg Trial for America,' producer Fred Zollo argued on the release of *Ghosts of Mississippi*, because 'what Beckwith did is what the Nazis did.'⁴⁴⁴ As a result of such trite comparisons, the film does not expect its audiences to have any connection to or sympathy for Beckwith. Almost entirely 'sinister' (as in *Mississippi Burning*), or 'ludicrous' (as in *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (Joel & Ethan Cohen, 2000) and Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012), despite the latter being set roughly a decade before the organization's first incarnation), Hollywood's presentation of the KKK traces what film scholar Melvyn Stokes calls 'the growing disapproval of the Klan on the part of movie producers and critics' throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Other than a couple of exceptions in the 1950s, 'most films about the Klan were looking back on the Klan from a post-Klan era,' imposing contemporary judgment that can often undermine the organization's historical threat and influence.⁴⁴⁵

In *Ghosts of Mississippi*, James Woods's Oscar-nominated portrayal of Beckwith proved 'a reminder of the viciousness of a dark time in a dark place,' according to the *New York Times*.⁴⁴⁶ A pantomime villain, were Beckwith a fictional character he could easily be dismissed by film critics as a frankly ridiculous archaism, spouting no limit of racial and religious hatred. And yet, Beckwith was real. He stood trial twice for Evers's murder in the 1960s, but was never convicted as the result of two hung juries. Refusing to take the accusations against him seriously, Beckwith 'appeared to enjoy himself immensely' during his original trials according to reports by Rev. Jack Mendelsohn.⁴⁴⁷

Just days after leaving the Mississippi Governor's mansion in January 1964, Ross Barnett moved across the courtroom to shake Beckwith's hand during Evers's widow

⁴⁴³ See Anthony Morris, 'Why is Hollywood Still Obsessed with World War II?' *Junkee*, October 24, 2014, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://junkee.com/why-is-hollywood-still-obsessed-with-world-war-ii/43700> for a discussion of lasting Nazi stereotypes in Hollywood and the reasons for Hollywood's frequent focus on World War II.

⁴⁴⁴ Fred Zollo, quoted by Sean Mitchell, 'Waking the Ghosts,' *Los Angeles Times*, December 15th 1996, accessed February 10, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-12-15/entertainment/ca-9135_1_mississippi-burning

⁴⁴⁵ Melvyn Stokes, *American History through Film* (London: A& C Black, 2013), 132.

⁴⁴⁶ Walter Goodman, 'Medgar Evers and His Tragic End, With Re-enactments,' *New York Times*, July 11th 1994, accessed November 23, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/11/movies/television-review-medgar-evers-and-his-tragic-end-with-re-enactments.html>

⁴⁴⁷ According to Mendelsohn's account, Beckwith 'rested his legs on another chair while he drank soda pop, scowled at Negro newsmen, and waved gaily to white friends. At one point, a bailiff had to escort him back to his place when he strode over to chat with members of the jury. With a courtly flourish he offered cigars to Prosecutor William L. Waller.' Jack Mendelsohn, *The Martyrs: Sixteen who Gave their Lives for Racial Justice* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 83-4.

Myrlie's testimony. The scene is replicated in *Ghosts of Mississippi*, causing a horrified reporter to exclaim, '[t]here's not a court in America that would stand for this!' 'What's America got to do with anything?' his companion responds. 'This is Mississippi.' The film quickly articulates its narrative position in the Magnolia State, both through its title and these opening scenes. And yet, its critique is leveled from much further afield. 'The most southern place on earth,' 'the South on steroids,' and 'the closed society' – just some of the historical characterizations of the state – Mississippi occupies an especially reviled place in racial memory.⁴⁴⁸ 'The rest of America don't mean jack shit!' Mayor Tilman (R. Lee Ermey) confirms in *Mississippi Burning*. 'You in Mississippi now.'

Historian Joseph Crespino builds on three metaphors in an attempt to understand Mississippi's role in the national consciousness. The first is as a "closed society:" 'the singular site of political authoritarianism and racial extremism in 1960s America.' The second 'is the inverse trope of Mississippi as a synecdoche, or America as Mississippi Writ Large.' Crespino argues that this second trope formed the basis of activist critique during the 1960s, as groups and individuals lamented a lack of federal intervention to help combat Mississippi's civil rights violations. Thirdly, Crespino synthesizes the idea of Mississippi as a scapegoat, 'the favorite trope of southern segregationists who portrayed themselves as the victims of northern hypocrites who heaped the sins of the nation on the heads of white Mississippians while ignoring the racism of their own cities and suburbs.'⁴⁴⁹

Mississippi Burning, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, and *A Time to Kill* each invoke the first and the third of these established metaphors at various points in their narrative. All are quick to present the state as 'a closed society,' never acknowledging the national implications of the issues raised in the films; while in their utilization of segregationist rhetoric, several characters convey the idea that the Magnolia State serves as a scapegoat for other regions of the country. 'If the entire Secret Service couldn't protect the President of the United States, how the hell are we supposed to protect a few Negroes?' Mayor Tilman asks the press in *Mississippi Burning*. Conservative critic Pat Buchanan argued

⁴⁴⁸ James Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Crespino, 'Mississippi as Metaphor,' 100; James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society, 1964* (New York: Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2012). This sense of Mississippi's exceptional brutality is repeated in several other films, including *The Help*, whereby, following the news of Medgar Evers's murder, the audience overhears NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins reflect that Mississippi is 'absolutely at the bottom of the list.' It is a 'savage and uncivilized state' that no other can approach in 'inhumanity, murder, brutality and racial hatred.'

⁴⁴⁹ Crespino, 'Mississippi as Metaphor,' 100.

in January 1989 that the film proved that ‘Hollywood hates the South’ because it ‘indicts an entire region for a single atrocity committed there.’ Contemporary Washington D.C. was more dangerous than Mississippi in the 1960s, Buchanan contended.⁴⁵⁰

The second metaphor that Crespino unpacks – that America is ‘Mississippi Writ Large’ – is rarely communicated through Hollywood film. The narratives mentioned above never leave the state of Mississippi, and though *Mississippi Burning*’s Agent Ward implies that ‘anyone’s guilty who lets these things happen,’ his position as an outsider in the state implies that Mississippi needed saving from itself, preferably by federal agents.

Inspired by the release of *Mississippi Burning* in 1988, Jackson newspaper reporter Jerry Mitchell began scouring the state for the records of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, a powerful state agency that worked to preserve segregation and intimidate civil rights workers between 1956 and 1977. Mitchell found that the Commission had secretly screened jurors for Byron De La Beckwith’s defense in 1964, despite the fact that he was being tried for murder by the state. Myrlie Evers-Williams and the NAACP had never given up their campaign to force the District Attorney to reopen the murder case, and they were eventually successful in 1990.⁴⁵¹ The subsequent events form the plot of *Ghosts of Mississippi*, as assistant District Attorney Bobby DeLaughter (Alec Baldwin) works to bring Beckwith to justice.⁴⁵²

Refusing to meet with Beckwith ‘on moral grounds,’ James Woods perfected his performance watching videos of the white supremacist, including Beckwith’s ninety-minute interview with Ed Bryson that aired on WLBT in Jackson in 1990.⁴⁵³ Woods also

⁴⁵⁰ Pat Buchanan, ‘Hollywood’s Never-Never Mississippi,’ *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, January 25, 1989, 33.

⁴⁵¹ Jerry Mitchell, ‘The Case of the Supposedly-Sealed Files – And What They Revealed,’ *Nieman Reports: Cold Case Reporting: Revisiting Racial Crimes*, September 9, 2011, accessed March 5, 2016, <http://niemanreports.org/articles/the-case-of-the-supposedly-sealed-files-and-what-they-revealed/>

⁴⁵² *Ghosts of Mississippi* came under considerable criticism for its focus on Bobby DeLaughter as a ‘white hero.’ Rob Reiner understood that Myrlie Evers was keen to see a film about her husband’s life and activism, but attempted to justify his focus on DeLaughter’s transformation, arguing that ‘This is not the Medgar Evers story, and it’s not the civil rights movement. It’s the story of the reinvestigation and re prosecution of Byron De La Beckwith...I chose to tell the story of [DeLaughter] a man who came from a racist background, who was the product of segregationist parents, and who spent four and a half years of his life working on this thing.’ Reiner, quoted in Amy Dawes, ‘Making Film Emotional Trip for Rob Reiner,’ *Sun Sentinel* (Florida), January 3, 1997, accessed July 6, 2014, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1997-01-03/entertainment/9612310140_1_evers-killer-medgar-evers-myrlie-evers-williams/2. For negative reviews of *Ghosts*, see Scott Hettrick, ‘*Ghosts of Mississippi* Lacks Feeling,’ *Sun Sentinel* (Florida), July 25, 1997, accessed June 19, 2014: http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1997-07-25/entertainment/9707180356_1_medgar-evers-myrlie-evers-trials; Chris Hewitt, ‘A worn-out formula haunts *Ghosts*,’ *The Free-Lance Star* (Fredericksburg, VA), January 3rd 1997, D5.

⁴⁵³ When asked why he refused to meet with Beckwith, Woods insisted ‘I just don’t like him, and I thought it would make him feel special, that I would further inflame his narcissism.’

worked with a vocal coach, maintaining that Beckwith's accent ensured he could maintain a crucial distance from the character: 'I imagined I was speaking a foreign language,' he recalled, reflecting an obvious discomfort with any association with Beckwith.⁴⁵⁴ By constantly reminding himself that Beckwith was a southerner, a supposed product of his environment, Woods (who grew up in Rhode Island) successfully 'othered' Beckwith in the context of a national culture that has continually 'othered' southerners. And yet, though Woods's performance was widely celebrated, critics have failed to acknowledge religion's role in Beckwith's onscreen construction. The intersections of Beckwith's extreme racial views and vengeful religious preoccupations are crucial to the film's attempts to communicate his evil, but also his distinctly southern, almost archaic identity.

In real life, Beckwith had been praised by Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler as 'a great warrior for Christ' and once told Jerry Mitchell that 'God will punish you if you don't write positively about white Caucasian Christians. And if God does not punish you directly, several individuals will do it for Him.'⁴⁵⁵ Before entering Angola State Prison in Louisiana in 1977 for illegally transporting explosives, Beckwith was ordained as a minister at the Temple Memorial Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, a congregation founded on the principles of 'Christian Identity,' most notably anti-Semitism and racism.⁴⁵⁶

Though Woods's criticisms of Beckwith are entirely valid, his own opinions on race came under scrutiny when in the same interview he compared Beckwith's evasion of justice to that of O.J. Simpson and criticized affirmative action procedures that he argued 'actually [held] back progress.' 'I have a ton of black friends and they hate the idea that people might think they gained their position based on some kind of quota, rather than on the basis of their talent,' Woods claimed. 'This country needs to shut up already and get going. Stop whining and start living.' (See Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 222-3) In more recent years, Woods has used his Twitter account to forward inflammatory themes and conspiracy theories. His popular targets include Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, Obamacare, and Islamic extremism; conservatives have celebrated him as 'a prolific, highly articulate, and politically incorrect conservative voice on Twitter.' In November 2016, he suspended his account in protest, after Twitter blocked the accounts of numerous alt-right users. See Jim Treacher, 'James Woods: "I'll Probably Never Work in that Town Again,"' *The Daily Caller*, September 10, 2013, accessed May 7, 2015, <http://dailycaller.com/2013/10/09/james-woods-ill-probably-never-work-in-that-town-again/>; 'James Woods Quits Twitter Following Suspension of Alt-Right Accounts,' *Hollywood Reporter*, November 18, 2016, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/james-woods-quits-twitter-suspension-alt-right-accounts-948994>.

⁴⁵⁴ Matthew Gilbert, 'James Woods is So Good at Being Bad,' *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1997, accessed May 12, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/1997-01-01/entertainment/ca-14352_1_james-woods

⁴⁵⁵ Butler quoted in Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 186; Beckwith quoted in Joe Maxwell, 'Clarion caller,' *World*, February 12th 2005, accessed March 24, 2015, http://www.worldmag.com/2005/02/clarion_caller

⁴⁵⁶ Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi*, 186.

Reflecting the media's coverage of Beckwith, Woods' performance is of an 'unregenerate hater,' who 'won't talk to no Jew,' jokes about African American homes burning down and is committed to an understanding that 'God put the white man here to rule over all the dusky races.'⁴⁵⁷ Though Beckwith's disdain for Judaism is evident in the transcript of his actual interview with Ed Bryson (who plays himself in the film), Beckwith's refusal to speak to Jews in the film was based on producer Fred Zollo's conversations with the real Beckwith at Hinds County Jail before the film was made.⁴⁵⁸ When asked if he was a Jew, Zollo responded that he was Catholic, to which Beckwith demanded that he recite the 'Hail Mary' before he would speak to him.⁴⁵⁹ Zollo's experiences were thus written in to the scenes depicting Beckwith's interview with Bryson.

These scenes, which according to the script require Woods to 'smile the mocking smile of a man who has gotten away with murder,' formed the basis of the teaser trailer that was shown in advance of the movie's release across the United States in late 1996.⁴⁶⁰ The scene presents Beckwith consistently conflating his racial and religious preoccupations. 'I'm going to look out for my God and my family and the whole state of Christ's church and that don't encompass anybody but white Christians,' Woods's Beckwith insists. 'All these other races, colors and creeds, sissies, whatever – they are anti-Christ.' According to Mississippi writer Willie Morris, who served as a consultant on the film, the trailer caused a stir in many cinemas, as audiences shouted at the screen and in at least one recorded case pelted it with popcorn.⁴⁶¹

Despite the film's focus on DeLaughter, this first trailer suggests that Beckwith is the movie's central character. The specific religious and racial nature of Beckwith's inflammatory rhetoric was clearly recognized as something that would incense but ultimately intrigue potential audiences. Indeed, initial discussions between Morris and Zollo show that they considered the Beckwith characterization crucial to the film's appeal and certainly its best chance at securing Oscar recognition. This was later vindicated when

⁴⁵⁷ See Dawes, 'Making Film an Emotional Trip.' A transcript of the original interview shows that Beckwith's religious preoccupations were indeed central to his worldview. Committed to an idea of 'Dixie' as 'a white Christian republic,' Beckwith denied his role in Evers's murder, but admitted that, as an Episcopalian, 'I was trained from my youth to make war for the enemies of this white Christian republic.' Interview with Byron De La Beckwith, April 30th 1990, Bobby De Laughter Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Box 4, Folder 27, p. 40 & 18.

⁴⁵⁸ Zollo also produced *Mississippi Burning*.

⁴⁵⁹ See Willie Morris, *Ghosts of Medgar Evers: A Tale of Race, Murder, Mississippi, and Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 1998), 144.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the film received two Academy Award nominations: one for Woods as Best Supporting Actor and one for the makeup team who managed to transform him from an actor in his forties to the seventy-four year old Beckwith.⁴⁶²

While many reviews criticized the film's focus on DeLaughter at the expense of the Evers family, most heaped praise on what the *New York Times* acknowledged as the 'wily malevolence' of Woods' Beckwith.⁴⁶³ A 'searing mad-dog racist,' according to one reviewer, Woods' Beckwith was declared a 'perfect villain,' with many critics acknowledging the actor's capacity for bringing life to cinematic reprobates, from his portrayal of a pimp in *Casino* (Martin Scorsese, 1995), to another recent performance as notorious criminal Carl Panzram in *Killer: A Journal of Murder* (Tim Metcalfe, 1995).⁴⁶⁴

During Beckwith's retrial in the 1990s, National Public Radio reported that listening to the former Klansman 'was like listening to someone who's been locked away in a time capsule for the last three decades...You have to look long and hard to find Mississippians today who express agreement with Beckwith's racist rantings.'⁴⁶⁵ Indeed Beckwith's lawyers, seemingly aware of their client's limited public appeal, decided that he would not take to the stand, even though this denied them the opportunity to forward Beckwith's 1964 claim that his rifle was stolen prior to Evers's assassination.⁴⁶⁶

Therefore, because there could be no courtroom speech from Beckwith, *Ghosts of Mississippi's* reconstruction of his interview with Bryson serves as an ideological set piece. Comparable to Clayton Townley's passionate speeches in *Mississippi Burning*, these scenes deliver Beckwith's toxic racism and obsessive Christianity directly to the audience. In both films, the cinematic gaze directed toward the two Klansmen remains consistently public and judgemental, with neither man seen in private moments. The content of Beckwith's and Townley's outbursts are also remarkably similar in content and rhetorical style, enabling filmmakers to imply a quintessentially white southern evil that has now been forced to comply with broader American patterns and laws. There is a

⁴⁶² Ibid, 87. Morris later describes the intricacies of Woods' transformation, writing that '[e]verything was rubber except his nose, eyeballs, and eyelids...A crew member was assigned to hold an umbrella over him so he would not melt' in the Mississippi sun (p.155).

⁴⁶³ Janet Maslin, 'For a True Story, Dipping Into the Classics,' *New York Times*, December 20, 1996, accessed July 25, 2015,

<http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9F0DE7DF1431F933A15751C1A960958260>

⁴⁶⁴ Margaret A. McGurk, 'Mississippi Smouldering,' *Cincinnati Enquirer*, date unknown, accessed July 12, 2014, http://enquirer.com/columns/mcgurk/010397b_mm.html; Matthew Gilbert, 'The Perfect Villain,' *Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), January 5, 1997, E3.

⁴⁶⁵ Quoted in Renee C. Romano, *Racial Reckoning: Prosecuting America's Civil Rights Murders* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 132.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 239, note 56.

clear assumption that audiences will recognise the Klansmen's religion to be little more than a rhetorical tool designed to obscure racial agendas.

Despite their narratives being divided by almost thirty years, both men are 'interviewed' in a traditional television journalism style, creating an air of authenticity designed to elicit strong audience reactions. Both interviews begin with extremely leading questions: 'Mr Beckwith, do you believe it is a crime for a white man to kill a black man?' Ed Bryson, playing himself asks Beckwith. In *Mississippi Burning*, Townley, is asked, 'Are you sir a spokesman for the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan?' The interviews repeat what Graham recognizes as the 'permissible (i.e., bankable) southern and racial imagery [that] obsessed Madison Avenue' during the 1950s and 1960s. They reflect the centrality of media conventions to the civil rights melodrama, whereby authenticity is attempted through the adoption of rhetorical and visual reminders of the fact that for most Americans the movement unfolded as a media spectacle.⁴⁶⁷ As we watch Beckwith's interviews through the eyes of Assistant District Attorney Bobby DeLaughter and his fellow investigators in *Ghosts of Mississippi*, we cannot help but share their disgust. 'He's a real beauty ain't he?' Lloyd 'Benny' Bennett (a real investigator from the case playing himself) comments sarcastically.⁴⁶⁸

For many journalists on the civil rights beat in the 1960s, television was not just about broadcasting the South into homes across the nation; it was, according to NBC correspondent John Chancellor, about showing southerners '*themselves* on television. They'd never seen themselves. They didn't know their necks were red.'⁴⁶⁹ Such 'apologists' for 'on-the-spot news coverage' believed – as Graham argues – that they were enabling black and white southerners 'to become aware of oneself as an *image*.'⁴⁷⁰

However, as Graham suggests, it is unlikely that southerners remained unaware of their onscreen portrayal. By the late 1950s, 'white southerners knew their necks were red, and most black southerners knew they were voiceless images in a tale of blood and vengeance,' Graham writes.⁴⁷¹ Long before the advent of television news, they had read

⁴⁶⁷ Graham, *Framing the South*, 5. See also: Allison Graham, "'We Ain't Doin' Civil Rights': The Life and Times of a Genre, as Told in *The Help*," *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 51-64.

⁴⁶⁸ Ed Bryson and Benny Bennett are not the only people to play themselves in *Ghosts of Mississippi*; Medgar Evers's sons Darrell and Van play themselves, while Evers's daughter, Reena, is portrayed by Yolanda King, daughter of Martin Luther King, Jr. Such actors have what Monteith calls 'a vested interest' the film's presentation of real events, and blur 'the distinction between movie-made memories and historical past.' See Monteith, 'Movie-made movement,' 136.

⁴⁶⁹ John Chancellor, quoted in Graham, *Framing the South*, 1.

⁴⁷⁰ Graham, *Framing the South*, 1.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

about themselves in ‘regional fiction’ and ‘civil rights journalism.’ Most importantly, Graham argues, ‘[t]hey’d seen it at the movies.’⁴⁷² Just as Sherriff Stuckey sarcastically remarks in *Mississippi Burning* that it ‘ain’t right having blood on Main Street. How’d that look on the TV news?’, Clayton Townley is evidently aware of media conventions. He precedes his speech to the reporters by asserting that, as ‘a Mississippian [and also] an American,’ he ‘is sick and tired of how many of us Mississippians are having our views distorted by you newspaper people and on the TV.’ He vehemently denies that he is a spokesperson for the Ku Klux Klan, but is determined to ‘get this straight.’

We do not accept Jews, because they reject Christ,’ he shouts. ‘Their control over the international banking cartels are at the root of what we call Communism today. We do not accept Papists, because they bow to a Roman dictator! We do not accept Turks, Mongrels, Tartars, Orientals nor Negroes because we are here to protect Anglo-Saxon Democracy, and the American way!’⁴⁷³

Thus, though Townley appeals to American patriotism, he nevertheless betrays his own racial and anti-Semitic convictions, undermining himself in the eyes of the national media and by extension the movie’s audience.

In staging scenes to reflect media coverage, *Mississippi Burning* established a tradition that continues to typify civil rights cinema. Graham argues that Hollywood directors in the late twentieth-century were influenced by critical acclaim that surrounded the award-winning civil rights documentary series *Eyes on the Prize*.⁴⁷⁴ Largely because of its considerable use of original footage, *Eyes on the Prize* has endured as one of the most important resources on the civil rights movement. The footage at the heart of its narrative continues to shape ‘what is taught and studied as civil rights history in secondary schools in the United States and abroad,’ Graham and Monteith write.⁴⁷⁵ As a result of its

⁴⁷² *Ibid*, 2.

⁴⁷³ According to Tobolowsky, at least 1000 of the extras present in the crowds for his character’s main speech at a ‘political meeting’ were contemporary card-carrying members of the Klan. Concerned that the movie had anti-Klan intentions, many local whites took a special interest in its production, but were impressed with Tobolowsky’s performance. According to the actor, whose Jewish heritage adds a further irony to the story, the raucous reactions of many extras to his character’s race-baiting, pro-white South demagoguery were genuine. ‘I was like Mick Jagger,’ he describes. Stephen Tobolowsky, *The Tobolowsky Files Ep. 39 – Contagion* (Podcast), October 29, 2010, accessed June 23, 2014, <http://podbay.fm/show/339001481/e/1288378803?autostart=1>

⁴⁷⁴ Graham, *Framing the South*, 149.

⁴⁷⁵ Graham & Monteith, ‘Southern Media Cultures,’ 24. Graham and Monteith also note that ‘[t]he year [between] the first broadcast of *Eyes on the Prize* [and the release of *Mississippi Burning*] saw the publication of three seminal studies of the civil rights struggle.’ They were: Seth Cagin & Phillip Dray, *We Are Not Afraid: The Story of Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney, and the Civil Rights Campaign for Mississippi* (New York: Macmillan, 1988); Stephen

critical success, filmmakers in the late 1980s and 1990s were ‘quick to emulate the look and sound of decades-old broadcast journalism,’ as Graham notes, looking to archival footage to give their historical dramas the impression of authenticity. *Ghosts of Mississippi* opens with a montage of images designed to quickly narrate the African American struggle in the United States, while *Forrest Gump* repeatedly inserts its protagonist into news clips, including George Wallace’s ‘Stand in the Schoolhouse Door’ at the University of Alabama in 1963. Through the insertion of actual news footage, many civil rights dramas, including *The Long Walk Home* and *The Help*, demonstrate what Graham recognizes as ‘television’s capacity to function as both an iconic element of set design and a featured player in the screenplay.’ TV news footage often allows characters and audiences to gather information from the same source, but as ‘the visual style of early 1960s news footage became a marker of historical authenticity,’ it was even used ‘anachronistically without critical comment.’ *The Chamber*, another 1996 John Grisham adaptation, ‘recreated’ a news segment from 1967 in black and white, despite the fact, as Graham acknowledges, ‘that network news was regularly shot in color at that time.’⁴⁷⁶

Mississippi Burning injects its narrative with several clips from ‘interviews’ conducted with Jessup County residents, designed to give a broader sense of a fictional community described by the *Washington Post* as ‘an inbred bigoted community.’⁴⁷⁷ For Alan Parker, there were no doubts as to who the film’s racial villains would be: ‘It was always the poor white who performed the violence,’ he claimed. ‘What I’ve tried to say in the film is that the roots of racism are economic.’⁴⁷⁸ Though Parker makes no specific reference to religion, he could easily have replaced ‘violence’ with ‘religion.’ The two are interwoven throughout his narrative, separating the good from the bad, at least amongst the white characters. Parker’s thesis is explicit in the film when Ward asks Anderson, ‘Where does it come from, all this hatred?’ His partner responds with a story about his father, who killed a mule belonging to a black farmer out of jealousy. ‘If you aren’t any better than a nigger, son, who are you better than?’ Anderson remembers his father saying to him. ‘The old man was so full of hate, he didn’t know that being poor was what was killing him,’ Anderson concludes. Immediately after this statement a brick flies through the window, alerting the agents to the burning cross outside their window

Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Touchstone, 1988).

⁴⁷⁶ Graham, “‘We Ain’t Doin’ Civil Rights,’” 57.

⁴⁷⁷ Deson Howe, ‘*Mississippi Burning* – at High Noon,’ *Washington Post*, 9th December 1988, WE51.

⁴⁷⁸ Alan Parker, quoted in Kroll, ‘Rerunning the Racial Gauntlet,’ 68.

and the legacy of the racial hatred and corrupted religion that marked the life of Anderson's father and continues to stifle southern progress.

Like so many other popular and historical accounts of the Klan, *Mississippi Burning* discredits what historian Kelly Baker recognizes as 'the religious vision of the order,' presenting it as little more than a 'tiresome declaration of false religion.'⁴⁷⁹ According to Baker, the 'desire to set up boundaries between true and false religion does nothing to further the scholarly enterprise,' marking the 'religion of the hate movement as somehow not religion.'⁴⁸⁰ Because this religion is considered unauthentic, it is not properly explored, thus its impact is lost. Most importantly, Baker argues:

[P]resenting the religion of the Klan as false religion allows an assumption that religion is somehow not associated with movements and people who might be unsavory, disreputable, or dangerous. Religion is at best, ambiguous, which means that it can be associated with movements we label "good" and "bad."⁴⁸¹

Baker's comments justify the need for her study, but they also raise questions about the presentation of the Klan in popular culture. If the religion of the group is presented as illegitimate, as Baker suggests, what does it mean that this 'false religion' is the dominant manifestation of white southern religion in Hollywood cinema? Does the continued association of white southern religion and the Klan, plus the subsequent delegitimizing of those religious concerns have lasting impact on popular understandings of white religion in the region as false and self-serving? Many of the films discussed here would suggest that it does, whilst the often-juxtaposed positive portrayals of African American Christianity reflect a hierarchical understanding of religion within popular culture, whereby religion associated with one group becomes positive, and with another negative.

As if to reflect this dichotomy, a key scene in *Mississippi Burning* sees an African American church service juxtaposed with increasing numbers of Klansmen, who begin to gather outside the church. As the congregation sings 'When We All Get to Heaven,' a white Methodist hymn written by E. E. Hewitt in 1898, the tensions mount, as we see more men in white hoods forming their own counter-assembly.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁹ Kelly Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2011), 17.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 17-18.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid*, 18.

⁴⁸² See Esther Rothenbusch, 'The Joyful Sounds: Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States Hymnody Tradition,' in *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Ellen Koskoff (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 185. The following chapter will further discuss the distinction between hymns and gospel as musical forms within African American Christianity.

As the animated chatter of the departing churchgoers descends into terrified screams upon recognition of the waiting mob, Klan members begin to chase and beat members of the congregation. The same hymn can then be heard yet again, this time sang at a slower tempo by Lannie Spann McBride, who served as Parker's 'Gospel Music Consultant' on the movie.⁴⁸³ Through McBride's reserved delivery, the song loses the triumphalism of its lyrics ('When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be! When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory!'). There is no inspirational or confrontational element to the music; rather than encouraging resistance, the song acts as a salve, promoting dignity in the face of tragedy, or potentially indicting religion's failure to deliver justice in the world. The African American congregation's stoicism is cast in dramatic contrast with the extreme violence of their opponents. As one young black boy simply kneels in prayer he is kicked in the face and threatened with death by a Klansman.

The scene undoubtedly reflects the very different ways that these two groups of Mississippians have interpreted and enacted Christian teachings, but neither could be said to mirror dominant American culture. Indeed, in pitting the film's only two presentations of religious involvement against each other, the scene illuminates Paul Harvey's contention that the southern civil rights movement reflected 'American Christianity...at its most tragic and its most triumphant.'⁴⁸⁴

Representing what historian Charles Payne describes as the public 'face of racism,' characters like Clayton Townley and Byron De La Beckwith are constructed by Hollywood in order to be eradicated, implying that the intolerance and injustice they represented can and have been swept away.⁴⁸⁵ Both are convicted, and no narrative space is given to their supporters. When in 2005 Preacher Edgar Ray Killen was finally convicted of planning and directing the murders that form *Mississippi Burning*'s premise, journalist Gary Younge argued that such cases 'shift[ed] the burden of racist history from the institutional to the individual,' proving 'convenient for those who wish to claim that racism was practiced only by the poor and ended with segregation.'⁴⁸⁶ Similarly, both

⁴⁸³ See Internet Movie Database: *Mississippi Burning*, Full Cast & Crew, accessed June 23, 2014, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095647/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast.

⁴⁸⁴ Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming*, 4.

⁴⁸⁵ Charles Payne, quoted in Gary Younge, 'Racism Rebooted,' *The Nation*, July 11, 2005, accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/racism-rebooted?page=0,1>

⁴⁸⁶ Younge, *ibid.* Republican politicians have been continually accused of pedaling a similar narrative, as they attempt to appeal to black voters. Reporting on Republican Senator for Kentucky Rand Paul's speech at historically black Howard University in April 2013, Jamelle Bouie argued that the Senator 'focused his time and attention on the 19th century history of the GOP,' but ignored Republican's 'fraught relationship with black voters over the last 50 years. At

Mississippi Burning and *Ghosts of Mississippi* simply relegate their villains to subcultural status, rather than attempting to communicate the religious practices and societal systems that fostered and supported their racial attitudes. Beckwith ‘was a bad guy,’ James Woods argued, ‘I’m so sick of evil being justified.’⁴⁸⁷

Beckwith’s sense of Christianity as a vengeful faith committed to the protection of white supremacy forms *Ghosts of Mississippi*’s only presentation of religion, equating Beckwith’s archaic religiosity with the horrendous nature of his crime. Unable to speak to the real Beckwith whose case was then on appeal, director Rob Reiner nevertheless visited Beckwith’s cell at the Hinds County jail while the convicted murderer was sleeping. Using Beckwith’s cell as a means through which to explore his preoccupations, Reiner appeared to be taking his cues from Scorsese’s *Cape Fear*, where Max Cady’s cell provides our first introduction to the villain. Reiner recalled that Beckwith’s cell was full of literature reflecting his obsessions, ‘pamphlets, books and magazines from the Aryan Nation, the Nationalist Movement, the Christian Identity Movement. He is firmly steeped in his ignorance,’ Reiner concluded, and ‘definitely in touch with the outside world. He writes five to 10 letters a day to various hate groups.’⁴⁸⁸

In *Ghosts of Mississippi*, Beckwith remains unrepentant, still unable to recognize the humanity of the man he murdered almost thirty years previously. His exceptional hatred and refusal to take his case seriously reflects his jarring presence within the ‘New South’ that DeLaughter represents. ‘The growth I’ve had,’ the real DeLaughter once said, ‘is symbolic of the growth people of our age have had.’⁴⁸⁹ In the film’s narrative, DeLaughter’s increasing commitment to racial justice strains and ultimately ends his marriage to the appropriately named Dixie, whose step-father Russel Moore had been ‘perhaps the most racist judge in the history of Mississippi’ according to Myrlie Evers (played by Whoopi Goldberg).⁴⁹⁰ Dixie herself is adamant that in attempting to bring

no point did Paul acknowledge Nixon’s Southern Strategy, Lee Atwater’s racial demagoguery, or Ronald Reagan’s decision to denounce “welfare queens” and embrace “states’ rights” while campaigning in Philadelphia, Mississippi—where three civil-rights workers were murdered by white supremacists.’ Jamelle Bouie, ‘Rand Paul at Howard,’ *The Daily Beast*, April 11, 2013, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/11/rand-paul-at-howard.html>

⁴⁸⁷ Gilbert, ‘Perfect Villain,’ E3, E7.

⁴⁸⁸ Reiner, quoted in Dawes, ‘Making Film Emotional Trip for Rob Reiner’.

⁴⁸⁹ Bobby DeLaughter, quoted in Morris, *Ghosts of Medgar Evers*, 68.

⁴⁹⁰ A senior member of the Jackson Citizens’ Council, Judge Moore had conspired to have Evers arrested along with NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins in 1959, when the two activists planned to mark the fifth anniversary of the *Brown* decision with a desegregation suit in Jackson. Moore was a spectator at Beckwith’s original trials in the 1960s, and kept the murder weapon as a souvenir. DeLaughter was able to retrieve the rifle from his mother-in-law prior to the 1994 retrial. (See Vollers, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, 75-7 & 279)

Beckwith to justice, her husband was determined to ‘humiliate [her] in front of [her] friends, [her] family and the state of Mississippi.’⁴⁹¹ It is only through distancing himself from ‘Dixie’ – both his wife and the regional captivity her name symbolizes - that DeLaughter can develop into the true American visionary the film requires. Indeed, he stops singing the song ‘Dixie’ to comfort his young daughter, telling her that perhaps it is that very song that keeps attracting ‘ghosts’ to her room –and by extension, Mississippi itself.⁴⁹²

Crucial to the filmic DeLaughter’s gradual enlightenment, ‘Dixie’ serves as a reminder of the prejudices this privileged white southerner has overcome. Like the scenes at the country club with his parents and mother-in-law that the real DeLaughter insists never happened, the scene in which Alec Baldwin’s DeLaughter sings ‘Dixie’ to his daughter provides an insight into the entrenched racial hierarchies the character had absorbed from birth before acknowledging Medgar Evers - another thirty-seven year old father of three – as a human being.⁴⁹³ According to Jerry Mitchell, screenwriter Lewis Colick and producer Fred Zollo were both committed to the idea ‘that DeLaughter was the story: a young prosecutor, son of Ole Miss, who overcame the objections of his own racist family to join forces with Medgar Evers’ widow and win the longshot case to finally put Beckwith behind bars. “You’re looking for things where you can get a movie star,” Colick says. “This was a movie star role.” Colick’s script also granted Baldwin the crucial cross-examination of Beckwith’s alibi, when in fact District Attorney Ed Peters and not DeLaughter delivered this. In a meeting with Peters, director Rob Reiner told the former DA that it was essential that DeLaughter and Myrlie Evers shared a look of understanding after the examination. ‘[T]he enlightened Southern boy and the grieving widow,’ Peters later scoffed.⁴⁹⁴

Though Reiner acknowledged that the real DeLaughter was ‘a very principled, religious man,’ his film’s constructed Beckwith/DeLaughter dichotomy would have been compromised by an insight into the latter’s religious and conservative preoccupations.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹¹ Jake Brigance suffers from similar marital strain in both the novel and film *A Time to Kill* when his wife Carla leaves town with their daughter as the result of Klan intimidation. Though this is primarily for their safety, it is suggested that the marriage is under strain as a result of the case. This marital uncertainty is exacerbated by Brigance’s developing friendship with liberal, northern law student Ellen Roark (Sandra Bullock).

⁴⁹² The song is a link to a memorialized past that is increasingly unsavory to DeLaughter. It is also what Sean Mitchell referred to as ‘a broad stroke some might trace to the hand of Hollywood.’ ‘I would always tuck my kids in at night,’ the real DeLaughter explained, ‘but no, I didn’t sing “Dixie.”’ See Mitchell, ‘Waking the Ghosts.’

⁴⁹³ See Morris, *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers*, 131.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ Reiner, quoted in Dawes, ‘Making Film Emotional Trip’.

‘It was from the depths of my conservatism, under God’s guidance, that I drew strength enough to keep going,’ DeLaughter later claimed.⁴⁹⁶ ‘During that time, there wasn’t but one other alternative and that was to say a lot of prayers,’ he remembered. ‘And probably if I had had the authority to say, “I want one scene to convey one thing that did not make the final cut,” it would be a scene to illustrate that in some way.’⁴⁹⁷

Frequently cast as the domain of the outcast, religion is never prominent in the lives of Hollywood’s central white protagonists. White southerners who prove to be significant, progressive characters like DeLaughter and Jake Brigance have often ‘risen above’ the deeply established confines of their southern homeland, abandoning its religiosity just as they have shunned its racism. In *A Time to Kill* passionate religiosity is reserved entirely for African Americans and white supremacists. Though mainstream white Christianity does not feature prominently in *A Time to Kill*, its singular appearance is undoubtedly associated with older, more conservative generations, notably Jake’s in-laws. We only ever see Jake in church with them, suggesting that it is much more about maintaining pretence than spiritual involvement. Following the service, they express their concern that he has taken such a racially explosive case. Like most southern moderates, the film suggests, they would prefer a quiet life.

Jake’s wife Carla is visibly shocked that her husband wants to talk to the press outside their church, telling him ‘this isn’t the time.’ Carla’s concern, like her parents,’ is rooted in how much they, as a middle-class white family, have to lose from her husband’s involvement in the trial. It is therefore somewhat ironic that Brigance uses his presence at a mainstream southern white church – a place where such commitment is clearly lacking – to pledge himself to social justice and Hailey’s case.

This scene is bookended by two distinctly more enthusiastic religious ceremonies. It is preceded by Freddie Lee Cobb’s attempts to recruit his friends to the Klan in order that they might join ‘the war to protect our Christian homes and families’ and ‘resurrect our country from the fires of racial degradation.’ Then, immediately following the scene in Jake’s church, the film cuts to the service underway at Mount Zion CME Church and the rapturous response to the entrance of Hailey’s family. Reflecting continuing de facto segregation of public worship in the 1990s, the juxtaposed scenes of Jake’s and Carl Lee’s churches also communicate a very different attitude towards the social purpose of religion. Indeed, Grisham’s publishers recognise that even children in the fifth grade can

⁴⁹⁶ Bobby DeLaughter, quoted in Morris, *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers*, 68.

⁴⁹⁷ DeLaughter, quoted in Peter T. Chattaway, ‘Setting the record straight,’ *The Ubysssey* (University of British Columbia), January 10, 1997, accessed November 12, 2014, http://www.library.ubc.ca/archives/pdfs/ubyssey/UBYSSEY_1997_01_10.pdf, 4.

spot the symbolic and physical differences between the two churches, as evidenced in their ‘Teacher’s Guide’ to the novel.⁴⁹⁸ While Mt Zion CME is actively committed to supporting the community, the mainstream white church appears more as a place to ‘be seen,’ lest your neighbors (or in-laws) think less of you.

Because Hollywood adaptations so regularly jettison the religious preoccupations of their white protagonists, it is interesting to examine Grisham’s initial intentions for Jake’s spiritual life. At what Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized as America’s ‘most segregated hour,’ Grisham writes that Jake, who was brought up a Methodist attends ‘First Presbyterian Church of Clanton,’ following negotiation with Carla, who had been brought up Baptist.⁴⁹⁹ ‘The Baptists had more members and more money,’ Grisham writes, ‘but the Presbyterians and Methodists adjourned earlier on a Sunday and outraced the Baptists to the restaurants for Sunday dinner.’⁵⁰⁰ Thus, Jake and Carla’s spiritual realignment does not appear to have been too taxing and probably reflects their now-elevated social status in the community.⁵⁰¹ On Sundays, Grisham describes, Jake and Carla ‘sat in their usual pew, with [their daughter] Hanna asleep between them, and ignored the sermon.’ Jake focuses instead on his legal cases, while Carla is ‘mentally redecorating the dining room.’⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁸ Question 2, Chapters 11-15: ‘Compare the Brigrance church with the Hailey family’s Mt. Zion CME.’ Random House, ‘Teacher’s Guide: A Time to Kill,’ accessed December 14, 2016, https://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers_guides/9780440245919.pdf.

⁴⁹⁹ King frequently reminded audiences that America’s churches remained its most segregated institutions. For the origin of King’s observation see Keith D. Miller, *Language of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King Jr., and its Sources* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 245, note 56; Kathleen Garces-Foley, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 167, note 2; John Grisham, *A Time to Kill* (1989), Kindle edition (London: Cornerstone Digital Publishing, 2010), 117.

⁵⁰⁰ Grisham, 117.

⁵⁰¹ Because the film resituates the drama in the actual town of Canton, Mississippi, it is interesting to consider the history of First Presbyterian, which in 1964 was the only white Protestant congregation in the town to welcome northern activists and clergy. As Carolyn Dupont writes, First Presbyterian’s faithful were ‘[g]uided by their cerebral and theologically liberal – by Mississippi standards – pastor, Richard T. Harbison.’ However, ‘sometimes few but Harbison and his wife even spoke’ to the newcomers and local attendance began to drop. Citizens’ Council intimidation prevented further integration of the northern students and Harbison’s resignation proved inevitable when in his temporary absence the ‘First Presbyterian Church joined the rest of Canton in its policy of “no hospitality.”’ (See Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 183-5) In his study of Mississippi Presbyterians, R. Milton Winter demonstrates frequent divisions that have separated congregations since the civil rights movement, ‘in a region where many considered secession an ancient and honorable means of resolving differences.’ Winter argues that ‘in an era when social and political change was rapid,’ Mississippi’s Presbyterian leaders, ‘far from Presbyterianism’s centers of strength...grasped the inherently conservative nature of religion and took what some saw as a “last stand” against change.’ See Winter, ‘Division & Reunion,’ 67.

⁵⁰² Grisham, *A Time to Kill*, 118.

As culturally liberal southern whites, both Brigance and DeLaughter are horrified when they come under pressure to give up their cases in order that black lawyers might undertake them. They see themselves as the good guys: harbingers of the New South and critically removed from the racist rednecks that seemingly blight Mississippi's progress. Thus Brigance and DeLaughter fail to understand why some members of the black community might view them with suspicion.⁵⁰³ Crucially, it is assumed that the audience will share this understanding of the spectrum of racial attitudes amongst whites. 'These films are about a certain kind of white person who came of age at a certain age,' Bernard Beck argued in 1997. 'That's who makes movies.'⁵⁰⁴

In their 1996 study *Hollywood's America*, Stephen Powers, David Rothman, and Stanley Rothman argued that Hollywood's 'liberal' agenda is deeply entrenched in the 1960s. Hollywood elites 'seek to persuade Americans to create the kind of society that they regard as just and/or good.' Therefore, those who oppose the 'liberal or leftist perspectives that became prominent in the 1960s' often become cinema's villains or buffoons. 'In short, filmmakers seek to propagate an ideology that they believe should be held by all *decent people* [emphasis mine].'⁵⁰⁵ While it is important to note that not all prominent Hollywood figures share the same disdain for social and political conservatism, Powers et al. argue that the vast majority of 'the Hollywood elite shares a set of political and cultural assumptions that it views as natural.'⁵⁰⁶

Seldom has this been more apparent or consistent than in the post- civil rights era depiction of religious white southerners, from the sinister Klansmen of *Mississippi*

⁵⁰³ In many ways, Brigance acts as his client's, but also the audience's, guide, in the post-civil rights South. He is racially liberal, committed to 'the new South,' but 'would go back to hangings on the courthouse lawn if we could . . . The only problem with the death penalty is that we do not use it enough.' He does not 'believe in forgiveness or in rehabilitation' and is certainly 'no ACLU card-carrying radical.' When Ellen Roark disagrees with his views, Brigance asks her to spare him her 'northern, liberal, cry-me-a-river, we're the only enlightened ones in the northern hemisphere bullshit.' In the end, though, it is Brigance's ability to understand the minds of the jury members that eventually ensures Hailey's release. 'You think just like them; that's why I picked you,' Hailey informs Jake. 'You my secret weapon. You's one of the bad guys. You don't mean to be but you are. It's how you was raised . . . You see me like the jury sees me. You are them.'

⁵⁰⁴ Bernard Beck quoted in Teresa Wiltz, 'Whose History.' Several critics have argued that Hollywood's increasing fascination with the civil rights movement and Vietnam reflected baby boomer nostalgia, as both contemporary racial and tensions and the Gulf War encouraged comparisons with the events of the 1960s. Yet, as Sharon Monteith has argued, if filmmakers were so concerned with attracting baby boomer audiences in the late twentieth-century, why did they prove so reluctant to engage with student involvement in the civil rights movement, especially the voter registration drives that brought Goodman and Schwerner to Mississippi in the first place? See Monteith, 'Exploitation Movies and the Freedom Struggle of the 1960s,' 195.

⁵⁰⁵ Stephen Powers, David Rothman, and Stanley Rothman, *Hollywood's America: Social and Political Themes in American Motion Pictures* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 3.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

Burning, to their bumbling counterparts in *Fletch Lives* (Michael Ritchie, 1989), a film that also features fraudulent televangelist Jimmy Lee Farmsworth (R. Lee Ermeley).⁵⁰⁷ Farmsworth, central to the film's satirical approach to the numerous scandals that had rocked evangelical ministries in the late 1980s, is hungry for land and profits, exploiting elderly church members so that he can expand Bibleland Amusement Park, the centerpiece of which is the 'Jump for Jesus' trampoline area.

Thus in both its dramatic and comedic presentations of the South, late twentieth-century Hollywood responded to what liberal critics were lamenting as the "Southernization" of American public life. More than simply transforming the Republican platform on a number of key issues, especially race, southern conservatives like Newt Gingrich contributed to a rise in evangelical rhetoric and anti-intellectualism. '[A] transplant from the poisoned soil of the Bourbon South,' political journalist Michael Lind argued in 1997, 'Republican anti-intellectualism [was] the gift of George Wallace to the GOP.'⁵⁰⁸

By the time the 'conservative revolution reached high tide' with Ronald Reagan's political success in the 1980s, '[t]he politics of rage that George Wallace made his own had moved from the fringes of our society to center stage,' claims historian Dan Carter.⁵⁰⁹ 'What in the culture wars has broadened into partisan conflict about matters such as prayer in schools, abortion, and family values,' Manis writes, 'began as and largely remains at heart the question first raised by the civil rights debate: How diverse, racially and culturally, should America be?'⁵¹⁰

Hollywood has appeared consistently fascinated with the civil rights movement and its legacy since the release of *Mississippi Burning* in 1988. Yet its presentation of religion has remained rudimentary at best. Presenting only the Klan as the gatekeepers of segregation, many Hollywood films project white supremacy as an extreme, dubiously religious, yet simultaneously class- and gender-based identity. This not only denies the widespread white concern about the implications of integration, but also the considerable range of white evangelical involvement in the civil rights movement.

⁵⁰⁷ Fittingly, Ermeley also played Mayor Tilman in *Mississippi Burning*.

⁵⁰⁸ Michael Lind, *Up from Conservatism: Why the Right is Wrong for America* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 136.

⁵⁰⁹ Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 474. Reagan left office as the most popular president of the second half of the twentieth-century, but blacks considered him a racist by a 3 to 1 margin. See Tom Wicker, *Tragic Failure: Racial Integration in America* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1996), 13-15.

⁵¹⁰ Manis, *Southern Civil Religions*, xiv.

In exceptional fashion, Ava DuVernay's depiction of the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965 highlights a broad landscape of religious thought in the freedom struggle, documenting a moment that New-Left journalists Warren Hinckle and David Welsh christened 'The Charge of the Bible Brigade.'⁵¹¹ In *Selma*, Martin Luther King, Jr. (David Oyelowo) chastises the hypocrisy of white preachers who preach the Bible but 'remain silent before their white congregations.'⁵¹² King equates these white preachers with politicians and law enforcement officers who blindly accept and enforce segregation and brutality. Their fingers were all on the trigger of the gun that killed unarmed marcher Jimmy Lee Jackson, he argues.⁵¹³

Acknowledging the responsibility of white believers, King urges people of all faiths to come to Alabama and march with him and other activists on their second attempt to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge towards Montgomery. 'I am appealing to men and women of God and goodwill everywhere: white, black and otherwise,' King says to the media. 'If you believe all are created equal, come to Selma. Join us. Join our march against injustice and inhumanity. We need you to stand with us.' In the film, as in reality, the response was both 'rapid and astonishing,' as Hinckle and Welsh noted. 'Never in the history of the United States has organized religion collaborated to such an extent on an issue of social justice,' Hinckle and Welsh wrote. 'The clergy men did not merely exhort – they led the way.'⁵¹⁴

Thus, though *Selma* does not depict any grassroots white activism, it does acknowledge that many white consciences were stirred by the horrific violence of Bloody Sunday, when protestors first attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7th 1965. *Selma* not only acknowledges the presence of white religious figures in the subsequent marches, but uses them to make a crucial point about the universal morality

⁵¹¹ Warren Hinckle & David Welsh, 'The Five Battles of Selma,' *Ramparts Magazine*, June 1965, 36, republished in David Garrow, *We Shall Overcome*, Vol. II (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 438.

⁵¹² It is important to note that the words ascribed to King in *Selma* are based on his actual speeches and writings, but are in themselves fictional. King's actual words are copyrighted and licensed by his estate to a Steven Spielberg project. The King estate has in the past sued publications and filmmakers for their unauthorized use of King's words, including the producers of *Eyes on the Prize*. See Jonathan Band, 'Can You Copyright a Dream? How the Martin Luther King estate controls the national hero's image,' *Politico*, January 12, 2015, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/01/selma-martin-luther-king-can-you-copyright-a-dream-114187.html#.VTu-zK1Viko>

⁵¹³ Jimmy Lee Jackson was a young African American male shot at close range by an Alabama State Trooper following a peaceful demonstration in Marion, AL on February 18th 1965. He died in hospital on February 26. His murder, depicted in *Selma*, was the catalyst for the marches from Selma to Montgomery.

⁵¹⁴ Hinckle & Welsh, 'The Five Battles of Selma,' 438.

of King's message, consciously directed to 'men and women of God and goodwill everywhere.' Yet, in its consequent focus on Unitarian Universalist Minister James Reeb (Jeremy Strong) – who had travelled from Boston to be present at the march – *Selma* does suggest that these enlightened whites were likely to be northern and certainly not from the evangelical denominations that dominated the southern religious landscape. James Forman (Trai Byers), executive secretary of SNCC, suggests this when he laments the fact that 'nice respectful white folks' are never around 'for long.'

Viola Luizzo (Tara Ochs), murdered by Klansmen just hours after crowds dispersed from Montgomery, was also a Unitarian Universalist, compelled to travel to Selma from Detroit after hearing King's call. Yet their northern credentials, white skin and Christianity, did little to save Reeb or Luizzo from the reactionary hatred their presence aroused in their killers and their deaths reflect the fact that all Americans were embroiled in the movement and its implications. Faya Rose Toure, a black lawyer working in Selma in the 1960s recalled the attitude she noted among many of the town's whites: 'anyone who values black life is considered a traitor. Therefore they are deserving of death.'⁵¹⁵

Although *Selma* has already been the subject of some debate – most notably surrounding its depiction of President Lyndon Johnson – it has raised an unprecedented critical discussion about the role of religion in the civil rights movement.⁵¹⁶ For example, The Gospel Coalition (TGC), a 'fellowship of evangelical churches,' published a series of discussions with religious historians about the role of white religious southerners, stimulated by the release of *Selma*. According to Justin Taylor, who conducted the interviews:

The movie *Selma* reminds us that white clergy protested and marched with Martin Luther King Jr. and other African Americans in the 1960s on behalf of Civil Rights. But it also reminds us—as Anthony Bradley recently observed—that many of those clergy were from the North and were Protestant mainliners, Greek

⁵¹⁵ Faya Rose Toure, quoted in Scott Helman, 'Letter from Selma,' *Boston Globe*, July 17, 2011, accessed January 13, 2015, http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/articles/2011/07/17/fbi_reopens_civil_rights_era_cold_case_painful_past/?page=full.

⁵¹⁶ See David Kaiser, 'Why You Should Care That *Selma* Gets LBJ Wrong,' *Time*, January 9, 2015, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://time.com/3658593/selma-lbj-history/>; Amy Davidson, 'Why *Selma* Is More Than Fair to L.B.J.,' *New Yorker*, January 22, 2015, accessed August 4, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/amy-davidson/selma-fair-l-b-j>; King, 'How long? Not long,' 469-71.

Orthodox, Jewish, and Roman Catholic. One has to wonder: where were the conservative evangelicals?⁵¹⁷

In response to this question, J. Russell Hawkins reveals how the National Association of Evangelicals responded to King's call for clergy to join him in Selma with the following dismissal: the Association 'has a policy of not becoming involved in political or sociological affairs that do not affect the function of the church or those involved in the propagation of the gospel.'⁵¹⁸ Much of Hawkins' subsequent argument is damning. 'To state it plainly,' he argues, '*the majority of southern white evangelicals actively opposed the civil rights movement in its various manifestations in the middle decades of the twentieth century because they saw it as a violation of God's design for racial segregation*' (emphasis Hawkins's).⁵¹⁹ Carolyn Dupont reinforces this point, arguing that 'any suggestion that the religion of southern whites aided the civil rights struggle grossly perverts the past.' She continues:

It is true that every major denomination in the United States embraced the Supreme Court's *Brown v Board of Education* decision that declared segregated schools unconstitutional. However, the picture looks very different at the local level, where southern evangelicals more often fought ferociously against any effort to dismantle the system of white supremacy.⁵²⁰

It is clear then that *Selma* provoked difficult conversations for white evangelicals, who questioned their denominations' absence in the film's evocation of King's 'beloved community.'

Yet, more than any film before it, *Selma* presents an interesting cross section of religious involvement in civil rights activism. It shows that whites, like countless blacks, were compelled by their spiritual convictions to appeal for racial justice. The fact that such a conversation occurred on the pages of TGC is testament to the way in which *Selma* forces audiences to acknowledge those present at the marches – black and white – but also ask questions of those who were not. In so doing, *Selma* contributes to the consistent reshaping of public memory, disrupting the dominant narrative that no religious whites

⁵¹⁷ Justin Taylor, 'Jim Crow, Civil Rights, and Southern White Evangelicals: A Historian's Forum.' See also Anthony Bradley, 'The KKK, *Selma*, and Southern Christianity,' Acton Institute Power Blog, January 14, 2015, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://blog.acton.org/archives/75181-kkk-selma-southern-christianity.html>

⁵¹⁸ See Hawkins, in Taylor, 'Jim Crow, Civil Rights, and Southern White Evangelicals.'

⁵¹⁹ Hawkins, *ibid.*

⁵²⁰ Carolyn Dupont, in Taylor, 'Jim Crow, Civil Rights, and Southern White Evangelicals,' <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2015/02/10/jim-crow-civil-rights-and-southern-white-evangelicals-a-historians-forum-carolyn-dupont/>

supported the civil rights movement without simply rewriting history to alleviate white guilt.

Reflecting the discomfort many conservative evangelicals felt when faced with the conspicuous absence of their denominations in the civil rights campaign, SBC pastor Jon Speed titled his review of the film ‘You Will Hate Selma But Should Watch It Anyway.’ ‘The people who tried to stop the march to Montgomery? They look like me,’ Speed writes. ‘When Martin Luther King, Jr. called for men of faith to come to Selma to march with him it wasn’t the conservative evangelicals who showed up. Billy Graham wasn’t there; you know, the guy who doesn’t have any problems joining hands across denominational lines?’ Though ‘it makes me cringe to type it,’ Speed concluded, many conservative evangelicals were probably ‘on the other side of the bridge. They were standing with the Alabama State Troopers. If they weren’t standing with them in body, perhaps they were in spirit.’⁵²¹

Needless to say, this unmatched debate has left some critics unhappy with *Selma*. Several have focussed on the small Jewish presence in the march scenes, despite historical evidence to the contrary.⁵²² More generally, Ulrich Rosenhagen argues that religion in *Selma* ‘is often little more than a skeletal stage set to provide a little context or drama.’ Despite showing King’s appeal to religious people across the nation, their subsequent arrival in Selma and the spiritual nature of the march, Rosenhagen contends that the film ‘misses how a broad coalition of people of different faith traditions who shared a sense of accountability before their God carried the civil rights movement forward.’⁵²³ In contrast to Rosenhagen’s comments, *Selma*, more than any major Hollywood release before it, acknowledges the deep spirituality that moved figures such as King and his African American followers, without simply denying any white religious consciousness

⁵²¹ Jon Speed, ‘You Will Hate Selma But Should Watch It Anyway,’ *Gospel Spam*, January 14, 2105, accessed June 23, 2015, <http://gospelspam.com/selma-movie-review/>

⁵²² Though the figure third from King’s left as they cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in *Selma* is wearing a yarmulke, he is not particularly prominent. Several critics have questioned the absence of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose appearance was much more traditional and therefore identifiable on the front row of the actual march. See Peter Dreier, ‘*Selma*’s Missing Rabbi,’ *Huffington Post*, January 17, 2015, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/selmas-missing-rabbi_b_6491368.html; Ulrich Rosenhagen, ‘The People’s Legs Are Not Praying - Why Selma Is Not the Interfaith Movie I Was Hoping For,’ *Huffington Post*, January 16, 2015, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ulrich-rosenhagen/the-peoples-legs-are-not-b_6479070.html. Despite Rosenhagen’s claim that the opening scene of the second march should feature Heschel, the rabbi did not travel to Selma until Saturday March 19, and so only participated in the third and final march on was not present in Selma until the third march on March 25. Though other Jewish activists answered King’s original call to clergy in anticipation of the second march (known as Turnaround Tuesday), Heschel was not one of them.

⁵²³ Rosenhagen, ‘The People’s Legs Are Not Praying.’

outside of the Ku Klux Klan. Thus *Selma* manages two things that no other film discussed in this chapter can claim: it undoubtedly centralizes the role of local blacks in the campaign - and rightly so – but also presents a broad coalition of races and religions coming together in pursuit of greater American freedom.

Chapter 4: Protective fortress?: The southern black church in the civil rights drama.

When President Barack Obama delivered a searing eulogy for slain South Carolina state senator Reverend Clementa Pinckney in June 2015, he referred to the black church as ‘our beating heart.’⁵²⁴ Obama linked the racially motivated murder of Pinckney and eight of his parishioners at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Charleston to a long history of violent terrorism directed at African American churches. Journalists likened the President’s appearance to a performance, arguing that he ‘deploy[ed] the inflections and oratorical rhythms of a pastor,’ ‘[w]rapping his words in the cloak of a church sermon.’⁵²⁵ When the President embarked on a rendition of the hymn ‘Amazing Grace,’ the clergy around him appeared pleasantly surprised and were soon on their feet to join Obama in song.

The *Financial Times* reported that Obama was ‘in dialogue with his audience’ that day. ‘Murmurs of approval, exclamations, even little organ trills are heard from the crowd.’⁵²⁶ Many were convinced by the ease with which Obama adopted the rhetorical traditions of the African American church, despite the fact that he was not raised within it. Yet, at the end of what *Bloomberg Politics* called a ‘vindicatory and legacy-insuring’ week, in which the Supreme Court endorsed his policies on gay marriage and health care expansion, Obama found himself at ‘the altar of a black church to mourn people lost to the kind of racial hatred that his presidency was supposed to relegate to a dark chapter of American history.’⁵²⁷

Obama used his eulogy to draw attention to the important historical role black churches had played in the pursuit of African American freedom, as ‘rest stops for the weary along the Underground Railroad; bunkers for the foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement.’ Referring specifically to the importance of Emanuel AME, Obama reminded

⁵²⁴ President Barack Obama, Eulogy for Senator Reverend Clementa Pinckney, TD Arena, College of Charleston, South Carolina, June 26, 2015. Transcript accessed July 23, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/26/remarks-president-eulogy-honorable-reverend-clementa-pinckney>

⁵²⁵ Ed Pilkington, ‘Obama gives searing speech on race in eulogy for Charleston pastor,’ *The Guardian*, June 26, 2015, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/26/obama-charleston-eulogy-pinckney-amazing-grace>

⁵²⁶ Sam Leith, ‘The rhetorical tools used in Obama’s powerful Charleston address,’ ‘The Art of Persuasion,’ *Financial Times*, July 6, 2015, accessed February 19, 2016, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fc150ea4-2197-11e5-ab0f-6bb9974f25d0.html#axzz3pOBsH6QP>

⁵²⁷ Margaret Talev & Mike Dorning, ‘The Audacity of Obama,’ *Bloomberg Politics*, June 28, 2015, accessed August 16, 2016, <http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2015-06-28/the-audacity-of-obama>

his listeners that ‘Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached from its pulpit’ and ‘marches began from its steps’ during the ‘righteous movement to dismantle Jim Crow.’⁵²⁸ The words spoken in black churches were only as important as the radical action they inspired outside, Obama suggested, reflecting an understanding of the southern black church’s potential power that has become entrenched in the national consciousness.

Social scientist R. Drew Smith argues that ‘[t]he association between black churches, civil rights activism, and the mid-twentieth century South has become mutually reinforcing. When mentioning black churches and civil rights activism, one thinks of the mid-twentieth century South; when mentioning civil rights activism and the mid-twentieth century South, one thinks of black churches.’ The ‘heroic activism mobilized from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s against the segregationist juggernaut of the American South’ provided a ‘historical stage,’ Smith writes, upon which ‘black churches were spotlighted for their substantial role.’ As such, the civil rights movement changed ‘perceptions in the minds of many about the potential political significance of black churches.’⁵²⁹

Yet, for many historians, the political role of the black church remains ambiguous. In their studies of Mississippi and Louisiana, respectively, civil rights historians John Dittmer and Adam Fairclough have shown that many black southern churches failed to support the freedom struggle in any meaningful fashion.⁵³⁰ Taylor Branch notes that Martin Luther King, Jr. only threw ‘himself into the escalating civil disobedience of the movement’ in late 1961, after his attempt to ‘gain control of the National Baptist Convention [NBC]’ ended in disunity and eventual excommunication.⁵³¹

Sociologists in the 1960s argued that black America, like the rest of the nation, was becoming increasingly secular. E. Wilbur Bock reinforced this idea in 1968, suggesting that ‘Negroes are becoming less involved in the religious institution as they

⁵²⁸ Obama, Eulogy for Pinckney.

⁵²⁹ R. Drew Smith (ed.), Introduction, *From Every Mountainside: Black Churches and the Broad Terrain of Civil Rights* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 1.

⁵³⁰ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Adam Fairclough, *Race & Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*, Second Edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

⁵³¹ Following the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-6, King’s original intention was to build support and momentum for civil rights activity within the NBC’s ‘isolated world.’ Branch writes that this was much more ‘suited to [King’s] stature as a prince of the Negro church’ than direct conflict with segregationists, but while some two thousand pastors (one fifth of NBC clergy) resigned with King in 1961 over the Convention’s failure to adopt a serious civil rights platform, ‘others, including old family friends and eminent preachers such as Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. could not bear to tear away’ from the national church. See Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 25.

have lost faith in its function for social change.’⁵³² Despite such evidence, contemporary historians are still working to complicate popular ideas of a united, progressive black church. In 2008, Barbara Dianne Savage argued that popular perceptions of the civil rights movement have ‘eclipsed the history and memory of intraracial conflicts about the place of religion in political struggle.’⁵³³ Similarly, Eddie Glaude has written of ‘a reductive historical narrative about African American religion,’ where internal theological and political differences are ignored and ideas about the African American “public” (or “publics”)⁵³⁴ become extremely limited.

Though Glaude does not mention film specifically, his critique of out-dated perceptions about the church’s centrality in African American life offers a useful framework for considering cinematic projections. Whereas Glaude is right to argue that ideas of a collective ‘black church’ have limited value, because ‘[a]ll African American churches were not and are not politically engaged in some recognizably progressive or prophetic sense,’ very few feature films have actually focussed on socially or politically engaged black churches.⁵³⁵ In fact, many more have downplayed or even degraded church-organized black political activity in favour of a more static, unthreatening spirituality that appears to be at odds with the dominant narrative that scholars note and to which Obama appealed in Charleston.

The American public clearly understood Obama’s terms of reference when he evoked the political and historical significance of black churches, but this national comprehension differs considerably from the dominant narratives about black churches in Hollywood film. Often, mainstream movies strip black churches of political significance. While still an instrument of solidarity, the church becomes little more than a sanctuary, where African Americans sing and pray for eventual deliverance from this world, but make little attempt to instigate earthly change.

Alternatively, in a distinct but related common narrative, politics *is* acknowledged within a black church, but in a reductive manner. *A Time to Kill*, for example, is deeply cynical about black church involvement with organizations such as the NAACP, which is presented as a manipulative, self-serving group of elite blacks determined to raise their

⁵³² E. Wilbur Bock, ‘The Decline of the Negro Clergy: Changes in Formal Religious Leadership in the United States in the Twentieth Century,’ *Phylon*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1968), 57.

⁵³³ Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 270.

⁵³⁴ Eddie Glaude, ‘Publics, Prosperity, and Politics: The Changing Face of African American Christianity and Black Political Life,’ in *Crediting God: Sovereignty and Religion in the Age of Global Capitalism*, ed. Miguel E. Vatter (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011), 287.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid*, 288.

own profile. Though the 2015 film *Selma* does not shy away from the internal tensions – particularly between SNCC and the SCLC – that by 1965 threatened the civil rights movement’s public-facing cohesiveness, its presentation of the movement as one of personalities rather than icons is all too rare.

This chapter explores the presentation of southern African American Protestantism in civil rights filmmaking since *Mississippi Burning* (1988), exploring understudied scenes and tropes – particularly the use of African American religious music – in order to tease out a more nuanced understanding of the function of black religion in these films. The chapter will briefly explore the legacy of southern black Protestantism in popular culture, from the ridiculed, hypocritical preacher of minstrelsy to the prophetic clergymen of the civil rights movement. This exploration will expand the fundamental preoccupation of this thesis, which questions the origins of and the reasons behind Hollywood’s (mis)use of southern religious language and iconography.

Central to this chapter is the implication that the civil rights movement celebrated in Hollywood film is one of eminently respectable and patient black Protestants that denies the overtly political actions of many African American preachers and religious groups in this period. While a small body of more interrogative films have been made for television, such depoliticization in Hollywood portrayals suggests to audiences that racial change occurred naturally in the United States, or through the work of liberal, usually secular whites.⁵³⁶ As a result, mainstream Hollywood repeatedly denies the sacrifices of countless African Americans in a movement that, while supported by some whites, was of black origin. This narrative not only negates the numerous theological and political contributions of black churches to the mid-twentieth century struggle, but also the efforts and achievements of groups that increasingly distanced themselves from the church-led movement, including SNCC, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Black Panther Party.⁵³⁷

Reliant on the construction of diametrically opposed groups, Hollywood repeats its dichotomy of dignified African American Protestantism versus zealously racist white evangelicalism in order to simplify one of the most significant ideological battles of the

⁵³⁶ Monteith notes that TV movies *The Road to Freedom: The Vernon Johns Story* (Kenneth Fink, 1994), *Freedom Song* (Phil Alden Robinson, 2000), *Boycott* (Clark Johnson, 2001) & *The Rosa Parks Story* (Julie Dash, 2002) ‘fall outside of the broad (predominantly white) mainstream cinematic tradition.’ See Monteith, ‘The movie-made Movement,’ 121.

⁵³⁷ Though SNCC’s original formation and ethos owed much to the religious outlooks of leading figures such as James Bevel and John Lewis, this emphasis had begun to evaporate as early as 1963. See Claybourne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 95.

twentieth century: whether and how to dismantle racial segregation in the United States. While basic historiographical questions about the African American freedom struggle remain hotly debated by scholars, popular culture ensures that it is ‘pressured toward moral legibility,’ according to Scott Romine.⁵³⁸ The apparent evil of southern whites is central to the construction of this narrative, cast against an overarching southern ‘blackness’ that lacks nuanced denominational, class, or political distinctions.

The association of African Americans with an exotic, natural religious expressivity is a classic Hollywood trope rooted in racialist debates about the nature and place of blacks in America that began in the eighteenth-century. But, while black lawyer and journalist Loren Miller conceded in 1934 that ‘the movies but reflect the traditional American outlook,’ he charged filmmakers with ‘doing more than their fair share to whip up prejudice.’ He argued that ‘millions of white Americans of all ages confirm their beliefs about Negroes at the neighborhood theaters’ and chastised Hollywood pictures that demonized African cultural and religious practices, as well as ‘[n]ews reels that poke fun at Negro revivals or baptisings [sic].’⁵³⁹

For many whites, the distinct, enthusiastic worship styles that had migrated to the urban north with southern African Americans as part of the Great Migration of the first decades of the twentieth century were excessive and undignified. Initially overcrowding the mainline black churches of their new cities, many black southern migrants formed their own, smaller, more informal places of worship in storefronts and houses.⁵⁴⁰ Here, as music scholar Teresa L. Reed notes, congregants could ‘sing, shout, clap, emote, and praise in the manner to which they were most accustomed.’ By 1928, Reed notes, ‘66 percent of Chicago’s black Baptist churches and 86 percent of its Holiness/Pentecostal churches met in storefronts and houses, most of which were on the more economically depressed part of the city’s South Side.’⁵⁴¹

Though Wallace Best’s 2005 study of early twentieth-century black Chicago undermines the notion that the storefront church was solely a lower-class phenomenon, these makeshift churches did often prove embarrassing for many mainstream, middle-class black denominations and sociologists. Influential African American writers such as E. Franklin Frazier and Richard Wright adhered to what Best calls ‘Darwinian metaphors’

⁵³⁸ Romine, *The Real South*, 132.

⁵³⁹ Loren Miller, ‘Uncle Tom in Hollywood,’ *The Crisis*, 1934. Republished in *The Crisis: 60th Anniversary Issue*, November 1970, 347.

⁵⁴⁰ Mellonee V. Burnim, ‘Gospel,’ in *African American Music: An Introduction*, Second Edition, eds. Mellonee V. Burnim & Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2015), 189-90.

⁵⁴¹ Teresa L. Reed, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 69.

to distinguish between the apparent ‘backwardness of black southerners and the civility of urban blacks.’⁵⁴² Migrants were encouraged to join established mainline churches, but with such a crowded religious market in northern cities, displaced southerners were free to find the church that best suited them.⁵⁴³

Reflecting their southern roots, many new churches prioritized personal salvation over social reform. Perhaps most importantly, they drew members and money from the established churches. Middle class critics highlighted the uneducated preachers that led storefront flocks, arguing, as sociologist Ira Reid did in 1926, that while the ‘sincere and well-established churches in Harlem...steadily prod at social problems with instruments both spiritual and physical and methods religious and humanitarian, the others are saying, “Let us prey.” And they do.’⁵⁴⁴

Outside the storefront walls, Reed writes, both black and white Americans ‘seemed to agree that black religion – particularly, Southern-born black religion – was comical.’⁵⁴⁵ Though recorded sermons by southern clergy such as J. M. Gates proved huge business for recording companies from the mid-1920s and early 1930s, many secular blues musicians manipulated religious compositions to reflect growing dissatisfaction with organised religion, which had proven unable and unlikely to enhance the material and political needs of its congregations.⁵⁴⁶ In either case, black Christianity had become what religious historian Lerone Martin calls ‘a mass-produced commodity.’⁵⁴⁷ By the 1930s, many artists were deliberately targeting the crossover market, selling entertaining, light-hearted records rather than overt social commentary. However, a consistent feature remained: the distortion of black religious worship and clergy. Ignorant, hypocritical preachers and deacons were often central figures, caricatured much as they were in minstrelsy, where white audiences had long indulged their fantasies of decadent African American religious culture.

In his study of antebellum blackface, music scholar William John Mahar notes that ‘[r]eligion was a powerful indicator of difference’ and that performers often

⁵⁴² Wallace Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 38.

⁵⁴³ See, Milton C. Sernett, ‘When Chicago was Canaan,’ chapter in *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 154-179.

⁵⁴⁴ Ira Reid, ‘Let Us Prey,’ *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (September 1926), quoted in Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 191-2.

⁵⁴⁵ Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 64.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 65.

⁵⁴⁷ Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York University Press, 2014), 5.

emphasized ‘the charismatic role of the African American preacher.’ More than simply ‘delineating’ African Americans, Mahar writes, black dialect was used to enhance ‘prevailing racist theories that linked difference with some form of deficiency,’ reassuring those whites unsettled by the articulate rhetorical performances of prominent African Americans such as Frederick Douglass.⁵⁴⁸ Thus, as a recognizably black or interracial worship style, the exuberance of pentecostal or Holiness traditions became tied to ideas of rural blackness, reflecting a regional and class bias that easily intersected with minstrelsy’s use and production of racial stereotypes. For many white audiences, minstrel shows did not simply entertain; they confirmed what Reed calls ‘the huge cultural gap between themselves and blacks.’⁵⁴⁹

With the rise of Hollywood, many of these tropes made the transition to the big screen. ‘It was more than simply the significance of religion in black culture that attracted the attention of white filmmakers,’ religious historian Judith Weisenfeld argues. Rather, as it had within minstrelsy, African American religion on screen ‘helps us make meanings out of blackness.’⁵⁵⁰ ‘Thousands of Negroes in the Deep South visualize God in terms of people and things they know in their everyday life,’ states the prelude to *The Green Pastures* (1936): ‘*The Green Pastures* is an attempt to portray that humble, reverent conception.’ The film is therefore about ‘what southern blacks believe,’ rather than a true engagement with the Bible, a preamble that makes it clear that the intended audience is white.⁵⁵¹

The film offers what Arthur Knight calls ‘the imagination of, rather than practice of religious belief,’ ‘an interior, psychological (yet also emphatically collective) state.’⁵⁵² To simply label it racist, Weisenfeld argues, denies the important cultural dialogue the film contributed to: how it helped shape and reinforce white ideas about African American religion and the decisions white America subsequently made about the roles of blacks in national life. White audiences clearly responded well to the idea of childlike African Americans, incapable of bearing a grudge. However, as Curtis Evans asserts, ‘the alleged qualities of African American religious believers that were deemed so attractive

⁵⁴⁸ William John Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 84-5.

⁵⁴⁹ Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 71.

⁵⁵⁰ Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name*, 235.

⁵⁵¹ Several scholars have argued that this disclaimer reassured white audiences unaccustomed to the presentation of God as a black man. See Anna Siomopoulos, *Hollywood Melodrama and the New Deal: Public Daydreams* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 83.

⁵⁵² Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 144.

to those who appreciated *The Green Pastures* were those that so vexed black critics.⁵⁵³ Weisenfeld argues that African American religion, as portrayed in these early films ‘becomes a sign and a symptom of the perpetual backwardness and outsider status of African Americans,’ a static and grounding force that pacifies and justifies broader cultural difference.⁵⁵⁴

When a high-profile Broadway revival of *The Green Pastures* played for less than a month in 1951, *Ebony* magazine celebrated it as ‘one of the most heartening signs of the growing maturity of race relations in America.’⁵⁵⁵ Ten years later, Ossie Davis – one of the revival’s biggest stars – would present his own satirical account of race and religion in the American South, *Purlie Victorious*. Opening in September 1961, Davis’s play ran for 261 performances, before being adapted to film in 1963 as *Gone Are the Days!* (directed by Nicholas Webster).⁵⁵⁶ Determined to ‘preach freedom in the cotton patch,’ fast-talking Purlie (played by Davis himself) intends to wrestle a stolen inheritance and a disused barn from his former Confederate master Capt’n Cotchipee so that he can build his church and lead his people.

By the summer of 1963, the significance of the civil rights movement was undeniable. Beamed across the world during coverage of the spring Birmingham campaign and the June desegregation of the University of Alabama, the year was probably best cemented in civil rights memory by the highs of the August 28 March on Washington and the devastating lows of the September 15 bombing of Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church. Initially released just eight days after the bombing, on September 23, 1963, Davis’s understudied work moves deftly between the numerous strands of the evolving freedom struggle, in a unique manner that is ripe for re-evaluation alongside the later civil rights melodramas that offered nothing of Purlie’s radical critique of segregation and embryonic calls for black power. The dramatic financial failure of *Gone Are the Days!* contributed significantly to the subsequent scarcity of black-centered films that characterized the rest of the 1960s.⁵⁵⁷ As such, Purlie proves an unlikely, yet

⁵⁵³ Curtis J. Evans, ‘The Religious and Racial Meanings of *The Green Pastures*,’ *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 18, No.1 (Winter 2008), 84-5.

⁵⁵⁴ Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name*, 236.

⁵⁵⁵ ‘No Time for Green Pastures,’ *Ebony*, July 1951, quoted *ibid*, 85.

⁵⁵⁶ *Purlie Victorious*’s stage run was directed by Howard Da Silva. Blacklisted as a Communist during the 1950s, Da Silva would go on to direct the stage adaptation of *My Sweet Charlie* in 1966. See Thomas S. Hirschak, *Enter the Playmakers: Directors and Choreographers on the New York Stage* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 28.

⁵⁵⁷ By contrast, Donald Bogle writes, ‘[n]o other period in black movie history . . . has been quite so energetic or important as the frenetic 1970s. More black actors and actresses worked in films than ever before,’ and studios ‘produced black-oriented films pitched directly at pleasing

significant figure in the history of civil rights cinema, and he is worthy of some exploration here.

Though all the characters in *Gone Are the Days!* are rooted in minstrelsy stereotypes, the satirical nature of Davis's writing quickly establishes them as critiques rather than advancements of white privilege. Davis admitted to using comedy to draw attention to the ridiculousness of segregation, an exercise one reviewer compared to 'blow[ing] up [stereotypes] like Macy parade balloons, [making] them fatter and more preposterous than an old-fashioned cartoonist could ever have conceived.'⁵⁵⁸ Yet this farcical self-awareness did not protect Davis from considerable critical disdain. One reviewer of the original play argued that Davis's work was 'based on the assumption that there is a humorous side to the racial problem.'⁵⁵⁹ The civil rights movement was helping to reconstruct popular ideas about the southern black preacher and his congregation; the popularity of deacon caricatures had dramatically declined.⁵⁶⁰ Perhaps the farcical satire of *Purlie Victorious/Gone Are the Days!* proved too close to older, more disparaging styles for some critics.

However, far from an attack on black male religious leadership, *Purlie Victorious/Gone Are the Days!* manages to explore what Carol Bunch Davis calls 'linkages between integration, black Christianity, and self-affirmation,' all of which become 'equally important functions in resisting racial oppression.'⁵⁶¹ In this respect Davis's work was more culturally significant than many of his critics gave him credit for, moving between various ideological strains of the evolving black freedom struggle with ease and humour. The contemporary context of high profile leadership and grassroots organization adds humour to Purlie's pompous sense of importance that only he can lead his people out of ignorance and into freedom. 'Who else they got?!,' Purlie asks, with almost a wink to the camera for audiences aware of Davis's commitment to the existing movement.⁵⁶² The film brims with what film historian Christopher Sieving calls 'watchwords from the civil rights movement ['You tryin' to get non-violent with me,

blacks.' See *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films, Fourth Edition* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2006), 232.

⁵⁵⁸ Walter Kerr, 'Review of *Purlie Victorious* – New York, Cort Theater,' *New York Herald-Tribune*, September 29, 1961.

⁵⁵⁹ Susan M. Black, 'Review of *Purlie Victorious*,' *Theatre Arts* 45:12 (December 1961).

⁵⁶⁰ Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 87.

⁵⁶¹ Carol Bunch Davis, 'Troubling the Boundaries: "Blacknesses," Performance & the African American Freedom Struggle of the 1960s' (PhD thesis, University of Southern California, 2007), 55.

⁵⁶² Davis served as master of ceremonies at the March on Washington. He would later eulogize both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.

boy?'] and cutting references to serious events and topics.⁵⁶³ For some, however, the proximity to real events, especially the Birmingham church bombing that left four young girls dead, rendered Davis's attempts at humour callous. Indeed, the timing was unfortunate, with the film opening just eight days after the tragedy. Davis himself later noted that 'maybe, at this point in our history, Negroes do not feel like laughing.'⁵⁶⁴

Contemporary events and emotions aside, there was a more practical reason for the relative failure of *Gone are the Days!* The desegregation of movie theatres in the South was gaining momentum. The NAACP had called a high profile press conference in June 1963 arguing for the fairer treatment of African Americans in cinema and television, building upon decades of protest, while the Kennedys included cinema owners amongst the influential groups invited to the White House in anticipation of the President's proposed 1963 civil rights legislation.⁵⁶⁵

By the time *Gone are the Days!* was released in September, increasing numbers of southern cinemas were desegregating under Justice Department pressure. However, as Sieving writes, Davis's film 'stood little chance of playing the ever-expanding number of integrated houses below the Mason-Dixon line.'⁵⁶⁶ While Davis was confident that his film could be 'the electric example of [financial] success' needed to change the industry's attitude towards black stories – with grittier, more 'authentic' films like *Black Like Me* (Carl Lerner, 1964) and *Nothing But a Man* (Michael Roemer, 1964) waiting in the wings – the topicality of his film was considered to be of little appeal to white audiences and would actually have fared better in black-only theatres.⁵⁶⁷ Following a disastrous first run in Manhattan, distributors began to consider *Gone Are the Days!* 'too controversial' for release. 'It's dead,' co-producer and distributor Milton Hammer lamented after five

⁵⁶³ Christopher Sieving, *Soul Searching: Black-Themed Cinema from the March on Washington to the Rise of Blaxploitation*, E-book (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 25.

⁵⁶⁴ Ossie Davis, quoted *ibid*, 28. The film's original distributors offered the film for charity screenings to raise money for the victims of the Birmingham bombing. See Howard Thompson, 'Davis Film Draws Slim Attendance: "Gone Are the Days" May Have to Be Withdrawn,' *New York Times*, September 27, 1963, 16.

⁵⁶⁵ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 166-7.

⁵⁶⁶ Sieving, *Soul Searching*, 24.

⁵⁶⁷ Ossie Davis, quoted in 'What Negro Needs is Screen Success; Film Showmen Strictly Imitative,' *Variety*, March 20, 1963, 3. Some critics also questioned the necessity of a film that offered little diversion from the Broadway play seen by an estimated 40,000 people. The *New York Times* described the movie as 'filmed facsimile' that had 'taken little advantage of the versatility and motion of the movies.' Author unknown, 'Purlie and His Friends Return in a Film, "Gone Are the Days!"' *New York Times*, September 24, 1963, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C02E3D6123CEF3BBC4C51DFBF668388679E> DE

weeks of what the *New York Times* called ‘meager public support.’⁵⁶⁸ Despite some passionately supportive reviews and publicity in the black press and a handful of showings in big cities such as Houston, Chicago and Baltimore, exhibitors largely rejected the film.⁵⁶⁹ The ‘topicality’ that had seemed so promising had become a liability.

On the other hand, Sieving notes that *Gone Are the Days!* lacked the authenticity that NAACP demanded from black-centered cinema.⁵⁷⁰ Overtly stylized and artificial, Davis’s vision relies on comedy and overblown characters rather than the entrenched institutionalized racism that marked contemporary African American life. Its knowing satire of age-old black stereotypes and sparse theatrical sets rather than location-specific filming differs considerably from the realism of *Nothing But a Man*, for example, the story of a restless black railroad worker frustrated with the limitations of life in segregated Alabama. And yet, *Gone Are the Days!* manages to acknowledge the fast pace of racial change through a cinematic genre that had no precedent for black artists and audiences. According to Bunch Davis, this ‘refusal to adhere to a singular mode of the representation of “blackness”’ rendered *Purlie Victorious/Gone Are the Days!* too problematic to critics unaccustomed to seeing cinematic black preachers assertively criticizing American race relations.⁵⁷¹ Much of Purlie’s self-affirming rhetoric would become increasingly associated with the black power movement later in the 1960s (as well as the connected black arts movement of the mid 1960s-1970s) but within the play/film’s retrospective southern narrative (and indeed within the civil rights context in which it opened), it was perceived as the evidence of an anger unbecoming of a preacher.

Davis had attempted to draw attention to segregation as a ridiculous performance in itself, but his film had failed to elicit his desired response. Purlie’s first and final sermon (the film both begins and ends with Capt’n Cotchipee’s funeral) concludes with what critic Edward Mapp later deemed the first ‘explicit statement of the “black is beautiful” credo’ in American film.⁵⁷² ‘Today, my friends, I find in being black a thing of beauty, a joy, a strength, a secret cup of gladness...Be loyal to yourselves, your skin, your lips, your hair, your southern speech, your laughing kindness,’ Purlie advises, before passionately bestowing the protections of American citizenship upon his congregation, in

⁵⁶⁸ See Howard Thompson, ‘“Gone Are Days [sic]” Closes Monday: Racial Folk Fantasy Fails to Draw Support,’ *New York Times*, October 24, 1963, 37.

⁵⁶⁹ Sieving, *Soul Searching*, 27. See p. 29 for detailed discussion of the film as featured in the black press.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 29-35.

⁵⁷¹ Davis, ‘Troubling the Boundaries,’ 61.

⁵⁷² Edward Mapp, *Blacks in American Films: Today and Yesterday* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972), 77.

a sure nod to the patriotic appeals of the civil rights movement: ‘May the Constitution of the United States go with you; the Declaration of Independence stand by you; the Bill of Rights protect you and the State Commission against Discrimination keep the eye of the law on you, now and forever, amen!’ The congregation then descends into a rendition of the spiritual ‘Oh Freedom,’ a song popular with civil rights activists, that contains the improvised lyrics: ‘No more Capt’n Cotchipee, No more crawling on our knees, Tell the NAACP we are free!’ Sieving notes that such congratulatory references to the civil rights movement and black pride assumed ‘viewers’ solidarity...and their familiarity with black culture and folklore.’ While this proved crucial to the attempts to market the film to African American audiences, Davis’s apparent lack of restraint proved more problematic to any hope of a crossover, interracial audience.⁵⁷³

In a considerable break from the dominant ideology of non-violence that inspired clergymen central to the established movement, Purlie describes how ‘the wrath of a righteous God’ led him to become a preacher and ultimately whip his former master. ‘How come the only cheek gets turned in this country is the Negro cheek?’ he asks. Though Purlie’s description of ‘murder’ was merely a parable, a fantasy of the violence he would like to inflict on Capt’n Cotchipee, his sermon has a profound effect on his friends and family, leading them to finally rebel against white authority. When the old Confederate drops dead from shock, the congregation celebrate the death of their former master with adapted spirituals and minstrel songs including ‘Massa’s In the Cold, Cold Ground.’ At the beginning of the film, Purlie questions if this is ‘Big Bethel on her best behaviour?’, aware of the presence of whites at the church’s first integrated service (both within the narrative and in the cinema’s audience). Purlie then encourages his congregation to ‘put on their Sunday-best-go-to-meeting-self,’ reflecting the respectability central to the church-led southern freedom movement. Although Davis’s delivery is satirical, the box office failure of *Gone Are the Days!* suggests that the film itself could have benefitted (in commercial terms only) from a stronger commitment to the ‘Sunday-best-go-to-meeting-self.’ Despite Davis’s best efforts it was this vision that would endure as the dominant cinematic representation of southern African Americans facing racial violence.

The following year, critic Albert Johnston lamented that ‘it seems impossible for writers and film-makers to capture the essence of courage or dedication that drives many

⁵⁷³ Sieving, *Soul Searching*, 36.

Negroes toward self-sacrificial death in the Southern states.’⁵⁷⁴ Yet, Johnson had some sympathy for Hollywood, as ‘to release a fiction film based on the true-life horrors experienced by white and Negro civil rights workers in the backward counties of Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama... would be inflammatory and raise cries of anarchy.’ While a series of exploitation films quickly capitalized on the tensions surrounding the Freedom Rides and Freedom summer, Johnson would have to wait another twenty-three years for a mainstream Hollywood release that purported to show the dangers facing civil rights workers in the Deep South.⁵⁷⁵ Yet, that film – *Mississippi Burning* – was far from the vision of ‘[t]he Negro and his struggle for freedom and personal integrity in the American South’ that Johnson had invited in 1965.⁵⁷⁶ Much has been written on the film’s failure to develop any black characters, with scholars arguing that director Alan Parker simply utilized 1960s Mississippi as the backdrop for a timeless cop drama. However, despite the considerable scholarship on *Mississippi Burning*, academics and critics have neglected the film’s particular presentation of African American Protestantism and how this contributes significantly to its construction of a victimized, stoic black community that bears little resemblance to the vibrant grassroots activism that characterized the civil rights movement at this time.

Though *Mississippi Burning* is not afraid to show the realities of white violence, it denies African American agency in its dignified yet simplistic depiction of a silent, frightened community. Schultz and Harvey’s recognition that religion is so often the marker of the outsider in popular American history could not be more appropriate.⁵⁷⁷ *Mississippi Burning*’s black population seems entirely estranged from both the plight of the missing civil rights workers and the brutality that marks their own everyday lives. As conservative columnist George Will argued in 1989, blacks appear in *Mississippi Burning* merely ‘as sufferers, a background chorus to a melodrama of white FBI agents battling white conspirators.’⁵⁷⁸

Music is a fundamental component of this construction. For example, almost every scene of black suffering in *Mississippi Burning* – from the beating of a black congregation by Klansmen to house bombings and the subjugation of black protesters by angry whites – is accompanied by a slow tempo gospel hymn. The film’s opening credits

⁵⁷⁴ Albert Johnson, ‘The Negro in American Film: Some Recent Works,’ *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Summer 1965), 15.

⁵⁷⁵ See Monteith, ‘Exploitation Movies and the Freedom Struggle of the 1960s.’

⁵⁷⁶ Johnson, ‘The Negro in American Film,’ 23.

⁵⁷⁷ Schultz & Harvey, ‘Everywhere and Nowhere,’ 135.

⁵⁷⁸ George F. Will, ‘*Mississippi Burning*: A Flawed Account,’ *The Washington Post*, January 12, 1989, A19.

play over images of a slowly burning church, sound tracked by a mournful rendition of ‘Precious Lord, Take My Hand.’ The film ends with a choral performance of ‘Walk on by Faith,’ led by Lannie Spann McBride in the remains of a burned church. Her interracial choir of faces previously unseen in the film exemplifies the manner in which black spiritual music has been repeatedly used in film to guide white characters and audiences through the African American ‘experience.’ FBI agents Ward and Anderson watch from a respectful distance before heading back to their car and presumably Washington, D.C. As such, the scene will be their (and presumably the audiences’) lasting memory of Mississippi. Little more than a ‘southern cliché,’ according to historian Roger Fischer, ‘[a]fter two hours of nonstop white depravity and black victimization, the scene rings fundamentally false.’⁵⁷⁹

This repeated use of sombre religious music, rather than the freedom songs activists and historians have consistently linked with the movement, is not unique to *Mississippi Burning* and deserves scholarly attention as a fundamental component of the civil rights melodrama. In numerous films, including more contemporary, post-civil rights narratives like *A Time to Kill*, such musical accompaniment implies that the besieged African American community is resigned to their earthly fate, placing their hope in eventual redemption through death in Christ. Though musicologists such as Philip Tagg have debated the musical evidence of ‘specific skin colour or continental origin’ in a given piece of music, they neglect, as Ruth Doughty has noted, ‘to address that “black music” is systematically deployed by the film industry to gain swift entrance into the African American condition.’⁵⁸⁰

‘Black music’ is, of course, a contentious term, yet, it remains evident that certain musical forms – including blues, jazz, hip hop, and gospel – often facilitate what Doughty recognizes as Hollywood’s ‘concise and unambiguous’ attempt at connoting the geographical location and racial make-up of a film’s setting.⁵⁸¹ Black religious music – and specifically gospel – is crucial to Hollywood’s evocation of the southern black community, despite the fact that scholars have consistently linked gospel music to the

⁵⁷⁹ Roger A. Fischer, ‘Hollywood and the Mythic Land Apart, 1988-1991,’ in John David Smith & Thomas H. Appleton, Jr. (eds), *A Mythic Land Apart: Interpreting Southerners and Their History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 180.

⁵⁸⁰ Philip Tagg, ‘Open Letter about “Black Music,” “Afro-American Music” and “European Music,”’ accessed May 23, 2014, <http://tagg.org/articles/opelet.html>. This letter was re-edited in 1989 and published in the journal *Popular Music*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 285-98. Ruth Doughty, ‘African American Film Sound: Scoring Blackness,’ in *Sound and Music in Film and Visual Media: A Critical Overview*, eds. Graeme Harper, Ruth Doughty, & Jochen Eisentraut (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 325.

⁵⁸¹ Doughty, 325.

distinctive experiences of African Americans transplanted to the urban North during the Great Migration.⁵⁸² Nevertheless, because ‘gospel has frequently been depicted as some kind of pure, unmediated, expression of black “folk” mentality,’ as Brian Ward recognises, it is apparently immune ‘to the crass and distortive business considerations which have made other forms of black popular music, like black rock and roll, pop and soul, somehow less “authentic.”’⁵⁸³ Disavowing R&B and soul as derivative and commercialised, Charles Hobson argued in 1968 that ‘[n]othing in soul can match the best in Gospel.’⁵⁸⁴ The continuing influence of this scholarship assumes that gospel speaks to and for all African Americans, uniting them to a common past that endures through collective racial consciousness and cultural forms.

Sociologists and historians have linked African American social and cultural movements ever since W.E.B. DuBois explored the ‘souls of black folk’ in 1903.⁵⁸⁵ ‘For DuBois,’ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison write, ‘the slave songs were not merely music, they were an expression of a life rooted in a rural past, and more generally they reflected an experience all African Americans could recognize.’⁵⁸⁶ Almost a century later, Hollywood filmmakers would make a comparable, albeit superficial, attempt to root the freedom struggle of the 1950s and 1960s in a monolithic, gospel-performing southern black church.

Offering a dignified salve, rather than compelling social action, this music often pacifies and attempts to justify broader cultural difference in mainstream Hollywood film, rendering southern black communities the natural victims of zealous white supremacists. The songs are often mournful; providing comfort they replace the politicized nature of many churches at this time with a stoic and gracious faith. The filmic presentation of African American religious music therefore often lacks an oppositional, radical quality: what Brian Blount acknowledges as the ‘politically charged, cultic back beat of [black]

⁵⁸² Indeed, many gospel songs owe much of their form to secular styles, which proved problematic for many Baptist and Methodist traditionalists. For some established congregations, gospel was often too closely identified with Pentecostalism, projecting what C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya call ‘problematic theology,’ as performers interpret and compose songs based on their own ‘personal theology,’ rather than from accepted dogma. See *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 377.

⁵⁸³ Brian Ward, *Just my soul responding: Rhythm and Blues, black consciousness and race relations* (London: Routledge, 1998), 197.

⁵⁸⁴ Charles Hobson, ‘The gospel truth,’ *Down Beat*, May 30th 1968, 19.

⁵⁸⁵ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903 (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1994), 155.

⁵⁸⁶ Ron Eyerman & Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth-Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75.

religious existence.⁵⁸⁷ Channelling Cornel West's understanding of the 'Afro-American spiritual-blues impulse' being rooted in 'modes of religious transcendence and political opposition,' Blount argues that African American music is the 'impulse of a defiant people whose existence took place within the context of monumental oppression.'⁵⁸⁸ Because most civil rights narratives imply that the boundaries of racism and segregation have been largely overcome, the songs transport audiences back to a darker time when race relations were considerably worse.

Mississippi Burning's commitment to self-perfecting American progress reflected dominant ideologies fundamental to declining race relations in the late 1980s. Less than a year after its release, three quarters of whites responding to a poll believed that opportunities for African Americans had improved under Ronald Reagan's administration, despite evidence to the contrary. George Lipsitz argues that this discrepancy does not necessarily indicate 'ignorance of the dire conditions facing black communities, but...that many whites believe that blacks suffer deservedly, that they do not take advantage of the opportunities offered them.'⁵⁸⁹ 'Especially since the passage of the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights Acts,' Lipsitz writes:

the dominant discourse in our society argues that the problems facing communities of color no longer stem primarily from discrimination but from the characteristics of those communities themselves, from their purportedly unrestrained sexual behavior and the resulting childbirths out of wedlock, from crime, welfare dependency, and a perverse sense of group identity and group entitlement that stands in the way of individual achievement and advancement.⁵⁹⁰

Rather than harvesting the fruits of progress secured in the 1960s, contemporary African Americans, especially those residing in urban ghettos, 'suffer[ed] from poor housing and employment opportunities because of their own lack of willpower,' survey results suggested.⁵⁹¹ For whites harboring these attitudes, *Mississippi Burning* presented stoic, rural blacks worthy of viewer sympathy and FBI protection. Silently hopeful that America would one day embrace them as full citizens, these African Americans apparently knew that change was gradual and they waited with dignified patience. They were rewarded

⁵⁸⁷ Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?: Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 93.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 93-4.

⁵⁸⁹ George Lipsitz, 'The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the "White" Problem in American Studies,' *American Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Sept. 1995), 380-1.

⁵⁹⁰ Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 24-5.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid*, 19.

with the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. Segregation was no more the narrative suggests; equal opportunities now characterized America.

Such faith in American progress constructs the contemporary ‘agitation on the part of activists and organizations still struggling for equality [as] unwarranted and illegitimate,’ Kelly Madison writes.⁵⁹² It is easy to see why the angry urban African American of the late 1980s and 1990s – so threatening to what Jennifer Fuller calls America’s relatively recent ‘sense of itself as a successfully integrated nation,’ – was symbolically replaced by his cinematic ancestor: the docile, deserving, poor southern black.⁵⁹³ Just as much earlier fictions such as *The Green Pastures* ‘joined broader discussions about black migration and the kind of religion that was deemed “good” for the black masses,’ in the words of religious scholar Curtis J. Evans, late twentieth-century civil rights melodramas like *Mississippi Burning* offered reassuringly rural black communities that seemed to have resisted industrialization and secularization.⁵⁹⁴ During the uncertainty of the Depression, ‘[w]hite admirers tended to laud what they saw as the peculiar qualities of African Americans exhibited in *The Green Pastures*,’ Curtis continues, in a description that could be easily applied to *Mississippi Burning*: a ‘lack of vindictiveness, resignation under suffering, a joyful carefree spirit, and a simple innate religiosity.’⁵⁹⁵ Relegated to mere props, African Americans in Alan Parker’s film are, to use David Jansson’s words, ‘used or abused by white Southerners depending on the degree to which the latter group has achieved some level of American enlightenment.’⁵⁹⁶ The ‘disciplined and determined struggle by blacks for jobs, education, housing, and political power disappears from view,’ Lipsitz writes, as ‘submissive and cowed blacks look on with fear and apprehension’ at ‘white vigilante violence.’⁵⁹⁷ The film’s presentation of African American religion is a commonly under acknowledged part of this construction.

In over two hours, *Mississippi Burning* offers just one rallying call from the pulpit as an unnamed black man (played by Frankie Faison) delivers a eulogy for a slain civil rights worker (based on James Chaney). In this rarely discussed scene, the speaker explicitly expresses his continued anger and frustration at the slow progress of racial change:

⁵⁹² Madison, ‘Legitimation crisis and containment,’ 406.

⁵⁹³ Fuller, ‘Debating the Present,’ 169.

⁵⁹⁴ Evans, ‘The Religious and Racial Meanings of *The Green Pastures*,’ 60.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁹⁶ Jansson, ‘A Geography of Racism,’ 270.

⁵⁹⁷ Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 222.

I have no more love to give. I have only anger in my heart today...and I want you to be angry with me! Now, I am sick and I am tired . . . and I want you to be sick and tired with me! I...I...I am sick and tired of going to the funerals of black men who have been murdered by white men! I...I am sick and tired of the people of this country who continue to allow these things to happen!

Because *Mississippi Burning* fails to ‘focus on one local black leader,’ Donald Bogle writes, the eulogy scene ‘seems almost like an afterthought.’ Bogle likens this underdeveloped scene to the ‘poorly conceived black FBI agent who threatens a white character with castration.’⁵⁹⁸ Indeed, the eulogy’s communication of black anger bears a stark contrast to much of the rest of the film, which consistently limits African American assertiveness to the willingness of two unthreatening black children to testify before the FBI. Yet, while the black FBI agent is, as Bogle writes, ‘a complete falsification of history’ (the FBI had no black agents at this time), the eulogy scene clearly echoes elements of CORE’s Mississippi director Dave Dennis’s impassioned speech at Chaney’s actual funeral on August 7th 1964.

Featured in Episode V of PBS’s *Eyes on the Prize* in February 1987, this memorable speech may have been familiar to some audiences watching *Mississippi Burning*. ‘I’m sick and tired of going to funerals!’ Dennis exclaims, admitting that his emotional attempt to rejuvenate the local movement was ‘not the traditional thing most of us do at such a gathering.’⁵⁹⁹ *Mississippi Burning*’s recreation, while reflecting Dennis’s anger, lacks his uncompromising call to action. In the film, the darker tone of the speech actually reflects the shift in the FBI’s tactics, as Agent Ward agrees to join the Klan ‘in the gutter’ and ‘fight dirty,’ a decision that follows the Klan’s beating of a white female informant rather than the continued intimidation and persecution of African Americans. Though Dennis gave a damning account of the actions of state and federal officials, including the President, he also cursed local African Americans who refused to act in pursuit of their own liberation. The congregation had an obligation, Dennis implied, to not simply mourn Chaney’s death, but continue his work to ensure he did not die in vain:

⁵⁹⁸ The FBI had no black agents at this time. See Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes*, 303.

⁵⁹⁹ Dave Dennis, Eulogy for James Chaney, First Union Church, Meridian, Mississippi, August 7th 1964, recorded by Pacifica Radio. Transcript in William H. Lawson, ‘A Righteous Anger in Mississippi: Genre Constraints and Breaking Precedence,’ (MSc Dissertation, Florida State University, 2004), accessed May 23, 2015, <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:181562/datastream/PDF/view>, p.56, 55.

I've got a bitter vengeance in my heart tonight ...If you do go back home and sit down and take it, God damn your souls! Stand up! Your neighbors down there who were too afraid to come to this memorial, take them to another memorial...Make them register to vote and you register to vote. I doubt if one fourth of this house is registered. Go down there and do it. (Pause) Don't bow down anymore! Hold your heads up!⁶⁰⁰

In her study of the African American funeral, historian Suzanne E. Smith compares Dennis's speech with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s February 1965 eulogy for Jimmie Lee Jackson.⁶⁰¹ Both exalted the fallen as martyrs, but also hoped to instigate further political action. Like Dennis, King argued that the list of those implicated in such murders was much longer than simply the men who pulled the triggers. William Lawson notes a rhetorical struggle in Dennis's speech that is equally evident in King's: a conflict between the need to remember and honor the fallen and simultaneously condemn those responsible. Both tributes 'function less like eulogistic discourse and more like [speeches] attacking complacency.'⁶⁰² Both seem to suggest that salvation is not simply awarded by God, but something that requires personal action, inspired by a righteous anger.

Selma paraphrases King's eulogy for Jackson, but is true to King's original message, as he implores further action from both the government and the congregation. Like John of Revelation, King uses Jackson's funeral in *Selma* to demand confrontation, calling for what preacher and scholar Brian Blount deems 'a resistance that existed as an oppositional, contrary witness.'⁶⁰³ 'Who murdered Jimmie Lee Jackson?' King asks in the film. 'Every negro man and woman who stands by without joining this fight as their brothers and sisters are humiliated, brutalized and ripped from this earth.' According to Blount, 'Revelation commends bold witness-active resistance to powerful, deeply entrenched forces of institutional evil' and was central to many of the demands King made of his followers.⁶⁰⁴ In the final words of his eulogy, King speaks directly to the murdered Jackson: 'We will vote. We will put these men out of office. We will take their power; we will win what you were slaughtered for. We're going back to Washington. We're going to demand to see the President...if he does not act, we will!'

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, 56, 58.

⁶⁰¹ Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁶⁰² Lawson, 'A Righteous Anger,' 30.

⁶⁰³ Often known as the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation culminates in the destruction of New Babylon, the birth of a New Jerusalem and the second coming of Christ, providing a powerful vision of redemption in Christ. Brian K. Blount, 'Reading Revelation Today: Witness as Active Resistance,' *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (October 2000), 412.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. 398.

Selma's commitment to a vision of King's leadership denies the fact that it was SCLC Director of Direct Action James Bevel who actually used Jackson's death to inspire the march from Selma to Montgomery. Though Bevel does feature in DuVernay's film, played by Common, his crucial role in instigating the march is not presented.⁶⁰⁵ Evoking the twelfth chapter of Acts, the real Bevel likened Governor George Wallace to King Herod, who 'laid violent hands' upon Jesus's followers. Speaking just hours after Jackson passed away, Bevel then shifted his biblical focus to the Old Testament story of Esther, who seeks counsel with the king and protection for her people. 'We must go to Montgomery and see the king!', Bevel advocated: the king here being Governor Wallace. 'The blood of Jackson will be on our hands if we don't march. Be prepared to walk to Montgomery. Be prepared to sleep on the highways.'⁶⁰⁶ Thus, in paying their respects to the fallen, Dennis, King, and Bevel all issued rallying calls, participating in what Smith recognizes as 'a type of political theater to dramatize the cause of the movement and energize its followers.'⁶⁰⁷ Determined to incite rather than soothe, the civil rights funeral had become a 'direct catalyst for activism.'⁶⁰⁸

In *Selma*, King is visibly distressed following his eulogy for Jackson, but the scene cuts quickly to his discussions with other movement leaders about the demands and priorities of their proposed voting legislation: 'We know Johnson can't see the full picture, so let's paint it for him.' The deftness with which the film moves from the pulpit to this political debate shows how, unlike other civil rights movies, DuVernay's vision of the voting rights campaign draws little distinction between religious and political

⁶⁰⁵ In a deleted scene from the movie, Bevel implores King to 'be aggressive,' lamenting that his colleague is 'too soft.' Bevel's idea that 'we lay Jimmie Lee's body down on George Wallace's door in Montgomery,' is met by King's repeated assurance: 'We need to remain calm.' See Bryan Alexander, 'Common snaps in this deleted 'Selma' scene,' *USA Today*, April 21st 2015, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2015/04/21/selma-deleted-scene-common-martin-luther-king/26112273/>

⁶⁰⁶ James Bevel at Brown Chapel AME, Selma, Alabama, February 26th 1965. See Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 599; Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 177. Bevel undoubtedly deserves more credit for his role in the Selma campaign and indeed the civil rights movement than DuVernay's film grants him, but given his later crimes and associations, Bevel makes an unlikely cinematic hero. Following King's death in 1968, Bevel advocated the innocence of King's assailant James Earl Ray and later ran as vice president on Lyndon LaRouche's 1992 ticket. At the time, LaRouche was in jail on charges of mail fraud and tax evasion. Bevel was arrested in May 2007 following charges of incest brought about by one of his daughters, relating to crimes committed when she was a teenager in the early 1990s. He was convicted in April 2008 and sentenced to 15 years in prison. He died six weeks later of pancreatic cancer. See Alexander Remington, 'King Adviser James Bevel, 72; Incest Sentence Clouded Legacy,' *Washington Post*, December 20, 2008, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/19/AR2008121903432_2.html

⁶⁰⁷ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 179.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 169.

gatherings. Many of the same people, and certainly many of the same ideas, are found at both.

Unaccustomed to the cinematic presentation of black politicization within the church, many critics have disparaged DuVernay's attempt to project King's message of spiritual and political resistance in *Selma*. The religious scholar Ulrich Rosenhagen argues that 'the film is loaded with gospel music' and that 'King's Christian language [in the film] seems to be little more than the rhetorical flourishes of an artful political motivator.' As such, Rosenhagen believes that 'the one message *Selma* fails to communicate is the one most central to the civil rights movement and most needed in our day; namely, this fusion of the spiritual with the political.'⁶⁰⁹

Yet, *Selma* relies heavily on notions of King's spiritual preoccupations, occasionally at the expense of his shrewd political manoeuvring. For example, scenes that depict King leading the protestors in a silent prayer on the Edmund Pettus Bridge before abandoning the second attempt to reach Montgomery on March 9th 1965 (known as Turnaround Tuesday) are rooted in ideas of King's pronounced faith. In DuVernay's vision, James Reeb goes to his death trusting that King was 'tapped into what's higher, what's true.' King had 'prayed to God and got an answer,' Reeb believes.

This narrative over-spiritualizes King's role in the Selma campaign. In contrast to much of the rest of the film, it contributes to, rather than complicates, popular mythology about King's messianic leadership. For example, critic Peter Bradshaw calls the film's depiction of Turnaround Tuesday 'an extraordinary and absorbing scene,' in which King displays 'Zen mastery.'⁶¹⁰ However, evidence shows that King had already negotiated the outcome with the government, promising to lead the marchers to the bridge and then back to Selma in return for peaceful restraint from the police and Alabama State Troopers.⁶¹¹ Though he was undoubtedly wary of taking Alabama law enforcement officials at their word, King knew exactly what he was doing. While DuVernay portrays the dissatisfaction many in the movement felt at the turnaround, she never provides the viewer with the evidence or even the suggestion of King's behind-the-scenes, pragmatic deal. Though Du Vernay shows King in conversations with Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights John Doar (Alessandro Nivola) prior to the march, their discussions prove inconclusive.

⁶⁰⁹ Rosenhagen, 'The People's Legs Are Not Praying.'

⁶¹⁰ Peter Bradshaw, 'Selma review – Martin Luther King, a love and a fighter,' *The Guardian*, February 5, 2015, accessed December 6, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/feb/05/selma-review-martin-luther-king-civil-rights>

⁶¹¹ David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* E-book (New York: Open Road Media, 2015), 693-6.

Though information regarding King's deal may not have been instantly available to the journalists on the bridge, by March 15th the bi-weekly *Universal Newsreel* reported that 'Dr King turned his marchers around at the behest of the White House, an arrangement that had been made in advance to avoid confrontation.'⁶¹² This information is denied to DuVernay's viewers, enabling the film to reimagine religion as the prominent element of a decision made on entirely the bridge.

Though these scenes actually overstate religion's role in King's decision-making, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the moments in which DuVernay's presentation of King powerfully entwines political demands with deep spirituality. Following his first speech upon arrival in Alabama, King's congregation in *Selma* is united, not in a meek rendition of a hymn akin to the presentation of black churches in *Mississippi Burning*, but in a vocal, political demand: 'Give us the vote! Give us the vote!' Though these scenes occur within the walls of a black Methodist church and are perhaps therefore not the interfaith vision that some religious scholars had hoped for, this positioning of the black church as both religious and political site is central to *Selma*'s diversion from the white-centric narratives of previous civil rights melodramas, demonstrating the regularity with which King and others skilfully interweaved black and white evangelical traditions with contemporary political concerns within black Protestant institutions. All too often, Eddie Glaude has written, 'the prophetic energies of black churches are represented as something inherent to the institution,' rather than the result of the concerted effort of individuals' and so it is important to see this faith-inspired rhetoric in action.⁶¹³

Glaude, one of many scholars to lament King's depoliticization in popular culture, writes of 'a reductive historical narrative about African American religion,' where King has come to 'exemplify the commitments of good African American Christians and their churches.'⁶¹⁴ Yet this argument fails to note the frequency with which Hollywood film denies even this apparently sanitized, dominant view of King in favor of a passive black religious community that accepts brutality as indicative of their chosen status.

⁶¹² *Universal Newsreel*, Vol. 38, Iss. 22, March 15, 1965. Narrator: Ed Herlihy. US National Archives. Accessed June 23, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iC7K_TRozNs. Aniko Bodroghkozy notes that on the day of the event, March 9, 1965, newscasters 'remained oblivious to the nuances and complexities around the aborted march.' See *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 131.

⁶¹³ Eddie Glaude, 'The Black Church is Dead,' *Huffington Post Religion Blog*, April 26, 2010, accessed March 12, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html

⁶¹⁴ Glaude, 'Publics, Prosperity, and Politics,' 288.

Hollywood's projection of the black church is therefore generally more reserved than even the perception that Glaude argues is prescriptive in American culture.

Very few feature films have actually looked to King or his contemporaries for their stories. Obviously biographical films require a considerable amount of legal approval, but the fact that so few feature films present any form of political engagement (even fictional) during one of the most well documented periods of American social upheaval is indicative of Hollywood's long-standing unease with black stories.⁶¹⁵ With the exception of *The Long Walk Home* (1990) and *Selma*, the religious and political activism that King and so many others espoused during the civil rights movement rarely figures in cinema.

Despite its focus on a fictional, everyday family, rather than committed activists or clergy, *The Long Walk Home* does depict political mobilization in the black church. Set during the Montgomery bus boycott, the film does not present King visually, as Monteith notes, but his words are heard over loudspeaker, as crowds overflow from the first mass meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) at Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, 1955.⁶¹⁶ In the snippet of King's original speech used in the film, he appeals to spiritual faith in ideas of equality before God, but also US civic ideals. King tells those gathered that '[t]he only weapon we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. And we are not wrong. If we are wrong, then the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the constitution of the United States is wrong.

⁶¹⁵ In both 2015 and 2016, every actor nominated in all four Academy Award acting categories was white, sparking a significant social media backlash against perceived racial bias in Hollywood. Recent figures have shown that in 2014, minorities bought 46 percent of movie tickets sold in the US, despite being just 37 percent of the population. In short, despite Hollywood's limited attempts to appeal to minority markets, black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans are statistically more likely to regularly visit the cinema than their white neighbors. (Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA), Theatrical Market Statistics 2014, accessed April 12, 2016, <http://www.mpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/MPAA-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-2014.pdf>) And yet, hugely popular films with predominantly minority casts are repeatedly reported as 'surprise hits.' Recent examples include *Straight Outta Compton* (F. Gary Gray, 2015), now the most successful music biopic of all time, both within the US and worldwide. 75 percent of its US audience was non-white. See Drew Harwell, 'Diverse movies are a huge business. Why doesn't Hollywood make more?' *Washington Post*, December 15, 2015, accessed March 6, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/diverse-movies-are-a-huge-business-why-doesnt-hollywood-make-more/2015/12/15/ec002564-9774-11e5-b499-76cbec161973_story.html; Jason Bailey, "'Straight Outta Compton' is Only a 'Surprise Hit' if You Aren't Paying Attention," *Flavorwire*, August 18, 2015, accessed June 9, 2016, http://flavorwire.com/533555/straight-outta-compton-is-only-a-surprise-hit-if-you-arent-paying-attention?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=socialflow&utm_campaign=FlavorwireSocial.

⁶¹⁶ See Monteith, 'Movie-made movement,' 127.

If we are wrong, then God Almighty is wrong.’⁶¹⁷ Just as *Selma* reflects the SCLC’s conscious efforts to ‘raise white consciousness,’ *The Long Walk Home* here presents King’s rhetorical efforts to imbue black political protest in Montgomery with the legitimate ideals of the American legal system and the all-inclusive laws of God. King’s speech at Holt Street positions the church-led movement as a righteous crusade established and maintained by the same American principles audiences are likely to value in their own lives. As such, the scene not only reflects the movement’s unabashed appeals to respectability in the 1950s and 1960s, but ensures that contemporary audiences invest in this legitimacy, having recognised enduring moral and cultural touchstones.

The political implications of King’s leadership become clear later in the film when the congregation is informed that a bomb has exploded at the young reverend’s home. This is about more than simply buses, as black maid Odessa Cotter (Whoopi Goldberg) well knows. Soon it will be about ‘the parks and the restaurants...colored teachers in white schools,’ Odessa tells her white employer, Miriam Thompson (Sissy Spacek). ‘What about when we start voting Ms. Thompson, ’cos we are. And when we do, we are going to put Negroes in office. What about when the first colored family moves into your neighbourhood?’ Drawing strength from rallies and church services, Odessa is prepared to walk miles and risk unemployment to secure a better life for her children, one of whom is tellingly named Selma: a sign of what is to come. ‘You come into town and go to one of those mass meetings,’ she tells a colleague, ‘you’d feel like you could walk forever.’

In one church scene, a black preacher explains some of the boycott’s logistics: ‘If you have a car, but you must be at work during the day, we have fine young men who can drive your cars, allowing you to still contribute to the boycott.’ Following the preacher’s request, the choir sings ‘We’re Marching to Zion,’ a song which takes on a more literal meaning for the large number of congregants that are now walking to work and school rather than use segregated transport. For the Cotter family, whose young son Theo (Richard Habersham) bears the scars of a beating by racist whites after an incident on the segregated buses, the service and indeed the song seem to cement their sense of righteousness and gradually they all join in the singing. ‘Everybody would...clap and hold hands in the meeting,’ Jo Ann Robinson of the Women’s Political Council – who first instigated the boycott movement – would later recall: ‘Oh, you just loved

⁶¹⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., ‘Address to the first Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) Mass Meeting,’ December 5, 1955, Holt Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama. Transcript accessed May 16, 2015, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/the_address_to_the_first_montgomery_improvement_association_mia_mass_meeting.1.html

everybody.’⁶¹⁸ Indeed, when racists surround Odessa and other black women at the carpool headquarters, the women respond to the chants of ‘Walk, nigger, walk’ with a rendition of the hymn ‘I’m Going Through,’ which includes the lyrics:

I’m going through, I’m going through,
I’ll pay the price, whatever others do;
I’ll take the way with God’s despised few;
I’m going through, Jesus, I’m going through.⁶¹⁹

The hymn situates the women’s struggle within a larger moral framework, yet Rosa Parks herself doubted that it would have been enough to silence a racist mob. ‘People adamant about harassing blacks wouldn’t have been affected by someone stepping forward to sing a song,’ Parks said. ‘They just weren’t Christian enough to fall silent.’⁶²⁰ Though Parks is surely right, civil rights memoirs and histories are filled with stories of those who entered the political and often physical battlefield armed only with their sense of righteousness before God.⁶²¹ Indeed King himself appealed to this very morality in his first address to the MIA, as heard in *The Long Walk Home*: ‘If we are wrong, God almighty is wrong.’⁶²² It is also important to note that the scene shows the women engaging in the song themselves; it is part of their narrative, rather than simply a soundtrack for their victimization. The scene may provide a suitably redemptive Hollywood ending, but like several others in the film, it does more to at least hint at the links between African American Protestantism and civil rights activism than so many of the films that followed it.

For all its flaws, *The Long Walk Home* was not surpassed in its presentation of racial activism in the South until *Selma*’s release twenty-five years later. It is especially

⁶¹⁸ Jo Ann Robinson, quoted in Lynne Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 118. See also Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women who Started It*, edited by David J. Garrow (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

⁶¹⁹ Herbert Buffum, ‘I’m Going Through,’ 1914.

⁶²⁰ Rosa Parks, quoted by Elaine Dutka, ‘Driving Miss Odessa: Rosa Parks calls the film important because the United States has neglected the subject for too long,’ *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1990, accessed September 8, 2015, http://articles.latimes.com/1990-12-20/entertainment/ca-9576_1_rosa-parks

⁶²¹ For example, Parks’ lawyer Fred Gray remembered that Parks instilled in him ‘the feeling that I was the Moses that God had sent to the Pharaoh and commanded him to “Let my people go.”’ (Quoted in Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters*, 111) Activist Mildred Forman Page recalls, ‘As I look back over the many times we have put our lives on the line and came out unharmed, I say only God could have saved us.’ See ‘Two Variations on Nonviolence,’ in Faith S. Holsaert et al. (eds.) *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 55.

⁶²² King, Address to the MIA, 5th December 1955.

more nuanced than *The Help*, the 2011 female-driven narrative to which it is most frequently compared. Whereas one critic perversely argued that the Cotter ‘family’s frequent churchgoing’ in *The Long Walk Home* ‘and its belief in nonviolent resistance are overemphasized, *no matter how true they are to the attitudes of the black community of this place and time*’ (emphasis mine), *The Help* offers no exploration of the theological or political preoccupations of its black characters, other than the fact that they do, of course, attend an unspecified church.⁶²³ This lack of development contributes to a narrative that seems to wilfully deny the reality of black life in Jackson, Mississippi in 1963-4.⁶²⁴

Recognizing the recalcitrance of Montgomery’s political elite, *The Long Walk Home* – unlike many other civil rights melodramas – does not limit its presentation of white supremacy to what Madison calls the ‘particularly distant, extreme, blatant and therefore superficial.’⁶²⁵ Its racists are not ‘trash from down the road,’ or even Klansmen. They are respectable white politicians and businessmen like Miriam’s husband Norman (Dwight Schultz), who joins the White Citizens Council (WCC) during the film on the basis that ‘the Mayor and the City Commission have all joined.’⁶²⁶ In reality, Mayor W. A. Gayle was open about his WCC membership, publicly committing Montgomery to segregation.⁶²⁷ In *The Long Walk Home*, Norman attends meetings filled with suited, middle class men, responding directly to the boycott that threatens their domination in the city. Set a decade later, *Selma* also makes it clear that the continued oppression of southern blacks is the result of careful manoeuvring by both local and national political forces. *Selma* particularly indicts Alabama Governor George Wallace (Tim Roth) for his wilful opposition to desegregation, but the film’s most powerful evocation of the white power structure’s obstructive efforts to curtail African American progress comes in its

⁶²³ Janet Maslin, ‘A Personalized View of the Civil Rights Struggle,’ *New York Times*, December 21, 1990, accessed July 25, 2015,

<http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C0CEED8173CF932A15751C1A966958260>

⁶²⁴ Despite been set in the midst of civil rights struggles, *The Help*’s hyper-feminized sphere enabled filmmakers to divert attention from the very real events exploding across Mississippi and the rest of the South. While both it and *The Long Walk Home* are centered on developing relationships between black and white women, the latter makes a much more concerted effort to situate its characters within real events. Political battles never enter *The Help*’s feminized sphere and thus systematic racism is ignored. As a result, the film’s ahistorical presentation of middle class female conflict equates institutional racism with class snobbery, denying both black and white female political agency.

⁶²⁵ Madison, ‘Legitimation crisis and containment,’ 406.

⁶²⁶ In reality, membership of the WCC did rise dramatically during the boycott, from eight hundred in the entire state of Alabama before the boycott to fourteen thousand in Montgomery alone during the boycott. See Cheryl Fisher Phibbs, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott: A History and Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009), 58.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*

unflinching construction of the brutal treatment marchers received at the hands of the local police and Alabama state troopers on what is now known as Bloody Sunday: March 7th 1965.

While the original footage seen by millions in news reports offers a clear view of the initial confrontation between law enforcement officers and marchers, this optimal camera angle is lost once the marchers are pushed further and further back towards the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Obstructed by police cars and tear gas, the main scenes of violence and altercation are soon unclear. ‘Viewers had to imagine, with the audio assistance of disembodied shrieks and screams, what was going on behind the car and inside the clouds of tear gas,’ media historian Aniko Bodroghkozy writes.⁶²⁸ In contrast, ‘DuVernay’s film puts viewers right in the center of the violence as marchers choke on the gas, their bodies bludgeoned by state troopers’ clubs.’⁶²⁹ Kenn Rabin, *Selma*’s Archive Producer, agreed that filming this sequence anew in color – rather than relying on the archival footage he knew so well from researching *Eyes on the Prize* – proved crucial to the scene’s power. ‘Seeing the actors that we’d gotten to know throughout the film take on that devastating punishment, rather than their historical counterparts in black and white archival, struck me as exactly the right way to handle that very emotional and galvanising sequence,’ Rabin argued.⁶³⁰ *Selma* ‘asks viewers to be with the marchers,’ Bodroghkozy concurs, ‘sharing and participating in their brutalization.’⁶³¹ The film ‘manages to convey the claustrophobic panic of the marchers as they flee,’ Richard King writes, ‘blinded, through the haze of tear gas.’⁶³² Supplementing DuVernay’s camera angles, the words of Martha Bass’s ‘Walk with Me,’ which soundtracks the scenes, becomes more than just a plea for God’s grace and deliverance. It forces viewers to acknowledge their position amongst the marchers and the violence they are witnessing.

In choosing Bass’s rendition of this spiritual, Morgan Rhodes, *Selma*’s Music Supervisor, hoped to communicate ‘generations of freedom fighters and generations of struggle.’ She describes feeling tremendous pressure to find the right song for this hugely significant moment, but Bass’s powerful rendition of ‘Walk with Me,’ backed by full

⁶²⁸ Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time*, 128.

⁶²⁹ Bodroghkozy, ‘Oscars 2015: What “Selma” Got Right and Got Wrong,’ NBC Storyline, February 22, 2015, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/oscar/oscar-2015-what-selma-got-right-got-wrong-n310361>

⁶³⁰ Kenn Rabin, quoted in Sheila Curran Bernard, ‘A Conversation with Selma Archive Producer Kenn Rabin,’ *The American Historian* (February 2015), accessed January 9, 2016, <http://tah.oah.org/february-2015/conversation-with-kenn-rabin/>

⁶³¹ Bodroghkozy, ‘Oscars 2015’.

⁶³² King, ‘How long? Not long,’ 473.

choir, provides a composed yet mournful soundtrack to the chaos of the visual scene. Rhodes claims that she was attracted to the words ‘tedious journey’ in the song. ‘Nothing was more tedious than that journey across the Edmund Pettus Bridge,’ she continues; ‘you could describe it in a lot of ways: tedious, perilous, uncertain.’⁶³³ Though ‘tedious’ may seem an unlikely description for an event that was surely terrifying, Rhodes understands the word here as synonymous with ‘wearisome,’ a reference to the sheer length of the journey: both physically, as it is over fifty miles from Selma to Montgomery, but also historically.⁶³⁴ Selma’s activists were building upon an African American struggle that began with the arrival of the first slaves. Progress had been incredibly slow.

As a spiritual, the song ‘had travelled over the generations,’ Rhodes said, ‘from slaves singing it to now, this critical moment in civil rights history.’⁶³⁵ The movement cannot be separated from the faith that ‘undergirded’ it, Rhodes argued, but her religious choices, like *Selma*’s narrative, reflect a more nuanced understanding of the role of African American religion in the movement than previous civil rights melodramas.⁶³⁶ The film celebrates rather than obscures the political will displayed in the voting rights campaign.

With its specific references to the Book of Revelation, ‘I’ve Got the New World in My View’ by Sister Gertrude Morgan was another important religious choice for Rhodes. Heard as protestors descend upon Selma’s County Courthouse to demand their right to register to vote, Sister Morgan’s lyrics reflect their collective desire for change: ‘I got the new world in my view, On my journey I pursue, Said I’m running, Running for the city, I got the new world in my view.’⁶³⁷ ‘People were marching for rights that they did not yet enjoy,’ Rhodes explained, but they ‘had a vision of the world that they wanted.’⁶³⁸ Referring to the Courthouse as ‘a citadel defended by fanatics,’ King also imbues this scene with both political and biblical significance.

⁶³³ Morgan Rhodes, interviewed by Alex Cohen and Jacob Margolis, ‘The music of “Selma”: scoring the civil rights movement,’ *Take Two*, Southern California Public Radio, January 9, 2015, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.scpr.org/programs/take-two/2015/01/09/41040/the-music-of-selma-scoring-the-civil-rights-moveme/>

⁶³⁴ Rhodes clarified her understanding of ‘tedious’ in a Twitter post, January 3, 2016, 3.11pm: <https://twitter.com/morganrhodes/status/683787883711299584>

⁶³⁵ Rhodes, ‘The music of “Selma”.’

⁶³⁶ Morgan Rhodes, quoted in Fredara M. Harley, ‘Musiqology Interview with “Selma” Music Supervisor, Morgan Rhodes,’ *Musiqology*, January 22, 2015, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://musiqology.com/blog/2015/01/22/musiqology-interview-with-selma-music-supervisor-morgan-rhodes/#sthash.cecBCLnK.dpuf>

⁶³⁷ Sister Gertrude Morgan, ‘I Got the New World in My View,’ *Selma – Music from the Motion Picture*.

⁶³⁸ Rhodes, in Cohen & Margolis, ‘The music of “Selma.”’

Rhodes's musical choices are committed to emphasizing this intersection of religious and political inspiration. Immediately following King's first speech in Brown AME, the scene transition is accompanied by The Impressions' 1964 hit 'Keep on Pushing,' which echoes biblical ideas of transcendence in Curtis Mayfield's lyrics, 'Hallelujah, hallelujah; Keep on pushing; Now maybe someday; I'll reach that higher goal.'⁶³⁹ Having grown up in the Chicago projects, Mayfield may have been geographically distant from the southern civil rights movement, but his music reflected his spiritual and political affinity with much of its rhetoric. 'Keep on Pushing' exposed Mayfield's gospel roots, while lending 'lyrical and spiritual support to the civil rights movement' his biographer Peter Burns writes.⁶⁴⁰ Musicologist Tammy Kernodle argues that 'Keep on Pushing' reflects the transition of African American political thought in the mid-1960s, chronicling the 'growing anger that exploded in 1964 and '65 with rioting in major cities across the country.' Musically, Kernodle argues, 'Keep on Pushing' is just one example of how 'the freedom song [developed from] its beginnings as revamped spiritual and gospel song performed in call-and-response format to a secular individually performed song that reflected the feelings and aspirations of the larger community.'⁶⁴¹

Brian Ward writes that soul music's 'nationalist credentials' were in large part rooted in the 'musical and presentational devices drawn from a gospel idiom to which blacks had an intensely proprietorial relationship.'⁶⁴² R&B and soul had proved popular with interracial audiences; indeed many white artists had admired and replicated these styles. But amongst blacks, it was the obvious influence of gospel – the only black musical style not to be 'invaded by white musicians' according to the *Baltimore Afro-American's* Al Rutledge – that gave these secular styles their credibility.⁶⁴³ Indeed, many of the same producers and musicians worked on both gospel and soul/R&B records, and ultimately, all records were pitched to the largest possible audience. From the mid-1950s, gospel artists began to perform with full R&B bands, many of whom had formed in the church to begin with, exposing what Ward calls 'an intriguing circularity.'⁶⁴⁴ In musical terms, this lineage 'was most evident in [soul's] tumbling gospel triplets, its call and

⁶³⁹ The Impressions, 'Keep On Pushing,' *Selma – Music from the Motion Picture*.

⁶⁴⁰ Peter Burns, *Curtis Mayfield: People Never Give Up* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2003), 29.

⁶⁴¹ Tammy L. Kernodle, "'I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free': Nina Simone and the Redefining of the Freedom Song of the 1960s,' *Journal of the Society for American Music*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2008), 296.

⁶⁴² Ward, *Just my soul responding*, 184.

⁶⁴³ Al Rutledge, 'The Root of All Soul,' *Baltimore Afro-American: Magazine Section*, July 20, 1968, 1.

⁶⁴⁴ Ward, *Just my soul responding*, 197.

response instrumental and vocal patterns, the regular rustle of sanctified tambourines, and the energizing slap of get-happy handclaps.’⁶⁴⁵ Yet, the success of artists such as Mayfield and Ray Charles was also ‘pregnant with political and racial significance,’ Ward writes, symbolizing triumph over adversity and material success, and with ‘personal dignity and racial pride intact.’⁶⁴⁶ The crossover careers of these and many other black soul artists were testament to a growing acceptance of the interlocking secular-spiritual impulses of African American music in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Nina Simone, the daughter of a North Carolina preacher, argued in the late 1960s that ‘Negro music has always crossed all those lines [between secular and sacred] and I’m kind of glad of it. Now they’re just calling it soul music.’⁶⁴⁷ Yet, Simone’s indignation at the continued mistreatment of American blacks developed into what Kernodle calls ‘a growing sense of secularism,’ especially evident in the lyrics to ‘Mississippi Goddam’: ‘I even stopped believing in prayer.’⁶⁴⁸ Unlike Simone, Mayfield actually extended the importance of religious imagery in African American protest song, producing songs that reinforced the intersections between spirituals, gospel, soul, and the freedom songs so crucial to the movement. Following ‘Keep on Pushing,’ Mayfield wrote perhaps his most famous song of the civil rights era, ‘People Get Ready,’ which updates the gospel train imagery of ‘Swing Low Sweet Chariot,’ famously associated with the Underground Railroad, reminding listeners that ‘You don’t need no ticket, you just thank the Lord.’⁶⁴⁹

Connecting mid-twentieth century gospel with contemporary RnB and rap, ‘Glory,’ *Selma*’s Academy Award-winning original song – a duet between singer John Legend and rapper Common – features a powerful, gospel-inspired chorus. Common’s rap, NPR pop critic Ann Powers argues, is ‘preacherly,’ delivered like a sermon.⁶⁵⁰ Reinforced by his role in the film as SCLC leader Reverend James Bevel, Common – an artist renowned for his social commentary and political activism – reinforces the film’s attempts to make links between the past and the present. Referencing contemporary racial injustices as well as the high points of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s,

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, 184.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, 187.

⁶⁴⁷ Nina Simone, interviewed by Phyl Garland, ‘Nina Simone: High Priestess of Soul,’ *Ebony* (August 1969), 159.

⁶⁴⁸ Kernodle, ‘I Wish I Knew,’ 302. Nina Simone, ‘Mississippi Goddam,’ *Nina Simone in Concert*, Decca, 2006.

⁶⁴⁹ Curtis Mayfield ‘People Get Ready,’ *The Anthology: 1961-1977*, MCA Records, 1992.

⁶⁵⁰ Ann Powers, interviewed by Renee Montagne, Morning Edition, NPR, February 20, 2015, accessed January 4, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2015/01/15/377427650/how-one-of-gospels-essential-songs-gave-selma-its-soul>

‘Glory’ plays over the film’s end credits, transporting audiences from the periodization of *Selma* back into the twenty-first century by encouraging them to examine more recent events and the limitations of America’s racial progress.

In the film’s final scenes, ‘Yesterday was Hard on All of Us’ by British singer/songwriter Fink soundtracks archive footage of the actual Selma to Montgomery march. Its opening lyric, ‘Where do we go from here?’, seems to reference the fact that the movement was at a crossroads.⁶⁵¹ More specifically, though perhaps coincidentally, the song borrows these words from the figurehead of the movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., who entitled his 1967 book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* The last he published before his assassination, *Where Do We Go From Here* begins where *Selma* leaves off, with the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Reflecting on the movement’s victories, King pondered the urban riots that nevertheless rocked major cities, and concluded that Americans of all races needed to work together to combat poverty.⁶⁵²

More than simply the triumphant end of the march, *Selma*’s ending – like King’s book – encourages viewers to recognize this as the last high point of a movement that has continuing relevance and unfulfilled promise. This is made explicit when the film ends and ‘Glory’ begins. Common’s rap makes specific reference to both historical and recent events: ‘The movement is a rhythm to us, Freedom is like religion to us...That’s why Rosa sat on the bus, That’s why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up.’⁶⁵³

Selma’s capacity to provoke deeper, more probing questions than its cinematic forbearers was evident from its original trailer, which featured Public Enemy’s ‘Say It like It Really Is.’ Writing for *Tribeca*, Mark Blankenship noted that while ‘[y]ou might expect a studio historical drama with obvious awards ambitions to score its trailer with period-appropriate music about racial equality,’ *Selma*’s first trailer featured ‘a furious, modern hip-hop song, pounding us with beats and the promise of a revolution.’⁶⁵⁴ Although Public Enemy is not used within the film’s narrative, the use of its song to generate public interest surely reflects *Selma*’s commitment to an unflinching examination of the legacy of the civil rights movement, thus linking it with bolder explorations of African American identity such as Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989),

⁶⁵¹ Fink, ‘Yesterday Was Hard on All of Us,’ *Selma: Music from the Motion Picture*.

⁶⁵² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010).

⁶⁵³ Common & John Legend, ‘Glory,’ *Selma: Music from the Motion Picture*.

⁶⁵⁴ Mark Blankenship, ‘Can Public Enemy Make “Selma” Feel Modern?’ *Tribeca*, November 7, 2014, accessed February 26, 2015, <https://tribecafilm.com/stories/public-enemy-selma-trailer-song>

which featured Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' prominently. Similarly, 'Glory' urges the continued politicization of African Americans, rather than the post-civil rights complacency evident in many earlier civil rights dramas, in which the triumphant use of gospel music over closing credits often suggests that American racism has been overcome.

Hoping to convey a more nuanced, evolving understanding of the place of African American music in the freedom struggle, Rhodes was clear that her musical choices were intended to link *Selma*'s protestors to their collective history, reflecting the power of African American spiritual music across generations of struggle. When compared with what Anthony Puccinelli calls *A Time to Kill*'s 'rows of "good, churchgoing black folk" ...praising the Lord as gospel music swells on the sound track,' *Selma*'s use of both spirituals and religiously-influenced popular music ensures the film is rooted in a much more complex understanding of black activism and religion and their expression through music.⁶⁵⁵

Hoping to stimulate a more complex dialogue about the role of music in the African American freedom struggle, DuVernay urged Rhodes to uncover 'underground hits and B-sides' to soundtrack the film's action, rather than relying on movement 'classics' such as 'We Shall Overcome.'⁶⁵⁶ The only significant departure from this policy comes at the conclusion of the film's credits, following 'Glory.' Here Rhodes inserts an audio recording of activists singing a medley of 'This Little Light of Mine/Come By Here' at Jimmie Lee Jackson's funeral. 'I thought it was a good way to end,' Rhodes recalls, 'so that you remember that there was a time, a significant time in 1965...[when] the core of this movement was also faith. It gets into your spirit and it just gives you chills, because you're transported back to that time.'⁶⁵⁷ However, it is unlikely that many audience members are still in their seats by the time the medley begins. For many gospel devotees, this was a wasted opportunity. Robert Darden, who has written extensively on the religious music of the civil rights movement and founded the Black Gospel Music Restoration Project, praised the writing, directing, and acting evident in *Selma*, but argued that the film could have benefitted from what he calls 'the real sounds

⁶⁵⁵ Anthony Puccinelli, 'Designer Rage: *A Time to Kill*, Directed by Joel Schumacher, With Matthew McConaughey, Samuel L. Jackson, Sandra Bullock, Kiefer Sutherland, and Ashley Judd,' *Chicago Reader*, August 15, 1996, accessed March 27, 2014, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/a-time-to-kill-directed-by-joel-schumacher-with-matthew-mcconaughey-samuel-l-jackson-sandra-bullock-kiefer-sutherland-and-ashley-judd/Content?oid=891305>

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ Rhodes, in Cohen & Margolis, 'The music of "Selma."'

of its story.’ Through its omission of civil rights anthems such as ‘Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round’ and ‘Woke Up this Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom,’ *Selma* is yet another civil rights drama that denies ‘music its rightful place as a transformative change agent in the movement.’⁶⁵⁸

Civil rights melodramas have tended to ignore freedom songs – the adapted and often improvised communal renditions of older hymns and folk songs that proved so crucial to the movement – in favor of more traditional hymns. These hymns convey faith and longing, but nothing of the movement’s persuasive collective energy. ‘[E]xamples of purposeful communication,’ freedom songs ‘enabled civil rights activists to set forth a definition of themselves and their undertaking that gave impetus to movement activities,’ Kerran L. Sanger writes.⁶⁵⁹ ‘The songs offered a compelling means by which activists could communicate amongst themselves and disseminate a positive self-definition,’ Sanger continues, arguing that the songs proved crucial to efforts to raise black consciousness and recruit activists.⁶⁶⁰ Sung during protests and meetings, in jail cells and in churches, songs like ‘Oh Freedom’ and ‘Keep Your Eyes on the Prize’ were powerful rhetorical actions designed to invoke racial pride and American collectiveness, as well as practical information about how current obstacles (sometimes specific politicians or law enforcement officers) could be overcome.

However, it is clear from the examples already examined in this chapter that Hollywood has preferred to present the civil rights movement as that of stoic, patient African Americans, rather than political ‘radicals’ demanding their rights. This tendency manifests through the frequent use of sorrowful religious music that forms a protective salve in the face of white depravity, but does little to reflect or instigate tangible activism. It encourages audience sympathy without alienating white audiences, but denies the true power of music in the movement.

It is easy to imagine DuVernay inserting freedom songs into her narrative: freedom songs on the streets, in the churches, and in Selma’s jail. This would have been a more powerful and more truthful vision, Darden argued. And yet, as Ann Powers contended, *Selma*’s understated presentation of King and his followers in some of their most private moments meant it was extremely unlikely that DuVernay would focus on the ‘big group sing-alongs and celebrity sightings weighing down our memories of King’s

⁶⁵⁸ Robert Darden, ‘The Missing Songs of “Selma,”’ *On Faith*, January 16, 2015, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2015/01/16/the-missing-songs-of-selma/35899>

⁶⁵⁹ Kerran L. Sanger, *When the Spirit Says Sing!: The Role of Freedom Songs in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

crusades.’⁶⁶¹ Indeed, DuVernay’s instructions to Rhodes reveal that she deliberately avoided them, perhaps because of the superficial manner in which African American religious music has been manipulated by so many other civil rights dramas. King’s interaction with spiritual music in *Selma*, like so many of his experiences in the film, occurs privately, when he calls Mahalia Jackson (played by Ledisi Young) in the middle of the night, fearful of what awaits him and his friends in Alabama. ‘I need to hear the Lord’s voice,’ King tells Jackson, who responds with a heartfelt, unaccompanied rendition of ‘Take My Hand, Precious Lord.’ Like the scenes in *Selma*’s jail, where Ralph Abernathy (Colman Domingo) reminds his weary friend of the gospel’s teachings on the ineffectuality of worrying, this moving evocation of King’s personal spirituality is vital to the film’s capacity to highlight King both as a powerful orator and leader, but also as a man who looked to his friends and his faith for guidance and inspiration.

Shannon M. Houston notes that the scene with Mahalia Jackson ‘could have made for an incredible, musical film moment on a much grander scale,’ evoking the song’s hallowed place within the mythology surrounding King. King’s favourite hymn conveys weariness and longing and was performed at his funeral by Jackson herself and at a later memorial by Aretha Franklin. King had implored Ben Branch, the musical director of SCLC’s Operation Breadbasket, to play the song ‘real pretty’ at an upcoming rally just moments before he was assassinated on April 4th 1968.⁶⁶² Thus, it is through this song, Powers argues, that ‘King lived, died, and was spiritually resurrected.’⁶⁶³ Despite all this, DuVernay enshrines the song within a private moment, enabling the audience to hear the song as King would have heard it, without the symbolism it acquired following his death. King may have needed ‘the headlines and the big names at the protests,’ Houston continues, but ‘in the midnight hour, so to speak, it’s “the voice of the Lord” (the voice of a woman) that allows him to keep his eyes on the prize.’⁶⁶⁴

It is undoubtedly because of its connection with King that ‘Take My Hand, Precious Lord’ has featured so prominently in civil rights filmmaking. Mahalia Jackson’s

⁶⁶¹ Ann Powers, ‘How One of Gospel’s Essential Songs Gave “Selma” Its Soul,’ *The Record: Music News from NPR*, January 15, 2015, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2015/01/15/377427650/how-one-of-gospel-essential-songs-gave-selma-its-soul>

⁶⁶² Obituary: ‘Ben Branch, 59, Leader in Civil Rights, Business,’ *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1987, accessed April 23, 2014, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1987-08-28/news/8703050549_1_mr-branch-ben-branch-southern-christian-leadership-conference

⁶⁶³ Powers, ‘How One of Gospel’s Essential Songs Gave “Selma” Its Soul’.

⁶⁶⁴ Shannon M. Houston, ‘Violence and Glory in Ava DuVernay’s *Selma*,’ *Paste*, January 5, 2015, accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2015/01/violence-and-glory-in-ava-duvernays-selma.html>

version opens *Mississippi Burning*, while a searching rendition by The Jones Sisters soundtracks the most dramatic moments of *A Time to Kill*, as Carl Lee assassinates the men who raped his daughter on the steps of the courthouse as they make their way to their trial. As the camera zooms in on the faces of Carl Lee's black inmates, the low-tempo gospel hymn begins with a solo voice. The solo continues as people make their way to the courthouse, echoing the opening scenes of *Inherit the Wind*, when the inhabitants of another small southern town descended upon their local courthouse for the infamous Scopes Trial, accompanied by an particularly sombre, solo version of 'Give Me that Old Time Religion.' Willing Carl Lee on through the shared power of the song, the words to 'Take My Hand' seem to reflect his frustration and desperation:

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn,
Through the storm, Through the night,
Lead me on to the light,
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.⁶⁶⁵

Whereas black gospel music often soundtracks white violence inflicted upon innocent, peaceful African Americans, 'Take My Hand' here accompanies scenes of black vigilantism and murder, potentially reflecting the limitations of non-violent Christian patience. Throughout the film, Carl Lee is forced to contemplate the failure of the civil rights movement to change the hearts and minds of many white southerners. 'America is a war,' he contends. By the film's close, however, *A Time to Kill* elicits hope in a more positive future, as white and black families come together for a celebratory barbecue, suggesting that the promise of the civil rights movement has been reborn in Canton, Mississippi. As the credits begin, a large choral rendition of 'Take My Hand, Precious Lord' begins to play, at a faster tempo than the song's previous appearance in the film. This triumphant musical ending, in-keeping with dominant tropes of civil rights filmmaking, creates the impression that America's racial turmoil has been laid to rest.

Seldom the subject of scholarly enquiry, *A Time to Kill's* use of religious language, music, and symbolism advances the dominant agenda of the civil rights genre: what Monteith calls a 'cinema of integration and reconciliation.'⁶⁶⁶ Offering a series of tropes that are recognisably 'southern' and therefore appealing to (white) audiences

⁶⁶⁵ Jones Sisters, 'Take My Hand Precious Lord,' written by Rev. Thomas Dorsey. *A Time to Kill OST*, Atlantic, 1996.

⁶⁶⁶ Monteith, 'The movie-made Movement,' 121.

reluctant to acknowledge and absorb national guilt over the legacy of America's racial tensions, the film propagates a self-congratulatory national message that denies the need for sustained activism to secure and extend the legacy of the freedom struggle. The NAACP's significance as one of America's most established and committed forces for the extension of racial equality is promptly undermined, as its leaders manipulate otherwise contented southern black clergymen into furthering their agenda with promises of money. Clearly flattered, Reverend Ollie Agee (Thomas Merdis) remembers NAACP representative Reverend Isaiah Street (Joe Seneca) 'marching with Dr King,' but *A Time to Kill*'s post-civil rights narrative suggests that such politics belong in the past and should not be equated with contemporary issues.

Dissatisfied that a local white lawyer is defending a black man in an important civil rights case, the NAACP have raised money for an alternative legal defence: their own lawyers. Rev. Street claims that 'the black community are concerned that [Carl Lee] Hailey's attorney [Jake Brigance] is not sensitive to the movement.' This dignified concern is promptly undermined when Rev. Street loses his temper and refers to Jake as a 'cracker,' showing the prejudice that lurks beneath his serene, progressive exterior. Indeed, this exchange suggests that such black political figures are actually hindering racial progress, with their overblown sense of group identity and aggressively anti-white stance. Critic Roger Ebert argued on the film's release that these scenes were incredibly 'awkward,' constructed to 'equate the NAACP lawyers with figures like the Rev. Al Sharpton,' a contentious racial and religious leader accused by many conservative critics of manipulating racial discord for personal gain.⁶⁶⁷

In-keeping with this cynicism, the NAACP in *A Time to Kill* appears to view Carl Lee's case as an opportunity for national marketing rather than a trial in the fate of an individual. 'Carl Lee's acquittal for the killings of two white men would do more for the black people of Mississippi than any event since we integrated the schools,' Rev. Street says. However, 'his conviction [would be a] symbol of deep-seated racism, perhaps enough to ignite a nation,' he concludes, almost hopefully. It is hard to tell which outcome

⁶⁶⁷ Roger Ebert, review of *A Time to Kill*, July 16, 1996, accessed June 10, 2014, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/a-time-to-kill-1996>. Sharpton is a Baptist minister, political commentator and activist, whose supporters, including President Barack Obama, argue is a voice for the downtrodden. His critics, however, argue that he is a 'professional black' (as opposed to a black professional), who 'thrives on a politics of racial division.' See Clarence Taylor, "'A Natural-Born Leader": The Politics of the Reverend Al Sharpton,' in *Black Religious Intellectuals: The Fight for Equality from Jim Crow to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 118-149.

Rev. Street would favour, indeed Jake asks, ‘Of all your cases, how many are supposed to be lost so you can martyr the victim?’

Carl Lee knows from discussions with his wife Gwen (Tonea Stewart) that Rev Agee appealed to the common decency of the congregation to raise the money, to help the family manage household bills. Implying that the organization has manipulated the local church, Jake suggests that ‘the black community’ Rev. Street claims to represent is not the *local* community, but the national black political elite. Confident that he has a better understanding of the local black community than the NAACP, Jake threatens Rev. Agee: ‘I’m sure your congregation would be interested to know that Gwen and the kids can’t eat because you want to get in good with the NAACP.’ Though Carl Lee later deflates Jake’s self-righteousness (‘I ain’t never seen you in my part of town. I bet you don’t even know where I live.’), it has nevertheless been suggested that Rev. Agee has overstepped his jurisdiction and that as a man of God he should not be involved in a political power play. Thus, the film encourages viewers to question whether Jake, even with the best of intentions, can ever really understand Carl Lee, but not before it has offered a cynical conjecture about the continuing role and function of the black church. The scene suggests that the black congregation would share Jake and Carl Lee’s suspicions; they would rather take their chances with the few local, liberal whites working to ‘protect’ them than with the NAACP. Any legal fees raised are to go to Jake, ‘unless the NAACP wants to go on record as soliciting funds under false pretences.’ This plot device implies that localized problem solving is preferable to strategic national action, reflecting the film’s distinctly conservative agenda. The restrictive, overarching narrative of the civil rights melodrama does not have room for the more complex interactions between black and white, religious and secular activists in national groups. *A Time to Kill* may direct its cynicism towards the NAACP in particular, but it reflects Hollywood’s broader discomfort with black political agitation, which has compromised its presentation of the civil rights movement and its legacy. Nuances and connections are often lost, as well as ideological progression and evolution: the consequences of success and defeat, the disagreements and the breakaways.

By consistently attaching value to an unfaltering, ever-united church-led movement, mainstream Hollywood can easily discredit alternative visions of racial reform in the US, especially black power. Unfailingly presented as the heroic movement’s more militant descendent, ‘Black Power is often reduced,’ historian Peniel Joseph writes, ‘to symbols associated with its advocacy of self-defense (i.e., the Black Panthers).’ The prominence of this narrative in public memory and popular culture, Joseph argues,

‘creates a situation in which the BPM [Black Power Movement] can be conveniently blamed for the demise of the Civil Rights Movement, rather than being viewed as an alternative to the ineffectiveness of civil rights demands in critical areas of American life.’⁶⁶⁸

Highlighting significant civil rights activity outside the South, as well as what Joseph calls ‘the multi-layered roots of Black Power-era radicalism,’ scholarly work by Timothy Tyson and Jeanne Theoharis, amongst others, complicates this dichotomous association of the southern civil rights movement with the church and the black power movement with an urban, secularized North.⁶⁶⁹ Yet, such binaries endure in Hollywood. Recent films such as *The Butler* (Lee Daniels, 2013) continue to propagate the idea that black power attracted an uncouth, radical, and militant section of black society that was opposed to the further development of an interracial America.

As Eddie Glaude notes, Lee Daniels’s film is committed to a narrative of the civil rights movement’s ‘*decline* or descent into black power’ (emphasis mine).⁶⁷⁰ Black power becomes a negative force, dividing black America after a time of great unity. *The Butler* personifies this ideological divide through its protagonist Cecil Gaines (Forrest Whitaker), who struggles with and temporarily disowns his son Louis (David Oyelowo) during the latter’s transition from peaceful non-violent activist to black power advocate.

Born to sharecroppers on a Georgia plantation in the late 1910s, Cecil is committed to the relative safety of life in Washington D.C. by the time the civil rights activism of the 1950s and 1960s begins. Thus, he cannot understand why Louis would sacrifice his privileged position to endure the southern inhumanity that his father purposely left behind. ‘I can’t protect him in the South,’ Cecil laments when Louis decides to attend Fisk University in Tennessee over the nearby Howard. Thus, the narrative implies that it is the South, not the U.S. that is unsafe for young black men, perpetuating sectional stereotypes about the recalcitrant South, geographically and culturally removed from the rest of the nation. This sectionalism is reinforced by the fact that the majority of the film’s narrative takes place in the White House, where Cecil – the

⁶⁶⁸ Peniel E. Joseph (ed.), ‘Introduction: Toward a Historiography of the Black Power Movement,’ *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid, 4. See Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Theoharis, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement outside the South.’

⁶⁷⁰ Eddie Glaude, ‘Princeton Professor Analyzes “Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*.” Radio interview with Dean Richards.’ WGN Chicago, August 20, 2013, accessed July 6, 2015, <http://wgnradio.com/2013/08/20/princeton-professor-analyzes-lee-daniels-the-butler/>

butler – overhears consecutive presidents acknowledge and occasionally intervene in specifically southern acts of racism or civil rights activity that is contained within, and apparently indicative of, the troublesome region.

As the history of the African American freedom struggle plays out through Louis's life and various allegiances, he begins to resent his father's political ideology, as well as his job at the White House. To Louis, both exemplify servility. Through these family disagreements, the film presents black power advocates as spoiled, disrespectful youngsters incapable of building upon the sacrifices of their more conservative, patriotic elders. Indeed, Louis's usually sympathetic mother Gloria (Oprah Winfrey) strikes her son for disrespecting his father, arguing, 'Everything you are, everything you have, is because of that butler.'

Because Cecil cannot see the need for a civil rights movement outside of the South, neither can the film, which is narrated from his point of view. Rather than presenting the evidence of sustained racial degradation in the North, the film is committed to the 'dividing line' that Theoharis argues has been constructed between 'the heroic southern freedom struggle and the civil rights movement's militant and northward turn.'⁶⁷¹

Historians working to complicate this projection of regional difference have pointed to local civil rights organizing across the country, including cities such as Boston and Los Angeles. Activists in northern and western cities were not merely inspired by the movement, Theoharis implies, 'they were trying to elevate their own campaigns.' Yet, their struggles were frequently explained away as 'ghetto frustration,' rather than meaningful political rebellion in the face of nationwide racism and hypocrisy.⁶⁷² 'On one side of the Mason-Dixon line,' Theoharis writes, 'a courageous black people held together by longstanding cultural traditions fought systematic racial inequality.' Deprived of this rural, southern authenticity – what Theoharis calls their 'moral and family traditions' (read religion) – African Americans that had migrated north or west found themselves lacking in direction in a post-civil rights era, or so the popular narrative implied.⁶⁷³ They had 'courageously escaped Jim Crow,' Theoharis summarizes, 'but lost their way in the promised land.'⁶⁷⁴

Central to a narrative that limits racism to the poor white South and deserving black righteousness to southern religious communities, Hollywood's use of southern

⁶⁷¹Theoharis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight,' 50.

⁶⁷² Ibid, 54.

⁶⁷³ Ibid, 68-9.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid, 68.

religious stereotypes – both white and black – denies the national reality of racial degradation, and instead rewards conservative faith in the self-perfecting nation. Failing to critique the true successes, disappointments, and ideological developments of the African American freedom struggle, Hollywood provides what film historian Ian Scott calls ‘iconic representation[s] of a [national] system that can somehow still be redeemed.’⁶⁷⁵ Yet, in consistently using black (rather than white) religion to reinforce these traditional American values in the southern civil rights genre, Hollywood filmmakers are interpreting religious expression and its place in the lives of communities through a racialized lens, ascribing positive value to African American religious expression while negatively casting its white equivalent. In a southern African American context, mainline religion becomes positive: a progressive vehicle bringing America closer to its best ideals. It is what separates civil rights activists from their apparently deviant, disruptive northern cousins.

Thus, as Scott argues, Hollywood is constantly ‘rebranding the traditional values and beliefs of the American experience.’⁶⁷⁶ Righteous African Americans who secured their liberty through a dignified commitment to the Bible and the Constitution are to be celebrated. Rural, religious, and patient, this African American recognises the successes of the civil rights movement and the immense progress that has been made. His dignified stoicism under Jim Crow renders concerns about contemporary racial tensions self-indulgent and potentially damaging. Yet, in its unprecedented and patronizing reverence to its limited idea of the southern black church, Hollywood seems to undermine its own legacy of suspicion towards religion, albeit through a simplistic, generalizing projection rather than nuanced understanding of the numerous strands of African American Christianity

This prescriptive, limited understanding of blackness is rooted in popular culture’s much older considerations about the place of blacks in American society, from minstrelsy to the films of the 1930s that attempted to translate African American life to white northern audiences recognising the significance of the southern black influx now known as the Great Migration. Yet, despite Hollywood’s conservative reverence for this restrained, patriotic vision of the civil rights movement, segregated worship spaces provided the physical and psychological environment in which the movement evolved into the ‘searing critique of American values and institutions’ that Paul Gaston recognizes

⁶⁷⁵ Ian Scott, *American Politics in Hollywood Film* Second Edition (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 24.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

it to be.⁶⁷⁷ *Selma* has shown that Hollywood can produce a stimulating, successful interrogation of one of the movement's many chapters, acknowledging and documenting the power of the African American church without denying its political motivations and functions. In the wake of its success, one can only hope that it is not the last.

⁶⁷⁷ Paul M. Gaston, 'After Jim Crow: Civil Rights as Civil Wrongs,' in *The Southern State of Mind*, ed. Jan Nordby Gretlund (Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 1999), 36.

Chapter 5: ‘They take the Bible literally you know:’ *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the origins of Hollywood’s secular civil rights hero.

In December 1996, Janet Maslin wrote in the *New York Times* of *Ghosts of Mississippi*’s “‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ moment,” when white southern attorney, Bobby DeLaughter, tucks his daughter Claire (Alexa Vega) into bed, and explains to her (and the audience) why it is no longer appropriate for them to sing ‘Dixie.’⁶⁷⁸ Just as Atticus Finch once attempted to alleviate daughter Scout’s (Mary Badham) fears of the ghostly Boo Radley (Robert Duvall) while tucking her into bed, DeLaughter tells Claire “I’m not so sure all ghosts like “Dixie.””

Less than a month later, *Entertainment Weekly* contended that southern legal drama *A Time to Kill* owed ‘half of its plot, three quarters of its title, and all of its good intentions’ to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. ‘Jake Brigance, sir, is no Atticus Finch,’ the article continued, arguing that despite Matthew McConaughey’s admirable performance as Brigance, the twenty-six year old’s first lead role simply lacked Gregory Peck’s gravitas or star persona.⁶⁷⁹ Although this is ostensibly a criticism, it reflects the distinct parallels critics were drawing between the two films, and specifically the lead characters: both white southern lawyers defending poor black clients.⁶⁸⁰ Grisham’s publishers made the same connections in their ‘Teacher’s Guide,’ encouraging teachers to ‘enhance students’ experiences as they read *A Time to Kill* by drawing comparisons to Harper Lee’s classic,’ which they argued ‘addresses the same cultural issues.’⁶⁸¹

It is easy to see the large shadow that Peck’s Academy Award-winning white-hero performance casts over the characters of Brigance and DeLaughter. As attorneys, they each represent what sociologist Jennifer Pierce calls ‘arbiters of the law, justice, and morality.’ Each suffers considerable personal turmoil, usually at the hands of bitter white

⁶⁷⁸ Maslin, ‘For a True Story.’

⁶⁷⁹ Peck was forty-six years old when he played Finch. It is interesting to consider how differently *A Time to Kill* would be received if made today, when McConaughey (now in his mid-forties) has a much more defined star persona, rooted in southern dramas such as *Mud* (Jeff Nichols, 2012), *Free State of Jones* (Gary Ross, 2016), and the HBO series *True Detective* (Season 1, originally aired January-March 2014).

⁶⁸⁰ ‘A Time to Kill,’ *Entertainment Weekly*, January 10, 1997, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://www.ew.com/article/1997/01/10/time-kill-kill-mockingbird>. Other reviews that specifically compare the two films include Hal Hinson, “‘Time to Kill’: Justice Gets a Make-Over,” *Washington Post*, July 24, 1996, accessed September 1, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/review96/timetokillhin.htm>; Dreher, ‘Time to Star.’

⁶⁸¹ Random House, ‘Teacher’s Guide: *A Time to Kill*,’ 1.

supremacists, but all endure as “civilizing” figures who worked to bring order to social upheaval through the law,’ which they remain steadfastly committed to.⁶⁸² ‘In this country, the courts are the great levelers,’ Atticus advocates in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, just as Jake Brigrance will insist that ‘in the New South, justice will be colorblind.’ Though neither *A Time to Kill* nor *Ghosts of Mississippi* received the same critical acclaim as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the more recent films serve as important evidence of the continued significance and marketability of the civil rights, white hero narrative. For while Kelly Madison writes that the white civil rights hero was constructed from the 1980s onwards, as white Americans scrambled to redefine themselves from a ‘legitimation crisis by constructing co-optive collective memories’ of the civil rights movement, *To Kill a Mockingbird* shows that this practice far preceded the post-civil rights era.⁶⁸³ Indeed it was being constructed alongside and in relation to the unfolding movement, becoming a recognizable trope.

Echoing Graham, Pierce argues that *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *A Time to Kill* project a ‘triumphal narrative of racial progress [which suggests] that white Americans could overcome their blindness to racism and become not only allies to people of color, but even heroic leaders in movements for racial justice.’⁶⁸⁴ These redemption narratives, so fixed on white, elite (and usually male) experiences, reduce African American characters until they simply ‘support and “anoint” the protagonist as a savior,’ as Pierce writes. Pierce also notes that such films ‘demonized’ the white working class ‘as the “true” racists,’ in order to restore white middle class innocence.⁶⁸⁵ Such is the ‘strangeness of Atticus Finch’s career,’ Joseph Crespino writes; ‘once a tool of liberal racial politics, Atticus has now become the pawn of racial conservatism,’ where ‘racism only exists on an individual basis’ and ‘social reform can occur only through individual moral reform – not through social or structural change that might challenge the legal, economic, or political status quo.’⁶⁸⁶

The manner in which Jake Brigrance and Bobby DeLaughter are constructed as distinctly southern white gentlemen in direct opposition to other, less educated white southern men owes a lot to *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s construction of Atticus Finch, both in novel and film. Where Atticus casts himself against the white trash alcoholic Bob

⁶⁸² Jennifer L. Pierce, *Racing for Innocence: Whiteness, Gender, and the Backlash against Affirmative Action* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 49.

⁶⁸³ Madison, ‘Legitimation crisis and containment,’ 400.

⁶⁸⁴ Pierce, *Racing for Innocence*, 46; Graham, *Framing the South*.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

⁶⁸⁶ Joseph Crespino, ‘The Strange Career of Atticus Finch,’ *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer 2000), 26.

Ewell, DeLaughter has Byron De La Beckwith, and Brigrance the local Klan. In the midst of the civil rights era and the culture wars, such dichotomies increase the hero's narrative power, marking him as special.⁶⁸⁷ Their centrality to the film's narrative, but also Hollywood's concept of American morality, is perhaps best reflected in their final summation speeches. This is especially significant in *Ghosts of Mississippi*, which depicts DeLaughter delivering a powerful digest that quotes President Kennedy's June 1963 statement on civil rights. While the scene focuses on DeLaughter, frequent cuts to Myrlie Evers-Williams imply that DeLaughter is speaking for her and her family, just as Atticus's final speech involves numerous cuts to the African Americans gathered in the 'colored balcony' to watch Tom Robinson's trial. *Ghosts of Mississippi's* director Rob Reiner believed it was essential that DeLaughter and Evers-Williams shared an understanding after the speech. However, her admission that the Assistant District Attorney reminds her of her slain husband appears as uncomfortably deferential as Lee's assertion that African Americans would stand in recognition of Atticus's valiant efforts to defend Tom Robinson. Such scenes of what Crespino calls 'black deference' reflect the enduring legacy of what Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton exposed as 'the subtle paternalism bred into [white people] by society' that was perhaps more pervasive and harder to eliminate than overt racism. The implication of such paternalism, Carmichael and Hamilton argued 'conditioned' how white people expected blacks to react to their whiteness.⁶⁸⁸

Equating privileged white masculinity with heroism, *To Kill a Mockingbird* set a cinematic precedent that would endure through the construction of other southern white lawyers, each ennobled by their participation in cases involving comparatively underdeveloped African American characters. Indeed, Crespino's description of Atticus could be applied to any of these characters: 'while embodying the most noble aspects of the southern tradition, [the white civil rights hero] also transcended the limits of that tradition and attained a liberal, morally rational racial viewpoint that was seen as quintessentially American.'⁶⁸⁹

Yet, while these characterizations have come under considerable scrutiny, most notably in Graham's *Framing the South*, critics have seldom recognized, let alone analyzed the absence of religion in the construction of the southern white hero. Smarter

⁶⁸⁷ President Clinton, another southern lawyer was at this time constantly drawing distinctions between himself and the largely southern Republican coalition led by Newt Gingrich.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, 22; Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 28.

⁶⁸⁹ Crespino, 'Strange Career of Atticus Finch,' 20.

than his neighbors, Hollywood's white civil rights hero lawyer propels the apparently national agenda of consensus liberalism and secular equality, rather than the sectional obsessions of zealous Christianity and racial division: a distinction that warrants attention. This chapter argues that Robert Mulligan's 1962 adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, arguably the first white-hero civil rights melodrama, sacrifices the religious diversity and moral complexity of Harper Lee's novel in a manner that would prove exemplary to later generations of filmmakers. *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s cinematic morality, inextricably bound to Peck's paternal, liberal humanism, is rooted in a learned rationality that transcends small town racial bigotry, and exists beyond the influence of religiosity.

'[A] particular touchstone of white liberalism,' *To Kill a Mockingbird*, especially in film form, has 'defined for much of the nation – indeed for much of the world... – the South as an American problem,' Eric Sundquist writes.⁶⁹⁰ Recent debates over *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s 'true' moral center (i.e. Atticus), stimulated by the 2015 publication of Lee's only other novel *Go Set a Watchman* and the deeply personal grief many readers exhibited at Lee's death in early 2016, reflect *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s lasting and immutable power in both literary and cinematic form. In each of its manifestations Lee's story continues to shape popular dialogue around race, religion, and poverty in the American South. It is therefore crucial to reassess this vital piece of southern iconography within this thesis. This chapter endeavors to construct a more nuanced understanding of how a story approaching its sixtieth anniversary continues to dramatically influence popular perceptions of southern racism and religious culture despite a considerable number of scholarly attempts to complicate its legacy.⁶⁹¹

Rebecca Best writes that Maycomb, Lee's fictional southern Alabama town, is comprised of what Foucault would call 'disciplinary mechanisms,' designed to uphold

⁶⁹⁰ Eric J. Sundquist, 'Blues for Atticus Finch: Scottsboro, *Brown*, and Harper Lee,' in Griffin & Doyle, *The South as an American Problem*, 182.

⁶⁹¹ Crespino writes that a '1991 American "Survey of Lifetime Reading Habits" by the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Library of Congress revealed that next to the Bible [*Mockingbird*] was "most often cited in making a difference" in people's lives.' (Crespino, 'Strange Career,' 10) Yet, the novel has not been sheltered entirely from controversy. Sporadic lawsuits occurred across the South in the mid-1960s as the novel became entrenched in school curricula and emerged again from the late-1970s onwards. Yet, whereas objections in the 1960s usually arose from concerned white parents critical of the book's integrationist message and derogatory depictions of whites, more recent concerns have been raised by liberals, who argue that the book uses racial slurs and fails to critique institutionalized racism. See Jill May, 'In Defense of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' in Candice Mancini (ed.) *Social Issues in Literature: Racism in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird* (Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2008), 56-8.

strictly defined race, gender or class norms.⁶⁹² Scout and her older brother Jem ('almost six' and 'nearly ten' at the novel's opening) 'develop their personalities and find their places in society by copying the behavior of people in similar social positions,' Best writes.⁶⁹³ Constantly under surveillance, the children are discouraged from drifting too far from the status quo, and so they begin to acknowledge their position alongside their lawyer father Atticus, Aunt Alexandra, and their middle class neighbors. The siblings' questioning and eventual acceptance of middle class, liberal, white southern Christian values forms the subsequent basis of the novel's lasting moral code.

Implying that white liberalism was, in fact, the norm in southern Alabama at this time, the novel quickly reveals its preoccupation with class and status. Yet, while *To Kill a Mockingbird's* fixation on issues of class has been thoroughly scrutinized, the importance of religion – another complicating factor in the novel's representation of divided southern whiteness – has been largely neglected. Characterized by Scout as 'Maycomb's principal recreation,' church attendance appears almost compulsory in the novel (11). However, allowing religion to take over one's life can be as harmful as alcoholism, according to the Finches' neighbor Miss Maudie Atkinson.⁶⁹⁴

While Scout is encouraged to be wary of overly zealous religiosity, it is important not to dismiss religion in the novel as a mere 'social activity,' as Maureen Markey does. Arguing that Atticus's 'serious moral values' are rooted in secular humanism, rather than Christian theology, Markey trivializes religion's significance in the novel: a contention that only makes sense if readers accept Atticus as both entirely secular and infallible, or at least the book's sole moral compass.⁶⁹⁵ A close reading of the novel shows that Atticus is not the omnipotent voice of secular egalitarianism that Markey claims, and while he is a prominent character – the idealized father of Scout's retrospective narration – Atticus is simply one of many characters in the novel to offer a worldview. In fact, Scout's childlike ability to absorb, critique, and refashion numerous philosophies and belief systems is crucial to the novel's structure and appeal.

⁶⁹² Rebecca H. Best, 'Panopticism and the Use of "the Other" in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' *Mississippi Quarterly*, Vol. 63, Iss. 3-4 (Summer 2009), 543. See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 1975 (London: Penguin, 1991).

⁶⁹³ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Grand Central Publishing/Hachette Book Group, 2010), 7. Hereafter page numbers will appear in text unless further comment is required. Best, 541-2.

⁶⁹⁴ '[T]he Bible in the hand of one man is worse [than a whiskey bottle in the hands of another.]' *TKAM*, 60.

⁶⁹⁵ Maureen E. Markey, 'Natural Law, Positive Law, and Conflicting Social norms in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' *32 North Carolina Central Law Review*, (2009), 221-2.

Maycomb abounds with gossip and contradictory characters, but its inhabitants – like those of Faulkner’s novels – are of what Cleanth Brooks called ‘a Christian environment.’⁶⁹⁶ Lee was a lifelong member of her local United Methodist Church in Monroeville, Alabama, where stained glass windows were donated in honor of her parents.⁶⁹⁷ Religion offers a constant reference point within Scout’s changing world, as perhaps it did for Lee herself: from Jem’s lament that the only movies that come to town are ‘Jesus ones,’ to Miss Stephanie’s exclamation about the crowds gathering for Tom Robinson’s trial: ‘you’d think William Jennings Bryan was speakin’ (9 & 213). When Jem and Scout suffer racist taunts as a result of their father’s legal work, Atticus specifically informs them that he ‘couldn’t go to church and worship God if [he] didn’t try to help’ Tom Robinson (139). As such, Atticus appeals to his children’s burgeoning sense of Christian principle in order to justify undertaking legal work that they are too young to fully understand.

Scout encounters several different theological attitudes as a result of interactions with her family, her neighbors, and black housekeeper Calpurnia. She also discovers that there are differing opinions on the correct purpose and place of organized religion in southern life. Her precocious literacy, so often attributed to Atticus’s teaching, is actually the result of copying Bible passages with Calpurnia. Though she had read law files over Atticus’s shoulder for as long as she could remember, Scout asserts that ‘Atticus ain’t got time to teach me anything,’ and so it is Calpurnia she blames when her literacy causes her and her teacher to start ‘off on the wrong foot’ (22 & 33).

Although the Bible is not the crucial element in this aspect of the novel, its presence is testament to the pervasive nature of Maycomb’s distinctly southern Protestantism, whereby the Bible takes on a meaning and purpose far beyond its theological function. More than simply a frame of moral reference, it becomes an educational tool: a book Scout must grapple with if she is to make sense of any other. And yet, if reading is akin to breathing, as Scout claims, the Bible serves more than merely a gateway to literacy: it is the means through which to navigate southern life and

⁶⁹⁶ Brooks wrote that Faulkner’s characters ‘represent, whatever their shortcomings and whatever their theological heresies, Christian concerns.’ See *The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 22-3.

⁶⁹⁷ Sam Hodges, ‘Harper Lee was United Methodist in word, deed,’ United Methodist Church News, February 19, 2016, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/harper-lee-was-united-methodist-in-word-deed>

society.⁶⁹⁸ Such religious characterizations, discussions, and experiences are as crucial as racism is to Lee's evocation of the small town rural South. Indeed, Atticus argues that the racism evident in Tom Robinson's conviction is 'just as much Maycomb County as missionary teas' (285). Yet, in Mulligan's adaptation, Maycomb appears uncomplicated by the influence of religious faith – specifically the Methodism that is so important to the Finch lineage that it is mentioned on the novel's second page. There is little in Mulligan's film to suggest that Atticus is directed by anything other than secular, human decency and the family does not appear to attend church as they do in the novel. The film's only suggestion of denominational affiliation is Jem's request that Atticus play football 'for the Methodists.' Drawing attention to this cinematic refocus, this chapter examines the novel's religious moments and attempts to differentiate or reconcile the narrative and ideological decisions that led to their cinematic omission. As such the chapter better positions both the novel and the film within the history of how southern religion has been represented, misrepresented and sometimes elided in popular culture.

Lee's novel is by no means kind to religion. The book abounds with the hypocrisies and elitism of supposedly Christian people, from the dubious charity work of the women's missionary circle to the societal exile of the Radleys, a family of 'foot-washing Baptist[s]' (59). But it offers a nuanced and inclusive view of the numerous strands and intensities of southern faith found within Maycomb's white social spectrum. The misinterpretations and hierarchies that govern relationships between white Baptists and Methodists, for example, are every bit as complex to Scout as those between the races.⁶⁹⁹

It is fitting, then, that Scout and Jem's only insight into the African American experience comes through religion, when they attend First Purchase African Methodist

⁶⁹⁸ 'I never loved to read. One does not love breathing (23).' Lee's emphasis on the Bible is replicated in Billy Bob Thornton's 1996 Arkansas-based film *Sling Blade*. Of the bundle of books Karl (Thornton) carries around with him, it is only the Bible, and a book about Christmas, to which he refers specifically. Though Karl admits he 'can't understand all of it,' he recalls key teachings aloud when trying to make sense of the world around him. He knows that the Bible has a powerful grasp on his community, and so he uses it, not specifically as a spiritual guide, but more as a practical manual through which he can attempt to navigate everyday southern life. When he is finally separated from Frank (Lucas Black), the young boy for whom he essentially sacrifices himself, Karl hands over his books. Here, the visual prominence of his Bible reflects its symbolic significance: its bold red pages contrasted against the white, unnamed books that sit beneath it in the pile. After a last longing stroke of the red leather, Karl hands over the books in the hope that Frank 'can make a little more sense outta them than [he] can.'

⁶⁹⁹ Scout appears particularly puzzled by the Baptist insistence on 'closed communion,' in which only baptized believers can participate. Methodists practice 'open Communion,' wherein believers and non-believers can participate.

Episcopal Church with Calpurnia.⁷⁰⁰ ‘That Calpurnia led a modest double life [had] never [previously] dawned on me,’ Scout realizes (167). Despite the many differences between their usual church and Calpurnia’s, Scout observes that the preacher at First Purchase is committed to ‘the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen,’ something ‘I had often met in my own church.’(162) As such, Scout’s developing awareness of what it means to be a southern woman is closely linked to her experience with organized religion.

Clearly a tomboy, Scout is used to a rough and tumble, playful existence with her brother Jem and summertime neighbour Dill Harris. However, as the novel and the children develop, Scout is increasingly left out of the boys’ games and expected to adhere to gender standards that both startle and stifle her. In noticing the sexism that marks the rhetoric at both black and white churches, Scout begins to appreciate that divisions between the sexes run much deeper than her brother’s adolescent awkwardness. As such, the scene provides an interesting insight into the young girl’s developing awareness of intersections between gender, race, and religion that is conspicuously absent from the film. Dean Shackelford has argued that in omitting many of Scout’s scenes and thoughts, including those at First Purchase, the film ‘compromise[s] the novel’s feminist center.’⁷⁰¹ Indeed, in ignoring much of Scout’s growing relationship with neighbor Miss Maudie and neglecting characters like Aunt Alexandra altogether, the film sacrifices Maycomb’s feminine sphere – which so often overlaps with the town’s religious culture – to make way for the more masculine, political domain of the courtroom.

In making such narrative decisions, Mulligan and his screenwriter Horton Foote distorted what literary scholar Bradley Shaw calls ‘Lee’s Southern religious complexities’ in favor of ‘what they reasonably could assume was the primary Gothic horror of the South: persistent and irrational hatred inflamed by a degenerating poverty.’⁷⁰² This chapter builds upon Shaw’s insightful work on religion in the southern gothic movie genre, arguing that Lee’s intricate and often feminized religious landscape was omitted in order that the film might build towards Tom Robinson’s trial (and the case for Atticus’s sainthood) in a more streamlined manner. Illuminating the evolution of the civil rights drama genre presented in previous chapters, this chapter therefore posits *To Kill a Mockingbird* as the original white-hero civil rights melodrama and critiques the story’s hallowed position as an apparently exemplary testament to the power of anti-

⁷⁰⁰ The name ‘First Purchase’ reflects the fact that the church was bought with the first earnings of Maycomb’s freed slaves.

⁷⁰¹ Shackelford, ‘The Female Voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,’ 105.

⁷⁰² Shaw, ‘Baptizing Boo,’ 458.

racism. Analyzing *To Kill a Mockingbird* in relation to the films that followed it (rather than viewing them *in light of it*, as is conventional), this chapter asks why *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains such a popular and influential introduction to southern culture and specifically, why it has been shielded from the criticism that has marked the release of subsequent civil rights dramas that follow a broadly similar narrative.

Though Lee's novel and the subsequent film adaptation are set during the 1930s, Atticus Finch 'embodies what historians have called the "liberal consensus" of mid-twentieth-century America,' Crespino writes. 'With the defeat of the Depression at home and fascism abroad, postwar Americans were confident that democracy and western capitalism could answer basic questions of material need and class inequality.'⁷⁰³ As the United States competed with the Soviet Union for world influence, 'legalized racial discrimination in the South was, of course, the glaring contradiction to American egalitarian rhetoric.'⁷⁰⁴ Yet, like Henry Grady, the late nineteenth-century advocate of the 'New South' whose speeches Atticus recommends to Jem, Atticus never suggests that African Americans will be involved in the development of the New South, or even in their own emancipation. He is a member of the state legislature, but brushes off Jem's demands that he 'go up to Montgomery and change the law' (294). Though it is easy to dismiss Jem's naïve requests, the point remains that Atticus is committed to gradual change in the South, and makes no demands of his region. He defends Tom Robinson because he is required to by court appointment and because he believes him to be innocent, not because he intends to pursue overarching racial change.⁷⁰⁵

Despite this evidence, critics and fans alike have consistently drawn parallels between *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s depiction of race relations in the Deep South during the Depression and the civil rights movement that punctuated the period between the novel's and film's releases. Writing of a spell in jail in 1961, Freedom Rider and CORE leader James Farmer recalled being given a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by NAACP chairman Roy Wilkins.⁷⁰⁶ Though Farmer did not express an opinion on the novel, his memory nevertheless reflects what Sundquist calls 'the book's popular appeal at the height of the

⁷⁰³ Crespino, 'Strange Career,' 11-12.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

⁷⁰⁵ 'I'd hoped to get through life without a case of this kind, but [Judge] John Taylor pointed at me and said "You're It,"' Atticus tells his brother Jack in the novel (117). Lee does however make it clear that some white townsfolk resented Atticus because 'he aims to defend' Tom, rather than simply letting the case run its usual course (218).

⁷⁰⁶ James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1985), 14.

civil rights protest.⁷⁰⁷ Likewise, Andrew Young – a key member of the SCLC who went on to serve as US Ambassador to the United Nations – has credited the novel with giving Americans ‘a sense of emerging humanism and decency.’⁷⁰⁸ Yet, despite these apparent connections to the anti-racist activism of the 1960s, *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s filmmakers seemed reticent to openly support the civil rights movement. ‘The big danger in making a movie of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,’ Mulligan recorded in the Production Notes, ‘is in thinking of this as a chance to jump on the segregation-integration soapbox. The book does not make speeches. It is not melodramatic with race riots and race hatred.’⁷⁰⁹ Yet, in an extract of Atticus’s courtroom speech omitted from the film, Lee presents a skeptical understanding of the fundamental principles guiding the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision. In omitting these lines, Mulligan avoided Lee’s attempts to grapple with the reality of white southern reaction to *Brown*:

Thomas Jefferson once said that all men are created equal, a phrase that the Yankees and distaff side of the Executive are fond of hurling at us...because all men are created equal, educators will gravely tell you, the children left behind suffer serious feelings of inferiority. We know all men are not created equal in the sense some people would have us believe – some people are smarter than others, some people have more opportunity because they’re born with it. (273-4)

Atticus presumably means Eleanor Roosevelt when referring to the ‘distaff side of the Executive,’ and it is not the first time the former First Lady is mentioned in the novel. Mrs. Merriweather declares that ‘Mrs. Roosevelt’s lost her mind – just plain lost her mind coming down to Birmingham and tryin’ to sit with them,’ referring to Mrs. Roosevelt’s challenge to the segregated seating plan at the Southern Conference for Human Welfare in 1938 (313). Yet, by this point in the novel, it is only 1935. Such a chronological lapse, not the first in the novel, is indicative of the manner in which Lee presents what Patrick Chura calls ‘an amalgam or cross-historical montage, its “historical present” diluted by the influence of events and ideology concurrent with its period of production.’⁷¹⁰ Atticus’s cynicism towards public education in the 1930s therefore

⁷⁰⁷ Sundquist, ‘Blues for Atticus Finch,’ 183.

⁷⁰⁸ Andrew Young, quoted in Michiko Kakutani, ‘Review: Harper Lee’s ‘Go Set a Watchman’ Gives Atticus Finch a Dark Side,’ *New York Times*, July 10, 2015, accessed May 2, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/11/books/review-harper-lees-go-set-a-watchman-gives-atticus-finch-a-dark-side.html?_r=0

⁷⁰⁹ Robert Mulligan, ‘Production Notes,’ Special Features, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Dir. Robert Mulligan), DVD: Universal Studios, 2008.

⁷¹⁰ Chura also points out that the Works Progress Administration is mentioned in the novel’s fourth chapter, set in 1933, despite the fact that the WPA was not established until 1935. See

reflects a predominant white southern discomfort with outside agitation that enables him to both anticipate and echo the 1954 *Brown* decision. ‘Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children,’ *Brown* declared, ‘for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn.’⁷¹¹

While the New Deal and a progressive First Lady proved little threat to institutionalized racial hierarchies, *Brown* was a crushing blow for much of the white South, and it is to this contemporary scene that Atticus/Lee surely speaks. Yet, while Eric Sundquist concludes that *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s ‘inventory of the historical forces making up white liberal consciousness in the late 1950s’ mean that it ‘might well have been entitled “Driving Miss Scout,”’ the story (in both literary and cinematic form) remains immensely popular and resistant to scholarly accusations of racism and elitism.⁷¹² In the six years that passed between the *Brown* decision and the novel’s publication, only six percent of southern public schools desegregated in compliance with the law.⁷¹³ Elizabeth Lee Haselden, one of the few reviewers to criticize Lee’s novel after it received the Pulitzer Prize, argued that the novel allowed the reader to ‘witness to his [own] concern about injustice-in-general...without feeling any personal sense of guilt or involvement in the extensions of justice into our own time and place.’⁷¹⁴ Despite its seemingly open themes of equality and anti-racism, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, sequestered in its historical 1930s bubble, makes only guarded references to the events of the 1950s. Atticus, like the reader, appears contented with the ‘baby step’ that Miss Maudie argues Tom’s case represents (289). ‘Acclaiming the merits of the book’s theme,’ Haselden wrote, ‘soothes the public conscience.’⁷¹⁵

The film urges black patience and trust that the white liberalism and decency that Atticus represents will triumph. However, historian Tony Badger has argued that for all its vitality during the New Deal era, southern racial liberalism was inherently gradualist and, by the turn of the 1960s, in a state of paralysis. Whereas southern segregationists

Patrick Chura, ‘The Historical Conditions of the Novel,’ in *Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 48.

⁷¹¹ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 494 (1954).

⁷¹² Sundquist, ‘Blues for Atticus Finch,’ 183.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁷¹⁴ Elizabeth Lee Haselden, ‘*To Kill a Mockingbird* Lacks Realistic Characters,’ in Terry O’Neill (ed.), *Readings on To Kill a Mockingbird* (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 2000), 31. Reprinted from *Christian Century*, May 24, 1961.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

launched a huge campaign of propaganda and massive resistance, liberals failed to communicate a visible, gradualist alternative. The change that readers and viewers know will eventually come to Maycomb will have little to do with the work of southern moderates like Atticus. In fact, as Badger argues, it will happen in spite of them, and will be far from gradual. ‘After 1960,’ Badger writes, ‘no southern white could dictate the timetable of racial change. Segregation collapsed under the combined assault of the black civil rights movement from within the region and the federal government and judiciary from outside.’⁷¹⁶ Atticus seems to resign himself to this when he tells his children ‘it’s all adding up and one of these days we’re going to pay the bill for it’ (296). Atticus’s transition then, from a moderate in *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s 1930s to a Citizens’ Council member in *Go Set a Watchman*’s 1950s is actually entirely believable, reflecting the hardening attitude of many southern whites who believed they had been abandoned or even betrayed. Mobilized segregationists had outflanked the liberal leadership, and moderation no longer appeared viable. Indeed, many white southerners began to identify it as racial treason.

Yet, *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s conciliatory narrative evades these key moral and practical questions, and the fact that Atticus actually achieves very little – Tom Robinson is convicted and dies – becomes unimportant. Legal scholar Theresa Godwin Phelps writes that Tom’s death is ‘the bitter truth that flies in the face of all interpretations that see triumph in the book.’⁷¹⁷ As a result of the novel’s faith in Atticus’s gradualism, Tom Robinson dies as soon as he loses faith in his white attorney’s ability to fight his appeal. Phelps reinforces this point, arguing that in the book’s logic Tom ‘might have been saved,’ if only he ‘had been patient and allowed Atticus to speak and act for him.’⁷¹⁸ Yet, while Atticus acknowledges in the novel that he himself ‘couldn’t in truth say we had more than a good chance,’ and that ‘Tom was tired of white men’s chances and preferred to take his own,’ the film is more damning of Tom’s attempts at autonomy. Indeed, differences in Atticus’s reaction show the lawyer’s overblown centrality to the filmic narrative: ‘The last thing *I told him* was not to lose heart; that we’d ask for an appeal,’

⁷¹⁶ Tony Badger, ‘Fatalism, Not Gradualism: The Crisis of Southern Liberalism, 1945-65,’ in Brian Ward & Tony Badger (eds.) *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York University Press, 1996), 89.

⁷¹⁷ Teresa Godwin Phelps, ‘The Margins of Maycomb: A Re-Reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,’ *45 Alabama Law Review* (1994), 529. For a ‘triumphal’ reading of the narrative, see Thomas Shaffer, *American Legal Ethics: Text, Readings, and Discussion Topics* (New York: Matthew Bender, 1985), 10: ‘Tom Robinson loses his case and his life, but in this loss truth triumphs over racism, meaning triumphs over power.’

⁷¹⁸ Phelps, ‘Margins of Maycomb,’ 527.

Atticus laments in the film, almost aggressively. ‘We had such a *good* chance. We had *more* than a good chance.’

Atticus’s frustration reflects a strain of southern liberalism that, by the mid-late 1950s when Lee was writing her novel, was becoming increasingly unsustainable in the wake of more persistent African American demands for civil rights and federal intervention. “Wait” has almost always meant “Never,” Martin Luther King wrote in April 1963 when he, like Tom Robinson, found himself in an Alabama jail. ‘For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” King wrote from Birmingham, just days after the film *To Kill a Mockingbird* premiered in the city. ‘It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity.’⁷¹⁹

When, on *Watchman*’s release, influential African American writer and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates revealed he had never read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and did not intend to, Ryu Spaeth reflected on the ‘irrelevance of *Mockingbird* to the black experience, even as it remains absolutely essential to the white understanding of America’s racist past.’⁷²⁰ Indeed, while neither James Baldwin nor Ralph Ellison ever saw fit to write about *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the 1960s or beyond, numerous scholars have criticized Lee’s novel and the subsequent film for their white-centric themes, which deny African Americans any active role in a story that patronizingly compares them to the innocent mockingbird of its title. Such comparisons are not, as historian Isaac Saney writes, ‘a paean to the intrinsic equality and humanity of all peoples, nor do they acknowledge that Blacks are endowed with the same worth and rights as whites.’ When Miss Maudie elaborates on Atticus’s teaching that ‘it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird’ because they ‘don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy,’ the novel’s symbolism actually implies that ‘Black people are useful and harmless creatures akin to decorative pets,’ Saney argues.⁷²¹ Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, American cinema has repeatedly used mournful religious music to symbolize acceptance of one’s ‘natural’ position. Rather than focus on the assertive freedom songs that communicated defiance, sorrowful music guides white characters and audiences through the trials of the African American experience. As such, Miss Maudie’s assertion that mockingbirds ‘don’t do one thing but

⁷¹⁹ King, ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail.’

⁷²⁰ Ryu Spaeth, ‘Is *To Kill a Mockingbird* racist?’ *The Week*, July 17, 2015, accessed August 23, 2015, <http://theweek.com/articles/566893/kill-mockingbird-racist>. See also Isaac Chotiner, ‘A Conversation with Ta-Nehisi Coates,’ *Slate*, July 13, 2015, accessed September 4, 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/07/ta_nehisi_coates_the_between_the_world_and_me_author_on_charleston_obama.single.html

⁷²¹ Isaac Saney, ‘The case against *To Kill a Mockingbird*,’ *Race & Class*, Vol. 45, Iss. 1 (July 2003), 102.

make music *for us* to enjoy’ (emphasis mine) reflects the failure of Maycomb’s whites, and perhaps Lee herself, to identify any meaning for black life and existence outside of the white social structure.

Although numerous fans and critics have argued that Tom Robinson’s story must have been based, at least in part, on the Scottsboro cases – in which nine black males (aged between twelve and nineteen) were wrongfully convicted of raping two white women on a train passing through Alabama in 1931 – *To Kill a Mockingbird* gives no suggestion that mass protest could ever occur in support of black defendants.⁷²² ‘Scout Finch faces the realities of southern society within the same age span that Harper Lee faced Scottsboro,’ Jill May argues.⁷²³ Yet, Saney writes that while ‘a maelstrom of activity swept through African American communities, both North and South,’ during six years of Scottsboro cases and appeals, ‘*Mockingbird* gives no inkling of this mass protest and instead creates the indelible impression that the entire Black community existed in a complete state of paralysis.’⁷²⁴ As Phelps writes:

Calpurnia and Tom Robinson’s family are amongst the most sympathetic characters in the novel. They represent a certain kind of southern Black that might hope to move beyond the margins of Maycomb and under the protection of its laws. But they must play quite stereotypical roles: Calpurnia is the “good Mammy” and Tom is the disempowered “naif.”⁷²⁵

For some critics, this use of stock characters, while technically limited, was essential to the book’s message and popularity. ‘It is perhaps impossible for students and scholars born after around 1955 to appreciate what a groundbreaking, even *shocking* book *To Kill a Mockingbird* seemed in the early 1960s,’ Alice Hall Petry writes.⁷²⁶ As such, Steven Lubet contends that ‘the points were probably best driven home through the use of didactic characters, almost stick figures... For Tom to be the most believable, Mayella must be the most disgraceful.’ Yet, while Lubet may be confident that ‘in the fight against

⁷²² Claudia Durst Johnson sums up the novel’s parallels with the Scottsboro cases as: ‘the threat of lynching; the issue of a southern jury’s composition; and the intricate symbolic complications arising from the interweave of race and class when a lower-class white woman wrongfully accuses a black man or men. The centrality of the woman’s testimony, her behavior on the witness stand, the cover-up of another crime or secret, and the important issue of her low social standing in the Scottsboro case correspond to the situation constructed by Lee in TKM.’ See *To Kill A Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 5. For a more detailed reading of *Mockingbird*’s legal relationship to the Scottsboro cases, see Sundquist, ‘Blues for Atticus Finch.’

⁷²³ May, ‘In Defense of TKAM,’ 64.

⁷²⁴ Saney, ‘The case against TKAM,’ 103.

⁷²⁵ Phelps, ‘The Margins of Maycomb,’ 529.

⁷²⁶ Alice Hall Petry, ‘Harper Lee, the One-Hit Wonder,’ in Petry (ed.), *On Harper Lee: Essays and Reflections* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), xxiii.

racism, a little class and gender bias can be an effective literary device,' others prefer to take the story on its own terms.⁷²⁷ After all, 'the white law does little for Tom Robinson,' Phelps writes,' and Calpurnia, the Finches' beloved housekeeper, must ride in the backseat when travelling in Atticus's car.⁷²⁸ The film avoids this awkward evidence of Jim Crow within the Finches' prized domesticity by omitting Calpurnia entirely from the scene.

Despite its apparent sympathy for Tom and Calpurnia, *To Kill a Mockingbird's* presentation of black and white relations is distinctly hierarchical. Calpurnia 'knows what she means to this family,' according to Atticus, and yet she is far from an equal (209). Similarly, W. J. Stuckey argues that while Tom's trial is the story's 'main plot line,' it is nevertheless 'inserted into the middle of the Boo Radley incident,' which occupies Scout's and therefore the reader's imagination much longer than Tom does.⁷²⁹ Lesley Marx writes that 'Tom's predicament (rather than Tom as a character) is merely a catalyst,' his trial and death significant only for the lessons it teaches middle class white children: the same children that are treated like royalty by the noble black community when they attend First Purchase AME Church.⁷³⁰ '[T]he men stepped back and took off their hats; the women crossed their arms at their waists, weekday gestures of respectful attention,' Scout remembers. 'They parted and made a small pathway to the church door for us' (157-8).

While Robert Butler argues that these scenes demonstrate that the African American congregation, unlike its white counterparts, 'warmly welcomes outsiders,' Scout's use of the word 'weekday' to describe the African Americans' 'respectful attention' makes it clear that Maycomb's blacks are accustomed to behaving in a certain manner around white people.⁷³¹ Indeed, their weekday employment almost certainly

⁷²⁷ Steven Lubet, 'Reconstructing Atticus Finch,' *Michigan Law Review* 97, No. 6 (May 1999), 1355.

⁷²⁸ Phelps, 529, *TKAM*, 321. In the novel, Atticus asks Calpurnia to accompany him to Helen Robinson's house to help break the news about her husband's death. They meet Jem and Dill along the way, who confirm in their summary of events that Calpurnia was in the back seat (321).

⁷²⁹ W. J. Stuckey, 'To Kill a Mockingbird Is a Good but Flawed Novel,' in O'Neill, *Readings*, 26.

⁷³⁰ Lesley Marx, 'Mockingbirds in the Land of Hadedahs: The South African Response to Harper Lee,' in Petry, *On Harper Lee*, 115.

⁷³¹ See Robert Butler, 'The Religious Vision of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' in Petry, *On Harper Lee*, 131. *Watchman* offers a considerably different take on this scene, as the grown Scout (now known by her given name Jean Louise) visits Calpurnia's home. She is horrified to find Calpurnia detached and 'wearing her company manners,' treating Jean Louise like any other white visitor. 'Why are you shutting me out? What are you doing to me?' Jean Louise demands of her former carer, who responds simply, 'What are you all doing to us?' (Harper Lee, *Go Set a Watchman* (London: William Heinemann, 2015), 160-1)

depends on them adhering rigidly to these conventions. Though they are undoubtedly more Christian in word and deed than many of the novel's white characters, one cannot escape the entrenched nature of white supremacy that forces them to stand to attention in the presence of white children, even on Sundays and in their own 'Quarters.'

Scout's (and the reader's) only insight into Maycomb's black community, these scenes also introduce the only African American who promotes separatism Lula: a woman dismissed by her own community as 'a troublemaker from way back, got fancy ideas an' haughty ways' (159). Pointing out the hypocrisy of white children attending 'nigger church,' a situation that would never be accepted in reverse, Lula argues that Calpurnia's relationship with the Finches is little better than that of servant to master. When Calpurnia asserts that Jem and Scout are her 'comp'ny,' Lula's response is acerbic: 'Yeah, an' I reckon you's company at the Finch house during the week' (158).

Deliberately confrontational, Lula is apparently not even a practicing Christian; she has turned up purely to express her distaste. Calpurnia's son Zeebo confirms that Lula is estranged from organized religion when he informs Scout that 'Reverend Sykes threatened to church' Lula, i.e. make an example of her before the congregation (159). She is therefore separated from the upright, respectable, church-based African Americans working with dignity to improve race relations in Lee's contemporary 1950s and early 1960s.⁷³²

Rather than portray ideological divisions within the black community – divisions that were becoming more and more pronounced by the time most audiences saw the film in 1963 – Mulligan's film omits the scenes at First Purchase altogether, ensuring that the film never enters Maycomb's 'Quarters.' This is just one of many scenes in which Lee attempts to navigate Maycomb's complex, intersecting religious and political fault lines, and its omission from the film enables the movie to deny the existence of the black assertiveness that Lula represents, as well as what Scout calls Calpurnia's 'modest double life:' which calls to mind Du Bois's concept of 'double consciousness.'⁷³³

⁷³² It was at Christmas 1956, as the Montgomery bus boycott came to an end, that songwriter and composer Michael Brown gifted Lee enough money to quit her job and dedicate herself to writing what would become *Watchman* and later *Mockingbird* full time. Lee never revealed the names of her benefactors, but they spoke of their gift during interviews for Mary Murphy's documentary, *Hey, Boo: Harper Lee and To Kill a Mockingbird*, which aired on PBS as part of the *American Masters* series on July 10, 2015.

⁷³³ *TKAM*, 167. 'It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.' Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

Despite evidence that the story's African Americans are fiercely policed by both law and custom, and expected to behave in a manner pleasing to the white middle classes, many of *To Kill a Mockingbird's* advocates have argued that both novel and film fight racism through symbolism, such as Atticus shooting a rabid dog in the street. Here, as in the trial, Atticus is called upon to strike down that which threatens his community, standing in for the lawmen who fail to act. After all, it is County Sherriff Heck Tate who implores Atticus to shoot the dog: 'For God's sake Mr. Finch...I can't shoot that well and you know it!' (127)

'They're perfectly willing to let [Atticus] do what they're too afraid to do themselves,' his sister Alexandra laments in the novel. Equating tolerance and statesmanship with class status and education, as the novel often does, neighbor Miss Maudie reminds Alexandra that Atticus's bravery is appreciated by '[t]he handful of people in this town with background' (316). Crespino argues that '[Sherriff] Tate in this scene may well refer to the elected officials of the South, such as Arkansas governor Orval Faubus in Little Rock, who through fear, incompetence, or narrow-mindedness were unable to face down the mad dog of southern racism.' It is also important to note, as Crespino notes, 'that Calpurnia, the Finch's [sic] domestic servant and the lone African American in the scene, is the one who alerts Atticus to the dog's presence and warns the all-white neighborhood to stay off the streets.' Through Calpurnia, 'Lee acknowledges the working-class African American civil rights protesters in the South who revealed the ugly face of Jim Crow to liberal America [but] their role is limited to that of warning the liberal white hero of the danger to come.'⁷³⁴

In the novel, Miss Maudie declares that Atticus's marksmanship is 'a gift of God,' which, along with Calpurnia's whisper of 'Sweet Jesus, help him,' adds a metaphysical dimension to Jem and Scout's growing appreciation of the father they had previously dismissed as 'feeble' and 'nearly fifty' that is absent from the film (130, 127, 118). While Scout narrates that the dog appeared to be 'dedicated to one course and motivated by an invisible force' in the novel, Robert Butler writes that 'an opposing invisible force acting through Atticus serves to save them,' dramatizing 'the capacity of grace to transform human life.'⁷³⁵ As Miss Maudie says after the trial, 'We're so rarely called upon to be Christians, but when we are, we've got men like Atticus to go for us' (288). Unfortunately, as Jem realizes, 'can't any Christian judges an' lawyers make up for heathen juries' (289).

⁷³⁴ Crespino, 'Strange Career of Atticus Finch,' 18.

⁷³⁵ *TKAM*, 126; Butler, 'The Religious Vision,' 125.

While the novel endows Atticus with religious symbolism, screenwriter Horton Foote found a much more concise manner in which to ensure that Atticus's sense of justice was unavoidably apparent: by dedicating twice as much time to Tom Robinson's trial as the novel does.⁷³⁶ As such, Foote's adaptation reflected what Nicole Rafter calls courtroom drama's 'turn toward the right,' which began in 1957 with Sidney Lumet's *12 Angry Men*. Like its descendants *Witness for the Prosecution* (Billy Wilder, 1957), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (Stanley Kramer, 1961), *Inherit the Wind*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *12 Angry Men* is considered a classic courtroom drama, and this period 'the genre's golden age.'⁷³⁷ Often, 'a solitary figure's courage carries the day,' Rafter writes, as the hero 'bases his decision on belief in a moral law that transcends man-made laws and must be followed by all human beings.'⁷³⁸

Without Lula, Atticus becomes the only Maycomb resident prepared to even acknowledge the town's 'usual disease' and therefore assumes, if not invents, the role of the white civil rights hero who identifies and attempts to rectify the problems that African Americans themselves cannot even put into words. Through this reconstruction of the novel's narrative, the adult, masculine world of the courtroom and the contemporary 1960s tensions it reflected replaces Scout's naïve and unassuming interpretations about the Depression-era world around her. Atticus becomes central to the story, but also to the wider narrative of an apparently changing South.

Uncomplicated by many of the book's pressures, the cinematic Atticus appears all the more exceptional. His siblings, Jack and Alexandra, are both absent from the film, which presents Atticus and his children as an isolated but content family unit. In the novel, Alexandra significantly disrupts this liberal sanctuary, constantly reminding readers of the family's often-fractious internal and external relationships. Especially significant to

⁷³⁶ 'Only about 15% of the novel is devoted to Tom Robinson's rape trial, whereas in the film, the running time is more than 30% of a two-hour film. See Shackelford, 'The Female Voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' 102-3.

⁷³⁷ Nicole Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 102. *Judgment at Nuremberg*, Kramer's three and a half hour film about an American judge tasked with determining the culpability of four German judges during the Holocaust, premiered on American television on March 7, 1965. It was interrupted by a special report from Selma, Alabama, where African American protesters had been brutalized while trying to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge towards Montgomery. 'After this dramatic news report,' Bodroghkozy writes, 'ABC returned its viewers to the motion picture about German culpability in the brutalization and mass murder of Europe's Jews.' See *Equal Time*, 116.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid*, 103. While Rafter's book provides a welcome and lively introduction to the history of American crime drama, she makes some mistakes in her presentation of the 1950s and 1960s. She states that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in Georgia (98), rather than Alabama, and in her discussion of *Inherit the Wind*, argues that many of the tensions evident in the film had 'already been addressed in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' despite the fact that *Mockingbird* was released over two years after *Inherit the Wind* (104).

Scout's development, Alexandra actually moves in with her brother and his children to assist the motherless Scout's transition into womanhood. The perennial southern busybody, Alexandra is a frightful gossip, obsessed with matters of lineage and class status. Committed to the racial, class, and gender boundaries that divide Maycomb's residents, she provides a helpful commentary on the town's social structure. She personally polices these boundaries wherever possible, and encourages others – especially Atticus and his children – to do the same. Because Atticus is less committed to these societal rules, Alexandra's presence is crucial in reminding readers of the reality of southern middle class life. To deny Alexandra's presence, as the film does, is to deny the frictions and divisions within the Finch family (and by extension the middle class liberalism they represent) and to suggest that the only opposition or criticism Atticus and the children faced was from less educated, lower-class outsiders.

Alexandra is also significant because her interests and occupations are just one of the many ways that Lee's novel reinforces the significance of organized religion in the small town South. A member of the women's missionary circle, she invites many of the neighborhood women into the Finch household to discuss 'the squalid lives of the Mrunas,' an African tribe seemingly incapable of living up to the women's moral standards (305). 'It was customary for every circle hostess to invite her neighbors in for refreshments,' Scout narrates, 'be they Baptists or Presbyterians' (307).

Scout describes Mrs. Merriweather, one of Alexandra's guests, as 'the most devout lady in Maycomb.' Her 'large brown eyes always filled with tears when she considered the oppressed,' Scout recalls, as Mrs. Merriweather describes '[t]he poverty...the darkness...the immorality' blighting the Mrunas (308-9). The women's sense of Christian responsibility to these far flung tribes, though laden with colonialist overtones, is nevertheless hugely ironic when one considers their attitudes towards the people of African descent living in poverty across the tracks from their own neighborhood. 'Until the civil rights era, most Baptists saw no conflict between their desire to evangelize non-white peoples and their support for racial segregation in the South,' Mark Newman argues.⁷³⁹

Carolyn Dupont argues that missionaries proved a powerful voice for racial change in American Christian life. 'Perhaps nowhere did the vision of Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian racial progressives express itself as forcefully as in missionary publications,' she writes, noting that the Methodist publication *World Outlook* 'took

⁷³⁹ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 129.

racial mixing for granted.’ Citing issues from the late 1940s and early 1950s, Dupont notes that *World Outlook*’s ‘photos displayed black and white youth together in interracial institutions, conferences, and retreats.’⁷⁴⁰ The publication even ran articles by high profile black leaders, including representatives of the United Nations and the NAACP, and yet, as Dupont recognizes, progressive evangelicals often only advocated ‘better treatment of black Americans,’ rather than systemic change. They were also an elite, relatively minor faction of ‘vast and multifaceted religious bodies. Most white Americans seemed fairly content to let the status quo remain,’ Dupont concludes.⁷⁴¹

In its report to the Southern Baptist Convention in June 1954, just two weeks after the *Brown* decision, the Christian Life Commission advocated that American ‘treatment of minority peoples in our citizenship weakens the witness of our missionaries in other lands even more than in our own...our missionaries have left China and are finding it more and more difficult to work in Africa, Asia, and other areas of the world.’⁷⁴² As such, Newman writes, ‘it became increasingly impossible to separate missions from American race relations’ in the 1950s and 1960s, as white backlash to the *Brown* desegregation decision and increased civil rights activity ‘generated adverse national and international publicity that undermined the efforts of Southern Baptist missionaries abroad.’⁷⁴³ ‘[A] few more Montgomerys and Birminghams and we might as well call home our SBC missionaries ministering to the black people of the world’ the editor of North Carolina’s *Biblical Recorder* lamented in June 1961.⁷⁴⁴

Reflecting this hypocrisy, Mrs. Farrow, ‘the second most devout lady in Maycomb,’ moves from the discussion of the Mrunas to the local black community, arguing ‘[w]e can educate ’em till we’re blue in the face, we can try till we drop to make Christians out of ’em but there’s no lady safe in her bed these nights’ (311). Recalling the downcast mood of her maid following Tom Robinson’s conviction, Mrs. Merriweather laments that ‘there’s nothing worse than a sulky darky.’ She goes on to inform the other

⁷⁴⁰ Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 54-5.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁴² A.C. Miller, ‘Forty-Sixth Annual Report of The Christian Life Commission,’ published in the *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1954: Proceedings June 2-5 1954*, St Louis, Missouri, accessed March 23, 2015, http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1954.pdf, 404.

⁷⁴³ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 136.

⁷⁴⁴ J. Marse Grant, ‘Stern Challenges Prod Convention Leadership,’ *Biblical Recorder*, June 3, 1961, accessed May 9, 2015, <http://recorder.zsr.wfu.edu/Default/Skins/WakeforestA/Client.asp?skin=WakeforestA&AW=1470152365023&AppName=2>, p.3.

ladies how she dealt with the situation: “‘Sophy,’ I said, ‘you are simply not being Christian today. Jesus Christ never went around grumbling and complaining.’” (310)

It is amidst the bigotry and hypocrisy of the women’s missionary society that Atticus emerges with the news that Tom has been shot dead while attempting to escape from prison, reminding readers, as Maureen Markey writes, ‘that such bigotry and prejudice have violent and deadly consequences in the real world.’ Thus it is through her participation with the apparently Christian missionary society that Scout learns most about hypocrisy and prejudice, undercutting what Markey recognises as ‘Atticus’ valiant efforts to convince Scout and Jem that the people of Maycomb are not as bad as the jury that convicted Tom.’⁷⁴⁵ If Scout is to enter ‘this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water,’ she must learn to repress her true feelings (313). Her memories of the missionary circle will, of course, be contrasted with her recollections of attending First Purchase with Calpurnia, where Reverend Sykes converts his Christian principles to direct action, refusing to let the congregation leave until ten dollars had been raised for Tom’s family. The manner with which Lee intersects issues of race with those of faith is perhaps best exemplified by Scout’s admission that while ‘Negroes worshiped’ at First Purchase on Sundays, ‘white men gambled in it on weekdays.’ (157) ‘Whites trespass with apparent impunity’ upon this ‘sacred space,’ Phelps argues, ‘bring[ing] illegal activities under the protection of an unwritten rule that allows them to take whatever they please from the Blacks.’⁷⁴⁶

It is presumably this same impunity that empowers the jail guards to shoot Tom seventeen times when he made ‘a raving charge at the fence’ in the novel. Fully aware that Tom only had one good arm and so was unlikely to have successfully scaled the fence, Atticus laments the tragedy: ‘They didn’t have to shoot him that much’ (315). Even Braxton Bragg Underwood, the racist proprietor of the *Maycomb Tribune*, describes Tom’s death as a ‘senseless slaughter’ (323). Another character omitted from the film, Underwood was named for a Confederate general and, according to Atticus, ‘despises Negroes, won’t have one near him’ (209). Yet he lurked in the shadows with his shotgun, determined to protect Atticus (and therefore Tom) from the lynch mob, emerging as a complex, if relatively minor character, who goes on to write a scathing indictment of Tom’s trial. As such, Underwood seems to individually embody much of the contradictory rhetoric reverberating across the white South in the mid-twentieth century.

⁷⁴⁵ Markey, ‘Natural Law,’ 225.

⁷⁴⁶ Phelps, ‘Margins of Maycomb,’ 528.

Omitting Underwood, presumably in the interests of a simplified plot, the film's producers also refused to implicate the Finches' middle-class Christian neighbours in the degradation and murder of Maycomb's blacks. Gone altogether are scenes at First Purchase and the missionary circle, while the events leading to Tom's death are both literally and symbolically altered. 'Here the movie tries to placate Dixie audiences by departing from the sacred text of the novel,' Andrew Sarris wrote in the *Village Voice* in March 1963.⁷⁴⁷ Though Tom is still shot by law enforcement officers, it is while the well-meaning officers were 'taking him to Abbottsville for safe-keeping,' rather than during a regular exercise period. 'Tom broke loose and ran,' Atticus tells Miss Maudie and the children in the film. 'The deputy called out to him to stop. Tom didn't. He shot at him to wound him and missed his aim: killed him. The deputy says "Tom just ran like a crazy man."'”

There is a considerable difference between accidentally killing a man with a warning shot, and shooting a man seventeen times. The narrative decision to switch to the former alleviates much of the novel's implicit white guilt. It is also significant that Atticus's description of Tom's killer, simply 'the guards' in the novel, becomes 'the deputy' in the film. Though the deputy is not named, the fact that he is known to the Finches simply by his rank and title implies that he is a more senior and therefore trustworthy narrator than a group of anonymous guards. Atticus clearly trusts this man's memory of the events, and in recalling it to Maudie and the children, Atticus implies little cynicism. This was an individual tragedy: an accident of Tom's own making, rather than the murder of a scared victim of an inherently racist justice system by its indifferent and faceless guards. This narrative shift is especially significant when one considers the contemporary context of the civil rights movement in 1962-3, when huge numbers of black men, women, and children were being arrested and held in southern jails knowing that any abuse inflicted upon them would go unpunished.⁷⁴⁸

Other noteworthy scenes omitted from the film include those in which the missionary ladies and then Scout contemplate how they would act as Mayor of Birmingham or even the Governor of Alabama (313). Obviously this too would have

⁷⁴⁷ Andrew Sarris, 'A Negro is Not a Mockingbird,' *Village Voice*, March 7, 1963, 15.

⁷⁴⁸ Historian Zoe Colley argues that going to jail was an integral part of non-violent protest in the South, tracing the development of the 'jail-no-bail' ideology that marked the sit-ins and Freedom Rides of the early 1960s, through Freedom Summer and the later Black Power movements. And yet, despite this important attempt to transform the jails into sites of activism, Colley stresses that violence, sexual assault, and poor facilities were common. See Zoe A. Colley, *Ain't Scared of Your Jail: Arrest, Imprisonment, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012).

taken on considerably more symbolism in 1962-3 when George Wallace was elected Governor and Birmingham erupted into some of the most extreme violence of the civil rights era. Key scenes with elderly neighbour Mrs. Dubose are omitted for a similar reason, with producer Alan Pakula recalling that though further scenes were shot, 'the film builds up so gradually to the courtroom' that any distractions from this meant that 'the narrative of the picture began to crumble.'⁷⁴⁹ Pakula's admission confirms that Atticus and the trial were recentralized as the point of the narrative, at the expense of scenes that added further nuance to Maycomb's racial landscape or indeed Atticus himself. Though Thomas Shaffer does not seem to be aware of Pakula's commentary, his speculation about the real reasons for Mrs. Dubose's absence from the film is nevertheless convincing: 'the American civil-rights agenda when Horton Foote wrote the screenplay could not find a way to come to terms with Mrs. Dubose – with the fact that Atticus Finch could endure an old woman's ruthlessness and racist attack on him and his client and at the same time hold her out to his children as the bravest person he ever knew.'⁷⁵⁰

Hiding a Confederate pistol beneath her 'numerous shawls and wraps,' Mrs. Dubose argues in the novel that Atticus 'is no better than the niggers and trash he works for' (132, 135). Jem responds by beheading her flowers, only to be punished by Atticus and forced to read Sir Walter Scott's medieval romance *Ivanhoe* to the cantankerous old bigot. As if to reflect Mrs. Dubose's nostalgic choices, the flowers in question are white camellias: perhaps a reference to the Knights of the White Camellias: a white terrorist group that advocated white supremacy after the Civil War.⁷⁵¹ After all, Mark Twain argued in *Life on the Mississippi* that Sir Walter Scott had done 'measureless harm' to the American South, infecting the region with 'the jejune romanticism of an absurd past that is dead.'⁷⁵² Scott may not have 'man[ned] the batteries that fired on Fort Sumter,' lawyer Scott Horton contended more recently in *Harper's*, but he did encourage 'a whole generation of southerners [to think] about the idyllic life and plantation agriculture, with its natural order of aristocracy and slavery.'⁷⁵³ A fierce advocate for the maintenance of racial and class boundaries, Mrs. Dubose appears committed to the hierarchies of the Old South, and Scott's romanticism brings her some peace and comfort in her dying months.

⁷⁴⁹ Alan Pakula, Directors' Commentary.

⁷⁵⁰ Thomas Shaffer, 'Growing Up Good in Maycomb,' *Alabama Law Review* 45 (1993-4), 541.

⁷⁵¹ Formed in Louisiana, the Knights were most active in the late 1860s.

⁷⁵² Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Kindle Edition, 2012), 82-3.

⁷⁵³ Scott Horton, 'How Walter Scott Started the American Civil War,' *Browsings: The Harper's Blog*, July 29, 2007, accessed June 4, 2016, <http://harpers.org/blog/2007/07/how-walter-scott-started-the-american-civil-war/>

Though the Knights of the White Camellias are obsolete by the time of the novel's setting, and Mrs. Dubose herself dead by the novel's end, the camellias persist. Despite Jem's actions, the flowers grow back just before Mrs. Dubose dies. "“You thought you could kill my Snow-on-the-Mountain, did you? Well, Jessie says the top's growing back out. Next time you'll know how to do it right, won't you? You'll pull it up by the roots, won't you?””(146) As such, despite Atticus's attempts to redeem Mrs. Dubose in his children's eyes, Jem's lesson appears to be that racism, like the camellia root, runs much deeper than he first expected. Indeed, Atticus returns from the old woman's deathbed with a gift for Jem: a boxed 'white, waxy, perfect camellia...Jem's eyes nearly popped out of his head. "“Old hell-devil...Why can't she leave me alone?”” (148)

Atticus's graciousness towards Mrs. Dubose confuses his children, and so after her death he informs them of the morphine addiction she had been battling, telling them that 'she died beholden to nothing and nobody' (149). However, the stark nature of the film adaptation's new racial focus could simply not allow the toxic racism of a genteel southern lady living alongside the Finches. Such close proximity would damage the easy production of a class-based understanding of racism: a construction that provided a convenient buffer for a nation struggling to come to terms with the reality that the civil rights movement was holding up to scrutiny. Though Mrs. Dubose appears briefly in the film, calling Scout an 'ugly girl' for her lack of appropriate manners, she makes no further comments or appearances after being appeased by Atticus. Thus her racism is omitted. Intolerance must be banished entirely to the Ewells and the other poor whites that make up the jury that convicts Tom Robinson.

In many ways, Tom's trial is only significant to *To Kill a Mockingbird's* narrative (both literary and cinematic) because it enables readers and the audience to determine the hierarchies of whiteness. It is clear in the novel that the middle-classes are easily exempted from jury duty, absolving them of the prejudice evident in Tom's trial. 'You never see anyone from Maycomb on a jury,' Jem observes, 'they all come from out in the woods' (296). However, while Lee's novel offers the Ewells alongside the evident hypocrisy and racism of other, more socially superior Maycomb residents, in the film's rendering the Ewells and their social peers on the jury assume all of Maycomb's intolerance.

The natural harbingers of racial terrorism, 'the Ewells lived as guests of the county,' Scout declares. 'No truant officers could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could ever free them from congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings' (22). Discarded by the

community, like the trash they live amongst near the town dump, these poor whites will not be redeemed; indeed their entire sordid existence is played out in the courtroom for all to see. The story's pantomime villains, the Ewells, are rude, filthy scavengers; even Atticus struggles to find a good word about them and certainly no one seems to care that by the end of the novel/film the underprivileged and abused Ewell children are now orphans. '[T]he disgrace of Maycomb for three generations,' the family offer little but racist diatribe and are a clear indictment of rural, southern poverty. Employing a child's naïve and honest narration for the entire story, Lee is able to offer judgment on the Ewells, without facing criticism. As a child, Scout cannot be blamed for her opinions; in fact her 'natural' distrust of the Ewells proves to be entirely justified. Through Scout's growing suspicion of lower class families, Lee is able to offer her own cynical interpretation of the divisions of whiteness and the differences between a good family and 'trash.'

According to Pakula, the film's only 'really totally dark person is the James Anderson character [Bob Ewell], who's pathetic.'⁷⁵⁴ Indeed, Ewell's claims to be 'a God-fearing man,' the victim of 'tricksy lawyers like Atticus Finch,' cements his presence as a symbol for the recalcitrant white South that deliberately obstructed civil rights legislation. Thus, while the novel presents a host of hypocritical and supposedly Christian Maycomb residents, Mulligan's film isolates Ewell as a low-class, racist, and openly religious anomaly. The violent abuse he inflicts upon his daughter Mayella not only separates him from the narrative's other single father, Atticus, but sets a precedent for the violent misogyny that almost all white supremacist villains will enact in later southern dramas, from *Mississippi Burning*, where Deputy Sheriff Clinton Pell violently beats his wife after she talks to the FBI, to *A Time to Kill*, where Klansmen kidnap and abuse liberal law student Ellen Roark.

In all of these films violence against women – often specifically sexual violence – contributes to a wider characterization of mindless depravity that is deeply gendered. Theodore and Grace-Anne Hovet point out that all 'points of conflict in [*To Kill a Mockingbird*] are marked by the absence of a female presence, particularly the maternal. Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Ewell, and Mrs. Radley have all died before the key events in the stories. Thus there are no mothers who...have implicated themselves in Mayella's abuse by her father, or exonerated Atticus's failure to act more decisively in the state legislature to combat segregation and lynching.'⁷⁵⁵ Maycomb's lynch mob, like the Klans of

⁷⁵⁴ Alan Pakula, Director's Commentary, Special Features.

⁷⁵⁵ Theodore R. Hovet & Grace-Anne Hovet, 'Contending Voices in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' in Mancini, *Racism in Harper Lee's TKAM*, 118. *Forrest Gump* presents a similar narrative, in which the motherless Jenny and her sister are abused by their white trash father. Jenny prays to

Mississippi Burning and *A Time to Kill*, is entirely male. Likewise, though Atticus may trivialize the fact that women cannot serve on juries in Alabama ('I doubt if we'd ever get a complete case tried—the ladies'd be interrupting to ask questions' (296)), women are nevertheless absolved of the blame the narrative directs at those who convicted Tom Robinson.⁷⁵⁶ However, while the novel's presentation of Mrs. Dubose and the women's missionary circle makes it clear that the vast majority of middle-class Maycomb women harbour distinctly racist views, the film's omission of these scenes encourages viewers to see southern racism as a distinctly male phenomenon, a cinematic trope that has been replicated by numerous civil rights melodramas.⁷⁵⁷

The fact that none of *Mockingbird's* characters, male or female, seem to care about Mayella's abuse, suggests that neither they nor their author find the situation shocking or particularly noteworthy. Mayella may have lied about Tom Robinson, but her rape at the hands of her father 'is dismissed as irrelevant and unimportant,' literary scholar Diann Baecker writes. 'Her testimony is motivated less by shame than by fear – not of Robinson, but of her father. Atticus calls her a victim of "cruel poverty and ignorance," but what she is most clearly is a victim of incest and physical abuse.'⁷⁵⁸ And yet, as Laura Fine notes, 'Atticus's conception of those in need of protection does not include girls being sexually abused by their own fathers,' or indeed orphans, as all the Ewell children are by the end of the novel.⁷⁵⁹ As Baecker argues, '[t]he incestuous relationship of a white trash man with his white trash daughter is a part of the novel often glossed over by scholars who probably find it unremarkable anyway, as if to say, what else can be expected from people living so close to Negroes.'⁷⁶⁰

Enduringly obstinate, the fanatical Bob Ewell pragmatically adopts the language that will secure his victory in this case: the language of race and Christianity. Yet, within Mulligan's adapted narrative, this plea to be recognized as a Christian appears all the more desperate, as the community's pervasive Christianity has been obscured. Thus irredeemable, Ewell – ironically named for the man perhaps most associated with

God for deliverance: 'Dear God, make me a bird so I can fly away.' Just as Boo Radley strikes a blow for the civilized white South when he kills Bob Ewell, Forrest Gump bulldozes Jenny's family home – the site of her abuse.

⁷⁵⁶ Atticus also encourages Jem, but never Scout, to pursue a legal career.

⁷⁵⁷ Such cinematic tropes help to reinforce the idea that white women were often the weakest link in the wall of segregation. See Gail Murray, *Throwing off the Cloak of Privilege*.

⁷⁵⁸ Diann L. Baecker, 'The Africanist Presence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' in Mancini, *Racism in Harper Lee's TKAM*, 109.

⁷⁵⁹ Laura Fine, 'Structuring the Narrator's Rebellion in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' in Petry, *On Harper Lee*, 72.

⁷⁶⁰ Baecker, 'The Africanist Presence,' 106.

upholding ‘genteel southern values,’ Robert E. Lee – must die at the ‘sickly white’ hand of Boo Radley: whom Allison Graham recognizes as ‘the fading specter of southern gentility.’⁷⁶¹ Here Graham reflects Sundquist’s understanding of the story’s central illusion: ‘that racial hysteria – the Klan, night-riding mobs, the White Citizens Council – can be likewise unmasked, humiliated, and brought to justice once the South [Scout and Jem] disposes of its childish fears [Boo Radley] and moves forward into the post-*Brown* world.’ It is, as Sundquist asserts, ‘a masterpiece of indirection that allows young readers to face racism through the deflecting screen of a frightening adventure story, just as it allows American readers to face racism through a tale that deflects the problem to the South.’⁷⁶²

Yet, in the novel, Jem and Scout’s savior, Boo, is a ‘foot-washing Baptist,’ isolated by what Shaw calls ‘the [Radleys’] extreme brand of evangelical Protestantism.’⁷⁶³ Protecting the children on Halloween, a pagan occasion on which evil spirits roam, Boo converts Ewell’s heresy into what Butler calls ‘a kind of All Saints’ Day, the day after Halloween devoted to honouring unrecognized saints who do not have celebratory days of their own.’⁷⁶⁴

In the novel, Scout learns about the Radleys’ religious convictions from her neighbour Miss Maudie, also a Baptist. Though Scout is puzzled by the fact that Baptist insistence on closed communion probably separates her, as a Methodist, from all Baptists, foot-washing or otherwise, Miss Maudie decides that ‘it was easier to define primitive baptistry than closed communion.’ Thus, Scout is awakened to the numerous strands of Protestant orthodoxy in her small neighbourhood. ‘Foot-washers believe anything that’s pleasure’s a sin,’ Miss Maudie instructs. ‘Did you know some of ‘em came out of the woods one Saturday and passed by this place and told me me and my flowers were going to hell?’ Scout begins to instantly question the intent of any religion that might banish Miss Maudie to ‘various Protestant hells’ simply for enjoying her flowers. ‘Thing is, foot-washers think women are sin by definition,’ Miss Maudie continues. ‘They take the Bible literally you know.’ (59) Thus, Scout absorbs her neighbor’s concern that the Bible can be dangerous, ‘worse than a whiskey bottle’ for some men (60). For Mr Radley, disturbed religious understandings have manifested in a violent and reclusive son.

Miss Maudie teaches Scout to be suspicious of excessive religion, especially that of the rural and/or secluded. The two middle class white females therefore assume a bond

⁷⁶¹ Graham, *Framing the South*, 161.

⁷⁶² Sundquist, ‘Blues for Atticus Finch,’ 187.

⁷⁶³ Shaw, ‘Baptizing Boo,’ 458.

⁷⁶⁴ Butler, ‘The Religious Vision,’ 125-6.

that transcends both generational and denominational differences, illuminating the broad Protestant spectrum in Maycomb, whilst simultaneously reinforcing ideas about what is appropriate for the ‘sensible’ middle classes. ‘There are just some kind of men who – who’re so busy worrying about the next world they’ve never learned to live in this one,’ Miss Maudie says of Mr Radley. ‘If [Boo’s] not crazy, he should be by now’ (60).

Ignoring these scenes with Miss Maudie, and indeed the Radleys’ profoundly religious identity, Mulligan’s film ‘completely avoids the theological explanation for Boo’s character,’ Shaw argues.⁷⁶⁵ As a result, Boo emerges simply as a ghostly white hero, but enters Scout’s world as an equal, cementing the film’s commitment to the the Radleys as the Finches’ unusual, but ultimately redeemable white, liberal, secular, middle-class neighbors and allies.

Yet, while the film ends with this sense of community understanding (‘Boo was our neighbor’), Lee’s Scout takes the time in the novel to explain that she never saw Boo again, and that though he had given them so much, including their lives, she and Jem had given him nothing in return and so they could not really be neighbors (373). ‘[U]ltimately an inexplicable Gothic mystery,’ according to Shaw, Boo simply returns home.⁷⁶⁶ But while the New Deal ‘posed little challenge to Jim Crow,’ Sundquist writes, events of the early 1960s ensured that *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s filmmakers were less interested in Lee’s subtle invocations of the southern gothic, and more concerned with the demonization of lower class, evangelically-tinged racism and the subsequent redemption of the white middle-classes.⁷⁶⁷ Though the Finches had never been able to hold back Maycomb’s racist hysteria alone, by 1962-3 they needed secular alliances more than ever to keep the tensions from their neighborhood, and so the film creates the impression that in battling the racist Bob Ewell, Boo Radley has built a lasting relationship with Scout and the Finches.

Once a ‘displaced phantasm of racial fear,’ Boo Radley emerges as what Sundquist calls ‘the domesticated “gray ghost” of harmonious integration.’⁷⁶⁸ Committed to the idea that the region was best left to solve its own problems, *To Kill a Mockingbird* as both novel and film prioritizes middle class white community renewal over meaningful racial change. After all, as Atticus tells Scout in the novel, ‘[m]ost people are [nice], when you finally see them.’ (376) Sundquist writes that Atticus’s ‘integrity is circumscribed by his admonition that moral action must respect the prejudices of “our friends” and

⁷⁶⁵ Shaw, ‘Baptizing Boo,’ 458.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, 456.

⁷⁶⁷ Sundquist ‘Blues for Atticus Finch,’ 187.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

ultimately abide by local ethics.’ As such, Sundquist continues, ‘the novel’s undeniable power is circumscribed by its own narrative strategies.’⁷⁶⁹ Upholding Atticus’s teaching, producer Alan Pakula describes a failed lynch mob as having ‘an essential decency.’ Those gathered to murder Tom Robinson may be ‘a different class’ from Atticus and other bastions of Maycomb’s legal system, including Sherriff Heck Tate and Judge Taylor, but ‘they all come from the same communities.’⁷⁷⁰ Pakula’s comments, like Lee’s novels, suggest that these people understand and guide each other better than cynical, federal legislation ever could. Walter Cunningham, leader of the mob, is ‘basically a good man,’ Atticus tells his children, ‘he just has his blind spots along with the rest of us.’ (210) Unfortunately, as law professor Monroe Freedman points out, ‘Cunningham’s blind spot (along with the rest of us?) is a homicidal hatred of black people.’⁷⁷¹

Cultural and legal gatekeepers like Atticus and Sherriff Tate make key decisions in the novel and film of *To Kill a Mockingbird* that undermine any argument that they are committed to the law in an abstract sense. As Mulligan’s movie attempts to navigate white liberal responses to the rapidly evolving black freedom struggle, Atticus and Sherriff Tate instigate resolutions based on *their own* interpretations of what is best for Maycomb. While this is well-intentioned, it clearly echoes the white South’s frequent demands for time and autonomy in dismantling racial segregation, despite the fact – as Tom Robinson’s trial shows – that there was little reason for African Americans and sympathetic whites to put any faith in the capacity of southern legal systems to deliver racial justice. Yet, while the white South’s recalcitrance in the face of federal desegregation decisions is remembered by historians as a repulsive manipulation, Atticus’s seemingly intractable status as Maycomb’s hero is rooted in the same racial, gender, and class privilege. In the 1998 documentary *Fearful Symmetry: The Making of To Kill a Mockingbird*, prominent black Alabama attorney Cleophus Thomas, Jr. argues that the story’s events transform Atticus from ‘a defense lawyer to the benign figure of the state, the legislator, the state official that decides when the power of the state ought to be used.’ But rather than seeing this as problematic, Thomas warns that ‘we, as individuals, have to make sure we don’t characterize these people in a pejorative way and say they’re soft on crime.’⁷⁷² Literary scholar Claudia Durst Johnson concurs, arguing

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid, 206.

⁷⁷⁰ Pakula, Director’s Commentary.

⁷⁷¹ Monroe Freedman, ‘Atticus Finch – Right and Wrong,’ *Alabama Law Review* 45.2 (Winter 1994), 476.

⁷⁷² Cleophus Thomas, Jr., interviewed in *Fearful Symmetry: The Making of To Kill a Mockingbird* (Dir.: Charles Kiselyak), 1998. Special Features, *To Kill a Mockingbird* DVD.

that in giving up ‘what means most to him’ – the law – to protect Boo Radley, Atticus performs ‘one of his most unselfish and heroic acts.’⁷⁷³ In changing Lee’s fiction to better position Atticus as a hero, *To Kill a Mockingbird* the film has irreparably influenced popular understanding of any of Atticus’s three incarnations.⁷⁷⁴ It is the image of Peck and the courtroom scenes of the 1962 film that continue to dominate the public memory of this fictional character.

Famous for his virtuous, upstanding roles in films such as *The Yearling* (Clarence Brown, 1946) and *Gentleman’s Agreement* (Elia Kazan, 1947), Peck was fresh from playing another upstanding southern lawyer terrorized by the white trash underbelly of the South in *Cape Fear* when he began work on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He brought considerable and deliberate star power to the film: the only casting decision that contradicted Mulligan’s demand for unrecognizable faces and lesser-known Broadway actors.⁷⁷⁵

Forming Brentwood Productions with Mulligan and Pakula, Peck was heavily involved in the film’s development, contributing to the casting and creative development. Having watched a rough cut in June 1962, Peck sent a lengthy report to his agent and executives at Universal Pictures. Concerned that the film was too committed to the children’s stories, Peck argued that ‘Atticus has no chance to emerge as courageous and strong.’⁷⁷⁶ In a follow-up letter he stressed that ‘the picture will begin to look better as Atticus’ storyline emerges, and the children’s scenes are cut down to proportion.’⁷⁷⁷

Diverging considerably from the novel, Peck’s sense of ‘proportion’ helped inflate Atticus far beyond his literary significance. The actor’s association with the fictional southern lawyer would last his entire career; a connection Peck actively supported, commenting in March 1963, ‘I never had a part that came close to the real me until [Atticus].’⁷⁷⁸ His agent argued that he would ‘lose the entire South’ by taking the

⁷⁷³ Claudia Durst Johnson, quoted *ibid*.

⁷⁷⁴ By Atticus’s three incarnations, I refer to the character in Lee’s novel *Mockingbird*, Peck’s performance in Mulligan’s film, and his latest (though perhaps oldest) manifestation in *Watchman*. Though the chronology of Lee’s writing remains somewhat unclear, the dominant understanding is that *Watchman* reflects her first manuscript, about the adult Scout (now known by her real name Jean Louise) returning to Maycomb from New York to visit her ailing father, Atticus. *Mockingbird* of course, resituated the narrative to Scout’s childhood and was released to huge success in 1960.

⁷⁷⁵ Pakula, Production Notes.

⁷⁷⁶ Gregory Peck, letter to George Chasin and Mel Tucker, June 18th 1962, quoted in Gary Fishgall, *Gregory Peck: A Biography* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 236.

⁷⁷⁷ Peck, letter to Mel Tucker, July 6th 1962, quoted in Fishgall, 236.

⁷⁷⁸ Peck, quoted in James Bacon, ‘Although Women’s Hearts May Flutter, Gregory Peck Claims They Scare Him,’ *Reading Eagle* (PA), March 27th 1963, 53.

role, but Lee's happiness with Peck's performance surely legitimized the actor's ascendancy.⁷⁷⁹ Having based Atticus on her own father, Lee asserted that 'the man and the part met. As far as I'm concerned, that part is Greg's for life.'⁷⁸⁰

In May of the same year, the actor became something of an American spokesman at the Cannes Film Festival, facing what the Associated Press called 'a barrage of questions about race relations in the United States.' One French journalist asked Peck, 'Do you like Negroes as you did in the film?,' to which the California-born actor responded, 'I have never felt intolerance. I judge Negroes on personality, intelligence and quality, as I would anyone else. I'm thankful that I was born in an area where this type of prejudice doesn't exist.'⁷⁸¹ Tangled in a web of national myth-making, Peck's comments reflected popular misconceptions about the South as *the*, rather than *a*, site of racial injustice and intolerance. Even when later admissions about his hometown of La Jolla, California contradicted Peck's 1963 idealistic recollections about his upbringing, he remained committed to his own personal righteousness in a manner that seemed to further link him with Atticus Finch: Maycomb's apparently colorblind pioneer. Appealing for funds for the Southern Poverty Law Center's KLANWATCH in 1990, Peck wrote how the Klan burned a cross in La Jolla in 1923 after the first black family moved in. According to Peck, who would have been five years old when the incident occurred, '[t]he incident shocked me, and I suppose the concept of resisting and fighting racial injustice took root and as I grew up became part of my character.'⁷⁸²

Looking hopefully towards a peaceful, integrated South, Peck distanced himself and Atticus from contemporary Alabama, where white attitudes were hardening. Staunch segregationist George Wallace had been elected Alabama Governor just six months earlier with a colossal 96% of the popular (white) vote. At his January 14 1963 inauguration in Montgomery, Wallace stood on the star marking where Jefferson Davis was sworn in as provisional president of the Confederate States of America in 1861 and made his infamous declaration, 'Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!' Never one to avoid the headlines, Wallace drew national attention. Gene Roberts

⁷⁷⁹ George Chasin, quoted in Michael Freedland, 'I'm the only journalist alive to have interviewed Harper Lee – and it's all thanks to Gregory Peck,' *The Guardian*, July 13, 2015, accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/13/interviewed-harper-lee-to-kill-a-mockingbird-sequel-go-set-a-watchman>

⁷⁸⁰ Lee, quoted *ibid*.

⁷⁸¹ Peck, quoted in [author unknown], 'Peck Applauded after Racial Quiz,' *The Spokesman-Review*, May 20th 1963, 9.

⁷⁸² See Anthony Perry, 'Gregory Peck Recalls an Uglier Side of La Jolla,' *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1990, accessed July 4, 2015, http://articles.latimes.com/1990-03-16/local/me-45_1_la-jolla

and Hank Klibanoff write that '[r]eporters were drawn to [Wallace] like biologists are drawn to the emergence of an old virus they believed to have been exterminated.'⁷⁸³

Long synonymous with oppressive racial violence and segregation, Alabama's largest city, Birmingham, was almost 40% black in 1963, but its African American residents were subject to strict local ordinances as well as state-wide Jim Crow laws.⁷⁸⁴ In April 1960, just three months before Lee's novel would sardonically dismiss North Alabama's 'Liquor Interests, Big Mules, steel companies, Republicans, professors, and other persons of no background,' Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Harrison Salisbury offered a much more damning indictment of Alabama's 'Magic City' (21). Describing Birmingham as a police state, Salisbury argued that 'every medium of mutual interest, every reasoned approach, every inch of middle ground has been fragmented by the emotional dynamite of racism, reinforced by the whip, the razor, the gun, the bomb, the torch, the club, the knife, the mob, the police and many branches of the state's apparatus.'⁷⁸⁵ Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene 'Bull' Connor was one of several city officials who filed libel suits against Salisbury, in cases that would not be fully resolved until 1966.⁷⁸⁶

It is perhaps in Birmingham where the quiet optimism of *To Kill a Mockingbird* most starkly contrasted with southern reality. On April 3, 1963, as the film premiered in the city, Bull Connor reeled from an embarrassing election defeat the previous evening that saw the more moderate, if still pro-segregation, Albert Boutwell elected Mayor of Birmingham. Also signifying Birmingham's transition from a three-man commission (where Connor had served for over two decades) to a larger elected council, the election suggested that the city was moving slowly, unevenly, but unmistakably towards a more moderate and inclusive politics. It was, the *Birmingham News* argued, a 'peoples'

⁷⁸³ Gene Roberts & Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 303.

⁷⁸⁴ See Bass, *Blessed are the Peacemakers*, 90.

⁷⁸⁵ Harrison Salisbury, 'Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham,' *New York Times*, April 12, 1960, 28.

⁷⁸⁶ Salisbury was indicted for criminal libel by grand jury in Jefferson County and faced twenty-one years in jail and \$21, 000 in fines, in addition to the civil libel actions totaling \$1,500,000 against him and \$3, 150, 000 against the *New York Times*. In August 1966 the United States Court of Appeals overruled the Alabama decision, citing the First Amendment. See Anne Permaloff & Carl Grafton, *Political Power in Alabama: The More Things Change . . .* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 146-7; *New York Times Company v. Connor*, 365 F.2d 567 (5d Cir. 1966).

victory.⁷⁸⁷ A ‘New Day Dawns for Birmingham,’ Boutwell himself declared on the paper’s front page, complete with the image of a golden sun.⁷⁸⁸

Birmingham’s triumphant moderates must have been especially pleased that Mary Badham and Philip Alford, the young actors who played *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s Scout and Jem Finch, respectively, were both Birmingham natives. To the city’s business and professional elite, it appeared that the city was making important steps towards middle-class respectability. Presented with plaques commending ‘the good image which you created for yourself, Birmingham and Alabama,’ Badham and Alford drew several hundred people onto the streets at *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s premiere in their hometown, adding some Hollywood glamour to Birmingham’s ‘New Day.’ Mayor-elect Boutwell welcomed the child actors to the stage at the Melba Theater, and vowed that though there was not much he could ‘give’ Alford and Badham just yet, he hoped to eventually ‘give [them] a better Birmingham.’⁷⁸⁹ Yet, for all the day’s optimism, it soon became clear that Connor and his fellow commissioners had no intention of leaving office, signifying the start of over six weeks of political and racial chaos in Birmingham that would cement the city’s reputation for racial hatred and brutality.

April 3 1963 also marked the beginning of the SCLC’s Operation C: a consolidated effort to draw attention to Birmingham’s appalling conditions and entrenched racism as part of a wider push for civil rights legislation. Martin Luther King, Jr., responding to pressure from long-time Birmingham activist, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, was now convinced that the next big fight would be in Birmingham, but had been persuaded to defer instigating activities in the city until after the election, for fear of handing reactionary votes to Connor. What began on April 3 1963 would become one of the movement’s most powerful and persuasive uses of direct action, forcing the world to acknowledge the brutal racism that marked southern black life. As Roberts and Klibanoff write, Project C ‘was a plan built on organizing, baiting, and seeking confrontation.’ Shuttlesworth had promised King as many people as he needed to sustain a lengthy series

⁷⁸⁷ ‘A Victory, A Job,’ *Birmingham News*, April 3rd 1963, 2. Newspaper clipping, Birmingham, Ala. City Council Scrapbooks 1962-1969: February 21 1963 – April 12 1963, Birmingham Public Library Digital Collections, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://cdm16044.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/BPLSB02/id/3757/rec/25>, p. 124.

⁷⁸⁸ Albert Boutwell, ‘New Day Dawns for Birmingham,’ *Birmingham News* April 3rd 1963, 1. Newspaper clipping, Birmingham, Ala. City Council Scrapbooks 1962-1969: February 21 1963 – April 12 1963, p. 122.

⁷⁸⁹ Albert Boutwell, quoted in Emmett Weaver, ‘”Mockingbird” Bows, Local Stars Shine,’ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, April 4th 1963, Birmingham Public Library Digital Collections: <http://cdm16044.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4017coll6/id/1068>.

of boycotts, marches, and demonstrations.⁷⁹⁰ ‘If you create enough tension,’ King told a mass meeting on April 3, ‘you attract attention for your cause.’ Only this attention, he advised, would ‘get to the conscience of the white man.’⁷⁹¹

By the time the American delegation reached Cannes in mid-May, clashes in Birmingham had turned violent. The world watched in horror as Birmingham law enforcement, still under Connor’s orders, used dogs and high pressure water hoses to attack protesting African Americans, including many children. Eleven pages of ‘frightening,’ now iconic, images were published in *Life* magazine, drawing readers’ attention to ‘the spectacle of racial turbulence in Birmingham.’⁷⁹² President Kennedy would later remark that ‘events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or State or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them.’⁷⁹³ Neither, it seems, could the European media, who directed their observations and questions to Peck as *To Kill a Mockingbird* won the short-lived Prix Gary Cooper, established at Cannes in 1961 to reward the film with the most social and human significance.⁷⁹⁴ Screenwriter Allen Rivkin, head of the American delegation to the festival, praised Peck’s performance before the journalists, arguing: ‘This was the first time that an American performer has been questioned by the European press on the U.S. race question. It is still a great problem, but we are solving it and we are not afraid to talk about it and or bring a picture on the race question to an international film festival such as Cannes.’⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁰ Roberts & Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 304, 306.

⁷⁹¹ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 405.

⁷⁹² ‘They fight a fire that won’t go out,’ *Life*, May 17th 1963, 29.

⁷⁹³ President John F. Kennedy, Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights, June 11, 1963. *The American Presidency Project*, accessed June 24, 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9271>

⁷⁹⁴ The Prix Gary Cooper was only awarded twice: to *A Raisin in the Sun* (Daniel Petrie’s adaptation of Lorraine Hansberry’s 1959 play about an African American family in Chicago) in 1961 and *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1963. American critic Richard Roud argued that prizes were often ‘created’ at Cannes when ‘it looked like we were not going to pick up anything.’ ‘[C]ynically (or sentimentally – it often comes to the same thing) [somebody] seized on the fact that Gary Cooper had died that year and that’s how the ‘Prix Gary Cooper’ was born. Oh, it was tarted up with a few lines to explain that this prize was to recompense films whose “humanitarian qualities were exceptional and which promoted better understanding between nations, but this didn’t fool anybody, and it thereupon became a useful prize whenever the American selections weren’t up to scratch.’ It may have been that the American delegation was keen to see these two racially significant films rewarded on the international stage, especially in the wake of increasing civil rights activism at home. See Roud, ‘The International Gravy Train,’ *Guardian* December 11th 1971, reprinted in Michael Temple & Karen Smolens (eds.) *Decades Never Start on Time: A Richard Roud Anthology* (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 123.

⁷⁹⁵ Allen Rivkin, quoted in ‘Peck Applauded After Racial Quiz’.

Rivkin's comments reveal that the American film industry – or at least the Cannes delegation – did see *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a commentary on the current racial situation in the United States. Yet, the film's cultural power seemed to exist in an entirely different Alabama than the one that the SCLC and other groups were working so hard to desegregate. Indeed, Harper Lee assured the *Birmingham Post-Herald* in 1962 that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was 'not a racial novel. It displays an aspect of civilization, not necessarily Southern civilization.'⁷⁹⁶ Never ostracized in her hometown of Monroeville, Lee told *Life* in 1961: 'I'm not Thomas Wolfe; I can go home.'⁷⁹⁷

Apart from when put on the spot by French journalists, there is no evidence that the film's producers made any comment on the contemporary racial situation in Alabama and across the South. Indeed, it was not uncommon for filmmakers, studios, and publicists to attempt to 'contain' the civil rights implications of their movies in the early 1960s. 'Films that examined civil rights struggles in any guise at all were typically reviewed as "melodrama" or "social problem pictures,"' Monteith writes. Of course, as Monteith continues, it was impossible to dictate audience response, but such descriptions 'could lead the terms of audience engagement and reception, and they certainly indicated that influential film reviewers rarely correlated southern cinema with racial politics.'⁷⁹⁸

For example, while director Michael Roemer and producer Robert Young spent months living amongst African American communities in the Deep South in order that their 1964 film *Nothing But a Man* might reflect an 'authentic' way of life, reviewers appeared determined to strip the film of its cultural significance. 'Armed with a letter of introduction from the NAACP,' Roemer and Young met numerous civil rights workers from the SCLC and CORE – including James Bevel and Diane Nash – and were frequently tailed by local sheriffs.⁷⁹⁹ Young had previously directed a documentary for NBC's prestigious *White Paper* series called *Sit-In*, focusing on the civil rights activism of Nashville students in 1960.⁸⁰⁰ Perhaps as a result of these connections, critic Thomas Goldthwaite felt compelled to reassure his readers that *Nothing But a Man* was not simply a dramatization of the network newscasts beaming racial violence into American living

⁷⁹⁶ Lee, quoted in Charles Leerhsen, 'Harper Lee's Novel Achievement,' *Smithsonian Magazine* (June 2010), accessed July 16, 2015, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/harper-lees-novel-achievement-141052/?no-ist>.

⁷⁹⁷ Lee quoted in 'Literary Laurels for a Novice,' *Life*, May 26, 1961, 78A.

⁷⁹⁸ Monteith, 'Civil Rights Movement Film,' 130.

⁷⁹⁹ Michael Roemer, 'Filmmakers' Statements,' in David C. Wall & Michael T. Martin (eds.) *The Politics and Poetics of Black Film: Nothing But a Man* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 25-6.

⁸⁰⁰ Aired February 20th 1960.

rooms. Roemer's film 'is not a violent racial documentary and the sympathy felt is for a poor uneducated man rather than specifically for the plight of the Southern Negro,' Goldthwaite argued. It was unlikely, he concluded, 'that this celebrated picture...will inspire denunciations of the South.'⁸⁰¹

However, though the film does not directly mention the civil rights movement, it is clear that when Duff Anderson (Ivan Dixon) berates his co-workers for 'acting the nigger,' and his conservative preacher father-in-law for 'stooping so long...you don't even know how to stand straight,' he is expressing his desire for African American empowerment and self-determination. These scenes, integral to Anderson's identity as a politically-astute black protagonist, presumably helped inspire Malcolm X's admiration of the film. Yet they drew limited attention in the film's marketing campaign, which attempted to attract audiences by focusing on the movie's more universal themes of family and romance. Moira Walsh, praised the film for being 'scrupulously non-propagandistic and...not even primarily about race.'⁸⁰²

While the film failed to generate considerable box office success, white critics were 'lavish in their accolades,' as Hoyt Fuller wrote in *Negro Digest*.⁸⁰³ But this praise – rooted in the film's apparent universality – proved offensive to those who, like Albert Johnson, recognized the film's 'exceptionally tame' indictment of white southern racism.⁸⁰⁴ As if to prove this point, *Life* magazine appeared to celebrate the idea that *Nothing But a Man* 'is one [film] whites can see without bleeding to death if they're liberals, or breaking the kitchenware if they're not.'⁸⁰⁵ Such emphasis on what the film

⁸⁰¹ Thomas J. Goldthwaite, "'Nothing but a Man' Rated Good Theater,' *Spokesman-Review*, February 11, 1966, 3. This fear of alienating white audiences, especially in the South was also reflected in television. David W. Rintels, a former president of the Writers Guild of America, West was asked to write an episode of *The FBI* (aired ABC, 1965-74) on a subject of his choice in 1963. Rintels wanted to write a fictionalized account of the contemporaneous investigation into the 16th Street Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. When the producer reported back, having consulted the show's sponsor (Ford Motor Company), the network, and the FBI, Rintels was told 'they would be delighted to have me write about a church bombing subject only to these stipulations: The church must be in the North, there could be no Negroes involved, and the bombing could have nothing at all to do with civil rights.' Quoted in Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 160.

⁸⁰² Moira Walsh, 'Films,' *America* 112, No 2 (1965), 62-3. Reading Roemer's account of *Nothing But a Man* in David Wall and Michael Martin's recent volume on the film, it is clear that his own experiences as a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany influenced his decision to write about racialized outsiders. (See Roemer, 'Filmmakers' Statements,' in Wall & Martin (eds.), *The Politics and Poetics of Black Film*, pp. 25-39) Duff's was 'not really a Negro story,' Roemer argued – 'it's the story of the search for identity and that is everyone's story.' Quoted in "'Nothing But a Man: Triumph on a Budget,' *Ebony*, April 1965, 200.

⁸⁰³ Hoyt W. Fuller, 'Nothing But A Man Reconsidered,' *Negro Digest*, May 1965, 49.

⁸⁰⁴ Johnson, 'The Negro in American Films,' 25.

⁸⁰⁵ Brian O'Doherty, 'Classic of a Negro Who Stopped Running,' *Life*, February 19, 1965, 15.

could offer white audiences ‘merely adds up to the fact that *Nothing But A Man*, while low-keyed and plausible, lets the White South off the hook,’ Fuller continued. ‘Its white villains are of the variety calculated to be irrelevant – hoodlums and straw bosses.’ Often little more than disruptive caricatures, Roemer’s white southerners avoided critical analysis, despite the incongruous fact that they all have distinctly southern accents and the film’s southern blacks do not. ‘The [true] source of viciousness which pinions the Negro hero against the wall is never probed, never even suggested,’ Fuller writes. As such, the true realities of Duff’s attitudes and behaviors are never explored. ‘Every Negro knows that the price of being *that kind* of man in the South is prison or death, or both,’ Fuller concluded.⁸⁰⁶

One contemporaneous film that refused to ignore the reality of southern racism was Otto Preminger’s *The Cardinal* (1963). Adapting Henry Morton Robinson’s bestselling 1950 novel, Preminger and his screenwriter Robert Dozier added an African American Catholic priest named Father Gillis (played by Ossie Davis), who travels to the Vatican in 1934 seeking support to desegregate Catholic schools in his Georgia parish. Like Mulligan’s adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Preminger used a 1930s plotline to comment on the contemporary 1960s. Yet, unlike Mulligan, who frequently omitted *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s religious elements in pursuit of a more streamlined civil rights narrative, Preminger deliberately forced his viewers to acknowledge the religious and racial complexities of the Deep South, admitting that he was inspired by the 1962 desegregation rows at Catholic schools in New Orleans. Despite these tensions, Preminger expected the film to play in the Crescent City and many others across the South. ‘If they don’t want to accept it like it is in Georgia [for example], then we won’t play there. I have a contract with all my pictures saying that not one scene can be cut without my permission.’⁸⁰⁷

Preminger had even offered Martin Luther King, Jr. a minor role as a southern senator in his 1962 film *Advise and Consent*, arguing that ‘his appearance will make a positive statement for this country here and abroad. It should indicate that it is possible for a Negro to be elected to the United States Senate at any time, now or in the future.’⁸⁰⁸ The press erupted with news of the casting after the SCLC administrative committee agreed (in King’s absence) that King would accept the role, on the basis of a \$5000

⁸⁰⁶ Fuller, ‘*Nothing But A Man Reconsidered*.’

⁸⁰⁷ Otto Preminger, quoted in Larry Still, ‘Negroes Could Dominate Industry!: Preminger Lists Religion, Race Bias, Sex as Top Movie Themes,’ *Jet*, January 16, 1964, 58-9.

⁸⁰⁸ Quoted in A. H. Weiler, ‘Dr. King to Play Georgia Senator In Movie of ‘Advise and Consent,’ *New York Times*, October 20, 1961, 1.

contribution to the organization. However, on the same day that the *New York Times* presented the story on its cover, King issued a statement to the press confirming that while ‘[w]ell-meaning associates of mine felt that a positive contribution might be made by my appearance in a film as a Negro Senator...I feel that the brief role could not be of any significant value in advancing civil rights, and therefore have not accepted the proposal.’⁸⁰⁹

In *The Cardinal*, Gillis’s church has been burned by white supremacists, and though his request for papal support is denied, the film’s protagonist Stephen Fermoye (Tom Tryon), then a bishop, covertly follows Gillis to Georgia. Though it is but one sequence of events in a three hour film spanning over twenty years of Fermoye’s life, the narrative addition was publicized as a welcome triumph in both *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines. The latter produced a five page spread about the film, including numerous images of the film’s racial violence, as well as portraits of Ossie Davis and his family in Rome during filming. As such, the film was portrayed as an important event for blacks in cinema. Indeed, *Ebony* referred to the plotline as ‘a gripping episode...[that] dramatizes the crucial racial problem which faces the church in America today,’ while *Jet* printed Preminger’s comments about the need for African Americans to be ‘aggressive’ in their pursuit of cinematic success.⁸¹⁰

In Preminger’s narrative, Fermoye encourages Gillis to testify against the arsonists, contradicting the advice of the local bishop who frequently refers to Gillis as ‘boy’ and Fermoye as a ‘Yankee agitator.’ Denied a room at a local hotel as a result of his ‘meddling,’ Fermoye is kidnapped along with Gillis and attacked by ‘Dixie’-singing local Klansmen, who whip him in front of a burning cross when he refuses to spit on his crucifix.⁸¹¹ While Preminger admitted that the scenes were designed to show Fermoye ‘was far ahead of his time and took an uncompromising stand on behalf of racial equality’ in 1934, exactly twenty years before the *Brown* decision, the characterization reflects the considerable opposition such a pioneer was likely to face, rather than simply elevating its protagonist to unrealistic heights.⁸¹² It is also important to note that Gillis too is ahead of

⁸⁰⁹ See ‘To Tom Roland,’ *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume VII: To Save the Soul of America, January 1961 August 1962*, ed. Clayborne Carson & Tenisha Armstrong (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 314; Sharon Monteith, *American Culture in the 1960s* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 11.

⁸¹⁰ Author unknown, ‘*The Cardinal*,’ *Ebony*, December 1963, 127. Preminger quoted in Still, ‘Negroes Could Dominate Industry!’ 58.

⁸¹¹ While many Christians wear plain crosses, the wearing of crucifixes (complete with corpus) is almost exclusively a symbol of Catholicism.

⁸¹² Preminger, quoted in ‘*The Cardinal*,’ *Ebony*, 127.

his time, attempting to desegregate southern parochial schools two decades before his demands would carry any legal, never mind social, weight. As victims of white supremacist violence, Fermoyle and Gillis are unlikely to dismiss the Ku Klux Klan – as Atticus Finch does – as a defunct ‘political organization’ unable to ‘find anyone to scare’ (196). Enduring ecclesiastical passivity and white terrorism together, Fermoyle and Gillis foster a lasting understanding that is built upon a mutual understanding of equality before God.

In comparison to the more overt social commentary of films such as *Nothing but a Man* and *The Cardinal*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* appears distinctly detached from the reality of America’s most publicized period of racial turmoil. And yet it has endured as an apparently enlightening piece of social commentary. Remarks following the controversial release of *Go Set a Watchman* help illuminate this debate, fostering a new dialogue between critics and fans about the lasting significance of both Lee’s novel and the subsequent film adaptation.⁸¹³

When it was revealed that the Atticus of *Watchman* was a Citizens’ Council member committed to the separation of the races, fans and critics alike responded with a flurry of op-eds, blog posts, and articles. While some critics were right to point out that a flawed and even contradictory Atticus was more reflective of white southern thought in the 1950s, most seemed to see Atticus’s ‘transformation’ as some kind of personal betrayal. Many vowed not to read the book at all, while one Michigan bookstore contended that its customers were owed ‘refunds and apologies’ over the manner in which the book was advertised. Brilliant Books of Traverse City argued on its website that readers should approach *Watchman* as a mere academic curiosity: an insight into the editing process rather than a legitimate prequel or sequel to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or even a novel in its own right. ‘It is disappointing and frankly shameful to see our noble

⁸¹³ Many considered the July 2015 release of *Watchman* to be the callous manipulation of an elderly woman struggling with both hearing and sight impairments. Though the first-time author was adamant she was working on other material in the early 1960s, Lee’s openness about her writing habits (and pretty much anything else) had dried up by the middle of the decade. Alice Hall Petry describes Lee as being ‘reclusive and rather terse’ from 1964 onwards, and recounts numerous stories of journalists and other writers who had tried and failed to get the beloved author to reveal anything about her working practices and the likelihood of any further releases. (Petry, ‘Harper Lee, the One-Hit Wonder,’ 145.) Because many grew to accept Lee’s withdrawal from public life, the apparent ‘reappearance’ of the *Watchman* manuscript in the last year of the author’s life appeared somewhat cynical and certainly financially motivated. See Alexandra Alter, ‘Harper Lee, Author of “To Kill a Mockingbird,” Is to Publish a Second Novel,’ *New York Times*, February 3, 2015, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/04/books/harper-lee-author-of-to-kill-a-mockingbird-is-to-publish-a-new-novel.html>

industry parade and celebrate this as “Harper Lee’s New Novel,”” the website reads. ‘This is pure exploitation of both literary fans and a beloved American classic (which we hope has not been irrevocably tainted).’ Yet, rather than focus on the editorial hand missing from *Watchman*’s prose, the booksellers’ opinion piece suggests that the novel would sit uneasy with viewers because of the distasteful attitudes espoused by many of its characters. *Watchman* ‘is a first draft that was originally, and rightfully rejected,’ the piece reads. ‘The book, and some of the characters therein, are very much a product of this era in the South.’⁸¹⁴

Watchman acknowledges the racism of what Jean Louise calls ‘[m]en of substance and character...of all varieties and reputations.’⁸¹⁵ It is a complex, often frustrating look at the hardening racial attitudes of many white southerners following the 1954 *Brown* decision. In this sense, the opinion piece published by Brilliant Books actually castigates *Watchman* for its realism, a criticism that is testament to the hallowed place that Mulligan’s adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* occupies in the popular (white) memory of the civil rights movement. After all, racist opinions abound in Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and certainly did not lose the novel many fans. It is only in Mulligan’s film, which omits the middle-class bigotry of Mrs. Dubose and the women’s missionary circle, that racism is confined entirely to its most overtly violent and masculine manifestation: Bob Ewell. Described in the 1998 documentary *Fearful Symmetry* as a ‘southern cracker...the twisted, decayed remnant of the lively braggarts of Scotch-Irish descent...who despised machines and money and ambition and who dueled at the hint of an insult,’ Bob Ewell became the cinematic blueprint for the southern racist, carefully detached from the middle-class whites who shared many of his viewpoints, but delivered them in more genteel settings.⁸¹⁶ The willful denial that Atticus could even harbor racist views, something that has been suggested by numerous scholars in the decades since *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s publication, suggests that for some readers he has become an actual historical person, whose words and actions have been callously misrepresented in *Watchman*.⁸¹⁷ The fact that the president of the American Bar Association has risen to

⁸¹⁴ ‘Go Set a Watchman – An Opinion Piece,’ Brilliant Books, Michigan, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://www.brilliant-books.net/go-set-watchman-opinion-piece>

⁸¹⁵ Lee, *Watchman*, 110.

⁸¹⁶ Narration, Kiselyak, *Fearful Symmetry*.

⁸¹⁷ For a critique of Atticus in *Mockingbird*, and the cultural relativism that others have used to defend him, see Freedman, ‘Atticus Finch – Right and Wrong.’

Atticus's defense in the past is testament to Atticus's exceptional cultural and ideological significance in the minds of countless (predominantly white) Americans.⁸¹⁸

After publishing Joseph Crespino's critique of Atticus's enduring legacy in 2000, the editors of *Southern Cultures* were forced to reflect that it had 'been some time since an essay has provoked as much debate around here.'⁸¹⁹ Noting that 'readers found [Crespino's reappraisal] to be a narrow and inaccurate portrayal of Harper Lee's most famous creation,' the editors then printed three responses to Crespino's article.⁸²⁰ The first, written by North Carolina attorney Marcus Jimison, argued that 'Atticus displayed the principle of non-violent resistance [sic], years before Martin Luther King Jr., when he refused to respond violently after the racist Maycomb spat in his face.'⁸²¹ Jimison's conflation of Atticus's fictional words and deeds with the realities of civil rights history confirms the unique place *To Kill a Mockingbird* (as both film and novel) holds in the American imagination. That Jimison contrasts Atticus's fictional actions with King's real ones implies that the two men are of equal historical value. It also ignores the fact that Lee's novel, while set in the 1930s, was written in the 1950s, when the actions of figures such as King were being covered in the media, presumably influencing her understanding of what constituted noble non-violence.

Like the debate generated by Crespino's article, the controversy surrounding the publication of *Watchman* has proven 'fascinating, if a bit depressing,' as Yale law professor Stephen L. Carter recorded for *Bloomberg*. Those boycotting the book 'don't know what they're missing,' Carter contended, arguing that while many views espoused in the novel may seem shocking or unsavory to *Watchman*'s contemporary readers, they are very much entwined with the historical evidence of progressive white opinion in the Alabama lowlands of the 1950s.⁸²² Indeed many of *Watchman*'s critics would have done well to read Lee's disappointed letter to a friend in 1961, after a 'pastiche' piece she had written was rejected by *Esquire* magazine on the basis that the editor did not believe that segregationists could oppose the Ku Klux Klan. 'This is an axiomatic impossibility,

⁸¹⁸ Talbot D'Alemberte, President of the American Bar Association in 1991-2, wrote an article for *Legal Times* challenging Freedman's article, arguing that 'Finch rose above racism and injustice to defend the principle that all men and women deserve their day in court.' See 'Remembering Atticus Finch's Pro Bono Legacy,' *Legal Times*, April 6, 1992, 26.

⁸¹⁹ Crespino, 'Strange Career of Atticus Finch.' See 'Letters to the Editors,' *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Winter 2000), 1.

⁸²⁰ 'Letters to the Editors,' 1.

⁸²¹ Marcus Jimison, *ibid.*

⁸²² Stephen L. Carter, "'Watchman' Is Harper Lee for Grown-Ups,' *BloombergView*, July 15, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-07-15/-watchman-is-harper-lee-for-grown-ups>

according to *Esquire!* Lee seethed. ‘I wanted to say that according to those lights, nine-tenths of the South is an axiomatic impossibility.’⁸²³

Though the exact content of Lee’s rejected piece remains a mystery, it is apparent that she was still attempting to navigate the seemingly endless manifestations of southern white racial attitudes. While editorial guidance appears to have persuaded Lee to present readers with obvious heroes and villains in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, her earlier effort *Watchman* frequently represents the incongruity of white southern racial thought in the mid-1950s. Even Jean Louise, physically sickened after witnessing her father and boyfriend attend a White Citizens’ Council meeting, admits that the *Brown* decision left her ‘furious’ and that after reading about it in the newspaper ‘she stopped at the first bar she came to and drank down a straight bourbon.’⁸²⁴ She shares her father’s opinion that African Americans are ‘backward...that the vast majority of them here in the South are unable to share fully in the responsibilities of citizenship.’⁸²⁵ ‘If Atticus is a bundle of contradictions,’ Allen Mendenhall writes, ‘so is Jean Louise.’⁸²⁶

As she attempts to account for the rising racial tensions in her hometown and across the South, Jean Louise is forced to confront her own inconsistent and evolving racial attitudes. She begins to doubt the faith she has put in others, especially Atticus, and therefore begins to question the security she once felt in such an apparently blighted and bigoted town. Crucial to Lee’s vision of small town southern life, religion forms a considerable part of this texture, as it did in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Visiting home, Jean Louise is again expected to comply with the social requirements of her family’s distinctively southern Methodism. Passages in which Jean Louise’s uncle Jack Finch lambasts the local minister’s musical direction show that southern whites could be just as protective of their distinct religious identity as segregation. Horrified that his minister has attended a course ‘in what was wrong with Southern church music,’ led by an instructor from New Jersey, Jack contends that ‘apparently our brethren in the Northland are not content merely with the Supreme Court’s activities. They are now trying to change our hymns on us.’⁸²⁷

⁸²³ Harper Lee to Harold Caulfield, 1961, quoted in Gaby Wood, ‘Harper Lee: the inside story of the greatest comeback in literature,’ *Telegraph*, February 19, 2016, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/go-set-a-watchman/the-curious-case-of-harper-lee/>

⁸²⁴ Lee, *Go Set a Watchman*, 238-9.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid*, 242.

⁸²⁶ Allen Mendenhall, ‘Children Once, Not Forever: Harper Lee’s *Go Set a Watchman* and Growing Up,’ *Indiana Law Journal Supplement*, Vol. 91:6 (2015), 13.

⁸²⁷ Lee, *Go Set a Watchman*, 97.

While she may be primarily focused on dissecting Maycomb's racial issues, Jean Louise is nevertheless reminded that religion and white supremacy are the two seemingly integral, yet intertwined elements of Maycomb's identity. 'There's nothing like a blood-curdling hymn to make you feel at home,' she thinks on her first Sunday back in Maycomb, suggesting that religion plays little role in her New York life. Picturing her childhood, she remembers Maycomb's frequent revivals: 'Revival time was a time of war: war on sin, Coca-Cola, picture shows, hunting on Sundays; war on the increasing tendency for women to paint themselves and smoke in public, war on drinking whiskey...at least fifty children per summer went to the altar and swore they would not drink, smoke, or curse until they were twenty-one.'⁸²⁸ Transfixed by oratory performances and descriptions of hell ('a lake of fire exactly the size of Maycomb, Alabama'), Scout, Jem, and Dill would enact their own revivals, 'repeating [their] own version of everything they had heard for the past three nights,' before plunging each other into 'the black water of the fishpool' in the name of baptism.⁸²⁹

Back in Maycomb as an adult, Jean Louise attends Bible class, where she 'slept with her eyes open through the lesson, as was her custom.'⁸³⁰ Momentarily more observant and overtly critical of the hypocrisy of Maycomb's Christians than her childhood incarnation as *To Kill a Mockingbird's* Scout, Jean Louise comes to tolerate the religiosity of her home just as she comes to terms with its racism. Sleeping with one's eyes open therefore becomes a fitting metaphor for Jean Louise's eventual acceptance of Maycomb, as she chooses to put her own objections to one side for the sake of maintaining familial and indeed regional/racial connections.

An alarming ending to a book determined to document what Michiko Kakutani calls 'the worst in Maycomb in terms of racial and class prejudice,' Jean Louise's acceptance of her father's bigotry – and that of the white South in general – illuminates one of the novel's more problematic insinuations: that 'the civil rights movement roiled things up, making people who "used to trust each other" now "watch each other like hawks."⁸³¹ The novel therefore offers a fairly complex and realistic examination of white southern thought in the months and years following the *Brown* decision. In many respects, variations of these debates marked *Watchman's* 2015 publication, as ideological battles raged over the place of the Confederate flag in the twenty-first century South and black

⁸²⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁸²⁹ Ibid, 61, 65.

⁸³⁰ Ibid, 91-2.

⁸³¹ Kakutani, 'Review: "Go Set a Watchman."'

communities across the nation drew attention to the brutal racism of overwhelmingly white police forces.

Yet, for all its contemporary significance, *Watchman*'s ending is very much of the 1950s, as Jean Louise and therefore the reader succumb to the idea that there is something worth preserving about this way of life after all, and that southern whites across the political spectrum need to address these issues together, as a family, rather than splinter under the duress of national bodies such as the Supreme Court or the NAACP. Just as Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* implied there were no simple answers – 'perhaps no answers at all,' according to Sundquist's observation – *Watchman* denies African Americans a voice in its discussions of their goals and tactics in an atmosphere enflamed by the *Brown* decision.⁸³² Harper Lee wrote at 'a moment when white America was ready for fictive salvation,' Sundquist writes. But, though white liberalism was in crisis, 'various representations of African-American self-assertion...coexisted with *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' Sundquist writes, in the works of James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver to name but two. And yet, these works 'failed to reach even a fraction of Lee's vast audience.'⁸³³ Other voices still were being heard, Sundquist continues 'in boycotts and demonstrations, in demands for enforcement of the law.'⁸³⁴ In many ways, the Atticus and Scout Finch of *Mockingbird* 'may be less characters in a novel than the embodiment of the nation's profound, continuing, and frequently self-deluding need for racial salvation.'⁸³⁵

While it is hard to defend Lee's omission of black voices, her presentation of white middle class thought in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is more developed than the film adaptation suggests. She does acknowledge hypocrisy, contradiction and difference among Maycomb's whites, and indeed within the Finch family itself. In denying numerous strata of the town's society, the film simplified the town into a dichotomous liberal, secular middle class and an irredeemable dynasty of white trash, whose appeals to Christianity appear as misguided as their claims to racial privilege.

In a manner that would prove vastly influential in post-civil rights productions like *Mississippi Burning*, Mulligan's adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* flattens Maycomb's white religious and political diversity in order to provide an instantly recognizable uneducated redneck menace that absorbs the town's hypocrisy. Such behavior can, after all, only ever be associated 'with minds of their caliber,' Atticus

⁸³² Sundquist 'Blues for Atticus Finch,' 183.

⁸³³ *Ibid*, 205.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid*, 206.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid*, 205.

advises in the film of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with a dismissive gesture towards the Ewells. Indeed, ‘Atticus Finch’s primary strategy in his defense of Tom Robinson was to compromise Mayella’s testimony by revealing her to be white trash,’ Wayne Flynt argues. Atticus is played an advantage almost immediately when Mayella takes offense at being referred to as ‘Miss Mayella’ or ‘Ma’am,’ interpreting the lawyer’s courtesy as ‘just another “put down,” a mocking charade.’ Yet, while ‘no white jury could accept’ that Mayella could ever seek validation from a black man, Flynt continues, ‘it was clearly Harper Lee’s intent that her readers believe it.’⁸³⁶ The resulting “white trash scenario,” in which the audience is encouraged to acknowledge and judge the ignorant bigotry of the underclasses, was so successful that it has become a cliché in popular culture,’ Theodore and Grace-Anne Hovet conclude. It is ‘evident not only in *To Kill a Mockingbird* but also in films like *Easy Rider* and in prime time television programs such as *In the Heat of the Night* and *I’ll Fly Away*.’⁸³⁷

In omitting Aunt Alexandra and the missionary circle, scenes at First Purchase, and in failing to develop storylines involving Mrs. Dubose and the Radleys, Mulligan and his team not only ignored much of Maycomb’s diverse texture, but moved the narrative towards a decisive battle of good versus evil personified by Atticus and Bob Ewell. Establishing a cinematic trope that has endured for more than half a century, Mulligan’s adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* helped define the southern civil rights melodrama as a simplified battle, building upon class anxieties within white communities, rather than tackling racial issues head-on.

Harper Lee may have ‘given us the Gospel According to Atticus,’ but ‘we are the ones who continue to work and worship Atticus’s golden image,’ Rob Atkinson writes.⁸³⁸ Though Steven Lubet argues that readers ‘are anxious for Tom’s vindication,’ Atkinson

⁸³⁶ Wayne Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 215. Dolphus Raymond, another of Lee’s characters omitted from the film, also destabilizes many of Maycomb’s societal rules. The apparently alcoholic heir to an old family fortune, Raymond lives with a ‘colored woman’ and his ‘mixed chillun’ on an old plantation by the county line (214). Yet, when Scout and Dill meet him during a break in the trial, they learn that Raymond drinks nothing but Coca-Cola, but pretends to be drunk so that ‘folks can say Dolphus Raymond’s in the clutches of whiskey – that’s why he won’t change his ways...I’m not much of a drinker, but you see they could never, never understand that I live like I do because that’s the way I want to live.’ (268) Scout comes to realize that Mayella ‘couldn’t live like Mr. Dolphus Raymond, who preferred the company of Negroes, because she didn’t own a riverbank and come from a fine old family.’ Nobody said, “That’s just their way,” about the Ewells’ (256-7).

⁸³⁷ Theodore R. Hovet & Grace-Anne Hovet, ‘Contending Voices in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,’ 115.

⁸³⁸ Rob Atkinson, ‘Comment on Steven Lubet, *Reconstructing Atticus Finch*,’ *Michigan Law Review* 97 (1998-9), 1370.

contends that ‘we are the readers, and we are also anxious that our role model do the vindicating, and thus vindicate us, too.’⁸³⁹ To make an icon, Atkinson concludes, one must know their audience. ‘True prophets seldom present as lovely an image of their compatriots, and they are seldom as loved in their own countries’ as Harper Lee.⁸⁴⁰ Indeed, as controversy surrounding *Watchman* suggests, it is unlikely that Lee would have been such a national treasure had her first published literary effort called such direct attention to the racial debates dividing her contemporary South.

⁸³⁹ See Lubet, ‘Reconstructing Atticus Finch,’ 1355; Atkinson, ‘Comment on Steve Lubet,’ 1372.

⁸⁴⁰ Atkinson, ‘Comment on Steve Lubet,’ 1372.

Conclusion

When Arkansan actor-turned-director Billy Bob Thornton released his critically acclaimed film *Sling Blade* in 1996, he faced innumerable questions about the South. Dubbed ‘the hillbilly Orson Welles’ by his co-star Robert Duvall, Thornton admitted that the region had influenced him ‘[c]ompletely and totally.’⁸⁴¹ He was happy to discuss his favorite southern writers and answer seemingly endless questions about the southerner’s propensity for storytelling. ‘The South is a rich place,’ Thornton told *Creative Screenwriting*, ‘There are ghosts in the South. The atmosphere’s different, the air’s heavier. It’s an area where stories are a staple. The South is all about stories. I loved growing up there. I loved hearing the stories.’⁸⁴²

In these interviews, Thornton indulged journalists determined to emphasize *Sling Blade*’s ‘southern-ness,’ contributing to an exoticized mythology about southern authenticity. According to Rita Kempley of the *Washington Post*, the ‘movie [is] rich in the rhythms and peculiarities of a vanishing Southern dialect.’⁸⁴³ It tells the story of Karl Childers (played by Thornton), an intellectually disabled Arkansan released from the state’s ‘nervous hospital’ twenty-five years after murdering his mother and her lover. Finding a new family with 12 year-old Frank (Lucas Black) and his mother Linda (Natalie Canerday), Karl eventually sacrifices himself, returning to the ‘nervous hospital’ after murdering Linda’s abusive boyfriend Doyle (played by country star Dwight Yoakam). Karl is ‘a cinematic cousin of [Forrest] Gump’s,’ Kempley writes, ‘only from a darker part of the forest.’⁸⁴⁴

Much has been written about Karl as a ‘Christ-figure:’ an outsider who can be both tender and violent, serving as both redeemer and punisher.⁸⁴⁵ Thornton admitted that ‘[t]here’s definitely a whole lot of underlying stuff,’ drawing attention to the fact that

⁸⁴¹ Robert Duvall, quoted in Pete Hammond, ‘Duvall on “The Judge”: It Felt Like Making A Studio Film From The ‘70s,’ *Deadline*, December 4, 2014, accessed May 2, 2015, <http://deadline.com/2014/12/the-judges-robert-duvall-tops-an-already-stellar-career-with-one-of-his-best-roles-to-date-1201269748/>

⁸⁴² Thornton quoted in Erik Bauer, ‘“I’m pretty anti-violence. I don’t want to do more movies about violence” – Billy Bob Thornton,’ interview for *Creative Screenwriting*, originally published in Vol. 4, No.1. Reprinted at <http://creativescreenwriting.com/im-pretty-anti-violence-i-dont-want-to-do-more-movies-about-violence-billy-bob-thornton/>

⁸⁴³ Rita Kempley, ‘Who Is That Guy?’ *Washington Post*, March 23rd 1996: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/review97/fbillythornton.htm>

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁵ See Matthew McEver, ‘The Messianic Figure in Film: Christology Beyond the Biblical Epic,’ *Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (October 1998), accessed May 7, 2014, <https://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/McEverMessiah.htm>; Mark Roncace, ‘*Sling Blade*,’ in *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films*, ed. Adele Reinhartz. London: Routledge, 2013, 238-242.

Karl's only possessions are books: 'the Bible, a book about carpentry and another about Christmas.'⁸⁴⁶ But while the Christ-figure has been identified in films as varied as *Cool Hand Luke* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1967) *Edward Scissorhands* (Tim Burton, 1990), and a variety of Westerns, Thornton's film does not rely simply on this imagery to imbue his film with religious meaning.⁸⁴⁷ Rather, he offers a distinctly southern vision of a violent and all-encompassing faith. 'Karl was reared on the Ten Commandments. And little else,' Kempley writes. 'His parents, both religious fanatics, considered him a punishment from God, and kept him in the shed behind the house. He was waiting for his Bible lesson the night he caught his mother in the act with her young lover and killed them both with a sling blade.'⁸⁴⁸

When Karl visits his reclusive father (Robert Duvall), their interaction confirms the abuse that the film has, until now, merely suggested. Yet, despite the old man's ungodly acts, Mr. Childers's living room contains at least thirty images of Christian iconography. In another region, the framing of such imagery might provide visual evidence of a man's deep religious preoccupations. However, there is little in word or deed to suggest that Karl's father is concerned about the fate of his soul. Indeed, Karl contends that his parents gave him false information about the Bible, telling his father, 'I learned to read some. I read the Bible quite a bit... Those stories you and Momma told me, they ain't in there. You ought not done that to your boy.' It is implied that the stories the Childers told their son justified their abuse of him, and their murder of their younger son.⁸⁴⁹ Now older and more spiritually aware, Karl, who admits he can't understand all

⁸⁴⁶ Thornton, quoted in Kempley, 'Who's That Guy?'

⁸⁴⁷ Like *Cool Hand Luke* and *The Green Mile* (Frank Darabont, 1999), *Sling Blade* contributes to a body of work testament to Hollywood's obsession with crime and punishment in the South. *Cool Hand Luke* focuses on a southern chain gang in the 1940s, while *The Green Mile* depicts an innocent man (and Christ-figure) facing the death penalty in Depression-era Louisiana. Another more humorous examination is *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, in which three men escape a Mississippi chain gang. 'While the most sadistic aspects of the South's penal system have never ceased to enthrall, they also have never seemed to surprise,' Heather Ann Thompson writes. 'After all, the region's economic and political system had formerly revolved around slavery, an institution so barbaric, so heinous, that it assuredly would have tainted southern culture long after it ended.' While Thompson provides numerous accounts of barbaric practices in the southern penal system throughout post-Civil War history, she argues that 'even a cursory look at what was happening in northern prisons' in any decade 'should have raised questions about the uniqueness of the brutality that flourished in southern penal institutions.' See Thompson, 'Blinded by a "Barbaric" South: Prison Horrors, Inmate Abuse, and the Ironic History of American Penal Reform,' in Lassiter & Crespino (eds.), *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, 74 & 84.

⁸⁴⁸ Kempley, 'Who's That Guy?'

⁸⁴⁹ After surviving a homemade abortion, the younger Childers son was handed over to Karl (who 'wasn't but six or eight' years old), who was instructed to 'throw it away.' With no way to care for the baby, Karl admits that he buried him alive in a shoe box, figuring it was better to 'return him to the good Lord right off the bat.'

of the Bible, uses it to pass judgement on his father, criticizing his abuse of both his children, and drawing attention to his false theology.

Despite its depiction of deceitful, manipulative religious practice, *Sling Blade*'s rural Arkansas setting serves as a theological backdrop: 'the pervasive character of Southern evangelical Protestantism,' Bradley Shaw argues, evidenced through iconography and language, is 'just there.'⁸⁵⁰ This is not a theology that requires education to understand. Rather, as Karl demonstrates, it can simply help an otherwise marginalized figure to understand and navigate southern life. 'A lot of people might think the movie is a slam on religion, but in fact it's very much in support of religion,' Thornton told the *Washington Post* on the film's release, 'See, I think religion is a good thing. The problem is people who take it into their own hands and use it for their own purposes, the guys that wear white shoes and have their own TV shows.'⁸⁵¹

By focusing on Thornton's upbringing in Arkansas, film critics touted the star as a genuine southerner, thus qualified to make value judgments about other films set in the region. '[T]hese things they make like *Ghosts of Mississippi* or *Mississippi Burning* are just ridiculous,' Thornton argued, 'I can't even discuss those . . . why there's this desire to write about all these horrible things that happened over civil rights, I don't know.' Such films achieve little more than 'reminding people of our horrible past,' Thornton argued, creating the impression that 'everyone's supposed to be racist – it's just a bunch of poor fuckin' people eating cornbread down there. It makes people think that everyone from Mississippi is like Byron De La Beckwith or something.' Making specific reference to *Ghosts of Mississippi*, released in the same year as *Sling Blade*, Thornton contended that James Woods – 'a terrific actor' – had 'no business playing' Beckwith, '[j]ust like I've got no business playing a yuppie lawyer from Manhattan.'⁸⁵²

Simultaneously lamenting and claiming ownership over Hollywood's repeated portrayal of the South's bitter racial history, Thornton's sensitivity reflects the fact that the civil rights drama was becoming a recognizable Hollywood preoccupation by the mid-1990s, shaping popular opinion about the South and the legacy of the movement. 'There's more and more of those movies,' interviewer Erik Bauer concurred when Thornton mentioned *Mississippi Burning* and *Ghosts of Mississippi*: 'They're like their own genre now.'⁸⁵³

⁸⁵⁰ Shaw, 'Baptizing Boo,' 464.

⁸⁵¹ Kempley, 'Who's That Guy?'

⁸⁵² Thornton quoted in Bauer, "'I'm pretty anti-violence.'"

⁸⁵³ Bauer.

The tendency in the 1980s and 1990s ‘was to retell the movement as individual morality tales for a nation in which black and white individuals remain disconcertingly separate,’ Monteith writes.⁸⁵⁴ In providing the first assessment of religion’s role in the construction of the civil rights genre, this thesis expands scholarship on the genre, but also the South in film more generally. It fills a notable gap in both film and southern studies, which have largely ignored the region’s religious landscape in discussions of its distinctive culture. The study posits religion as a fundamental component of the South on film: crucial to the evocation of the region. Religion enables filmmakers to quickly denote the South, providing a range of signs, sounds, and symbols testament to the former Confederacy’s tangibly religious culture. As this thesis has shown, Evangelicalism has long dominated the region, with the emphasis on individual testimony ‘making its public presence especially widespread,’ according to religious historian Charles Reagan Wilson. ‘Although embodied in a myriad of denominational forms,’ Wilson explains, ‘evangelical Protestantism has served as an unofficially established religious tradition, powerful in worldly resources, institutional reach, moral authority, and cultural hegemony.’ Used to advance the cause of slavery and later racial segregation, white southern religion has often intersected with sectional political concerns. It has therefore been both ridiculed and demonized in popular culture; and yet, for other adherents, it provided the theological and moral compass with which to fight injustice and survive isolation and even violence.⁸⁵⁵

By focusing specifically on films preoccupied with the events and legacy of the civil rights movement, this study uncovers alternative means of understanding Hollywood’s civil rights narratives, emphasizing religion as an overlooked trope. By pointing out the frequency with which Hollywood’s racially-motivated villains espouse Christian as well as racial zealotry, this thesis has suggested that the white supremacist rogue is a more layered, if still deeply stereotyped figure.

Poor, uneducated, and consistently male, the redneck figure is often a deeply religious character, but his theology is dismissed in cinema as the meaningless ramblings of an already dangerous and disturbed figure. Religion intersects with tropes of race, class, and gender to further distance the southern redneck from ‘American norms.’ Yet, while they are often mocked or disdained, Hollywood sensationalizes these characters in thrillers like Scorsese’s *Cape Fear*, in which the lunatic on the periphery of society

⁸⁵⁴ Monteith, ‘The movie-made Movement,’ 125.

⁸⁵⁵ Charles Reagan Wilson, ‘Religion and the US South,’ *Southern Spaces*, March 16, 2004, accessed May 6, 2015, <https://southernspaces.org/2004/overview-religion-and-us-south>

subscribes to a celestial set of rules, and so is unlikely to be disheartened by the threat of penal justice.

In analyzing filmmakers' attitudes and decisions (especially significant when adapting novels or producing remakes of existing films), the attitudes behind Hollywood's presentation of racism, regional identity, and religious convictions are made more apparent. Reflecting on films from the 1960s to the present, this thesis offers a timeline of influence and intertextual dialogue, in which later films absorb and adapt the preoccupations of the immediate civil rights era in order to communicate lasting, but evolving issues surrounding race, class, gender, and religiosity.

However, in drawing attention to the specific and problematic legacy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this thesis challenges the dominant scholarly opinion that Hollywood's civil rights genre, as we now understand it, began in the late 1980s with the release of *Mississippi Burning*. Reexamining Mulligan's adaptation of Lee's novel, this study draws attention to its conspicuous omission of the novel's many religious elements and argues that this process of secularization served as a blue print for simplified dichotomies of religious and non-religious white southerners that endure in Hollywood's white-centric civil rights genre. Through a new examination of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its legacy, this thesis offers a fresh perspective on the chronology of the civil rights genre, and the class-based presentation of white southern religion onscreen.

In order to present an effective contrast, this study has also reflected on the representation of African American religion, highlighting the frequency with which southern black Protestantism contributes to a soothing narrative of racial reconciliation, by reducing African Americans to dutiful, cowering Christians, committed to a promise of deliverance in the next life rather than the pursuit of earthly freedom. This static, rural Christianity renders African Americans the natural victims of the rabidly racist white poor, and helped white audiences navigate the social and political changes instigated by the Great Migration in the first decades of the twentieth-century, and later the civil rights movement.

Diverging considerably from the bold political leadership historians have so frequently attributed to the black church in the civil rights era, Hollywood's black southern Christians exist entirely independently of the activism that marked their contemporary region, though some occasionally fall under the temporary spell of political agitators like the NAACP. However, such groups are usually shown to be self-serving, manipulative elites, acting in the best interests of their metropolitan leadership rather than impoverished southern blacks. These narratives present African Americans as naturally

suiting to religious life in the rural South, where traditional allegiances of family and church can provide a sustaining, if limited, lifestyle, free from the temptations and frustrations of the urban ghetto. These traditional southern commitments have been positively explored in black-focused productions such as Maya Angelou's only directorial venture *Down in the Delta* (1998), in which Loretta (Alfre Woodard), a poorly educated, alcohol and drug-addicted Chicago mother, finds solace and inspiration amongst forgotten relatives in the Mississippi Delta. However, in white-centric civil rights narratives, the rural black South appears more as a cognitive and physical limitation than a source of political and spiritual inspiration.

Down in the Delta – by focusing on multiple generations of the same African American family – forces viewers to consider the realities of slavery and its lasting implications for inherited wealth and opportunity. Also explored are the false promises of the urban North, and the ease with which those failed by the education system can slip into a life of poverty and/or substance abuse. As such, it does not flinch from the enduring and unsettling legacies of slavery and Jim Crow on African American life in the 1990s, causing one unsympathetic reviewer on the Christian site *Movieguide* to lament its 'politically correct and socialist implications of minority entitlements.'⁸⁵⁶

By contrast, films such as *A Time to Kill* promote a much more conservative message in which African Americans display neither the need nor desire to battle institutional racism. This contributes to a wider late twentieth-century discussion about personal responsibility, rooted in debates surrounding affirmative action and the ongoing war on drugs. Dismissing the NAACP as a privileged elite determined to line their own pockets, *A Time to Kill* presents Jake Brigance, the local white lawyer, as Carl Lee Hailey's best chance of survival, prioritizing 'against the odds' interpersonal relationships over petitions for lasting and national change. The black church is central to this debate, because it is through Reverend Agee that the NAACP reaches out to Carl Lee, cementing the film's presentation of the church as the center of the black community. It is clear that Rev. Agee has been manipulated by the organization, and he later redeems himself by yielding to Jake and Carl Lee's threats that any money raised must be directed solely to the Hailey family. The narrative punishes Rev. Agee for showing leadership, implying that his role is to serve the status quo and guide his congregation in solely spiritual rather than political matters.

⁸⁵⁶ Author unknown, 'Movie Review: *Down in the Delta*,' *Movieguide*, 1998 (exact date unclear), accessed November, 12, 2015, <https://www.movieguide.org/reviews/down-in-the-delta.html>

Any popular perception of a monolithic African American church is misleading and reductive. Many religious leaders failed to support the movement, and yet popular conceptions of a united religious movement have obscured memories of intraracial disagreement. In examining President Obama's rhetoric at the funeral of Rev. Clementa Pinckney in 2015 in Chapter 4, I have shown how a popular perception of the African American church as a beacon of hope and activism in the civil rights movement endures in American popular and political rhetoric, despite being almost completely absent in popular cinema. As Chapter 4 shows, it is a static, unthreatening black spirituality that endures in Hollywood's civil rights genre, where the black church serves as little more than a sanctuary. It is clear then that cinema exists within a much larger cacophony of competing voices and images.

In presenting religion as a key component of the African American experience in the civil rights genre, this thesis has drawn particular attention to the role of music in creating an image of black docility and helplessness. A more detailed examination of these musical choices and the historical significance of chosen songs would undoubtedly yield fascinating results with regard to the presentation of African American spirituality in mainstream cinema. Likewise, a comparison between the use of music in civil rights melodramas and documentaries might produce interesting and divergent ideas about the role of music in both emotive and factual filmmaking. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates the benefits of acknowledging and dissecting all forms of religious expression when examining civil rights filmmaking.

More broadly, this thesis contributes to existing scholarship on the enduring legacy and divisions of the 1960s. Though debates about the meaning of the United States have endured since its foundation, the rapid and widespread changes of the 1960s have left enduring fault lines in American politics, society, and culture. 'The sixties gave birth to a new America,' Andrew Hartman writes; a nation in which new and often conflicting ideas were increasingly evident. '[N]ational culture grew more divided than it had been in any period since the Civil War,' Hartman continues, drawing the boundaries for what would become the 'culture wars.'⁸⁵⁷ It is only after the sixties, Hartman contends, that conservatives could point to the decade itself as threatening, reflecting with hindsight on the sheer number of political and social changes that had occurred. Americans 'grew wary of "an assault on Western civilization" only after the barbarians had crashed the gates.'⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁷ Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

Hartman's analysis points to the frequent intersections of race, gender, and religion in the bitter exchanges of the enduring culture wars. Yet, despite religion's accepted centrality to these ideological conflicts, film scholars have seldom explored how it punctuates Hollywood's attempts to reconstruct the civil rights era in particular. While there are numerous insightful works on representations of race, class, and gender, few scholars have supplemented this analysis with an exploration of religion. This study, while focused on the southern civil rights movement, has shown that the intersections of race, class, gender, and religion offer numerous avenues for the exploration of American identity as portrayed in mainstream cinema.

The 1960s and the enduring culture wars pitted secular liberals against their conservative and often deeply religious compatriots. How Hollywood presented religion is therefore crucial to these debates about American culture, and yet scholars and critics have so often ignored it. As this thesis has shown, the frequency with which Hollywood presents white supremacists as religious as well as racial zealots implies that many filmmakers share concerns about the intersections of intolerance and fundamentalist Christian belief. In some cases, these intersections run so deep, they can allude to race in an entirely white narrative, such as Scorsese's *Cape Fear*. Papers and records referenced in this thesis evidence the intentional use of stereotypes in that movie, showing that the decisions to utilize southern stereotypes and Hollywood tropes are often self-conscious, enabling filmmakers to comment on existing cultural debates and controversies. For example, it is evident from the *Cape Fear* papers held at the Harry Ransom Center that the scandals involving numerous leading evangelists in the late 1980s were fresh in the mind of the film's producers, and that their attitudes towards Pentecostalism in particular were far from unbiased. The co-ordinates of Cady's reincarnation have significant meaning in the context of the culture wars, offering a judgment on fervent Pentecostalism and constructing intersections with depraved sexuality, low education, and criminality. While the 1962 version of the film uses Robert Mitchum's Cady to explore the erosion of racial boundaries in that era, De Niro's Cady allows Scorsese and Strick to question the dominant political position of evangelical Christians in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as the development of new white southern anxieties towards a growing Hispanic population.

The two *Cape Fear* films provide a direct link between the representation of the South in the 1960s and the late twentieth-century. The covertly racialized narrative of the original film interrogated whether all Americans *should* be entitled to civil rights, especially when – as the film implies – such legislation leaves a nuclear white family

vulnerable. The later remake reflected the debates of the cultural wars by suggesting that that family was already fractured by sexual infidelity, access to drugs, and consumerism: things many conservatives would argue are by-products of the 1960s. In offering the new Bowden family some of ‘that old time religion,’ Max Cady – an avenging angel from the southern past – proves even more terrifying than their late twentieth-century ennui, implying that the most potent danger to the new American family was its failure to deal with its past.

Debates in the 1980s and 1990s about affirmative action, along with the rising tide of civil rights genre films, reflected this apparent failure to deal with the American past. Mounting racial tensions were exacerbated by church burnings in southern African American communities, and the civil rights melodrama became an arena in which to discuss competing political ideologies, by refracting the present through the memories of the past. Reducing historical events and legacies to personal histories, films such as *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *A Time to Kill* used religious language and iconography to communicate and construct the meaning of the 1960s in the 1990s. They fashioned a simplistic binary of good versus evil that, while designed to alleviate white guilt for the racial sins of the past, actually contributed to a much older scapegoating of the southern rural poor, whose ignorance and zealous religiosity rendered them convenient and ideal actors of racial violence. Reinforcing the divisions of whiteness arguably first evidenced in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, religion proved crucial to Hollywood’s attempts to make sense of both the backlash to civil rights legislation in the 1960s as well as the rising surge of conservatism in its present day. As a result, and as this thesis has shown, civil rights melodramas flatten the diversity of white responses to the civil rights movement, ignoring those Christians inspired by their faith to protest alongside African Americans as well as those who expressed their commitment to segregation in a more refined manner than demagogic preachers committed to the supposedly biblically-sanctioned separation of the races. Social passivity was common amongst white southerners of all convictions.

As white redemption narratives, few civil rights dramas contain any reference to mainstream Christianity, where religious preoccupations would seemingly obscure the hero’s and indeed the film’s claims to secular righteousness. *Selma* has recently complicated the notion that white religious southerners were alone in their resistance to the legislative changes of the civil rights era, or that white Christians were not compelled by Martin Luther King, Jr.’s message of ecumenical solidarity in the pursuit of human rights. However, it remains the dominant Hollywood convention to celebrate secular

whiteness. This is often at the expense of black activism, but creates equally prominent divisions of whiteness along regional, class, and religious fault lines.

Religion is crucial to Hollywood's continued presentation of the South as a region apart from the rest of the nation. Accordingly, its specific manifestations in films that examine the civil rights era and its legacy have lasting implications for the popular understandings of the movement, the region, and its religious culture. This thesis offers detailed analyses of how religion intersects with other key coordinates of the white South in mainstream cinema, providing fresh perspectives on the region's place in American cinema, as well as a new methodology through which to examine the enduring inferences of the 1960s and the resulting culture wars.

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