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The Costumed Catholic: Catholics, Whiteness, and the Movies, 1928 - 1973

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THE COSTUMED CATHOLIC:

CATHOLICS, WHITENESS, AND THE MOVIES, 1928–1973

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN AMERICAN HISTORY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2013

To my parents

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the impact movies had on the place of Catholics of European descent in mainstream white America. Most scholars who study the history of Catholic populations in this country assume that they attained whiteness at some point. Whether with the Irish in the late nineteenth century, or more generally when urban parishes began the move to the suburbs post-World War II, the historiography claims that Catholics earned white status. However, an analysis of twentieth century American film complicates the historiography of Catholicism. A set of negative stereotypes, instead, have colored the presentation of the religion in cinema that have called attention to aspects of the Catholic character that separated from other whites. Many of these ideas were the product of the nineteenth century when Protestant America first became exposed to large numbers of Irish Catholics. Film in the next century inherited those ideas from minstrelsy and vaudeville, and applied new stereotypes like urban settings and violence that they thought typified the behavior of all Catholics. Catholics responded by creating the Legion of Decency and paying more attention to film content beginning in the 1930s, though their efforts only further cemented many of the notions that audiences adopted in thinking of Catholicism. As their power in Hollywood waned from the 1950s forward, a time when their religion supposedly entered mainstream whiteness, Catholicism on film took a darker turn that has lasted until today.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> That system is training millions of children to morality and decency. One of its objects is the making of moral citizens of our youth, devoted to their country and obedient to its laws. But if the talking picture, by lowering moral standards, neutralizes the effects of this training, we are bound to condemn it and combat it.
>
> —George Cardinal Mundelein writing about the Catholic educational system, 1930.[1]

Going My Way, starring popular singer and Catholic Bing Crosby, delighted movie

audiences in 1944. In reviewing the film for the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther

wrote, "It is the story of new versus old customs, of traditional age versus youth. And it

is a story of human relations in a simple, sentimental, honest vein. But it is far from a

serious story—in the telling anyhow. It is as humored and full of modern crackle as a

Bing Crosby film has got to be."[2] Crowther's review speaks to how Catholics were not

taken seriously in American society and culture. Mundelein's words, however, reveal

that Catholics wanted their place as "devoted" citizens of the United States, "obedient to

its laws." Non-Catholic Americans like Crowther exhibited ambivalence as to whether

Papists, with their "old customs," could be Americans. In a country with a popular

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[1] The Martin J. Quigley Papers, Individual Correspondence Series, Box 1, Folder 3, University of Georgetown Special Collections.

[2] Bosley Crowther, "'Going My Way,' Comedy-Drama With Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald at Paramount--New Film," *New York Times*, May 3, 1944.

culture fixated on the modern[1], a religion like Catholicism tagged by Crowther as "traditional" was seldom regarded as "serious." Read together, Mundelein and Crowther demonstrate that for Catholics there existed a push and pull between the often conflicting exigencies of new and old; in other words, between Americanism[2] and fealty to Rome. Analyzing Catholicism on film between the 1930s and early 1970s helps to make sense of these conflicting exigencies and points to a better understanding of Catholics' place in American society and culture.

This dissertation will identify the impact movies had on European Catholics' attempt to integrate into mainstream white American society. In a Protestant dominated United States, true whites did not practice Catholicism, live in close packed urban parishes, or traditionally make up a part of the working classes. Since Catholics usually

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[1] Many texts exist that discuss American culture, both in broad and specific terms, in terms of new cultural ephemera replacing older ones in popular culture. The constant reinvention of popular culture was particularly true on a mass scale. While one might argue that mass culture's preoccupation with the next new thing is not peculiar to the United States, calling America a country "fixated on the modern" rings true when one considers that, especially in the twentieth century, American popular culture gave the world such phenomena as film, jazz, and rock 'n roll, to name a few. For further reading on the effects of popular culture on modernity, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 3-15; Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 261; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 1-15; Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family in Postwar America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-10; Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

[2] Americanism involves a set of beliefs that historically consisted of ideas like white superiority, Capitalism, and Protestantism. The process of begetting these attitudes onto newcomers and future generations is called Americanization. See James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Rethinking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *The Journal of American History*, 79 (3), 996-1020.

did not measure up to these white standards, it made integration difficult. Prior to the

country's founding, Americans inherited from the British a distrust of Catholic

peoples,whom the English saw as savage and uncivilized.[3] Protestant Americans defined

Roman Catholics of all ethnicities as an "other" group in politics and culture.[4] The

otherness of Catholics, the alien nature of their religious practices, and their presumed

fidelity to a hierarchical institution that looked to a foreign prelate for guidance, proved

antithetical to constructions of Americanness. According to historian Matthew Frye

Jacobson, self-professed Americans of the early nineteenth century espoused ideals of

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[3] This is known as the "Black Legend," the notion held by British colonists that French and Spanish colonies, in cahoots with the Catholic Church, practiced a more brutal style of slavery. Slaveholders in British North American colonies used this as a justification for their own use of African slavery, thinking it more humane. In reality, French and Spanish colonies, like Spanish Florida, offered freedom to runaway slaves if they converted to Catholicism. If runaway slaves did not convert, they remained in bondage. For more on this, see Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999); For more on England's history of anti-Catholicism, see Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714: A Narrative History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 138-157.

[4] There are a few schools of thought on whether or not Catholics make up a united religious group that cuts across ethnic lines, or one that comprises many distinct cultural practices under one heading known as "Catholicism." For those who argue for ethnic distinctions, see Timothy J. Meagher, *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1925* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 273-283; Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 219-231; Eileen M. McMahon, *What Parish are You From? A Chicago Irish Community and Race Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 1-5; Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Experience: An Interpretation of the History of American Catholicism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967) Mark J. Hurley, *The Unholy Ghost: Anti-Catholicism in the American Experience* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1992) Dolores Liptak, *Immigrants and Their Church* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989) Mark S. Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003) James M. O'Toole, ed., *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); For those who see more of a united American Catholic Church, see James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 132, 157; John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969); F. Michael Perko, *Catholic & American: A Popular History* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1989); Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Those who see divisions center on the immigrant generations and ignore the more Americanized succeeding generations, while the reverse is true for those who see unity. This dissertation seeks to add a third dimension to this body of scholarship that is founded in a more unified approach: that movies showed both how Catholics became more white in some respects, but still retained much of what made them distinctive.

republican self-government, and in this light they found Catholics wanting. Jacobson cites debates that took place at the country's founding regarding whether or not those considered loyal to the Pope were eligible for citizenship.[5] White Americans feared Catholics' allegedly clannish parishes and scoffed at their association with the laboring classes. Apprehension over Catholic inclusion in American society became more apparent with the arrival of thousands of poor Irish in the mid-nineteenth century. Newspapers at that time lampooned the Irish as lower-class, ape-like animals, or depicted them as an invading Popish horde.[6] Later in the nineteenth century, whites saw Italian Catholic immigrants as being part of the mafia, a communal form of crime that earned them scorn.[7] Thus many in the news media, politics, and civic leadership saw Catholics as problematic citizens in American society.

One of the mechanisms at work in labeling some Catholics as "other" was whiteness. Throughout the course of American history whiteness comprised a changing set of ideas, though at base it involved the exclusion of peoples according to subjective categories such as skin color, ethnicity, class, and religion. In the United States, proper white Americans belonged to Protestant stock. Thus religious affiliation was a part of the changing, privileged language of whiteness. Political cartoons of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also demonstrate the ties between anti-Catholicism and whiteness, as

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[5] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 22.

[6] In an article titled "The Irish at Home and Abroad," *Harper's Weekly* labels the Irish as "the Pope's Irish mercenaries." "The Irish at Home and Abroad," *Harper's Weekly*, July 7, 1860.

[7] Thomas Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 79-92.

did then accepted theories like scientific racism. In 1922, Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* criticized the Church's tendency to break down racial distinctions.[8] During the failed 1928 presidential campaign of Catholic Al Smith, *Heroes of the Fiery Cross* by Bishop Alma White of the Pillar of Fire Church was published as part of a series of works promoting the Ku Klux Klan and to warn readers of the supposed dangers of Roman influence.[9] These works sought to alert Americans to perceived threats to white purity as imperiled by a foreign institution like Roman Catholicism.

At the beginning of the twentieth century a new medium known as cinema began to challenge books and print media for the attention of the public. In cinema, entertainment mixed with the dissemination of white themes, which was most clearly demonstrated, for example, in D. W. Griffith's 1915 production *Birth of a Nation*. D. W. Griffith's film, like others produced in the early decades of the movie industry and later, kept alive a white ideal that Catholics could come close to, but never quite attain. While aspects of cinematic whiteness changed throughout the twentieth century, it served to separate Catholics on film from normal American society. Religious affiliation was always a problem, even in the 1930s and 1940s when, thanks to the Legion of Decency, Catholics exercised considerable influence on movies. Beyond what church they attended, Catholic portrayals on film retained stereotypical components that have colored how Americans viewed them since their arrival. Negative attributes given to Irish

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[8] Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 85. For more on scientific racism, see Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 32-44.

[9] Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 180-185.

Catholics, such as living in urban squalor, drunkenness, large families, and violent tendencies, all were characteristics that white protagonists typically did not display on film. When movie Catholics did shed these supposed intrinsic parts of their character, they were depicted as exotic, or foreign, in either their setting or appearance.

In the years following the Cold War, despite a prewar period where the Catholic image on-screen came close to being in line with traditional ideas of Americanism, they were pushed to the cinematic margins once again. Where prewar films like *Boys Town* (1938) placed Catholics in the American heartland, postwar films featured priests isolated and alone in society. Even in quintessentially American settings like Westerns, people of the Roman faith were imbued with characteristics that marked them as different. In the late 1950s and into the 1960s, nuns became the Catholic cinematic stand-ins, yet still could not attain certain aspects of whiteness reserved for women, particularly in being a part of the typical, suburban, Cold War family structure. Female religious could be nurturers, at times, but not sexual partners, as many films took pains to point out. Other nun movies poked fun at their lifestyle, though appearing at a time in American culture when traditional modes of living were questioned. Eventually even societies of women largely divorced from male dominance proved too staid for American culture and by the late 1960s, Catholicism on film lost its appeal.

For Catholics the push and pull of between the desire for full white status and loyalty to their religion despite its alleged regressive qualities played itself out prominently on the big screen. *Going My Way* offers one of the more vivid examples of the conflict felt by many American Catholics. It also represents a zenith in on-screen

representation of American Catholics in the twentieth century. As film gradually

replaced both the entertainments of the working classes and the art of society's upper

echelons in the early nineteenth century, America's Catholic population still retained

many of its old world qualities: both demographically and in terms of its liturgical

character with ritualized practices and Latin Masses.[10] That old world character leant all

Catholics—even those of European stock whose visages might otherwise make them a

part of mainstream white America—the tinge of otherness on-screen. While historians of

American film have only briefly touched upon it, clearly religion played a significant role

in determining whether or not one was white.[11] Thus for much of twentieth century

American history, Catholics of European descent on film possessed questionable

qualifications for whiteness.

     Analyzing those questionable qualifications for whiteness helps bring to light the

complicated and precarious place of Catholics in America. In the silent film era, the

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[10] For more on the nineteenth century split between high- and low-brow American culture, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 169-177. For more on the cultural pastimes of Americans both before the emergence of cinema and during it, see May, *Screening Out the Past*, 3-21; See also Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn -of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 139-162. The most comprehensive work of American Catholic History can be found in Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985).

[11] Matthew Frye Jacobson delves into the issue of whether non-Protestant Christians, i.e. Catholics, could be considered whites, an issue that played on the minds of the Founding Fathers. Other historians, including Thomas A. Guglielmo, also fleetingly discuss religion as part of the determining factors of whiteness. However, for them and the majority of historians who research whiteness in America, the focus is on other factors. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 22, 31; Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 3-13. See also Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two: The Origins of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso, 1997); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-3; Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2003), 3-15.

appearance of a priest on-screen signified either simply a member of the Christian clergy, or a broad model of holiness. Lay Catholics in movies almost invariably appeared in urban, and often squalid, conditions. In fact, Catholics in city settings became symbolic of most urban, white/European American working class populations in movies. Catholics as white/European American urban stand-ins was a lasting motif despite their gains in the movie industry starting in the 1930s. The promulgation of the Production Code in 1934 governing film content, co-written by Father Daniel Lord and Hollywood trade magazine owner Martin J. Quigley, instituted a period of roughly twenty years where the portrayal of Catholicism on film broke free of some of the constraints that stereotypes like the city parish placed on its on-screen representation. Despite a somewhat more positive portrayal on film for a time, as seen in *Going My Way*, it was difficult for Catholics to be taken seriously. Frivolity began to be replaced with more alien depictions of Catholicism as the power of the Production Code waned during the 1950s, which in turn gave way to darker films during the 1960s and 1970s. These portrayals, varied as they may be, indicate that despite the increasing presence of Catholic images in film, an indelible mark of otherness remained and barred full acceptance as true Americans.

Scholars have not fully addressed the reasons why many American Catholics of European descent had trouble realizing full acceptance in society and culture. An overview of the scholarship on the history of American culture, Catholicism, whiteness, and film criticism can help answer the question of Catholics' place in America, but each category of analysis fails to give a complete picture. Each suggests what the others do not. The study of American culture includes film history but often gives a misleading

picture as to the role of Catholicism. American Catholic history highlights the marginalized nature of Catholicism throughout much of this country's past but largely excludes film. Whiteness studies tend to focus on the working class but not on the impact of religion. Meanwhile film criticism contemplates how aspects of the national character appear on film without considering the historical context of group identities. Taking part in American society and culture, as scholars agree, often involved struggle for many groups of people. Catholics of European descent also struggled to carve out their place in American society and culture.

Those who study American society and culture acknowledge the role that culture played in making America less plural, more white, and more religiously homogenous. To be white meant not only the color of your skin, but also what class you belonged to, your culture, and even what religion you professed.[12] Within that culture there existed a tension between Protestant elites and other religious groups like Catholics that made it difficult for the latter to realize the fruits of white American citizenship. Historians of American Catholicism, for example, argue that before the mid-twentieth century, Catholic acceptance as white was rare. Nevertheless, a closer look at how Catholics appeared in films of the era shows that the project of making whites out of Catholics began prior to the exodus out of urban areas when many scholars believe Catholics became white. Scholars of the cinema occasionally talk about how films portrayed Catholics at this time, but normally their arguments revolve around film criticism that does not place such representations in a historical context.

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[12] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 8.

Thus what follows consists of a review of pertinent literature on the subjects of American culture, American Catholic history, the development of whiteness in America, and film criticism. Discussing these four fields of study will demonstrate the shortcomings of the current literature and show where this dissertation will point it in a new direction. The intent here is to both relate how scholars agreed on these subjects, and to show how their disagreements evidence the need for revision. These four subjects overlap in many respects because Catholics played a large role in American culture, the social construction of whiteness, and film. Yet even the best works on American Catholicism do not give a complete picture of Catholic identity in the United States. At the same time, many of the works reviewed will give this dissertation a theoretical foundation that will form the basis for my ideas on the challenges to European Catholics' white status as seen in movies.

European Catholics played a key role in the development of American culture, though their religion has received uneven attention, and keeping this in mind helps when approaching the scholarship. For instance, many scholars relate how the fragmentation of American culture, and the fact that variety exists due to large numbers of immigrants encountering a new culture, posed a challenge to any kind of unity in this country.[13] This argument goes beyond culture as well. Historians discern divisions not only along cultural lines, but ethnic, religious, social, class, and political ones as well. Conversely,

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[13] In his introduction to his collection of essays titled *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture*, John Higham states that ". . . national culture has caused divergent ethnic, class, and ideological groups to 'hang together' as Americans." See John Higham, *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xiv. See also Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Lears, *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1-10.

John Higham in his collection of essays titled *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture* remarks that American institutions connected ethnic groups to one another. In Higham's view, one might refer to all these groups as "American" insomuch as they lived in the same country and grappled with many of the same institutions. Nonetheless, Higham glosses over, at least, the diversity of American culture and, at most, does an injustice to that diversity.

Historians have discussed how culture has been utilized as a tool to control diversity in American culture. As Michael H. Hunt states in *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, the United States traditionally embodied an ideology regarding diversity that simplified it as, "an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality."[14] Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Lears in *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History* believe such a reality imposes unity on American culture, but in fact that reality says more succinctly that a certain set of rules governs what it means to be American. In other words, diversity matters little when a select few determine the course of American society and culture. For Hunt, those with the power to mold what it meant to be American shaped U.S. foreign policy. Culturally, the United States became enamored of myths surrounding the white, Protestant, and elite Founding Fathers—a notion somewhat sanitized for public consumption. Those who did not fit with this conceptualization of what it meant to be American were perceived as foreign and received distrust in the United States.

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[14] Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 1.

In the early 1900s, according to Warren Susman in *History as Culture*, the conflict between the older, almost Puritanical cultural forms of the previous era and that which emerged in the newly affluent Jazz Age, increased. This increase in conflict came with the introduction of new technologies into American society, such as movies and radio. Their introduction, helped by a booming 1920s economy, made the ascendant, newer culture triumphant. Susman refers to this phenomenon as a "Communications Revolution," where people's perceptions of culture changed as communication technology advanced. This development had the most significant impact on the middle class, creating a new social order with the middling sort at the pinnacle of society. The new social order broke with the moralizing agenda of the Victorian period and elevated personality—in other words, being well-liked and admired—as the penultimate achievement of man. The cult of personality established a material culture where conspicuous consumption went beyond the respectability of possessions as in the previous era. People not only wanted to spend money, but they also wanted the experience of viewing a movie, witnessing a sporting event, or listening to jazz.[15]

Reading *History as Culture* gives the impression that this youthful, experiential culture reached all levels of American society. No doubt, as seen in Susman's work, people from all sectors of society attended movies on a regular basis. Movie attendance correlates with the assertion that the budding twentieth century American culture that changed along with technology left a lasting impression. Scholars like Father Andrew Greeley, however, argue forcibly for a distinctive Catholic culture in the United States,

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[15] Susman, *Culture as History*.

one somewhat immune to attempts at Americanization through participation in the newly

emerging culture. For Father Greeley, American Catholicism grew during two centuries

of careful ecumenical care from Rome, giving rise to a self-conscious American Catholic

identity resistant to outside influences like movies.[16] Susman does not talk about

Catholics, nor does religion factor into his arguments. As becomes clear from his

writing, change in American society is driven by advancements in technology and the

cult of personality.[17] As a work like *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema*

by Bryan P. Stone presupposes, escaping the faith of those consuming cutting-edge

cultural forms like movies remains difficult at best.[18]

The consumers of films often came from the working class. John Bodnar's *Blue-*

Collar Hollywood: Liberalism, Democracy, and Working People in American Film

focuses on their experience. Using the 1930s as his starting point, Bodnar elaborates on

how, after barely three decades, an already prosperous Hollywood scrambled to find

some way of communicating American ideals to a viewing public increasingly becoming

unlike themselves. For example, he sees few major films leading up to this time

featuring a working class protagonist. But with the onset of the Great Depression,

Bodnar conjectures that more working class themes and concerns appeared on the screen

than on the factory floor. He takes his narrative up to the 1980s, demonstrating the

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[16] Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Experience: An Interpretation of the History of American Catholicism* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1967). Greeley continued to argue for a distinct Catholic identity throughout his scholarly career, though later historians like Timothy Meagher disagree. See Meagher, *Inventing Irish America*.

[17] Susman, *Culture as History*.

[18] Bryan P. Stone, *Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

indelibility of working class themes in an unquestionably popular cultural form. *Blue-Collar Hollywood* carries forward the work of Lary May in *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* by highlighting the continued impact that the working class had on Hollywood productions.[19]

When historians discuss the working class in American movies, they rarely mention Catholicism, the religion of a large portion of this class. One cannot deny the presence of Catholics in the working class. Regardless of class, scholars often mention religious affiliation as merely a part of group's cultural make-up.[20] Bodnar's *Blue-Collar Hollywood* contains few references to religion and even fewer to Catholicism. To his credit, he alludes to the Legion of Decency, formed in 1934, that pressured Catholics not to attend movies due to their supposedly explicit content.[21] In fact, Catholics had much more say over the subject matter of movies given the connection of the Legion of Decency to Father Daniel Lord and Joseph Breen, a lay Catholic, who served as president of the Production Code Administration.[22] Therefore, if, as Bodnar contends, working

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[19] John Bodnar, *Blue-Collar Hollywood: Liberalism, Democracy, and Working People in American Film* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 102; Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 37.

[20] Granted, the point of many works on the working class is to examine the struggles of working people in a Capitalistic society that promotes the advantage of the wealthy while subsuming the interests of workers. Nonetheless, when assembling a full picture of the lives of working people, many scholars discuss the religion of workers when doing localized studies of working conditions. For an example of this, see Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1-2.

[21] Bodnar, *Blue-Collar Hollywood*, 8.

[22] Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

class culture remained a vibrant part of American culture overall, then Catholics certainly played a larger role in determining its direction than he realizes.

Regardless of whether or not films portrayed the working class or Catholicism in a positive light, historians of American cinema see the period including the 1930s to the 1950s as a sort of golden age for movies. During this golden era of film attendance, movies enjoyed a privileged place as purveyors of American ideals, especially given the level of government control through the use of the Production Codes. Not until after the 1950s when televisions entered into households did movie theater attendance begin to dip and the government began to lose its grip on movies. As Lary May postulates in *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*, ". . . the film industry from the thirties to the sixties . . . already played an important role in shaping nationalism and public life."[23] May goes further in his analysis to demonstrate how Hollywood bowed to the pressure of Washington in the political climate of the post-World War II era and the onset of the Cold War. Because of these events, Hollywood presented a more intolerant and monolithic American culture to movie watchers, one that those in power felt properly exposed Americans to the dangers of the world outside the borders of the United States.

May offers perhaps the most complete picture of how American culture can affect the construction of individual identity. Still, like most historians of American culture, he says little about religion. It lies there unacknowledged when he discusses the role of censorship in aiding the development of a new cultural order. On the contrary, Gregory D. Black expounds further on the ties between Catholicism and censorship in *The*

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[23] May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975. Black also delves deeper into the role

of Catholics in the production and distribution of films in *Hollywood Censored: Morality*

Codes, Catholics, and the Movies. According to Black, Father Daniel Lord looked at

movies as the pinnacle of the dramatic arts in that they cut across social, economic,

political, and educational lines. Lord's thinking guided his creation of the Production

Codes regulating Hollywood. It also led groups like the Legion of Decency to attempt to

ban Catholics from viewing certain films. How much success the Catholic Legion of

Decency had with such attempts remains unclear, but they did exercise a measure of

influence over Hollywood. Black does well to highlight the impact of Catholics on

Hollywood during the golden age of big studio productions when one might believe that

business could proceed with latitude.[24] Nonetheless, Black fails to give a sense of the

larger significance of the agency Catholics exercised in the film industry. Understanding

the impact Catholics had on movies is an important, though incomplete, contribution to

American cultural history. Pieces of history like those of Black do well to counter the

assumption one might draw that Catholics had little say in cultural output.

Defining Catholic identity in American society poses a challenge for scholars of

American History. How Catholics constructed their identity, especially when it came to

the Irish, is the subject Timothy J. Meagher's *Inventing Irish America: Generation,*

Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1925. Attempts to create a pan-

Catholic identity, one embracing all ethnic Catholics like those in Worcester,

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[24] Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Massachusetts, failed towards the end of the nineteenth century. It did not succeed

because Americanized Irish leaders of the movement could not articulate a Catholic

identity that appealed to newly arriving immigrant Faithful in the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries. Yet in the eyes of the majority, Protestant dominated America,

a Catholic was a Catholic. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century after

generations of Irish Catholics had lived in the United States, people saw the Church as

tainted with foreignness. By the first decades of the twentieth century, that foreignness

earned Catholics only the condemnation of many Americans, making their religion un-

American.[25]

    Inventing Irish America ponders the place of Catholics in America by examining

their attempts at fitting in. Still, perhaps no historian looks at the totality of Catholic

experience in the United States more than Jay P. Dolan. In *In Search of an American

Catholicism: A History of a Religion and Culture in Tension*, the "tension" spoken of in

the title refers to the "two souls" of American Catholics both based on religion. On the

one hand, Catholics, for the most part, remained faithful to the teachings and practices of

the Church despite the suspicion with which many Americans viewed them. On the other

hand, as Americans, Catholics lived in a country where their loyalties often went beyond

religious ties and pulled them in directions that did not always fit with their faith. With

the changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in 1965, Dolan sees

Catholicism as a more public institution, responsive to its parishioners. Before Vatican

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[25] Meagher, *Inventing Irish America*, 1-16. It also failed because the Irish saw themselves as the only
logical choice to lead.

II, both Protestants and Catholics looked at the Church as an unchangeable institution, one unaffected by influences like American culture.[26]

Dolan emphasizes Vatican II as the turning point for American Catholicism. Vatican II impacted Catholics in important ways. For instance, it switched the language in which priests gave Mass from Latin to the vernacular. Another alteration to the Mass involved the priest turning to face the congregation instead of celebrating with his back turned to the audience. These innovations to the Mass, Dolan argues, mark a culmination in the ascendancy of American culture in relation to Catholicism. In other words, they made the Church more American. Dolan states that before Vatican II the tension that existed between Catholicism and American culture prevented the Americanization of Catholics, given their fidelity to European style modes of worship.[27] Still, Catholicism arrived in what became the United States at the same time, and in some cases before, Puritans in New England. The fact that Catholicism has been a part of the American cultural landscape from the beginning remains overlooked by many historians who believe the changes wrought by Vatican II is when Catholicism finally became American.[28]

Catholics maintained a considerable place in American culture despite their own diverse population sometimes obscuring the fact that Catholics observed one Faith. As the title suggests, James T. Fisher's *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in*

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[26] Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism*, 3-11.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Michael Gannon, *The Cross in the Sand: The Early Catholic Church in Florida, 1513-1870* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1983).

America seeks to demonstrate a level of cooperation among Catholics in America. Going along with ideas like those proposed by Higham, Fisher relates a unity based on diversity. This position was not without its challenges. Fisher looks at the whole of American history in order to identify a Catholic identity in America. Therefore, in his construction of Catholic identity, his historical actors continually had to include newly arriving groups in the midst of their parishes. Incorporating new groups meant that certain ethnicities, such as the Irish, rose to a leadership position in American Catholicism only to be replaced by another wave of Catholic immigrants. New Catholic immigrants forced co-religionists to come to terms with their multi-cultural Faith before taking their place in America in order to present a unified face to the larger society.[29]

For Eileen McMahon in *What Parish are You From? A Chicago Irish Community and Race Relations*, a person's ethnicity said much that went beyond affiliations that came about because of mass culture. McMahon focuses on the Irish, but also makes reference to other communities in Chicago. She argues that the parish people belonged to normally determined their ethnicity. In spite of ethnic differences between parishes in Chicago, McMahon highlights a Catholic community connected through various parishes spread around the city. Parishes formed insular ethnic communities, but insulation could provide strength. McMahon discusses how Catholics had a long tradition of dealing with scorn from other religious groups, particularly from Protestants who exerted hegemony over other religions in the United States. Because of the society that parishioners situated themselves in, Church attendance became both a personal and community building

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[29] Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants*, ix-x.

experience. As McMahon argues, when in the 1920s and 1930s African Americans began moving north during the Great Migration, Catholics felt their parishes threatened by the inclusion of blacks. In response, white parishioners began to vacate their parishes in the city for the suburbs in order to preserve the racial integrity of the community.[30]

One work that does take a broader chronological approach to Catholics and race, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* by John McGreevy contends that Catholics took issue with African American neighbors before their mass migration in the 1920s and 1930s. Relations between Catholics and blacks literally exploded in violence during the 1919 Chicago Race Riot. Catholicism acted as a double-edged sword in moments of violence. Essentially, religion provided cohesion for communities much as Eileen McMahon argues in *What Parish Are You From?*[31] Additionally, parishes could become a source of bigotry towards outsiders like African Americans due to the close-knit communities they formed. Also like McMahon, McGreevy highlights the Catholic exodus from the city after World War II to the suburbs. Nevertheless, the process for McGreevy endures until 1965 when the Second Vatican Council implements significant changes in the Church. Not only did priests no longer say Mass with their backs to the congregation or in Latin, but Rome also attempted to make the Church more responsive to the people. Prior to Vatican II, priests usually behaved respectably towards African Americans, which sometimes differed from the attitudes of parishioners. The Second Vatican Council canonized more tolerant

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[30] McMahon, *What Parish Are You From?*, 1-5.

[31] McMahon, *What Parish Are You From?*, 1-5.

behavior and racial attitudes and caused many white parishioners to gradually move away from their long-time neighborhoods.[32]

Samuel Freedman's *The Inheritance: How Three Families and the American Political Majority Moved from Left to Right* deals not only with a physical movement away from the urban roots of many Catholics, but also from their political affiliations. When comparing McGreevy and Freedman's work to that of Eileen McMahon, we see that the entrance of Catholics into white society goes beyond the relocation to the suburbs. In *The Inheritance*, the shift from the Democratic to the Republican Party by three of the families Freedman discusses, two of which are Catholic, took generations rather than a discrete period following World War II. The movement to the suburbs also composed only one part of this process. In the city where they lived in their ethnic communities, the communal style of living served to make families into stalwart supporters, for instance, of the New Deal. Yet, as Freedman puts it, "It was they who wrested citizenship from a nativist nation, rose from privation into the middle-class, and swung the pendulum of ideology from left to right."[33] Works like *The Inheritance* and *Parish Boundaries* complicate the view that Catholics gained acceptance into white America by showing other processes at work than relocation to the suburbs or Vatican II.

Robert Orsi's *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* gives a fuller account of one Catholic group's experience with

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[32] John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of the Chicago Press, 1996), 1-5.

[33] Samuel G. Freedman, *The Inheritance: How Three Families and the American Political Majority Moved from Left to Right* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 22.

Americanization. Orsi concentrates on Italian Harlem in New York City. More specifically he centers on a celebration, called a *festa*, in which most members of the community participated. All those involved in the *festa* functioned in prescribed manners typical of ritualized Italian Catholic culture. Many of these practices entered into Italian American culture outside of the influence of the Church, even though the *festa* owes its existence to the Catholic feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Note, however, that this particular dedication to Mary, the mother of Jesus, became known as the Madonna of 115th street, thus making it an expression of popular religion. As generations passed, though, Americanization and the inclusion of other groups into Italian Harlem exerted dual pressure on the community. Outsiders viewed the *festa* almost as a pagan ritual and the children and grandchildren of those that initiated the celebration began to turn away from its observance.[34]

Thomas Guglielmo discusses in detail how Italians attained white status in America in *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*. Guglielmo challenges a cardinal tenet of whiteness literature: that Southern and Eastern Europeans had to make great efforts to accrue acceptance as whites in the United States. He distinguishes between color and race, claiming that "color" referred to broad categories like "white" and "black." As for race, Guglielmo asserts that racial distinctions were ascribed to discrete areas of certain countries, such as southern and northern Italy. Race had more to do with what part of the globe one hailed from rather than the color of one's skin, according to Guglielmo, and some Italians typified what he

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[34] Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xxxix-xlix.

calls an "in-between" racial group. Due to the fact that the government considered northern Italians as racially more desirable than southern Italians, northern Italians realized the privileges of whiteness sooner. American society associated southern Italians with Africa and criminal behavior, thus they remained "in-between" longer. Nonetheless, the key indicator of whiteness for all Italians, even the more swarthy complexioned, came on their immigration papers where they marked "white" for their race. Hence, no matter how much Italians suffered due to their alleged affiliation with Africa, after a few generations their whiteness was assured.[35]

White on Arrival and *Madonna of 115th Street* tell two sides of the same story. If, as Guglielmo claims, fairer skinned northern Italians were more desirable than the darker southern Italians, then one needs to include religion in order to better define their racial character. Though complimentary, neither Orsi or Gugliemlo give a full enough rendering of Italian Catholics in the United States, especially given their conclusions about Italian whiteness. The fact that scholars of whiteness do not usually discuss religion in terms of race becomes all the more suspect when one considers that scholars of the African American community often mention religion as a part of black racial identity. Adam Green, for example, attests to how African Americans in Chicago combined a growing affinity for mass media and publicity with traditional bedrocks of the community such as church attendance in order to foster a nationwide black

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[35] Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 3-13.

consciousness. By doing this, as Green claims, African Americans revised how they engaged with a white dominated American society.[36]

Looking at the way African Americans interacted with white society provides a point of comparison for the Catholics did so, and highlights the deficiencies of whiteness studies. Insomuch as blackness studies exist, such as Robin D. G. Kelley's *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, they show that blacks constructed an identity opposed to that which white dominated America tried to impose upon them, particularly in the 1930s, in marked contrast to what they experienced during Jim Crow, Reconstruction, or the Antebellum periods. Kelley discusses the role that radical politics played in the African American community, giving them the strength to resist their degradation through both active and passive means. Passive forms of resistance, like not working as hard as a manager might expect at low-paying jobs or speaking in slang, form part of the "hidden transcript," a concept Kelley borrows from political anthropologist James C. Scott. Corresponding methods of resistance became "masks" that they used in order to hide the true meaning of their behavior. One cannot understand black working class struggles without coming to terms with what Kelley terms their "infrapolitics."[37]

There exists no similar articulation of infrapolitics among the white working class in part due to their white status. The need to adopt masks did not arise in relation to blacks. As the dominant social group, Caucasians did not have to hide the ill-will they

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[36] Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1-18.

[37] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 1-13.

felt towards African Americans so long as the society they lived in remained conducive

to white superiority. Even though there existed a socio-economic hierarchy that

separated rich and poor whites, racial segregation ensured the notion of superiority in the

minds of all whites. Consequently, though deference between whites continued, all

Caucasians could have the assurance of social preference in a white dominated society.

However, the one way in which blacks influenced even the most racist whites in the

twentieth century came from black culture. Michael Bertrand relates in *Race, Rock, and*

Elvis that African American music empowered blacks and gained the attention of young

whites in the 1950s. Youthful Southern Caucasians rebelled against the racial

conventions of their more staid elders and thus began to call into question the inferiority

of blacks as well as the meaning of their own whiteness.[38]

Young whites in the South questioned the meaning of whiteness only after

centuries of the development of white racial attitudes towards blacks. David Roediger in

Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class analyzes how

whiteness developed and claims that race took its place in American culture from the

beginning. Race played a role not simply in how white workers viewed blacks, but also

in how they defined themselves. The genesis of racial attitudes—of whiteness—went

along with the metamorphosis of the working class in the mid-nineteenth century. In one

sense, Roediger agrees with Kelley in that racial prejudice served as a social construction

in reaction to dealings between whites and blacks. Insomuch as white elites dealt with

blacks, they could fall back on their comparative wealth in order to divide them from

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[38] Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 35.

those they felt inferior. The white working class, alternatively, feared the dependency they thought they observed among blacks in the emerging Capitalist order and sought to disassociate from it. Thus white workers could call themselves neither slave nor black but whites.[39]

Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* offers a more nuanced approach to the growth of whiteness in the United States. He goes beyond ideas of race that says whites based most of their racial prerogatives on the subjugation of blacks as in *Wages of Whiteness*. Instead, Jacobson takes a more ethnic line of reasoning than does Roediger, positing that ideals of whiteness came more from the top-down than not. His main concern turns on the question of who does the constructing of race, and not structural forces like class. The sciences, the state, and popular culture all had their collective say in determining which so-called racial traits society accepted. According to Jacobson, the various immigrant groups that immigrated to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exemplified a burgeoning of races in the United States beyond the previous white-black divide. But because of the advantages of whiteness developed in the nineteenth century, whiteness became a racial category to which groups like Italians, the Irish, Jews, and even Asians felt compelled to aspire.[40]

Jacobson succeeds in making religion, as least for Jews, part of their racial make-up when coming to this country, but also as something that required muting in order to

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[39] Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 3-15.

[40] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 1-14.

become more white. The dilemma with this construction of whiteness lies with Judaism.

Their non-Christian religion, a significant part of their own group identity, proved a

major stumbling block to their acceptance as whites, despite Al Jolson's attempts at

copying white ideas of racial superiority by donning blackface in *The Jazz Singer*.[41] Neal

Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own: How Jews Invented Hollywood* renders a more in-

depth study, focusing on how Jews molded one of the most important cultural phenomena

of the twentieth century, cinema, to the purpose of gaining acceptance in America.

Gabler does not concern himself with whiteness, although he does admit that Jews in

Hollywood wanted acceptance as Americans and not Jews. Nonetheless, Gabler notes

that Jews could never earn the status of the older money back east, and instead turned the

movie industry into their own interpretation of what it meant to be American.[42] In other

words, instead of simply accepting the tenets of white America without question, Jews

produced their own image of America.

　　　How the Irish Became White by Noel Ignatiev illustrates another example, going

along with Roediger and Jacobson, of a group that sought to adopt whiteness. Ignatiev

looks at how Irish Catholics were seen as racially inferior. According to Ignatiev,

oppressed Irish Catholics responded to this treatment by becoming oppressors

themselves. They turned to oppression because they realized that the color of one's skin

offered advantages in a racialized society. With the memory of struggles in Ireland fresh

in their minds, they did not take well to comparisons with black slaves. Even though

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[41] Ibid., 119.

[42] Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989).

American culture at the time lampooned the Irish as behaving no better than the supposedly animal-like African Americans, the Irish persisted in their endeavors to become white. Their efforts involved accepting the Capitalist order to gain entrance into American society. Ignatiev shows that the Irish helped give rise to racial divisions among the working class by shunning their black co-inhabitors of the underclass, thus agreeing with Roediger. *How the Irish Became White* goes so far as to purport that the Irish invented white supremacy in America.[43]

Igantiev's analysis of how the Irish became white amounts to blaming them for a social problem that existed before their arrival in the United States. Further, discussing their choice of whiteness as he does as if no other alternative existed further degrades their plight. The fact remains that the Irish had other identity constructions other than their skin tone, like Catholicism, proved problematic for their entrance into American society in general. In her chapter titled "Religious Rivalry and the Making of Irish-American Identity" in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, Irene Whelan picks out the thread of Irish American identity that favored the Protestant Irish over the Catholic Irish. Favoring Protestantism becomes an important point since Ignatiev touches on Catholicism as composing a portion of the racial character of the Irish but does not explore this concept past the introduction. As Whelan argues, the Catholic Irish became code for all manner of social ills in the twentieth century including poor education and squalid living conditions. She also mentions the enmity between Protestants in the United States and the Irish newcomers as

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[43] Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 1-3.

a continuation of Old World squabbles.[44] So long as the Irish maintained their fidelity to the Church in Rome, their loyalty as Americans was scrutinized.

The custom of testing the loyalty of a certain group to the United States through culture was a common theme. Ignatiev mentions how the Irish participated in minstrelsy in order to show whites their disregard for blacks and their fitness for being true Americans. Minstrelsy was a large part of American culture in the nineteenth century, and the Irish helped to both make minstrelsy popular and develop the racial themes it contained. The Irish carried many of those themes over to vaudeville productions, the successor of minstrelsy in American culture. Therefore, when movies began to appear in the early twentieth century, there already existed a set of ideas, or stereotypes, in culture that elevated white American status over all other races and creeds. As Richard Dyer states in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*,

> How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of others (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and other like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens.

What Dyer means is that the way people are represented in culture says much about their treatment in real life. Images of marginalized groups historically did not convey a positive representation of their place in American society. Rather, a variety of negative

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[44] Irene Whelan, "Religious Rivalry and the Making of Irish-American Identity," in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, J. J. Lee and Marion Casey, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 271-285.

stereotypes typify the way American culture displayed diversity. Additionally, those

stereotypes feed into how marginalized peoples are already perceived, reinforcing their

other status.[45]

Overall, the existence of a powerful ethnic stereotype raised the likelihood of

insulting representations in popular culture. *The Matter of Images* gives a general

overview of stereotypes as they pertain to whites, homosexuals, and women to name a

few. The book argues that film overtook most other cultural outlets in the United States

during the twentieth century as the primary purveyor of stereotypes. Unfortunately,

religion occupies little of the text, and the same can be said for others who study film.[46]

Scholars like bell hooks, in *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies*, focus on the

issues that the title advances instead of giving a general overview as does Dyer. hooks

speaks to the pedagogical role films played since their inception in American culture.

The purpose behind the discourse of films as agents of American culture, according to

hooks, is not necessarily to give an accurate portrayal of real life. Instead, they give a

stylized, imaginative version of the way a select few want American society to look.

When it comes to issues of race, sex, and class, filmmakers take stereotypical themes

long present in America and present them as the proper way for society to look.[47]

The white race, for example, though socially constructed, long held a dominant

position in American culture and exercised the greatest level of control over how society

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[45] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

[46] Ibid.

[47] bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 72.

was represented on film. Thus the presentation of whiteness had a powerful effect on

consumers of culture. In Daniel Bernardi's edited volume *The Birth of Whiteness: Race*

and the Emergence of U. S. Cinema, he acknowledges the power of whiteness through a

collection of essays. They cover how whiteness appeared on screen through a variety of

themes, including: white nationalism, the influence of colonialism and empire on racial

constructions, the fear of miscegenation, and black responses to the rise of these themes.

The essays show that whiteness insinuated itself into the movies from the beginning since

they all deal with the early movie industry, particularly silent films. Moreover, Bernardi

emphasizes the way movies form an authoritative fiction with the potency to mold the

way people view the world. Along these lines, whiteness on film encompassed such

topics as the elevation of so-called whites, the supposed beauty of whiteness over that of

other races, the educational level of whites, and the purported grandeur of white

civilization. These themes, along with others, laid the groundwork early on for films that

portrayed whiteness, and how filmgoers interpreted whiteness.[48]

Religion does not appear in Bernardi's collection of essays, which is important

because other works show the importance of religion to identity construction as seen in

Green's *Selling the Race*. Returning Bernardi's point regarding the interconnectedness of

black and white screen images, if Green and Irene Whelan's theories as to the importance

of religion prove correct, then it follows that in movies faith should play a prominent role

in determining a group's racial character culturally speaking. In *Images and the*

Imageless: A Study in Religious Consciousness and Film, Thomas Martin asserts that, in

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[48] Daniel Bernardi, ed., *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U. S. Cinema* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 4.

a Christianized society like America, religion instills itself into much of what people do, especially when it comes to cultural production. Ergo film viewers cannot watch a movie without separating themselves from the culture in which they live, and the same holds true for those making the movie.[49] Film critics miss the line of reasoning that links race and religious consciousness in the cinema.

Perhaps the closest that film critics come to an intersection of religious consciousness and race appears in *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* by Hernán Vera and Andrew Gordon. Vera and Gordon point to a series of films such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) and *The Green Berets* (1968) in which the main characters epitomize how whiteness can deliver society from all ills. As the authors state, "The messianic white self is the redeemer of the weak, the great leader who saves blacks from slavery or oppression, rescues people of color from poverty and disease, or leads Indians in battle for their dignity and survival." Yet Vera and Gordon also admit that such characters on film appear as social misfits or outcasts, people that do not fit the norm of what society expects of them. Still, when the white savior comes among the oppressed, he assumes acceptance by those he seeks to save. The white messiah, therefore, ultimately props up white stereotypes regarding the unfitness of minorities to save themselves from their own struggles. Though these characters usually undergo a moment

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[49] Thomas M. Martin, *Images and the Imageless: A Study in Religious Consciousness and Film* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991), 33.

of self-realization through interaction with another race, the privileges of white status

remains because of these characters Christian qualities.[50]

In order to gain a complete understanding of American society through film, one

needs to understand the role religion played. Bryan Stone in *Faith and Film: Theological*

Themes at the Cinema theorizes that Christianity and film form a dialogue whose themes

weave their way into cinema. According to Stone, religion and movies are inseparable.

As a theologian and film critic, Stone wants to look at movies in order to gain a deeper

understanding of Christianity in America by picking out religious motifs. He uses the

tenets in the Apostles' Creed, the basis for much of Christian belief, in order to analyze a

series of films to demonstrate how Christianity influenced, and was influenced by, the

cinema. With the Apostles' Creed and what it means for Christians beliefs, Stone thus

forms a cogent Christian identity that he traces through movies.[51] Stone does not speak

specifically about any one Christian sect, much less Catholicism, nor does he discuss race

or politics. Regardless, he does well to show how in an American society in which the

majority of the people adhere to Christianity, religion cannot be separated from a popular

cultural product like film.

Scholars of American culture highlight how the advent of mass culture, including

the movies in the twentieth century, helped heal divisions in American society that

existed in the working class, but often ignore the role religion played. Nonetheless, as

historians like Irene Whelan in her chapter "Religious Rivalry and the Making of Irish-

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[50] Hernán Vera and Andrew Gordon, *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 33-51.

[51] Stone, *Faith and Film*.

American Identity" relate, religions like Catholicism mattered more than mere affiliation with a certain class.[52] For historians like Gregory Black, the one thing that matters about Catholic involvement in the film industry is their association with the production codes.[53] The scholarship needs revision in order to illustrate that religion mattered in how groups were presented in American culture. When *Harper's Weekly* referred to the Irish in 1860 as ". . .the Pope's Irish mercenaries," it mattered.[54] When Bing Crosby took the role of Father O'Malley in 1944 in *Going My Way* to help save an inner city parish from folding, it mattered. These events mattered because Catholicism played a key role, and they speak to the continued struggles of Catholics in a white, Protestant dominated United States.

Scholars have not looked at whiteness and Catholicism together when examining American culture, particularly when discussing movies. The fact that scholars of whiteness do not usually discuss religion relative to racial constructions becomes all the more suspect when one considers that historians of the African American community mention religion as a part of black racial identity. Though only briefly touching on religion, Adam Green's *Selling the Race*, in examining the black struggle with modernity through cultural outlets, provides a model for looking at how certain directors used Catholicism to show Catholic fitness for whiteness. Green attests to how African Americans in Chicago combined a growing affinity for mass media and publicity with

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[52] Whelan, "Religious Rivalry and the Making of Irish-American Identity."

[53] Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975*; Black, *Hollywood Censored*.

[54] "The Irish at Home and Abroad," *Harper's Weekly*, July 7, 1860.

traditional bedrocks of the community such as church attendance in order to foster a

nationwide black consciousness. Blacks during World War II and after packaged and

sold a unique sense of group life and imagination identifiable in magazines such as *Jet*

and *Ebony*. Not only did these magazines help create a new national racial identity, they

demonstrate a turn towards modernity for African Americans previously tied to the pre-

modern legacy of slavery. By giving rise to a new sense of racial identity that went along

with modernity, as Green claims, African Americans revised how they engaged with

American society.[55] I use Green's theories to help explain the way movies were used sell

Catholic acceptability to white audiences.

Jacobson also delves into the subject of movies and the power they had on

shaping racial attitudes in *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*.

When discussing the power of films in elevating white primacy, he writes, "Hollywood's

cumulative lore has supplied an alternative myth of origins for the nation, whose

touchstone is Ellis Island rather than Plymouth Rock, and whose inception is roughly in

the 1890s rather than the 1600s." In other words, white immigrants taking part in a post-

Civil Rights revival of ethnicity helped bolster racial whiteness by constructing a new

white identity both against and inspired by productions like *Roots*. Jacobson

acknowledges mass culture's long held position as the primary purveyor of white images

and stereotypes.[56] While useful in discussing why filmmakers used white images, *Roots*

Too fails to satisfactorily account for how religion was tied to racial identity. Jacobson's

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[55] Green, *Selling the Race*, 1-18.

[56] Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 72-129.

primary concern is the rise of hyphenated white Americans. If Catholics were as white as

Jacobson supposes, and as movies of the 1930s and '40s bear out, then why did their

depiction on the silver screen become more distinctive in the 1950s?

In order to more fully bridge the gap between whiteness and Catholicism on film,

the ideas of Rebecca Sullivan in *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar*

Culture will be employed. Though focusing on nuns, her theories on how women and,

more importantly, religion were relegated to the comfortable domestic sphere connects to

whiteness as seen in scholarship on families during the Cold War.[57] As Sullivan

explains, "This feminization of religion was especially true for postwar Catholicism,

which tried to overcome centuries of marginalization and suspicion and claim access to

the suburbanized middle class." On the contrary, nuns—and, by extension, Catholics—

presented distinguishable images in the public sphere that went against normative views

of femininity and even Catholicism.[58] Thus *Visual Habits* can help explain why a shift

occurs in the presentation of Catholic icons like nuns and priests in post-World War II

America. The shift was apparent in 1959 with the release of *The Nun's Story*, which

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[57] Many scholars see the 1950s as a period in which a renaissance of the cult of domesticity occurred, centered on the woman as family caretaker and thus tied to the household. For more on this phenomenon, see May, *Homeward Bound*; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 17; May, *Homeward Bound*; Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 133-152; Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Cheryl L. Reed, *Unveiled: The Hidden Lives of Nuns* (New York: Berkley Books, 2004); Sylvia Harvey, "Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir," in *Movies and Mass Culture*, John Belton, ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 173; Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post War America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Powers, Rothman, and Rothman, *Hollywood's America: Social and Political Themes in Motion Pictures*, 227-231; May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 169; Mast, *A Short History of the Movies*, 146-149; Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 79-82; I. C. Jarvie, *Movies as Social Criticism: Aspects of Their Social Psychology* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1978), 88-90.

[58] Sullivan, *Visual Habits*, 10.

focuses on the life of a nun instead of Irish Catholics or priests who long held the position of Hollywood's Catholic stand-ins. *Visual Habits* also provides a guide to analyzing these shifts in Catholic representation on the screen by relating what they say about Catholicism's changing place in the United States.

Another work focusing on the changing place of Catholicism in America, and which this dissertation fundamentally disagrees with, is Anthony Burke Smith's *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War*. While on the surface Smith's argument that Catholics in the decades between the 1930s and 1950s greatly influenced American culture generally is correct, his position goes too far. Covering much of the same ground intended in my own work, Smith proclaims that Catholic involvement in popular culture, particularly in film, affected how people viewed their national community from New Deal Americanism to the postwar era. Again, it cannot be disputed that Catholics impacted American culture from the 1930s to the 1950s.[59] But to make Americanism synonymous with Catholicism in American culture ignores both the antecedents of the era focused on in Smith's work, and what came after. As will be made apparent in this dissertation, even at a time when Catholicism became more acceptable in American culture, its representation was still fraught with stereotypes long present in the national consciousness. And the negative stereotypes that emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s reiterated the notion not being a part of normative American society and rendered whatever gains made in American culture virtually meaningless.

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[59] Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010).

No work theorizes how societies interpret alienness better than Edward Said's book *Orientalism*. Said argues that Westerners looked at Asia for centuries as exotic and representative of the excesses of civilization. Orientalism developed in order to justify the colonization of and scientific racist attitudes against Near East Islamic countries. Europeans thus saw non-white peoples and lands as culturally inferior.[60] Though not normally associated with the Middle East by Americans, the Catholic Church stood as symbolic of "other" ideas deemed anathema to American society. Though the movies of the 1930s and 1940s reflect a desire on the part of some moviemakers to show a more acceptable Catholicism to the American viewing public, this changed as the United States entered the Cold War. During the 1950s, as America fought Communism on an international scale, foreign ideas became suspect on the home front. Given the history of anti-Catholicism in the United States, it is not surprising that the milieu in which Catholic movies of the 1950s and 1960s were made dictated a more foreign looking Catholicism than previous decades.

The foreignness of Catholicism on film constituted a language that told audiences how Catholics should be perceived. James Monaco in *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond* talks of images, specifically film images, as an easily understood "language" because, unlike words by themselves that have multiple meanings, "A picture bears some direct relationship with what it signifies, [which] a word seldom does."[61] Focusing on the way filmmakers presented Roman Catholic images such as priests, nuns,

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[60] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 49-72.

[61] James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176.

or the Mass demonstrates the way producers, directors, and even actors created a language in their rendering of Catholicism on the big screen. Those involved in movie-making used the imagery of priests and nuns as signposts to indicate Catholic whiteness, or lack thereof. Analyzing indicators of Catholic whiteness involves a process called semiotics.[62] Semiotics serves the purposes of this dissertation in helping to understand the changes Catholic images underwent between Al Smith's failed presidential campaign and the release of *The Exorcist* in 1973. The language of Catholicism on film can be understood in terms of the stereotypes developed during the nineteenth century, which were transmitted in the era of film.

However, in order to understand individual movies other film criticism tools are needed. These tools include *mise-en-scéne*, which involves the reading of meanings in individual shots. At certain moments in movies, directors chose to focus on particular elements of the Catholic character that could serve either to demonstrate their qualifications for whiteness, or their alienation from American society. When a collection of these moments is analyzed together, it is called *montage*, which looks for the meaning behind the way a series of scenes are arranged. *Montage* allows for the overall message behind a movie to become more important, making it an important lens for a synthesis of the meaning of the way Catholicism is presented on film.[63] Using semiotics, *mise-en-scéne*, and *montage* as lenses through which to view Catholic movies

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[62] Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 32-66. See also Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 176-178, 468-477.

[63] Ibid., 205, 464.

helps identify factors that separated Catholics from mainstream whiteness and track the way they changed over time.

When looking at Catholicism on film, three distinct periods can be discerned that shall form the chapters of this dissertation. The problem facing the religion and its on-screen representation revolved around hostile feelings towards Catholics developed throughout America's history. Their attempt to monitor and control their image stemmed from centuries preceding where several negative stereotypes came about regarding Catholicism. Thus the first chapter will look at the way on-screen Catholicism fit into a country with a history of anti-Catholic tendencies tied to white superiority. The United States inherited English sensibilities towards Catholicism, and nurtured them throughout its development in the nineteenth century. The waves of Irish Catholics who came to this country in the mid-nineteenth century gave so-called "natives" added fuel to separate all Catholics as invaders in a white society. In turn, the Irish became symbols of all Catholics, even as they used American cultural outlets like minstrelsy in an attempt to gain entrance into American society. Unfortunately, involvement in minstrelsy only ingrained stereotypes about Catholics into American culture, which were kept alive in vaudeville acts and then transmitted into film in the early twentieth century.

The second chapter will focus on how Catholicism on-screen became less threatening as the need for national unity overrode ethnic distinctiveness during the 1930s and 1940s. That desire to fit in led to a minstrelized presentation of Catholicism, sometimes by its own practitioners, in order to demonstrate their qualifications as white Americans. This minstrelization took the form of downplaying ethnic divisions in order

to show that they could take their place among America's diverse peoples, as movies like

Boys Town highlight. The Bing Crosby priest movies of the World War II era were

carefully crafted in order to present Catholicism in as an acceptable light as possible. At

the same time, Catholics realized a measure of influence over all film through the Legion

of Decency, and its ally Joseph Breen. After World War II as the Cold War set in, the

tone of Catholic movies changed as latent anti-Catholicism reappeared both on a societal

level and on film as the foreign character of Catholics returned to the forefront.

Chapter three will analyze films like *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *The Nun's

Story* (1958) to show how on-screen Catholicism separated from mainstream white

society. The priest moves of the 1950s symbolized that separation, as they, along with

their religion, increasingly came to be seen as isolated from American society. Film

genres like Westerns reinforced the alien nature of Catholicism by emphasizing the

foreignness of adherents to that religion. The rise of nun films later in the period

represented a form of Catholicism that could be better controlled, since white women in

the Cold War were supposed to pay deference to males, nuns being no exception. Still,

nuns could also stand for radical feminism, although the coming of the 1960s saw a

subtle backlash against Catholicism on film with comedy being used to poke fun at the

lives of female religious. By the end of the 1960s, Catholicism on film became no

different from any other traditional American institution, leaving it once more

marginalized in an American culture that was supposedly embracing the "other" at that

time.

In the conclusion, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1973) will be discussed as the ultimate example of the costumed Catholic, the symbol of the otherness that taints popular representations of Catholicism to this day. They typify the image problem that the Catholic Church always had in the United States, which separated it from mainstream whiteness. These two films introduce the idea of Catholicism as being complicit with evil, while also bringing back many of the stereotypes used to portray the religion as examined throughout this dissertation. In short, they look back while also pointing forward to how Catholicism has usually, and continues to be, perceived in a negative light. Any moments where the religion on film did achieve some measure of respectability were only temporary, and as easily and often removed—by filmmakers or the audience—as Father O'Malley's robes.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CLOAK OF WHITENESS

POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS OF CATHOLICS IN THE NINETEENTH AND

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

> Then up speaks brave Morrissey with a heart both stout and true
> "Yes I am an Irishman that never was subdued
> And I can lick those Yankees and you saucy beggar bear
> In honour of old Paddy's land it's the laurel I do wear."

—Morrissey and the Russian Sailor[1]

American films of the early 1900s utilized negative stereotypes to represent Roman

Catholic peoples, developed over centuries of America's experience with Catholicism.

Those stereotypes separated Catholics from mainstream white Protestant Americans in

terms of class, behavior, and culture. However, these stereotypical depictions did not

originate in the twentieth century; indeed, they had a long history. During the nineteenth

century cultural outlets such as political cartoons, literature, minstrelsy, and vaudeville

codified these stereotypes, defining a color line that alienated Catholics from white

America. Significantly, as these negative views developed, the Irish became

representative of all Catholic peoples. Catholics, because of symbols like Morrissey, the

Irishman "that was never subdued" and who could "lick those Yankees," were viewed as

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[1] "Morrissey and the Drunken Sailer," Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2004, http://www.mun.ca/folklore/leach/songs/NFLD1/15-06.htm.

subhuman by whites, characteristics that were also attributed to African Americans.

Further, Irish participation in minstrelsy solidified the image of all Catholics as playful,

unintelligent, drunken, low class, and prone to violence. The popularity of minstrelsy in

American culture and its association with Irish performers and its stereotypes projected

unto all Catholic peoples. Their negative portrayal carried over into vaudeville as it

replaced the minstrel show in the late nineteenth century when more Catholic peoples

joined their Irish co-religionists in America. Therefore when the advent of film occurred,

a body of nonwhite stereotypes already existed for filmmakers to draw from that did little

for the lowly place of Catholics in America.

English attitudes, which strongly informed the development of American

stereotypes of Catholicism, took shape in Ireland. Beginning in the sixteenth century

English Protestants colonized and controlled Ireland, and conflict characterized the

relationship between the two peoples. During the sixteenth century, religious affiliation

counted as much as country of origin. English Protestant invaders from Elizabeth I

onward forced an inferior status upon Irish Catholics. At the same time, the British

Parliament enacted a series of discriminatory laws that removed many basic rights, like

land and crop ownership, from the vanquished Irish Papists. The English viewed

Catholic Ireland as uncivilized and less Christian because of the continued presence of

Catholicism, using religious differences as an excuse to carry out invasions and slaughter.

Sir Henry Sidney expressed these sentiments when he wrote to Queen Elizabeth I in 1567

about Western Ireland: "[Among the Irish] Perjury, robbery, and murder counted

allowable. Finally, I cannot find that they make any conscience of sin and . . . I doubt

whether they christen their children or no, for neither find I place where it should be

done, nor any person able to instruct them in the rules of a Christian; or if they were

taught I see no grace in them to follow it."[1] The state of hostility between Catholics and

Protestants in Ireland due to religious differences often erupted into open violence, and it

was not until the twentieth century that Catholic Ireland succeeded in freeing itself from

English Protestant rule.[2]

As the English settled North America, beginning at Jamestown in 1607, they

brought with them a deep-seated anti-Catholic sentiment. Irish Catholics became a part

of the growing overseas British empire by providing a source of unfree labor.

Significantly, their as indentured servants often led to their conflation with African

bondsmen in terms of their place in colonial society, at least until Bacon's Rebellion in

1676.[3] Not only did many Irish Catholics serve as virtual slaves while laboring as

indentured servants in British North America, but the laws regarding Catholicism that

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[1] Sir Henry Sidney to Queen Elizabeth on Munster and Connaught, 20 April, 1567, in *Sources and Debates in English History, 1485-1714*, ed. Newton Key and Robert Bucholz (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 80–81.

[2] Because they were Catholic, Ireland offered support to dissident English Catholics after the establishment of the Church of England and the institution of penal laws against Catholicism in England's territories. Further, Ireland was seen as a threat particularly during the sixteenth century as a safe harbor for Britain's main enemy: Catholic Spain. Matters did not improve in the seventeenth century. Because Charles I (1625-1649) married a Catholic, after his beheading in 1649, Oliver Cromwell's forces moved upon Ireland in 1649 in order to defeat those still loyal to the crown who had allied themselves with Irish Catholics. Cromwell's soldiers caused much death and destruction for the next year. Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 65-157, 250-276, 321–22; Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 20–24.

[3] During Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, some feared that the uprising was part of a "Popish plot" to take control of the profitable colony of Virginia. After Bacon's Rebellion, however, white Protestantism became an avenue for racial superiority, keeping the relatively small Catholic population on the same level as the African in colonial society. Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 134-136.

governed the new English colonies matched the anti-Catholic tone of laws in England.[4]

Parliament sought to keep Britain's colonies free of Catholicism from the beginning. The

English religious controversialist (one who took a controversial stand on human rights

during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and poet William Crashaw in 1609

expressed English plans for their colonies, "Suffer no papists, let them not settle there; let

the name of pope or popery never be heard in Virginia."[5] With the exception of

Maryland, which was founded by exiled English Catholics, the society that emerged in

British North American colonies did not allow the free practice of Catholicism.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in a land that grew more

independent in the decades leading up to the American Revolution, few Catholics

enjoyed the benefits of the freedom increasingly demanded by their Protestant neighbors.

Religion mattered, and proper English colonists came from Protestant stock.[6]

That Protestant Stock dominated the settlement of Great Britain's North American

colonies throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries. Imported along

with all those Protestants was a healthy fear of Catholics. Indeed, anti-Catholicism was a

key component of what it meant to be English at the time that colonization began.

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[4] Ibid., 92–96; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso, 1997), 51.

[5] Quoted in John Laux, *Church History: A Complete History of the Catholic Church to the Present Day* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989), 549.

[6] Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to Present* (New York: Double Day & Company, 1985), 84–97. Dolan devotes a large section of his work on Maryland, which was the one colony founded in British North America where Catholics could practice freely before the guarantees of religious freedom provided by the United States Constitution. Dolan speaks of Catholics as "flourishing" in Maryland, and acknowledges the tradition of English anti-Catholicism and the lack of rights for Catholics, but fails to explore this topic fully. Dolan largely focuses on positive events of American Catholic history in order to show that Catholicism has a special place in American society.

Colonial subjects prided themselves in their loyalty to their mother country, at least until

the mid-eighteenth century, and did not tolerate "Popery," one of the derogatory labels

attached to Catholicism, outside of Maryland. It is important to note that negative

attitudes against Catholicism took hold in America at the same time that whiteness

became a privileged attribute. The widespread hatred of Catholics at this time exhibited

itself in public displays, as in Newburyport, Massachusetts, when on Pope Day children

dragged grotesque statues of the Roman prelate through the streets to resounding

ridicule.[7] It is ironic that in a colony originally founded as a refuge for Puritans escaping

persecution in England should turn that attitude back on fellow Christians.

When the United States came into being in 1789, the same ideas about the

unfitness of Catholics for white Protestant American society helped guide the writing of

the Constitution. The framers of the Constitution pondered whether Catholics could be

considered eligible for citizenship based on their religion and lack of whiteness. Some,

including John Adams, did not think Catholics could ever exist in a Protestant-dominated

United States, no matter the professions of freedom of conscience found in the

Constitution. As he wrote in 1782, "The proviso of conforming to the laws of the country

respecting the external show of public worship, I wished to have excluded; because I am

an enemy to every appearance of restraint in a matter so delicate and sacred as the liberty

of conscience; but the laws here do not permit Roman Catholics to have steeples to their

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[7] Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 36, 69.

churches, and these laws could not be altered."[8] Among the reasons for suspicion of

Roman Catholics, aside from the anti-Catholicism inherited from England, was their

suspected fidelity to a foreign prelate. In a young nation that recently rebelled

successfully against foreign rule, those who had loyalty that went beyond the borders of

the United States were seen as potentially un-American. Further, they wanted to limit

citizenship to "white persons," and did not feel Catholics met that criterion. Thus, it was

questioned by Adams, among other founding fathers, whether these possibly disloyal,

nonwhite inhabitants of the United States could take full part in this new country.[9]

The tense legal atmosphere that Catholics inhabited in the United States

comprised one layer of disapproval received from Protestants. The United States

inherited a legacy of anti-Catholicism from the English. In Europe, northern Europeans,

the English among them, largely practiced Protestant Christianity. Southern Europe

remained predominately Catholic. The individualism so prized by Americans can be

traced to Protestant ideals, particularly the deeply personal practices of the Puritans.

Catholics practiced a more communal form of religion in which, instead of God's

salvation being reserved for a select few, the road to heaven was open to anyone who

kept their faith in the Church's teachings. Adding to the notion Catholic religious

practices supposedly prohibited independence, geographically northern Europe was the

source of whiteness while southern Europe was associated with Africa. The

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[8] "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U. S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875," "The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Volume 5J. Adams to Livingston," 805, accessed at http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?hlaw:21:./temp/~ammem_EEUk::, November 14, 2011.

[9] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harcard University Press, 1998), 22.

individualism of Protestantism that shaped many of the founding freedoms of the United

States were ideas with which Catholicism supposedly did not fit.[10]

Americans thought of Catholicism as a nonwhite alien entity, a possible

interloper, and a threat to American ideas of individual freedom. For the first decades

after the signing of the Constitution in 1789, however, most Americans were not troubled

by the presence of Catholics. Catholics of all ethnicities, whether European or otherwise,

formed a small percentage of the nation's population and therefore there was little worry

over living amongst large numbers of Roman Catholics. In these early decades, the

dominance of Protestants in American society and culture was unquestioned because of

the small size of the Catholic community. Up until the mid-nineteenth century, the total

number of adherents of various Protestant sects outnumbered the number of Catholics.

Also, thanks to evangelicalism and the Second Great Awakening, movements that

promoted mostly harmonious relationships between sects while reviving Christian belief,

Protestantism in America could claim a level of inter-sectarian cooperation unknown in

Europe.[11] Not until the 1840s, when thousands of Irish Catholics began to arrive in

America daily due to the onset of the Potato Famine, did enough of them reside in the

United States to begin to test ideas of freedom of religion. By 1850, Catholicism

constituted the single largest Christian group in the United States.[12]

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[10] Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 48–71.

[11] Ibid., 51–53, 59–67.

[12] Rev. Laux, *Church History*, 574.

With a rising population of so-called "priest lovers," religion became even more important. The Know-Nothing Party presented one of the more visible challenges for newly arrived Irish Catholics. Adherents of Know-Nothingism were intolerant of anything they deemed un-American and nonwhite, and their ideas developed at a time when Irish Catholics flooded urban areas in the mid-nineteenth century. Espousing the rhetoric of America as one hundred percent white, Protestant, and native-born, Know-Nothing members viewed Irish Catholics as a threat to the Constitution. For Know-Nothing members, or nativists as they were also called, Irish Catholic could never be white Americans because, among other factors, their religion prevented it. Sometimes nativists resorted to violence in order to address the Catholic threat.[13] The *Circular* of Brooklyn captured a riot in 1854, which began as a small squabble between the Irish and Know-Nothing members, but turned into a full-scale riot with the police called to settle the mob.

> A *melee* and running fight, between the Irish and the
> Police, [spread] through the neighboring streets. The
> Police were armed with clubs and pistols, and fifteen or
> twenty shots were exchanged in the course of the fray. But
> one or two only were hit, as we understood afterwards that
> the shots were fired more for the purpose of intimidating
> the rioters than for injuring them. Several of the officers
> were injured by stones thrown at them by their opponents.
> We were glad to hear that the results of the affair were no
> worse: it led us to realize very sensibly how thin the
> protection is which is afforded by laws and police, against
> the passions of men, and how easy it may be for society to
> resolve itself back into anarchy, unless restrained by the

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[13] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 231; Leo Hershkowitz, "The Irish and the Emerging City: Settlement to 1844," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 33.

actual [emphasis mine] sovereignty of Christ. The only
true reliance is on that arm.[14]

Moreover, it is clear that many in America saw the Irish not just as alien, but as an

invading Popish horde. Cartoons appeared in *Harper's Weekly* that depicted half-human

invaders from Rome (fig. 1) coming to devour America's white children.
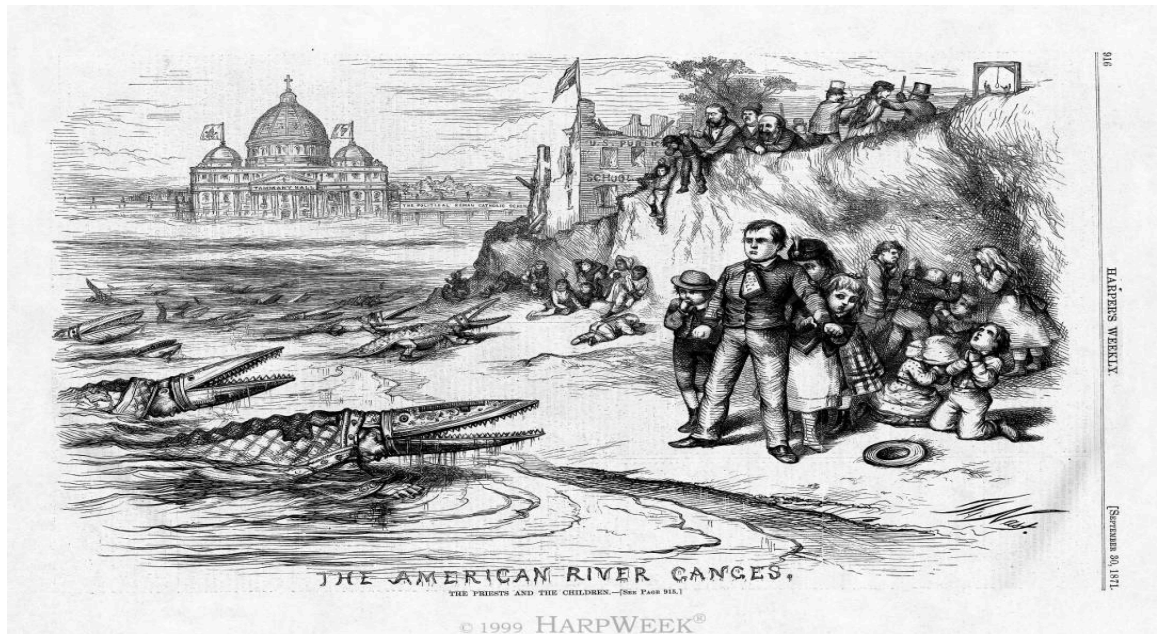
Figure 1. *Harper's Weekly*, "The American River Ganges"
Source:
http://app.harpweek.com.flagship.luc.edu/IssueImagesView.asp?titleId=HW&volumeId=
1871&issueId=0930&page=916

After dealing with much of the same treatment at the hands of their English

overlords in Ireland, many Irish reacted to their continued degradation in their new

country by taking part in some American traditions that might demonstrate their

qualifications as white Americans—including racist attitudes toward African Americans.

In the United States, groups like the Nativists labeled Irish Catholics "Niggers turned

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[14] "Another Sunday Riot," *Circular*, June 13, 1854, American Periodicals.

inside out," or referred to blacks as "smoked Irish."[15] The Irish soon realized that the

color of one's skin was one of the more easily identifiable markers of status in the United

States. Contained in slums, disdained for their religious beliefs, their brogue lending

them an illiterate air, and believed not fully human, Irish Catholics nonetheless strove to

gain whatever advantage they could in the United States by claiming white status through

their skin tone.[16]

      As a result of their ambiguous racial status, the Irish strove for acceptance in

America. Still, theirs was not the most simple or easy entrance into American society.

While the Irish found an avenue to success through machine politics, political cartoons

depicted them as ape-like, brawling, drunken animals, all nonwhite attributes. In 1863,

while Civil War gripped the nation, a draft riot took place in New York City in which

contemporary commentators saw the belligerents as being comprised solely of Irish

Catholics who sought to undermine the Union cause by not submitting to compulsory

military service. Instances of such violence reinforced the notion of the Irish as an

animalistic, foreign invader, there to upset the natural order.[17] Again, *Harper's Weekly*

sensationalized Irish behavior, as in 1871, when an angry crowd greeted a former nun-in-

training, Edith O'Gorman (fig. 2), who lectured on the supposed evils of the Catholic

Church.

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[15] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 49.

[16] Ibid., 1–3; Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 14.

[17] Barnet Schecter, *The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 233.

Figure 2. *Harper's Weekly*, "Roman Catholics Disgracing Themselves"
Source:
http://app.harpweek.com.flagship.luc.edu/IssueImagesView.asp?titleId=HW&volumeId=
1870&issueId=0507&page=304.

Note the way in which Irish facial features appear inhuman. People who behaved in such

barbaric ways as the press suggested could never truly be seen as white or American.

Though Irish Catholics attempted, and succeeded in some respects, to take full part in

American society, when they were depicted to the general public they did not meet

proper white standards.

While the Irish Catholic image in the United States of the nineteenth century was

plagued by the negative stereotypes seen in political cartoons, they fared little better in

American culture. Irish cultural traditions, such as music and even literature, became

popular in America, and as a result, Irishness became less distinct from American culture

overall. Many songs of the 1800s, catchy tunes despite having little to do with American

life, were written by Irish musicians.[18] Yet popular music did not ensure Irish

acceptance, and other aspects of their ethnic character still separated them as "other."

What never blended with American culture for the Irish was their religion, particularly

with its vivid and easily identifiable clergy, material culture, and institutions. Religion

became the most indelible marker of Irish nonwhiteness, one that Protestant American

observers did not ignore.[19]

One of the more popular forms of anti-Catholicism in the United States came

from literature, specific examples of which include Maria Monk's *The Awful Disclosures*

of Maria Monk, or, The Hidden Secret's of a Nun's Life in a Convent Exposed. Monk's

book, along with the work of several other nineteenth-century authors like Lyman

Beecher and Josiah Strong, made up a wide body of anti-Catholic literature. Many of

these books came at precisely the time when the Catholic population began expanding

rapidly during the 1840s and 1850s.[20] Indeed, the only book to outsell Monk's in the

nineteenth century was Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, underscoring

widespread intolerance toward Catholics. Unlike Stowe's book, however, Monk's did

nothing to increase sympathy for Catholics. Her book also contributed to the nonwhite

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[18] Lawrence McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 1–8.

[19] Anti-Catholic tracts could decry the whole religion, or simply aspects of its doctrine, as did Edward Maguire, *The New Romish Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, or, Trial of the Church of Rome Before a Jury of Roman Catholics on a Charge of Imposing on the Consciences of Christian People "a Yoke Which Neither We nor Our Fathers Were Able to Bear"* (New York: T.L. Magagnos, 1855).

[20] Other works literary works of anti-Catholicism from the nineteenth century include Henry Edward Manning, *Pictures of Christian Heroism* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier, 1855); Louis N. Beaudry, *Spiritual Struggles of a Roman Catholic An Autobiographical Sketch* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875); H. M. Wharton and Charles Warren Currier, *The Curse and Chains of Roman Catholicism: A Controversy* (Baltimore: R.H. Woodward, 1888).

Catholic discourse, since throughout she refers to her convent as the "Black Nunnery,"
and her sisters as "Black Nuns."[21] Catholic writers were not complacent in the face of
works like *The Awful Disclosures*. Throughout the nineteenth century, Catholic
intellectuals fought rising sentiment against the Roman faith by trying to place their
religion within the pantheon of American Christian traditions.[22] While understandable,
their attempts to make Catholicism more palatable to the American public often meant
sacrificing aspects of their religious culture and heritage that made their community
distinctive.[23]

Literature was not the only popular cultural form that that scorned and ridiculed
marginal peoples in American society. Coming out of the antebellum period, the minstrel
show was the most popular entertainment outlet of its time. In an era in which historians
see few examples of true mass culture, minstrelsy appealed to the working classes,
particularly individuals in the more urban North, who sought a way out of their
degradation at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Attending minstrel performances
offered those on the lower end of the social order an opportunity to see who was racially

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[21] Thomas Aiello, "The Paranoid and the Damned: Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* and the Changing
Religious Culture of the 1960s" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical
Association, Chicago, January 7, 2012); See also Maria Monk, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, or,
The Hidden Secret's of a Nun's Life in a Convent Exposed* (James S. Hodson, 1851),
http://books.google.com/books?id=ZftZAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Awful+Disclosures&hl=e
n&sa=X&ei=uZNoUar1H7TlygHmoYCYBw&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

[22] Some examples of Catholic literary responses to anti-Catholic books include Frederick Oakeley, *The
Church of the Bible, or, Scripture Testimonies to Catholic Doctrines and Catholic Principles* (London:
Charles Dolman, 1857); Thomas O'Gorman, *How Catholics Come to Be Misunderstood: A Lecture*
(American series of publications, no. 3. [St. Paul]: Catholic Truth Society, 1890); John Ireland, *The Church
and Modern Society Lectures and Addresses* (Chicago: D.H. McBride, 1897).

[23] Azizah al-Hibri, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Charles C. Haynes, eds., *Religion in American Public Life:
Living with Our Deepest Differences* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 149.

privileged by highlighting those deemed unacceptable. Minstrel shows helped instill

what it meant to be white by giving a lesson, through entertainment, on the racial

structure of the nineteenth century. Performers donned blackface or the tattered clothing

of the stereotypical Irish immigrant, acted the fool, and played music all meant to ridicule

African Americans and the Irish. The portrayal of these others was as harmless, lazy

"darkies" or inept, incomprehensible Paddies and Biddies and demonstrated what

whiteness was not. Witnessing these behaviors on stage established a dividing line

between improper colored peoples and proper whites. They also did not threaten whites

in their behavior, acting silly or drunkenly so as to fulfill what was seen as stereotypical

for their particular race and culture. The timing of minstrelsy's development was

noteworthy, coming at roughly the same time as the Potato Famine migrations of Irish

Catholics in the 1840s. In the early years of minstrelsy, performers ridiculed Irish and

black culture on the same stage. Audiences who laughed and sang along were also taught

how not to be a white person. In other words, proper white behavior did not involve jig

dancing, drunkenness, or tomfoolery.[24]

A comparison of blackface and Irish minstrelsy must begin with the one

overriding element of all minstrelsy: the performance of race. In an America where true

whites were Protestant, racial ideas permeated all facets of society, including culture and

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[24] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94–96. One key source on early minstrelsy, Edward Rice's 1911 *Monarchs of Minstrelsy*, tracks the development of minstrelsy starting with the author's grandfather, Thomas "Daddy" Rice. He talks of how Irish and African cultures were blended to produce a cultural phenomenon. See *Monarchs of Minstrelsy: From "Daddy" Rice to Date* (New York: Kenny Publishing Company, 1911).

religion. Even the act of Protestant worship could be seen as performing whiteness.[25]

The stage minstrel show of the nineteenth century, historians agree, was one of the

biggest cultural phenomena of its time. Its use of characteristics that supposedly defined

African Americans and the Irish—silliness, drunkenness, and general ineptitude, to name

a few—underscored whiteness by defining what it clearly was not. Because of its

widespread popularity, minstrelsy established a set of tropes for the way cultures were

performed in public, establishing stereotypes that can still be discerned today. Irish

Catholics participated in minstrelsy both on stage and as onlookers, which represented a

sort of Faustian deal for both performers and audiences that promoted whiteness. It

involved ridiculing blacks, as well as themselves, so that whites could have a point of

comparison, a demonstration, so to speak. The antebellum minstrel show also provided

the first, albeit deplorable, examples of white exposure to what was then considered

"black culture" and "Irish culture," conflating the two from the beginning.[26]

In the urbanizing antebellum North, many newly arrived, working-class Irish

Catholics saw minstrel performances. They also took a prominent place on stage in

minstrel productions almost immediately upon their arrival in the United States in the

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[25] Christianity, according to historian Edward Said, traditionally comprised one of the elements that separated whites from nonwhites in the Western world going back centuries. See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 59–63, 114–115, 117. In the United States, articles from dailies in the nineteenth century indicate that Catholicism was considered separate from Protestant Christianity, bringing into question whether one who practiced Catholicism could be considered white at all.

[26] Stephen Rohs, *Eccentric Nation: Irish Performance in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 23; Robert Nowatzki, "Paddy Jumps Jim Crow: Irish-Americans and Blackface Minstrelsy," *Eire/Ireland* 41, nos. 3–4 (2006), 163.

mid-1800s. Musicians and actors also sang songs that stereotyped the Irish.[27] The most prolific songwriter of mid-nineteenth-century minstrel songs was Stephen Foster, himself of Scots-Irish descent. Stephen Foster's music, played by Irish Catholics, filled minstrel performances with sentimentality for slavery, as in "My Old Kentucky Home," and faraway Ireland, as in "Near the Broad Atlantic Waters," both written in 1860.[28] Another popular minstrel song, "The Year of Jubilo," featured Irish minstrels in blackface singing of "Darkies" and getting the better of "Ol' Massa."[29] Thus so-called Irish and black culture was used on stage to tell the Irish in the audience how to be white by reminding those listening that slavery was natural and that the Irish were far from their homelands. Alongside the Sambo, or sometimes following him, was the stereotypical Irish "Paddy," with tattered clothing, broken English, and an inability to do much of anything right. "Paddy," or the stage Irishman, was meant to be humorous like the Sambo, but the joke was also on the Irish themselves. For while audiences chuckled at the "Paddy," or the equally stereotypical Irish female "Biddy," they also witnessed how others perceived their own shortcomings.[30]

These shortcomings are summarized in the following cartoon (fig. 3) that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in 1868.

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[27] Ibid., 162.

[28] Ken Emerson, *Doo-Dah! Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998); See also the "Stephen Foster Collection/Sammlung, 1826–1864," http://www.musicanet.org/robokopp/foster.html.

[29] Steven Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 19.

[30] Robert C. Toll, "Social Commentary in Nineteenth-Century White Minstrelsy," in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 96–100.

SCENE ON THE ROAD TO JEROME PARK.
Paddy to Bridget.—"Sure, Biddy, the Folks will think we're the Aristocracy goin' to the Races!"
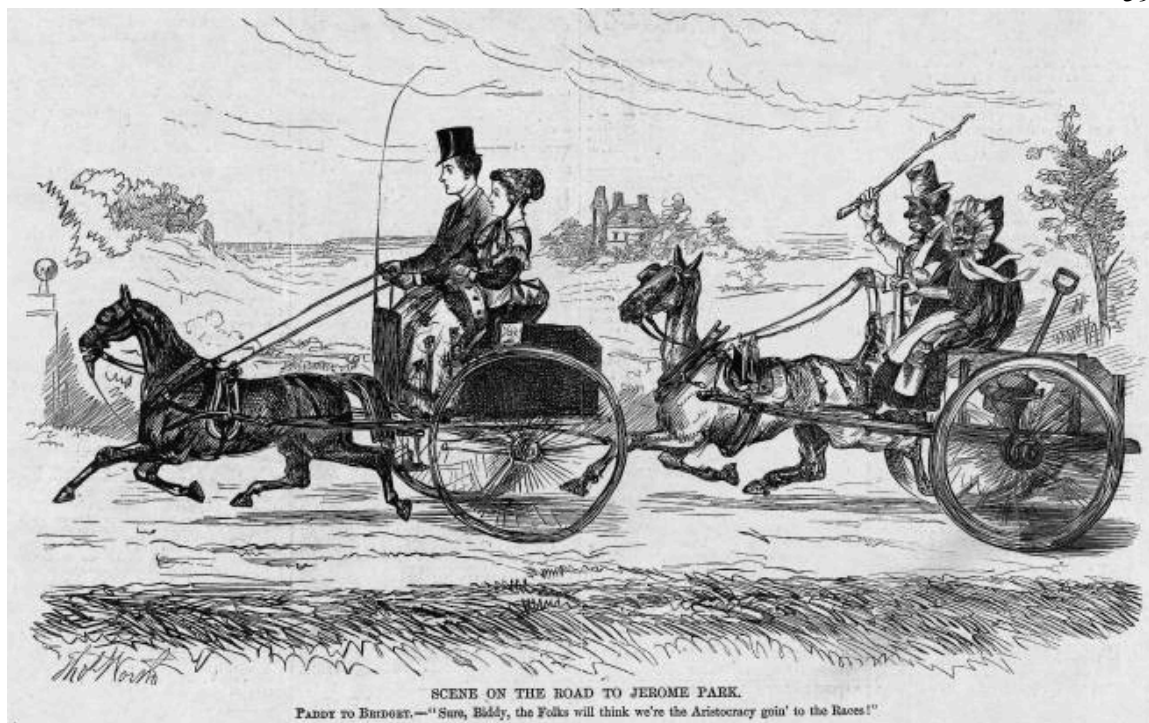
Figure 3. *Harper's Weekly*, "Scene on the Road to Jerome Park"[31]
Source:
http://app.harpweek.com.flagship.luc.edu/IssueImagesView.asp?titleId=HW&volumeId=
1868&issueId=0620&page=397.

The cartoon demonstrates how non-Catholics viewed Irish Catholics as a result of their minstrel image. The caption above reads, "Paddy to Bridget.—'Sure, Biddy, the Folks will think we're the Aristocracy goin' to the Races!'" Both Paddy and Biddy appear apelike and wear what looks to be blackface. Also note the differences between the carriage carrying Paddy and Biddy and the one they follow. The people in the front carriage have a neat vehicle, a healthy horse, and themselves look kempt, as opposed to the disheveled state of Paddy and Biddy. The picture not only has the stereotypical Irish characters, but shows them attempting to copy white ways, but clearly unable to do it

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[31]http://app.harpweek.com.flagship.luc.edu/IssueImagesView.asp?titleId=HW&volumeId=1868&issueId=
0620&page=397, accessed January 12, 2012.

properly. The caption is further reminiscent of the point of minstrelsy: to denigrate black and Irish cultures in order to elevate whiteness.

The Irish on the minstrel stage and in the audience were ubiquitous in antebellum America, an entertainment patronized heavily by the nation's urban working class. Their association with African Americans, both through minstrel performances and on the lower rungs of society, called into question their ability to attain white status in American society. The Irish were keen observers of the oppression that social systems could cause, having been oppressed by the English in Ireland for centuries. Pushed out of Ireland by English oppression and the Potato Famine that ravaged their staple crop in the 1840s and 1850s, many Irish immigrants hoped for something different in America. When their degradation continued in their new, more urban homes, minstrelsy offered the Irish targets for their centuries-old frustrations. Their participation served as an attempt to overcome barriers to social acceptance. Thus minstrelsy served as an object lesson in the power dynamics at work in nineteenth-century America.[32]

When Irish Catholics, or people who played them on stage, performed, they acted out exaggerated, nonwhite cultural traits that colored all Catholic representations for decades, symbolized in the outrageous behavior of Paddy and Biddy. Many Irish Catholics took part in this process, thus blurring the lines of blackface and creating a kind of Irish minstrelsy. Often whites acted out what they saw as amusingly negative Irish and black behavior, blurring the line between the two peoples. Irish performers and audience members alike did not object to their cultures' stage portrayal, while African American

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[32] Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 42.

leaders like Frederick Douglass saw minstrelsy as insidious, and damaging to the psyche of all participants. In 1849, Douglass declared that no African American would attend a minstrel performance until performers "cease to exaggerate the exaggerations of our enemies; and represent the colored man rather as he is, than as Ethiopian Minstrels usually represent him to be. They will *then* command the respect of both races; whereas *now* they only shock the taste of the one, and provoke the disgust of the other."[33] Minstrelsy helped accomplish an ordering of ethnicities in an American society predicated on racial hierarchy, constructing a black and Irish bottom class that lumped the two together and upon which to uphold privileged white identity. In turn, as blackface performers, Irish Catholics used racial othering to set a foundation for their own minstrelization, making both black and Irish culture objects of ridicule.[34]

Ultimately, minstrelsy helped make whiteness the ideal, while presenting a challenge for Irish and blacks seeking acceptance into American society. At the same time, quarrels between Irish and blacks hampered their ability to improve their social standing. African Americans competed with the Irish for working-class jobs and tenement housing. In some cases, African American and Irish men battled one another for female companionship. By participating in minstrelsy, the Irish made light of one of their main competitors for all manner of resources in American society, even though it was offset by the ridicule they also placed upon themselves. The performance was also

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[33] Frederick Douglass, "Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders," *The North Star*, June 29, 1849, published by Stephen Railton of the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, Electronic Text Center, Charlottesville, Va., 2001, http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/minstrel/miar03at.html.

[34] Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 4; Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky": Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 104–105.

an attempt by the Irish to separate themselves from African Americans. Their

participation in minstrelsy, it was hoped, would make them appear harmless, or at least

less so than their African American competitors. Instead, it damaged both Irish and

blacks and did little to help the Irish seem more white.[35] The chasm separating those of

the lower orders in American society from the white Protestants at the top was both wide

and deep. Those at the top of the social hierarchy tended to lump all peoples beneath

together, as seen in political cartoons of the 1800s depicting Irish and African Americans

as basically the same (fig. 4).

Figure 4. *Harper's Weekly*, "North-South/Black-White Scale"

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[35] Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 188–89.

In cultural terms, the minstrel show represented a failed attempt on the part of Irish Catholics to close the gap with their white Protestant cousins. Clearly social elites scorned African Americans, and Irish association with minstrelsy failed to separate them from that scorn.

One of the things largely absent from Irish minstrelsy was Catholicism. In making light of African Americans, and their own culture as well, the Irish rarely mentioned religion. This was key. In antebellum America, a people's religion could not be separated from their culture.[36] The minstrel show attempted to do just that by having the Irish behave in stereotypical ways, exploiting their own cultures, while eliding their more clearly intolerable religion. Yet white Protestants could no more forget the fact that "Irish" was synonymous with "Catholic" than could the Irish forget about their Catholicism. When the minstrel show ended and the Irish performer wiped off the blackface, he traded that black mask for his true Catholic identity. Religion continued to separate the Irish even after the popularity of the minstrel show waned later in the nineteenth century. The Irish left the minstrel stage to return to their parish communities that were, if nothing else, physically separated from other peoples. The parish provided an easy way for white Protestants to identify the Irish, and other Catholic peoples later, as a nonwhite people, living in crowded, squalid neighborhoods far removed from their supposed social betters.[37]

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[36] Noll, *The Old Religion in the New World*, 122-127.

[37] James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.

Irish participation in minstrelsy complemented the way that America ordered its society, fulfilling the class stereotypes entertained by white Protestant elites. When a member of society's upper crust viewed a minstrel show, it represented a form of "slumming," an activity that did not have the same pejorative connotation in antebellum America as it does today. Beginning in the 1830s well-to-do people toured seedier sides of towns where many parishes were located, exhibiting equal measures of horror and longing for lifestyles deemed licentious. Minstrel shows sometimes made up a part of this tour, conjuring thoughts of how sad or barbaric were the lives of those the performers portrayed—and, by extension, members of that culture—must be. Through slumming and viewing minstrelsy, Protestant elites could draw the line between acceptable white behavior and the barbarity of Irish Catholics.[38]

Minstrelsy remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, even as cultural tastes in American society changed. However, as Lawrence Levine relates in *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, minstrelsy's ability to both entertain and highlight unacceptable behavior began to decline. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a new type of entertainment called vaudeville emerged that incorporated lowbrow minstrelsy, highbrow Shakespearean performances, and other variety acts. No matter vaudeville's attempts at Shakespeare, it failed to appeal to the evolving sensibilities of the upper classes and thus was labeled lowbrow. Adherents to late Victorian ideals turned to the supposedly more

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[38] The activity known as "slumming" was popularized by Charles Dickens, an English writer of vast popularity in the United States, who wrote of visiting wretched neighborhoods in cities across America during his visit in 1842. Despite the fact that Dickens's unfavorable opinion of the United States led to a fall from popularity on his part, his words inspired others to go slumming as well. See Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), 191–232. See also Anbinder, *Five Points*, 33–34; Chad C. Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3-7.

highbrow arts like painting and classical music instead of the light-hearted and silly

performances of the vaudeville stage, the last vestige of the nineteenth century minstrel

show. The rowdiness of minstrel performances separated them from the more staid

variety acts of vaudeville, which was an attempt to appeal to the family-centered values

of the late nineteenth century middle class. Still, the middle and upper classes more

regularly attended the symphony or opera, while the lower classes began to frequent the

vaudeville show, opening a gap in the cultural tastes of American society. Vaudeville

was the clear successor to minstrelsy, helping ensure negative stereotypes were

transmitted into the era of film that succeeded it, when upper class patrons who left

would be reintroduced to what it supposedly meant to be Irish Catholic.[39]

Irish Catholics participated in the evolution of vaudeville. Their involvement was

one of the reasons for the continuity between minstrel and vaudeville shows. The Irish

wrote songs, performed on the vaudeville stage, and patronized shows. Their

participation in vaudeville meant the continuation and reinforcement of Irish people's

minstrelization. For the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, vaudeville and its

minstrel show forerunner came as close to a mass culture as anything before the advent of

radio and film. They were cultural forms that did not require, or cater to, refined, literate

audiences, though the popularity of Shakespeare in some vaudeville performances

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[39] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 4, 91; Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University, 1980), 199; Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 18.

betrayed a more educated audience than members of the upper class might have cared to admit.[40]

Several factors contributed to vaudeville achieving near mass-culture status—factors that aided the development of film and radio in the twentieth century. The high cost of attending opera or symphonic performances prevented those who frequented vaudeville shows from consuming so-called higher art. Moreover, there were social stigmas attached to people who attempted to travel above their station in America's social hierarchy. Certain cultural forms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were for the select few, like painting and opera. While vaudeville attempted to appeal to the upper classes, it became a part of mass culture because the audiences were drawn from the masses and not society's elite. Everything about the Irish, who could not be considered society's elite, in vaudeville—from the ditties penned by songwriting duo Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart, to the costumes tailored to their immigrant, working class roots, to performers like George Cohan—all spoke to the lower class audiences that filled vaudeville houses. Also, because vaudeville had mass popularity, those who put on the shows consciously catered to the many. Irish Catholics were part of those masses, patronizing a cultural production where their supposed deviant behavior had become an accepted part of their character.[41]

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[40] Ibid. 70.

[41] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 143–45; Robert W. Snyder, "The Irish and Vaudeville," in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 407-410. Vaudeville also helped launch the careers of several Irish Catholic film stars, including James Cagney and Jackie Gleason.

Vaudeville helped solidify the Irish character in American culture as nonwhite by both giving part of the stage to minstrel performances, and creating an urban/ethnic style that became one of their more enduring stereotypes. One of the more popular Irish performers of vaudeville was Maggie Cline, better known as the "Irish Queen." Her songs talked about her people's supposed penchant for being behind on rent payments, or their peculiar enjoyment of violent boxing matches. Audiences, both Irish and not, learned to accept these notions as typical Irish behavior. One group they were not typical of, however, were white Protestants. No matter the development of a so-called "refined vaudeville" in the late nineteenth century, it could not break free of its ties to its nonwhite minstrel forebears, or the tenement streets that continued to separate it from proper white culture.[42] Highbrow entertainment, like opera, was intended for white Protestants, leaving vaudeville for the Irish Catholic masses.

Those masses, and mass forms of entertainment, also helped to order the United States culturally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But how did the people at each rung of the cultural ladder know their place within American society? The parish separated people into identifiable, ethnic neighborhoods, or ghettos, often with their own unique cultures, which vaudeville seemed to take pleasure in. Other outlets reinforced the cultural order, such as print media. In newspapers and magazines distributed across the nation, an ideal, Protestant, white middle class emerged, particularly in cartoons and advertising. Cartoons were especially powerful in that they could bring into stark relief the disparities between people in society. And even if they

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[42] Ibid.

intended to bring to light those disparities present in American society, cartoons still

demonstrated a clear understanding of what society deemed good (white) and bad

(everyone else). Advertising in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played

an increasing role in drawing lines in society as well. As showcases for material culture,

advertisements could show their readers what goods they needed to be proper Americans:

the right Sunday dress, a house in the best neighborhood, and adherence to a consumer

lifestyle. Advertisers manipulated American ideals, dividing people into Americans and

non-Americans based on whether or not they owned certain products (fig. 5). They

helped to prop up the social order and gave the masses a higher status for which to

strive.[43]

Figure 5. Pear's Soap Ad
Source: Robert Green, "Commodity racism for the 21st century," December 15, 2009,
http://mylifeasacat.wordpress.com/2009/12/15/commodity-racism-for-the-21st-century/

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[43] Lendol Calder, *Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 7–8.

As part of those masses, an aura of otherness stuck with the Irish despite their making fun of themselves through minstrelsy and vaudeville, participation in the Democratic Party, and filling the ranks of the Union army during the Civil War, 1863 draft riots notwithstanding.[44] Even after the Civil War, a full generation or two removed from the large waves of people that came from Ireland during the Potato Famine in the 1840s and 1850s, Irish Catholics could not fully escape from the perceived taint of Catholicism. This taint stuck with them because, particularly beginning in the 1880s, many more Catholic populations began emigrating to the United States. Eastern European Poles, French Canadians, southern European peoples like Italians, and Hispanics (primarily from Mexico) all joined the Irish and continued to make Catholicism the fastest-growing denomination of Christianity in the late nineteenth century. The arrival of more Catholic groups served as a reminder of the religious identity of the Irish Catholics. For example, in 1889 the *New York Times* reported that French Canadian Catholics outnumbered their Irish coreligionists in New England, an area that included Irish-dominated Boston.[45] Different groups of European Catholics often clashed, as did Germans and Irish over the presumed leadership of American Catholics.[46]

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[44] Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 42, 87–88, 157–163.

[45] "FRENCH CANADIAN CATHOLICS," *New York Times*, January 22, 1889, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[46] "GRIEVANCES OF GERMAN CATHOLICS," *New York Times*, August 3, 1887, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Timothy Meagher devotes an entire book to how the Irish attempted to create a pan-Catholic identity in the United States with themselves at the head, a move that angered other ethnic Catholic groups. See Timothy J. Meagher, *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880–1925* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 299; Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants*, 81.

Whatever the conflict between ethnicities, as the nineteenth century progressed

and the numbers of Catholics grew, so too did the mechanisms in place in American

society for controlling them. Two of the tools that arose in the latter half of the

nineteenth century were mass media through the thousands of newspapers then in print

across the nation, and mass culture. With the rise in newspaper readership, as well as

popularization of forms of culture such as music and the vaudeville stage, cultural

purveyors soon realized the potential of mass culture to reach vast audiences. Advances

in communication made news from all parts of the country readily available. Mass media

aided the development of mass culture in the United States in a variety of ways, begun

with the establishment of the affordable, aptly named "penny press" in the 1830s. Daily

newspapers tracked the movement of stage troupes and informed readers of cultural

events. They also reviewed shows, focused attention on the rise and fall of star

performers, and informed readers of show venues.[47]

The media helped the rise of mass culture because, to cite one example,

newspapers could tell readers if a cultural phenomenon was proper or not. By making a

spectacle of a riotous Irish stage play, or a minstrel show, they could show what

separated true Americans from the lower sorts. In other words, culture viewed through

the lens of the media could be seen as a kind of social control, warning people of the

dangers of nonwhite ethnicities influencing American culture. The way a newspaper

covered cultural performances like vaudeville or opera separated their consumers into

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[47] Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 164; David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 22-39.

categories like "highbrow" and "lowbrow." In 1903, *Harper's Weekly* commented on the

development of the cultural gap by discussing the history of the vaudeville show. The

article credits minstrelsy as vaudeville's primary forebear, since the former featured

sketches and farces in between musical performances. It then goes on to discuss the role

the Irish played in giving minstrelsy, and later vaudeville, its reputation:

> During an earlier period of its history, and, indeed until
> very recent times, variety theatres were under a ban, while
> variety actors were looked down upon with lofty disdain by
> members of the legitimate dramatic profession. This was
> largely due to the fact that variety shows, as a rule, were
> given as adjuncts to large drinking-halls, to which
> admission was either free, or secured by a ticket which also
> entitled the holder to refreshment. It was also undeniable
> that jig-dancing [or Irish dancing] and the singing of negro
> melodies in black face did not constitute as dignified a form
> of amusement as the impersonation of Shakesperean and
> other classic roles.

The article goes on to note how minstrelsy and the variety show, at least in New York,

emerged in the Irish neighborhood known as the Bowery.[48] Respectable, white, middle-

and upper-class people did not attend lowbrow entertainments, the type of performances

that became associated with Catholic peoples like the Irish. Conversely, the so-called

high art of the upper classes was considered above the comprehension of the lower sorts

that Catholic peoples often found themselves among.[49]

Beyond shaping entertainment tastes, mass media's cultural commentary also

presented what it meant to be a white American. Scholars traditionally construct analyses

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[48] "The Variety Stage: Something of its Early History in New York," *Harper's Weekly*, March 22, 1902, http://app.harpweek.com.flagship.luc.edu/IssueImagesView.asp?titleId=HW&volumeId=1902&issueId=0322&page=380, accessed November 17, 2011.

[49] Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow*, 240.

of whiteness in America through the structures of class and skin color. When culture

enters the debate, scholars often remark on how whiteness became associated with more

high-minded forms of culture, like classical music and fine art. Cultural analyses of

whiteness are closely connected to arguments based on class structures, since it was

largely the middle and upper classes that patronized the so-called fine arts. The problem

with structural analyses of whiteness is that they cannot explain cultural change,

especially in regards to minstrelsy's transition into vaudeville, and how it kept alive

negative Irish stereotypes. To date scholars look at Irish Catholics' participation in

minstrelsy as evidence that they earned white status. As minstrelsy becomes a part of

vaudeville and its popularity fades, the current literature has little left to say since it has

supposedly been determined that Irish Catholics were white by the turn of the twentieth

century. But the mark of Irish otherness, molded by minstrelsy, remained in vaudeville,

thus challenging the idea that they became truly white.[50]

When more easily discernible ethnic characteristics like religion are considered,

we see that the Irish, as well as other European Catholic groups, retained distinctions that

separated them from mainstream whiteness. The need to move beyond traditional

categories of analysis when discussing whiteness becomes all the more important given

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[50] Historians like Noel Ignatiev and David Roediger analyze the impact that blackface minstrelsy had on the formation of racial attitudes, particularly for Irish Catholics. The point for them is that blackface minstrelsy falls within a pantheon of behaviors Irish Catholics used in order to become acceptable whites. Clearly, however, the story does not end with blackface minstrelsy. For more, see Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 42; and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2003), 115–23; Anbinder, *Five Points*, 189–190; John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Anglo Relations in New York City," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Bayor and Meagher, 142–143; Toll, "Social Commentary in Nineteenth-Century White Minstrelsy," in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*, ed. Bean, Hatch, and McNamara, 96–101; Rohs, *Eccentric Nation*, 73–120; Mick Moloney, "Irish-American Popular Music," in *Making the Irish American*, ed. Lee and Casey, 382–384.

that social perceptions of skin color operated as a shifting cultural aesthetic by which to judge people in America. In vaudeville, as in minstrelsy before it, examples of nonwhite behavior played out on stage that instructed audiences on how not to act. Thus, whiteness was elevated in all cultural works, be they music or visual. The elevation of whiteness lasted into the twentieth century with the onset of film as a popular cultural medium. Filmmakers also provided images of white superiority. People of color or lower socioeconomic status, foreigners, or any figures that did not fit the stereotypical American ideal were cast as subservient to those with whiter faces.[51]

Whatever their approaches to analyzing whiteness, what scholars have generally missed has been a thorough account of the impact of religion on whiteness in movies. Many have hinted at its importance, some even mentioning how Protestantism comprised a major part of what it meant to be white on film. So accepted was the connection between Protestantism and whiteness that the close correlation between the two in American culture went unquestioned. Early movies established the connection between Protestantism in whiteness, making clear that heroes and heroines were typically not Catholic. When filmmakers displayed Protestantism in tandem with their images of ideal whites, they represented what it meant to be white in America. That Protestantism should hold sway over American culture for so long and last into the introduction of movies becomes all the more puzzling when considering the influence of Irish Catholics on American culture. Yet many Irish performers left their religious views off of the stage and out of their performances in their attempt to become more American. Therefore,

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[51] Daniel Bernardi, ed., *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U. S. Cinema* (New Brunswick, N. J.: 1996), 4.

Catholic characters could not adhere to their religion and expect good things to happen to them on film.

Yet the question of whether people crossed the so-called color line by choice is not the matter at hand. Clearly, white status held advantages for those who could pass as white, that is, those whose skin was light enough, who belonged to the right political associations, and who obtained enough wealth. These factors point to the malleability of color, as previously discussed by scholars. Instead, by examining the role that religion played in making someone white or not-white, this dissertation shows the color line to be more expansive than historians have previously argued. For historians, aspects of whiteness changed as various peoples overcame the barriers preventing them from participating in American society. For Catholics, at least in terms of American Culture, their religion remained an obstacle. For being a Catholic or a Protestant in America involved a set of decisions whose implications point to deep-seated sentiments and conflicts older than this nation itself. Thus if a Catholic immigrant to the United States attempted to switch his or her religious loyalty, the act had more implications than helping to obtain a competitive advantage in American society. Apostasy could mean alienation from family members, separation from peer groups, and loss of an identity. Therefore, at least in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many Catholics remained faithful to their religion and thus not fully white.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when thousands of new Catholics joined their Irish cousins in the United States, ruling class whites drew these

lines more distinctly than ever.[52] These decades provide a key moment at which to begin

an analysis of the effect that film had on Catholics' ability to enter into mainstream

American society. Not only was the Catholic population rising at this time, but the era

also saw the introduction of film to America. Additionally, political movements spread

during the late nineteenth-century in America, which sought to address perceived

problems concomitant not only with a burgeoning foreign population, but also with

growth in urban, industrial centers. Progressives, and later Populists, thought that

America had undergone a loss of the agrarian spirit supposedly integral to the thinking of

founding fathers like Thomas Jefferson. The city, with its urban slums full of nonwhites

feeding the industrial machine was deemed anathema by Populists and Progressives alike,

though the two groups reacted to these problems in different ways.[53]

     Considering the similarities between Progressive and Populist thought bears fruit

when one considers their influence on films and filmmakers. As historian John Belton

put it, "The ideologies of populism and progressivism outlived the rise and fall of the

Progressive and Populist political parties. It is primarily as myths that they found their

way into motion picture narratives." And as Belton goes on to relate, the theme of

something lost in America, and of heroes that hearken back to an allegedly simpler time,

remained a stalwart part of moviemaking throughout the twentieth century.[54] Catholics

certainly did not fit the mold of America's heroic, mythic past, especially not those

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[52] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 203–22.

[53] Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 22–42.

[54] John Belton, ed., *Movies and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 4.

starving Irish Catholics who came during the Potato Famine in the mid-nineteenth

century or the "criminal" Italians who began to arrive in the early 1900s.

Still, the relationship between Catholicism and the onset of film as a visceral and

powerful cultural medium in America was not always one of mutual horror. Roman

Catholicism, with its pomp and circumstance, related well to the spectacle that film

became. Instead, the image of Catholics in the United States as reproduced in the media

and other cultural outlets has been a complex one. The enthusiasm with which the lower

classes greeted film as it expanded into working-class neighborhoods through

nickelodeons and storefront theaters spoke to the appeal of film to the masses in the

United States.[55] Still, despite the numbers of Catholics swelling the lower classes at the

same time film took hold, few early movies depicted Catholics, and when they did,

utilized nonwhite stereotypes developed in minstrelsy and held over from vaudeville.

Anti-Catholicism was never distant from the minds of many influential thinkers in

the United States. In the early decades of the twentieth century, eugenics influenced the

way in which ethnicity was conceived. By measuring physical characteristics and

intelligence, eugenics purported, through pseudo-empirical means, to make a

scientifically provable hierarchy of peoples, with Anglo-Saxons ensconced firmly at the

top.[56] Eugenicist books like Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* lamented

Catholicism's tendency to break down racial distinctions. Grant discussed the links

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[55] Given that Irish Catholics, as members of the lower classes, helped make music and stage productions popular in the United States, it should come as no surprise that they helped make movies successful early on. Indeed, Lary May gives credit to the working classes for providing the impetus for the early expansion of movies as an industry. See May, *Screening out the Past*, 43–59.

[56] Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xii.

between religion and race when reviewing the "Neanderthal" Irish and their

qualifications for separate statehood. He found that the Irish were "not entitled to

independent national existence on the ground of race," owing to the fact that they looked

too much like the English. However, he goes on to say, "if there is any ground for a

political separation from England, it must rest . . . on religion, a basis for political

combinations now happily obsolete in communities well advanced in culture."[57] For

middle- and upper-class whites in American society, Grant's words reflected a

condescension that formed one aspect of the social order in the early twentieth century.

Though *The Passing of the Great Race* was never widely read in America due to its anti-

Christian overtones, it did influence American thought. Many saw a problem in the

rising tide of immigration in the early decades of the twentieth century, including

thousands of Catholics, and Grant's work influenced the formation of anti-immigrant

legislation. Eugenics also served the purposes of certain Progressives who saw it as their

duty to mold the large immigrant communities, like Irish Catholics, into something more

American. Progressive eugenicists like Madison Grant developed a racial hierarchy of

peoples that led in 1924 to the placing of quotas on the number of people allowed from

so-called nonwhite countries, including those from Catholic lands.[58]

Some Catholics did not sit idly by while non-Catholics utilized racist rhetoric and

tried to assimilate them into American culture and society. During the decades bridging

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[57] Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 59, 95–96.

[58] Rivka Shpak-Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 2; Ordover, *American Eurgenics*, 25; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 87-90.

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a few Catholic apologists spoke out publicly for

the rightful place of Catholics in America. They denounced the intolerance toward

Catholicism in America, and sought to appeal to the Christian sensibilities of Americans

for acceptance. Their attempts may have met with some success, but their impact was

small. And they did little to counter the stereotypes that came out of the nineteenth

century about Catholics and their communities.[59] No matter how strenuously Catholics

spoke out in defense of their own innate American characteristics, or wrote about their

Americanness in novels like J. Godfrey Raupert's *Roads to Rome: Being Personal*

Records of Some of the More Recent Converts to the Catholic Faith[60], their impact on

public opinion was negligible. As a culture and people they could not shake the negative

connotations associated with them stemming from a long history of English prejudice,

and more recent minstrelsy and its vaudeville successor.[61] Early films of the twentieth

century demonstrate a codified set of stereotypes, or language, that Catholic thinkers

attempted to address and by which Catholic peoples on-screen were identified.

These stereotypes, already made powerful by popular cultural forms of the

nineteenth century, became that much more far-reaching with film. As *Moving Picture*

World proclaimed in 1910 about the discursive function of movies, "What is wanted is a

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[59] Examples of pro-Catholic tracts and lectures of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries include Thomas O'Gorman, *How Catholics Come to Be Misunderstood: A Lecture* (American series of publications, no. 3. [St. Paul]: Catholic Truth Society, 1890); John Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society: Lectures and Addresses* (Chicago: D.H. McBride, 1897); Bernard W. Kelly, *Some Great Catholics of Church and State* (New York: Benziger, 1909).

[60] J. Godfrey Raupert, *Roads to Rome: Being Personal Records of Some of the More Recent Converts to the Catholic Faith* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901).

[61] Moloney, "Irish-American Popular Music," in *Making the Irish American*, ed. Lee and Casey, 381–98.

single word that is etymologically correct and that will fit the dignity to which the motion

picture is so rapidly attaining as a large factor in education—no less than as the most

popular form of amusement." Film delighted audiences and critics alike from the

beginning.[62] The magazine's assertion suggests that not only was the effect of movies

widespread, but that filmmakers tried to elevate their art to a higher plane than the

vaudeville and minstrel shows that preceded them. Early nickelodeons showed moving

pictures meant to appeal to the sensibilities of the working class, the social strata of many

Catholics, and thus were light hearted and did not usually involve moralistic messages,

thus reinforcing nonwhite stereotypes about the Irish and other Catholic peoples.[63]

However, the revenue generated by movies led to the development of a motion picture

industry, one that hoped to attract fans of the opera by telling consumers of highbrow

culture that going to the cinema was akin to a night of Puccini.[64] Movies never replaced

opera, but neither did opera hinder the extreme success of film, and as audiences

diversified economically, the implications of the portrayal of Catholic peoples became

more important.

Early films catered to nonwhite stereotypes about Catholic peoples, which

featured their overcrowded neighborhoods, their penchant for violence and drinking, and

their associations with crime, all part of the Catholic character in the United States as

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[62] *Moving Picture World*, August 6, 1910, 292; Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 170.

[63] Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University, 1980), 211.

[64] Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1-2; See also May, *Screening Out the Past*, 147–66.

seen by white Protestants. One of the first Catholic peoples in the United States

portrayed in film were the Italians in *The Black Hand*, made in 1906 and produced by the

American Mutoscope and Biograph Company. It was the same company at which a

young actor-turned-director named D. W. Griffith got his start in 1908.[65] As the opening

lines of *The Black Hand* attest, the movie is based on historical events.[66] Newspapers of

the early 1900s often reported on the activities of an Italian criminal group known as

"Mano Negra," or the Black Hand. As portrayed in the film, one of the favored tactics of

this criminal enterprise was to blackmail local businesses into giving tribute, usually a

large sum of money. If the money was not paid, the Black Hand threatened violent

retaliation.[67] Residents of ethnic neighborhoods in urban areas knew of the Black Hand's

reputation, and either gave up their money, or resorted to desperate acts.[68]

The Black Hand, and the movie of the same name, as the newspapers suggest,

was situated in an Italian neighborhood in New York (though the Black Hand operated in

most cities with Italian neighborhoods). The makers of the film used a *montage* of

location shots to show the squalor of the neighborhood where the criminals plotted their

devious schemes. Additionally, the film depicts Black Hand members in their hideout

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[65] http://www.biographcompany.com/history_home.html, accessed January 19, 2012.

[66] *The Black Hand*, directed by Wallace McCutcheon (1906, New York: American Mutoscope and Biograph Company), available on YouTube.

[67] Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 31.

[68] One person who resorted to a desperate act was New Yorker Enrico Pavone in 1906 when he shot and killed Nunziato Legato, a suspected member of the Black Hand. "KILLS BLACK HAND AGENT WHO DEMANDED MONEY: Intended Victim of Tribute to the Italian Society Revolts. Street Crowds in a Panic. A Fresh Demand for $500 Accompanied by a Threat, Causes Calabrian Stenographer to Shoot," *New York Times*, November 14, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

where they regularly partake of an ever-present bottle of liquor.[69] The activities of these

criminal characters foreshadow those of another film with Catholic characters, D. W.

Griffith's *Intolerance: Love's Struggle throughout the Ages*. While the members of the

Black Hand drink more frequently than characters in *Intolerance*, both films make it a

point to picture their characters consuming alcohol. Additionally, the two films feature

the main characters engaging in criminal activity in tenement neighborhoods, a mainstay

of Catholic depictions in popular culture. While the film does not feature any Catholic

references (priest, statues of the Virgin, Crucifixes, etc), those viewing it in 1906 likely

knew what church Italians attended.[70]

In addition to those seen in *The Black Hand*, more direct references to Catholic

deviancy are found in early American movies. One example is 1911's *Cupid and the

Comet*. Like many films of the day, including *The Black Hand*, *Cupid and the Comet*

was short. Nevertheless, it used what many audiences in the era considered risqué

comedic devices to drive home its point. Instead of the farcical Paddy and Biddy of

minstrel fame, the producers make light of Catholics by portraying an effeminate priest as

one of main characters. Yet, the comedy used in the film hearkens to earlier stage

performances from Irish Catholics, which did little to garner respectability for their

religion. When the two lovers that the film focuses on come to the priest to get married,

the young lady is dressed as a boy and the priest hesitates to marry the two. Director

Alice Guy used cross-dressing characters to challenge gender norms. But even her

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[69] *The Black Hand*, 1906.

[70] *Intolerance: Love's Struggle throughout the Ages*, directed by D. W. Griffith (1916, Culver City, CA: Triangle Film Corporation), DVD.

effeminate priest could not consent to the marriage of the two main characters until the young lady reveals her true identity. So while one might point to *Cupid and the Comet* as being forward thinking in some respects, Catholics were nevertheless ridiculed.[71]

The most prominent early film that showed the semiotics of both the ridicule and the backwardness that Americans viewed Catholicism with was 1916's *Intolerance: Love's Struggle throughout the Ages*. It was directed by prolific filmmaker D. W. Griffith, who wished to repeat the success of 1915's *Birth of a Nation*. Further, Griffith hoped the proselytizing tone of *Intolerance* might make some forget about the controversy generated by the 1915 film's cloaked Klansmen galloping to the rescue of white womanhood. *Birth of a Nation* garnered Griffith fame and fortune at a time when those who flocked to see the film deemed as fact the negative racial stereotypes portrayed in the film. Nonetheless, because he was a filmmaker with progressive social views and a staunch Methodist, Griffith was sensitive to criticism. For Griffith, financial success paled in importance to criticism of his masterwork. His desire for redemption drove the production of *Intolerance* in its large budget, subject matter, and scope. No matter how prodigal Griffith was while making his second epic film, *Intolerance* flopped. Despite the titillating special effects he pioneered in making the film, people simply did not wish to spend their money on over three hours of preaching about the evils of prejudice.[72]

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[71] "Cupid and the Comet (1911)," IMDb, accessed on January 20, 2012, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1226294/.

[72] Richard Schickel, *D. W. Griffith: An American Life* (Indianapolis, IN: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1996), 303.

Divided into four historical periods—contemporary America, ancient Babylon, sixteenth-century France, and Jesus' Palestine—the movie did what its title suggested: it brought examples of intolerant behavior from history to the silver screen. *Intolerance* featured massive sets, thousands of extras, innovative special effects, and star power in the form of Mae Marsh, Lillian Gish, and Douglas Fairbanks. Some of the more familiar parts of the movie involved the contemporary story of the Dear One, the contemporary section's lead character, played by Mae Marsh. Forced, after a strike, to leave her idyllic home in the factory town where she lived with her father, the Dear One moves to the city and innocently—one could say naively—immerses herself in urban pursuits, whereupon a series of misfortunes befall her that she appears ill equipped to handle.[73]

One distinctive feature of the Dear One is her Catholicism. In the Dear One's scenes, Griffith establishes *mise-en-scéne* with motifs that he drew from stereotypes about Catholic populations that were commonly believed in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. These motifs include the overcrowded tenement setting in which the Dear One lives, the Dear One's male counterpart named simply the Boy (also the Dear One's love interest) and his involvement in crime, the casualness with which people of her status consumed alcohol, and visible markers of the characters' Catholicity. In the Dear One's tiny apartment, a statue of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus symbolizes her Papist leanings—a statue that is later blasted apart by gunfire during a close-up that features only the figure of the Mother of Jesus. Then, as the Boy prepares

[73] *Intolerance*, 1916.

for execution for a murder he did not commit, a priest in full ceremonial garb comes to hear his last confession and walk the Boy to the gallows.[74]

Everything about the Catholicism seen in *Intolerance* marks it as "other." From the priest ministering to the Boy to the Dear One's pitiful circumstances, Catholics fell outside of traditional constructions of what it meant to be white, middle- and upper-class Americans. While Griffith presented traditional white values in a critical light by displaying members of higher socioeconomic status as moral busybodies responsible for many of the Dear One's troubles, the distinction between respectable and disreputable is obvious nonetheless. In Griffith's on-screen representation of the problems in American society, one does not see Catholics living in spacious homes with a wide selection clean clothing. In the film, only Catholics dance around their apartments, drink beer with their meals, or give their babies a bit of whiskey to soothe teething gums. The Dear One's behavior leads the band of middle- and upper-class women whom Griffith labels as the "Uplifters" to take the Dear One's baby on grounds of her unfitness as a parent. Again, Griffith does not condone the actions of the "Uplifters," and instead expects the audience to sympathize with the awful circumstances of the Dear One. But it is the Catholic who must wear the cloak of the pauper and beg social betters, like the governor, for help. For all the moralizing intended by the director, Catholics still come off as a people separated from mainstream whiteness.[75]

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

Whether Griffith intended to demean Catholics by placing them among the lower classes in *Intolerance* or not, he certainly drew on stereotypes about Catholic populations that predated the United States itself. Indeed, one of the four plotlines in the film involves the persecution of French Huguenots by the French Catholic monarchy, culminating in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, when about 2,000 Parisian Protestants were killed.[76] Because Griffith sought to highlight examples of intolerant behavior, he identifies the one responsible for the outbreak of violence as "Catherine de Medici, queen mother who covers her political intolerance beneath the cloak of the great Catholic religion." Despite such directorial attempts at moderation, the audience is meant to sympathize with Protestants, especially martyrs like "the great Protestant leader, Admiral Coligny, head of the Huguenot party," who were being slaughtered by bloodthirsty Catholics. Not only does the intolerance of Catholics lead to the death of "the great Protestant leader," but also the slaying of Brown Eyes, another female character in the movie in the sympathetic mold of the Dear One.[77] The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre might have been a distant historical memory to audiences in 1916, but the on-screen murder and destruction played to what audiences expected from Catholic populations, even those of European descent. The massacre, along with the behaviors that led to so much trouble for the Dear One and the Boy, form a series of tropes that separated Catholics in America from normative white society. In *Intolerance*

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[76] For more on the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, see John Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe: From the Renaissance to the Age of Napoleon*, vol. 1 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 145–48.

[77] *Intolerance*, 1916.

Griffith argued that that negative Catholic behavior stretched back centuries, and that

these were well-formed sets of ideas that America inherited from the Old World.

Other early films contained negative portrayals of Catholics. Large-scale

cinematic productions like *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), starring action star Douglas

Fairbanks, presents Catholic *mise-en-scéne* with those professing the faith as helpless,

whose only salvation lies with the caballeros, or the gentleman class of mid-nineteenth-

century California.[78] The caballeros were the swashbuckling equivalent of *Intolerance*'s

"Uplifters," but without the moralizing agenda of their female counterparts, and cast in a

more positive light. At one point in the film Fairbanks's title character leads the

caballeros in fighting the "oppression" of the colonial government. Reviewers reacted to

the way Don Vega/Zorro was "so moved by the tyranny of his country's rulers"[79] who

"devoted themselves mostly to [preventing] the oppression of the poor."[80] In the end,

Zorro cannot defeat the forces of oppression on his own. The combined efforts of the

gentlemen of California are required to win the day and protect the destitute, the native

populations, and the clergy.[81]

The few Franciscan friars seen in *The Mark of Zorro* represent the only overt

references to Catholicism made in the film. And when they do appear on screen, again,

they appear helpless, including one prominent scene in which a friar is whipped in the

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[78] *The Mark of Zorro*, directed by Fred Niblo (1920: Douglas Fairbanks Pictures Corporation), DVD; Alison McMahan, *Alice Guy Blanché: Lost Visionary of the Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 233.

[79] "THE SCREEN," *New York Times*, November 29, 1920, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[80] Mae Tinée, "He's Back Again! The Good Old Doug of Days Gone By!" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 17, 1920; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[81] *The Mark of Zorro*, 1920.

public square.[82] That so few Catholic images appear in the film is puzzling when one

considers the history of the colonial society portrayed. Spanish California was replete

with Catholic traditions, with Spanish missions among the native populations that

predated the arrival of settlers. Catholicism was integral to a society and culture founded

by Spain, a nation that the pope called the Defender of the Faith in the sixteenth

century.[83] Of course, as an American-made movie, no good gentlemen in *The Mark of

Zorro* swears fealty to the Roman faith as one might expect of people living in the time

and place the movie was set. Indeed, the audience does not see a church until the

climactic chase toward the end in which colonial authorities pursue Zorro through town.[84]

Instead, the only characters in *The Mark of Zorro* who the audience can clearly identify

as Catholic suffer, and are powerless to protect themselves, mirroring the treatment of the

Catholic Dear One in *Intolerance*.

Another movie featuring Catholics and set in a far-off land, 1923's *The White

Sister* treated audiences to a great deal more religious *mise-en-scéne* than did *The Mark of

Zorro*. Indeed, *The White Sister* superficially offers sympathy to Catholic rituals and

traditions. Starring Lillian Gish as Donna Angela, a love-struck heiress turned pauper by

a jealous sister, the film features an Italian culture steeped in the Roman faith. One of the

first scenes in the film is Angela's father praying in a private chapel inside their palace.

Later on, when her lover Captain Giovanni Severi leaves on an expedition to Africa and

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846–1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1–5, 37.

[84] *The Mark of Zorro*, 1920.

is reported dead, Angela decides to become a nun. Her decision is foreshadowed when

she sees a portrait of herself wearing all white robes, which she comments makes her

look like "a woman too holy for a man to possess." She becomes, like the painting's title,

the White Sister, dedicated to serving in memory of her fallen lover. When it turns out

that Captain Severi is alive, and has crossed deserts and oceans to return to her, Angela

remains faithful to her vows despite still being in love.[85]

Angela's steadfastness in her vows appealed to audiences generally. Indeed, in

reviewing *The White Sister* the *Chicago Daily Tribune*'s Mae Tinée thought, "Regardless

of church or creed, every honest person who views 'The White Sister' will pronounce it

one of the most exquisite photoplays ever screened." Tinée went on to praise Lillian

Gish's acting performance and virtually ignore the fact that she played a nun.[86] For a

film that showed Catholicism in a largely sympathetic light, Tinée's oversight highlights

some of the problems with *The White Sister*. For instance, not once are the words

"Catholic" or "Catholicism" mentioned. Instead, the viewer is repeatedly reminded that

the events take place in Italy, in other words, where it is safe to maintain devotion to the

"Holy Church" because that is what Italians do. Also, while obviously a loyal and devout

nun, Angela's motivations for entering the convent are not religious. Another plot point,

though unfulfilled, is when Captain Severi exclaims his intolerance for Angela being a

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[85] *The White Sister*, directed by Henry King (1923, Inspiration Pictures), DVD.

[86] Mae Tinée, "'White Sister' Photoplay of Rare Appeal: One of Most Exquisite Ever Screened,", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 12, 1923, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

nun when he says, "The tyranny of the church—enslaving women who should be wives and mothers!"[87]

Intolerance and The White Sister are the more prominent examples of the few films from the early decades of the twentieth century that establish the semiotics of how filmmakers will present references to Catholicism. In them, we see the development of a movie language that borrows from anti-Catholic traditions developed in American culture and media, which placed nonwhite Catholics beyond normative society. In one sense, Intolerance and The Mark of Zorro evoke a sort of sympathy, in a condescending manner, for oppressed Catholic people like the Dear One and Franciscan friars. These characters are helpless to effect change to their situation, and must turn to upper-class people in positions of power to rescue them from degradation. When we see Catholics on-screen in dire straits, it reinforces the idea that they occupy the lowest positions in an American society dominated by ideas of scientific racism and white Protestant prerogatives. And the fact that so few prominent examples of Catholics exist in early films appears at odds with demographic reality, as the Irish were joined by Italians, French, Poles, and other Catholic peoples by the millions.

Still, what few early examples existed of Catholics in movies stirred some of the faithful to question whether or not their treatment was fair. In Ave Maria Magazine in 1928, Father Denis A. McCarthy commented, "People of Irish descent . . . have seen in such portrayals an insidious attack upon the good name of the Irish and Catholic element." McCarthy reacted to the stereotypes mentioned above, but in his words one

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[87] The White Sister, 1923.

can see the equation of Catholic and Irish. Thus negative views of one led to poor

treatment of the other, and vice versa. Further, McCarthy went on to decry how African

Americans were depicted on film, calling to mind the long associations between the Irish

and blacks as a result of the legacy of minstrelsy, and that "a goodly number of them are

our fellow Catholics." Despite acknowledging a greater "influence" for Catholics in the

United States, the underlying truth of McCarthy's article was that by 1928 there still

existed ties to nonwhite groups, kept alive on film, that separated European Catholics

from mainstream whiteness.[88]

In the decades to come, Catholics attempted to use their demographic power to

exert influence over the ways in which they appeared in movies. They responded to

negative stereotypes on-screen, such as violent Catholics murdering French Huguenots in

Intolerance. That such scenes made their way into major productions speaks to the

ineffectualness of Catholic thinkers around the turn of the twentieth century who

attempted to place Catholicism in a traditional American context. Over a century of

Harper's Weekly cartoons, Paddy and Biddy, and the vaudeville stage all proved major

stumbling blocks to Catholic acceptance. And already by the end of the 1920s,

Americans began to realize the discursive power of the moving picture in showing who

was acceptable and who was not. Catholics' solution to the problems inherent in their

representations in American culture was not to turn inward to the religious traditions that

made them distinct. Instead, a flowering of Catholic participation took place by both

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[88] Denis A. McCarthy, "The Moving Picture and the Negro," *Ave Maria Magazine*, September 8, 1928, 307–309.

clergy and laypeople in the fledgling movie industry in order to adopt the mantle of white

American status.

CHAPTER THREE

MAKING THE CATHOLIC WHITE

THE RISE OF CATHOLIC INFLUENCE ON THE MOVIES, 1928–49

> Whether we like it or not, the motion picture has become a powerful agent of the material civilization we live amidst; and constant, rapid improvement of the art of photoplay promises even greater influence for it in the future. The suggestion that it be seized upon as a medium for diffusing appreciation of Catholic Truth is being strongly urged by many persons.
>
> — Editorial, *Ave Maria Magazine*, 1928[1]

The continued presence of negative stereotypes in the film presentation of Roman

Catholicism in the decades spanning the Great Depression and the beginning of the Cold

War constituted what this study will call a "minstrelization" of Catholic culture. While

attempting to be more acceptable to general American audiences and to combat those

stereotypes, the movie industry saw a rise in Catholic influence as representatives of the

religion reached out to Hollywood seeking to control their image. Using the

demographic strength they had gained prior to the 1920s, Catholics seized the

opportunity provided by "a medium for diffusing appreciation" in order to present their

case for access to white privileges previously denied to them. Despite New York

governor Alfred E. Smith's (himself a Catholic) failed presidential campaign in 1928,

Catholics were able to wield political and cultural power through the Legion of Decency

in order to ensure that they were well represented in the most popular cultural

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[1] "Notes and Remarks," *Ave Maria Magazine*, February 11, 1928, 183.

phenomenon of the 1930s and 1940s. During that period, Catholics working in the movie

industry answered the general cultural call for national loyalty during the Great

Depression and World War II, making their on-screen portrayal of their religion more

positive to general audiences, but at the cost of translating age-old negative stereotypes

into success at the box office. Those old stereotypes, like the urban parish, became a

charming backdrop meant to show American society that Catholics were harmless.

Catholic culture on film thus became a parody of itself, much like the minstrel performers

of the nineteenth century who parodied black culture, performing a religion in a way

meant to be pleasing to non-Catholics while making themselves more acceptable white

Americans. Because of that minstrelization, Catholics in American culture were not

taken seriously and their gains of the 1920s faded with the onset of the Cold War.

The 1920s were a time of Catholic ascendancy in both American society and

American culture. As the film industry developed, both lay Catholics and the clergy

realized that the movies they frequented contained many negative stereotypes prevalent

since the nineteenth century. Early films portrayed Catholic people as drunken, poor,

brutish, and violent, and the clergy as helpless creatures in a cruel world. One Catholic

reaction to these stereotypes was to become increasingly involved in a movie industry

responsible for proliferating these negative images. Up to the 1920s, film industry

leaders included staunch Methodist D. W. Griffith and the Episcopalian-raised Cecil B.

DeMille, whose movies focused on broad Christian themes. DeMille's movies, such as

The Sign of the Cross (1933), provided positive cinematic Christian themes, and inspired

Catholic action in opposition to negative portrayals of Catholics in other films. Indeed,

Father Thomas F. Little, Assistant Executive Secretary of the Legion of Decency, credited DeMille's work as one of the impetuses behind the growth of the Legion of Decency, an industry watchdog organization that sought to influence Catholic movie viewing habits.[1]

The Legion was a nationwide organization that monitored films and made suggestions regarding movies they deemed fit not only for Catholic audiences, but for the general public as well. At its height, the organization maintained offices in most major cities across the country, and the pronouncements from its headquarters in New York influenced the entertainment choices of millions of Catholics. The Legion made its power felt most when it convinced Joseph I. Breen, a Catholic and the director of the Production Code Administration (PCA), to stop productions virtually before cameras began rolling. They could cut short a film—or at least demand that the studio remove dialog, scenes, or entire sections—because studios often submitted scripts for Legion review in order to avoid sanctions. Finally, they could also force studios to take movies out of circulation.[2] For movies that were filmed, the Legion used a board of reviewers composed of both priests and laypeople that rated films. Those with an "A" were

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[1] Letter of Father Thomas F. Little to Cecil B. DeMille, January 4, 1951, Box 1, Folder 1, Individual Correspondence Series, Martin J. Quigley Papers, Georgetown University Library. Quigley's devotion to decency in movies was sincere; he even published books on the subject. See Martin J. Quigley, *Decency in Motion Pictures* (New York: MacMillan, 1937). For more on the Legion of Decency, see Gregory D. Black's *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2] One example of many can be found in a letter of Joseph Breen to Martin Quigley, dated March 1, 1935, where Breen informs Quigley of the plan to cut short the run of a number of films based on a number of letters written to William Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), by members of the Legion of Decency. They include such titles as *Born to be Bad*, *Affairs of a Gentleman*, *Women in His Life*, and *Hips, Hips, Hooray*. See Box 1, Folder 3, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

acceptable for general audiences, "B" were for adults only, and "C" were deemed

objectionable for all moviegoers. That system came about only after arguments between

local boards, the Chicago Council of the Legion of Decency prominent among them, and

the national office. Though the ratings were tinkered with over the decades, the Legion

of Decency developed a streamlined method of film analysis utilized for decades in the

mid-twentieth century.[3]

The Legion of Decency worked closely in the development of the Production

Codes, and the codes carried the approval of the Church hierarchy in America. In fact,

the formation of the Legion of Decency as a Catholic-led film censorship board was one

of the reasons for the genesis of the code. The authors of the code, Martin J. Quigley,

publisher of Hollywood trade magazines and Father Daniel Lord, were among the first

members of the Legion. The Legion and the code were established with the assent and

involvement of the American Catholic Bishop's Council, which met in Cincinnati in

1928 to ratify the formation of a National Legion of Decency. Cincinnati was chosen

because of the interest shown by its archbishop, John T. McNicholas, who was one of the

first highly placed Catholics in the American Church hierarchy to express unease about

the influence of movies on audiences. McNicholas was also the chairman of the Catholic

Bishops' Committee on Motion Pictures. Throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s,

despite squabbles between various local Legion boards, Catholics worried about movie

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[3] Ibid. Black sees the Legion as little more than moralizing busybodies who sought to overly control movie content. I argue, however, that the organization was largely ineffectual after the 1940s, given the overall liberal turn of movies from the 1950s onward.

content could turn to a top-down, streamlined approach for movie vetting.[4] Thus by

1928, both the clergy and lay Catholics became involved in making their image more

palatable to Americans generally through the medium of film.

The founding of the Legion of Decency and the Production Code played key roles

in helping to make Catholics on film more palatable to American audiences. Catholic

involvement in the film industry came to be personified in two individuals, Martin J.

Quigley and Joseph Breen. Personal friends, these two laypeople worked closely with

the Legion of Decency and the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Motion Pictures. They

both held influential positions in Hollywood: Breen as president of the Production Code

Administration and Quigley as publisher of *Motion Picture Herald*. They developed a

system during the 1930s: the Legion reviewed films, the bishops made their

recommendations to Breen about which movies should be censored, and then Quigley's

Motion Picture Herald covered those movies deemed appropriate. At the same time,

each one of them and the bodies they represented disseminated their film

pronouncements to anyone they thought might be affected by supposedly incendiary

material, such as studio executives and, more importantly, audiences.[5]

For Catholics, in terms of their place in America overall, 1928 was a pivotal year.

Not only were the Production Codes written, but it also marked the selection of Al Smith

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[4] At least initially, the Bishops' Committee and the Legion operated separately, each producing their own pronouncements on film. Though they supported each others' work, the bishops produced their own literature for a time on the supposed evils of film. Later on, the bishops deferred to the Legion. See Box 1, Folder 30, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

[5] Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975*; For more on Joseph Breen, see Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and& the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

as the Democratic nominee for president of the United States. He, too, supported the

Legion of Decency.[6] Smith's presidential nomination was the end result of nearly a

century of Catholic demographic growth and participation in the Democratic party.

Living in urban environments where parishes did much to identify Catholic others inside

and white Protestants outside, they made political gains in city governments through a

system of patronage.[7] In politics, as well as in culture, Irish Catholics attempted to make

their presence heard. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

mostly Irish Catholic political machines sprang up in urban areas across the North. The

machine politics used by the Irish was rife with graft and corruption, but with it they

secured political might that led to the takeover of the Democratic party in several urban

areas. Al Smith rose to prominence in New York's machine and became the Democratic

presidential nominee in 1928.[8]

Seemingly gone were the days when Catholics could only look to their parish

neighbors for acceptance in an America that labeled them as racially other.[9] Two years

prior to Smith's presidential campaign, he attended the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago,

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[6] Al Smith served on the Archdiocesan Council of the Legion of Decency in New York. Letter of Al Smith to Martin Quigley, December 13th, 1934, Box 2, Folder 9, Subject Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

[7] Eileen M. McMahon, *What Parish Are You From? A Chicago Irish Community and Race Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 56.

[8] Chris McNickle, "Overview: When New York Was Irish, and After," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 352.

[9] Indeed, 1928 saw Catholics anticipating a new found acceptance among their Protestant neighbors in America, which of course did not translate into success for Al Smith's presidential campaign. See "Our Splendid Opportunity," *Ave Maria Magazine*, January 28, 1928, 117.

a meeting of Catholics from around the world that included a visit by the Pope.[10] The

event, a sort of world's fair for Catholicism, was covered heavily by the press, both

during the lead-up and while it occurred. Filling venues like Soldier Field, Catholics

could no longer be dismissed (fig. 6):

Figure 6. Nuns Seated at 1926 Eucharistic Congress at Soldier Field, Chicago
Source: Diana Dretske, "Eucharistic Congress 1926," *Illuminating Lake Country, Illinois History* (blog), January 31, 2012,
http://lakecountyhistory.blogspot.com/2009/02/eucharistic-congress-1926.html.

The photograph illustrates one reason that Catholicism looked good on film. The

uniform rows of nuns and other clergy members that appeared in newspapers around the

world were, if nothing else, aesthetically pleasing. Their distinctive costuming and

rituals also could make for easily identifiable symbols of Christianity. But when it came

to the way that members of the religion were portrayed on film, Catholics used social,

cultural, and political gains during the 1920s in order to affect movie productions and

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[10] "Governor Smith Will Attend The Eucharistic Congress," *New York Times*, Jun 10, 1926, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

bend film to an agenda that went beyond aesthetics or moralizing and policing cinema.

Later films of the 1930s and 1940s continued the trend toward a more acceptable

Catholicism in American culture, one that catered to constructions of American

whiteness. These decades offer some of the most indelible Catholic images of the

twentieth century—but at what cost? In order to demonstrate their qualifications for

American status, as the Irish did in the nineteenth century, Catholics on film had to

downplay many of the very aspects that made them Catholic. What audiences were given

were films where characters' Catholicism was deemphasized in order to focus on parts of

their religion that could fit with broad constructions of Americanism, particularly

highlighting Catholic participation in society during the Great Depression and World War

II.

One of the steps undertaken to bridge the gap between the distinctiveness of

Catholicism and the incorporation of white ideals into Catholics' cultural image was the

development of the Production Codes. Lord and Quigley's collaboration symbolized the

Catholic move toward Hollywood, with Lord representing the Church and Quigley the

movie industry. Lord was a logical choice to work with Quigley, given the years he spent

previously working to combat indecency in literature.[11] The Production Code regulated,

in part, the portrayal of religion for both Catholics and Protestants. In a sense, the code

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[11] The papers of Martin J. Quigley are replete with references to the subject of whether it was he or Lord who authored the Production Code, even though they did in fact coauthor it. The prominence of the code and Quigley's ambition to increase his influence over the movie industry made him defensive, even paranoid at times, about his authorship of the code. Seemingly any time the subject was mentioned in any publication anywhere in the country, an angry letter from Quigley arrived, saying that it was he himself who wrote it, and that Lord assisted. Quigley often used the phrase "the frequently repeated historical error that Father Lord was coauthor of the Code," (Box 1, Folder 15, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers).

itself was a type of semiotics meant to monitor the moral content of film. Quigley and

Lord used the bland term "religion" in the actual wording of the code, but movies like

Cupid and the Comet (1911), with its effeminate priest, could not have been far from

their minds. The intent was not to make a code that addressed only Catholic

representations on film, but to formulate guidelines that eroded the differences between

Catholicism and any other Christian religion in America. The section of the code on

religion states:

> 1. No film or episode may throw *ridicule* on any
>   religious faith.
> 2. *Ministers of religion* in their character as ministers
>   of religion should not be used as comic characters
>   or as villains.
> 3. *Ceremonies* of any definite religion should be
>   carefully and respectfully handled.[12]

If the code had been written to narrowly affect the way Catholics appeared on

film, then William H. Hays, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of

America (MPPDA), may not have labored to convince Hollywood executives to sign on

and enforce it by 1934. Hays had intimate knowledge of those behind the code, but knew

it needed broad appeal for it to be accepted in the movie industry. With adoption of the

Production Code, the studios also agreed to follow the dictates of the PCA, headed by

Breen.[13] The code was not meant to specifically target the negative portrayal of any

religion, much less Catholicism. Still, given the number of influential Catholics involved

in the movie industry, it also gave them a chance to show that they, like their white

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[12] Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930–1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 347–360.

[13] Ibid., 320.

Protestant cousins, cared deeply for movie content and the welfare of Americans in general.[14]

The Production Code alludes to other topics in early films that concerned Protestant-led, pre-code censorship boards as well. The first order of business for the code, the first of its "General Principles," was that "no picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil, or sin."[15] These sentiments express the disapproval that many people, not just Catholics, felt in the wake of *The Public Enemy* (1931). While the film does open with the caveat that the producers wished to show a cautionary tale of what can happen to people who become criminals, audiences saw a kind of modern-day Robin Hood in the lead character Tom Powers

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[14] The historiography on film censorship is large. Most books focusing on the topic mention Catholic authorship of the Production Code, which stand as symbolic of the moral backlash against films by well-to-do elites who sought to control cultural content. The main focus of censorship efforts, both on the state and national level, was to limit the amount of sexuality they saw on early films. With no system in place early on to regulate film content, the early film industry exploited a variety of titillations to keep audiences coming to theaters. As the industry grew, so did limits set up the content of such a far-reaching and influential cultural form. For more, see Matthew Bernstein, ed., *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Black, *Hollywood Censored*; Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies*; Gerald R. Butters Jr., *Banned in Kansas: Motion Picture Censorship, 1915–1966* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007); Francis G. Couvares, ed., *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality, 1909–1925* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Charles Lyons, *The New Censors: Movies and the Culture Wars* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); George H. Roeder Jr., *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War Two* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Dawn B. Sova, *Censorship Histories of 125 Motion Pictures* (New York: Facts on File, 2001); Stephen Tropiano, *Obscene, Indecent, Immoral, and Offensive: 100+ Years of Censored, Banned, and Controversial Films* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2009); Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Laura Wittern-Keller, *Freedom of the Screen: Legal Challenges to State Film Censorship* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

[15] Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 347–60.

(James Cagney).[16] Powers comes from an Irish family and his portrayal has clear

parallels with previous negative stereotypes about the Irish that the code hoped to

curtail.[17] While it was not precisely a Catholic movie, the positive reception of *The*

Public Enemy created greater urgency in the movement to change the movie industry, and

Quigley's position as publisher of movie industry trade magazines proved key in getting

Hays to bring the code before studio heads.[18]

Of course, the reason for the code was not solely to prohibit negative Catholic

stereotypes. Instead, this Catholic-written document expressed a desire to uphold the

prerogatives of whiteness. Under the heading of "Sex" the following prohibitions appear:

"5. *White slavery* shall not be treated. 6. *Miscegenation* (sex relationship between white

and black races) is forbidden." On the subjects of white slavery and miscegenation, and

in other parts of the Production Code that talk about drunkenness, violence, promiscuity,

etc., one can see the negative traits white Protestant Americans had traditionally seen in

Catholics as symbolized by the Irish during the nineteenth century. The minstrel shows

that Irish Catholics both participated in and witnessed displayed deviant behaviors that

appear in the code as listed above. Catholics were seen as brutish, criminal, prone to

miscegenation, animalistic, and sexually licentious, and thus were written off as a

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[16] May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 68.

[17] *The Public Enemy*, directed by William A. Wellman (1931, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), available on Netflix.

[18] Quigley's papers mention that Hays developed ties to Quigley because of his publications. See Box 1, Folder 6, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers for an example of the relationship between the two.

group.[19] The negative stereotypes that Catholics were labeled with formed the basis for

what the code hoped to abolish. Hence the Production Code underscores the moral

milieu in which Catholics contended and sought to gain access to white status.[20]

Films during the 1930s and 1940s are open about the Catholic affiliations of

leading characters. Catholicity itself was downplayed, however, in that the characters

and plots revolved around white American values as upheld in the Production Codes,

which Catholics in American culture lacked according to observers.[21] Amidst the tense

times of the Great Depression and World War II, Catholics sensed the need for a

semiotics with which they could achieve middle-class status, exist in the country's

heartland, and take part in sports, among other symbols of Americanism. In other words,

they wanted to show that they too could pass for white within the confines of social and

cultural constructions present in the country at that time. Catholics used their growing

clout in the movie business to combine Catholicism and Americanism. For example, few

prominent Catholic movies of the decade displayed any sympathy for organized labor,

despite widespread involvement among both laymen and the clergy, because unions were

perceived as anti-capitalist.[22] And in the 1930s, when the country experimented with

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[19] Andrew M. Greeley, *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 32–47.

[20] Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 347–360.

[21] Larry McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 57-59.

[22] Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in New Deal Pittsburgh* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1999), 210.

many radical ideas, culturally and politically, on-screen Catholicism was portrayed as a stalwart of traditional American values.[23]

The 1930s tested traditional American values. People had placed their faith in institutions, specifically banks and the government, and the failures of both led to the economic collapse that was the Great Depression. That collapse shook Americans' trust, a feeling compounded when institutions seemed powerless to end the economic woes experienced by so many. People began to seek alternatives, not only to the failed institutions that led to the Depression, but in other aspects of their lives. The 1930s was the time of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John L. Lewis, of the Works Progress Administration and labor organizing.[24] It was also the time of Woody Guthrie and the Marx Brothers, a budding migrant worker culture that glorified tramps on the big screen– a far cry from the upper and middle class heroes of previous cultural outlets.[25]

While politics and culture leaned to the left in America during the 1930s, many Catholics went in the other direction in order to prove their dedication to American values. One prominent example of this backlash was Father Charles Coughlin's radio broadcasts. Coughlin saw much of the New Deal agenda initiated by Roosevelt as socialism, even communism, and the United States government as culpable for its implementation. He did not mince words when it came to the government, as when speaking at a full Madison Square Garden in New York City: "Congressman who are so

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[23] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998).

[24] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 278–281, 501.

[25] Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 82, 454.

drunk with authority as to oppose the expressed will of their constituents can no longer be tolerated in public office."[26] Whether on his nationally syndicated radio show or in public, his criticism of contemporary policies that were intended to fix the Depression were often rife with xenophobic vitriol. While not focused on whiteness, Coughlin's words expressed the feelings of some Catholics of European-descent who wanted to be treated as white.[27] Father Coughlin's case was extreme, but symbolizes how many Catholics did not participate in the left-wing radicalism of the day despite adherence to the Democratic Party.

The Legion of Decency came into being in part to fight against radicalism as they saw it in film. Catholics in key positions in Hollywood, saw their work as a crusade to protect their coreligionists and other Americans from offensive and radical material (fig. 7).

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[26] "Text of Father Coughlin's Address Attacking Plutocrats and the Bonus Veto," *New York Times*, May 23, 1935, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[27] Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

Figure 7. Legion of Decency Angel Protecting White Purity
Source: "Legion of Decency: Reports and Newsletters, 1934–1935," CNOL, Box 4, Folder 99, Bishop John Francis Noll Papers, University of Notre Dame Library

Figure 7 was seen in parishes across the country as part of the circulars of the Chicago

Council of the Legion of Decency,[28] and symbolizes Catholic efforts in the movie

industry. The boat and its sails, marked "Innocence" and "Purity" respectively, speak not

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[28] The structure of the Legion of Decency included many separate councils that reviewed movies as they were distributed to different parts of the country. As the papers of Martin J. Quigley show, the Chicago council rose to prominence early on and carved out a niche among the Legion as the body that all other councils took their cues from in making their decisions.

only to the role of the Church, but also to the desire to associate with traditional aspects

of whiteness. Given the language of the Production Codes and their ties to the Legion of

Decency, an agenda of maintaining racial purity together with traditional American

values, can be inferred from the above picture. The avenging angel wields the sword of

the "Legion of Decency," protecting the flock from the tentacles of the menacing "Movie

Octopus." The image also implies that the dark form of the cinematic sea creature has

already struck, claiming victims wrapped in "Rottenness" and about to take more with

"Indecency" and "Debauchery."

The picture of the Legion of Decency angel protecting innocent children by

lopping off the tentacles of the movie octopus alludes to the true power of Catholics

regarding the movie industry. For all the considerable influence of key laypeople in

Hollywood, Catholics could affect studios the most at the box office. When Archbishop

John Joseph Cantwell of Los Angeles wrote to Archbishop Patrick Joseph Cardinal

Hayes of New York, his co-member on the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Motion

Pictures, Cantwell downplayed the role of people like Breen and Quigley while

promoting the power of parishioners at their local theaters when he wrote:

> Experience has shown that formal protests by ecclesiastical
> authorities and by responsible organizations to the heads of
> the motion picture industry at Hollywood are of little avail
> in stopping the production of indecent pictures. The only
> effective protest is that made by a great body of the
> Catholic faithful, not merely in Hollywood, but at the
> particular theaters where immoral pictures are being
> exhibited. The exhibitor at the individual theater should be
> directly responsible for the moral standard of entertainment
> that he supplies his patrons.[29]

[29] Roll No. X-2, X-5 Folder 14, National Legion of Decency Archives, Patrick Joseph Cardinal Hayes Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary.

Cantwell did not necessarily mean to detract from the work of Quigley or Breen, or the effectiveness of the Production Codes, but instead wanted to highlight the fact that Catholic moviegoers had the purchasing power to give studio heads an idea of what they wanted to see. In turn, it was up to the Church hierarchy to guide parishioners in what they should and should not patronize at the cinema.

The politicking that went on between the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Motion Pictures and the Legion of Decency is sometimes difficult to track, but their impact on movie production and distribution during the 1930s and 1940s was clear. Regardless of film content, people of all faiths in America attended the cinema on a weekly basis before the introduction of television began to take customers out of theaters in the 1950s.[30] After 1934, with the advent of the Production Code and the installation of Joseph Breen as PCA administrator, studio heads could expect a concerned letter on behalf of Catholic moviegoers, usually from Legion officials, about objectionable film content, either as the movies were produced or after their release. An example of the pressure Catholics could exert on the movie industry was the ban of 1935's *The Devil is a Woman*. The diocesan director of the Legion in Buffalo, New York, Father Edward S. Schwegler, objected to the showing of the Paramount Pictures movie because of its perceived salacious title and themes of impure womanly behavior. In protest he wrote a letter to Martin Quigley. In turn, Quigley passed word onto Breen, who worked under William H. Hays, who as president of the MPPDA successfully pressured Vice President and General Manager of

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[30] May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 101–135; For more on how television replaced cinema, see Lynn Spigel, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 100–109.

Paramount Pictures G. J. Schaefer to remove *The Devil is a Woman* from Buffalo theaters by the end of 1935.[31]

The task of applying the pressure that Catholics could bring to bear on Hollywood could be confusing, as was the case with the stream of letters sent as a result of *The Devil is a Woman*. Quigley himself lamented this confusion in his initial reply to Schwegler. "It is regrettable that, with such a fine victory practically achieved, there is so much more internal controversy and confusion. The basic explanation, I imagine, is that the Catholic people are simply not so organized as to permit of a definite policy and unified action in such a campaign as this [against movies]."[32] That confusion, and his pointing out that "Catholic people are simply not so organized," both eventually played a part in the downfall of the Legion despite later attempts at streamlining movie vetting. Nonetheless, moviemakers had to be aware of what they portrayed lest they tempt the ire of a significant portion of their audience, or at least their clergymen, who were all too ready to summon their numbers in the form of angry letters and threatened boycotts. Indeed, sometimes movies could be pulled from theaters simply because of the knowledge that Hays and the member companies of the MPPDA had of the power of Catholics in Hollywood.[33]

Ostensibly, the point of all the letter writing and censorship organizations was to improve the moral tone of movies for the general viewing public. Further, the Legion

[31] Box 2, Folder 1, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

[32] Ibid.

[33] As head of the PCA, Breen had intimate knowledge of the inner-workings of Hays' MPPDA. In 1935, for example, Breen sent Quigley copies of correspondence exchanged between Hays and the MPPDA discussing which movies they wanted to remove from theaters due to code violations. See Ibid.

and the code represented only one way in which Catholics attempted to improve their

cinematic image. The furor caused when Catholics did not approve of movie content,

however, resulted in a period during the 1930s and 1940s when the portrayal of Catholics

on-screen contained positive elements. Following the precepts of the Production Code,[34]

it was mandated that priests be sympathetic characters, a far cry from the days of *Cupid*

and the Comet where the main character, a priest, was the subject of ridicule. The

distinctive robes of Catholic clergymen made discerning their religion easy. Further,

priests were overwhelmingly played by white actors who, while donning a marker of

otherness in the form of the collar, still enacted ideals of whiteness in their skin color and

upright behavior.

Priests in movies were often juxtaposed against counterparts who did not follow

the rules. Lay Catholics on-screen were as wild and stereotyped as ever. Unless the story

was about some exotic location, such as *Camille* (1935), in which all the characters were

upper-class French people,[35] Catholic populations retained the traits attributed to Irish

Catholics in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. They were working class,

prone to drunkenness and violence, and had large families. What separated these

portrayals from their forebears was that these characters were redeemable—could attain

whiteness in other words—and it was the priest who acted as the redeemer. Here again

we have a subtle reinforcement of white prerogatives. Priests represented true whiteness

in Catholic films, and it was only through the benevolence of white priests that Catholics

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[34] Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 347–360.

[35] *Camille*, directed by George Cukor (1935, Culver City, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios.), DVD.

could ever earn redemption. Priests were everything their flock was not: they lived in modest, but certainly not squalid, conditions; they were sober peacemakers; and due to their celibacy, they did not have the armies of children that were normally associated with Catholic families.

Movies that resisted these stereotypes in the 1930s set a precedent for the portrayal of Catholics in a positive light. The most sympathetic films featuring Catholicism were often set in far-off lands and distant times. For example, *Camille*, which takes place in nineteenth-century France, shows a deference for clergy that is portrayed as simply a part of French culture. Catholic laypeople in such movies could be open about their religion because they existed in different times and places. Catholic clergy members in movies that were set in contemporary America could be definitively Catholic because they catered to whiteness, while their charges remained stereotyped as ever. These cinematic priests were a source of pride for Catholic viewers. On March 4, 1941, Quigley wrote to Breen about the possibility of a film adaptation of the book *The Labyrinthine Ways*, "I have no doubt that it would make a motion picture story of great interest to Catholics," since one of the central characters was a priest.[36] Quigley's commentary suggests a sensitivity among laypeople to the way priests appeared in

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[36] Box 1, Folder 4, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers. This passage also sheds light on the concern of Catholics during the 1930s and into the 1940s over the encroachment of communism on American culture. As Quigley goes on to say about the book, "It also reveals what ought to be much better known in the United States; namely, the intensity and extent of the persecution of the church by the Reds in Mexico." This fit with the general mistrust of the left felt by Catholics at this time, and dovetails with the efforts of the church to make itself appear more American in culture, and white on the big screen.

movies. Films that feature priests from the late 1930s show that only by upholding

whiteness could Catholic clergy save characters from the blackest of sins.[37]

Perhaps no other actor embodied the tough, redeeming qualities of Catholic clergy

members on-screen better than Spencer Tracy. Tracy earned fame and success by

playing priests during the late 1930s, most notably in *San Francisco* (1936) and *Boys

Town* (1938). Tracy, of Irish Catholic roots, had misgivings about taking on the role of a

priest, as Clark Gable, his costar in *San Francisco*, revealed: "I couldn't see what Tracy

was worried about. He said he felt like a man walking a tight rope. He had to be human

and, at the same time, holy. For my money, he hit the perfect balance between the two

from the opening scene."[38] In the scene to which he refers, Tracy is introduced as Father

Tim Mullin (right, Figure 8), as he spars with Blackie Norton (left), played by Clark

Gable.

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[37] Movies set in distant times and locations and outside of the normal experience of everyday Americans, include *Camille* (1936), *San Francisco* (1936), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937), *The Hurricane* (1937), and *Tortilla Flat* (1942). Some exception to the rule of fantastical settings do occur on movies like *You Only Live Once* (1937) and *The Black Legion* (1938), although they still feature clergy members, usually priests, as strong, redeeming characters.

[38] A detailed biography of Spencer Tracy was recently written by James Curtis, *Spencer Tracy: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2011), 283.

Figure 8. Father Tim Mullin Boxing Blackie Norton in *San Francisco* (1936)
Source: http://drx.typepad.com/psychotherapyblog/photos/page/54/

Seeing Tracy as a priest boxing on-screen is at variance with the Franciscan friar

in *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), who is flogged in public. The image of a brawling priest

also conjures images of drunken Irish brawling. The messages differ, however: drunk

Irishmen were a blight on society, whereas Father Mullin knocking down the corrupt

Blackie Norton symbolized uprightness triumphing over evil.[39]

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[39] *San Francisco*, directed by W. S. Van Dyke (1936, Culver City, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios.), DVD; the sight of a virile priest playing at the sport of boxing also exemplifies Catholics' attempt to counter in their on-screen image: that Catholics were not masculine and therefore unable to be true, white Americans. See Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 174.

Throughout *San Francisco*, Father Mullin, following the guidelines of the Production Codes, makes it his mission to reclaim his roguish friend Blackie Norton. Father Mullin conveys a tenderness regarding his relationship with Blackie, implying that they grew up Catholic together. But while Blackie continued in the life of crime in which they both dabbled when they were younger, Father Mullin turned his back on the way of the crook when he decided to become a priest. Talking to Mary Blake, the lead female character played by Jeanette MacDonald, Father Mullin sums up his views on the world Blackie inhabits in San Francisco: "You're in probably the wickedest, most corrupt, most godless city in America. Sometimes it frightens me. I wonder what the end is going to be. But nothing can harm you if you don't allow it to, because nothing in the world, no one in the world, is all bad." Even though Blackie often refers to religion as "hocus pocus" and "sucker lovin'," the *mise-en-scéne* in one of the film's more memorable shots establishes the moral superiority of Father Mullin leading Blackie up a hill. The angle of the shot augments Father Mullin's position in front, and they are clearly struggling upward toward something. That something is Mary Blake, for whom Blackie has searched in the days following the earthquake of 1906, the climax of the film. Mary is at the top of the hill, and the camera angle in that final scene directs the audience's gaze upward, toward her. She stands singing a hymn, and when Blackie finally catches sight of her, he turns to Father Mullin in order to ask him how to thank God for having found her in the end.[40]

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[40] Ibid.

After Mary and Blackie reunite, facilitated by Father Mullin, we see Father

Mullin ministering to victims of the earthquake assisted by several nuns, showing

Catholics helping with the relief efforts. The reunion is followed by a stirring *montage* in

the finale in which San Franciscans march arm in arm back to their ruined city with the

cry "We will rebuild it!" In the film Catholics, too, along with a redeemed Blackie

thanks to Father Mullin, doing their part to rebuild the city. The call for working together

to rebuilding goes along with the desire felt by many Americans during the Great

Depression to do the same for their country, a spirit embodied in the New Deal.

Everyone needed to accept their share of the task of rebuilding, Catholics included—that

was the final message of *San Francisco*. Still, the role played by Father Mullin in the

plot of the movie was a secondary one. And the pugilistic aspects of his character leaned

on older Catholic stereotypes. Regardless, Catholics could look at Father Mullin

favorably in that he stood for good in the face of corruption.[41] *San Francisco* was not the

perfect Catholic movie; that came in 1938 when Spencer Tracy took the role of Father

Edward J. Flanagan in *Boys Town*.[42]

     San Francisco and *Boys Town* display many parallels, not the least of which was

that Tracy played a priest in both of them. The main similarity is in the plot, which

focuses on the relationship between Father Flanagan and Whitey Marsh (played by teen

heartthrob Mickey Rooney). Whitey Marsh is a character much in the mold of Blackie

Norton, albeit younger. Both Blackie and Whitey come from the same type of rough,

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[41] Ibid.

[42] *San Francisco*, 1936; *Boys Town*, directed by Norman Taurog (1938, Culver City, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios), DVD.

criminal childhood, and their upbringing leads them both down the wrong path. In both

San Francisco and *Boys Town*, Tracy's priestly, upright conduct contrasts sharply with

that of his antagonist. Further, Tracy plays a hard-nosed, no-nonsense character, acting

as a forceful example for good. Just as Father Mullin is not afraid to step into the ring

and go toe-to-toe with Blackie, Father Flanagan slaps Whitey around in order to correct

the boy's insolent behavior. As Father Flanagan says, "Now look, Whitey, in a pinch I

can be tougher than you are, and I guess maybe this the pinch." As in *San Francisco*, the

priest helps along the character development of the costar, although the change wrought

by Father Flanagan on Whitey is more pronounced.[43]

That Whitey and Father Flanagan are not above violence suggests that *Boys*

Town, like *San Francisco*, still contains the taint of negative Catholic stereotypes. While

it is true that those elements do appear in *Boys Town*, the setting of the film makes it

perhaps the pinnacle of Hollywood Catholics' attempt to make their religion appear more

white and American. Instead of the urban slums of most Catholic films throughout the

twentieth century, or their counterparts with their exotic settings or long ago times, *Boys*

Town features a *montage* of shots that place it in America's heartland and in the present.

The movie does give the audience glimpses of the criminal world Whitey inhabits in

Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, presenting these prototypical Midwest towns as seedy.

But it is outside of the city, in the farmland where Father Flanagan has his school for

delinquent boys, that Whitey finds his salvation. Director Norman Taurog made use of

the rural setting of *Boys Town* in many shots, showing the school as a beacon on a hill

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[43] Ibid.; *Boys Town*, 1938.

amid the American countryside, telling troubled young men that there was hope for them yet. *Boys Town* shows that Catholics indeed have their place in America's agrarian ideal, since the land that the school was built on was originally Nebraska farmland. Because traditional American values were tied to an agricultural past, whereas the city was seen as a place overrun with foreigners, a movie featuring Catholics settling in the countryside symbolized a move away from at least one stereotype. Since *Boys Town* was among those farms instead of confined to an inner-city parish, or ghetto, the movie showed Catholics' ability to take their rightful place as true white Americans.[44]

Another aspect of *Boys Town's* wide appeal is Father Flanagan's acceptance of people of all faiths. As one of the boys at Whitey's first meal at Boys Town tells it, "At Boys Town, everyone worships as they please, thinks the way they want to think. . . . If you're a Catholic, a Protestant, you can go right on being one."[45] Mae Tinée of *the Chicago Daily Tribune* highlighted the fact that the school was so welcoming to all boys: "This picture tells in fact and fiction of how the priest came to found this community just outside of Omaha, which has no fences, no fees, and is interdenominational, in that lads of all colors and creeds are welcome, and free to worship as they wish." Another of film's *montages* has several close-ups from the lunch scene speak to the multi-ethnic student body, making the Catholic simply part of a multi-ethnic America. Further, Flanagan and Boys Town existed in real life and were nationally known to shelter wayward boys. As the opening lines of the same review proclaim, "There IS such a place

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

as 'Boys' Town.' There IS such a man as Father Flanagan."[46] Indeed, the fame of Boys

Town gave rise to the production of the movie. Its popularity increased the community's

renown, proved a boon to the real-life Flanagan's fund-raising efforts, and led to the

production of the 1941 sequel *The Men of Boys Town*, with Spencer Tracy and Mickey

Rooney reprising their roles.[47]

Many Catholics shared the favorable response to *Boys Town*. The *Villanovan*, the

weekly student publication of Villanova University, made it the movie of the week

following its release on October 9, 1938. *Boys Town'*s generally favorable reception was

a sign of the times. As in *San Francisco*, when all residents locked arms to go rebuild

their shattered city, Catholics in *Boys Town* reach out to people from all walks of life in

order to help them in their time of need, taking a leading role in helping society during

the Great Depression. Through the efforts of a Catholic priest who epitomized whiteness,

the concerns of Catholics and other Americans come together. The same issue of the

Villanovan that called *Boys Town* the "picture of the week" corroborates the call for

Catholics to live out American values with the following lines in an editorial:

"Americanism is the solution. Develop a truly patriotic love of our country; know its

history; obey its laws; respect its authority; be proud of the heritage handed down to us, a

heritage of peace, prosperity, and freedom in all its democratic connotations. Above all,

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[46] Mae Tinée, "Movie Success Minus Heroine Is 'Boys' Town': 'BOYS' TOWN,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct 9, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[47] "$178,000 Given for Boys Town**,"** *New York Times*, Oct 12, 1939, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

be an active American!"[48] An appeal of this nature signals a departure from the days

when the foreignness of Catholicism separated it from mainstream American whiteness.

The director, himself a Catholic, desired to present the Catholic Church as

American and that can be seen throughout *Boys Town*. One scene highlights the diversity

of peoples and religions accepted at Boys Town, focusing on a series of boys saying their

own prayers over lunch, some not speaking any words, and a Jewish boy saying a

blessing in Hebrew. The lunch scene emphasizes that all religions can coexist peacefully

under one Catholic (American) roof and that the United States was a country of faith.

The film implies that Catholics related well to their fellow Americans, thus proving their

worth to the country as a whole. Commenting on what he hoped to accomplish with

Boys Town, the real-life Flanagan declared, "Every boy who becomes a good American

citizen is worth $10,000 to the state," instead of becoming a drain on taxpayers by

leading criminal lives and ending up as wards of the government. These words speak to

the mission of Catholic institutions like Boys Town, and reflect the tone of their image on

film during the 1930s and into the 1940s as monitored by the Legion and Breen's PCA.

Flanagan felt that by keeping boys from straying beyond the bounds of normative

behavior, he was "serving [his] Creator and Country."[49]

The years following the release of *Boys Town* proved to be a time during which

Catholics needed to be "active" Americans. The subject of the previously quoted

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[48] No author, "Americanism," *Villanovan*, October 18, 1938, last accessed February, 16, 2012, http://digital.library.villanova.edu/files/VillanovaDigitalCollection/MagazinesNewslettersandJournals/The Villanovan/1938/ab4ab922-5690-478c-94d2-e665ad5c44e4/88e1e96c-0f13-45d3-88be-43f69b40185f.pdf.

[49] Ibid.

Villanovan editorial was the rise of "isms" around the world and the perceived threat of their intrusion into the United States. Therefore, the writer admonished readers to be vigilant and that then could "the United States be rid of these unwanted invaders."[50] The primary "ism" most on the minds of Americans in the 1930s was fascism. Not even a year after the release of *Boys Town*, fascist Germany plunged Europe into World War II. The fact that a Catholic university newspaper warned readers of the dangers of "isms," at a time when the press extensively covered the rise of fascism already, shows the widespread concern for the state of affairs leading up to the outbreak of World War II. The editorial in the *Villanovan* also fits with the relatively isolationist attitudes felt by many Americans on the eve of the conflict.[51] World War II tested loyalties, and because of the taint of foreignness long associated with them, Catholics felt increased pressure to demonstrate their ability to fit in to an America at war.[52]

As with the Great Depression, the entrance of America into World War II engendered a spirit of inclusiveness among Americans broadly. Government enlisted the help of Hollywood to instill a sense of patriotic duty among all Americans so that everyone would "do their part."[53] Evidence of the concern felt by highly placed Catholics in the movie industry can be seen in the letters exchanged between Monsignor

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 124.

[52] Jonathan Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from* Little Caesar *to* Touch of Evil (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 96-99.

[53] Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–13.

John McClafferty, executive secretary of the National Legion of Decency, and

conservative writer George S. Schuyler, then business manager of the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The letters were written

in response to criticism leveled by Schuyler at the PCA in the Pittsburgh *Courier*.

Schuyler felt that the code needed to be updated in order to remove any remaining

"barriers" to showing a true depiction of American life fraught with racial inequality, a

subject the code skirted. From the Catholic perspective, the fact that the code did not

concretely address racial matters, other than upholding the status quo, reinforces their

desire to fit into white America. McClafferty responded by focusing on morality,

explaining that the Catholic position on movies was inseparable from the American one

in regards to moral subjects and how the Legion did their part to promote American

values on film:

> Neither the Production Code nor the Catholic attitude on
> moral standards in films militates against the true and
> proper depiction of American life. The Code which
> articulates basic moral principles and prescriptions in no
> wise erects an artificial and unreasonable barrier to the
> right portrayal of American life. Basic morality plays a
> very important role in life. Realism, if it is to mirror life,
> must take into account basic morality.
>   The Production Code which is an instrument of self
> regulation controls the moral quality of the motion pictures
> produced by the companies signatory to the Code. There is
> no Catholic code which controls in the industry motion
> picture production. There are Catholic moral standards
> according to which Catholics and the Legion of Decency
> evaluate motion pictures produced.[54]

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[54] Box 1, Folder 26, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

At first glance, McClafferty's statement speaks more to the inner workings of the Legion

of Decency than to the place of Catholics generally in American society. Historians of

the Legion of Decency have viewed it simply as a group of moral busybodies intent on

controlling film content.[55] During World War II, however, the Catholic image in films

retained stereotypical aspects that had traditionally separated them from mainstream

America. Writing while the country fought a global conflict against foreign fascism,

McClafferty's words stress that Catholic morals are American morals and that the desire

to see those morals replicated on-screen guided the actions of the Legion. Catholic

leaders, long sensitive to slights to their loyalty, wanted Americans to understand that

Catholicism posed no threat to the war effort.

Why should Catholics feel the need to highlight their religion's benign nature

given that in the mid-twentieth century they enjoyed a demographic strength unmatched

relative to other Christian sects? In part because Al Smith's unsuccessful presidential bid

was seen as a blow to Catholics given some of the anti-Catholic rhetoric that came out of

the election, but also because many non-Catholic Americans still attributed negative

stereotypes to all Catholics, thus at the very least making their religion secondary to other

Christian sects.[56] Their numbers made Catholics targets of abuse by those who felt that

white purity was threatened by massive waves of immigrants coming to America and

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[55] Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 1–2; Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies*, 1–3.

[56] In December of 1928, after the Al Smith lost to Herbert Hoover in the presidential election, *Ave Maria Magazine* cited the Ku Klux Klan as among those responsible for the spread of the anti-Catholic ideas responsible for Smith's loss. The publication also praised Catholic "forbearance" in dealing with the hostile environment that of both the campaign and Smith's crushing defeat. Even before that, the magazine expressed misgivings as to whether or not the country was ready for a Catholic president. See "Notes and Remarks," *Ave Maria Magazine*, December 1, 1928, 696; S. B. J. "The Alternative," Ibid., March 10, 1928, 289–92.

threatening the Protestant establishment. With the outbreak of World War II, there was a

concerted effort on the part of the government to set aside age-old conflicts and work

together for victory.[57] Therefore, Catholics involved in movie production seized upon the

ideals of inclusiveness held up during the war to present their religion in as

nonthreatening a manner as possible.

One aspect of Catholics' mission to present an American-friendly Catholicism

was the Legion of Decency and its relationship with the Production Code Administration.

Many films before, during, and after World War II carried the PCA stamp of approval

during the opening credits. With Joseph Breen as the head of the PCA at this time, and

given his ties to the Legion of Decency, such approval equaled that of the Legion of

Decency. When people saw the seal of the PCA at the beginning of the film, it signaled

that there was a group of concerned Catholic citizens doing their duty as responsible

Americans.[58] The early years of World War II did not see a drop in the Legion's

production, even while the country mobilized for war. Between November of 1941 and

November of 1942, it reviewed 530 films, a typical year for the Legion and a testament

not only to the Legion's hard work but also that of movie producers.[59]

Filmmakers also showed Catholics doing their patriotic duty on-screen. In 1940,

on the eve of America's involvement in World War II, *The Fighting 69th* appeared,

starring James Cagney in the role of Private Jerry Plunkett. The film follows a group of

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[57] Erenberg and Hirsch, eds., *The War in American Culture*), 1–13.

[58] Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies,* 39.

[59] S/C 35, Folder 2, National Legion of Decency Archives, Francis Cardinal Spellman Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary.

New Yorkers of Irish descent who fight in the trenches during World War I. *The Fighting 69th* does not paint a flattering picture of lay Catholics, most of whom appear to be pulled from poor urban tenements.[60] But like many Catholic films of the 1930s through to the 1950s, there is a strong priest character, Father Francis Duffy (Pat O'Brien). Father Duffy attempts to persuade Plunkett to turn from his cowardly ways and be a better soldier. Only after his actions lead to the death of many of his comrades does Plunkett begin to realize the awful reality of war and seize the opportunity for redemption through service. In the end, Father Duffy's encouragement spurs Plunkett to bravery, and a heroic death for the American cause. While still retaining many old stereotypes, *The Fighting 69th* speaks to Catholics' ability to cooperate with other Americans in times of emergency, summed up in Father Duffy's words, "You know . . . if a lot of people back home knew how well the various faiths got along over here, it would cause a lot of scandal for some pious minds."[61] Despite the cooperation between religions in the army, Father Duffy also underscores divisions still lingering in American society at that time.

Another movie that also utilized stereotypes while showing Catholic willingness to serve was *The Fighting Sullivans* (1944). Made during the war and based on a true

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[60] Indeed, the Legion submitted a list of deletions to the MPPDA, which included dialog and scenes that portrayed some of the more foreign aspects of Catholicism. For example, much of the Latin was taken out of the film entirely. See Box 1, Folder 4, Individual Correspondence Series.

[61] *The Fighting 69th*, directed by William Keighley (1940, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), DVD. This was not the first time that Pat O'Brien played James Cagney's priest in a movie. In 1938 the two costarred in *Angels with Dirty Faces*, where O'Brien again takes the role of a priest. In fact, the resolutions of the two plots resemble each other, with O'Brien giving Cagney the courage to face death, but in the former it is the electric chair (instead of the trenches of France in the latter). *Angels with Dirty Faces*, directed by Michael Curtiz (1938, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), DVD.

story, the film chronicles a devoutly Catholic, large, Irish family that gives five sons to

the war effort. All five sons eventually die while serving in the Navy on the same ship

and during the same battle, leading the country to name a new destroyer *The Fighting*

Sullivans. Despite the family's sacrifice, the father of the fallen Sullivan boys states that

"we have a lot to be thankful for. "[62] Movies like *The Fighting 69th* and *The Fighting*

Sullivans speak to the role Catholics in the movie industry played in the war effort.

These films helped instill the idea that Catholics, too, were dedicated to the fight against

America's enemies. The majority of Americans could not see their soldiers' mettle tested

on far off battlefields, but they did see it verified on the silver screen. They could not be

on the ship on which the five sons served, but they could read about the real-life Mrs.

Sullivan urging on the war effort by "pleading" with the Navy to build more ships.[63]

Clearly, Catholic participation in the war effort, particularly through film,

amounted to propaganda. The use of propaganda in films was a topic that highly placed

Catholics in the Legion and in Hollywood worried about as America drew nearer to entry

into the war. On June 5, 1939, McClafferty wrote to McNicholas:

> Propaganda obtains its character from the nature of the
> cause it pleads and strives to advance in the minds, hearts,
> and actions of men. False propaganda, objectionable and
> dangerous because of the evil principles which inspire it,
> may be the more insidious and pernicious by virtue of the
> popular appeal of the medium used.
> The motion picture delights the eye and ear,
> combines light, shadow, and even color, blends movement,

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[62] *The Fighting Sullivans*, directed by Lloyd Bacon (1944, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), DVD.

[63] "SPEED UP PRODUCTION, THE SULLIVANS PLEAD: Parents Who Lost Five Sons in Navy Speak at Shipyards," *New York Times*, Feb 9, 1943; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

music, sound, and word. With an ease possessed by no
other medium, the film, in an environment shorn of
distractions, most readily rivets the attention of the
audience, reaches the depths of consciousness, and plays
upon the emotions. False propaganda in motion pictures,
then, is a problem of paramount importance. . . .
    Much of this propaganda is being inserted on the
plea that such is corroborative of "Democracy" and
"Americanism."[64]

America wanted "corroborative" Americanism from all its citizens, but the influence of

Catholics in the movie industry at the beginning of World War II and their stated concern

for the effect of propaganda led to some strange representations of Catholicism on screen.

Catholic moviegoers could look with pride at Spencer Tracy's strong, white characters,

but still witnessed the stereotyping of their ethnic group. Catholic filmmakers took part

in the leveling of American society in movies, and yet bent their own culture to the

purpose of propaganda as seen in wartime films like *The Fighting 69th* and *The Fighting

Sullivans*.[65] During the war, because of the clout that Catholics wielded in Hollywood,

Catholicism was portrayed as a religion led by pious white priests (without any

representation of a foreign hierarchy heavy-handedly meddling in the people's devotion).

By demonstrating due diligence in the separation of church and state, Catholicism

seemed just as American as any sect of Protestantism, despite centuries of being

perceived as pawns of Rome.[66] The imperatives of towing the government mandated-line

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[64] The Legion was not solely suspicious of propaganda in the motion picture industry leading up to and during World War II, but they also monitored communist activity. See Box 1, Folder 24, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

[65] Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 133–142.

[66] Catholic movies during World War II are replete with examples of Catholics not behaving as non-Catholic Americans thought they did traditionally. As will be seen, even priests and nuns were depicted as placing loyalty to America above that of their religion. An interesting case in point of a cinematic disdain

for Hollywood and the sincere wish to show their religion in a positive light sometimes

conflicted. More often they led to a hybrid form of Hollywood Catholicism that was at

once minstrelized and divorced from the most damaging ideas from decades past. The

code itself mirrors the stereotyping that went on in films of the 1930s-1950s, stripping

away distinctiveness for mass appeal.

    Going My Way (1944) paints the semiotics of this hybrid Catholic representation

on film during World War II, when total allegiance was demanded of all members of

society. The first time the movie's main character, Father Chuck O'Malley (played by

Bing Crosby), appears on screen in the urban tenement neighborhood in which the film is

set, he wears a casual straw boater (fig. 9).

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by the laity of their spiritual leaders is 1943's *The Song of Bernadette*. While set in the past and in a distant land, much like *Camille*, it tells the story of a young peasant girl, Bernadette, who has the uniquely Catholic experience of seeing an apparition of Mary. No one, including the Church, believes her at first, and she is only able to win over her doubters through her simple devotion.. *The Song of Bernadette*, directed by Henry King (1943, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.), DVD.

Figure 9. Father Chuck O'Malley in *Going My Way* (1944)
Source: "Bing Crosby as Father O'Malley in 'Going My Way'" in "Oscars 2012:
Academy Awards Through the Years," *Los Angeles Times*,
http://timelines.latimes.com/media/event_images/48/haxpv7kf.jpg

While the hat style may seem trivial, it is festive compared to standard images of priests

in previous films, or even to the stern look of Crosby's costar Barry Fitzgerald, who plays

Father Fitzgibbon. The clothing priests wear clearly evidences their Catholicism, while

at the same time remaining conservative in style, unlike the rags seen worn by the parish

boys. In movies, most priests are seen with a black fedora that matches their black suits

and white collars. Instead, Crosby dons a hat that sets a different tone from the outset for

his character, and his success as a priest owes more to his musical talent and financial

dealings than his ability as a priest.[67]

Going My Way sets a nonstandard tone in other ways as well. Like minstrel

performances before it, the film relied heavily on popular music in order to entertain. In

fact, popular music plays a key role in the plot. Few of the chants and choir melodies one

normally expects from Catholic religious music are heard. As Father O'Malley put it,

"Sometimes the spoken word can be pretty dull."[68] In fact, the music overshadowed the

Catholic theme of the film, since one of its song, "Swinging on a Star," garnered the

Academy Award in 1945 for Best Music. The score became commercially successful

separately as well, leaving behind any traces of its cinematic Catholic roots.[69] Going My

Way won seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, but its melodies, not its

religious themes, are probably its most enduring feature, thanks to Bing Crosby's real-life

fame as a singer.[70] In the confines of the movie, popular music becomes the vehicle by

which the parish is saved from financial dissolution.[71] While music is a traditional aspect

of minstrel performances, Going My Way does not give a minstrelized representation of

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[67] Going My Way, directed by Leo McCarey (1944, Hollywood: Paramount Pictures), DVD.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Anthony Burke Smith, "America's Favorite Priest: Going My Way (1944)," in Catholics in the Movies, ed. Colleen McDannell, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 107–126.

[70] "Awards for Going My Way (1944)," IMDb, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036872/awards.

[71] Going My Way, 1944.

Catholicism simply because of the music, though it certainly contributes. It also portrays Catholics using American popular music to sell their image broadly, not unlike the way Irish minstrel performers attempted to create an image tailored to be acceptable to American audiences.

While the Catholics of *Going My Way* may have possessed a musical virtuosity that allowed them to market and sell a song and save a parish, *Going My Way* makes light of Catholic culture. Other successful Catholic movies made at that time show the serious side of the religion's day-to-day activities yet are set in distant lands and times.[72] Many parishes before and since have faced financial problems that threatened to close church doors. Some did cease to exist, but the majority of them stayed open, and not because of any cultural skill or musical production. Instead, most parishes scathed off closure by getting the community to donate whatever extra they could, or by the diocese adding its financial support. By using pop culture in the manner that it does*, Going My Way* undervalues the importance of parishes to Catholic communities in the United States, particularly at the time it was released. Despite the comical light given to the parish's juvenile delinquents, their redemption is achieved through the medium of music instead of what Catholic audiences might expect for addressing poor behavior, such as working as altar servers. Parishes were often repositories for Catholic ethnic identity and traditions, as well as providers of basic necessities in times of need.[73] To be fair, *Going*

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[72] Two examples of this are *The Song of Bernadette*, 1943; *The Keys of the Kingdom*, directed by John M. Stahl (1944, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), DVD. *The Song of Bernadette* was nominated for eight Academy Awards, winning four, and *The Keys of the Kingdom* was nominated for four.

[73] John T. McGreevey, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 55–78.

My Way does show how a parish operated as the bedrock of an ethnic neighborhood.

Nonetheless, outside of the movie world, parish resiliency depends more often not on a

song, but on a community of believers who pooled their resources to provide for their

neighbors.[74]

As in Irish minstrel shows of the previous era, *Going My Way* features Catholics

entertaining by singing and dancing for audiences while telling a story. This storytelling

method proved successful, since *Going My Way* received over $15 million in box office

receipts in its first run—while America was still embroiled in World War II.[75] Historian

Anthony Burke Smith claims that the film succeeded because it was "modern" and

"signified the pluralism and urbanization of the twentieth century."[76] Given the

disapprobation long felt toward Catholics in the United States and the film's song and

dance routines, which can be compared to older minstrel performances, it makes little

sense to call *Going My Way* either plural or modern. Instead, director Leo McCarey,

himself a Catholic, relied on what had made Irish Catholics the hit in American culture

that they were long before Bing Crosby crooned.

Bing Crosby, also a Catholic, portrayed Father O'Malley in a way that attempted

to appeal to both specifically Catholic and broadly American sensibilities. He was aware

of the desire of prominent Catholics in Hollywood to make their religion less foreign to

the American public and supported the work of the Legion of Decency. Indeed, in 1935

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[74] McMahon, *What Parish Are You From? A Chicago*, 1–5.

[75] "*Going My Way*," http://www.boxoffice.com/statistics/movies/going-my-way-1944; May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 121.

[76] Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010), 86.

he turned down a role in *Sailor Beware* after the Legion deemed the movie

inappropriate.[77] His cooperation with the Legion suggests that his role in *Going My Way*

was calculated to please both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The *mise-en-scéne*

throughout demonstrates the desire to appeal to a broad audience. In his first appearance

in the movie, he wears a clerical collar, but there are several moments in which he is seen

out of his traditional garb. In fact, when Father O'Malley meets his old friend Genevieve

Linden (Risë Stevens), she does not realize he is a priest. This is what Catholics wanted

to tell Americans through movies: that you cannot tell the difference between a Catholic

and a normal American. And instead of reacting with horror when Father O'Malley

meekly informs Genevieve that he is, in fact, a priest, she greets the news with a

tenderness that symbolizes what all Catholics could hope for in their reception by

Americans.[78]

That positive reception was a gift and a curse for Catholics. Mae Tinée of the

Chicago Daily Tribune called *Going My Way* "a rare treat," and the *New York Times*

extensively covered the awards heaped upon the film, including those of the New York

Film Critics. Reviewers praised both Crosby's performance and that of his costar, Barry

Fitzgerald, who was not a Catholic in real life.[79] For all the favorable reviews earned by

Going My Way, for all its attempts to navigate the space between Americanism and

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[77] Box 2, Folder 1, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

[78] *Going My Way*, 1944.

[79] Mae Tinée, "Movie 'Going My Way' Is a Rare Treat: 'GOING MY WAY,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jun 10, 1944, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. "'GOING MY WAY' GETS FILM CRITICS' HONOR: Fitzgerald Performance Hailed as Best by a Man, McCarey Cited for His Direction," *New York Times*, Dec 28, 1944, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Catholicism, what was the cost to Catholics in general? Can a film that relied on age-old, stereotypical ways of presenting Catholicism, with its Irish tenement setting and minstrelized performances, in order to be widely successful truly be considered a step toward true inclusion of Catholics in America? Other than priestly garb and a few scenes actually inside St. Dominic's church, there is little that ties the movie to anything specifically Catholic. Of course, no Catholic, either clergy member or layperson, spends every moment of his or her life devoted to prayer or at Mass. But their faith and spirituality are often not taken seriously, and rarely have been taken seriously in films set in this country, and that fact makes a film like *Going My Way* both uplifting for its success and damaging for its stereotyped portrayal of Catholics. In other words, success at the box office meant sacrificing religious distinctiveness in order to be more American.

The success of *Going My Way* led to a sequel, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, which was released the following year, 1945. Appearing in theaters as the war was in its concluding phase, *The Bells of St. Mary's* demonstrates, even more than its predecessor, the concessions Catholics made during the war to uphold American values. In this film, Father O'Malley is sent to rescue a parish school from financial troubles. Instead of selling a song to a recording company, however, Father O'Malley enlists the help of big business in the form of real estate magnate Horace P. Bogardus (Henry Travers). When Mr. Bogardus finally assents to the dual pressures of the nuns' patient persistence (led by Sister Mary Benedict, played by Ingrid Bergman) and Father O'Malley's smooth talking, giving his new building to St. Mary's, he consoles himself by remembering that "the gift to the Church is deductible." In other words, the Church was not simply a collection of

beatific nuns and melodic priests, but could be a monetary benefit to American
business.[80]

The Bells of St. Mary's also shows a Catholic population hardened by four long
years of fighting and ready to reaffirm their loyalty to America. During the war,
Catholics traded much of their spiritual and material culture for loyalty to the American
cause and were toughened by a war that prepared them to face the dangers of the nuclear
age and Cold War—a development reflected in their on-screen image.[81] The Bells of St.
Mary's evidences the Catholic commitment to the postwar American cause. Even though
neither Father O'Malley or the nuns were pictured out of their ceremonial garb, there are
only two scenes shot inside of Catholic holy spaces—one inside St. Mary's Church, the
other an interior of the nun's chapel, and both brief. There is little Catholic about The
Bells of St. Mary's other than the clothing of the clergy, and that clothing becomes the
one of the more prominent reminders that these are Catholic characters. The first time
the audience sees the students of St. Mary's, they are lined up neatly outside the school
saying the pledge of allegiance with the American flag prominently displayed,
underscoring Catholic loyalty. During recess Father O'Malley and Sister Benedict break
up a fight between two boys, with Father O'Malley congratulating the victor and Sister
Benedict consoling the loser. Discussing the fight, Father O'Malley reminds Sister
Benedict, "On the outside [meaning outside of the walls of St. Mary's], it's a man's

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[80] *The Bells of St. Mary's*, directed by Leo McCarey (1944, no place: Rainbow Productions), DVD.

[81] Smith, "America's Favorite Priest; *Going My Way* (1944)," 119.

world."[82] Thus the Catholic penchant for violence, like the stereotypical "Fighting Irish,"

is turned into an asset when growing up in Cold War America.

The conversation between Father O'Malley and Sister Benedict regarding the

boys' tussle reveals more about why Catholics were still viewed with suspicion despite

the concessions made, at least on film, during the 1930s and 1940s. In reply to Father

O'Malley's statement "it's a man's world," Sister Benedict says, "Wouldn't it be better to

think your way through [life, instead of fighting]? That's pure conjecture, of course,

from someone on the inside." Their parlay takes a turn toward sexuality when Father

O'Malley replies, "But don't you think sometimes in raising boys a woman's influence

can be carried too far?" In response, Sister Benedict laughingly retorts, "Oh, you mean

they may become sisters, Father?" This is the only mention of such fears for Catholics in

the movie, and even Sister Benedict is depicted showing the boy who lost the fight how

to properly box.[83] But the words exchanged between Father O'Malley and Sister

Benedict highlight still present fears that Catholics might not be tough enough in the

coming global war against communism, and echoes films of previous decades of like

Cupid and the Comet and *The Mask of Zorro* showing Catholic characters as weak or

effeminate.[84]

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[82] *The Bells of St. Mary's*, 1945.

[83] Ibid.

[84] K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 70. Also, recall that the earliest examples of Catholics on film, particularly priests, show them as effeminate and helpless. See *Cupid and the Comet* (1911) and *The Mark of Zorro* (1920); see also Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 141.

In the years following World War II, the onset of the Cold War meant that Americans could ill afford to be "too soft" while the Soviets drew the Iron Curtain around Eastern Europe and developed their own atomic bomb. The letters of Catholics in the movie industry and the finished products on-screen show that they took their role in the war effort seriously.[85] No matter what concessions Catholics made to the war effort by trying to show their people as normal white Americans, the ubiquity of Catholic stereotypes on film served as a reminder of all the ills that American society traditionally associated with them. The continuing presence of stereotypes like having large families, residence in urban tenements, engaging in criminal behavior, and a focus on Irish Americans as representatives of all Catholics in the 1930s and 1940s, did two things. First, despite the fact that Catholics were largely sympathetic characters on film, those stereotypes show the indelibility of negative perceptions of Catholics in American culture and proved difficult themes for Catholics in the movie industry to grapple with in the face of larger issues like Depression and World War facing the entire nation. Second, they suggest that the largely positive light in which Catholics appeared during the war was merely the minstrelization of their own culture.

The war years contained the most pointed examples of Catholic minstrelization on film because they provided an opportunity for Catholic people to demonstrate their loyalty to white American values. Of course, World War II was not unique, since the government has traditionally fostered a sense of inclusiveness during times of

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[85] Martin J. Quigley often wrote with pride of his son, Junior, who served in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and worked in England collecting intelligence information. Martin Quigley Jr. eventually went on to succeed his father at the head of a media empire tied to the motion picture industry. Box 3, Folder 65, Subject Correspondence Series: Testimonials, Quigley Papers.

emergency.[86] Yet given the history of Catholic marginalization in America, it is not

surprising that an opportunity for redemption did not come around until the middle of the

twentieth century. With defining moments in American history like the Great

Depression, World War II, and the Cold War, Catholics attempted, through film, to

subdue that which made them unique. In movies, they wanted to present themselves as

American as anyone else, though they found shedding associations with underclasses and

ethnic minorities, two groups that Catholics were part of throughout the nineteenth and

into the twentieth centuries, difficult. In *Angels with Dirty Faces*, Father Jerry sums up

the difficulty for Catholics to improve their image:

> What earthly good is it for me to teach that honesty is the
> best policy when all around them they see that dishonesty is
> the better policy? The hoodlum and the gangster is looked
> up to with the same respect as the successful business man
> or popular hero. You and the Fraziers and the Kiefers
> [Rocky Sullivan's, played by James Cagney,
> coconspirators] and all the rest of the rotten politicians you
> got in the palm of your hand. Yes, you got my boys too.
> Whatever I teach them you show me up. You show them
> the easiest way, the quickest way, is with a racket or a gun.
> . . . You see, Rocky, I thought I could solve my problems,
> and the problems of my boys, which after all they are, from
> the bottom up. But I can't do it, I've got to start from the
> top down."[87]

These lines exemplify why Catholics became so involved in the movie industry, why they

reacted to Depression and war the way they did, and what they saw as the right behavior

in difficult times. The white characters in Catholic movies of the 1930s and 1940s, both

the clergy and laity, earned redemption through service to country and capital. During

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[86] Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), xiii.

[87] *Angels with Dirty Faces*, 1938.

the 1930s and 1940s, Catholics on film displayed a commitment to serving the white

American values that were promoted as the solution to the country's problems.[88]

Catholics in the motion picture industry served ably in times of national need. As

the nation turned from World War to Cold War, however, their on-film representation

became more exotic, if not more sinister. Why did this change occur? Part of the answer

lies with their inability to shake the negative stereotypes that had stayed with their

cultural image since the nineteenth century. In popular culture, Catholic peoples were

still drunkards, still violent, and still enclosed in their urban slums, though they might

now be considered loyal Americans. Their religion was presented as just as Christian as

any form of Protestantism, and yet few actual scenes were filmed with Catholics

participating in their distinctive ceremonies. Numerous Catholic characters filled movie

screens, and yet little was seen of the inside of Catholic churches, where their distinctive

liturgical material culture was on full display. The papal banner was traded for the stars

and stripes, and the American flag was seen often. Audiences understood that they were

watching Catholic characters, but the pressure exerted by Catholics in Hollywood made

sure that they were also seeing movies that emphasized their Americanness. Looking

back at his career as head of the PCA, Joseph Breen spoke to the desires of Catholics in

the movie industry during the 1930s and 1940s by remarking that their goals were

indistinguishable from those of any American:

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[88] Jews also used Hollywood in order to earn "white" status. Indeed, it was during the Great Depression, World War II, and the onset of the Cold War that the ideals of white, middle-class America were instilled in movies. See Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 34.

> This philosophical theory of reformation by legislation—
> the attempt to make people good and righteous by
> legislative fiat—is no new things in American legislative
> annals. The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution
> had been the supreme law of the land. All over America,
> organized groups of men and women, active in seeking to
> promote common weal, were urging more and more
> governmental censorship of motion pictures.[89]

Breen spoke these words in 1955, a year after his retirement from the PCA. In the

years between the end of World War II and Breen's retirement, a new enemy, the Soviet

Union, elevated America's commitment to white middle-class values, as presented on

film, to an unprecedented level. For American capitalism to triumph over Soviet

communism in the Cold War, America could ill afford for men "to become sisters," as

Father O'Malley worried in *The Bells of St. Mary's*. By 1949, when *Come to the Stable*,

a movie about a group of nuns who settled in a small Connecticut town hoping to build a

children's hospital, appeared in theaters, Catholicism had lost its luster. Critics called the

film's premise "absurd," and thought that the behavior of the nuns in the film was a "tax

on credulity," including their employment of an African American butler.[90] With

Catholicism no longer a box-office draw, the members of the Legion of Decency fighting

among themselves over the parameters of movie censorship, and Catholics retaining

aspects of their foreignness in an increasingly hostile Cold War climate, Catholics began

once again to recede to the margins in American culture. Throughout the 1950s and into

the 1960s, Catholics on film increasingly became isolated figures, whether among their

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[89] Box 1, Folder 4, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

[90] Bosley Crowther, "'Come to the Stable,' in Which Loretta Young and Celeste Holm Play Nuns, at Rivoli," *New York Times* Jul 28, 1949 ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

fellow Catholics in familiar settings or portrayed in far-off locales. That isolation led to a requestioning of Catholics' white American status, despite the fact that numerous Catholics abandoned their inner-city parishes for white neighborhoods in the suburbs.

CHAPTER FOUR

REMOVING THE WHITE MASK

THE DECLINE OF CATHOLIC REPRESENTATION ON FILM, 1950–1968

> Fear and hatred of all Irish Catholics had developed and spread like a
> terrible disease. . . . Hating is always the same, always senseless. One day
> it kills Irish Catholics, the next day Jews, the next day Protestants, the next
> day Quakers. It's hard to stop, it can end up killing men who wear striped
> neck ties, or people from Tennessee.
>
> —Captain Finlay, *Crossfire* (1947)

The decades following World War II, like Captain Finlay's changing targets of hatred,

demonstrated that movies continued to develop new ways for separating Catholics from

mainstream America. During the 1940s, a new film style known as "film noir" became

popular in Hollywood, of which *Crossfire*, quoted above, is but one example.

Characterized by urban settings, dim lighting, and characters of questionable morality,

film noir spoke to the uneasiness of a newly realized atomic world. Adherents to the

style challenged underlying social norms and created a dangerous, isolated world, cut off

from the traditional avenues to American success.[1] Finlay's words underscored the

Catholic place in that film world, one imbued with many of the negative stereotypes long

associated with their place in American popular culture. The captain, played by Robert

Young, tells the story of his grandfather's murder—a man who met his demise because

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[1] Andrew Spicer, *Film Noir* (New York: Longman, 2002).

others labeled him "a dirty, Irish Mick, a priest lover, a spy for Rome, a foreigner trying to rob men of jobs." His grandfather's people experienced violence, and now the people in the urban jungle of Finlay's day could not escape the same fate.[1] Yet, while the lead character of *Crossfire* highlights lingering prejudice against Catholics, the message is a blandly plural one meant to dovetail with the mission of groups like the Legion of Decency who sought to position their coreligionists in a broad American context. Film noir, on the other hand, was one example among many that showed how the hatred of the other lingered, and as the country entered the 1950s, such sentiments turned into outright suspicion of those who challenged the white, middle-class status quo.

As the United States continued its Cold War with the Soviet Union into the 1950s and 1960s, films questioned the place of Roman Catholics in society in new ways. European Catholics could lay claim to white status by virtue of their skin color, by abandoning their ties to urban otherness for suburban conformity, and with the election of the Catholic John Fitzgerald Kennedy as president in 1960, to name a few. Issues of living space and politics were to things that had traditionally separated Catholics from whiteness. Yet film increasingly represented an alien Catholicism, isolated from American society. In the cultural and political atmosphere of an ideological war waged against communism in the name of democracy and capitalism, movie producers revisited the notion that Papists were a people with foreign—read questionable—loyalties. In addition to the negative stereotypes that characterized Catholicism in movies, Catholic characters were also now alone and separated from the mainstream. As the power of

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[1] *Crossfire*, directed by Edward Dmytryk (1947, Los Angeles: RKO Radio Pictures), DVD.

Catholics in the movie industry waned, along with that of the Production Code

Administration, films seemingly turned on the Church, presenting it as an aloof, dark

influence in society. Finally, the number of examples of Catholics on film decreased

throughout the 1950s and 1960s, responding to trends in American Culture that went

away from Christian themes.[2] By 1968, when a modern film rating system replaced the

Production Codes, Catholicism emerged from the culture wars of the preceding decade

seeming myopic, backward, and with fewer cinematic representations.[3]

Since the Catholic Church in the United States attempted to portray an

unquestioned loyalty in difficult times like Depression and World War II, one might

expect a period of positive portrayals instead of an uptick in suspicion towards their

religion in the decades that followed. And while a person's religion did not mean as

much in determining a person's relation to whiteness as the twentieth century went on,

the same could not be said of the way Catholics were portrayed on-screen. Scholars of

whiteness see Catholics, particularly those of European ancestry, as attaining the

privileges of whiteness during the 1950s and 1960s, yet movies tell a different story.[4]

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[2] Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade against the Movies, 1940–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 226.

[3] Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3–4, 11; Jeffrey Marlett, "Life on the Frontier: *Lilies of the Field* (1963)," in *Catholics in the Movies*, McDannell, ed., *Catholics in the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169, 172.

[4] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 43; Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 247; John T. McGreevey, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 191; Eileen M. McMahon, *What Parish are You From? A Chicago Irish Community and Race Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 157–83; David R. Roediger, *Working*

Though movies slightly waned in popularity, and thus in effect, due to growing television viewership, film continued to be a large part of the entertainment choices of many of Americans.[5] Thus, regardless of whether or not Catholics were more accepted outside of the theater, inside audiences were still being told that Papists were different owing to the diminished influence of the Church on Hollywood and, later on, changing attitudes towards traditional institutions.

For instance, priests could still be relied upon to signal the presence of Catholic themes in a movie, although the number of clergymen portrayed positively dwindled as well as the number of priest movies in general. As the 1950s went on, priests were gradually replaced by nuns who, while also clearly Catholic, could present a less threatening, female form of Catholicism. Yet, even this supposedly softer, more easily controlled Catholic eventually appeared too staid in the face of loosening cultural strictures in the 1960s. By the 1960s, the Church as a whole was portrayed as the embodiment of everything the counterculture was not, and a few movies even depicted the religion as complicit with evil.

Contemporary critics, such as Erwin W. Geissman of Fordham University, questioned Catholicism in intellectual circles in the 1954 fall issue of *Cross Currents*. "We need a word here to identify the Catholic non-intellectual and I would suggest the term 'simplist.' The simplist reduces all problems to the most simple terms and then

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toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 167–69.

[5] Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 123.

discovers that they are no longer problems. He supposes that all issues can be

resolved by a common-sense application of theological and moral formulas."[6] Ever

sensitive to the way Catholics were perceived in America, Martin Quigley responded by

saying, "Dr. Geissman should [not] be in a position of influencing the young mind in a

Catholic college. . . . If we do not have the intelligence and the courage to deal with these

misrepresentative spokesmen of the Catholic mind we shall get nowhere in the great

struggle now in progress."[7] Still, it is little wonder that Geissman referred to Catholics as

"simplists," for this invention was based on an article appearing in *The Brooklyn Tablet*

on November 21, 1953, in which Father Dinneen of the Chicago council of the Legion of

Decency proclaimed that to go to a movie denounced by the Legion was tantamount to a

sin. Geissman saw Dinneen's attitude as symbolic of the whole of the Catholic

establishment, adding, "If this is only an isolated case of appalling ignorance it would be

a good individual example of the simplest mind. But the unpleasant suspicion lurks that

there may be Catholic seminaries teaching such nonsense."[8] Geissman's words also

foreshadow the backlash against Catholicism to come in American culture, one that

isolated it in the 1950s and made it appear silly in the 1960s.

Whether "an isolated case of appalling ignorance" or more widespread, Geissman

unwittingly touched on a problem that plagued Catholic policing of the cinema. The

acrimonious relationships between nearly everyone at every level of the Legion of

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[6] The Martin J. Quigley Papers, Georgetown University, Joseph Mark Lauinger Memorial Library, Special Collections, Individual Correspondence Series, Box 1, Folder 14.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

Decency helped lead to its dissolution.[9] Denneen, leader of the Chicago council,

headed a group of movie reviewers that drew a large amount of attention, as well as the

ire of other groups within the Legion, who bristled at the presumption that Chicago had

the final word on Catholic movie ratings. Quigley and Father Daniel Lord bickered over

who wrote the Production Codes, and even after Lord's death in 1955, Quigley could not

bear the thought of anyone anywhere believing that anybody but himself wrote the

codes.[10] Personal movie tastes meant that priests fought with the Legion, the Church

hierarchy, other priests, and the laity over which films should be approved or condemned.

Therefore, by the beginning of the 1950s, filmmakers finally realized that those Catholics

who insistently monitored movie content throughout the 1930s and 1940s no longer could

interfere as effectively as they once did.[11]

Catholic clergymen like John Nell, one of the founders of the Legion and editor of

Our Sunday Visitor during the 1950s, a nationwide Catholic periodical, worried about the

place of Catholics in the movie industry. He understood that the problem revolved

around the fact that most Americans were Protestant, a statistic that he felt tended to push

Catholicism to the margins. Sensitive to anything that might separate Catholicism from

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[9] While the Legion of Decency no longer exists in name, its influence is still felt today. Catholic newspapers and parish bulletins utilize a modified form of the Legion's movie rating system when printing reviews, which range from permissible for all ages to morally objectionable for all ages.

[10] To name just one example, see "Father Lord Vs. Quigley," *Variety*, June 6, 1936.

[11] Quigley's papers provide a window into the rise and fall of Catholic influence on film content. They also demonstrate that bickering over procedure characterized the Legion of Decency from the very beginning. Close friends could no longer speak to one another after years of disagreements over various film ratings, and Quigley himself was not above ending correspondences over perceived slights. And as a founding member of the Legion, a lifelong devout Catholic, and a person of influence in Hollywood, he stood at the intersection of a few streams of cultural thought for much of the middle decades of the twentieth century.

mainstream Americanism, Nell quoted William H. Hays, head of the Motion Picture

Producers and Distributers of America (MPPDA), as saying about Catholics, "You are an

urban people, and it is in the cities where we have our big theatres. Protestantism is

better than eighty per cent rural, and, therefore, is not close to the large theatres." Hays's

words both respond to a demographic reality and, on the surface, speak to the target

audience of films, since he acted as president of the organization that made sure films

made it into movie theaters. On the other hand, Hays uses one of the decades-old

stereotypes about Catholics: the urban parish. Nell added to the worry about being

different from Protestants when he claims that the "[Catholic hierarchy] have never

attacked Protestantism . . . or anything else through a Catholic organization or from the

pulpit." Such fretting about whether Catholicism had a place in a Protestant nation

produced uneven results in film vetting, which led to further bickering among Legion

leaders.[12]

　　　Not only did cracks begin to appear in the Legion leadership in the 1950s, but

those same leaders also felt that their message no longer reached its intended audience:

the everyday Catholic parishioner. Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York bemoaned

the state of the Legion in a letter to Quigley dated July 30, 1956: "The Legion of

Decency, while continuing to enjoy a unique measure of prestige, although bitterly

resented in certain Hollywood quarters and elsewhere, is able no longer to exert its

previous practical influence. This seems mainly due to the failure of large numbers of the

Catholic people to understand, accept, or abide by the mandates of the Legion's

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[12] "Letter of John Nell to John Cogley," Gordon Zahn Papers, University of Notre Dame Special
Collections, Box 3, Folder 3600, Item 3649.

classifications. Box office results seem to prove that this is so and are interpreted

accordingly by the industry." In other words, the everyday Catholic in the pews did not

heed Legion movie pronouncements because movies proved too popular to resist, despite

the demands of their religious leaders. Their continue patronage of theaters suggested to

Hollywood just how ineffectual the organization was. Quigley attempted to quell

Spellman's fears by pointing out that the new Production Code administrator used a more

"enlightened interpretation" of the code, one that attempted to balance the sometimes

conflicting imperatives of strict morality and entertaining titillation—which certainly

appealed to Catholic and non-Catholic moviegoers.[13]

One blow to Catholic involvement in the movie industry was the retirement of

Joseph Breen as head of the Production Code Administration. Breen's replacement was

Geoffrey Shurlock, a non-Catholic and the new administrator Quigley referred to in his

letter to Spellman, who took a more lax approach to movie censorship than his

predecessor. This increased freedom of expression occurred because, counter to the

organization's influence under Breen, the Legion could no longer assume their opinion

would be heeded. Additionally, in the wake of the Red Scare and the McCarthy hearings,

the Legion seemed similar to Joseph McCarthy and his ilk, attempting to stifle artistic

expression, at least in the eyes of Hollywood. As a result, the Legion lost much of the

influence it previously wielded in the wake of the Red Scare. The filmmaking industry

began to blur the lines between what was acceptable or not under the code, or ignore

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[13] Francis Cardinal Spellman Papers, S/C 35, Folder 13.

those guidelines completely, especially when it came to the depiction of, for example,

priests. As a result, Catholics began to be pushed to the margins.[14]

Of course, prominent priests already existed in the media, which proved resistant,

for at least some of the 1950s, to the erosion of positive examples of Catholicism.

Perhaps the most popular Catholic of the 1950s was Bishop (later Archbishop) Fulton

Sheen, whose syndicated television program "Life is Worth Living" drew millions of

viewers.[15] In 1952, commercial sponsors paid $1,000,000 in order to air twenty-six

weeks of the show across the United States and in Canada.[16] Sheen's words were not

always well received, however, as when he said during a special Mass dedicated to the

Virgin Mary that "we gather here today to ask the Blessed Mother to bring Christ to the

Soviet Union," instead of preaching in favor of the continued fight against communism.

Sheen added, "We of the Western World have reached into the heavens and have

perfected a greater destructive power than the sun itself. The burden is on us to use this

great power for the benefit and not the destruction of mankind."[17] Though Sheen took a

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[14] Black, *The Catholic Crusade against the Movies, 1940–1975*, 173.

[15] In his foreword to Sheen's autobiography, Raymond Arroyo suggests that it was Francis Cardinal Spellman, archbishop of New York, who was responsible Sheen's cancellation in 1957, despite a weekly audience of some 30 million. This was the result of a controversy that occurred between Sheen and Spellman after the cardinal demanded payment for donated milk distributed by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith come out of Sheen's own pocket in the sum of millions of dollars. Sheen refused. Spellman, as a member of the Legion of Decency, which by 1950s had influence over television program as well, used his influence to eventually get Sheen off the air. Spellman succeeded in doing so thanks to the perception by some in the media that Sheen was soft on communism. Fulton J. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay: The Autobiography of Fulton J. Sheen*, with a foreword by Raymond Arroyo (New York: Random House, 2008), xii; Black, *The Catholic Crusade against the Movies, 1940–1975*, 68.

[16] "Admiral Sponsor of Sheen TV Talks: Radio, Television Makers Pay $1,000,000 for 26 Weeks—Bishop's Fee to Charity," *New York Times*, October 22, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[17] "Russians Get Sheen Bid: Bishop Says Catholics Want to Make Them Christians," Ibid., October 25, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

different stance, such sentiment met with resistance and was not in keeping with

white, middle-class values of the 1950s. Further, his qualms regarding nuclear weaponry

helped lead to the cancellation of his program.[18] Therefore, despite Sheen's popularity

and the general acceptance of Catholics in other parts of American life, their questionable

loyalties never lay too far from the minds of some cultural observers.

One of the more puzzling questions of American Catholic history is why their

place in American society continued to be questioned on film at precisely the moment

when European-descended Catholics began moving with their Protestant cousins in the

suburbs. Movies evidence this trend not only in the use of familiar Catholic stereotypes,

but also by inventing new ones that further drew Catholic characters away from standards

of whiteness. Part of the answer lies in a backlash against Catholic involvement in the

movie industry, which by the 1950s was perceived as outright meddling. The

correspondence that took place between the director of the British-made movie *Lolita*

(1962), Stanley Kubrick, and Martin Quigley is an example of the distaste filmmakers,

especially young and upcoming ones, held for the Legion and the influence of Catholics

in general. As a businessman with several publications that relied on Hollywood for print

and advertising, Quigley catered to the trends he saw in the loosening of morals in film

content, as evidenced by the coverage his magazines gave to films the Legion saw as

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[18] Given Senator Joseph McCarthy's (the United States senator probably most responsible for the Red Scare of the 1950s) Catholic upbringing, few Catholics were brought before HUAC boards. However, Catholics still fell under some suspicion, mainly as a result of the long-standing status of Catholics as working class. Suspicion was cast on Catholics whenever the Communist Party, or anyone looking like a communist agent, were reported to attempt the recruitment of Catholic workers. See Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most-Hated Senator* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 176; Bertolt Brecht, HUAC Testimony, October 30, 1947, https://eee.uci.edu/programs/humcore/Student/archives/HUACBrecht.htm.

objectionable.[19] Still, by 1960 Kubrick was unaware of any rift when he first wrote to

Quigley about bringing his film to America, seeing only a hurdle to be overcome.

Throughout their correspondence, Quigley explains the Catholic position on the content

of *Lolita*, but there is always a sense that the film will inevitably be shown in America.

Quigley even went so far as to complain to Spellman about the Legion, saying in 1961,

"The laymen who originated and largely upbuilded [the Legion] over a period of two

decades were summarily excluded because they had the temerity to question the

introduction of uninformed and liberalistic theories and practices."[20]

Quigley saw money to be made by the movie industry he worked in with a

controversial film like *Lolita*, which meant further advertising dollars for his magazines.

Nonetheless, he did suggest some changes to the script, such as making the title character

older than fifteen. Kubrick ignored them.[21] As seen in his correspondence with Quigley,

Kubrick protested Catholic orthodoxy applied to cinema and his choice of film material

displayed his perspective. On a broader scale, movie producers began to move away

from the semiotics of the strong-priest characters that symbolized the Catholic presence

in the industry in the 1930s and 1940s. During the preceding decades, priests were tough

and patriotic, but also obviously Catholic. Beginning in the 1950s, priests were seldom

portrayed as physically strong, with notable exceptions like Father Barry (Karl Malden)

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[19] An example of the objectionable material Quigley's publications began to cover was the spread done on *Babette Goes to War*, as seen in the March 4, 1960, edition of Motion Picture Daily. Not only was the film deemed inappropriate, but the scantily clad Brigitte Bardot graced a full page ad. See Box 1, Folder 16, Individual Correspondence Series, Quigley Papers.

[20] Quigley Papers, Subject Correspondence Series, Box 3, Folders 5–11.

[21] Ibid.

in *On the Waterfront* (1954). Father Barry attempts to persuade Terry Malloy

(Marlon Brando) to help combat the corruption of the dockworkers' union. The priest

takes a hard-line approach to the evils he sees in the waterfront community, but he is

often a solitary figure in his fight, divorced from the trappings of the Church and from his

fellows, in some ways symbolic of the waning influence of Catholicism in Hollywood.[22]

One can see that waning influence in the *mise-en-scéne* of Father Barry's (fig. 10)

scenes in *On the Waterfront*. While important to the story, the priest's attempt to make

Malloy see the error of working with the corrupt boss that controls the dockworkers'

union, Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb), often fall on deaf ears. Instead, the resolution to

the plot can only come about after Malloy finally confronts the corruption of the docks on

his own, without help from anyone else. Malloy's struggle stands apart, and isolates,

Father Barry's own attempts to combat the evils of Friendly and his cohorts.

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[22] *On the Waterfront*, directed by Elia Kazan (1954, Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation), DVD.

Figure 10. Father Barry in *On the Waterfront* (1954)
Source: Jacob Hall, "Where Everyone Has Gone Before #28: 'On the Waterfront,'" November 5, 2012, http://blog.moviefone.com/2011/01/29/on-the-waterfront-discussion/

Father Barry tries his best to confront the problems on the waterfront.

Nonetheless, in the scene pictured above in which he pleads with the workers to stand up

to Friendly and company, his eloquent yet forceful pleading goes largely ignored:

> Boys, if you don't think Christ is down here on the waterfront, you have another thing comin'! . . . Every morning when the hiring boss blows his whistle, Jesus stands alongside you in the shape-up. He sees why some of you get picked, and some of you get passed over. He sees the family man worrying about getting their rent, and getting food in the house for the wife and kids. He sees you selling your souls to the mob for a day's pay. . . . Now does Christ think of the easy-money boys who do none of the work and take all of the gravy? And how does he feel about the fellas who wear $150 suits and diamond rings on your union dues and your kickback money? And how does he who spoke up without fear against every evil feel about your *silence*?

Whether director Elia Kazan meant it or not, Father Barry's speech hearkens to public

outcries against similar corruption in city politics, the mechanisms of which were largely

controlled by Irish Catholics. Friendly acts the part of ward boss, doling out patronage

however he sees fit. While Irish machine politics became increasingly reviled, Barry's

words echoed those of Catholic thinkers like Thomas O'Gorman who attempted to use

broad Christian principles to stem the tide of public opinion against Catholicism. Both

O'Gorman in 1890 and Father Barry were ineffectual in effecting change in their

surroundings.[23]

An example of a similar cinematic minister who catered to both Christian and

American ideals with success was the Reverend Peter Marshall in *A Man Called Peter*

(1955). The film tells the true story of a Scottish born Presbyterian minister who

becomes chaplain to the United States Congress. At one point, Marshall calls to mind the

unfitness of Catholics for American Christianity, claiming that God does not want those

"people in . . . cloisters."[24] So while a Marshall is able to win followers, Father Barry

cannot sway the dockworkers of *On the Waterfront* despite using similar messages. *A*

Man Called Peter also offers a stark contrast between Protestant success and Catholic

failure. The workers greet the priest's call to action not with upturned and open faces,

but with downward glances and shuffling of the feet after he endures beers and other

items thrown at him, and even after he attempts to instill the brotherhood of Christ in

[23] Chris McNickle, "When New York was Irish, and After," in *The New York Irish*, Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, eds. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 338–41; see also Thomas O'Gorman, *How Catholics Come to Be Misunderstood: A Lecture* (American series of publications, no. 3. [St. Paul]: Catholic Truth Society, 1890).

[24] *A Man Called Peter*, directed by Henry Koster (1955, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox), DVD.

them. Instead, it takes Malloy's passive acceptance of a beating at the hands of

Friendly for the workers to finally stand up to the wrongs in their environment.[25]

Again, priests like Father Barry who were strong, though ineffectual, characters

were rare on film in the 1950s. Movies during the Cold War seem to express the idea

that political events were spiraling out of control, and depicted priests as powerless do

anything about it. During the decade, many films depicted an alien invader, either in the

form of spacemen or communists, and that formula proved successful for many films.

Only by constant vigilance against outsiders could protagonists overcome obstacles posed

in the plot.[26] Given Catholicism's long-standing place in America as a foreign element, it

makes sense that in a xenophobic time cinematic Catholics, even priests, were portrayed

as isolated members of society. The isolation of Catholics on film contrasted with lay

people who realized new avenues to success in the 1950s by moving to the suburbs and

perceived as staunchly anti-communist.[27]

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[25] *On the Waterfront*, 1954.

[26] John Belton, *Movies and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 221; May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 264; Eric Avila, "Film Noir, Disneyland, and the Cold War (Sub)Urban Imaginary," in Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, eds., *Hollywood's America: United States History through Its Films* (St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 2001), 226.

[27] Throughout the 1950s, both the Legion of Decency and the Production Code Administration begin to lose what power they had over the movie industry. One of the main reasons for their decline was the retirement of Joseph Breen as head of the PCA—his direct ties to the Legion of Decency made its opinions carry far greater weight than most other groups of citizens in Hollywood. With Breen out of the way, filmmakers could take greater liberties with the way they portrayed Catholics. Further, infighting among the various members of the Legion, as well as the increasingly shrill pronouncements that they did make, made the Legion, like Catholics on-screen, appear isolated from mainstream Hollywood. Finally, members of the Legion saw the rise in popularity of movies that strayed from the strictures of the codes as an impediment to their work because it undermined their message that film must meet the Legion's moral standards. See Quigley Papers, Individual Correspondence Series, Box 1, Folder 22.

That cinematic isolation on-screen, paired with their customary foreignness, led to a series of films in which the portrayal of Catholics undoubtedly contained positive elements, but was not part of an American culture that held up white, middle-class, suburban families as the ideal. Despite the fact that Catholics outside of cinema had attained many of the trappings of whiteness, movies told a different story. They could be inspirational figures so long as they did so in other countries. Perhaps no movie highlights both the foreignness and the inspiration of priests on film, while also showing their isolation, better than Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953). Father Michael Logan (Montgomery Clift) is accused of killing a man because the actual murderer, the German caretaker of Father Logan's parish, Otto Keller (O. E. Hesse), used priestly robes to disguise himself while committing the crime. Keller confesses the murder to Father Logan, but because of his vows Father Logan cannot reveal what he knows about the killing. The terrible knowledge that Father Logan is burdened with leads him to act suspiciously in the eyes of the police investigating the murder, isolating him further.[28] Hitchcock masterfully demonstrates that solitude with shots like figure 11.

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[28] *I Confess*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1953, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), DVD.

Figure 11. Father Michael Logan in *I Confess* (1953)
Source: Chase Kahn, "Classic Rewind: *I Confess* (1953)," November 6, 2012,
http://thegloriousninth.blogspot.com/2011/08/classic-rewind-i-confess-1953.html

One might almost miss Father Logan in Hitchcock's shot, but the language of the

scene is clear. The priest walks alone in the shadow of Christ carrying the cross to his

crucifixion. Hitchcock attempts to draw parallels between Father Logan and Jesus that,

on the surface, might give the character, and thus Catholicism, a sympathetic tone. Like

the son of God, the priest is on his way to a trial in which he must bear the sins of others.

Even though the jury finds him not guilty—in other words, he does not suffer death on

the cross—the crowd that greets him outside of the courthouse clearly does not see him

as innocent. Only after Keller shoots his wife in front of the same crowd do people

realize that Father Logan did not commit the murder for which he was acquitted.

Throughout, his vow to uphold the secrecy of the confessional seal is depicted in this *montage* of scenes as an impediment to true justice. Importantly, when he is finally vindicated, it is not because of any of his priestly abilities or eloquence, but because of the actions of others.[29]

In the 1950s, in the era of the Cold War, audiences could be sympathetic to a priest on film when it was set in a foreign country. Priests could be heroic so long as it was clear that they performed their deeds elsewhere. Hitchcock framed his Catholicism as a foreign entity by placing the events of *I Confess* in Canada. Heroism aside, there are aspects of Catholicism in the movie that show it to be problematic.[30] First and foremost is the thrust of the plot, the inner struggle caused by knowing the truth of a grisly crime and not divulging it. The confessional seal thus becomes an obstacle to the exercise of justice. Second, Hitchcock adds another layer of internal conflict with a love interest in the form of Ruth Grandfort (Anne Baxter) that casts priests' sexuality, or lack thereof, in a critical light. In a flashback we see that Ruth and Father Logan once entertained notions of getting married. Fighting in World War II, however, changed his mind and helped convinced him to become a priest. The film conveys the sense that Father Logan might have been happier had he decided to get married instead.[31] Finally, critics did not respond well to *I Confess* in general. While referring to Father Logan as an

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[29] *I Confess*, 1953.

[30] Alfred Hitchcock himself was a devoted, if not showy, Catholic. Growing up in a staunchly Protestant country like England, the Hitchcocks' religion tended to isolate them from the rest of society. Later in life, Hitchcock was never overt about his religion in public, seeing his faith to be simply a matter of fact and nothing more, despite his generous contributions to Catholic charities. See Patrick Mcgilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 440–43.

[31] *I Confess*, 1953.

"irreproachable hero," Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* panned the movie as "an entertainment that tends to drag, sag, and generally grow dull," and describes the setting as adding merely "atmospheric flavor."[32]

When Catholic films were set in America, their "atmospheric flavor" was fraught with familiar stereotypes and clichés. These stereotypes can be seen in 1953's *Trouble along the Way*, starring John Wayne as a down-on-his-luck football coach named Stephen Williams. St. Anthony's, a small Catholic college, recruits Williams to put together a football team in order to save the school from closing after years of financial difficulty. When he shows up, the implication is that Williams is the answer to a prayer. These Catholics, helpless as they had been in so many other films before, had to rely on divine intervention in the form of the heroic John Wayne to ride to the rescue. Another familiar trait in the film is the urban setting of St. Anthony's, again, far from the spacious tracts of white suburbia. The film does introduce one new spin on the boxing priest stereotype, however: Catholic football prowess. During *montages* of St. Anthony's team at practice, the Notre Dame University fight song plays in the background. Williams drives home the point when looking at the schedule the school's dean, Father Burke (Charles Coburn), prepared for them: "Couldn't he have booked a Protestant school for a breather?" While physical ability may be a prized trait in America, the movie's focus on

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[32] Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review: 'I Confess,' Hitchcock Drama of Priests' Dilemma Starring Clift, Opens at Paramount," *New York Times*, March 23, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Catholic sports suggests that athleticism trumped intellectual achievement at their schools.[33]

Outside of athletic aptitude, Catholics on film in the 1950s did not constitute a part of America that moviemakers chose to focus on. Aside from priests whose duty, one could say, was to be Catholic, openly Catholic characters were clearly nonwhite peoples like on-screen Mexicans, whose darker complexions further differentiated them from "mainstream" Americans in movies. In a decade of film that contains so few examples of white, middle-class Catholics living in the suburbs, why the turn to Mexicans on film?[34] Because for all the supposed progress made by European Catholics in shedding that which distinguished them from Protestants, their religion still retained an element of foreignness that translated onto film in the form of Mexicans.[35] When viewed through the lens of film, Catholics become, if not completely so because of their social gains, something less than white.

The semiotics of Mexican Catholic foreignness on-screen was composed of three layers. First, Mexicans practiced a religion long viewed as foreign on film.[36] One can

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[33] *Trouble Along the Way*, directed by Michael Curtiz (1953, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), DVD.

[34] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 143–62; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 194–99. For the Catholic part in the peopling of suburbia, see John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 83–84.

[35] Theresa Sanders, "God and Guns: *Seven Cities of Gold* (1955)," in *Catholics in the Movies*, Colleen McDannell, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 127–37.

[36] In 1928, on the cusp of supposed widespread acceptance, Catholics acknowledged that one of the stumbling blocks to them being viewed as American was the exotic mixture of races that were labeled as

see the foreign nature of Catholicism in films like *Seven Cities of Gold*, where

Spanish missionaries, arriving with conquistadors, bring Catholicism to native peoples.[37]

Second, Mexican Catholics, particularly in the 1950s, usually appear in Westerns. While

the Western is a quintessentially American movie genre, it is also one of the most

formulaic, and thus stereotyped. *Giant* (1956), starring Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson,

James Dean, and Sal Mineo as the lead Mexican character, shows Catholicism as an

important part of Mexican life. While it does not show the abuse of Mexicans in a

favorable light, their poor living conditions and reliance on white Protestants for

employment compare to stereotypes previously attributed to the Irish.[38] Finally, it was

difficult to escape the fact that Mexican Catholics were played by actors who looked

different from actors in starring roles and whose characters took part in traditions that

marked them as alien. In *The Alamo* (1960), Davy Crockett (John Wayne) briefly

consorts with a maiden named Flaca (Linda Cristal), whose speech and faith make her

unmistakably Mexican.[39]

Westerns were popular during the Cold War era because they spoke to a mythic

past that supposedly embodied the virtues America required in order to triumph over

foreign powers. For example, as an outlaw, Billy the Kid represented the kind of

individualism that Americans saw as antithetical to the conformity of communism.

Catholic. See Denis A. McCarthy, "The Evil of Extreme Nationalism," *Ave Maria Magazine*, July 28, 1928, 112–15.

[37] Ibid.

[38] *Giant*, directed by George Stevens (1956, Burban, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), DVD.

[39] *The Alamo*, directed by John Wayne (1960, Los Angeles: United Artists), DVD.

Westerns also offered exotic locales for filmmakers to set their movies in, giving their

intended audiences a further level of escapism that constitutes one of the allures of going

to the theater.[40] Mexican Catholics often made up a part of the exotic scenery of the

mythic American West, especially in films set in the once-Spanish-controlled Southwest,

and their religious rituals became part of that exoticism. The point of most Westerns was

to show action in the name of peace and justice, and Catholics, while still present, were

pushed to the margins.[41]

This film genre, with its stock themes and images of cowboys and Indians, wagon

trains acting as vanguards of civilization, and lone gunfighters facing down criminal

elements, all spoke to the underlying struggles of the Cold War. The lone gunfighter,

sometimes acting as a representative of law enforcement, took on America's mantle as a

character that fought against the darker nature of man that many felt communism

symbolized. The cowboy fought the "red man," which represented the alien in Westerns.

The struggle was against the foreign, and movies like *The Alamo* depict Americans doing

battle against entire Catholic peoples invading their land.[42] Also, the narrative of settlers

taming the Wild West with American-style farming and family values pointed the way

for American audiences to how they could join the struggle: have good families and

maintain a proper home. Films that conveyed these messages at a time of heightened

suspicion of alien elements helped build a sense of an "us versus them," siege

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[40] May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 126.

[41] Juan José Alonzo, *Badmen, Bandits, and Folk Heroes: The Ambivalence of Mexican American Identity in Literature and Film* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 164.

[42] *The Alamo* 1960.

mentality.[43] Martin Quigley himself urged Howard Hughes to produce a film that

depicted nuns interacting with legends like Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett, thus making a

place for Catholics in Western lore beyond the stereotypes normally attributed to that

religion.[44]

Quigley's words point to a shift in Catholicism on film that took place not only in

Westerns, but in all movies. Priests increasingly came to be replaced by nuns who, while

also obviously Catholic in their habits, offered a more complex Catholic image. Nuns

took the place of priests on film because the men lost their box office allure by the late

1950s. Further, males had to be virile, or at least attracted to women, during the 1950s

and 1960s, and that was a role a priest could never fulfill.[45] Though nuns were visibly

Catholic, their on-screen semiotics differed due to their gender. While devoted to lives of

chastity, nuns could also fill the nurturing roles expected of women during the Cold War.

Nonetheless, despite their mothering abilities, many films of the late 1950s and into the

1960s portray as problematic a society of women dedicated to a sexless life. The ideal

white woman of cinema was someone who remained in the nuclear family, safely

ensconced in the suburbs and raising a respectable number of children, as seen in *The*

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[43] Movies that underscored the idea of the lone gunfighter standing up to criminal elements include *Rio Bravo*, directed by Howard Hawks (1959, Armada Productions) and *The Magnificent Seven*, directed by John Sturges (1960, A Mirisch-Alpha Production); the cowboy fighting the Indian could be subbed with the United States cavalry clashing with native peoples, as in *Fort Apache*, directed by John Ford (1948, Argosy Pictures), and its various sequels, or more concretely with actual cowboys and Indians as in *The Searchers*, directed by John Ford (1956).

[44] Howard Hughes eventually went on to make *Born to be Bad*; however, the Legion of Decency reviewed the film and found it objectionable, demanding changes be made to the film before its release. Quigley papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

[45] Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 306–310.

Best Years of Our Lives (1946), *A Man Called Peter*, and *The Man in the Gray*

Flannel Suit (1956). Further, films like *A Man Called Peter* took their Protestant religion

seriously, whereas nun movies became goofy in the 1960s. Even though virtuous and

serious in real life, nuns on-screen nuns often questioned the tenability of their own

position through either internal conflict or comedy.[46]

The 1950s was not the first decade in which nuns appeared in movies. Prominent

examples of cinematic nuns include *The White Sister* (1923), *San Francisco* (1937), *The*

Song of Bernadette (1943), *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945), and *Come to the Stable*

(1949). With the exception of *The White Sister*, female religious characters rarely

appeared in leading roles, particularly early on. When sisters do appear on film from the

beginning of the twentieth century up to the 1940s, they almost always played secondary

roles to priests. This gender dynamic comprised a significant part of the plots of *The*

Bells of St. Mary's and *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1944) and reflected both the millennia-

old practice of the Church and Catholicism's influence on Hollywood in the first half of

the century. Silver-screen sisters, like their real-life cousins, submitted to a Church

hierarchy in which male religious directed entire orders of nuns.[47] While Sister Mary

Benedict (Ingrid Bergman in *The Bells of St. Mary's*) and Reverend Mother Maria-

Veronica (Rose Stradner in *The Keys of the Kingdom*) may have proved the equal of their

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[46] Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 1–21.

[47] Orders of male and female of religious date back to the establishment of the Catholic Church in the first century. At the same time, female orders were made subordinate to male orders, which was, and still is, seen as fitting with the God-ordered family structure based on scripture. See Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 37, 44.

male counterparts, matching their wit and importance to the plot, the movies always

made clear that the priests were in charge.[48]

Yet in the 1950s, films featuring nuns were largely devoid of priestly

counterparts. What changed in the years bridging the two decades? One answer lies in

the nature of the problems facing America during the 1930s and 1940s. The Great

Depression and World War II proved a moment of retrenchment of male-dominated

gender roles in cinema as a way to fight poverty at home and fascism abroad. The most

visible Catholic male was the priest. The priest provided for the hungry and

downtrodden in *Boys Town* (1938), and even went to war in *The Fighting 69th* (1940).[49]

Meanwhile women religious largely played a secondary role in these decades, with the

men seemingly better equipped on film to deal with the problems facing the country

during the 1930s and 1940s.

The second answer to the question of why films shifted from nuns to priests

centers on the issues at the heart of the Cold War: namely American-brand capitalism

versus Soviet-style communism. For American culture on the home front, the frontline

troops in the capitalism/communism struggle were not the armed forces, but the nuclear

family. The nuclear family was expected to do its part through conspicuous

consumption: living in the suburbs, buying the latest appliances for the home, and so on.

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[48] *The Bells of St. Mary's*, directed by Leo McCarey (1944, no place: Rainbow Productions), DVD; *The Keys of the Kingdom*, directed by John M. Stahl (1944, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), DVD.

[49] *Boys Town*, directed by Norman Taurog (1938, Culver City, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios), DVD; *The Fighting 69th*, directed by William Keighley (1940, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures), DVD.

Men provided and women nurtured. These gender dynamics were part of the white

ideal of the era.[50] Catholicism did not fit precisely with family structures because of the

vows of celibacy undertaken by its most visible representatives: priests and nuns. In the

traditional sense, then, Catholic clergy did not fit the mold of the Cold War American

family. Actual Catholic families, including those of European descent with white skin,

have always been viewed in America as unorthodox due to their size and religious

customs, despite the fact that the Cold War era saw their adoption of certain traditional

family values through the abandonment of their urban parishes for suburban ones.[51]

Since priests were celibate, nuns became symbols of Catholicism during the Cold

War because they could be cast as nurturing without the burden of large families with

which Catholics have stereotypically been portrayed. As film scholar Rebecca Sullivan

writes, in movies, "Nuns played a key role in a period of great cultural anxiety over

transitions in power relations between genders, institutions, and ideals."[52] In one respect,

their function as chaste nurturers made them the ideal cultural symbol for Cold War

America. Aside from the obvious badge of foreignness contained in their garments, nuns

could both exist free of male dominance and staunchly uphold traditional womanhood.

On the one hand, as entire orders of female religious, they could point the way to a world

free from the gender strictures that rated women as second-class. On the other, as

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[50] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 112–162.; See also Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

[51] John T. McGreevey, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 79–110.

[52] Sullivan, *Visual Habits*, 3.

women, they could also be relegated to the safe domestic sphere that matters of the home shared with religion and which was a part of American life so important to white constructions. On-screen during the 1950s and 1960s, nuns contained all of these elements but also carried many of the negative stereotypes associated with Catholics. Therefore, nuns were neither too radical, nor could they fit precisely with traditional American womanhood, leading to their own isolation as seen in their often comical films.[53]

As the 1960s went on and sexual mores on film loosened, the characterization of nuns in movies changed, yet the frequency of their cinematic appearances remained high. In previous decades when the codes held sway over filmmakers' ability to portray sexual encounters outside of the confines of marriage in a positive way, if at all, nuns made excellent female symbols. But as extramarital sex became more acceptable in American culture, nuns came increasingly to be seen as archaic, if not downright goofy. Significantly, nuns continued to be popular choices for cinema subjects, as well as for television producers, in a time when women began to shed the strictures of male dominance.[54] Nuns became sources of ridicule, in their costume and in their behavior, which constituted a return to a minstrelized form of Catholicism. When they were not made fun of, they were portrayed as outside mainstream American life in location, behavior, or foreignness. Still, after the sweeping changes wrought in the Church as a

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[53] Ibid., 1–21.

[54] One of the more popular televisions shows during the 1960s, *The Flying Nun*, starring Sally Field as Sister Bertrille, ran from 1967 to 1970 as a comedic sitcom. While paying some homage to rising challenges to gender norms coming out of the 1960s, it nonetheless was meant to be funny and thus can be seen as a minstrelization of Catholic culture. For more, see Sullivan, *Visual Habits*, 190–-213.

whole in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in 1965, a period that

saw many changes meant to modernize female religious life, the popularity of nuns

eventually waned.[55]

Whether forward-thinking or supporting an older feminine ideal, the portrayal of

nuns in movies contributed to the minstrelization of Catholicism as a whole in America.

Film replaced the crooning Father O'Malleys of the World War II era with the tennis

playing (fig. 12) of Sister Scholastica (Celeste Holm) in *Come to the Stable*. Neither of

these films dignified the religion as worthy of equal footing with the Americanness of

white Protestants, unlike the lofty heights attained by Reverend Peter Marshall in *A Man

Called Peter*.

Figure 12. Sister Scholastica Playing Tennis in *Come to the Stable* (1949)
Source: Brian Eugenio Herrera, "Celese Holm in *Come to the Stable* (1949),"
http://stinkylulu.blogspot.com/2008/07/celeste-holm-in-all-about-eve-1949.html

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[55] Ibid., 214–216.

Director Henry Koster chose the *mise-en-scéne* of a sister, racket in hand, in her habit, signaling playfulness and silliness, reminiscent of the lack of seriousness previously attached to Catholics in American culture. *Come to the Stable* does hearken back to World War II–era themes, with the plot revolving around Catholics inserting themselves into a diverse community in order to get a children's hospital built in Western Connecticut. There was little new or radical about the nuns of *Come to the Stable*, whose eagerness to have a small place in an American community rendered them safe and able take part in a country now dedicated to defeating global communism.[56]

Nuns gradually replaced priests as the Catholic stand-ins in leading roles, even though on film Catholics increasingly existed on the margins of American culture and society. During the 1950s and 1960s when more Catholics blended into American society in the white suburbs than ever before, their on-screen status shifted in character. Not only were nuns portrayed in a legendary West, but they were also depicted in other exotic locales. The ubiquitous urban parishes of the previous two decades were rarely seen in American films anymore, and movies like *Come to the Stable* began that trend.[57] Even in films that harkened to older associations with city settings and strong priests, like *On the Waterfront*, Father Barry's character is isolated from the rest of the cast, and is largely ineffectual in changing the way things are done in the film's tough

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[56] *Come to the Stable*, directed by Henry Koster (1949, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), DVD.

[57] Ibid.

neighborhood.[58] With nuns, their foreign settings, coupled with their comedic themes

later on, signaled that Catholics had yet to gain full acceptance in American culture and

were increasingly alienated from it.

Even nun films set in the United States suggest that female religious are alien.

Lilies of the Field (1963) takes place in the American Southwest, a region previously

used in Cold War cinema to symbolically portray the fight against foreign elements

inside the country's borders. The nuns in the movie, though from Germany, appear to

make a home for themselves on the last frontier of the United States, always a powerful

bit of imagery in American film.[59] Regardless of factors that symbolically mitigate their

foreignness, like their location and the fact that they crossed the Berlin Wall in order to

get to America, they never do quite shed their foreign affiliations. Throughout, Homer

Smith (Sidney Poitier) teaches the nuns English (fig. 13). But his work proves only

partially successful, as their speech remains broken and heavily accented.

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[58] *On the Waterfront*, 1954.

[59] Janet Walker, ed., *Westerns: Film through History* (New York: Psychology Press, 2001), 1–26.

Figure 13. Homer Smith Teaches English to the Nuns in *Lilies of the Field* (1963)
Source: "Lilies of the Field (1963)," photos with Sidney Poitier, Lilia Skala,
http://www.imdb.com/media/rm509983232/tt0057251

Smith also introduces the sisters to American-style Christian hymns, which they eagerly

take to but give their own Catholic flare. Finally, it is clear that, while they receive some

help from whites in the form of the reluctant Mr. Ashton (played by Ralph Nelson, also

the director), the bulk of the work for building the chapel that is the focus of the plot will

be shouldered by these German nuns and their Mexican charges, characters displaying

elements that separate them from mainstream Americans. The film's *montage* of lessons

of cooperation are learned almost entirely by non-whites.[60]

Viewed through the lens of race relations, *Lilies of the Field* offers some of the

earliest examples of Mexicans, African Americans, and so-called Caucasians coexisting

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[60] *Lilies of the Field*, directed by Ralph Nelson (1963, Los Angeles, CA: United Artists), DVD.

peacefully in the United States in American cinema.[61] Further, Smith does not bow

meekly before whites, a trademark of Sidney Poitier's acting career.[62] Yet things that

make the main characters different from most Americans are always present. In the

scene pictured above (fig. 13), Poitier teaches the nuns the difference between white and

black skin. He further demarcates the color line when he turns down a job with Mr.

Ashton, crediting the satisfaction gained from his crew of Mexican workers and nuns

building the chapel. Smith is sensitive to slights to his independence even from the nuns,

as when he lectures them, "All that stuff you wear, you think it's a uniform that makes

you some kind of cop or something, laying down the law, throwing your weight around.

You sound like one of them old war movies, a regular Hitler. Well, you get yourself

another boy, huh?" Even though Smith does end up working for the sisters, these words

serve as a reminder that he is cut from a different cloth.[63]

Director Ralph Nelson acknowledged the difficulties of making a film about

Catholic nuns, set in a predominantly Mexican Southwest, and with a black Baptist in the

leading role, at a time when Hollywood simply did not make movies of that kind.

Friends in the motion picture industry advised Nelson that bringing together a mother

superior (Mother Maria, played by Lilia Skala) and an African American in leading roles

amounted to box office "poison." While Nelson clearly did not follow this advice and

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[61] Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 290; Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 73.

[62] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in Films* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 159; Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 289.

[63] *Lilies of the Field*, 1963.

cast the two actors anyway, he also couched the movie in broad racial terms so as to give the film general appeal. Nelson did not want to shoot a deeply religious movie, and carefully avoided making any serious effort at giving Catholicism the credit for bringing together a diverse group of people. He intended the film to be lighthearted and funny, and called the script "hilarious," an "irreverent treatment of a religious theme."[64] That irreverence reminds audiences that Catholicism is something foreign to America. No matter the film's message of tolerance and acceptance, it is only amongst minorities that other marginalized peoples can coexist peacefully.

Not only are Catholics on film portrayed as more alien in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, but nuns on film also question the validity of their vows. Cold War popular culture held that it was imperative for white women to get married and raise children, thereby protecting American traditions from encroaching communism—something nuns could not do.[65] One early example that included both the foreign nature of Catholicism and nuns reconsidering their vows was *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957). Set in the South Pacific during World War II, the movie centers on the relationship between Corporal Allison (Robert Mitchum) and Sister Angela (Deborah Kerr). Allison, shipwrecked, washes up on the shore of an island where Sister Angela's mission village has been deserted after the Japanese conscripted the natives for work in their army. Throughout the film, despite the constant danger of Japanese patrols, Allison stops to

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[64] Ralph Nelson, "Considering 'Lilies of the Field': 'What's in a Name' is a Pain to Comedy's Producer-Director," *New York Times*, September 29, 1963, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[65] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 130. See also Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001).

wonder why such a pretty woman would decide to become a nun, and not a wife.
While Sister Angela, for the most part, deflects these musings, there are moments, as
when Allison asks her openly to give up her vows and marry him, when there is an
obvious internal struggle on her part to give in to whatever feelings might be developing
for the ruggedly handsome Allison.[66]

  Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison leaves the relationship between Allison and Sister
Angela unresolved. Toward the end of the movie Allison makes his most blatant
advances on the nun and she is visibly shaken. Still, she walks prominently beside the
stretcher that carries the wounded soldier away as the movie concludes. The *mise-en-
scéne* sums up all the questioning of her vows Sister Angela undergoes while in the
company of Allison. Thus the audience can question whether she will follow him back to
the states to get married as he hopes. Particularly in the 1950s, nuns formed a crucial part
of the very nature of Catholicism; for a nun to entertain the possibility of leaving the
religious life calls into question those vows. The movie does offer more concrete clues as
to how Sister Angela truly feels about her vows. At one point, Allison uses the term
"mackerel snapper" to refer to all Catholics, talking about how his fellow Marines who
follow the Roman faith eat fish on Fridays. When Sister Angela has trouble digesting the
raw fish the two are forced to eat, she accuses herself of being a poor "mackerel snapper"
and not the best representative of her faith and vows.[67]

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[66] *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison*, directed by John Huston (1957, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), DVD.

[67] Ibid.

The most prominent early example of nuns questioning whether or not they make good "mackerel snappers" is *The Nun's Story* (1959). The film came on the cusp of the 1960s when the Production Codes were well into their decline and when female characters on film begin to step out of their traditional roles. The film also makes use of the exoticism of Catholicism, with settings in Belgium and the Congo. It offers a compelling glimpse into the private lives and thoughts of female religious, which was acceptable because it took place outside of the borders of the United States.[68] Film critics also found the film interesting, as Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* discussed the vivid color captured in the film's locales, as well as the struggles of one who wants to obey authority but seems to be unable to comply fully. Crowther commented, "For the evident point of this experience is that a woman gains but also loses her soul, spends and exhausts her devotion to an ideal she finds she cannot hold."[69]

That woman is Sister Luke (Audrey Hepburn) whose performance captures both the low-key gentleness expected of a nun and the emotional battle her particular character undergoes. She speaks that battle out loud when she prays, "Dear Lord, the more I try, the more imperfect I become. I seem to fail in charity, humility, and obedience. Pride is not being burned out of me. When I succeed in obeying the rule [meaning the rules of her order], I fail at the same time because I have pride in succeeding." The three ideals of "charity, humility, and obedience," as the movie shows in detail, are emphasized to nuns from the beginning of their training. In the end, obedience proves Sister Luke's

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[68] *The Nun's Story*, directed by Fred Zinnemann, (1959, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Picture), DVD.

[69] Bosley Crowther, "The Dedicated Story of a Nun: Audrey Hepburn Stars in Music Hall Film, Kathryn Hulme Novel Sensitively Depicted," *New York Times*, June 19, 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

downfall. Of course, in a Cold War atmosphere of conformity, Sister Luke's

rebellion might seem radical. Yet much of her behavior also reinforces the ideals of

white womanhood. For instance, when she finally reaches her dream destination in the

Congo, the *mise-en-scéne* focuses on her visible sadness when she is told she will not be

attending to the babies in the mission. This news comes shortly after she is informed that

the drums announcing her arrival alerted those on the mission that she was still young

enough to bear children, thus adding to her internal conflict given the imperative for

women her age to give birth to and care for children. Additionally, few characters in the

film can understand why a pretty young woman would want to be a nun—including her

father, who, despite the fact that she had been a nun for some time reminds Sister Luke

that her ex-boyfriend is still single.[70]

The film's climactic moment comes when Sister Luke's deepest fears are voiced

by Dr. Fortunati (Peter Finch). Ironically, the atheistic doctor delivers the words to her

that she herself avoids facing:

> I've got to tell you something about yourself, sister. I've
> never worked with any other kind of nurse except for nuns
> since I began [at the mission], and you're not in the mold,
> sister. You never will be. You're what's called a "worldly
> nun," ideal for the public, ideal for the patients, but you see
> things your own way. You stick to your own ideas. You'll
> never be the kind of nun your convent expects you to be.
> That's your illness, the TB [tuberculosis, which Sister Luke
> thought she had contracted] is a by-product. I can cure the
> by-product if you want me to.

Dr. Fortunati suspected that Sister Luke faked her tuberculosis, which she self-diagnosed,

because of her inner turmoil over her inability to obey her vows, at least in her own

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[70] *The Nun's Story*, 1959.

eyes.[71] On the surface, her trouble with obedience makes the film's tone somewhat

forward looking in a Cold War atmosphere that encouraged right conduct.[72] The fact that

she is a Catholic nun, however, also reinforces a subtle anti-Catholic tone in the film.

One of the more obvious moments when the movie questions Catholic loyalty comes

when the abbess informs the nuns that the Church does not wish to take sides in World

War II. The main focus of the film, though, is on womanhood and the choice to give it

up to become a nun. Why would anyone choose the life of a nun when the proper role for

a woman was to marry and raise a family? The film ends with Sister Luke walking out of

the convent largely how she left it: in street clothes with luggage in hand.[73] The constant

reconsidering of her lifestyle, not only by herself but also those around her, questions

female Catholic religious life.

With the obvious doubt that *The Nun's Story* casts on the idea of becoming a nun,

it is not surprising that the Legion of Decency, still operational in 1959 but in decline,

protested the film. Martin Quigley, on the other hand, vigorously defended the movie. In

a letter to the managing editor of the Brooklyn *Tablet*, Quigley calls the film

"magnificent and should so be treated [in a good light]." The letter came about in

response to criticisms leveled against the movie by members of the Legion and published

in the *Tablet*. Quigley's missive shows his estrangement by the late 1950s from the

Catholic cinema watchdog group he helped found, as well as its growing ineffectualness.

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 180.

[73] *The Nun's Story*, 1959.

He goes on to say that there needs to be a "to change [in] Catholic policy and procedure in the entire area of motion picture entertainment."[74] With former PCA administrator Joseph Breen no longer around to enforce its pronouncements, the Legion became even more critical of the movie industry, even when they focused on their religion as with nun films, and were increasingly ignored.[75] The growing resistance led to Quigley's departure, since he relied on the movie industry to sell his magazines. The internal strife of a once-powerful Catholic group in the movie industry allowed for more films that questioned why a woman would want to become a nun.[76]

The Nun's Story is certainly not the only film to feature nuns questioning their religious vows. During the 1960s, many more popular films focused on female Catholic religious going through the same inner struggle. Perhaps the most popular example of this theme was *The Sound of Music* (1965). *The Sound of Music* and *The Nun's Story* are similar in that they take place in foreign lands and the fact that both the main characters leave their convents. Whereas the latter takes place in Belgium and the Congo, the

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[74] Quigley Papers, Subject Correspondence Series, Box 2, Folder 7.

[75] Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940–1975*, 226.

[76] Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, Quigley's papers detail the growing gulf between himself and the Legion of Decency. There were times that certain movies that his magazines covered were ones that the Legion did not approve. With its influence waning, the Legion began critiquing the artistic content of film as well in an attempt to remain a viable force in the movie industry. Quigley disapproved of this measure because he saw the group merely in religious terms, and as such as responsible only for verifying a film's moral content. One can see the beginning of the rift early on when, on June 14, 1951, he wrote to Andre Ruszkowski of the *Revue Internationale du Cinema*, "I think incalculable harm is being done to the Catholic influence in motion pictures by what appears to be a difference of understanding and attitudes amongst leading Catholics interested in motion pictures. It is small wonder that persons outside the Church are puzzled to know how this can be, when all Catholics are considered responsible to identical doctrines and principles." The main source of that "difference of understanding," to Quigley, was Thomas F. Little, who took the Legion in this new direction. For nearly the next two decades until Quigley's death in 1966, Quigley and Little exchanged increasingly bitter letters over the Legion and films in general. Ibid, Box 3, Folder 3.

former centers on Austria. Either way, their settings speak to a trend in Catholic film

that Europe is where Catholicism comes from, and thus is not a traditional part of white

America. Like *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary* previously, the 1965 movie uses

music to entertain, adding a playfulness that hearkens back to earlier Catholic musicals

like *Going My Way*. Unlike *The Nun's Story*, the main character Maria (Julie Andrews)

does not follow through and become a full nun. Instead, she leaves the religious life as a

novitiate after falling in love with Captain von Trapp (Christopher Plummer).[77]

     The Sound of Music contains a *montage* of scenes portraying a Catholic Church

somewhat more accepting of Maria's doubts about becoming a nun than previous films

like *The Nun's Story*. When Maria expresses these doubts to the Mother Abbess (Peggy

Wood) at her convent, the Mother Abbess responds, "Maria, these walls were not meant

to shut out problems. You have to face them. You have to live the life you were born to

live." At another point, Maria discusses how she seems unable to stop herself from

speaking her mind. Again, the Mother Abbess offers comforting words—"Some people

would call that honesty"—even though Maria remains uncertain. In the end, that

outspoken nature attracts Captain von Trapp, causing him to fall in love with the

erstwhile nun-in-training, and she responds by giving in to her doubts about the religious

life and marrying her former employer. What we do not see, however, is that love

consummated, an act obviated by the existence of the von Trapp army of children already

present when Maria arrives to work as their governess. Before she falls for the captain,

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[77] *The Sound of Music*, directed by Robert Wise (1965, Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), DVD.

she already fulfills the proper role of motherhood for white women, one she could never do as a full-fledged nun.[78]

Whether a film focuses on full-fledged nuns or not, other movies dealing with sisters tend to make light of their lifestyle. In *The Trouble With Angels* (1966), the female religious of St. Francis, a school for girls, go from one comic set piece to another. These comical scenes include bubbles filling their private dining room, their inability to deal with a crowd of girls overly eager to purchase their first brassieres, and jumping into pools in full habit in order to save drowning swimmers. In addition to nuns performing comedic routines in full habit, the hilarity continues when the school's marching band accidentally orders revealing uniforms and is forced to perform in them, the *mise-en-scéne* made even funnier by the stifling atmosphere at St. Francis. The movie is a comedy, and by showing the nuns in so many silly circumstances it at best devalues Catholic educational institutions and, at worst, carries forward negative stereotypes attributed to the religion. Additionally, the fact that the film is set in the United States suggests that Catholicism in a domestic setting cannot be taken seriously. Serious Catholicism is for Europe and other far off lands, as in *The Nun's Story* and *The Sound of Music*. The film does contain serious moments, as when the willful Mary Clancy (Hayley Mills) decides to become a nun, but the overall tone of the film in dealing with religious matters of specifically Catholic nature is whimsical, unlike the sanctimonious Presbyterianism of *A Man Called Peter*.[79]

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[78] Ibid.

[79] *The Trouble with Angels*, directed by Ida Lupino (1966, Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation), DVD.

Not only is Catholicism portrayed as whimsical in *The Trouble with Angels*,

the movie represents it as backward and behind the times. Rachel Devery (June Harding),

Mary's best friend, informs Mary that she came from a "progressive" school. Tired of

the structure at St. Francis, Rachel writes a former teacher of hers, Mr. Petrie (Jim

Hutton), to come and rescue her from such a stifling environment. When Mr. Petrie

arrives, he confronts Mother Superior (Rosalind Russell) with Rachel's letter, and the

following conversation ensues:

> MR. PETRIE: Well, I hardly expect you to completely accept
> new trends or creative concepts in education.
> MOTHER SUPERIOR: It's [the new educational concepts] an
> abomination.
> MR. PETRIE: Now see here, Reverend Mother!
> MOTHER SUPERIOR: You see here, young man. In the seven
> months that child has been at St. Francis, there hasn't been
> one day the sisters haven't had to struggle with her colossal
> ignorance in such elementary matters as reading, writing,
> and arithmetic—not mathematics mind you, arithmetic. As
> for the social graces, I'm convinced that your school
> encourages barbarism, and concerns itself only with
> freethinking, freewheeling, and finger painting.
> MR. PETRIE: The finest educational minds in the country
> happen to be on our side.
> MOTHER SUPERIOR: God is on ours.

As this movie came out in the latter half of the 1960s when challenging traditional

institutions like Catholicism was more acceptable[80], such sentiment goes along with how

comically provincial the nuns appear. Finally, despite Mary's decision to enter the

convent in the end, the film questions why anyone would decide to become a nun.

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[80] Barry Keith Grant, *American Cinema of the 1960s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 43.

Rachel at first exclaims that the only reason someone could choose such a life was because "she was brainwashed!"[81]

One nun film captures the new, more alien semiotics in these movies while also utilizing stock stereotypes of previous eras, thus capturing on celluloid the Hollywood's representation of Catholicism from the 1930s through to the 1960s: *The Singing Nun* (1966). While Sister Ann (Debbie Reynolds) never doubts her commitment to the religious life, many of the important people in her life, including Father Clementi (Ricardo Montalban) suggest that perhaps the convent is not the place for her. As with other films about female religious, nuns represent a safe brand of Catholicism because they can fulfill a nurturing role and remain sexually pure at the same time. Also like similar films from the period, *The Singing Nun* is mostly lighthearted, and meant to be comedic at times, such as when Sister Ann rides a scooter to her first assignment as a nun. It also pays homage to an earlier era, since Sister Ann possesses a musical virtuosity to rival that of Father O'Malley (Bing Crosby) in *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*. Sister Ann consciously decides not to play the traditional Catholic hymns because she considers them "boring." Her success, also like earlier films, proves a monetary benefit to her order and a delight to the world.[82]

For Catholics to make music devoid of the Gregorian-style hymns normally associated with that religion also makes Catholicism safe in a Cold War American culture hostile to foreign-looking and -sounding elements. The music definitely contains

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[81] *The Trouble with Angels*, 1966.

[82] *The Singing Nun*, directed by Henry Koster (1966, Culver City, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios), DVD.

Christian themes, but in a way that was broadly appealing instead of specifically

Catholic in nature. At the same time, *The Singing Nun* offers other elements echoed in

other nun movies. Set in Belgium, which gives the film much of its foreign flavor, the

sisters reside in an urban environment in which they run a school along with their

convent. In the neighborhood lives a troubled family that Sister Ann takes an interest in,

especially the young boy Dominic (Ricky Cordell). With no mother, and a drunkard for a

father, Dominic looks to Sister Ann for support, a duty she eagerly accepts. That Sister

Ann is so willing to serve, combined with the film's melodic qualities, might make the

movie seem positive for Catholics. Yet consider that the only truly Catholic hymn heard,

"Kyrie Eleison," was sung at the end by the natives on the African mission that Sister

Ann travels to after giving up her music, thus reinforcing Catholicism's exotic nature.[83]

As with other nun movies of the period—whether they are silly or serious, set in

the United States or distant lands—they show that Catholicism is not a traditional part of

American culture. Movies with female religious highlight these differences perhaps

better than any other Catholic movie, and *The Singing Nun* is no exception. There is the

suggestion that Sister Ann had a relationship with a record producer named Robert (Chad

Everett) before she became a nun. He questions her lifestyle, perhaps wishing to rekindle

their past feelings.

> ROBERT: What made you give up everything for this? It's
> depressing that you should even be here.
> SISTER ANN: I want to be here.
> ROBERT: You know what I mean. What kind of girl wants
> to get up in the middle of the night, eat a Spartan breakfast,

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[83] Ibid.

> put in a backbreaking day among people like these, and
> live in a tomb?
> SISTER ANN: No girl would.
> ROBERT: That's what you do.
> SISTER ANN: Not I. I get up in the middle of the night to go
> to Mass, and then I have a Spartan breakfast, followed by
> doing the dishes, studying, visits to the neighborhood,
> playing with the children, feeding them, doing more dishes,
> and then more prayers. You see? Much more glamorous
> and fascinating than you thought, isn't it?
> ROBERT: How can you joke about it?
> SISTER ANN: Because I'm very happy. I even have a
> dispensation to laugh once in a while.
> ROBERT: Good . . . But I don't think you realize how much
> there is in this world you're missing.
> SISTER ANN: Maybe you don't understand how much there
> is outside this world you're missing?

Later on, Robert blatantly says, "You should be having children of your own!" when he feels his advances are not having the desired result.[84] The conversation points to one of the problems with Catholicism in a Cold War America in which the white domestic sphere traditionally inhabited by women was also the home front in the war on communism. Despite Sister Ann's motherly qualities, she belongs to a group of women who live somewhat outside of the strictures of male society (at least on film) and could not be a part of the nuclear family so important to the American consciousness during the 1950s and 1960s.[85]

The Singing Nun dealt with other issues pertaining to female sexuality of increasing import during the 1960s that did not cast Catholicism in a favorable light. When Sister Ann finds nude photos of Nicole (Dominic's older sister, played by

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[84] Ibid.

[85] May, *Homeward Bound*, 125–29.

Katharine Ross), the sister reacts with a horror befitting a nun. Yet the *mise-en-scéne*

of the shot suggests that perhaps she is being narrow-minded as Nicole defensively

claims that she did it to relieve their poor circumstances and would do it again. In

another part of the film, there is a *montage* where a young, pregnant woman faints during

a dance at the convent. When she is brought into the infirmary, she explains that she will

have an abortion instead of carrying the child to term. Again Sister Ann reacts with

righteous indignation, only to be told by the young woman, "You're not women! You're

just stupid nuns!" The ferocity of her rebuttal makes Sister Ann regret being so harsh,

even though speaking out against abortion is a part of Catholic doctrine.[86] Thus

Catholicism is portrayed as doctrinaire and behind the times.[87]

  The Singing Nun came out at a time of immense change for American Catholics.

The attention paid to sexuality and abortion in the film, subjects rarely mentioned in

Catholic movies, highlight these transformations.[88] *The Singing Nun* was loosely based

on the real-life career of Sister Luc-Gabrielle, whose own life evidences the period of

transition the Church underwent during the 1960s. In the same year as the movie's

release, Sister Luc-Gabrielle left her order, taking the name Jeanine Deckers in order to

pursue a career as a folk singer. She felt that the order prohibited her from her dream,

and the film that her singing spawned follows this theme. By the end of it, after being

pushed and pulled in several directions, Sister Ann felt the music took her away from her

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[86] For more on Catholics and contraception, see Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*.

[87] *The Singing Nun*, 1966.

[88] Ibid.

primary duties as a female religious. The cinematic singing nun gives up her music for the African mission. Unfortunately, both *The Singing Nun* and Jeanine Deckers's life as a musician proved flops.[89]

The Singing Nun's lack of financial success, along with the similar fate of *Where Angels Go, Trouble Follows* (1968; the sequel to *The Trouble with Angels*), show that happy-go-lucky, free-spirited, playful films about female Catholic life were no longer a box office draw. The decline of nun movies coincided with many key events in American Catholic history of the 1960s. In *The Singing Nun*, Sister Cluny (Agnes Moorehead) voices her disapproval of Sister Ann's behavior early, asking if Sister Ann's actions constitute the "liberalization" of their lives as nuns.[90] That "liberalization" she refers to is the reforms made to female religious life as a result of Vatican II. With a new emphasis on individualism as a way to attract new vocations to the religious life, American nuns now left their cloisters more frequently and participated in activities previously denied them, like civil and women's rights protests.[91] Despite attracting new recruits in record numbers, though, the move from the city to the suburbs by white Catholic parishes left many nuns disconnected from their vocation to minister to the needy.[92]

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[89] Sullivan, *Visual Habits*, 175–77.

[90] *The Singing Nun*, 1966.

[91] Sullivan, *Visual Habits*, 42–43.

[92] Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in The 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 8.

Nuns were not the only Catholics feeling out of touch with their traditional roles in the Church in the wake of the changes wrought by Vatican II. Those changes included alterations to the Mass (it was no longer said in Latin; the priest now faced the congregation instead of celebrating with his back turned); the style of church construction took on new forms, abandoning the old Romanesque style that left a giant cross footprint in the earth; and a greater emphasis on lay participation in the life of the parish. Additionally, at a time when contraception use became more acceptable, the Church's dogmatic stance against birth control led to further defections. For those accustomed to the daily mode of Catholic life as it had gone on for centuries, the new way of doing things proved difficult to cope with and many left the Church fold.[93]

Vatican II attempted to make Catholicism more democratic, a revolutionary move for an institution accustomed to millennia of strict hierarchy. One might have anticipated that such a move would be attractive to American Catholics, where the democratic ideal was part of what citizens learned from an early age.[94] Yet for all the apparent liberalization, the Church remained steadfast in its position on issues that turned off many young Catholics, like female reproductive rights, premarital sex, and the celibacy of the clergy.[95] American culture, particularly in the late 1960s, came to be dominated by a youth counterculture that saw Catholicism as a stalwart of the traditional values it sought to move past. In this respect, the Catholic Church had become more in line with white

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[93] Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 240.

[94] Ibid., 197.

[95] Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception*, 3–4, 11.

values that promoted traditional sexual mores, for sexual promiscuity had long been associated with so-called colored peoples.[96] As a result, from the 1960s onward, the majority of the representations of Catholicism, particularly on film, showed it as at least stifling, if not downright evil.

In at least one respect, Vatican II paved the way for the association of Catholicism with evil on film. One of the pronouncements of the council was a call for more openness to an American culture that increasingly challenged Church authority, which meant the end of the Legion of Decency.[97] The Legion was now seen as an impediment to the development of film as an art. Even by the end of the 1950s, in an attempt to change its image the Legion sought to alter its tone by "promoting" movies it approved rather than condemning those it did not.[98] At the same time, the era of the Production Codes came to an end, and by 1968 a new system for rating films, the one still used today, obviated the need for the sorts of guidelines for moviemaking that had controlled Hollywood for decades. With the end of the code, the last vestiges of Catholic influence on movie production disappeared.[99] Martin Quigley, who had seen "grave danger" in what he thought of as a more lenient Legion by 1962, died in 1964.[100] No matter how

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[96] Marlett, "Life on the Frontier: *Lilies of the Field* (1963)," in *Catholics in the Movies*, McDannell, ed., 169, 172.

[97] Sullivan, *Visual Habits*, 194.

[98] Quigley Papers, Individual Correspondence Series, Box 1, Folder 12; "New Legion of Decency Pledge Would Ask 'Promotion' Over 'Condemnation,'" *Variety*, January 27, 1960, 1.

[99] Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940–1975*, 226.

[100] Quigley Papers, Individual Correspondence Series, Box 1, Folder 12.

much Catholics in America adopted aspects of whiteness such as suburban, middle-

class affluence, without oversight Catholic representations on film took on a darker tone.

These acts meant the removal of the white cinematic mask when depicting Catholicism,

the shedding of a costume that Catholics on film had attempted to fit into since the

formation of the Legion of Decency in 1928.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

CATHOLICS ON FILM

SOMETHING LESS THAN WHITE

> The number of young men in our country who have drifted away from the
> Church, joined secret societies, contracted unlawful marriages, etc.—
> living as though they had never known the obligations of the religion in
> which they were baptized,—is greater than most persons would be
> disposed to admit; and among these backsliders are many Catholics who
> attended Catholics schools. If these young men had received what they
> were clearly entitled to at the hands of their instructors, the after-life of the
> great majority of them would have been different.
>
> —Editorial, *Ave Maria Magazine*, February 18, 1928[1]

These words echo the sentiments of observers of the Catholic Church in 1968—a period

in which many parishioners left the fold, in spite of the reforms brought about by the

Second Vatican Council.[2] While the changes wrought by Vatican II attempted to make

the Church appear more liberal in some respects—with the Mass said in the vernacular

and a recommitment to civil rights issues—the concurrent counterculture and its broad

challenge to existing institutions lumped Catholicism in with other traditional aspects of

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[1] "Notes and Remarks," *Ave Maria Magazine*, February 18, 1928, 214.

[2] James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard
University Press, 2009), 221.

American life.[1] After many decades of consistent, although problematic, cinematic

representations of Catholicism, the 1970s saw a decrease in the number of Catholicism-

themed movies after the release of *The Exorcist* in 1973. Further, without the Church's

constant monitoring—or meddling, as the Legion of Decency was once perceived to be

doing—Hollywood did not create many positive examples of Catholicism. Despite the

fact that some Catholics, particularly those of European descent, could now count

themselves as fully white and American in many respects, film kept alive stereotypes that

had always marked them as different.

That the film industry continued to represent Catholicism as outside of the

mainstream undermines the work done by concerned Catholics in the movie industry

from 1928 until the release of *The Exorcist*. People like Martin J. Quigley and Joseph I.

Breen, laypeople who helped found the Legion and write the Production Codes, could not

have foreseen the production of movies that openly countered the intent of the codes,

such as *The Exorcist* or *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). After witnessing the meteoric rise in

film's popularity during the first thirty years of the century, Catholics seized upon the

opportunity to make sure their image was favorably represented. This desire for proper

representation stemmed from centuries of negative, even bigoted, attitudes toward their

people. With the formation of the Legion and the writing of the code, Catholics strove to

make themselves appear as normal, white Americans. On film, it was only ever a

costume, and one that often appeared ill fitted.

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[1] John T. McGreevy, while not mentioning the counterculture specifically, details the growing backlash against the Church regarding female reproductive rights and women's liberation in the 1960s. See John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism And American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 260–68.

In *Rosemary's Baby*, we can see that costume fully removed. Starring Mia Farrow as Rosemary Woodhouse, the film centers on the lives of a newly married couple who discover the hub of a devil-worshipping cult in their apartment building. Its themes were far removed from the fun and frivolity of the nun movies of the 1960s, like *The Trouble with Angels* (1966). Indeed, the nuns who do appear in *Rosemary's Baby* are mean spirited, and Rosemary cowers from them as they haunt her in a dream sequence that also establishes her past Catholic school attendance. The film's semiotics speak to the doubts that many had in the late 1960s about the place of the Church in American society. Despite her lingering respect for the pope, Rosemary admits to being "unsure" about her status as a Catholic. The Castevets, the main characters' next-door neighbors, encourage her doubts. Minnie Castevet (Ruth Gordon) calls the Church "show business," and Roman Castavet (Sidney Blackmer) adds, "That's exactly what it is: all the costumes, the rituals, all religions."[2]

Even though Castevet says he does not support organized religion, he heads a coven of witches headquartered in his own apartment and often talks about a visit by Pope Paul VI and his Mass at Yankee Stadium, which actually took place on October 5, 1965.[3] While Castevet mocks Rosemary's respect for the pope, saying, "Well, now you don't need to have respect for him because he pretends to be holy," in a sense, Roman Castevet is the pope of his group of witches. They have their own rituals, incantations, and places of worship that mirror Catholicism. Indeed, the *mise-en-scéne* of the chamber

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[2] *Rosemary's Baby*, directed by Roman Polanski (1968, Hollywood: Paramount Pictures), DVD.

[3] "90,000 at Stadium Attend Papal Mass and Hear a Homily," *New York Times*, October 5, 1965, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

where the devil rapes Rosemary in what she thinks is a dream, features high, arched

ceilings and stone floors, reminiscent of a church. While the act takes place, a man

dressed in the pope's robes watches. Rosemary mistakes him for a priest, asking him for

absolution from her sins.[4]

The placement of a passive pope figure in a scene in which a woman is

impregnated with the spawn of Satan suggests that religions is, if not evil, then unable to

stop evil from spreading. At one point, the camera focuses in on a cover of a *Time*

magazine asking the question, "Is God Dead?" But Catholicism also has a special place

in the film in helping to bring about devil's plans. When Rosemary is forced to have

intercourse with the fallen angel, it is implied that he only wants Catholic women for the

ceremony. During the ritualized sex scene between Rosemary and the devil, all you see

of the beast is his hairy arm and hand (fig. 14).[5]

Figure 14. Rosemary Woodhouse Being Raped by the Devil in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968)
    Source: "Rosemary's Baby," http://www.mortalgore.com/content/rosemary's-baby

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[4] *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968.

[5] Ibid.

Compare the above image (fig. 14) to one that appeared in 1928 on the eve of the

presidential election that featured the Catholic Al Smith (fig. 15).

Figure 15. Cartoon from "Heroes of the Fiery Cross" Showing Klansman Clubbing the
Hairy Beast Arm of Rome
Source: "Heroes of the Fiery Cross,"
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heroes_of_the_Fiery_Cross

For some, Al Smith's defeat in the 1928 election meant the triumph of good over evil. In

Rosemary's Baby, Catholics who eventually accept that their God is dead service the

devil. Rosemary's pleas to God for help at the end of the film when she discovers the

true identity of the "child" that she birthed go unanswered. Instead, she comforts the

baby when another of the witch's brood disturbs its sleep, symbolizing her final

acceptance of her fall from the Church.[6]

     Rosemary's Baby asks the question, "Is God Dead?"—or at least it features a

magazine that does. *The Exorcist* answers "yes," regarding Catholicism and its practices

as a form of honoring that God. Film historians like Colleen McDannell erroneously see

Catholicism in *The Exorcist* as paling in importance relative to the specific examples of

Jesuit spirituality she sees in the film. Despite director William Friedkin's claim that the

film was an exploration of the "mystery of faith" that could "make you question your

own value system," McDannell views Father Damian Karras (Jason Miller) as a hero who

sacrifices himself as a sort of Eucharist to save Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair) from

demonic possession. While Father Karras does make the conscious decision to take the

demon out of the girl and into himself, it comes only after the Catholic exorcism rituals

proved completely ineffective. In other words, God, or religion generally, could not save

Regan—only the act of an individual priest who questioned his faith throughout the film.[7]

     To be fair, Catholicism was not the only thing that proved unable to stop evil.

Regan's atheist mother Chris (Ellen Burstyn) exhausts all other avenues before turning to

the Church, putting Regan through a series of tests to determine a medical reason for

what she initially mistakes for abnormal behavior. Still, even after science could not give

the MacNeils answers, the religious route offers only scientific solutions to the situation.

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[6] *Rosemary's Baby*, 1968.

[7] Colleen McDannell, "Catholic Horror: *The Exorcist* (1973)," *Catholics in the Movies*, McDannell, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208–216; William Friedkin spoke these words in an introduction to the twenty-fifth anniversary release of *The Exorcist*, directed by William Friedkin (1973, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers), DVD.

When Father Karras is first introduced to Chris, it is in his role as a psychiatrist. When Chris suggests demonic possession and the need for an exorcism at the outset of her meeting with the priest, he pooh-poohs the idea by saying that they "would first need a time machine," since the exorcism ritual was not performed anymore. Only after hearing the demon inside Regan speak in tongues, seeing her twist and contort in fantastical ways, and feeling the cold that enveloped the girl's room, does he finally accept the truth that she was possessed.[8]

Despite Father Karras's eventual belief in Regan's possession, he still has to face the Catholic hierarchy to get approval for performing an exorcism, even though the ritual proves fruitless in the end. While Chris begs and pleads for help, the Church responds slowly. When they finally agree to the ceremony, they call in another priest, the aged Father Merrin (Max van Sydow), to be the principal exorcist, allowing Father Karras merely to assist. For all the combined shouting of "the power of Christ compels you!" (fig. 16), the demon inside Regan laughs at their efforts and taunts them along the way.[9]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

Figure 16. Fathers Karras and Merrin Attempting Exorcism on Regan MacNeil in *The Exorcist* (1973)
Source: http://85anti.tumblr.com/post/6833525643/the-exorcist-1973

Though Father Merrin warns his assistant that "the attack is psychological," meant to

trick and confuse, he is visibly shaken by their complete failure. After a break in their

ritual, Father Karras resolves that he will not let Regan continue under the demon's sway.

When he reenters the room, however, he finds Father Merrin dead and decides drastic

measures are needed. The *montage* of the exorcism in the movie demonstrates

Catholicism's inability to triumph over evil, and in the end Father Dyer (Father William

O'Malley, also technical advisor on the set) unwittingly absolves the now-possessed

Father Karras of his sins, also forgiving the demon by proxy.[10] Thus not only do the

Church and its rituals prove powerless against encroaching evil, but the Church also—

unknowingly perhaps—sanctions evil's actions by pardoning the demon's new host.

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[10] *The Exorcist*, 1973.

As *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby* show, Catholicism on film took on a new,

more sinister character that complemented its staid status in American society as a result

of the culture wars of the 1960s. They introduce the idea of the Church being aberrant

due to its possible complicity with evil. For instance, we see Father Karras in full priestly

garb sneering at the homeless and being uncomfortable around patients in an insane

asylum, suggesting that the institution is corrupt and uncaring. *The Exorcist*, in fact, also

embodies many of the semiotics prevalent in preceding decades that have always

separated from mainstream whiteness. For example, it focuses on priests, as did the films

of the 1930s through the 1950s. During a party scene, Father Dyer entertains the revelers

by playing the piano (fig. 17), harkening back to Bing Crosby's (Father O'Malley)

crooning in *Going My Way* (1944) and *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945).

Figure 17. Father Dyer Entertaining at the MacNeils Party in *The Exorcist* (1973)
Source: "6 People Who Performed Their Real Life Jobs in Movies,"
http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/14201/6-people-who-performed-their-real-life-jobs-
in-movies

Just as Father O'Malley is often pictured without his collar, so too do the priests in *The Exorcist* shed the garments that identify them as clergymen. Father Karras is filmed boxing, not unlike the pugilistic Father Tim Mullin (Spencer Tracy) in *San Francisco* (1936) and reminiscent of the general Catholic affinity for sports as seen in *Trouble Along the Way* (1953). Although Father Karras has friends, his character is largely isolated due the psychological stress of his mother's death, as in priest films of the 1950s like *I Confess* (1953) and *On the Waterfront* (1954). Finally, Chris MacNeil represents the single, liberated woman that nun films of the 1960s hinted at, but ultimately poked fun at through their use of comedy. With its combination of old and new themes, *The Exorcist* highlights how Catholicism on film continued to make Catholics' place in American culture as tenuous as the nun costumes pictured briefly on Halloween night.[11]

What *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby* demonstrate clearly is that the era in which Catholics were treated with some measure of respect, albeit in stereotyped and formulaic ways that retained negative traits developed over the centuries, was over. After 1968, Catholicism took on a sinister character, previously precluded by the now-defunct Production Codes, even in more lighthearted films. Catholic movies from the 1970s forwards combined traditional negative stereotypes with new ideas, like the suggestion of evilness, in order to continue the semiotics that said Catholicism was not American. *The Blues Brothers* (1980) underscores the new dual nature of the Catholic image on-screen, using both music and fantastical abilities to present the religion. When Jake and Elwood Blues (John Belushi and Dan Akroyd, respectively) go to meet "the Penguin" (Sister

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[11] *The Exorcist*, 1973.

Mary Stigmata, played by Kathleen Freeman), the *mise-en-scéne* highlights what appears

to be a sister imbued with otherworldly powers as she floats in and out of her forbidding

office.[12] The most prevalent theme to come after *The Exorcist* relates to the way priests

have no power to stop evil, usually in the form of possession. This ineffectuality can be

found in the sequels the film spawned, as well as in other imitators. In *Amityville II: The*

Possession (1982), Father Adamsky (James Olson) uses the same tactic as Father Karras,

ridding the possessed of the spirit by taking it into himself.[13]

The more sinister nature of Catholicism on film can be attributed to the

interactions between the religion and American culture. American Catholic historian Jay

P. Dolan concludes that Americanism has influenced Catholicism more than the other

way around. American culture has traditionally privileged ideas like whiteness and

middle-class economic stability, which often left Catholics appearing as outsiders.[14] In

that culture, Catholics' relationship to whiteness and the middle class has always been

problematic, even after ethnic bigotry eased and movement to the suburbs diminished

some of the discrimination they faced. Dolan has also considers Catholicism in relation

to culture in terms of the ideals that made up Americanism and how it has never been

more than an ill-fitting "cloak" for Catholics. Over the centuries that Catholics

immigrated to the United States, a major concern of both laypeople and clergy was trying

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[12] *The Blues Brothers*, directed by John Landis (1980, Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures), DVD.

[13] *Amityville II: The Possession*, directed by Damiano Damiani (1982, Los Angeles, Orion Pictures Company), DVD.

[14] Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–11.

to make their religion fit with constructions of American whiteness. For all the blending

into American society that Roman Catholics have supposedly undergone, the fact remains

that their religion, if nothing else, separates and makes them different from most in what

has usually been a predominantly Protestant nation.[15]

In that predominantly Protestant country, belonging to the right Christian sect

mattered. Religion and whiteness were linked—an idea as old as the nation itself.[16]

When the English began settling North America, they brought with them anti-Catholic

ideas that remained until the founding of the United States. As Irish Catholics came in

the mid-nineteenth century, partly as a result of religious persecution in Ireland, they

encountered many of the same attitudes that had made them second-class in the old

country. In America, though, those attitudes took on a more racialized tone, equating

Irish Catholics with animals and African Americans. Seeing where they stood in a

racialized society, and cleaving to their skin tone as a means of separating themselves

from black people, the Irish used American culture, particularly minstrelsy, to

demonstrate their qualifications for whiteness. However, their involvement in minstrelsy

also led to a trivialization of their own culture, especially in the characters of Paddy and

Biddy. Their cultural products, whether in minstrel shows or in its vaudeville inheritor,

informed the development of stereotypes about all Catholic peoples that became the

standard for portraying Catholicism later on film.

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[15] Dolan, "A Catholic Romance with Modernity," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn 1981, Vol. V, No. 4, 124–26.

[16] Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to Present* (New York: Double Day & Company, 1985), 84–97

Hollywood products demonstrate both the indelibility and the discursive power of these ideas. Protestantism and whiteness are two things that films hold up as qualities to be praised in their lead characters.[17] Early films that feature Catholics borrow from the stereotypes established in the nineteenth century, while also adding new ones. Mirroring Paddy and Biddy's habits, on-screen they display a propensity for alcohol, something featured in *The Black Hand* (1906) and *Intolerance: Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916). Their helplessness to improve their lot was new to the first decade of the twentieth century. In *Intolerance*, the main character the Dear One (Mae Marsh) cannot save her baby from the meddling Uplifters or free her husband from wrongful imprisonment without the intervention of the governor. Similarly, in *The Mask of Zorro* (1923), only the upper-class caballeros have the ability to protect the lowly, including a friar who is beaten in public.

As Catholics became involved in the motion-picture industry, it was with the understanding that America generally viewed itself as a middle-class, white, Protestant nation. Catholics wanted to use the cinema not only to uphold what they saw as traditional American values, but also to give themselves a place among their fellow Americans. Additionally, the thousands of Catholic immigrants crowding urban tenements supposedly posed a threat to American ideals of individualism and Protestantism. The desire of Catholics to blend in guided the writing of the Production

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[17] Daniel Bernardi, ed., *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), xv–xviii.

Codes and the formation of the Legion of Decency.[18] On July 13, 1934, Howard Hall, a

reporter for the Hollywood trade magazine *Cinema Hall-Marks*, summed up lingering

anti-Catholic attitudes and the backlash against the Legion's meddling in film production.

> And there you have the basic reason for this crusade of so-called cleanliness in motion pictures. The churches, particularly the Catholics and old-line Protestants as our fathers knew them, seem to be definitely slipping into the discard as Americans everywhere flock to various so-called "New Thoughts" and many stop going to church altogether. This seems to have compelled many churches to merge just as many daily newspapers were compelled to merge when radio ate into their popularity.
>
> Now churches of all denominations are uniting to grasp control of the world's most universal and most easily understood medium, the motion picture, in an effort to get people back into the churches. But they won't succeed! Most people who have deserted the churches have not necessarily become Atheists. They do believe, however, that a moral mind is based on strength of character and good breeding combined with a sense of honor, honesty and fairplay; and not on a lot of ceremonial *fol de rol*, hypocritical psalm-singing and a false sense of responsibilities based on archaic superstitions.
>
> Those behind this cinema clean up movement are the same who "railroaded" the 18th Amendment in the Constitution, **which took us 14 years to nullify.** They fostered the Anti-tobacco movement which died aborning. And now they want to control the movies! But these bigoted reformers (who, by the way, would do well to keep their own minds clean and leave others to do likewise) who it seems drove the people out of the churches (as our fathers knew them) will only succeed in driving them out of the theatres with their bigoted reform propaganda.
>
> The following has been said here so many times that the words are worn out—and still it falls on deaf ears! But the fact remains that the Motion Picture Industry has the greatest universal and most easily understood medium in the motion picture—their own product. Why turn it over

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[18] Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930–1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 347–360.

> to the reformers to be ruined? The greatest portion of this
> industry is run by the Jews. I, personally, have found them
> (except a minor few) honest, honorable, just and possessing
> a sense of fairplay. But, my God, haven't they any guts?[19]

Hall could call Jews in Hollywood "honorable" because during the 1930s, 1940s, and into the 1950s, as heads of most of the major movie studios, their products catered to white, middle-class values. They constructed an idea of what they thought America should be, and sold it to audiences nationwide through their films.[20] Jews rarely appeared on film during these decades, yet their participation in the film industry offered them one avenue for attaining whiteness. Like Catholics, Jews were long thought of as nonwhite on the basis of religion. Similarly, Catholics attempted to influence the movie industry and make themselves appear more American, but did not achieve the same results. With rituals as distinctive as those of Catholicism, Jews in Hollywood shied away from portraying their religion on the silver screen lest they risk poor box-office returns.[21] Catholics, on the other hand, wanted their image on-screen to be portrayed in a way that could grant them access to white privileges. Where Catholic involvement in Hollywood was seen as meddling, Jews remained behind the scenes more, a strategy that ended up proving more beneficial to their cinematic perception.

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[19] The Martin J. Quigley Papers, Georgetown University, Joseph Mark Lauinger Memorial Library, Special Collections, Newspaper Clippings Series, Box 4, Folder 64.

[20] Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 6.

[21] Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 156.

Nonetheless, through film, Catholics did try to show that they were just as American as Protestants. During the 1930s and 1940s, depression and war offered opportunities for Catholics to demonstrate their Americanness with the broad strokes that film allowed. They exercised considerable clout in the movie industry through the Legion of Decency and the Production Codes. As authors of the code and with an ally in the Legion monitoring its implementation, movies provided Catholics with a forum in which to display their dedication to bringing the country out of the Great Depression and fighting fascism during World War II. The poster boys for Catholics, the ones who upheld the white ideals of toughness and loyalty as defined during that era, were priests like Father Flanagan (*Boys Town*) and Father O'Malley. Such characters made Catholicism palatable to American audiences, since they did not live in squalor and have armies of children, stereotypes that had remained from the nineteenth century.

Priests remained popular cinematic subjects into the 1950s. However, with the waning influence of the Production Codes and the Legion, coupled with Breen's retirement in 1953, film began to portray clergymen as isolated and alien. Characters like Father Michael Logan in *I Confess* appear as impediments to the exercise of justice, no matter how noble their dedication to their vows seem. Directors make it a point to film priests alone, showing them cut off from normal society. The films of the 1950s represent Catholics as alien in other ways, too. Filmed in increasingly exotic locations and times, as in the desert vistas of a bygone era in Westerns like *Giant*, we see a respect for the religion but a clear message that Catholicism is foreign. Given the general fear of

foreignness during Cold War, it is unsurprising that a religion with such a long history of alienness to white American values should be questioned.

Filmmakers turned to nuns in order to portray a safer Catholicism. Beginning in the late 1950s with movies like *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957) and *The Nun's Story* (1959), cinematic sisters took the place of priests in representing their religion on screen. With their habits signifying their faith just as clearly as a priest's collar might, nuns enacted the feminine ideal of Cold War obedience. As the 1960s went on, though, the portrayal of women religious became more exotic, comedic, and generally irreverent toward the work that real-life nuns did. At the same time, many of the films of the 1960s feature nuns, or others, questioning why any woman would choose a life of celibacy and service over the socially sanctioned role of child bearer. Sometimes the nuns gave up their duties, as in *The Nun's Story* or *A Change of Habit* (1969), but even when they did not, the questions were still present. Combined with films that made light of nuns, like *The Singing Nun* (1966) or *The Trouble with Angels* (1966), the audience is left with the sense that Catholicism was separate from mainstream America.

Previous work on the place of Catholics in America has been uneven. This study intersects with four bodies of scholarship—film criticism, whiteness studies, American Catholic history, and American cultural history—that illuminate the complex standing of Catholicism, but also agree that it eventually became part of mainstream whiteness. Films critics see Catholicism as upholding aspects of whiteness on-screen at various times, but do not examine the historical context of these images. Students of whiteness and its history in the United States consider Catholicism in their analysis but largely

ignore film. Historians of the religion in America find that Catholics enter society as whites some time during the Cold War, but do not look at how movies continued to show their people, even those of European descent, as different from most Americans. Scholars of American culture, on the other hand, discuss film and how it upheld ideals of whiteness from its inception, although they do not connect Catholics to these ideas. My analysis of the way Catholics are portrayed on American film navigates the space between these areas of study and shows that European Catholics' white status is more complicated than previously thought, making them something less than white.

The extant film criticism literature and its take on the place of Catholics in American society leaves much to be desired from a historical perspective. Yet it offers ways to look at how groups appear in movies, positing that the manner in which they are portrayed on film mirrors their treatment in real life. Film scholars explain that cultural discourse gave rise to a stereotypical, stylized way that filmmakers wanted society to look and disparate groups to interact with one another. More specifically, they discuss how movies also traditionally underscored the importance of whiteness in American society, showing white characters as economically better off, more educated, less susceptible to corruption, and more loyal to their country than nonwhites. In their view, moviemakers consistently showed that Protestantism formed an important part of what it meant to be white when displaying religious themes. White Protestant characters often act as saviors, held up as examples of the proper way for people to behave. The few works that do deal specifically with Catholicism do not place the religion in a white context, instead focusing on specific examples of Catholic teachings that appear in

certain films. Despite this lack of scholarly attention, Catholicism was a popular topic for

many films in the twentieth century, and with the evident commitment to whiteness seen

in movies, cinematic Catholics often had trouble measuring up.[22]

When historians of whiteness examine Catholicism, they often do not consider the

role of film, stating that most European Catholics could claim white status by the mid-

twentieth century. Many groups like the Irish and Italians were compared to African

Americans during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which initially made their

attempt to claim white status difficult. Yet these scholars simply look at factors like

European Catholics' light skin tone or eventual economic and political success as tools

they used to shed their association with Africans and become fully white. Other studies

of whiteness consider how specific documents, like immigration papers, offered an

assured way to realize white status for Europeans, at least according to the government.

The literature agrees that European immigrants did not need to adopt the same strategies

as blacks in order to stem prejudice while working toward whiteness. Instead, in many

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[22] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1; bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 72; Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 90; Joseph H. Kupfer, *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 5–6; Norman K. Denzin, *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995), 14; Denzin, *Reading Race: Hollywood and the Cinema of Racial Violence* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2002), 6; Barry Keith Grant, *American Cinema of The 1960s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 48; Daniel Bernardi, ed., *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U. S. Cinema* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 1–10; Bernardi, ed., *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2001); Bernardi, ed., *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Richard Porton, *Film and the Anarchist Imagination* (New York: Verso, 1999), 36; Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 4; Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 236; Thomas M. Martin, *Images and the Imageless: A Study in Religious Consciousness and Film* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991), 33; Hernán Vera and Andrew Gordon, *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 33–51; Richard Walsh, *Finding St. Paul in Film* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 3.

cases they copied the tactics of the oppressors, such as Irish minstrelsy, in order to move

beyond the comparisons made with their fellows at the bottom of the social ladder.

Social structures like class and ethnicity, and cultural ones such as religion and language,

privileged whites who were middle class or above, could claim Anglo-Saxon heritage,

belonged to a Protestant sect, and spoke English, among other things. Yet the scholarship

that narrowly focuses on these social structures does not acknowledge how film has kept

alive negative attitudes toward European Catholic groups, making findings in the body of

work problematic.[23]

Scholars of American Catholicism have neglected the mechanisms by which

Catholics became white, or how they overcame the social barriers in their way. The story

of Catholicism, according to American Catholic historians, is the story of its adherents,

starting with the Irish, dealing with a series of obstacles that barred them from acceptance

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[23] Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso, 1997), 93–96; Thomas Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–13; Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1–18; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 1–13; Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 35; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2003), 3–15; John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 223; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1–14; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1–3; Irene Whelan, "Religious Rivalry and the Making of Irish-American Identity," in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, J. J. Lee and Marion Casey, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 271–85; Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 80–88; Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 104; Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 72–129; George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), vii–xx; Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 57–92.

as Americans, much less as whites. For European Catholics, successful navigation of

those obstacles occurred at different times throughout history. The breadth of American

Catholic scholarship shows a continual rejuvenation of the Catholic population through

immigration, which also renewed the taint of foreignness that has remained with all

Catholics in the eyes of Protestant Americans. Even studies that discuss attempts to unite

Catholics under one cultural banner, as the Irish tried toward the end of the nineteenth

century, prove what difficulty they had at gaining acceptance. Instead, various ethnic

groups often kept alive their own traditions from the old country, further separating

Catholicism from mainstream Americanism. Still, historians see different Catholic

groups earning acceptance in American society either through movement to the suburbs

or by through assimilation by apostasy. Yet in cultural terms, specifically in film,

something about Catholicism seems to separate it from mainstream white America.[24]

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[24] Timothy J. Meagher, *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880–1925* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 1–16; Dolan and David J. Alvarez. *An American Church: Essays on the Americanization of the Catholic Church* (Moraga, CA: Saint Mary's College of California, 1979); Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 1–3; Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck, S. J., eds., *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U. S.: Issues and Concerns* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism*, 3–11; Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 244; James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 132, 157; Lynn Dumenil, "The Tribal Twenties: `Assimilated' Catholics' Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (Fall 91 1991): 21; Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Experience: An Interpretation of the History of American Catholicism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 19–20; Greeley, *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 14; Mark J. Hurley, *The Unholy Ghost: Anti-Catholicism in the American Experience* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1992), 153; Eileen M. McMahon, *What Parish are You From? A Chicago Irish Community and Race Relations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 228; James D. Davidson, *Catholicism in Motion: The Church in American Society* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2005), 10; John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 156; Dolores Liptak, *Immigrants and Their Church* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989), ix; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 241; John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of the Chicago Press, 1996), 1–5; McGreevy, "Thinking On One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928–1960," *Journal of American History* 84, no. 1

American cultural historians have chronicled the importance of whiteness in

constructing precisely what it has meant to be American. While not always focusing on

religion, many scholars of whiteness note the importance of being Protestant in the

United States. That branch of Christianity has traditionally been associated with many of

our founding stories and myths, including things like the Protestant work ethic, religious

"awakenings" and revivals taking place as the country pushed west, and the belief that

revolutionary leaders intended this country to be Protestant. In other words, to be

culturally American meant being a white yeomen farmer bringing civilization and

Christianity to the continent. Studies of American culture show that these ideas, in place

prior to the arrival of large numbers of Irish Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century,

were kept alive as American culture developed new forms of expression like minstrelsy

(June 1997): 97–131; Samuel G. Freedman, *The Inheritance: How Three Families and the American Political Majority Moved from Left to Right* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 22; José Casanova, "Roman and Catholic and American: The Transformation of Catholicism in the United States," *International Journal of Politics, Culture & Society* 6, no. 1 (September 1992): 75; Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in New Deal Pittsburgh* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1999), 82–87; Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xxxix–xlix; Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The Nineteenth-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: A Plume Book, 2002), 189; David R. Contosta, "Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses: Anti-Catholicism and American Church Designs in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009): 851–52; William V. D'Antonio, et. al. *American Catholic Laity in a Changing Church* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 6; Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 220; John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Anglo Relations in New York City," in *The New York Irish*, Ronald H. Bayor and Meagher, eds. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 143; Douglas Brinkley and Julie M. Fenster *Parish Priest: Father McGivney and American Catholicism* (New York: William Morrow, 2006), ix–xiii; Thomas Carty, *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 1–9; James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1–10; Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture for the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 1–15; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 204–8; Michael Ian Borer, and Adam Murphree, "Framing Catholicism: Jack Chick's Anti-Catholic Cartoons and the Flexible Boundaries of the Culture Wars," *Religion & American Culture* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 95–112.

and vaudeville and were later transmitted onto film. Scholars of this field show that these

various cultural forms instructed Americans on improper behavior—how not to be white.

Each successive artistic form displayed an exotic "other" in its portrayal of various ethnic

groups, Catholics included. While ideas of whiteness changed during the twentieth

century, the power of film in keeping Catholicism as an "other" in American society

survived.[25]

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[25] John Higham, *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xiv; Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Lears, *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1–10; Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–8; Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 1; Lendol Calder, *Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86; Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11; Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The Nineteenth-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: A Plume Book, 2002), 189; Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), xiii–xvi; Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1–13; May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 83; May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1; Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1–14; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1–9; John Bodnar, *Blue-Collar Hollywood: Liberalism, Democracy, and Working People in American Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 121–25; George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 36–37; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 214–19; Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 182; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 15; James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Rethinking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History* 79 (3), 996–1020; Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6; John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994); John Belton, *Movies and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 209; George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 90; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998), 194–95; Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19–22; Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 21–22.

The discursive power of whiteness persisted on film throughout much of the twentieth century, making whatever strides gained by Catholics outside the movie theater less meaningful than other scholars suppose. When film arrived on the American cultural scene in the early 1900s, observers immediately grasped its importance as a technological tool to inform people, particularly the working classes who made up the largest group of patrons. D. W. Griffith, among other early filmmakers, saw his films as moralizing tools, meant to be used to instruct the masses on proper behavior by purveying ideas of whiteness. Catholicism had staying power in American cinema, not least because so many Catholics became involved in Hollywood. However, the exoticism of Catholicism in movies hindered the acceptance of Catholics as normal whites in American society. With distinctive rituals and costuming, Catholicism could be used by filmmakers to portray everything from typical Christianity to the decadence of civilization. Thus we see the colonizing effect that film had on Catholicism and the continual use of Catholics' image as examples of nonwhite, "other" behavior.[26]

Film critics use tools like semiotics, *mise-en-scène*, and *montage* in order to analyze the way a subject is portrayed, and they help track the way Catholicism has been presented relative to whiteness. Early movies like *Intolerance* are products of the time in which they were made, showing an urban, lower-class Catholic population with ties to criminal behavior. The close-up of the statue of the Virgin Mary and Child being blasted apart by gun fire speaks volumes as to the negative views on Catholicism held by many Americans at that time. The promulgation of the Legion of Decency and the Production

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[26] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 49–72.

Codes in the 1920s and 1930s showed that Catholics understood the power of film and that they were concerned about the way their image was presented to cinema audiences. Thus when *Going My Way* appeared in 1944, America saw a Father O'Malley who was clearly Catholic but who performed a nonthreatening Catholicism and minstrelized the religion in the process. As the Cold War went on, we see a questioning of foreign elements, a label traditionally given to Catholicism. With the isolated priests of the 1950s as in *On the Waterfront* (1954) and the clearly foreign, slightly silly nuns of the 1960s like in *Lilies of the Field* (1963), we see a reinforcement of aspects of the Catholic religion that has always separated it from mainstream society and has made Catholics' white status problematic. These films, and others like them, underscore the changing language used to present Catholicism on-screen and make real life Catholics' precarious white status a costume that often shifted or was removed altogether.

This shaky white status points, particularly in relation to movies, to an image problem on the part of the Catholic Church in the United States. Despite all the attempts to make the religion appear more modern and accepting of the input of the laity, it emerged from the culture wars of the 1960s looking stuck in the past. Films like *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* highlight Catholicism's relationship with American culture, revealing contention that continues to this day. For every movie like *The Rite* (2011), in which a young seminarian with doubts about his calling saves a fellow priest from possession through exorcism, there are numerous other examples of Catholicism

shown in a negative light.[27] Another movie that deals with possession, *The Order* (2003),

shows the Church's rituals to be just as powerless against evil as those in *The Exorcist,* as

well as an impediment to the romance between the main characters, one of whom is a

priest.[28] Further, films like *Dead Man Walking* feature modern nuns, at least in

appearance since Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) does not wear the habit, but also

highlight Catholicism's tie to crimes and the tenability of being a female religious in

today's society.[29] From the ridicule heaped upon the Church by Cardinal Glick's

(George Carlin) irreverent "Buddy Jesus" in *Dogma* (1999) to the Church's seeming

complicity in Father Brendan Flynn's sexual predations in *Doubt* (2008), Catholicism

rarely stands for anything positive.[30] *Doubt* speaks to perhaps the biggest image problem

facing Catholics today: the sexual scandals involving priests and boys.

As the Church continues to deal with negative perceptions, we see that film has

kept alive many of the stereotypes associated with Catholics since the sixteenth century.

No matter what strides Catholics made in culture, or the way those negative stereotypes

changed, there has always been something that separated them from mainstream

America. Films dealing with Catholicism today do not uphold ideas of whiteness, but the

cinematic message is still clear: there is something different about Catholicism that

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[27] Not only is the exorcism successful, but it also helps Michael realize that he in fact does want to become a priest, and the film's final shot is him hearing confession. *The Rite*, directed by Mikael Håfström (2011, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers), DVD.

[28] *The Order*, directed by Brian Helgeland (2003, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox), DVD.

[29] *Dead Man Walking*, directed by Tim Robbins (1995, Universal City, CA: Working Title Films), DVD.

[30] *Dogma*, directed by Kevin Smith (1999, Los Angeles, CA: Lionsgate Films), DVD; *Doubt*, directed by John Patrick Shanley (2008, Santa Monica, CA: Miramax Films), DVD.

makes it popular film material yet is ultimately damaging to its reputation. Because so many Catholics of European descent no longer retain the markers that once separated them from society, whether through assimilation or their socioeconomic status, the fact that movies continue to show Catholicism to be something distinct and exotic makes their acceptance in America incomplete. The partial white status of Catholics as reflected on film is one as easily removed as the costumes worn by those on the silver screen, revealing lingering negative attitudes against Catholicism as old as America itself.

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