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HOLLYWOODLANDIA: CELEBRITY WOMEN, MOVIE CULTURE, AND AMERICAN PUBLIC WOMANHOOD, 1916-1950

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HOLLYWOODLANDIA: CELEBRITY WOMEN, MOVIE
CULTURE, AND AMERICAN PUBLIC
WOMANHOOD, 1916-1950

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HOLLYWOODLANDIA: CELEBRITY WOMEN, MOVIE
CULTURE, AND AMERICAN PUBLIC
WOMANHOOD, 1916-1950

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the

Dedman College

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

with a

Major in History

by

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Hollywoodlandia: Celebrity Women, Movie
Culture, and American Public
Womanhood, 1916-1950

Advisor: Professor Crista DeLuzio

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This project proposes to study the ways in which celebrity women's behavior may have encouraged American women to challenge, but not necessarily subvert, traditional gender roles even as Hollywood publicity continued to emphasize the importance of those same roles in women's lives. It does that by examining three sites where celebrity women prominently lived, worked, played, and volunteered between 1920 and 1950: the Hollywood Studio Club, a boarding house only for women in the entertainment industry, in Los Angeles; the Sun Valley Ski Resort, the first modern ski resort in the American West, in central Idaho; and the Hollywood Canteen, a volunteer canteen for servicemen staffed only by Hollywood personnel, also in Los Angeles. An examination of the archival records of each site, together with fan magazine coverage, reveals that these sites became spaces where celebrity women pushed the boundaries of traditional gender norms and the strict separation of spheres that movie fan culture promoted. Simultaneously, these places came to represent certain ideologies about gender, class, and race in the United States between 1920 and 1950.

Hollywoodlandia demonstrates at these three individual sites, celebrity women behaved in ways that may have encouraged women to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations

about their bodies in public spaces. However, the publicity about that same behavior at these sites reveals the extents to which creators of movie fan culture were invested in maintaining and reflecting not only traditional gender roles, but also propagating images of rich white women meant to function as representatives of the evolving conceptions of an “ideal” national American womanhood between 1920 and 1950, a womanhood that was malleable and modern and yet unchangingly restrictive. Within this argument can be found messages about the differences between how celebrity women and the film industry reflected, disseminated, and pushed back against prevailing ideas about gender, race, class, and nationalism in the United States during the industry’s golden age, laying the groundwork for a postwar cultural turn toward the home as women’s appropriate domain.

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This project is dedicated to all the women I write about, whose lives and professional work have shaped me in ways that are hard to describe. This work is my attempt to thank them.

And this is dedicated to myself. You did the damn thing.

INTRODUCTION

On March 14, 1950, Senator Edwin C. Johnson of Colorado took to the floor of the United States Senate to propose a bill.¹ As other senators debated public policies like the National Housing Act and natural gas regulation, Johnson was concerned about something entirely different: a Hollywood actress – Ingrid Bergman, to be precise. Referring to Bergman as “Mrs. Peter Lindstrom,” her married name (which she never used professionally), Johnson denounced the Swedish actress in no uncertain terms:

Mrs. Peter Lindstrom’s unconventional free-love conduct must be regarded for what it is – an assault upon the institution of marriage. It must be accepted, too, as a direct challenge to the family unit as the basis for our civilization...we have here the pin-up girl of millions; Hollywood’s sweetheart; a celebrated international figure, who has started a crusade against the holy bond of matrimony.²

Johnson further vilified Bergman for also failing her role as a mother, both to the nine-year-old daughter and to her newborn son. Even “dumb beasts” were better mothers than Bergman, Johnson said.³ He thought that she had transgressed American morality so completely that she should not even be allowed to return to the country:

The United States of America has been wonderful to Mrs. Peter Lindstrom. Here she gained happiness, fame, millions of friends, leisure, and great wealth...Under our law no

¹ The bill Johnson was proposing would require “the licensing of actors, actresses, producers, and films by a division of the Department of Commerce.” The object of Johnson’s bill was “to insure wholesome motion pictures for the people and to eliminate persons of low character from making and appearing in films.” Senator Johnson, speaking on S. 3237, on March 14, 1950, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 96, pt. 3: 3285.

² Senator Johnson, speaking on S. 3237, *Congressional Record* 96, pt. 3: 3286.

³ Senator Johnson, speaking on S. 3237, *Congressional Record* 96, pt. 3: 3286.

alien guilty of moral turpitude can set foot on American soil again. Mrs. Peter Lindstrom has deliberately exiled herself forever from the country which was so good to her.⁴

It was not just Senator Johnson who felt this way about Ingrid Bergman. Three months after the actress's photo graced the cover of *Photoplay* in December 1949, a young woman, Mary Alice O'Connor from Boston, wrote a letter to the magazine that displayed many of the same feelings as Johnson:

What nerve you have putting Ingrid Bergman on your cover. Are you trying to make a martyr of Miss Bergman? No schoolgirl infatuation is so important that a woman who once served as an example to women all over the world should throw over everything for it. Miss Bergman doesn't have to give any retirement statements. The public will be happy to retire her.⁵

Another movie fan, Eileen Sullenberger from New York City, wrote into *Modern Screen* in August 1949, saying, "I have to laugh when I think of the high ideals that were supposed to be upheld by Ingrid Bergman...It's coincidental, and a pity, that having played both saint and sinner in the movies, Miss Bergman seems to want to go to the same extremes in private life [sic]."⁶ Even Hollywood gossip columnist Hedda Hopper predicted that Bergman's film career was over.⁷

In order to answer the question of what Bergman had done to cause such widespread consternation, we must first ask why the American public was so concerned about Bergman's personal life to begin with. Prior to 1949, Bergman had been one of the most popular actresses of the decade, first gracing American screens in *Intermezzo* (1939), an American remake of a Swedish film she made the year before. In the intervening years, Bergman had played a Swedish nanny, a Spanish Republican, the Norwegian wife of a wartime Resistance leader, a nun, and a literal saint,

⁴ Senator Johnson, speaking on S. 3237, *Congressional Record* 96, pt. 3: 3284.

⁵ Letter from Mary Alice O'Connor, "Readers, Inc." Letters to the Editor, *Photoplay*, March 1950, 18, Media History Digital Library from the Wisconsin for Film & Theater Research, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>.

⁶ "Bergman's Folly" in "your letters....," *Modern Screen*, September 1949, 26, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>.

⁷ Hedda Hopper, "Get Off That High Horse," *Modern Screen*, October 1949, 30, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>.

Joan of Arc. Bergman herself, at least according to her publicity, had become a kind of all-American immigrant, having adopted American ideals so completely that her foreignness – and any hints of what industry and government leaders may have seen as subversive foreign ideology – was subsumed. Columnists portrayed a Bergman as humble, reserved, kind, and intelligent, and as fiercely protective of her nine-year-old daughter as she was supportive of her husband’s medical career.⁸ And audiences loved her. Johnson admitted that Bergman was his own favorite actress “by very long odds.”⁹ Even after news of her scandal broke in mid-1949, she was still one of the most popular stars among the readers of *Photoplay* in December of the same year: “[F]or the past several months she has been astounding the world with her unexpected behavior. But, so far, there has been no sign of a marked slackening of interest in Miss Bergman. She is still immensely popular.”¹⁰

So what was this scandal? What had brought Bergman from the height of stardom to being called one of “Hollywood’s two current apostles of degradation” by a sitting American senator?¹¹ It was a simple story, really, and not a particularly unique one in the course of human history. In April 1949, Bergman left her husband and daughter in the United States as she went to the island of Stromboli off the northern coast of Sicily to make a movie with Italian neorealist director Roberto Rossellini. Through the course of filming, the actress and the director fell in

⁸ Hedda Hopper, “Ingrid Bergman Talks,” *Modern Screen*, December 1948, 29, 81-85, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>.

⁹ Senator Johnson, speaking on S. 3237, *Congressional Record* 96, pt. 3: 3286.

¹⁰ “Medal Winners For 1949: Most Popular Stars,” *Photoplay*, March 1950, 89, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>.

¹¹ Senator Johnson, speaking on S. 3237, *Congressional Record* 96, pt. 3: 3285. The other apostle of degradation, according to Johnson, was actress Rita Hayworth who, in May 1949, gave up a movie career to marry Prince Aly Kahn, the son of a prominent leader of the Ismaili community of Shia Islam. Hayworth’s story brings up additional questions about the intersection of gender and race in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. John Kobal, *Rita Hayworth: The Time, the Place, and the Woman* (New York: Norton, 1978).

love, and in the same month that the couple's film, *Stromboli*, was released in American theaters, Bergman gave birth to their son before she had either divorced Lindstrom or marrying Rossellini.¹² That was what Senator Johnson, Hedda Hopper, and millions of Americans had spoken and written about. Ernest Hemingway, one of Bergman's closest friends, perfectly encapsulated the question I found myself asking the first time I heard this story: "What is all this nonsense? She's going to have a child. So what? Women are always having children."¹³

The argument here is not that Bergman's actions should not have constituted a scandal. It probably still would be one today. But the fact that an American senator took to the senate floor to declare a Hollywood actress the leader of a crusade against the institution of marriage makes this incident worth studying.¹⁴ And so the question remains, what *was* all this nonsense? Why did the American public feel so deeply betrayed by Bergman's actions? Why did those actions constitute another assault in the supposed war against domesticity? What social expectations about women, marriage and motherhood had she strayed from? How would the response have been different if she had behaved in the same way a decade or two before? Why should Bergman's personal life have given rise to so much public consternation?

¹² Due to several legal difficulties (Bergman herself explained, "I was a married Swedish citizen hoping to divorce and marry an Italian who had had his marriage annulled, and my husband was now an American citizen living in California"), Bergman received a divorce through the Mexican courts, and married Rossellini through a proxy marriage performed in Mexico by a lawyer and an Italian film producer who was good friends with the couple. Ingrid Bergman and Alan Burgess, *Ingrid Bergman: My Story* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980): 275-276.

¹³ As quoted in Bergman and Burgess, *Ingrid Bergman: My Story*, 246. Bergman became good friends with Hemingway after she starred in Paramount's production of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943). According to Bergman, Hemingway called her in Italy just before her son was born, even more clearly articulating how silly he found the situation: "What's this? America's gone crazy. Scandal because of a baby! Ridiculous!" Bergman and Hemingway remained friends until his death; Bergman even visited Hemingway at his home in Idaho near Sun Valley, the site studied in chapter two.

¹⁴ The Roscoe "Fatty Arbuckle" Scandal of 1921-1922, in which a popular comedian was accused of killing a young actress, is most often-cited as one of the most influential celebrity scandals of Hollywood's earliest years. See: Hillary Hallet, *Go West Young Woman! The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

In the decades between 1920 and 1950, there were many effective vehicles for creating, disseminating, and contesting gender ideologies, but there is no denying that Hollywood was among the most influential. Scholars have widely noted that nearly fifty percent of Americans attended the movies each week during these years, making the movies what film historian Lary May called “the first true mass amusement in American life.”¹⁵ Central to the success of the movies was the concept of “stars” who were celebrated for their successful performances on the screen, as well as exploited by the industry for the growing influence that they had on their fans. With the advent of movie fan magazines, celebrities’ most private behavior became public fodder – or it at least appeared so to fans reading about it. Fan magazine writers, who often worked in conjunction with studio publicity managers, had immense sway over the movie-going American public. Of their many functions, an important role of the fan magazine and other Hollywood publicity was to make and disseminate messages about American ideologies such as gender, race, class, and democracy. Especially important to this project, makers of movie culture exploited the popularity of the industry’s actresses to push ideologies about gender that often aligned with more traditional expectations for American women to value their role in the private home than in a public career, even as the actresses themselves did the very opposite.

Publicity about the personal lives of famous people could – and in many ways was designed to – encourage fans to engage in similar behavior as their favorite actors or actresses, but industry leaders kept a close eye on stars’ private behavior, always cognizant of possible messages that their actions could convey. Having been accused of contributing to the moral

¹⁵ Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980): xi. For figures of film attendance see also: Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will: Workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

denigration of American society from its earliest days, industry leaders most often aligned itself with the prevailing conservative gender ideology that stipulated that women's primary domain was the domestic one. Because of this, I argue that the film industry was an incredibly important player in larger national debates about the public/private dichotomy for American women. Though some makers of movie fan culture were willing to concede in the 1920s that women might sometimes work in the public sphere without fully compromising their private roles and responsibilities, things had completely changed following World War II, when most Hollywood publicity emphasized celebrity women's marriages, children, and homes rather than their individuality or career ambitions.¹⁶ But Hollywood publicity, quite purposefully, never told the whole story. Understanding the amount of influence stars had over their fans, studio publicity departments and fan magazine editors and writers had a close working relationship, planting or covering up stories to keep the shiny veneer of a star's public persona intact. As publications full of half-truths and outright lies, fan magazines prove thorny historical sources, for the gender ideologies propagated in their pages did not exactly match with how women really behaved. This is not to say, of course, that female Hollywood stars behaved in ways that egregiously defied gender norms outside the studio lot. But not every star was quite as dedicated to the domestic sphere as gossip columnists and publicity men made it seem.

This project explores the ways in which celebrity women's personal behavior in both public and private spaces may have encouraged American women to challenge the traditional separation of spheres, even as fan magazines and movie plots continued to emphasize the importance of female domesticity to family stability, social morality, and national identity. It traces these challenges that took shape at three sites reported on in fan magazines between 1920

¹⁶ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008 [1988]): 62-64.

and 1950: the Hollywood Studio Club, a boarding house for women in the film industry, in Los Angeles; the Sun Valley Ski Resort, the first modern ski resort in the American West, in central Idaho; and the Hollywood Canteen, a volunteer canteen for servicemen staffed exclusively by Hollywood personnel, also in Los Angeles. Examination of the archival records of each site, together with fan magazine coverage, reveals that fan magazine coverage of women's behavior at these places performed effective cultural work in reinforcing the gender status quo in the United States between 1920 and 1950. Simultaneously, however, these places became spaces where celebrity women pushed the boundaries of traditional gender norms without seeking to destroy them altogether. The understandings of the gender divide changed over time: in the 1920s, the first years of the Studio Club, women's activities in the public sphere were gaining greater acceptance among the general population; by the time the Hollywood Canteen closed in 1945, the rhetoric had begun its postwar swing back toward an emphasis on women's return to the private home. Celebrity women's behavior at these places blurred the lines between public and private for themselves and for all American women – that is, all *white* and *middle-class* American women – thereby reflecting and reinforcing the racial and class hierarchies that structured social life throughout much of the nation in these decades. Hence, these sites are significant stopping places on the roadmap to an understanding of the Bergman scandal.

These three sites provide a neat chronological structure, as the sites' founding and first years of operation coincide with successive decades: the Hollywood Studio Club in the 1920s (though it was founded in 1916), Sun Valley in the late 1930s, and the Hollywood Canteen in the early 1940s. As such, each place provides an opportunity to examine how ideas about femininity and "proper" gender roles operated during the decades leading up to the middle of the century, as well as how celebrity women acted in ways that challenged "proper" roles. As these sites

received publicity through fan magazines, they gained a degree of cultural significance, which magazine creators shaped to fit the contours of the traditional gender expectations of the decade even as the behavior of the women themselves may have undermined it. This chronological set up also allows us to trace how Hollywood's conception of women's role in the maintenance of American national identity as it changed over time. During World War II, the Hollywood Canteen forged the most explicit connection between idealized American womanhood, national pride, and democracy. Even so, the representations and real-life experiences of celebrity women at the other two sites during the 1920s and 1930s laid the foundation for the vision of American womanhood, based in whiteness and middle-class status, upon whom the survival of the nation depended as the United States entered an uncertain postwar world.

Popular perception often claims that early Hollywood was an unfriendly industry for women, usually painting female celebrities with broad strokes, either as victims to a ruthless studio system who controlled their every move or as complicit participants in the oppression of those they deemed their social inferiors, including people of color and the working-class.¹⁷ These dichotomies much like the public/private divide discussed in this project, are too simplistic, and this work joins in scholarship that is uncovering celebrity women's agency within an oppressive star system.¹⁸ It is true that some women in Hollywood were subjected to the intense whims of

¹⁷ For just one example, see: Amanda Morris, "Golden Age of Hollywood was not so golden for women," *Northwestern Now*, Northwestern University, April 1, 2020. <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2020/03/golden-age-of-hollywood-was-not-so-golden-for-women/>; kym k (screen name), "The Not-So-Golden Era of Hollywood," *The Seamstress of Bloomsbury* (blog), November 8, 2022, <https://theseamstressofbloomsbury.co.uk/blogs/seamstress-blog/not-so-golden-era-of-hollywood>; Charlotte Chilton, "35 Rules You Probably Didn't Know Old Hollywood Stars Had to Follow," *Harpers Bazaar*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/g31916339/old-hollywood-star-rules/>.

¹⁸ Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Kathleen Anne McHugh, *American Domesticity: From How-to Manual to Hollywood Melodrama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Jeanine Basinger, *The Star Machine* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

the studio system, and most, if not all, participated in the creation of popular culture that declared a restricted role for women, people of color, and working-class people in American society. My project, however, shows that celebrity women's public personal behavior was more nuanced. When famous women lived, worked, played, and volunteered in public spaces, their actions had the potential to encourage all American women to challenge women's limited engagement with the public realm. This dissertation also reveals the extent to which the film industry was invested in maintaining the social status quo, for limiting access to the public sphere by gender, race, and class kept the existing social hierarchy, with wealthy white men at the very top, in place. By using archival materials like oral histories, local and regional publications, and the sites' administrative records of the Hollywood Studio Club, Sun Valley, and the Hollywood Canteen, this project acts as a social history, exploring how three individual local sites opened up new spaces in which celebrity women could interrogate previous gender norms that had tightly controlled women's public activities. Further, by examining how fan magazines and other fan culture covered women's behavior at these individual sites, this project is also a cultural history, demonstrating how the film industry, arguably the biggest cultural force in the United States at the time, was a major driver in reifying the private home as the ideal social domain for all American women. In other words, I show that celebrity women were more than just pretty faces or pin-up girls – they could be prominent representations of women's freedom in the public sphere, inspiring American women to pursue similar forms of public behavior.

The ideology of separate spheres, which is central to this project, dictated that men's primary realm of influence was in the public sphere, in which men participated in the workforce, politics, and public leisure activities. Women's primary domain, on the other hand, was that of

the home and everything related to it – cooking, cleaning, raising children, and various other household duties. A gender division of labor had been central to American culture and society since the earliest days of European colonization, though it was not until the early eighteenth century that the language of separate spheres began to dominate the rhetoric of gender relations.¹⁹ As the American Revolution brought about major political and social changes in the new nation, there lacked an established national tradition of women’s political behavior, making it easy for male social and cultural leaders to disseminate messages about women’s proper place in society: the home. The ideology of Republican Motherhood, which declared that it was women’s civic duty to remain in the private home and teach their children proper American values, allowed women to claim a significant political role even in their limited capacity as a member of the nation.²⁰

Separate sphere ideology was fully embedded in American society during the nineteenth century, but it was also in this century that women began to challenge their exclusion from public life. Especially after the American Civil War, white and Black women played significant roles in women’s rights, temperance, Spiritualist, and social reform movements.²¹ As the nineteenth century drew to a close, women’s rejection of their confinement to the private sphere most often

¹⁹ Even if separate spheres dominated the public discourse, Americans’ lived experiences did not neatly match up with a clean public/private divide. Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of an American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996): 4.; Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2011).

²⁰ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1980).

²¹ Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1969* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women’s Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: the Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

came through two main avenues: their participation in the economic work force, and their consumption of popular culture. In cities like Chicago, middle-class women literally redefined the physical urban space as their sartorial styles sparked debates over women's very existence in public spaces such as the Columbian Exposition of 1893.²² Working-class women, too, were central to the emergence of various forms of public leisure in the early twentieth century, including early motion pictures. Through consumer products like fashionable clothing and dime novels, and leisure activities like amusement parks and dance halls, working-class women created a distinctly working-class identity based in femininity and consumerism.²³ Interacting with the public market on a daily basis through consumption of products for themselves, their homes, and their families, women claimed access to an increasing number of public spaces.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, women's public presence expanded as they played prominent roles in Progressive reform movements and gained the right to vote. World War I opened up even more public avenues for women, including the armed forces and the economic workforce.²⁴ By the 1920s, many (white, middle-class) American women extended the freedoms they had gained during wartime into their personal lives, demanding sexual equality on top of political and economic equality. Many conservative Americans feared that women's sexual freedom would lead to a breakdown of the family unit, which social leaders claimed was the

²² Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Emily Remus, *A Shopper's Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

²³ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

²⁴ Michael McGirr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Allison L. Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Elizabeth Cobbs, *The Hello Girls: America's First Women Soldiers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); Susan Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

basis of American democracy.²⁵ With the Great Depression came a call for women to leave the public work force in favor of men with families, though the number of women in the workforce actually increased during the decade. Still, public rhetoric intentionally pushed traditional gender roles as fundamental to the success of the nation.²⁶ World War II, of course, created an immense opportunity for women to gain even greater footholds in the public domain with American men serving in the armed forces, but even wartime propaganda signaled an expectation that women would forsake their public positions for their husbands, children, and homes.²⁷

Because of the prevailing social belief that women were the moral guardians of the family, their engagement with the movies was particularly crucial to the medium's success. First as traveling exhibitions and then as nickelodeons, movies were a cheap and incredibly popular leisure activity that quickly gained a foothold in working-class and immigrant communities. As scholars like Kathy Peiss, Nan Enstad, and Elizabeth Ewen show, working-class and immigrant women regularly attended the movies, using the meanings they made from the movies they watched to make claims of American womanhood through mirroring behavior or consuming the same products as the modern American women they saw on screen.²⁸ In the late 1910s, film

²⁵ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

²⁶ Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009 [1984]): 182-183.

²⁷ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²⁸ Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985); Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*. Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

distributors and theater owners, sensing a new opportunity to make more money, began to court middle- and upper-class women to new lavish theaters in the hopes that higher-class women would bring a sense of respectability to the physical space of the movie theater and legitimize the pastime of moviegoing for their families.²⁹ Soon enough, movies were considered an appropriate activity for Americans of all ages. As the movie theater was increasingly patronized by women, creators of fan culture imagined their audiences as predominantly female, leading to a feminization of movie fan culture.³⁰

Fan magazines were ubiquitous in twentieth-century American popular movie culture, read by millions of Americans every month.³¹ These magazines were built on a curious combination of gossip, half-truths, glamor, consumption, and the illusion that they revealed the “real” person behind a star’s persona. They functioned to cover up the less savory stories happening off the studio lots, to promote newly released films, and – like movies themselves – documented (and projected) significant changes in American society and culture.³² Significantly, as Mary Desjardins demonstrates in her work on publicity in Hollywood’s Golden Age, coverage in these fan magazines shaped how the designation of “public” and “private” applied to American life, especially for their predominantly female readers. In Desjardin’s estimation, fan magazines promoted a kind of American femininity in which the two separate spheres were

²⁹ Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

³⁰ Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010): 19.

³¹ While exact readership is difficult to pin down, Sarah Polley estimates that the readership during the Golden Age ranged, on average, between roughly 2 million and 10 million. Sarah Polley, “A Spectrum of Individuals: U.S. Fan Magazine Circulation Figures from 1914 to 1965,” in *Star Attractions: Twentieth-Century Movie Magazines and Global Fandom*, eds. Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lanckman (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019): 67.

³² Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*.

reconciled as public female celebrities allegedly exposed the secrets of their private life – their homes, their families, their beauty routines, and even their innermost thoughts.³³ However, given that many of the articles and stories about celebrities were planted, modified, or even written by publicists themselves, fan magazines cannot be read as sources of “truth” of what really happened or how stars “really” felt. Still, that does not mean that they are not useful. Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lanckman suggest using fan magazines as “conduits of historical assumptions: assumptions about appropriate gender roles, goals, behaviors, desires, and appearance, via the stars whose promotion formed the center of every issue.”³⁴ This project aims to do just as McDonald and Lanckman suggest, analyzing fan magazines’ coverage of celebrity women’s behavior at the Studio Club, Sun Valley, and the Canteen for changing ideas about women’s relationship to the domestic sphere, the public workforce, and the nation.³⁵

Central to the success of fan magazines was the “star,” a new social and cultural category that developed alongside and because of fan culture. According to Anthony Slide, early film industry leaders resisted an industry-backed creation of fan publications because they believed promoting certain performers might influence other actors to recognize their central role in a film’s popularity and ask for a higher salary. Thus, when the first movie fan magazine was published in 1911, it originally only adapted movie plots into story form. However, as

³³ Mary Desjardins, “‘As Told By Helen Ferguson’: Hollywood, Publicity, Gender, and the Public Sphere,” in *When Private Talk Goes Public: Gossip in American History*, eds. Kathleen A. Feeley and Jennifer Frost (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 163.

³⁴ McDonald and Lanckman, “Introduction,” in *Star Attractions*, 3.

³⁵ Using a wide corpus of magazines, from the ever-popular Photoplay to the many smaller publications – names like Picture-Show, The Photo-Play Journal, Glamour of Hollywood, and Silver Screen – would not have been possible without the incredibly important work that has been done by David Pierce and Eric Hoyt, who created the Media History Digital Library at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. With hundreds of thousands of fan magazine pages digitized and fully accessible online, Pierce, Hoyt, and the dozens of others associated with the project, scholars in the field of film history may be able to reveal new or unusual ways in which fan magazines challenged and/or reinforced ideologies about gender, race, class, and other social categories in the twentieth-century United States.

moviegoers increasingly asked to more about their favorite screen players, industry leaders realized they could not avoid publishing articles about film performers' personal lives; *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, the first fan magazine, published its first star profile on actress Florence Lawrence in December 1911, just months after its first issue.³⁶ With the advent of *Photoplay*, arguably the premier fan magazine in early Hollywood, that same year, fan culture would never be the same. Richard deCordova argues that the earliest film players like Lawrence, Florence Turner, Francis X. Bushman, and King Baggot, famous between 1909 and 1913, were “picture personalities,” whose public identity was formed and maintained by their appearance in films rather than offscreen behavior.³⁷ By 1914, however, something even bigger grew out of audiences' desire to know more about the actors' offscreen personalities and private lives. Within five years, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks emerged as the industry's first bona fide movie stars, especially after the couple married in 1920. For the first time, two “picture personalities” were more defined by their private lives than by their public performances. From this point forward, American culture would never be without the star. With the solidification of the studio system in the mid- to late 1920s, stars became products for the film industry.³⁸ With little regard for opinions of the performers themselves, Hollywood turned out hundreds of star personas –

³⁶ *Motion-Picture Story Magazine* and *Photoplay* were the first fan magazines published in 1911. Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine*, 17, 47.

³⁷ deCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 50.

³⁸ The Studio System was made up of what Lary May called the Big Eight, eight studios that owned almost all of the talent in the industry and produced almost all of the films that were released in the United States. The Big Eight were also the founding members of the Motion Picture Association of America. The big eight are: Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, United Artists, Warner Bros., Columbia Pictures, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (a conglomerate of Loews (an original studio), Metro Pictures, and Goldwyn Pictures), RKO Pictures, and 20th Century Fox (created by a merger of Fox Film and 20th Century Pictures). May, *Screening Out the Past*, 176-177. See also: Basinger, *The Star Machine*.

products, not people. As a result, the stars were literally the most glamorous, beautiful, and idolized people on the planet, but their public personas did not always match their private selves.

We see here a kind of triumvirate reciprocal relationship between the film industry, the stars, and fan magazines – all were reliant on each other for their very existence. Without fan magazines and the film industry, there is no star; with no star, there is no fan magazine or film industry; and without the industry, none of it was possible. In a symbiotic and interdependent relationship, celebrities and makers of fan culture each had a stake in how publications portrayed the stars. For this reason, much of the publicity about stars feels contrived, often skewing toward more traditional ideologies about gender, race, and class, promulgating a social hierarchy led almost exclusively by rich white men. How the Hollywood stars really behaved, however, was a different story. This is not to say that celebrities always acted in a way that completely contradicted their reported behavior. Rather, viewing how they actually behaved together with how they were profiled in fan magazines can provide a more complete picture about how movie fan culture used movie stars to portray ideologies about gender, race, class, and nationalism. This is where archival research becomes crucial, filling in the informational gaps left by the half-truths of the fan magazines. In the archival documents, we find women behaving in ways that challenged traditional ideologies (whether intentionally or unintentionally), while we see that fan magazines most often downplayed those efforts, especially as the decades wore on. At the Hollywood Studio Club, Sun Valley, and the Hollywood Canteen, celebrity women, constantly blurred the lines between the public and private, acting in ways that pushed the boundaries of accepted gender roles while fan culture worked to reinforce those same gendered expectations, especially after 1920.

The motion pictures and the stories of the personal lives of their performers proved particularly efficient vehicles through which certain ideologies about the nation and its citizens were disseminated, not just domestically but internationally as well. As film historian Lary May writes, “Nothing is more American than Hollywood. All agree on that.” May argues that beginning in the 1930s, the film industry was an important force in “reshaping nationalism and public life,” as filmmakers began drawing on their immigrant and working-class pasts to create characters and plotlines that pushed back against “mainstream values of success and home.” The 1950s, however, “represented a return to a more intolerant and monolithic national culture” as World War II redefined the meaning of democracy. Many 1930s films featured folk heroes and antiheroes like gangsters and flappers who rebelled against the moneyed elites, which promoted the power that the lower classes had in resolving wealth inequality exacerbated by the Great Depression. Movies in the 1940s, by contrast, began to portray the United States as vulnerable to external threats, labeling class conflict as unpatriotic and reflecting a citizenship based in private consumerism and a return to a more rigid separation between the public and private spaces. In other words, May demonstrates, films shifted from promoting a bottom-up, democratic approach to cultural authority – where the masses had greater influence in creating and transforming traditional American symbols and myths than the elites – to a top-down approach, where the few leaders at the top of the social ladder once again had more power to define culture than the masses.³⁹ Similarly, Elaine Tyler May demonstrates that portrayals of gender in movies and fan culture mirrored the same political and nationalist trajectory laid out by Lary May; women, fictional and real, who had been celebrated for their independent careers in the 1930s, were

³⁹ Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 1-2, 60-62, 140-148.

predominantly featured as wives and mothers less than ten years later.⁴⁰ The work of both Lary May and Elaine Tyler May are foundational to this project, as these historians sketch out the very trajectory I argue that fan magazines followed, even as they reported on how celebrity women diverged from it. The Mays' work also very clearly lays out the central role that the film industry played in transforming American nationalism during the first half of the twentieth century.

Films were also particularly important in spreading ideas about the nation and American nationalism, which is central to this work. This project's definition of nationalism – the creation and maintenance of an American national identity through the promotion of common values, and a shared, often mythic, past – is dependent on Benedict Anderson's conception of "imagined community." Anderson argues that nationalism started in the Americas with the advent of print capitalism which "made it possible for people to think about themselves and others in profound new ways."⁴¹ Through print culture, the same information about a shared past and common values circulates among all members of the nation, swaths of citizens who are otherwise entirely unconnected. In film scholar Richard Abel's estimation, in a modern world where print culture began to slowly be subsumed by a culture of images, films in many ways took the place of print culture as the vehicle through which ideas about the nation reached the masses. Equally important, Abel contends that certain genres of films and those films' stars together "represented

⁴⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*.

For scholarship about film's depictions of women, see: Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); M. Joyce Baker, *Images of Women in Film: The War Years, 1941-1945* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980); Elizabeth Kendall, *The Runaway Bride: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1930s* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993); Jackie Stacey, *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994); McHugh, *American Domesticity*; Jeanine Basinger, *I Do and I Don't: A History of Marriage in the Movies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Alison L. McKee, *The Woman's Film of the 1940s: Gender, Narrative, and History* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁴¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016 [1983]): 36.

an imagined community of nationality,” in that motion pictures were central vehicles through which Americanization – the process of assimilating the diverse groups of immigrants to American national identity – took place.⁴² This project builds off both of these seminal arguments, asserting that print capitalism, in the form of fan magazines, created an imagined community of women who identified as American through mirroring the actions of American female film stars. Fan magazines stand on a kind of middle-ground between Anderson and Abel, providing rich sources that reveal how closely the American nation-building project was tied to Hollywood between 1920 and 1950.

At the heart of nation-building in the twentieth-century United States was the concept of democracy – more specifically the idea that anyone, if they worked hard enough, could achieve financial security, climb the social ladder, and become part of the nation’s social, cultural, and political leadership. If “nothing is more American than Hollywood,” as Lary May asserts, then it would reasonably follow that many mainstream Hollywood films during this “Golden Age” portrayed positive images of Americanness and democracy, which created an overly optimistic view of how democracy worked in the United States. Fan magazines passed on those same American ideals, as defined by Hollywood, onto the public. They also worked in tandem with the motion pictures to underscore the democracy of Hollywood – that any young performer who made it to Hollywood could, with enough hard work and sheer good luck, become just like the people they read saw onscreen or read about in the pages of magazines. This promise of upward mobility in Hollywood was only possible because of the democracy allegedly inherent in the United States.

⁴² Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences*.

One of the ways in which the promises of American democracy remained incomplete, especially within Hollywood publicity, was for Black Americans and other citizens of color. Though Hollywood provided more opportunities for performers of color than the average American industry in the 1930s and 1940s, the limited participation of celebrities of color at the Studio Club, Sun Valley, and the Hollywood Canteen – and an almost complete lack of coverage of Black performers within fan magazine pages – shows that fan culture promoted an image of American democracy that was ultimately restricted by race. Though archival evidence shows a growing participation of Black Hollywood women in the same public spaces as their white counterparts in the 1940s, fan magazines and feature films continued to exclude Black performers from their pages and production sets. This shows that leaders of the film industry had a vested interest in maintaining the existing racial hierarchy between 1920 and 1950, one based in white supremacy.⁴³ Though Black citizens had participated in film culture since its inception, any depiction of racial equality – or even any depiction of a non-stereotyped Black character – was absent in mainstream Hollywood films, especially after D.W. Griffith's *Birth of Nation* in 1915.⁴⁴ There began to be increasing participation by Black performers in mainstream feature

⁴³ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); 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); Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Tyler Stovall, *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

⁴⁴ Cara Cadoo argues that during the era of itinerant movie exhibitors prior to 1910, African Americans understood their participation in motion pictures as a tool to claim a modern American identity, raise money for churches, fraternal orders, and schools that promoted ideas of racial uplift. Importantly, Cadoo shows, “practices of black film exhibition were not simply borrowed from a world of white producers and showmen.” Rather, African Americans embraced motion pictures – in many cases sooner than some of their white counterparts – because it “was suited to the needs and public spaces of modern black life.” Cara Cadoo, *Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014): 16. See also: Allyson Nadia Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Miriam J. Petty, *Stealing the Show: African American Performers and Audiences in 1930s Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

films during the early 1930s, but into the 1940s, most of their roles continued to portray African Americans almost exclusively as enslaved peoples, domestic workers, or manual laborers. As we will see, because Hollywood publicity did little to dispel or push back against onscreen racist depictions, audiences received messages that actively promoted whiteness as a central characteristic for the ideal American citizen.

This project also draws on theories and scholarship that explain the close connection between gender and nationalism. Sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis argues that women are central to nations and nationalism, even as other theorists have tended to ignore gender as an important nationalistic category. Yuval-Davis contends that women are biological, cultural, *and* symbolic reproducers of the nation. Not only are they the nation's literal mothers, but so too are they the citizens who pass on myths, symbols, and ideologies that help concretize quintessential nationalist characteristics for future generations.⁴⁵ Anne McClintock similarly argues that "all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender." Defining nations as "contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize peoples' access to the resources of the nation state," McClintock shows that the authority of the nation is dependent on gender difference, where nations' leaders limited women's access to national power to solidify a social hierarchy that makes women and children inferior to men.⁴⁶ This dissertation examines how, as social and cultural leaders consistently worked to convince women that their limited roles as wives and mothers in the domestic sphere were central to the nation's survival, celebrity women challenged those assertions by living, working, playing, and volunteering in public. Over the course of thirty

⁴⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London; SAGE Publications, Ltd, 1997).

⁴⁶ Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," *Feminist Review*, no. 44, Nationalisms and National Identities (Summer, 1993): 61-62.

years, the push and pull of influence over American audiences between film industry leaders and celebrity women demonstrates the centrality of Hollywood in reshaping of American public womanhood in the early twentieth century.⁴⁷

Chapter one begins in Hollywood in 1916, with the opening of a boarding house meant specifically for women trying to find work in the film industry called the Hollywood Studio Club. By this point, the film industry had firmly established itself in California after moving from New York City around 1910, and the new cultural category of the movie star was on the rise. Founded after a librarian of the Los Angeles Public Library noticed a small group of female movie extras regularly meeting in the basement to practice acting, the Hollywood Studio Club began as a social club, eventually becoming a residential house owned by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Supported by some of the biggest female stars of the 1920s, including Mary Pickford herself, the Studio Club housed many future stars, including silent performer ZaSu Pitts and actresses Donna Reed, Marilyn Monroe, and Rita Moreno. Previous scholarship on the Hollywood Studio Club focuses almost exclusively on the role the Club played in labor issues, especially for female extras in the film industry, and to this point, no other scholarly work has studied how the Club operated on a daily basis.⁴⁸ This chapter focuses on how female leaders of the Studio Club created a safe space in which young women trying to succeed in an industry could pursue a public career without being accused of breaking down the existing social hierarchy. As a place run by women for women, one of the Club's defining characteristics was its supportive atmosphere in which the residents all understood the unique

⁴⁷ See also: George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2020 [1985]).

⁴⁸ Heidi Kenaga, "Making the 'Studio Girl': The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labor," *Film History* 18 no. 2 (2006): 129-139; Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*.

situation in which they all found themselves. William H. Hays, chief of Hollywood's censorship efforts, hoped the Hollywood Studio Club would be a temporary home for young women who had failed in Hollywood; in his estimation, women would live at the club for only as long as it took to make enough money to return home. However, under the leadership of Marjorie Williams, the Club's director for nearly twenty-five years, the Studio Club supported women who were serious about making a career in Hollywood rather than sending them home. Central to Williams' tenure were the intertwined concepts of respectability and autonomy; residents at the Studio Club had to maintain a standard of propriety, which was distinctly middle-class, in order to justify the high degree of autonomy that living at the Studio Club afforded. Fan magazines reported on the Studio Club regularly, emphasizing its well-known reputation by pointing to the white, middle-class, beautiful, ambitious young woman as the ideal resident – and the ideal (female) American citizen. Still, much of the fan magazines coverage portrayed the Club as a safe space for young women hoping to break free of previous cultural restraints that denied them public careers, which likely appealed to many American women hoping to do the same thing in their own lives.

Following the examination of the Hollywood Studio Club in chapter one comes the first of three “intermissions,” readings of films that correspond to each site. The first intermission features *Stage Door*, the 1937 RKO Pictures film directed by Gregory LaCava and starring Katharine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers. Based on a 1936 play of the same name, the film version of *Stage Door* was both heavily influenced by and disseminated many of the same messages as those that shaped the real Hollywood Studio Club and its reputation in fan magazines. Because LaCava regularly visited the Studio Club to find inspiration for the fictional club's atmosphere, the Footlights Club of *Stage Door* emphasizes many of the same characteristics as the Studio

Club, including the same intertwined concepts of respectability, class status, and autonomy. Importantly, *Stage Door* offers viewers the same liberatory possibilities as the Studio Club, especially because the challenges the characters level at traditional gender norms are not denounced in the end; more pointedly, the characters played by Hepburn (Terry) and Rogers (Jean) are not chastised for pursuing careers instead of marriages, something quite unusual for films in the 1930s. *Stage Door* disseminated the same message about working women as did the Hollywood Studio Club: they were not a threat to the social hierarchy, perhaps encouraging millions of American women to enter the economic workforce themselves.

Chapter two will take us out of California entirely, dropping us 850 miles northeast of Hollywood in the Sawtooth Mountains of central Idaho. Beginning in the winter of 1936, Hollywood stars flocked to a tiny Western mining town to take advantage of a world-class ski resort that had just opened there, the first of its kind in the American West. Sun Valley, as the resort was named, had a contingent of celebrity visitors on its opening night and has rarely been without them since. The height of its connection with Hollywood, however, was in the first two decades after its opening, when some of the film industry's biggest names visited regularly. Celebrity women's behavior at the resort garnered a lot of attention in national fan magazines. In a historical moment where women's physical exercise was limited to non-strenuous activities, celebrity women participated in a sport that, until only a few decades prior, had been dominated almost exclusively by men. Fan magazines seized on the new images of celebrity women donning the latest skiing fashions, which legitimated women's engaging in what had previously been considered a masculine activity. When they schussed down mountainsides, celebrities sold not just clothing, but specific ideals about physical health, beauty, race, and even heterosexual romance. Yet while these magazines linked Sun Valley to consumerism and normative standards

of femininity, they also linked Sun Valley to another important, but more subtle, message – that women might use their bodies in public for their own enjoyment. Even as celebrity women challenged traditional gender roles by pursuing leisure for their own pleasure outside of the private home, magazine narratives tended to emphasize the private sphere as women’s proper domain. The story of Gretchen Fraser, the Sun Valley trainee who went on to win gold in the 1948 Winter Olympics, underscores this final point, as Fraser frequently crossed the boundary between the public and private spheres, even as she claimed to subscribe to the traditional norms that dictated her primary position was in the home. Though the history of Sun Valley has been well documented by other authors, few have examined how the resort might have had a larger impact on American culture outside of the state of Idaho. This chapter demonstrates that Sun Valley was well-known across the country and played a role in the shifting attitudes about women’s public behavior.⁴⁹

Intermission two examines two films of the Golden Age that are predominantly set in Sun Valley: *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941) and *Duchess of Idaho* (1950). Mythologizing the elite playground in the public moviegoing imagination, these films depicted the resort as an appropriate public space for women to use their bodies in physical exercise, which would enable them to cultivate the health and strength they needed to fulfill their traditional gender roles of wife and mother. Here, again, we can clearly see the difference between women’s real behavior and the portrayal of that behavior in popular culture. Whereas the real women skiing and playing at Sun Valley were pushing the boundaries of acceptable public activities, the fictional women always find romance at the resort, which, the audience is led to assume, eventually results in

⁴⁹ Doug Oppenheimer and Jim Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography* (Boise: Beatty Books, 1976); Dorice Taylor, *Sun Valley*: (New Haven: Eastern Press, 1980); Van Gordon Sauter, *The Sun Valley Story* (Hailey: Mandala Media, LLC, 2011); John W. Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley: A History from Union Pacific to the Holdings* (Charleston: The History Press, 2020).

marriage and a return to the home. These films also emphasize whiteness as a prerequisite characteristic to visiting the resort, as the only roles for Black performers in the movies are as railroad laborers, showing how Sun Valley's claim to democracy was, in fact, limited, especially by race. This intermission also briefly examines another film, *That Wonderful Urge* (1948), which is only partially set in Sun Valley but nevertheless underscores the connection between romance and the resort.

After our snowy vacation to Idaho, we return again to Los Angeles just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. As the film industry integrated itself into the war effort, aligning closely with the American government, individual members felt that the industry could do even more. Led by actors Bette Davis and John Garfield, Hollywood guilds, studios, and performers designed and built the Hollywood Canteen, a place where off-duty servicemen could come face-to-face with some of the most famous people in the country. The Canteen was staffed on a strictly volunteer basis from the stable of studios' and guilds' personnel, from the biggest stars to the most ordinary extra guild member. However, it was the famous female volunteers who arguably had the biggest role to play at the Hollywood Canteen, for celebrity women's volunteer efforts challenged the gendered status quo of American society by demonstrating that women's public bodies in wartime service were not social threats. The main scholarly work on the Hollywood Canteen, *Dance Floor Democracy* by Sherrie Tucker, examines how mainstream depictions of the Hollywood Canteen as a microcosm of democracy are dependent on nostalgic memories that make the Canteen dance floor a highly contested democratic space.⁵⁰ This chapter shows how gender and race operated in this contested space,

⁵⁰ Sherrie Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy: The Social Geography of Memory at the Hollywood Canteen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). For another history of the Hollywood Canteen see: Lisa Mitchell and Bruce Torrence, *The Hollywood Canteen: Where the Greatest Generation Danced With the Most Beautiful Girls in the World* (Duncan: BearManor Media, 2012).

pointing to the centrality of white celebrity women's bodies in making the Canteen an ultimate symbol of patriotism, democracy, and women's volunteerism – though the lived experience for people of color at the Canteen may have proved otherwise. Because white celebrity women's efforts were constantly described in fan magazines, Hollywood publicity actively erased Black women's actions at the Canteen, emphasizing whiteness as a prerequisite to patriotic American citizenship. Within these same articles, movie culture, more strongly than ever, pushed a narrative that emphasized white celebrity women's devotion to their marriages, families, and homes to encourage (white) American women to willingly return to the home when the war was over. Using depictions of women's physical sacrifice and volunteerism at the Hollywood Canteen through fan magazines and other propaganda, Hollywood publicity primed women for the sacrifice the government expected them to make after the war was over: return to the home.

The last intermission examines the fictional depiction of the Hollywood Canteen released by Warner Bros. in 1944, also called *Hollywood Canteen*. A particular genre of war musical, *Hollywood Canteen* is a kind of propagandistic picture designed to disseminate important messages about the war while attempting to dazzle audiences with sheer star power. With less than an hour of plot in a two-hour movie, *Hollywood Canteen* was made-up of a series of vaudeville-style acts where celebrities sang, danced, and/or acted in a comedy sketch. These numbers do nothing to move the plot along, but exist exclusively for spectacle and propaganda. *Hollywood Canteen* and two similar pictures – *Stage Door Canteen* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars* – convey many of the same messages about gender, race, and democracy in the United States during wartime as the real Canteen. While fictional *Hollywood Canteen* painted the real one as a fully democratic space, it simultaneously exposed the limits of American citizenship, presaging

the entrenchment of white men at the top of the social hierarchy and the cultural turn back to the private sphere for women in postwar society.

Lastly, the conclusion returns to the Ingrid Bergman scandal in order to offer an answer to Ernest Hemingway's question, "What is all this nonsense?". Having examined nearly three decades of Hollywood fan culture and archival research, the raw footage of the public outrage over Bergman's private life gets edited into a final product that explains why Senator Johnson believed he had a public duty to denounce a Hollywood actress on the Senate floor. Throughout all three sections run themes of democracy, race, gender, and culture that help us trace just how the film industry participated in the maintenance of the gendered social order in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. This project also allows us to see how celebrity women's real behavior may have deviated from that expected order, which may have encouraged female fans to challenge traditional gender roles in their own lives. We can see how expectations for American womanhood changed during the middle decades of the century – and how they did not.

Over a hundred years after the founding of the Hollywood Studio Club in 1916, the term "influencer" is ubiquitous, referring to internet celebrities who have so much pull and influence on their fans – now called "followers" – that an endorsement from just one influencer can boost a product's sales for months. But influencers are not a new phenomenon. The women studied in these pages were arguably among the first mass influencers, using their behavior to push back against social expectations that demanded a rigid divide between women's public and private roles. However, because almost everything that came out of Hollywood was modified by journalists, publicists, or sometimes even the stars themselves, any overtly subversive messages were downplayed or erased, creating a confusing public rhetoric that allowed for a certain

amount of transgressive behavior as long as it was ultimately contained within marriage and women's return to the private domain. Though today's influencers have much more control over the messages that they convey to their fans, and modern technology has made it possible for influencers to reach more people than ever before, they continue to be involved in highly contested debates about American national identity, trying to create public consensus about who belongs to the nation, what values Americans find most important, and the limits of American democracy. Many of the questions that influencers continue to wrestle with is the role that gender plays in the nation. While many modern celebrities challenge not just traditional gender roles but also the typical gender binary, there remain mainstream conservative groups that call for a strict gender divide between the public and private spheres. Within these chapters, we will see how current arguments about gender and race in the United States are not new but, in fact, have been around for over a century.

CHAPTER 1

“More Loveliness Per Square Foot”: Celebrity and Future Celebrity Women at the Hollywood Studio Club, 1916-1946

On a brisk spring evening in 1923, you (yes, you, reader!) take your seat in a row of chairs set up on the back deck of a refurbished Colonial-style mansion in the heart of Hollywood, California. This event, you've been told, is a play put on by a small acting group in the area and, though you have picked up a copy of this evening's program, you have not read it yet. After you greet a few other attendees you recognize, you sit down and make small talk with the person next to you. Soon, the lights dim, and the curtain opens on a large wooden stage. There stands Anygirl – the protagonist of the play – having just arrived in Hollywood, clearly eager to make a career in the motion pictures. Having heard of the Hollywood Studio Club as a suitable residence for aspiring actresses, Anygirl visits and meets with Marjorie Williams, the director. Unfortunately, Marjorie tells Anygirl, the Hollywood Studio Club currently has no vacancies. She recommends a nice house down the street where Anygirl can stay and tells Anygirl that she is welcome to use the Club rooms whenever she likes. The next day, Anygirl sets out to get a job. She visits every studio in town but is turned down at every set of gates. Returning to her rented room exhausted and frustrated, Anygirl contends with an attack of homesickness as she wonders if she made the right decision to leave home. The next day, she goes again to the Studio Club, where Marjorie introduces her to some of its residents. Hearing the young women's stories of hard work and tough breaks raises Anygirl's spirits, as she realizes her experience was not so different from

theirs. One resident even offers to let Anygirl accompany her to the studios the next day, where she would introduce Anygirl to her director.⁵¹

The second act opens on Anygirl receiving a part as an extra after her meeting with the director. You watch as she works all night in a large mob scene, able to get only a few hours' sleep before she must return to the studio, working through the day and night again. Two weeks later, her work as an extra ends. As she looks for another job, she hears that there is a vacancy at the Hollywood Studio Club, which she fills. Though she shares a room with two other women, she finds great comfort in associating with other aspiring actresses who are facing many of the same challenges that she is. Nevertheless, her job search proves fruitless, and Anygirl soon must face the fact, as Marjorie tells her, that she might need to consider employment in another industry. Utterly heartbroken, Anygirl recognizes the practicality in this suggestion and, with Marjorie's promise that she will extend Anygirl's credit on room and board, she takes a small business course. A week after beginning her course, Anygirl attends a dance where she meets a Man of Importance from the studios. He hears her story, appraises her ability, and decides to take a chance on her. After auditioning for the Man of Importance, Anygirl gets a leading role in his upcoming picture as the curtain closes on the second act. Finally, with one last raise of the curtain, you find out what happens to Anygirl: a big success, she lives in a home of her own and serves on the Hollywood Studio Club directorial committee.

As the play ends and the lights come up, you finally take a moment to read the program you had picked up at the beginning. Where page one lists the cast and summary of each scene, you notice something unusual at the bottom of page two:

⁵¹ Publicity Pamphlet, "Presenting the Studio Girl of Hollywood," 1923, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-08, Urban Archives Center (UAC), California State University-Northridge (CSU-N).

Scene 2

YOU are the principal in this scene. You have the chance to make or mar the picture. You have the choice of making a happy or an unhappy ending. You will be asked by Anygirl or Anygirl's representative to take a generous part in the campaign for a new and adequate building for the Hollywood Studio Club Girls. Will You take the part with feeling and make it a ringing success? Of course you will.

YOU WILL BRING DOWN THE CURTAIN AMID APPLAUSE FROM ALL THE STUDIO GIRLS.⁵²

You have just been advertised to, you realize as you shake your head, chuckling to yourself.

Maybe you are a Man of Importance from the studios. Perhaps you own a local business or you came because your friend is performing in the play. Regardless of who you are, the Hollywood Studio Club needs your help to build a larger residence. The plea is simple: make it possible for the fate of any girl who comes to the Club to follow that of Anygirl.

This brief foray into our imaginations to see the performance of "Presenting the Studio Girl of Hollywood" in 1923's Hollywood was not a total fiction. The Hollywood Studio Club was a real place, Marjorie Williams its actual director, and its plea for donations as earnest in real life as it was in the play. You, of course, were not there, nor does it appear that the play was ever actually performed. However, the publicity pamphlet in which this plot was laid out is quite extant, sincerely appealing for donations to help build a new dormitory and residence. The pamphlet provides a small glimpse into the function and purpose of the Hollywood Studio Club, the people connected with it, and the challenges that the motion picture industry posed to its aspirants, especially young women. In conjunction with national publications, fan magazine articles, and official records, this pamphlet reveals the importance of the Club in larger national debates about gender, respectability, and the film industry that scholars have not yet examined.

⁵² "Presenting the Studio Girl of Hollywood," Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-08, UAC, CSU-N.

Between 1916 and 1976, the Hollywood Studio Club was home to thousands of women, all of whom hoped to succeed in the film industry in some capacity. While most residents hoped for front-of-camera work as actresses, dancers, or musicians, many women found technical work as editors and other important behind-the-camera work during and after their time there. Only a handful of residents ever became well-known to movie audiences: ZaSu Pitts, Donna Reed, Marilyn Monroe, and Rita Moreno, to name a few.⁵³ Though owned and operated by the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), there was no religious affiliation or participation required for residence, and very few rules governed women's behavior there. Nevertheless, partly because of its association with the YWCA, the Club gained a reputation of respectability, becoming a physically and morally safe place for young women trying to navigate a difficult business. Even the house itself was famous, supported by scores of the biggest names in the industry, including Mary Pickford, one of the first major movie stars, Constance DeMille, wife of Cecil B. DeMille, a prolific director, and famous stage and screen actress Alla Nazimova.⁵⁴ Written about in national and international publications in nearly every decade between the 1910s and the 1970s, the Hollywood Studio Club was widely recognized as a shining star of safety and morality in an otherwise grimy industry and town.⁵⁵

⁵³ Scrapbook, Young Women's Christian Association 1894-1982 Collection, Box YWCA 101, Folder 1, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

⁵⁴ Scrapbook, Box YWCA 101, Folder 1, UAC, CSU-N; Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Gaffey, "The Studio Club," *Photoplay*, September 1917, 83-87, <http://mediahistoryproject.org>; Carol Warren, Manuscript of "Hollywood's Big Family of Girls," 1931, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-13, UAC, CSU-N; Harry Crocker, "Assignment in Hollywood," *Good Housekeeping*, September 1946, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-18, UAC, CSU-N; Betty Whitney, "Studio Club House Mother Remembers Marilyn, Kim," *Hollywood Independent*, December 21, 1972, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 82, Folder 03-18, UAC, CSU-N. For information about the YWCA, see: *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, eds. Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

During a time when women's public bodies often raised concerns about the threat of their unconstrained sexuality, a boarding house supported by the YWCA full of hard-working, ambitious (and white) young women directed by a middle-class white woman must have seemed to local reformers like an oasis of respectability in a film-centered desert of crime, sin, and vice. Since the nineteenth century, with the rise of the middle class in American society, entertainment producers and promoters viewed middle-class women as arbiters of culture and high morals. After the movies had proved a popular pastime among the working and immigrant classes, movie theater owners began courting more women, especially middle-class women, into the exhibition space, hoping that their presence would lend an air of refinement and distinction to the moviegoing experience. It worked. Going to the movies, thanks in large part to women, became an appropriate pastime for every American no matter their class, gender, age, or race. The Hollywood Studio Club did something similar for Hollywood, both as a town and as an industry. As the young women who resided at the Hollywood Studio Club succeeded in public careers, they brought middle-class morality to the place where they lived and the industry in which they worked.⁵⁶

Managing an organization by and for women, the leaders of the Hollywood Studio Club took women's growing political, economic, and social participation seriously, treating women's public contributions as legitimate and valuable. This mission, adopted especially by Marjorie Williams when she became director in 1923, flew in the face of what other social and cultural

⁵⁶ For analysis of women's role in transforming cultural spaces, see: Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement For All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2006); Emily Remus, *A Shopper's Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in New Downtown* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019). For a specific discussion of women and movies, see Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

leaders hoped it would be. Whereas leaders like “Cinema Dictator” Will H. Hays hoped that the Club would underscore traditional marriage as young women’s best option to steer them away from a public career, the Club instead undermined the typical gender expectations.⁵⁷ A career, not marriage, was the ultimate goal at the Hollywood Studio Club, though, as we will see, either outcome for a current or former resident was accepted and celebrated. Despite many reformers’ concerns that young women’s morality was at stake if young women worked in a large, urban environment like the film industry in Los Angeles, the women of the Studio Club brought a white, middle-class morality to the film industry, simultaneously defining middle-class respectability for millions of American women. The Hollywood Studio Club became an example of a liberating space for women, where success in both the economic workforce and in their private lives came as a result of women’s autonomy.⁵⁸ Curiously, Hollywood publicity did not undermine the Club project. Rather, industry leaders were willing to admit that women, if they displayed the correct middle-class attributes, including whiteness, could have a successful public career without threatening the social order. The women of the Hollywood Studio Club capitalized on the growing presence of American women in political, social, and cultural spaces

⁵⁷ Will H. Hays was the President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). Believing his true responsibility as President was to clean up the immoral film industry, Hays sought to oversee and regulate the film industry at nearly every level. Under his presidency, the MPPDA released the Motion Picture Production Code, colloquially called the Hays Code, in 1930 and began strictly enforcing it in 1934. One brave journalist in 1922 humorously referred to Hays as “Cinema Dictator,” a moniker that does not seem too far removed from Hays’ reputation. “Cinema Dictator Kept Busy Today,” Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

⁵⁸ For women’s roles in the 1920s and 1930s see: Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980); Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982); Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008 [1988]): especially chapters one and two; Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women’s Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: An American History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014). Despite overwhelming scholarly evidence that points toward the fact that millions of American women left the private sphere during the 1920s and 1930s for various reasons, conservative social expectations which demanded that women remain in the home dominated the public discourse for most of these years.

in the late 1910s and early 1920s, creating a house that appealed to young women seeking to break free of cultural restraints, but that also satisfied the concerns reformers had over young women's unrestrained physical bodies in public spaces.

I must include one important note before continuing. Much of the publicity around the Hollywood Studio Club described the Club as “unique,” an adjective which characterizes the Club within the scope of this project as well. While the other two sites examined in subsequent chapters focus mainly on the already-famous women of Hollywood, the Studio Club allows for a study of another group of women: potentially soon-to-be-famous women. While only a handful of former residents ever fell into the category of “movie star,” the promise of fame and fortune lay at the heart of the club, motivating many who lived there. Their behavior both in and out of the Club was often shaped by the potential to become a celebrity, which was often learned from the real celebrity women who visited the Club on a regular basis. I argue that a full understanding of the Hollywood Studio Club cannot be gained without acknowledging the way that the potential for celebrityhood influenced the women who resided there. For this reason, then, this chapter, like the Hollywood Studio Club itself, is unique in that it will focus on both the already-famous and the not-yet (and in many cases, never-would-be) famous women, showing how even potentially famous women connected to Hollywood might have played an important part in larger discussions about women's public activities and bodies.

Hollywood is a Trick Town: The History of Hollywood and Women

The film industry first came to California from New York City between 1908 and 1910 and spent much of the decade establishing itself in the city of Los Angeles. The reasons for this

move are manifold and well-studied by scholars: the diverse nearby geography could represent multiple locales on film; the temperate climate meant that the weather would rarely delay outdoor shoots; and Los Angeles had plenty of cheap land on which studios could be built, among many others.⁵⁹ In less than fifteen years, Los Angeles would go from a city with no connection to the movies whatsoever to producing an estimated 84 percent of the world's moving pictures.⁶⁰ Soon, "Hollywood" referred not just to the neighborhood of Los Angeles where most of the movie studios were located, but also to the industry itself – the collective of actors, directors, producers, and technical workers making this new form of mass amusement that would become one of the most profitable businesses of the twentieth century and beyond.

Hollywood and the movies would never have been what they became were it not for the influence of women of every class, from the elite-movie star to the working-class audience member. The relationship between the working-class and movies cannot be ignored, as scholars have thoroughly covered the history of the connection between motion pictures and its working-class audience. Projections of motion pictures, from traveling exhibitions in rural America to nickelodeons to storefront theaters in neighborhoods around the country, drew audiences from the working-class in droves. Cheap, quick, and easy to attend, the movies quickly became one of the country's favorite pastimes. Richard Abel argues that moving picture shows Americanized not only immigrant workers, but also native-born citizens as genres like Westerns and Civil War pictures provided a "usable past" upon which an imagined homogenous American identity could

⁵⁹ Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013): 77.

⁶⁰ Other factors for Hilary Hallett, *Go West Young Women! The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013): 7.

be built.⁶¹ In urban areas with large immigrant populations, movies were particularly important for community building both within their old ethnic communities and within their new American ones. Motion pictures did not require knowledge of the English language to participate, thus making movie theaters a place that immigrant communities could meet together and cultivate their shared ethnic identities. Simultaneously, however, movies and moviegoing in the United States was a distinct experience, providing immigrant audiences with glimpses into American culture on the screen and at the theater. According to historian Elizabeth Ewen, immigrant audiences saw the movies as “ironic and fantastic expressions of their own experiences in the New World,” making the movies a way in which immigrants understood and adapted to their experiences in this new, modern, urban, environment.⁶² With a “movie-mad” population who went to the movies in the tens of millions *every week*, the movie theater was an Americanizing space for all.⁶³

Arguably, the relationship between working-class women and the motion picture industry was the true driver behind the immense popularity of films. Kathy Peiss argues that the movies were particularly important for working-class women as they “constructed a notion of modern

⁶¹ Creating a shared usable past and identity rooted in memory is an important part of nation building, according to John R. Gillis, for it allows diverse groups of people to believe that they have a common history that binds them together as national citizens when, in reality, they have very little in common. Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 62; John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): Introduction.

⁶² Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985): 219.

⁶³ For information about the early film industry: Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990). For traveling exhibitions and rural audiences: Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibitions, 1880-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show*. For immigrants and the motion pictures: For discussions of the relationship between the working class and motion pictures: Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight hours for what we will: Workers and leisure in an industrial city, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

American womanhood that reaffirmed the flamboyant cultural style popular among many young women” by depicting women characters who “freely smoked and drank, wore lavish clothing, and lived in opulent surroundings.”⁶⁴ Movies offered more than just escapism and fantasy, however. Nan Enstad demonstrates that working-class women “built particular and distinctive social practices around motion picture consumption and incorporated the movies into their established consumer practices.” Along with fashion and dime novels, the movies were part of working-class women’s foundation upon which they claimed identities as respectable ladies, even as they modified higher-class ideals of American femininity and womanhood for themselves. The movies also allowed women to claim access to public space through consumption, another way in which working women declared their ladyhood.⁶⁵ When working-class women attended movie theaters with male or female companions or even by themselves, they began to reform the space into a “heterosocial and expressive commercial culture” where they had the freedom to experiment with their sexuality, social independence, and fun.⁶⁶

Women flocked to the movies and their constant presence in theaters proved the catalyst for two major changes in the film industry. First, they made the movie theater, and thus, the movies, a more respectable cultural space. Because of the close relationship between working-class and immigrant audiences and the film industry in the earliest years, movies and nickelodeons had taken on a patina of low-class amusement. Hoping to draw the middle classes to the theaters, the film industry, especially film distributors and exhibitors, embarked on a crusade to first improve the movie theaters themselves and then to create longer, more lavish

⁶⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986): 157-158.

⁶⁵ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 162.

⁶⁶ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 164.

“feature” films that would match the aesthetic of the opulent theaters.⁶⁷ These changes, film industry leaders believed, would elevate film from cheap amusement for the masses to artful, respectable entertainment for the classes.⁶⁸ Women, says Shelley Stamp, were central to the film industry’s attempt to make moviegoing an appropriate activity for those of all social groups. In the 1910s, middle- and upper-class women, with their refined Victorian morality, were presumed to be arbiters of culture and taste and, in the eyes of the film industry, they “could exercise considerable influence over the entertainment choices of others in their families and communities.” Seen by many social and cultural leaders as moral guardians of the family, women’s patronage would bring a sense of respectability to the movies and the movie theater as a family-friendly pastime for all. Stamp also shows that a complete change of ambiance was necessary to retain female audiences. This included everything from plush cushioned chairs to even daycares in some neighborhood movie theaters that mirrored the atmosphere of department stores, experiences which tied together women’s consumerism with their private familial sphere.⁶⁹ Indeed, as women attended the movies, courted by filmmakers and exhibitors, bringing with them the reputation of “ladies” that working-class women had worked so hard to cultivate, movies became a safe and appropriate pastime for all, no matter the class or gender.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ashby, *With Amusement For All*, 189-190.

⁶⁸ Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 30.

⁶⁹ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 17.

⁷⁰ The idea that women’s presence in a public space consuming and participating in culture altered the structure and practices of that culture was certainly not unique to the movies. Robert C. Allen describes how the much more liberatory nature of early burlesque stemmed from the fact that women themselves were in charge of the contents of performers’ acts, which changed once men became the producers of burlesque shows. Emily Remus points to leisure spaces in downtown Chicago, such as the 1893 Columbian Exposition, retail shops, and theaters, where women’s presence and behavior transformed “the material and moral landscape of the central business district.” Department stores were a particularly important space for American women gaining independence, as they were spaces that tied together women’s familial duties, consumerism, and respectability. Bringing their morality into the public commercial space, middle-class women shopping in department stores brought a sense of propriety to spending

The second change that women wrought upon the film industry as they consumed movies was their feminization of movie fan culture. Several scholars have examined how early industry leaders were well aware of the enormous female movie audiences, which Stamp, for one example, points to as evidence for the popularity of serials and other genres that featured adventurous heroines and independent women. In 1911, capitalizing on the immense popularity of movies among women audiences, the first fan magazine, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, was published. According to Anthony Slide, the creators of fan culture and fan magazines made women their target demographic, not necessarily because they believed moviegoing or magazine reading were inherently feminine activities, but because the editors and publishers themselves determined that movie audiences were more likely to be female than male. Though in the first few years, most movie fan magazines were mostly fictional adaptations of movie plots that readers could go see in theaters, Slide asserts that editor James R. Quirk and his publication of *Photoplay* changed fan culture forever. *Photoplay* and its competitors began publishing stories not just about onscreen fictional characters, but also about the personal lives of the onscreen players.⁷¹ Because of this presumed female-dominant readership, movie fan culture was an industry in which many women made successful careers as writers and journalists. When women writers created fan culture that featured women movie personalities, these burgeoning movie

money on products that promised improve their own and their families' lives. Women's misbehavior at the department stores, however, threw a wrench into the idea of women as society's moral guardians. Elaine S. Abelson thoroughly examines how, as middle-class women shoplifted at alarming rates, department stores modified their physical spaces, such as adding mirrors to store walls to prevent theft while clerks' backs were turned and making glass display cases to protect the merchandise. Even more than this, says Abelson, this phenomenon of middle-class women shoplifting transformed ideas about women's physical and mental health, which created "a new, representative female figure – the middle class shoplifter – and her inclusion in the prevailing cultural definition of women." Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, xi-xii; Remus, *A Shopper's Paradise*, 2; Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 7.

⁷¹ Anthony Slide, *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine: A History of Star Makers, Fabricators, and Gossip Mongers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010): 17-19, chapter 3.

stars became “women-made women,” according to Hilary Hallett, who then made American women through their fan magazine profiles: “as women experts explained to women readers how ordinary women became extraordinary women, they created a female-centered leisure space that reinforced two impressions: the movies aimed to help women satisfy their new desires, and fans’ support of the industry furthered their ambitions as a sex.”⁷² In other words, as female fan magazine writers promoted stories of how movie stars had started out as ordinary women, they inspired ordinary American women readers to aspire for success outside of the home, whether in Hollywood or elsewhere.

The rise of the movie star was perhaps one of the most important developments for the American film industry and the opportunities it provided for women. Mary Pickford, generally regarded as the first movie star, was an important figure in the transformation of women’s roles in public. She did this, according to Lary May, “by doing what seemed impossible...and moving beyond the spheres that divided the sexes in the nineteenth century.”⁷³ Mary Pickford, “America’s Sweetheart,” blended traditional feminine qualities like sweetness and beauty with ambition and hard work, qualities normally associated with men in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Even further, Hallett argues, as one of the most famous women in the country, Pickford “came to embody the ‘democratization’ of fame” because she climbed to the top of the social ladder from a working-class background.⁷⁴ As women became more and more visible, not just in public spaces in their own communities, but in spaces of national renown like the movies, they broke down men’s monopoly on personal achievement, distinction, and fame. Suddenly,

⁷² Hallett, *Go West Young Woman!*, 70-71.

⁷³ Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980): 96.

⁷⁴ Hallett, *Go West Young Woman!*, 27; May, *Screening Out the Past*, 120-121.

glamorous women not only appeared in magazines about the film industry, they quickly became features, their images plastered on front covers of movie magazines at newsstands across the country. Something must be said, too, about the fact that this democratization applied not only to gender but also to class, as the first generation of filmmakers in the American West often came from the working-class. When female movie stars like Pickford were profiled in fan magazines, they proved that fame could come to any American with a big dream and a little bit of money to spare.

In less than a decade, Los Angeles had become the movie capital of the country and, after 1918, of the world. While it is perhaps hyperbole to say that Hollywood would not have existed without women, it becomes clear that without women, the film industry would have taken much longer to develop into the behemoth of commercial entertainment that it quickly became. However, women's interaction with the film industry, whether as employees or as consumers, proved complicated for social leaders: while women working in the industry became examples of the success working women might achieve, they also were potential threats to the existing gender order. As Hallett contends, during the first decades of the twentieth century, when Victorian gender norms came crashing down as women entered the public sphere more often, many respectable Americans who could concur on little else agreed that Hollywood and its girls best symbolized the changes in gender roles and sexual feeling threatening to sweep the land."⁷⁵ In the milieu of Progressivism in the United States, film industry women could be both forces for good, by raising the morals of their families, communities, and the industry writ large, and potentially dangerous, as their bodies in public raised questions about women's unchecked

⁷⁵ Hallett, *Go West Young Woman!*, 24.

sexuality. The women connected to the film industry wrestled with this contradiction in print, in film, and in their daily lives throughout the industry's earliest years.

An Element of Weakness in Hollywood: Morality and the Early Film Industry

The film industry arose in Los Angeles just as the Progressive fervor of the early twentieth century was in its dying embers, finding itself caught up in a whole slew of social and cultural concerns and changes that swirled around the United States. Industrialization of the nineteenth century decentered labor from rural agriculture which scholars have often marked as a crucial shift in American society from, as one historian put it, “a society of island communities” where power was localized, to the emergence of a new system built out of the “regulative, hierarchical needs of urban industrial life.”⁷⁶ For most social reformers, the major concern around women's public presence in urban spaces was the dual threat that presence posed. Public women caused anxieties among social and cultural leaders, both because they presented an ideological threat to the existing social order, and also because they were perceived as vulnerable members of the population who might fall prey to greed, crime, vice, and men's insatiable sexual appetites.⁷⁷ These problems seemed to proliferate especially in urban areas, where the forces of modernity – from factory work to cheap leisure activities that challenged highbrow culture of the middle- and upper-classes – broke down the gender, sexual, and class boundaries of the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ Middle- and upper-class women, considered the moral guardians of both

⁷⁶ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1967): xii-xiv.

⁷⁷ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 23, 27. For a thorough discussion of the danger that women faced in urban spaces as portrayed in early motion pictures, see Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, chapter two.

⁷⁸ Cultural historian T.J. Jackson Lears points to antimodernism as a major driving force behind the progressive impulses of the upper classes, saying that class antagonisms embodied by events like the Haymarket bombing and industrial unionizing, “seemed particularly threatening to urban elites preoccupied with their own physical and

their individual families and the classes below them, found it easiest to gain a foothold in the public as progressive reformers by focusing on problems related to traditionally feminine domains: the labor of women and children, education (both secular and religious) and the home. From Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago to what historian Robyn Muncy calls the "female dominion" of child welfare and social services and many movements in between, American women were making a place for themselves in "the mostly male empire of policymaking."⁷⁹

A major cultural figure of the turn of the twentieth century that inspired young women hoping to find independence in the city, and frustrated reformers trying to control women's behavior and protect them from harm, was the New Woman. Appearing in almost all forms of popular culture, from the famous Gibson Girl advertisements to the adventurous characters of dime novels and serial films, the New Woman was ubiquitous throughout the United States. Historians have agreed that the New Woman was not just one thing; instead, says scholar Martha H. Patterson, in the discourse of the 1910s and 1920s, the New Woman was several contradictory things all at once: suffragist, socialist, capitalist, criminal, girl next door, a mannish woman, a lesbian, and a vamp, among several others.⁸⁰ The New Woman was "an anxious and paradoxical icon of modern American power and decline," as both an "appeasement to the ideological imperatives" of the dominant order and as "one of the foremost symbols of feminist ambition."⁸¹

moral decay" in the late nineteenth century. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981): 30.

⁷⁹ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): xii. Muncy also credits the growth of women's professionalization in industries such as social work, nursing, and home economics as a foundation upon which reformers could claim their own dominion during the Progressive Era (xiv).

⁸⁰ Martha H. Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2008): 1.

⁸¹ Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005): 3-4.

Despite all of these contradictions, however, the New Woman almost always represented a quest for self-expression, mobility, sexual freedom, political rights, and in the words of historian Linda Nochlin, “a heartfelt rejection of woman’s traditional role as it was defined by every society in the world,” a definition that relegated women to a life in the private sphere dedicated to marriage, children, and keeping house.⁸²

Motion pictures and their attendant fan culture were crucial vehicles through which the many images of the New Woman were disseminated to American audiences. From serial queens to burgeoning movie stars like Mary Pickford to female filmgoers occupying physical space in the theater, the movies quickly became a place where women could view examples of and experiment with their independence. Not only could the female characters in serials, suffragist films, and even labor films serve as prominent representations of the New Woman, but the actresses themselves “invited their female fans to identify with a [woman] liberated from many of the customary restraints that economic dependence and the cult of domesticity placed on their bodies and hearts,” Hallett states. Particularly relevant for this chapter is Hallett’s claim that the early film industry and fan culture equally emphasized the opportunities that the West, and especially Los Angeles, presented for young women seeking professionalization and independence. The New Western Woman, according to Hallett, was a subset of the New Woman who demonstrated that “even the most ordinary women workers gained access to the movies’ bohemian social settings and exciting work environments out west.”⁸³ More than just encouraging women to enter the public sphere through employment, the film industry

⁸² Linda Nochlin, “Foreword” in *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s*, eds. Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011): vii.

⁸³ Hallett, *Go West Young Woman!*, 12.

transformed the American West into a kind of mecca for women seeking to take advantage of changing gender and sexual mores.

At the same time, because of their importance in publicizing the New Woman and her desire (and ability) to break away from previous social and sexual strictures, the movies came under scrutiny by reformers. Beginning with nickelodeons in 1906, as the movies still catered mostly to working-class and immigrant audiences, it was almost immediately clear that motion pictures had immense power to circulate ideas and ideals. Afraid that movies would spread the wrong kind of ideals around the country, becoming, according to social literature of the time, a “menace to the morals of the community and the healthy development of the social organism,” community leaders debated if and how movies should be regulated.⁸⁴ Progressive reformers believed that, if left unchecked, lowbrow motion pictures, classified as entertainment rather than art, could tear apart the entire moral fabric of society, encouraging Americans to engage in vice, sin, and licentiousness rather than refining and uplifting them, as highbrow art was supposed to. They believed that women were particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of the movies, and this vulnerability was only exacerbated if the women moved to Hollywood to break into the movies. When women moved out west to try to make a career in the film industry, the urban environment and the questionable material that reformers believed underscored many films seemed a lethal combination for young women who were expected to perpetuate morality for the good of their families and their communities. Heidi Kenaga writes that it was the fear of young women’s offscreen sexual labor, which could easily be exploited by the industry’s male leadership in numerous ways, that “reinforced the anxieties of civic and cultural elites about

⁸⁴ J.E. Wallace Wallin from *Pedagogical Seminary* (1910), as cited in Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 4.

Hollywood's power to transform relations in the public sphere."⁸⁵ Janet Staiger argues that the years of the early film industry, in the late 1900s into the early 1910s, "was a period of intense struggle within the middle class to define an appropriate version of and explanation for Woman [sic] and women's sexuality." She further states that many films featured "troublesome situations" in which female characters who briefly step out of the bounds of middle-class sexuality "were dealt with by narrativizing them, explaining them, and then resolving them via an 'appropriate' conclusion."⁸⁶ By pushing for films that always transformed the "Bad New Woman" into the "Good New Woman" through a turn toward "appropriate" sexual behavior, local reformers and censors attempted to contain the independence and sexual freedom of the New Woman. Stories that appeared in newspapers and early fan magazines attempted to do something similar for real women hoping to work in Hollywood: to some extent, these print sources allowed images of the New Woman to proliferate their pages, yet they also conveyed a deep unease about the numbers – and the character of those women – flocking out west to make a new life in a very public industry.

This is where the Hollywood Studio Club enters our story.

"Unique Girls' Club at Hollywood": The Hollywood Studio Club's First Era, 1916-1925

By the mid-1910s, it became clear that women would not be deterred from migrating to Hollywood to follow in the footsteps of stars like Mary Pickford and Gloria Swanson, who glamorized and normalized women's presence in movies and the film industry. However,

⁸⁵ Heidi Kenaga, "Making the 'Studio Girl': The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labor," *Film History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 133.

⁸⁶ Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): xxi-xiv.

Hollywood publicity set about disabusing those women from the notion of fame and fortune in the industry. Fan magazine authors made clear that only the smallest fraction of women who wanted to become movie stars actually would, leaving a majority of young women migrants in a difficult, morally dangerous position. The most common way that women broke into – or attempted to break into – the movies was by starting as an extra, just as Anygirl had. Extras had a particularly challenging task, as their background performance was necessary to give films a sense of realism, but their value as performers was severely limited. Their days often started at dawn at the studio gates to find out if positions were available and, should they get a job, they would often work long hours into the night. The pay was even worse; in 1915, it was estimated that extras were paid between \$1.00 and \$2.50 per day and may have included a meal, depending on the studio or director and how long the director needed them.⁸⁷ For the scores of women who converged on Hollywood to make a career in the industry, working as an extra seemed like the best opportunity to be noticed by producers and singled out to become a star. Of course, that happened to very few extras, leaving women in a vulnerable position as they quickly ran out of money with little experience to show for it. Being an extra was not for the faint of heart; according to one *Photoplay* article from 1920, “The reason they are called ‘extra’ girls is because of the extra amount one has to do. The only thing that isn’t extra is the pay.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only roughly 8% of women in the manufacturing labor force earned less than \$3 a day in the first decades of the twentieth century. United States – All Wage-Earners, and Men, Women, and Children, by Classified Weekly Earnings, With Percentage at Each Amount: 1905, U.S. Census of Manufacturers, hosted at the University of Missouri, <https://libraryguides.missouri.edu/pricesandwages/1900-1909>. In 2023, an extra’s daily wages would vary between \$30.40 and \$76.00. Inflation figures found from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm. The monetary figures are cited in Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012): 25.

⁸⁸ Helen G. Smith, “The Extra Girl Is Handed a Few Snickers,” *Photoplay*, March 1920, 108, Media History Digital Library from the Wisconsin for Film & Theater Research, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>.

But all the hard work did not scare off those who were truly dedicated to their craft. In late 1915 or early 1916, a group of young women who fell into this category began meeting in the basement of the Hollywood Public Library to read plays and refine their acting skills. A librarian, Eleanor Jones, talked with the young women, who told her that most of them were living in cheap hotels, rooms without basic amenities, and poorly supervised boarding houses. Jones, believing that the women needed a much better living situation if they had any hope of succeeding, managed to rally support from female Hollywood luminaries, such as Anna de Mille, the wife of screenwriter and producer William C. de Mille, and actress/director Lois Weber. Jones, de Mille, and Weber, among others, first began a drama club in the library basement. Soon, the Los Angeles branch of the YWCA became involved, allowing the Club's members to participate in the Y's drama and gymnastics classes. Word spread, and the members soon outgrew the library basement.⁸⁹ The Club's leaders appealed to the Hollywood Business Men's Club, which raised \$1,500, enough for one year's rent on an abandoned Colonial-style mansion at 6129 Carlos Avenue that would serve as a clubhouse and dormitory for members.⁹⁰ The Hollywood Studio Club first opened its doors in July 1916, becoming a place where women

⁸⁹ The story of the Club's founding is fairly consistent throughout several accounts between published magazine articles and official Studio Club records. I culled the above details from Gaffey, "The Studio Club," *Photoplay*, September 1917, 83-87, mediahistoryproject.org. Gaffey's account was the earliest account that I could find, but I do not believe it to be the first ever account of the series of events that led to the Club's founding. Gaffey's account notes that Jones was particularly inspired to create a boarding house for female Hollywood migrants after one of the young women who had attended the Club in the basement of the library disappeared for several weeks. Upon her return, the girl was "a very pale, thin ghost of a girl." When Jones asked where she had been, "The girl swallowed hard and said: 'Hospital – a whole month and not a soul came to see me. I'm licked and I'm going back home.'" The girl returned home; "No one ever knew her name – but *she* started the Club." (85).

⁹⁰ The house number is incorrectly given as 6127 in the first stories published about the opening of the Studio Club, but eventually is given as 6129 in official publications a few years later. "\$1,500 Raised by H.B.M.C. For Lease of Twist Home For Studio and Office Girls," June 1916, Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

hoping to break into the motion picture industry might live, protected from urban threats of poverty, homelessness, con-men, and, the worst threat of all, sex work.⁹¹

In its earliest months, newspapers claimed that the mansion was supposed to be a recreation center, complete with outdoor gymnasium, tennis courts, a study and library, sewing room, and social hall.⁹² By September 1916, however, the recreation center had become a residence, able to accommodate between fifteen and twenty women who paid ten dollars per week in room and board, though any woman interested in a career in the film industry could become a member and gain access to the amenities.⁹³ Membership at the Club grew rapidly, with one newspaper estimating that membership reached 150 by February 1917.⁹⁴ Membership climbed so quickly due, in large part, to the dances, tea parties, club meetings, and live acting performances put on by the residents. These events served the dual purpose of also raising money for the maintenance of the residence; although the Los Angeles YWCA supported the Studio Club, the local Y had to maintain at least one other residence in the area, the Mary Andrews Clark Memorial Residence, in addition to its support of several non-residential clubhouses.⁹⁵ With the added expense of the Studio Club, leaders of the Los Angeles Y realized

⁹¹ "Twist Mansion Is Remodeled," *The Hollywood Inquirer*, July 14, 1916, Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

⁹² "Y.W.C.A. Signs Lease of the Twist Home as Recreation and Club Center for Picture Actresses," *Hollywood Citizen*, July 21, 1916, Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

⁹³ Anna May Mason, Report of the Hollywood Studio Club, May 15-June 26, 1920, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-29, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

⁹⁴ "Studio Club Board Meeting," *Los Angeles Municipal News*, November 14, 1916, Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

⁹⁵ The Mary Andrews Clark Residence was founded in 1913 and, as far as I can tell, was the only residence owned by the Los Angeles YWCA before taking on the Hollywood Studio Club in 1916. By 1924, residences also included residences for African American women and Japanese women in the area. "A few items from the 1924 program," The Los Angeles Young Women's Christian Association Pamphlet, YWCA of Los Angeles Collection, Box YWCA/1 11, Folder 11-29, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

they did not have adequate funds to continue to financially support the new residence, especially as the waiting list for residents was growing impossibly long for the maximum of twenty residents it could house. Knowing that eventually a new residence would need to be built but lacking funds with which to build one, in 1917, the Los Angeles Y leaders appealed to the YWCA National Board in New York City to take on the responsibility of the Hollywood Studio Club. The National Board bought the Carlos Avenue building from the Los Angeles Y for \$18,000.⁹⁶

The Hollywood Studio Club was unique in that it catered only to female film industry aspirants, but ideologically, it was part of a long line of industry-specific boarding houses designed to protect (and control) female employees. With the Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century, the division between public and private was blurred in a significant way, when female employees took up factory work in company towns where their housing was connected to the industry in which they worked. Textile mills in the company town of Lowell, Massachusetts between 1830 and 1860, analyzed by Thomas Dublin in his landmark study about women's work in the early nineteenth century, is perhaps the most prominent example of this new form of industry-related housing that melded traditional private behavior, such as deference to their male leaders (such as fathers and bosses), with modern public behavior of taking employment "to meet purely personal goals."⁹⁷ The Hollywood Studio Club could also be connected to the Settlement House Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A prominent branch of the Progressive movement, settlement houses sprang from reformers'

⁹⁶ Board of Managers Minutes, August 1918, YWCA of Los Angeles Collection, Box YWCA/1 8, Folder 08-17, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

⁹⁷ Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 100.

desires to uplift the nation's poorest and most vulnerable members, physically, spiritually, morally, and economically. Women were central to this movement: working-class women and children were often targets of middle- and upper-class women's reform efforts. Though few settlement houses were boarding houses like the Hollywood Studio Club, the two share ideological purposes, making the settlement house another site which blurred the public and the private for American women. At the settlement house, middle-class women reformers left their private domain to take up positions in public in which they hoped to reform the private space for women employed in the public sphere (and their families). There was no strict dichotomy of public and private in the settlement houses – the two combined to make the settlement house a complicated space that belied, in many ways, the rigid Victorian separation of spheres.⁹⁸

Like many settlement houses, it would at first glance appear that the Hollywood Studio Club had significant religious undertones, as it fell under the jurisdiction of the Young Women's Christian Association. Though many reformers denied that settlement houses were religious institutions, Ruth Hutchinson Crocker argues that many of them were undergirded by Protestant ideals.⁹⁹ Homes and clubs of the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations had many of the same goals, hoping to inculcate immigrant and migrant working-class men and women with middle-class codes of behavior and provide them with spiritual fortification against urban temptations and moral respectability in the face of the demoralizing forces of modern urbanity.¹⁰⁰ Spiritual development was not the only goal of the YWCA, however, as many local branches were equally as dedicated to helping young women confront the difficult social and

⁹⁸ Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁹⁹ Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992): chapter 4.

¹⁰⁰ Introduction in *Men and Women Adrift*, eds. Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt.

economic conditions they faced in the city.¹⁰¹ The Los Angeles area YWCA branches followed similar programs. A pamphlet from 1914-1915 described the classes and activities offered by the local branches, which fell under three main departments: Bible Study, General Education, and Physical Training. General Education classes included traditional courses in English, Mathematics, History, Botany, and European languages; classes in home economic specialties such as sewing and cooking; professional skills like shorthand and typing; and classes to develop artistic talents like acting and singing. The branches also offered gymnastics, weight training apparatuses, and recreative exercises and sports classes. The goal of all of these local classes, according to the pamphlet, was to “enable women to add to their culture and general usefulness and bring them into relationship with opportunities for broader development. It is its [the YWCA’s] purpose, also, to introduce into its activities, a general Association spirit of usefulness and fellowship.”¹⁰²

Interestingly, one thing that the Studio Club did not have in common with the other local branches was religiosity. In 1920, National Board YWCA field worker Anna May Mason reported that there was “no attempt to create a Y.W.C.A. atmosphere” at the Hollywood Studio Club. The residents seemed to prefer Christian Science and Theosophy, two sects of Christianity that generally fell outside of the Protestant umbrella. Though Mason seemed concerned by the lack of Protestant adherents at the Studio Club, she did have to admit, “the Club is doing the only service work for the motion picture girl. The producers and managers look to provide a home for the girls and set the moral standards.”¹⁰³ In fact, though the YWCA always owned the

¹⁰¹ Sarah Heath, “Negotiating White Womanhood: The Cincinnati YWCA and White Wage-Earning Women, 1918-1929 in *Men and Women Adrift*, 87.

¹⁰² Annual Announcement Pamphlet, Young Women’s Christian Association of Los Angeles, 1914-1915, 22, 8, YWCA of Los Angeles Collection, Box YWCA/1 1, Folder 01-15, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁰³ Mason, Report of the Hollywood Studio Club, 1920, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, UAC, CSU-N.

Hollywood Studio Club, there was never any strict enforcement or requirement of Protestant religious beliefs, though throughout its history, of course, religious classes were held for members who wished to attend.

Despite a lack of religiosity at the Hollywood Studio Club, its attachment to the YWCA helped cement its reputation in the Hollywood community as a safe and respectable place for young women in the film industry. This reputation became particularly important in the early 1920s, as a series of scandals involving young Hollywood actresses rocked the industry and the country, resulting in calls from social and cultural leaders discouraging young women from pursuing a career in what one magazine writer called a “wicked city” to which “no nice girl” came.¹⁰⁴ The mysterious death of director William Desmond Taylor in 1922 in which popular actresses Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter were believed to be involved, became another weapon in the arsenal for advocates for film censorship.¹⁰⁵ However, even the Taylor murder paled in comparison to undoubtedly the most famous and most controversial early Hollywood scandal, the Fatty Arbuckle scandal. Breaking the year before the Taylor murder, the 1921 death

¹⁰⁴ Kate Holiday, “Hollywood’s Favorite Child” transcript, n.d., Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-29, UAC, CSU-N. It is unclear in which magazine this article appeared, as I could only find the transcription in the archives.

¹⁰⁵ William Desmond Taylor was one of the most prolific directors upon the time of his death, having directed fifty-nine films in eight years, and he worked with almost every movie star in the early years of their career. The ways in which both Normand and Minter were involved in Taylor’s death was highly debated at the time. *The Los Angeles Times* reported that Taylor was killed just a few minutes after escorting Normand, apparently his lover, to her car as she left his home. “Taylor Murder Suspect Traced To, From House,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1922, newspapers.com. United Press correspondent Frank H. Bartholomew included a detail in his report that Taylor’s body was found facing a picture of Normand. Mary Miles Minter was allegedly in love with Taylor, although he did not feel the same way. According to *Photoplay* editor James R. Quirk, Minter wrote Taylor a note just before his death which read, “I love you; I love you; I love you!” James R. Quirk, “Moral House-Cleaning In Hollywood: An Open Letter to Mr. Will Hays,” *Photoplay*, April 1922, 53, mediahistoryproject.org; Bartholomew’s story stated that Minter was among the first to arrive at Taylor’s home after the tragedy was announced, and she allegedly told reporters, “No, I was never engaged to Mr. Taylor, I regret to say.” It was allegedly determined that “police had definitely established that jealousy over Taylor’s attentions to a woman was the motive of the crime.” Whether that woman was Normand, Minter, or another woman entirely was a question never definitively answered. The case is still cold. As a United Press correspondent, Bartholomew’s story appeared in several different newspapers. I used Frank H. Bartholomew, “‘Arrest By Night’ in Movie Murder,” *The Oklahoma News* (Oklahoma City), February 3, 1922, newspapers.org.

of actress Virginia Rappe, allegedly at the hands of comedian Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle changed the nation’s view of the dangers facing women alone in Hollywood. When doctors determined that Rappe died of a ruptured bladder, the American press published sensational stories about Arbuckle’s sexual aggression which had apparently led to Rappe’s death. Hallett details how, suddenly, Rappe became an illustrative example of the potential fate of every young woman who migrated to Hollywood: “No longer would the industry’s celebrity culture spin such unabashedly romantic adventure stories about the glories awaiting ambitious female migrants who went west to make their fortunes, and to remake themselves, along Hollywood’s streets.” Rappe instead “symbolized the hazards confronting the ‘millions of pretty girls’ who turned ‘their faces to the gilded west’” and pursued their dreams of fame and fortune in front of the movie camera.¹⁰⁶

After these scandals, Will H. Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, decided that something needed to be done about the hundreds of young women whose migration to Hollywood would surely end in tragedy like that of Virginia Rappe.¹⁰⁷ He, along with many members of the Hollywood Press, began a media campaign designed to do two things: first, discourage young women from migrating to Los Angeles, and second, to encourage the young women who had failed in the film industry to return home to pursue a more traditional life. Warnings about the difficulties of coming to Hollywood were published in fan magazines as early as 1919, with *Photoplay* quoting Edna Harris, the YWCA secretary heading the Studio Club:

If the movie-struck girl could foresee just a bit of the hard road to success as a film player, she would hesitate a long time before leaving home...Girls have come to Los Angeles with just enough money to make the trip. They are usually the most difficult to convince that they are not fitted for the screen and inevitably we must obtain positions for

¹⁰⁶ Hallett, *Go West Young Women!*, 183-184.

¹⁰⁷ Jane Dixon, “The Studio Club Extends a Friendly Hand to Those with Dreams Shattered,” Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

them in other lines or get them back to their homes...It is a hard game even for the girl who comes prepared for a long and arduous artistic siege.¹⁰⁸

Less a command to stay away than a caution for the young woman who may impulsively leave her hometown where she was surrounded by a large support system, Harris reminds readers that talent was not enough to guarantee success in the film industry. Even Mary Pickford advised that young women have enough money to last one year without work before moving.¹⁰⁹

Within three years of Harris's warning, the Taylor and Arbuckle scandals changed everything about the discourse of aspiring women film industry employees moving to Los Angeles. No longer did industry leaders find it enough to discourage women from migrating to Los Angeles without enough money; young women should no longer consider coming to Hollywood at all. The risks, for both individual women and for society writ large, were simply too great; not to mention that, with so many young women coming to Hollywood, getting a job in the studios was all but impossible. These were not subtle messages, either. The *Literary Digest* published the following excerpt from another publication called *The Presbyterian*:

Let every girl be sent home as soon as possible, and warning be sent out that no more are wanted. When a life of useful industry is thus supplanted by a life of artificiality, imitation, and indulgence, we can hope for nothing but breakdown and disaster from the rising generation. These well-meaning agencies must beware lest they sow the seeds of a nation-wide and generational misery and shame.¹¹⁰

Another newspaper article written by Jane Dixon starts with two commands: "Girls, stay at home. Marry the boy from Main street."¹¹¹ In May 1924, an article allegedly written by an

¹⁰⁸ Alfred A. Cohn, "What Every Girl Wants to Know," *Photoplay*, June 1919, 31, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹⁰⁹ "Hollywood Beggars Aid To Halt Mad Influx of Film-Struck Girls," 1923, Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹¹⁰ "No Room in the Movies," *Literary Digest*, August 25, 1923, in Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹¹¹ Jane Dixon, "The Studio Club Extends a Friendly Hand to Those with Dreams Shattered," Scrapbook, Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

unnamed beauty contest winner who came to Hollywood to become a star recalls not just her own failure but also of “a girl from Massachusetts with a long line of Mayflower ancestors” who went home after several months of unemployment; she tells of the extra girl who, “[a]fter a few weeks of showing her around the studios and meeting the stars she is dropped and left to make her own way,”; as well as the tragedy of “the girl who took an overdose of veronal, from discouragement of ever achieving the success of which she had dreamed.” The author adds in her closing paragraphs, “I can’t understand why any woman would leave a home and a husband to go into pictures.”¹¹² Young aspiring actress could not open a newspaper or magazine without reading warnings about the personal and social failure that would inevitably result if they moved west to try their luck in the motion pictures.

Fan magazine writers made it clear that when these young women failed, they had no one but themselves to blame. Jesse Lasky, one of the industry’s first major producers, did not mince words when discussing the situation that movie-struck girls faced in their struggle to break into the industry:

In spite of the hundreds of broadcasts dispatched from Hollywood each month showing the heavy odds against a girl striving to attain stardom in motion pictures, many who are making a comfortable living in other parts of the country trek to the film capital seeking fame and fortune...too many times the facts are passed by simply because the candidate is blinded by the few, but brilliant beacons of success. They think, in all probability, that they will be the exception; that determination is the only requisite and that they will be able to surmount the obstacles which were responsible for the failure of others. This is unfortunate, and, in the majority of cases, pathetic.¹¹³

Similarly, T. Howard Kelly of *Movie Weekly* blamed the naïve young women for the problems they faced, saying, “the cause of Hollywood’s temptation lies not in the city itself, but in the

¹¹² “Heart-Break Town,” *Screenland*, May 1924, 32, 104, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹¹³ Jesse J. Lasky, “Odds Against Girls,” ca. 1927, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 82, Folder 03-13, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

hearts and minds of the girls who foolishly imagine that they are cut out to be picture stars.”¹¹⁴ Both Lasky and Kelly, however, knew that women would come despite their warnings, so they presented a solution for those delusional women who needed to be picked up out of the gutter, helped back onto their feet, and sent home to pursue more traditional home-centric pursuits: the Hollywood Studio Club. The purpose of the Club, said Lasky, was to solve “the housing problem for these girls just ‘breaking into’ the industry and to provide happy and congenial surroundings while the girls were getting a start.”¹¹⁵ Even the unnamed failure who wrote the article in *Screenland* admitted that the Studio Club had taken in a struggling young woman, provided her with meals, aided her in her convalescence from an illness, and helped her get a job to the point that she was still able to pursue “her art.”¹¹⁶

But not everyone was impressed with the Hollywood Studio Club. *Screenland* writer Jim Tully published a story in September 1924 that blamed the Club for providing a false sense of security among young film aspirants. In his story, he tells of multiple young women who came to Hollywood with charm, poise, and wit – and also naivety. One girl “did not photograph as many of her more homely and stupid sisters. She failed to register that evanescent thing called soul.” Another young woman refused to engage in sexual favors with the director, “And that ended that – for the girl.” Another tried to overdose on drugs. Yet another had mild success on the New York stage, but ultimately failed in the motion pictures upon moving west and had to return home. Tully placed the blame for all of these defeats squarely on the shoulders of the Hollywood Studio Club and its leaders:

¹¹⁴ T. Howard Kelly, “Fund raised to create home for horde of screen-struck Girls invading Hollywood,” *Movie Weekly*, 1925, 4-5, found in YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-16, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹¹⁵ Lasky, “Odds Against Girls.”

¹¹⁶ “Heart-Break Town,” *Screenland*, 33.

Having lived on the crumbs of charity for many of my early years and knowing the system under which the Studio Club is run, I feel that it is a demoralizer instead of a builder of character as are institutions of its kind all the weary world around...If it had not been for the Studio Club, girls who had not the slightest chance to get into the pictures would not have prolonged the dull agony of hope deferred for months at a time.¹¹⁷

In Tully's view, it was not just Hollywood movies and the fan magazines that played a part in luring these young women to their moral doom; the Hollywood Studio Club was one of the worst offenders. The young women down on their luck would have gone home much earlier had the Studio Club not provided them with false hope.

Tully was in the minority, however, as most social and film industry leaders, including Will Hays, believed the Hollywood Studio Club to be a small fish of respectability in a sea of immorality. As he took up the task of reforming and censoring Hollywood, Hays saw the Studio Club as "one of our first obligations...for it is part of the welfare work we should be doing."¹¹⁸ Another newspaper writer called the Hollywood Studio Club "[o]ne of the best refutations of slanders against Hollywood...It is one of the few instances in the world where a great organization has opened a club and a real home for a single class of young women."¹¹⁹ Even Jesse Lasky, who found the young women unwisely seeking their fame and fortune in Hollywood "pathetic," admitted that the Hollywood Studio Club was a "beautiful affair," one of just two organizations in Los Angeles that was dedicated to protecting the young women from the exploitation and dangers that inevitably awaited them when they passed the studio gates.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Jim Tully, "The House of Broken Dreams," *Screenland*, September 1924, 25, 79, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹¹⁸ "Cinema Dictator Kept Busy Today," Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection.

¹¹⁹ Fred J. Wilson, "Ground Will Be Broken For New Studio Club As Home for Girls," YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 82, Folder 03-13, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹²⁰ The other organization that Lasky credits was the Central Casting Bureau (CCB), which was created to ease the difficulties faced by the crowds of extras crashing the studio gates every morning. The CCB included a branch specifically for women and children, led by female casting director Marian Mel. Mel was known for being brutally

Because so many young women migrated to Hollywood without enough funds to support themselves if they failed to find steady employment, the Hollywood Studio Club was truly a novel and essential site in Hays' attempt to clean-up the moral cesspool of Hollywood.

So important was the Hollywood Studio Club in the eyes of Hays and other local leaders that, during several different fundraising efforts to build a new dormitory between 1921 and 1923, the Hollywood community contributed thousands of dollars to create a larger "hospitable haven" for the aspiring young women.¹²¹ What Hays believed it to be was a landing pad for the young women after they failed; while at the Studio Club, the residents would have the opportunity to make just enough money to return home to a more traditional life. An article that appeared in the *Tacoma Ledger* profiled what many social and cultural leaders of Los Angeles claimed the purpose of the Club was: "In this building homeless girls will be sheltered until suitable employment is found for them, or until they are sent back home disillusioned."¹²² Another article described it as "something between an employment agency and a roundhouse," emphasizing the temporary nature of a stay at the Studio Club and advising readers that most young women stayed for only two weeks. Even as late as 1929, fan magazine *Picture-Play Magazine* promoted it as a place that young women could be "sheltered until money can be lent

honest with starry-eyed young women who thought just a few extra parts would lead to starring roles, even telling women to return home when necessary. Both Heidi Kenaga and Anthony Slide, the two scholars to have written about the Hollywood Studio Club, pair the CCB and the Hollywood Studio Club together as two crucial pieces of the labor sector for young women extras. While the CCB shared a similar purpose as the Hollywood Studio Club, I have chosen not to focus on the CCB, as I examine other important aspects of the Studio Club outside of the labor sector. Kenaga, "Making the 'Studio Girl,'" Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*.

¹²¹ Flavia Gaines Leitch, "Film World's Real Life Dramas Staged Inside Studio Club," *Los Angeles Examiner* (Los Angeles, CA) July 11, 1923, Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹²² "Movie Maids In Distress To Be Aided," *The Tacoma Daily Ledger* (Tacoma, WA), July 27, 1923, newspapers.org.

them for their [train] fares” when they realized they were “broke and ready to go home.”¹²³ A new Studio Club, said most leaders, would increase the capacity, but not the length of stay or divert from its purpose, providing *temporary* housing for up to 18,000 girls a year – which would equate to roughly fifty new residents per day in a home with a maximum capacity of one hundred residents.¹²⁴ These statistics were unrealistic, but point toward the expectation that Hollywood publicity claimed for the Studio Club: it was, more likely than not, a place for women to get back on their feet in order to head home, forsaking their dreams of fame and fortune on the silver screen for the more traditional life of marriage and motherhood.

It was also during this first era that already-famous celebrity women, who had often succeeded in public careers by forsaking their private responsibilities, began made their mark on the Hollywood Studio Club. Mary Pickford was so involved with the Studio Club in its early years that some journalists erroneously gave Pickford credit for founding it.¹²⁵ Pickford donated time and money to the Hollywood Studio Club for the rest of her life. Indeed, archival materials reveal that Pickford paid to have the Club recarpeted in 1960, long after her retirement from public life.¹²⁶ The Studio Club benefitted from the money and influence of many other women attached to the film industry as well. From the founding members Anna de Mille and Lois Weber to de Mille’s sister-in-law, Constance Adams deMille (whose husband was William’s younger

¹²³ Mignon Rittenhouse, “What Keeps Failures in Hollywood?,” *Picture-Play Magazine*, April 1929, 106, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹²⁴ “Movie Struck Girls Should Stay Away From Hollywood,” July 16, 1923, Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹²⁵ Mignon Rittenhouse, “The Pleasures of Poverty Row,” *Motion Picture Magazine*, November 1928, 118, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹²⁶ The carpets were installed at a cost of \$3,120 in 1960. According to archival documents, the new carpets were installed incorrectly, and when the company refused to fix it, Pickford and her lawyers filed a lawsuit against them. Receipts and Correspondence RE: new carpet and rugs for the Hollywood Studio Club, Mary Pickford Papers, Hollywood Studio Club, folder f.1466, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

brother Cecil¹²⁷) and silent film actress Tsuru Aoki, wife of Japanese silent film star Sessue Hayakawa, the help of celebrity women in the 1920s was central to keeping the Studio Club afloat as Hays, cultural leaders, and journalists tried to blame the Club for many problems facing the young women of early Hollywood. When celebrity women donated goods, money, or time to the Hollywood Studio Club, they demonstrated how seriously they viewed it: more than a place for silly young women to play out their ridiculous fantasies of becoming a movie star, the Club was, instead, a boarding house where young women who had dreams of becoming a movie star could reap the benefits of camaraderie, advice, money, and resources from some of the industry's already-established women. Fan magazines and newspapers regularly connected women celebrities to the Club, only solidifying it as a legitimate, respectable home for future and soon-to-be actresses. Alla Nazimova, Russian-American actress of the stage and screen, sold her glamorous clothing to the residents (at a highly discounted price, money which she summarily donated to charity), as well as donated the first one-hundred dollars to the new building fund in 1921; Aoki hosted Japanese teas at the Club for fundraising efforts; female director Lois Weber attended several teas there, while also serving on various club committees and as a club's donor throughout many years.¹²⁸

The Club's residents who became famous after its first few years were expected to contribute to the success of the women who came after them. Stars and former residents Helen Jerome Eddy and Marjorie Daw returned to participate in the teas, dances, and other events open

¹²⁷ Though it may appear to be a typo, Anna de Mille and Constance deMille are spelled differently. William and Cecil professionally used different spellings of their last name.

¹²⁸ Myrtle Gebhart, "The Studio Club Grows Up," *Picture-Play Magazine*, January 1927, 84, mediahistoryproject.org; "Japanese Tea Studio Club Feature," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 31, 1917, Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.; "Afternoon Tea," no publication listed, Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

to the public through the early 1920s, providing words of encouragement and advice upon their visits; Eddy, for example, taught a weekly dramatic course at the Club, and in 1918, *Photoplay* profiled her role in the production and performance of “Tragedy of Nan,” which helped fill the Club’s coffers when they got low.¹²⁹ ZaSu Pitts, perhaps the most famous former Studio Club resident of the late 1910s and early 1920s, was a favorite subject of early fan magazines, perhaps because she came to Hollywood as one of the mass of star-struck girls who managed to succeed thanks, in part, to the Hollywood Studio Club. Born in Kansas and raised in Santa Cruz, California, Pitts left her family home for a career as a movie star in Los Angeles in 1916 “without beauty, without experience and without influence to aid her. She did not even have a wardrobe,” says the profile of her in *Motion Picture Magazine*.¹³⁰ She spent months circulating around the studio gates for extra parts and managed to find housing at the newly formed Hollywood Studio Club, a member of one of the Club’s first cohorts. By the time full, multiple-page profiles about her appeared in the fan magazines starting in 1919, Pitts no longer lived at the Studio Club, but she often returned to attend parties, eat meals, and give advice and support to the current residents, once telling *Motion Picture Magazine* that ““It [the Club] is my hobby...the thing outside of my work that I am interested in most of all.””¹³¹ ZaSu Pitts quickly became one of the most recognizable, and very public, actresses associated with the Hollywood Studio Club. The publicity about her only increased the reputation of the Hollywood Studio Club as a place at which young women could get help on their journey to success in the movies, and

¹²⁹ Emma Lindsay-Squier, “The House of Twenty Stars,” *Picture-Play Magazine*, December 1920, 32, mediahistoryproject.org; Kenneth McGaffey, “Helpful Helen,” *Photoplay*, June 1918, 109, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹³⁰ Elizabeth Peltret, “The Girl With the Ginger-Snap Name,” *Motion Picture Magazine*, July 1919, 38, 64, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹³¹ Malcom H. Oettinger, “Homespun,” *Picture-Play*, January 1924, pgs. 32-33; Peltret, “The Girl With the Ginger-Snap Name,” 64, mediahistoryproject.org.

she herself became a much-admired example of how “movie-mad girl” could prosper in Hollywood.

Local journalists and leaders recognized the potential the Club had for other purposes, too. In 1923, in the midst of fundraising for a new Club dormitory building, *Los Angeles Citizen* journalist Fred J. Wilson exhorted his readers, “The work of the Hollywood Studio Club must be carried on. Surely we should be able to invest in the future of Hollywood’s young womanhood...it is an investment that will multiply itself incalculably before the passing of many years. Don’t forget.”¹³² Throughout 1923, several fundraising events provided \$150,000 to begin plans and construction on the new building. With a groundbreaking that finally followed just over a year later in 1925, the Hollywood Studio Club officially entered a second era, driven not by Hays and other cultural and social leaders, but instead, by the women who lived and worked at the Hollywood Studio Club themselves.

“Glamor Manor”: The Hollywood Studio Club’s Second Era, 1925-1946

Building the Club was, of course, nothing that the aspiring Hollywood starlets and the Club’s leaders could do themselves. According to the plans of director Marjorie Williams and the Building Committee, the majority of the money was raised through the Motion Picture Corporation, led by Hays, but roughly one-third of the necessary sum came from average Hollywood residents not connected to the film industry.¹³³ However, it was a woman connected to the film industry – major film star Norma Talmadge – who, when the Building Committee

¹³² Fred J. Wilson, “Aid Studio Club Raise Funds for Its new Home To Be Erected Here,” *Hollywood Citizen-News*, March 15, 1923, in Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹³³ Report of the Hollywood Studio Club, Year Ending December 31, 1923, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-06, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

found themselves five thousand dollars short just before opening, donated the remaining balance to complete the building's construction.¹³⁴ The second home of the Hollywood Studio Club, at 1215 Lodi Place, just blocks away from its original Carlos Avenue home, was dedicated and officially opened on May 7, 1926, offering accommodations that cost between ten dollars and fifteen dollars per week, including two meals. The first event at the new building was a dance that followed the Open House, an activity residents had held at the first Studio Club house for nearly a decade.¹³⁵

Designed by prominent California female architect Julia Morgan, the second Hollywood Studio Club not only housed more women, but had far more amenities of which the residents and members could take advantage than the Carlos Avenue house.¹³⁶ On the first floor of the three-story building was the kitchen and dining room, a library and lounge, a game room that included ping-pong table, and a large front living room with a piano and a large stage against the back wall. Here, residents could rehearse lines or practice their instruments leading up to rehearsals, and members used the stage to put on plays, which had sometimes been written by the residents themselves. Just off the main entrance was the front desk, staffed by a Hollywood Studio Club employee. The front desk was the heart of the Club's activity because the telephone, through which residents learned they had secured a job or received a social call, was located there. Every

¹³⁴ "Building of Studio Club is Assured," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1925, newspapers.com; According to the Studio Club's scrapbook, Talmadge was named especially as having given a "Special Gift," a category under which only one other donor fell. Hollywood Studio Club Scrapbook, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 101, Folder 1, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹³⁵ "New \$250,000 Home of Hollywood Studio Club To Be Opened Today With Dedicatory Exercises," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, May 7, 1926, newspapers.com; Invitation to the formal opening new Hollywood Studio Club, 1926, YWCA of Los Angeles Collection, Box 89, Folder 89:1, UAC, CSU-N.

¹³⁶ An oral history from Dorothy Coblentz, one of Morgan's architectural contemporaries, stated that Julia Morgan was "the official architect for...the YWCA in the West." She worked on California YWCA buildings in San Diego, San Pedro, Monterey, Riverside, Pasadena, Oakland, and San Francisco. She also designed YWCA buildings in Arizona, Hawaii, and Utah. Harriet Rochelin Collection of Material about Women Architects in the United States, Collection 1591, Box 2, Folders 62, 65, 71, Library Special Collections, University of California Los Angeles.

call, even a social one, carried with it enormous implications for the receiver's professional or personal life. Residents slept in rooms on the second and third floors; on each floor, residents shared one of two bathrooms and a utility room, either a sewing room or a kitchenette. A sleeping porch, where residents could sleep if the weather was warm or residents needed some extra cot space, was in the southeast corner of the third floor. The Club offered single and double rooms for between seven and thirteen dollars per week (two meals included) at its lowest cost, but most residents shared rooms to save money.¹³⁷ Applicants for residency had to meet only a few requirements: they had to be interested in a career in the film industry and they had to have a "respectable" reputation – which, more often than not, was defined in racial and classed terms.¹³⁸ Once their application was accepted, residents could stay for between six months and a year at a time, though they could stay for up to three years total.¹³⁹ During Williams' tenure, there was always a waiting list for residents, usually numbering between fifty and one hundred, demonstrating that the Hollywood Studio Club was well-publicized as a highly desirable place to live.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ This would be worth between roughly \$150 and \$280 in 2023, statistics pulled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm; The average weekly cost for rooms and meals seemed to hover between \$10 and \$17 (which would roughly range between \$175 and \$400 in 2023, depending on the year) through the late 1920s and much of the 1930s, with a fairly significant drop in prices during the worst years of the Great Depression. Hollywood Studio Club Informational Pamphlets, Scrapbook – Printing and Publicity, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 84, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹³⁸ Robert Wuthnow, *American Misfits and the Making of Middle-Class Respectability* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). See also: discussion of white, middle-class respectability on pages 55-64 of this chapter.

¹³⁹ Some sources say that professional women in an industry other than the entertainment industry could stay for up to one year, but the application of this rule is unclear. Merle Fortier Oral History, Part 1, October 26, 1989, Urban Archives General Oral Histories Collection, Box 3, Item 11, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹⁴⁰ "Woman's City Club Bulletin," Vol. 1, No. 5 (February 1924), ed. Mrs. George A. Barry, in Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N; "Directing the Hollywood Studio Club Especially Interesting, Says Miss Marjorie Williams," Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 82, Folder 03-13, UAC, CSU-N; Bradley Smith, "Gateway to Glamor," *Collier's Magazine*, March 9, 1946,

In direct contradiction of Hays' vision for the Club in its first era, there were very few formal rules at the new Hollywood Studio Club with which to control the residents' behavior in its second era, which reveals how much autonomy the residents had. No former resident or employee who spoke of the Club remembered any written rules whatsoever, save one: no men above the first floor.¹⁴¹ Though individual House Councils could institute certain rules, such as "no smoking," it seems that the director took no part in the making and enforcing of that rule. As early as 1916, the Club's director Julia Lee told *The Los Angeles Citizen*, "We have no 'don'ts' here. I have never said what the girls might and might not do."¹⁴² Lee's sentiments seem to have remained true throughout the Club's existence, for Merle Fortier, who worked at the Club in the 1960s and 1970s, expressed a similar attitude. There was not even a curfew, though employees locked the doors at 11pm. Even after this, though, there was no requirement that the residents retire to their rooms. If women returned after the doors had locked, someone was almost always wandering around to open them, meaning that there was no formal check that the residents returned to the Club at night.¹⁴³ It becomes quite evident, then, that the young women who lived at the Hollywood Studio Club had significant degrees of autonomy over their own bodies, an incredibly important image that was disseminated to American women throughout popular fan magazines and lifestyle magazines.

YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 85, Folder 06-02, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹⁴¹ Merle Fortier Oral History, Part 1, October 26, 1989, Urban Archives General Oral Histories Collection, Box 3, Item 11, UAC, CSU-N; Dorothy Spiegel Oral History, Part 1, December 13, 1989, Urban Archives General Oral Histories Collection, Box 5, Item 2, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹⁴² Ruth M. Dennen, "Garden Spot Where Joy Is King is the 'Movie' Girl's Hollywood Y.W.C.A.," *The Los Angeles Examiner*, November 5, 1916, Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁴³ Merle Fortier Oral History, Part 1, October 26, 1989.

Given its lack of rules, it is clear that by its second era, the Hollywood Studio Club was no longer what Kenaga described as a “surveilling, corrective site,” but instead became a place that offered encouragement and enthusiasm for women so they could succeed in their chosen career field.¹⁴⁴ The key to this shift was Marjorie Williams, the Club’s director for nearly twenty-five years. In the words of Edna Geister, writing for the YWCA’s “Woman’s Press” in 1925, Williams was more than just the director; she was “the executive secretary, the fire chief, the mother confessor, the bank pro tem., the Big Stick, and the beloved guardian angel, all in one.”¹⁴⁵ The *Indianapolis Star Magazine* described her as “a person at once a diplomat, a financial wizard, impeccably poised and groomed, worldly wise, spiritually sincere, tireless, sympathetic, and with a rock-ribbed sense of humor.”¹⁴⁶ Williams was practically synonymous with the famous residence, with almost every article about the Hollywood Studio Club mentioning her by name. Several other newspaper and magazine articles featured her rather than the club.¹⁴⁷ In 1946, Williams even participated in a nationwide radio broadcast with Louella Parsons, one of the most influential gossip columnists of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood.

More than just a sympathetic ear for the young women under her care, Marjorie Williams helped the residents thrive. Many Studio Club women who gained national, and even international, fame found success during Williams’ tenure, including Ayn Rand, Donna Reed, and

¹⁴⁴ Kenaga, “Making the ‘Studio Girl,’” 134.

¹⁴⁵ Edna Geister, “Ice-Breakers in Hollywood,” *The Woman’s Press*, 1924, found in Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁴⁶ Jessie Gobin Swintz, “Hollywood’s Sparkling Hoosier,” *Indianapolis Star* (Indianapolis, IN) August 1, 1954, found in YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 85, Folder 06-03, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁴⁷ Some examples of stories about Marjorie Williams, see Swintz, “Hollywood’s Sparkling Hoosier”; Kenyon Lee, “Hollywood Housemother,” *Movieland*, September 1946, 60-62, 86; Sarah Lockerbie, “Title to be determined by the Editor,” Article transcript, June 1954, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-13, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

Marilyn Monroe. Her secret to success, according to Dorothy Spiegel, one of her former residents was her enthusiasm in “not discouraging the girls.”¹⁴⁸ Ethel Sanford-Smith, Associate Executive Director of the Los Angeles YWCA in the 1970s, had heard many stories about how integral Williams was to the Club’s reputation and the residents’ success and happiness:

[Marjorie Williams] was really the guiding force and those young women respected her. She loved them and they knew it and she really set standards for them, for the people who came into the club. She gave them, I think, all the necessary warnings about what to expect when they went out on some of the interviews and...her knowledge of the industry and the respect that she had, the love that she had, of the girls, seemed to be what it took.¹⁴⁹

Williams’ encouraging attitude was in direct contrast to the attitude and beliefs of Will Hays and the cultural leaders of the previous years who sought to not only discourage young women from migrating to Hollywood, but also to discourage them from pursuing a career in the film industry. Under Williams, in fact, the purpose of the Hollywood Studio Club changed in significant ways. One of the most important ways it changed was its objective: at first a landing place for women when they failed, the Club became a place for women to begin their career by providing them a safe place to live until they succeeded. This change in purpose shaped the Hollywood Studio Club, into one of the most unique boarding houses for women in the United States. In addition, the Hollywood Studio Club stood out as a space where young women blended public work and private home. In this space, the residents pushed back against traditional norms that preferred to keep the boundary between the public and private spheres less flexible.

¹⁴⁸ Dorothy Spiegel Oral History, Part 1, December 13, 1989.

¹⁴⁹ Ethel Sanford-Smith Oral History, Part 2, October 20, 1989, Urban Archives General Oral Histories Collection, Box 4, Item 12, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

“The Girls Did It Themselves”: Women’s Autonomy at the Hollywood Studio Club

Besides being owned by a women’s association and directed by a woman, the female residents themselves took an active part in the operation of the Hollywood Studio Club, becoming very public examples of the positive effects of women’s autonomy. Almost immediately after their move into the original Carlos Avenue house, the residents elected officers from among their ranks to create a House Council, with a structure of one president, nine vice-presidents – each one representing a different studio, who were then appointed chairmen of various committees – two secretaries, and a treasurer. It appears that by the late 1920s, the studio-representative-cum-vice-presidents were dropped in favor of a general committee made up of between twelve and fifteen residents, though this structure may have differed throughout the years.¹⁵⁰ Special Committees were then organized for various reasons, such as for organizing important dances or teas. During the years of fundraising for the new building, the Fundraising and Building Committees were made up of teams of residents and members, whose responsibilities included, among many others, creating posters, making records and reports to give to potential donors at the teas they organized, and conceiving of possible fundraising events.¹⁵¹ As Merle Fortier, Assistant Director of the Club between 1963 and 1975, said succinctly about the residents’ contribution to the home, “the girls did it themselves.”¹⁵² Because of this, the Studio Club became a kind of microcosm of democracy, a place where anyone, no matter their career or class, could participate in making it better.

¹⁵⁰ “Studio Club Elects Officers,” *Hollywood Citizen* (Hollywood, CA) December 8, 1916, newspapers.com; Handbook for the Hollywood Studio Club, 1930s, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-24, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹⁵¹ “The Hollywood Studio Club Goes Ahead,” Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁵² Merle Fortier Oral History, Part 1, October 26, 1989.

As the residents worked together to make the Hollywood Studio Club a safe, collective, and democratic space, the collegial atmosphere naturally lent itself to one of its most defining characteristics: the support the residents received from each other. In his examination of the Club, Anthony Slide claims that “[p]ublicity relating to the Studio Club...always emphasized the camaraderie between the residents and their willingness to help each other. In reality, there was substantial competition for work.”¹⁵³ Slide is both correct and incorrect. He is correct when he states that there was substantial competition for work in Hollywood; with nearly one hundred girls entering the same difficult and demanding industry, it is very likely that multiple young women auditioned and applied for many of the same roles and positions. He is also correct that magazine and newspaper publicity emphasized the fellowship residents found at the Club. However, Slide seems to imply that all publicity about cooperation and camaraderie between residents was manufactured, and that residents’ competitive drive caused high levels of tension and friction in the house. Examinations of oral history sources and writings by the residents themselves reveal that this implication is incorrect; the camaraderie of the residents of the Hollywood Studio Club appeared so often in fan materials because it really existed there, not because fan magazine writers wanted to sugarcoat the Club’s realities.

Even from the beginning, the Hollywood Studio Club promised, and appeared to deliver, an atmosphere of collegiality and congeniality among the all-female residents. Though Slide just pages later admits that “[t]he women offered each other moral support,” which the women certainly did, it appears that it was more than just moral support that the women provided for each other.¹⁵⁴ Just months after its opening in 1916, Julia Lee, the YWCA secretary in charge of the Club, was quoted by Ruth Dennen of the *Los Angeles Examiner* as saying, “We work for one

¹⁵³ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*, 54.

¹⁵⁴ Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*, 56.

another's pleasure."¹⁵⁵ This sense of residents working for, doing for, and supporting one another was a constant thread throughout the Club's history. Dorothy Spiegel, a cartoonist and former resident between 1943 and 1948, provides a direct contrast to Slide's assertion that high competition prevented a true spirit of friendship and camaraderie among the residents:

It was a comfortable situation where you didn't have to make your own waves, you could ride along with somebody else, so to speak... There was a lot of helping out and opinions asked and given... Everybody was into everybody else's business because [their work] was related... You honored [other residents'] opinions... if they liked something you did it wasn't "Oh that's interesting," or "Oh, gee," or an answer like that, it was honest and knowledgeable, I guess you call it.¹⁵⁶

Merle Fortier described how the residents often shared nice clothing to go on auditions: "When they were going to go from interview to the studio, everybody would borrow from everybody else. Somebody had a beautiful pair of shoes, you know, and somebody else had a silk scarf. This way they all helped each other to look nice for their interview."¹⁵⁷ According to Spiegel, even in negative circumstances, the residents seemingly avoided the backbiting and gossipmongering that one might expect from a house full of women competing for the same jobs. When Marilyn Monroe, who lived at the Studio Club in the late 1940s prior to her super-stardom, had to leave due to unpaid room and board, the other girls were sympathetic, not malicious, in their behavior towards her.¹⁵⁸ From advice to clothing, the young women of the Hollywood Studio Club did more than just morally support each other – they literally lent clothes off their own back to help another girl succeed.

¹⁵⁵ Dennen, "Garden Spot Where Joy Is King is the 'Movie' Girl's Hollywood Y.W.C.A.," *The Los Angeles Examiner*, November 5, 1916, Scrapbook – Publicity 1915-1925, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 86, Folder 07-01, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁵⁶ Dorothy Spiegel Oral History, Part 1, December 13, 1989.

¹⁵⁷ Merle Fortier Oral History, Part 1, October 26, 1989.

¹⁵⁸ Dorothy Spiegel Oral History, Part 1, December 13, 1989.

Part of that support included celebration of others' achievements, as each resident's new job could contribute to a renewed sense of hope that other residents might also find success. When resident Dorothy Jordan appeared as leading lady in her first film, her friend and fellow resident Maureen O'Sullivan was allegedly elated for her: "The temperamental Maureen was so deeply impressed that her fingers fairly trembled as she fastened her friend into her new white satin dress," before she "inquire[d] dramatically, 'Oh, Dot, do you think I will ever have a chance to see myself on the screen as a leading lady?'"¹⁵⁹ While there was undoubtedly disappointment when some residents found success while others continued to struggle, there was still hope for a career in the industry, and the women of the Studio Club wanted to make sure that point was clear. Between 1935 and 1944, residents created "The Studio Club 'Spotlight'," a weekly newsletter to inform readers, likely mostly their fellow residents and perhaps a few outside members, of the happenings at the Hollywood Studio Club. In each edition, a section titled "Professionally Speaking" touted every career achievement of residents and former residents, especially as they related to the entertainment industry. This is an average sample, found in the February 18, 1935 issue:

Alice Baxter says business was bad last week – she only worked three days.
Julie Dillon spent two days at Palm Springs recently doing commercial posing for an automobile company.
Rosemary Smith is going to San Francisco this week for a radio audition.
Dorothy Daniels, a comparatively new arrival, has charge of the musical copywright [sic] department of the Electrical Research Products Incorporated (Erpi.)
Mary Bachtel is in the Sound Department at Columbia Studio.
Pearl Fletcher is working at RKO today.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Though quote is from a piece of publicity, making it difficult to tell if O'Sullivan really said those things, the publicity, nevertheless demonstrates that industry leaders recognized that one of the most important aspects of the Studio Club was that women supported other women. Carol Warren, Manuscript of "Hollywood's Big Family of Girls," 1931, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-13, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁶⁰ "Professionally Speaking," "The Studio Club 'Spotlight'," ed. Carol Warren, February 18, 1935, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-23, UAC, CSU-N.

It seems that the purpose of these small columns was not to discourage women from looking for a job in Hollywood or to push the women to compete with each other for jobs. Rather, even in this small sample, it is clear that many Studio Club residents found work in the film industry and the Studio Club residents hoped to encourage one another through the hardships that came with find a job in the public entertainment sector.

And, of course, as Slide contends, the fan magazines *did* emphasize the camaraderie between the women. In 1927, fan magazine writer Ruth Waterbury, writing for *Photoplay*, penned a series of articles titled “The Truth About Breaking into the Movies,” in which Waterbury reports her experiences pretending to be an aspiring actress attempting to break into the movies. Though she stayed at the Hollywood Studio Club during her stunt, Waterbury tells her audience little about the Club, except one important detail that portrayed fellowship between the residents: after Waterbury got a small part on a studio lot, the other residents earnestly helped her apply her make-up before she left for the studios in the morning.¹⁶¹ In 1946, popular weekly magazine *Collier’s* described how frumpy, unfashionable, or otherwise unglamorous women at the Club took tips from other residents. According to the article, after a few weeks under the tutelage of their compatriots, “they [began] to resemble movie material,” illustrating that at the Hollywood Studio Club, “[t]he greatest help the girls receive is from each other.”¹⁶² A journalist from *Indianapolis Star Magazine* described the atmosphere of the Club as “harmony in the midst of so much beauty, ambition, youth and sex.”¹⁶³ The supportive environment was one of the most

¹⁶¹ Ruth Waterbury, “The Truth About Breaking Into the Movies: Installment Two,” *Photoplay*, January 1927, pg38-39, 106-108; Ruth Waterbury, “The Truth About Breaking Into the Movies: Installment One,” *Photoplay*, February 1927, 41.

¹⁶² Smith, “Gateway to Glamor,” *Collier’s Magazine*, March 9, 1946, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 85, Folder 06-02, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁶³ Swintz, “Hollywood’s Sparkling Hoosier,” *The Indianapolis Star Magazine*, August 1, 1954, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, UAC, CSU-N.

important characteristics of the Club, as former resident and “Spotlight” editor Carol Warren wrote in an article: “Fascinating thing, this Studio Club life! So fascinating, in fact, that it leaves an indelible impression on the memory of every girl who has ever lived there. They all come back to visit – if not to live – and at every function given by the Club, one is bound to run into a group of former residents.”¹⁶⁴ Even women who were not residents gained significant support from the Club. In 1925, *Screenland* published a story about Betty Bronson, a silent star best known for her turn as Peter Pan in the 1924 film adaptation, who, though not a resident, spent “many evenings...under the hospitable club roof.” There, she received so much camaraderie and advice that Bronson credited those evenings as “very bright spots of her uncertain waiting time.” Within months of her time at the Studio Club, she won the role of Peter Pan, which catapulted her to stardom.¹⁶⁵

Any negative incidents appear to be relatively few and far between, as nearly all reports point to the Hollywood Studio Club being a supportive, safe, respectable haven for ambitious young women. According to one publication, even when word of disagreements between residents reached Marjorie Williams, it was handled without singling anyone out: “Miss Williams announced the difficulties to be discussed, in a manner as calm and impersonal as though they were questions concerning the merits of certain kinds of lipstick...But no names were mentioned, and only guilty consciences pronounced judgment.”¹⁶⁶ Judy Joanis, House Manager and staff for over thirty years, remembered how the supportive surroundings could reform behavior without any intervention on the part of the Club’s leadership: “We brought

¹⁶⁴ Carol Warren, Manuscript of “Hollywood’s Big Family of Girls,” 1931, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-13, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁶⁵ Grace Frye, “Betty Remembers,” *Screenland*, March 1925, 79, mediahistoryproject.org.

¹⁶⁶ Edna Geister, “Design for Living,” *The Woman’s Press*, June 1939, 276, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-17, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

[misfits] into the group. When they left, they were a credit to us. Even difficult girls responded to our good environment.”¹⁶⁷ While there may have been some degree of reform for some residents while they lived at the Studio Club, none of that reform came from deliberate attempts by leadership to change and modify young women’s behavior.

Much of this inviting atmosphere at the Hollywood Studio Club, and its ability to transform women’s behavior came not from the leaderships’ rules and regulations for residents, but instead from the autonomy and freedom that the women had while staying there. This a crucial aspect of the Club, for the residents became prominent and public examples of how young working women with almost complete freedom could avoid the moral pitfalls that many cultural leaders claimed that a career in the public workforce almost guaranteed. As national fan and lifestyle magazines profiled the Club in their pages, its women readers were presented with whole groups of women who had set out to the big city to find work in the film industry and who had maintained their sense of respectability throughout. Harry Crocker, wrote in *Good Housekeeping* in 1946 that “The Studio Club gives out-of-towners a good address. It establishes them in the eyes of the industry.”¹⁶⁸ In these two sentences, Crocker describes the club in two important ways: as a reputable residence and as a legitimate aid to a successful career in the film industry. Crocker gestures both toward encouraging young women aspiring to leave the home for a career (especially in Hollywood) and toward assuaging the fears of the young women’s guardians that her morality was not truly at stake – or at least would not be if she stayed at the Studio Club. With such a high reputation, Williams and her staff had much at stake in making

¹⁶⁷ Betty Whitney, “Studio Club House Mother Remembers Marilyn, Kim,” *Hollywood Independent*, December 21, 1972, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 82, Folder 03-18, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁶⁸ Crocker, “Assignment in Hollywood,” *Good Housekeeping*, September 1946, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-18, UAC, CSU-N.

sure the women who entered the Club met the “correct” standards. Those standards were encapsulated in the somewhat vague characteristic of “respectability,” which most often applied to aspiring residents of a particular class and race.

“Where Hollywood’s Good Girls Go”: Respectability at the Hollywood Studio Club

Heidi Kenaga summed up the importance of the concept of respectability and high moral reputation for the Club, explaining, “Since ‘inadequate moral supervision’ was assumed to be endemic to the workplace (especially in the film industry), the protection of female virtue was paramount for welfare reformers, particularly in regard to young, single, native-born, white women.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the Hollywood Studio Club, with its association with the YWCA, its female, white, middle-class director, and its host of white, mostly middle-class residents, appeared to promise – and deliver – adequate moral supervision. When potential residents applied to live at the Club, their morality had to be more or less verified before their application was accepted; a Studio Club employee followed-up with an applicant’s references to ascertain the young woman’s character.¹⁷⁰ Admitting only those women with the best moral reputations was meant to mitigate any negative behavior that may reflect poorly on the Studio Club, therefore reinforcing the high moral reputation of the Club, thus creating a kind of cyclical relationship between the Club and its residents. The high moral character of its residents meant that the Club retained the respectability necessary to entice the “appropriate” type of young women. This label of “respectability” at the Hollywood Studio Club simultaneously became a way that leaders kept track of their residents and part of the reason that residents were able to be so autonomous

¹⁶⁹ Kenaga, “Making the ‘Studio Girl’,” 131.

¹⁷⁰ Merle Fortier Oral History, Part 1, October 26, 1989.

without facing a great deal social pushback. In the process, the women of the Hollywood Studio Club became reflections of what many social leaders defined as an ideal American woman between the 1920s and 1940s: well-mannered, sexually pure, middle-class and white.

Respectability is a difficult concept to define, for it means many things to different groups of people throughout time. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow defines the concept broadly, saying that the desire for respectability “suggests that the respect a person hopes for and receives from others is important, which in turn necessitates bringing the question into a social context by asking, respect from whom?” In other words, “respectability” is malleable, taking on various meanings given the time and place in which it is enacted, and thus exactly defining it is both impossible and impractical.¹⁷¹ In the context of the Hollywood Studio Club between the 1920s and 1940s, “respectability” required that a woman have a “good” background and family life, ambition for a career, and sexual purity (or the appearance of it). Thus, when young, beautiful, middle-class women living at the Hollywood Studio Club behaved in ways that reflected contemporary middle-class values like modesty, sexual purity, and upward mobility; they were seen by studio heads and social leaders as respectable, thus bringing decency and reputability back to the studios. For reformers who hoped to clean up the film industry, the respectability of the women of the Hollywood Studio Club must have seemed like a boon to their campaign.

The concept of respectability at the Hollywood Studio Club hinged on two factors: whiteness and middle-classness. While there was no written mandate which demanded these potential residents be either white or middle-class, evidence shows that the ideal – and most common – resident was a young, middle-class white woman. However, it seems that the Club’s supportive atmosphere masked the importance of those qualifications, for residents saw the Club

¹⁷¹ Wuthnow, *American Misfits and the Making of Middle-Class Respectability*, 7.

as a democratic space where any “good girl,” no matter where she came from, might find support, friendship, and career success. This contradiction – that the Hollywood Studio Club was a place that claimed a democratic spirit while restricting true democracy in practice – is something that we will see in all three of the sites examined in this project. The Hollywood Studio Club was the earliest of those sites to become a prominent public illustration of the limits of democracy. By unintentionally tying together the characteristics of white middle-class womanhood and democracy, the women associated with the Hollywood Studio Club stood as public exemplars of what the ideal American womanhood between the late 1920s and mid-1940s.

The racial make-up of the Hollywood Studio Club mirrored that of Hollywood: a majority of its members and residents were white with few visible people of color. Los Angeles YWCA Associate Executive Director in the 1970s, Ethel Sanford-Smith, herself an African American, stated that to her recollection, “the Hollywood Studio Club had no blacks,” including on staff.¹⁷² Though one 1920s photograph from a scrapbook shows two African American women standing behind a group of residents posing for a photograph around Christmastime, there is no description that details what their role at the house might have been. Another photograph from the same scrapbook pasted under the heading “Personal Parties,” shows several women mingling around during a party where, just behind a group of young women chatting in the foreground, can be seen a middle-aged white woman handing something to an African American man dressed in a suit and tie.¹⁷³ Though there is, again, no information detailing anything in the photograph, the clothing intimates that it was taken in the late 1930s or early 1940s, meaning African American men and women visited and spent time at the Club. A

¹⁷² Ethel Sanford-Smith Oral History, Part 2, October 20, 1989.

¹⁷³ Photographs on unnumbered pages, Scrapbook, Young Women’s Christian Association 1894-1982 Collection, Box YWCA 101, Folder 1, UAC, CSU-N.

thorough examination of the Studio Club records do not reveal any documents about Black residents, visitors, or even employees at the Hollywood Studio Club.

Even if there were occasionally African Americans *at* the Hollywood Studio Club, there is very little evidence of an integrated Club, among residents or employees, until the 1960s.¹⁷⁴ As early as the 1870s, the YWCA was one of the few organizations not exclusively serving African Americans in which Black women could participate and, as such, the Y presented unique opportunities for biracial cooperation in a 1920s society that was still, by and large, segregated. The Hollywood Studio Club did not seem to offer the same kind of biracial cooperation, however, for even though there was no official race-based policy for residents and potential residents, the fact is that the Hollywood Studio Club was home for very few Black women or women of color at all. Ultimately, Sanford-Smith admitted, she did not think the segregation at the Hollywood Studio Club was purposeful, but rather the Hollywood Studio Club fell prey to the racial ideologies of the day which prized the contributions of white citizens far above those of Black residents: “It was no more deliberate than it was accepted...I don’t think it ever occurred to them that what they were doing was not right, because what they were *doing* was right, they just weren’t being inclusive.” (emphasis original)¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the leadership at

¹⁷⁴ Though I was unable to find any official resident lists or censuses, the scrapbook found in the Young Women’s Christian Association 1894-1982 Collection, Box YWCA 101, Folder 1, appears to be a scrapbook recognizing former Hollywood Studio Club residents who gained a measure of success in front of the screen or lens, as many are mentioned by name in fan magazines as connected to the Studio Club. This scrapbook includes photographs of just two Black women, though not until the 1960s: model Jeanne [Joanne] Deveraux and singer Mary Lee Whitney. If the photographs in the book are to be believed, other women residents of color include: Marianne Quon, Marie Gomez, Masami Saito, Rita Moreno, and Nancy Kwan. There may have been more women of color who stayed as residents but were unable to find fame in the entertainment industry.

¹⁷⁵ Ethel Sanford-Smith Oral History, Part 2, October 20, 1989; Adrienne Lash Jones, “Struggle among Saints: African American Women and the YWCA, 1870-1920,” in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*. 160-187.

the Hollywood Studio Club made it very clear that Black women had a limited role in the film industry, and thus, a limited role at the Hollywood Studio Club.

Other women of color associated with the Hollywood Studio Club had a slightly larger, but still diminished, role than African American women. In the Club's first two years, Tsuru Aoki, Japanese actress and wife to Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa, threw parties and visited the Hollywood Studio Club often, but after 1917, she is rarely mentioned in association with the club. As far as can be ascertained, Aoki is one of the few women celebrities of color to participate in the Club. Further, it hosted more Asian and Hispanic women residents than African American women residents, though only marginally.¹⁷⁶ And even if women of color lived there, the mainstream press never depicted any of them – from national magazines like *Photoplay*, *Picture-Play*, *Collier's* and *Photo Parade* to local newspapers, published photographs of residents showed an exclusively white population. To readers, the Hollywood Studio Club was, in the words of Sanford-Smith, “as segregated as it could be, it just didn't have signs.”¹⁷⁷ And because the Studio Club was one of the few famously respectable clubs for women in the film industry, respectability at the Club became synonymous with whiteness, thereby reflecting an ideal American characteristic in the 1920s and 1930s to a large audience.

With whiteness a near prerequisite to residency and membership at the Club, the second most important factor was class. As previously discussed, middle-class women's participation in attending the movies helped bring respectability to the movie theater and to moviegoing as a pastime, a process which the leaders of the Hollywood Studio Club – intentionally or unintentionally – replicated. By creating a boarding house specifically for women in the film

¹⁷⁶ This is possibly because of Los Angeles' proximity to Mexico and Central America and the state's substantial Asian and Asian-American population due to Asian immigration through California ports.

¹⁷⁷ Ethel Sanford-Smith Oral History, Part 2, October 20, 1989.

industry run by women connected to Hollywood, the leaders of the Studio Club tied together the moralizing force of middle-class women's reform and young working women's participation in the immoral film industry. Marjorie Williams and members of the all-female Board of Managers, as middle- and upper-middle-class women living in a large urban area, felt it their responsibility to reform the industry, just as other Progressive reformers had reformed other social ills in the two preceding decades. The reform enacted by Williams et. al came through their housing and feeding of middle-class women – or at least women with middle-class morals and behaviors – who would take their morality to the studio lots, raising the moral standards of films and the industry writ large.

The Hollywood Studio Club retained its high reputation by ensuring that most, if not all, of their residents had the same values that the middle-class had determined were most desirable. Prospective residents had to give references, whom a staff member of the Studio Club called to discuss the young woman and her background. Once references confirmed the young woman's character, the residents then had to maintain the standards that Williams and her staff had set in order to remain at the Club. The most important standard required that residents have unimpeachable sexual behavior, or they could find themselves out on the street. In an era where many members of the middle-class believed that, in the words of historian Elizabeth Alice Clement, "promiscuity for women could lead to ruin," women's sexuality had to be kept under control at the Hollywood Studio Club.¹⁷⁸ Dorothy Speigel remembers that a resident had been asked to leave because she had been promiscuous outside of the Club, "so they were watching

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 14. Clement studies the role of the working and immigrant classes in shaping "wider definitions of appropriate sexual behavior and values." The working class pushed back against the middle-class norms of sexuality, which, from the bottom up, led to a loosening of appropriate sexual behavior in private. However, through World War II, "Americans continued to condemn premarital intercourse in public discourse" (242).

that side of the reputation of the Club also...the administration kind of kept a protective eye on everybody.”¹⁷⁹ But this strict sexual code was seen as impractical by some. A story written by Omar Garrison from a 1949 *Los Angeles Mirror* described the many difficulties that young women in the film industry faced, many of whom were allegedly “cynically skeptical that virtue will ever hit the jackpot in Hollywood.” Allegedly, Garrison interviewed “One Tricky Vickie,” who belittled the high moral standards of the Hollywood Studio Club: “Take your mothball Susies at the Studio Club. They wear themselves ragged rehearsing for bit parts in one-night puppet shows. And at the end of the story, where are they? In some smelly bus station – a bag with a sag – waiting to blow town in a covered wagon.”¹⁸⁰ To this “Tricky Vicky,” some amount of sexual exchange was necessary to make it to the upper echelons of screen stars, something that the Hollywood Studio Club was hampering. By standing morally tall against an industry that demanded women’s immorality in the barter for success, the Hollywood Studio Club’s unwritten but enforced rule of sexual purity among residents emanated middle-class respectability. In order to maintain this respectability, prospective residents themselves had to uphold this middle-class respectability – even if they themselves were not in the economic middle class – before they could enter their name in the Club’s register.

Interestingly, however, the women who lived at the Studio Club believed that class did not matter – perhaps because a woman’s *cultural* class mattered more than her *economic* class did. It does not appear that any potential resident was turned away because she did not have enough money; as we have seen, many young women came to the Hollywood Studio Club without any money. In fact, the Club always had a Loan Fund which enabled, according to a

¹⁷⁹ Dorothy Speigel Oral History, Part 1, October 26, 1989.

¹⁸⁰ Omar Garrison, “Hollywood: Fame or Shame,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, July 13, 1949, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 85, Folder 06-05, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

handbook from the 1930s, “the Club to tide over any girls who need help through periods of temporary unemployment or illness.”¹⁸¹ The Club’s reputation did not depend on the amount of money that the women had but rather their appropriate behavior. A lack of economic distinction between residents proved a particularly democratic aspect of the Hollywood Studio Club. In her profile on the Studio Club that appeared in *Woman’s Press*, journalist Edna Geister described the wide range of jobs that the residents had, from actresses to scenario writers to radio singers, to the young women who had less glamorous jobs, such as the “courageous half-pint” who washes dishes at a local restaurant. Once they were within the walls of the Studio Club, however, “professional success or the possession of worldly goods meant nothing... The opinion of the level-eyed dishwasher was regarded as of as much value as that of the beautiful but petulant dancer.”¹⁸² Acting as a tiny microcosm of the United States, the Hollywood Studio Club democratically valued every voice from every class, and every resident, no matter her present class or the amount of money in her bank account, had the same chance to join the ranks of the rich and famous as every other resident. This likely seemed encouraging for many young women whose background may not have matched the characteristics of the ideal Club resident because it was middle-class morals – not middle-class money – that could secure her a place at the Hollywood Studio Club.

However, one way in which the Studio Club actually aligned with Hays’ vision of its purpose was by creating and retaining respectability for the industry. A 1919 report about Los Angeles and the moral conditions at the motion picture studios, shows that even in its first era,

¹⁸¹ Handbook for the Hollywood Studio Club, 1930s, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-24, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁸² Edna Geister, “Design for Living,” *Woman’s Press*, June 1939, 276, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, UAC, CSU-N.

the Club had a very high reputation: “It must be remembered that the girls living in the Studio Club are superior to a majority in the business.”¹⁸³ By its second era, the refrain about the Club and its respectability had not changed, as represented by a 1940s magazine photo spread titled “Where Hollywood’s Good Girls Go.” Among the pages are about a dozen photographs of the residents and rooms, with the women photographed in various poses around the grounds; some women are rehearsing dances, some women are sunbathing; one is chatting with Marjorie Williams, another working at the Club’s telephone switchboard. All are dressed simply, modestly, and fashionably – even the sunbathers are dressed in one-piece bathing suits or ensembles of shorts and sleeveless blouses so as not to reveal too much of their bodies. The story’s main caption, just under the title, reinforces the Studio Club’s high reputation: “Located at the corner of Lexington Avenue and Lodi Place in Hollywood, the Studio Club has been a film-capital institution for 21 years, has housed over 1000 girls from 16 countries. Godfathered by Will Hays, built with studio and star money, it’s a haven for good girls in Hollywood – who make good!”¹⁸⁴

“Most Are Serious”: Careers and Marriage the Hollywood Studio Club

With such a high, respectable reputation based on whiteness and middle-class values, most of the potential outcomes for the residents staying at the Hollywood Studio Club pointed toward a comfortable, middle-class life through any degree of success in a career or through marriage. What makes the Hollywood Studio Club unique, both for its time and within the scope of this project, is that, considering all of the liberating characteristics that the Hollywood Studio

¹⁸³ Report on the Motion Picture Industry in Los Angeles, ca. May 1919, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-30, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁸⁴ “Where Hollywood’s Good Girls Go,” Photographs by Jack Albin, *Photo Parade*, ca. 1940s, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 85, Folder 06-02, UAC, CSU-N.

Club offered, it did not ultimately reinforce traditional heterosexual marriage as the most preferable end to their stay at the Club, instead offering marriage as *one* desirable outcome. Of the three sites explored in this dissertation it is the only one that promised women some form of liberation without expecting them to give it up for a husband and children. It is also the only site that was established exclusively for women with women's needs in mind. These two facts are not coincidental. Because women were so central to the very operation of this female-only boarding house, only the Studio Club provided a truly liberatory experience for both its residents and the American women reading about it, not because the women living there declared that a career was better than marriage, but because either option was seen as a positive and acceptable result of women's independence.

Marjorie Williams, again, proves key to this unique aspect of the Hollywood Studio Club. Herself a single, middle-class, working woman for her entire life, Williams could not very well run a boarding house that emphasized only marriage as a solution for the young, single woman caught up in the excitement of working in the film industry. However, she also must have recognized that she could not run a house that suggested that women should forgo marriage for a life-long career – not in a society that valued marriage and family life so highly. Thus, while the Club's main function was helping young women find a job in the entertainment industry, and its publicity reflected that, Williams created an environment in the Club that celebrated a woman's marriage as much as it did a woman's career success. In doing so, Williams ensured the Club's survival against even the most conservative critics who might claim, as Jim Tully had in 1924, that the Hollywood Studio Club was compromising the young women's ability to settle down in a middle-class marriage where “they all belong.”¹⁸⁵ The women who lived at there were never

¹⁸⁵ Tully, “The House of Broken Dreams,” *Screenland*, September 1924, 79.

limited to only a career, nor were they expected to settle down in marriage, making the Hollywood Studio Club a liberating site for young, ambitious women, and making those women very public examples of what women's liberation could look like, even in a world that still expected women to surrender their bodies, minds, and dreams to the needs of a husband and children.

Marriage was just as likely an outcome – or perhaps even more likely – for the residents of the Hollywood Studio Club as was success in a career. One report from the early 1930s stated that roughly one hundred residents had married since their stay, while “only 20 to 25” had found “any great success” in their chosen field.¹⁸⁶ Any random sampling of issues of “The Studio Club Spotlight” newsletter almost always reveals news of a resident's marriage: “News of two recent marriages is proof that our former residents, although sometimes uncommunicative, keep in circulation, matrimonially speaking” (April 8, 1935); “Helen Mayer left Friday night for Portland, Oregon...and will later go to Boise, Idaho. Helen, who has for several years past taught dramatics with success at the Boise High School, plans to be married on September 1st.” (August 12, 1935); “Betty Lee Bonner, Club resident, formerly on the editorial staff of the Hollywood Citizen-News, married Lieut. George Pressy of the U.S.N. last week.” (January 6, 1936); “Margaret Harrison was married to Lieut. S.C. Lindholm last Monday at Yuma after an engagement of several months.” (September 22, 1936). The news of a resident's engagement was usually met with excitement from her housemates. When resident Virginia Sale became engaged to New York stage actor and studio writer Sam Wren, seven fellow club members plus Marjorie Williams attended her bridal shower.¹⁸⁷ Marriages of residents were especially exciting when the

¹⁸⁶ A Studio Club “Revue” 1916-1932, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 80, Folder 01-26, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁸⁷ “Former Residents Busy,” April 8, 1935; “Personal and Otherwise,” August 12, 1935; “Betty Lee Bonner Married,” January 6, 1936; “Virginia Sale To Marry,” April 1, 1935; “Virginia Sale's Shower,” April 8, 1935; all

husband-to-be was already part of Hollywood – and some members of Hollywood’s upper echelons married women who currently or had once lived at the Club: actors Alan Dinehart and Lewis Stone, director William Wyler, screenwriter Jesse Lasky Jr. (whose mother was on the board of the Hollywood Studio Club in its earliest years), and producer William Hawks (brother of famous director Howard Hawks).¹⁸⁸

But even if marriage was an acceptable, even desirable outcome, careers were paramount at the Hollywood Studio Club. The small number of twenty to twenty-five former residents who found “any great success” in their careers appears to take into account only the most famous women who found careers in front of the camera, naming leading ladies like Maureen O’Sullivan and ZaSu Pitts, as well as character actresses Virginia Sale and Dorothy Jordan. The report does admit, however, that one-third of the residents who stayed at the Hollywood Studio Club between 1916 and 1932 found careers in Hollywood behind the camera, or off the studio lots altogether. Sources tell of Studio Club girls in almost every department and facet of the film industry: actresses, dancers, script girls, film cutters and editors, screenwriters, models, animators, orchestral musicians, film technicians, hairdressers, costume designers, stand-ins, in various clerical positions on and off the studio lots, and even personal secretaries for stars and directors.¹⁸⁹ Though “success” in these non-acting roles may have been more difficult to

from “The Studio Club ‘Spotlight’,” ed. Carol Warren, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folders 02-24, 02-25, 02-27, UAC, CSU-N.; “Margaret Harrison Married,” “The Studio Club ‘Spotlight’,” ed. Carol Warren, Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 82, Folder 03-02, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁸⁸ Fact sheet for Ruth Waterbury, February 20, 1946, YWCA – Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 81, Folder 02-15, Urban Archives Center, California State University-Northridge.

¹⁸⁹ “Script Girls” were young women whose job it was to take notes and ensure continuity between the script and the shooting of the scene, often serving as personal assistants to directors. Film cutters were part of the editing process, for film strips literally had to be cut to edit together the desired scenes. Stand-ins served as body doubles for the stars as the technical crew set props, lighting, camera position, and other important parts of the scene. Holiday, “Hollywood’s Favorite Child” transcript, n.d.; Dorothy Speigel Oral History October 26, 1989; “No Title,” March 1944 “The Studio Club ‘Spotlight’: The Reincarnation Issue,” ed. Marian Clark, Hollywood Studio Club Collection,

materially display, especially when compared to the wealth fame that some of the Studio Club actresses achieved, there is a high likelihood that many of the women with expertise in their various fields found a great deal of success. What perhaps is more important than the simple fact of women obtaining various jobs around the industry is the fact that national publications discussed them. Take, for example, Harry Crocker's profile of the Hollywood Studio Club in *Good Housekeeping*, which informed his readers, "Not all Studio Club girls have become actresses. Some have become secretaries to stars and producers, some script girls, cutters, research workers, writers, hairdressers, costume designers, cartoonists, and singers." When this piece was published in 1946, *Good Housekeeping* had a circulation of over 2.5 million, meaning that hundreds of thousands of American women read of the many achievements of women in the labor sector, or at least in this particular industry, despite postwar concerns about women in the workforce.¹⁹⁰ Knowing this, it seems quite likely – though nearly impossible to confirm – that the Studio Club girls inspired at least one American woman to set out for work in the public sphere, whether in Hollywood or in a more local industry.

Marjorie Williams, key to the convention-bending aspects of the Hollywood Studio Club throughout her tenure, served as director for twenty-three years. Several newspaper articles written about Williams after her retirement in 1946 detailed her early career as a school superintendent and teacher and, of course, her many years at the Hollywood Studio Club, along

Box 81, Folder 02-15, UAC, CSU-N.; Lois Shirley, "The Girl who Played Greta Garbo," *Photoplay*, August 1929, 29, 108; Crocker, "Assignment in Hollywood," *Good Housekeeping*, September 1946, 13.

¹⁹⁰ Crocker, "Assignment in Hollywood," *Good Housekeeping*, September 1946, 13. The circulation figures were found in Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968): 140–143.

with the service she rendered for other Los Angeles civic and social agencies.¹⁹¹ After a life of public service, Williams sat down with journalist Kenyon Lee of *Movieland* to give her advice for young women trying to make it in Hollywood in 1946. According to the article, Marjorie Williams' first and last pieces of advice revolved, curiously, around the importance of marriage over careers – which stands in contrast to her behavior over the previous twenty-five years:

So, as an authority on the subject of girls who come to Hollywood with the hope of reaching stardom, Miss W. is the one person in Hollywood who knows whereof she speaks when she offers the following conclusions...According to Miss Williams, (1) The happiest young women, generally, are those who relinquish their stage, screen, or radio careers for a husband, home and children.

...

(7) It is easier for a girl to get a husband in Hollywood than a career.

(8) The most common error made by girls who fail to land a movie job in Hollywood, is the decision to stay in the screen capital rather than return to their home towns. This refusal to swallow pride, admit failure and try something else frequently leads to waywardness, trouble, and no end of romantic complications.

In a stunning contrast to her life's work, Williams suddenly claimed that marriage was the most desirable outcome for women, completely refuting the publicity that had come out about the Hollywood Studio Club under her directorship for decades. Apparently, Williams was now convinced of how incorrect she had been in encouraging women to enter the public sphere and have a career: "Today," writes Kenyon Lee, "the little white-haired woman, no larger than a whisper, basks in the desert sun at Palm Springs, and occasionally admits to an intimate friend that she regrets never having been married. 'A career is a nice thing,' she is wont to say, 'only you can't run your hand through its hair.'"¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Swintz, "Hollywood's Sparkling Hoosier," *Indianapolis Star Magazine*, August 1, 1954; Jean Muir, "Boardinghouse of Broken Hearts," *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 19, 1953, both in Hollywood Studio Club Collection, Box 85, Folder 06-03, UAC, CSU-N.

¹⁹² Lee, "Hollywood Housemother," *Movieland*, September 1946, 60-62, 86, Hollywood Studio Club Collection.

Given the reputations of fan magazines to sensationalize and fictionalize narratives to push certain ideologies, I am inclined to treat this account suspiciously. In no other profile of Marjorie Williams or the Hollywood Studio Club did any journalist document any similar sentiment from the Club's longtime director, nor does this statement match up with over twenty years of Williams' daily behavior. I was unable to determine if Williams actually felt or said what Lee quoted her as feeling and saying. Ultimately, it does not matter if she really spoke those words, because when Kenyon Lee wrote and published them in *Movieland*, a major fan magazine, the idea that the Hollywood Studio Club had served as a liberating site for women hoping to pursue a career in the entertainment industry, and perhaps thousands of women around the country, was undermined. As the post-World War II United States began a political and cultural swing back towards conservative gender roles, cultural leaders like Lee and the editorial team at *Movieland* and other fan magazines began dismantling the construction of womanhood, that of a young, ambitious morally middle-class, independent white woman, that the Hollywood Studio Club had built up for decades. Though the Club would continue for another thirty years, its liberating force waned in its last years. Marjorie Williams herself died just one year before its closure, having never married.¹⁹³

Conclusion

By the time the Hollywood Studio Club closed in 1976, tens of thousands of young women had passed through its doors. While very few of them became the big successes that they undoubtedly hoped for, there is no denying that the Hollywood Studio Club, for better or for worse, left an indelible impression on almost every single one of them. Many residents returned

¹⁹³ Death Record for Marjorie Williams, April 1, 1975, California, U.S. Death Index, 1940-1997, ancestry.com.

for teas, parties, or fundraising events. Some remained members, paying yearly dues to help support it. Many probably never went back as the years passed. Still, almost every former resident who recalled memories of the Studio Club, especially under the directorship of Marjorie Williams, remembered the support, kindness, and camaraderie they found while living there. Some residents admitted that they would not know if they would have had a successful career were it not for the Studio Club and the support they received.¹⁹⁴ Rather than competing with each other, as one might expect from a group of women who lived together and vied for many of the same jobs, evidence shows that the women of the Hollywood Studio Club rallied behind each other with every failure and every success, demonstrating the importance of women supporting women and the positive outcomes that support might inspire.

Publicity of the Hollywood Studio Club, influenced by Hays and other social and cultural leaders, painted the picture of a quaint boarding house where a mild-mannered housemother kept a watchful eye over ambitious but naïve young women who, more likely than not, would find themselves unemployed, penniless, and homesick, returning to their hometowns to lead more traditional lives. During the first era of the Club, much of that description was true. However, the real Hollywood Studio Club, especially in its second era, proved a much more complicated space. When run and backed by women like Marjorie Williams who embraced the social and cultural changes taking place around them, the Club's purpose changed from the last stop before home to the first stepping-stone on the way to a public career. Where Hays hoped to send untalented and ignorant "movie-struck girls" home to the private sphere, Williams worked to keep ambitious, hard-working young women in the public sphere, so they could reap the economic and social benefits of being a working woman in the 1920s and 1930s. With every

¹⁹⁴ Dorothy Speigel Oral History, October 26, 1989.

profile in fan magazines and national publications, more and more American women learned about a group of young women whose work in the film industry had not brought about their moral downfall, demonstrating that working women may not have been a threat to the American public after all.

With very few rules, no curfew, and no mandatory religious beliefs, the residents of the Hollywood Studio Club had immense autonomy and physical freedom, as long as they displayed “respectability” through whiteness and performance of middle-class morals and culture. Despite warnings from Hays et. al, when these independent white, culturally middle-class young women entered the public sphere to find a career, they did not categorically become public nuisances, victims of crimes, or sex workers. Most of the Studio Club girls, in fact, became productive members of society – both in public careers and the private domestic sphere. While the publicity of the Studio Club emphasized careers more often, Williams, the employees, and the residents celebrated every positive outcome, whether it be a career, marriage, or even returning home, if that was what the girl wanted. Refusing to limit women to one sphere over another, the Hollywood Studio Club was a liberating space both for the residents who lived there *and* millions of American women who hoped to carve out their own personal niche in the public sphere, especially in the public workforce.

And if movie fans, for some reason, did not read about the Hollywood Studio Club in the likes of *Photoplay*, *Good Housekeeping*, or *Movieland* magazines, a trip to the local RKO-owned movie theater in the fall of 1937 would introduce them to it – or, at least, something very close to it.

INTERMISSION 1

“I’ve Always Wanted to Live in an Atmosphere Like This”: *Stage Door* (1937) and the Hollywood Studio Club

In 1937, RKO executives announced that they were making a movie adaptation of “Stage Door,” an Edna Ferber and George Kaufman play which had premiered the year before in 1936. This announcement caused a stir among the film community. The film version, of the same title, would star Katharine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers, two of studio’s biggest stars. Part of the stir came from the very thought of Hepburn and Rogers working together – two similarly headstrong women who were not used to sharing the screen with another actress of equal caliber. The two had met a few years earlier in an unfortunate series of meetings and practical jokes, which culminated in Hepburn allegedly throwing water on Rogers’ new mink stole, quipping, “if it’s real mink, it won’t shrink.”¹⁹⁵ To add to the concern, each star’s career was on a different trajectory: Rogers was just off an incredibly successful run of movies with Fred Astaire, hoping soon to prove her worth as a serious actress as well, while Hepburn had become what the members of the Independent Theatre Owner’s Association called “Box Office Poison” after she made four consecutive films that failed with audiences.¹⁹⁶ Reports of on-set antagonisms akin to

¹⁹⁵ Ginger Rogers, *Ginger: My Story* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1991): 175.

¹⁹⁶ The Independent Theatre Owners Association took out a full-page advertisement in the trade journal *The Hollywood Reporter* on May 4, 1936, declaring certain stars “box office poison,” claiming audiences no longer wanted to see them onscreen. Of the five actors listed in the advertisement, four of them were women: Mae West, Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Katharine Hepburn. The only man was Edward Arnold. “Exhibitors Score Big Film Names,” *The San Francisco Examiner* May 5, 1938, newspapers.com. Hepburn’s “Box Office Poison” reputation is underscored by a telegram from Harry Brandt, the President of the Independent Theatre Owners

the mink stole bit even made their way into fan magazines. In August 1937, *Picturegoer* reported:

The battle of the century is being staged on the *Stage Door* set where Ginger Rogers is sharing honours with Katharine Hepburn. Neither has yet encountered such formidable feminine competition in a cast.

Hepburn won the first round by a large margin of points when she announced sweetly, “It’s so nice having Miss Rogers to play the ingenue in my new picture.”

Katie, however, nearly took the count when she got a glimpse of the gowns allotted to Ginger, but recovered in time to make a protest to the front office.

Film colony interest in the feud is heightened by the fact that Ginger Rogers was at one time seen about a great deal with Howard Hughes, now rumoured to be Katharine Hepburn’s fiancé.¹⁹⁷

Despite the media coverage of the alleged feud between the two stars, working on the set of *Stage Door* was, by all accounts, a professional, creative, and lively, if chaotic, experience. Upon its release in September 1937, the film garnered rave reviews, described by many as one of the best films of the year. Where Rogers and Hepburn earned most of the acclaim, critics and reviewers commended the multitude of strong performances from its many actresses. Mae Tinée of the *Chicago Tribune* told her readers, “Man is sure of little here below, but of one thing I am positive. You’re going to love ‘Stage Door!’” After briefly praising Hepburn, Rogers, actor Adolphe Menjou, and the stunning breakout performance of Andrea Leeds, Tinée continues, “Scenes are laid in a New York theatrical boarding house where live, hope, laugh, kid, cuss, and

Association, to Sam Briskin at RKO Studios: “Understand you are consider[ing] Katherine [sic] Hepburn in Stage Door consider this a colossal [sic] mistake STOP Believe you have a very valuable piece of property in this play STOP [U.S.] exhibitor with contracts in over sixty theatres with your company and interested in output of your company am advising strongly against Hepburn.” Telegram from Harry Brandt to Sam Briskin, January 8, 1937, STAGE DOOR – production notes, Paul Becker collection of Ginger Rogers RKO files, file f.25, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

¹⁹⁷ “Those Old Re-Issues,” *Picturegoer Weekly*, August 21, 1937, pg.6, Media History Digital Library from the Wisconsin for Film & Theater Research, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>.

weep stage struck girls who yern [sic] to see their names in electric lights...In the main, their story is like to that of the extra girl in Hollywood.”¹⁹⁸

Tinée is one of the few reviewers of *Stage Door* who drew a direct comparison between the fictional stage performers of the Footlights Club and the real movie performers of the Hollywood Studio Club. It is understandable, perhaps, that most reviewers failed to make the connection, as the original play from which the film was adapted was based on the Rehearsal Club, a women’s theatrical association founded in 1913 for the aid of young theatrical actresses in New York City, so the theatrical boarding house and the Hollywood boarding house may appear, on the surface, to be distinct from each other.¹⁹⁹ However, there is no denying that the Footlights Club of *Stage Door* was equally a stand-in for the Hollywood Studio Club as it was a stand-in for the Rehearsal Club. Film scholar Anthony Slide contends that *Stage Door*, the film, “finds a new plotline and dialogue based on the lives and gossip of the residents of the Hollywood Studio Club,” a statement underscored by the fact that the film’s director Gregory LaCava visited the Studio Club more than once to fashion the atmosphere of the film’s club.²⁰⁰ Whether audiences knew anything about the Hollywood Studio Club when they saw *Stage Door* may not have mattered. Though there is no mention of the Hollywood Studio Club in the film version of *Stage Door*, the movie nevertheless visually represented many of the same struggles

¹⁹⁸ Mae Tinée, “Movie Version of ‘Stage Door’ Is Given Rave,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1938, found in Scrapbook #7 of the Katharine Hepburn Papers, Margaret Herrick Library Special Collections, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

¹⁹⁹ There appears to be very little scholarship done about the Rehearsal Club. Originally designed as a cheap alternative to Broadway hotels in which actresses could eat food and rest between rehearsals, it eventually provided cheap lodging and meals to aspiring stage actresses just as the Hollywood Studio Club did for aspiring actresses in the film industry. Ann Folino White, “On Behalf of the Feminine Side of the Commercial Stage: The Institute of the Woman’s Theatre and Stagestruck Girls,” *Theatre Survey* 60, No. 1 (Jan 2019): 42.

²⁰⁰ Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2013): 57.

over respectability, relationships between women, and career and personal life outcomes that had defined the real Hollywood Studio Club. Through emulating the characters played by Hepburn and Rogers, who each defied gender expectations in their own ways, American women could begin to challenge the traditional gender roles of the 1920s and 1930s, which valued women's domain in the private home over their success in the public workforce. This is not to say, of course, that either *Stage Door* or the Hollywood Studio Club, just two cultural artifacts in a world of so many, could alone be responsible for breaking down gendered barriers to social equality; however, both the film and the place it ideologically and visually represented offered up positive images of women's respectability and autonomy in the late 1930s, helping to move the needle (ever so slightly) toward a national cultural expectation that demanded the same freedom for women in public spaces that white American men had enjoyed for over a century. Much like the Hollywood Studio Club itself, *Stage Door* is also the only movie examined in this project that does not undermine its liberating message, as its release came just as Hollywood publicity began increasingly emphasizing the domestic realm as women's primary responsibility.

Stage Door tells the story of two residents: Jean Maitland (Rogers) and Terry Randall (Hepburn), who live at the Footlights Club, an all-female theatrical boarding house in New York City. We are introduced first to Jean, who makes her entrance running down the stairs to accuse her roommate Linda (Gail Patrick) of stealing her stockings. As the film continues, we meet various other women living at the Footlights Club: Judith Canfield from Seattle (played by a very young Lucille Ball) who always dates timbermen from her hometown; Eve (Eve Arden), who carries a white cat around her shoulders as she moves about the house; Kay (Andrea Leeds), a one-hit-wonder struggling to book another acting part; and Ann (played by fifteen-year-old Ann

Miller), Jean's young dancing partner. The menagerie of the house also includes Hattie, the maid, Mrs. Orcutt, the housemother, and Miss Luther (Constance Collier), a retired stage actress who still takes acting very seriously. Soon enters Terry Randall, a new resident who, judging by her clothes, voice, and manner, is from a higher economic class than most of the other residents. Terry, we learn later, is the daughter of Henry Sims, the "wheat king," who, despite her wealth, wants to try a career on the stage without financial support from her father.

While rehearsing for a dance routine one day, Jean is spotted by Anthony Powell, famed stage producer who, until recently, had been showering attention on Linda in the form of jewels, furs, and nightclub dates.²⁰¹ Powell hires Jean and Ann to dance at Club Grotto, a club he partially owns. After their opening night, Powell invites Jean to his apartment for supper the next evening, which Jean agrees to do. The scene opens the next day on Judith and Eve sitting in the waiting room of Powell's casting office, joking about having seen Powell despite the fact that his secretary keeps telling callers that Powell is "not in." Kay enters the office for an appointment to audition for the lead in his new play, *Enchanted April*, a part she wants badly, only to learn that Powell has had to cancel his appointment with her. In the midst of her desperate pleas to see Powell, Kay faints. Terry, having just arrived in time to see Kay faint, rushes into Powell's office, yelling at him for refusing to see the people in his waiting room. Only moments after Powell kicks Terry out of his office, an investigator enters. The investigator's client, whom the investigator refuses to name, bribes Powell to hire Terry in the lead part of his new play.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Though I refer to all of the other characters by their first names, the other characters refer to Anthony Powell as "Powell" more often than Anthony or Tony, so I will refer to him as Powell.

²⁰² Audiences learn that the investigator's client was Terry's father, who hopes Terry will fail spectacularly in the lead role, give up her desire to act, and return home.

That evening in Powell's apartment we find Powell, charming and suave, attempting to seduce Jean. As he compliments her beauty and talent, he promises to mold her into a star, like Pygmalion did with Galatea. When a drunken Jean starts crying because Pygmalion and Galatea "didn't get married," Powell quickly rushes her out of the apartment. The next evening, Powell invites Terry over and he attempts the same ruse. Terry quickly shuts him down but proves her acting ability when she pretends to have been caught in an intimate moment with Powell as Jean storms into Powell's apartment, accusing him of having another woman there. After seeing this small amount of talent (and the money of the investigator's client in his pocket), Powell hires Terry for the part in *Enchanted April*, only to learn that she is temperamental, unprofessional, and, frankly, not very good at acting. However, the investigator will not allow Powell to cast anyone else and Terry struggles on. On opening night, after a nervous Terry leaves for the theater, Kay, malnourished and devastated at not having gotten the part, suffers a mental breakdown and, off screen, jumps out of a third story window. Just before the play starts, Jean breaks the news to a nervous Terry, blaming Terry for Kay's death. Though Terry does not want to go on, Miss Luther convinces her to take the stage for Kay and the people of the theater who were depending on her. Terry is a smash hit, but, in her short and emotional curtain speech, credits all of her performance to Kay. As she and Jean come together in the wake of Kay's tragic death, Terry has finally found her place at the Footlights Club. The film ends as another young woman enters the club to fill the vacancy left by Kay, and the audience is left with a sense that similar dramas will play out with every new young woman who comes through the front door.

Stage Door, the film, depicted a certain independence and autonomy for women that films, by the late 1930s, featured less often than they had in the early part of the decade.²⁰³ For

²⁰³ Norbert Lusk, "Norbert Lusk's Reviews: Stage Door," *Picture Play Magazine*, December 1937, pg.58, Media History Digital Library from the Wisconsin for Film & Theater Research, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>. For

Stage Door the film, part of that exciting feeling of autonomy and independence came from the fact that the actresses collaborated directly with director LaCava and scenarist Morrie Ryskind.

²⁰⁴ During rehearsals, the cast would play the scene in the living room set, ad-libbing and trying out dialogue, space, and movement, constantly rewriting scenes.²⁰⁵ Rogers stated that LaCava and Ryskind would “take time out from shooting to sit around and listen to the off-camera chitchat among us girls. He’d make notes on our conversations and then incorporate these off-the-cuff exchanges in dialogue.”²⁰⁶ Because of the cross-gender collaboration between filmmakers and actresses, the film feels vibrant, alive, and modern, especially for 1937. And, because of this, *Stage Door* the film offered a nuanced portrayal of women that directly mirrored women’s experiences at the real club for industry women, the Hollywood Studio Club.

One of the first things that we learn about the fictional Footlights Club is that the concept of respectability is quite important, in much the same way as it was important at the Hollywood Studio Club. Audiences first meet Jean as she rushes down the large staircase in the middle of the house, demanding that Linda, her roommate, give back the stockings she stole. As the two

discussion of the portrayal of female characters in films from the late 1930s and early 1940s, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008 [1988]): 43-66.

²⁰⁴ Elizabeth Kendall’s analysis provocatively labels *Stage Door* as a romantic comedy, explaining that the relationship develops between characters played by Hepburn and Rogers in parallel ways to male-female couples in other romantic movies like *It Happened One Night* (1935), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), and *My Man Godfrey* (1936). Elizabeth Kendall, *The Runaway Bride: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1930s* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990): chapter 8; Steve Neale summarizes the play version and the film version side by side, but analysis is minimum. Steve Neale, *Screening the Stage: Case Studies of Film Adaptations of Stage Plays and Musicals in the Classical Hollywood Era, 1914-1956* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press [John Libbey Publishing], 2017): chapter 8.

By all accounts, screenwriter Anthony Veiller was hired to rework the play’s script into a generally usable screenplay. Morrie Ryskind had no role to play in the original screenplay, instead brought to the set by director Gregory LaCava to rewrite scenes as the actors rehearsed, ad-libbed, and collaborated with LaCava and Ryskind to create a final product that was quick, snappy, and felt, to some extent, quite true to life. Veiller and Ryskind never met during the creation of *Stage Door*, and Ryskind never saw Veiller’s version of the script. Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 165.

²⁰⁵ Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 166.

²⁰⁶ Rogers, *Ginger: My Story*, 186.

verbally spar (“From now wear your own stockings or go barelegged,” quips Jean, “The places you go it doesn’t make any difference anyway.”), the matronly Mrs. Orcutt enters asking what the trouble is. Miss Luther answers haughtily, pointing to the two women, “Are you running a theatrical boarding house or a gymnasium?” Mrs. Orcutt, trying to get the women to stop fighting, demands, “How do you expect me to run a respectable boarding house if you—” only to be interrupted by Jean replying, “you’re doing the best you can with the people you’ve got,” an insult clearly directed at Linda. A few minutes later, after the fracas has died down and Linda has declared she is moving out of Jean’s room, Terry arrives at the Club. Dressed in a dark overcoat with big brass buttons and a large, fashionable hat, Terry’s class status is noticeably different than that of the young women dressed in slacks and simple dresses. Jean even mocks Terry’s clearly higher class, pantomiming walking a dog as she puts on a pretentious accent to say she “must take the greyhounds for a walk,” literally turning her nose up at Terry. As Terry waits for Mrs. Orcutt, she witnesses yet another fight between Jean and Linda, the two snapping off insults at each other so fast the dialogue is almost difficult to follow. Upon meeting Mrs. Orcutt, Terry asks, “This *is* a theatrical boarding house, isn’t it?”:

Mrs. Orcutt: It’s considered one of the finest boarding houses –
Terry: I was somewhat in doubt for a moment.

Just as at the Hollywood Studio Club, the Footlights Club depended on its reputation as “one of the finest boarding houses” to draw in members and secure its financial future, a reputation built upon young women’s “proper” (i.e. middle-class) femininity, behavior, and morals. Jean and Linda, whose aggression towards each other belies their supposed femininity – and the club’s reputation – threaten to upend that respectability with their fighting.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ *Stage Door*, directed by Gregory LaCava (RKO Radio Pictures, 1937), DVD (Turner Home Entertainment, 2005). This movie will be quoted often throughout the intermission and this citation applies to all further quotations of *Stage Door* (1937).

A pure sexual reputation was also just as important at the filmic Footlights Club as it was at the Studio Club, though much of it is implied rather than spoken. Filmmakers portray women's sexuality as valuable, something not worth exchanging for career success. Throughout the movie, the women often imply that meeting with Anthony Powell requires an exchange of sexual favors for his patronage. Though Jean knows what accepting an invitation to dinner at Powell's apartment really entails, she is desperate enough for a job that she is willing to sacrifice her virtue. Just before she leaves for her date with Powell, Jean discusses the situation with Terry, a conversation which explains Jean's justification in accepting Powell's invitation:

Jean: Why shouldn't I go out with him? I think he's very charming.

Terry: So are snakes.

Jean: Besides, if I don't go out with him, I'll probably lose my job and so will Ann and I'll be right back where I started from.

Terry: Oh, now, that's a rather lame excuse. You got along somehow before, didn't you?

Jean: I'm sick of getting along somehow.

Terry: Why don't you stick to your ideals? They're rather crude but they're alright.

Jean knows that meeting Powell is a break from her "ideals," but she also recognizes the economic benefit of going to his apartment – not just for herself, but for Ann too. She must decide between her "ideals," which guarantees her position at the Footlights Club, and the promise of a career. A successful career meant wealth and fame. Terry does not think the career is worth such sacrifice. During a brief pause in their verbal sparring, Terry notices that Jean is wearing one of her ermine coats. When Jean mumbles an apology for trying it on without her permission, Terry tells her to "wear it... You may as well go to perdition in ermine, you're sure to come back in rags." Clearly Jean's pure sexual reputation is at stake in keeping a date with Anthony Powell, a violation of which might keep her from the Footlights Club forever.

It is in the contrast between the individual responses of Jean and Terry to Anthony Powell's romantic (and sexual) advances that audiences see the real benefit of "sticking to their

ideals.” While in Powell’s apartment, Jean (perhaps purposefully) drinks too much during dinner, and manages to avoid falling prey to Powell’s “tired little boy routine,” as Linda called it. Once in his apartment, Powell would deliberately draw attention to two photographs – one of “Mrs. Powell” and one of “Junior” – before saying, “Lots of men who are separated from their wives simply let it be understood that they’re not married. Now I believe in this day and age that a man can have his home on the one hand and still live his own life...that is, any man of character.” Jean, quite intoxicated, is forced out the door after a misunderstanding between them about marriage. The next evening, Powell – already having dropped Jean as a potential protégé – invites Terry to his apartment. Though she is quite sober and resistant to Powell’s charms, Terry thinks on her feet, staging the scene of a more typical Powell seduction for Jean to see as she enters the apartment, pretending to be smitten with him. Jean, feeling betrayed, storms out, yelling, “I hope you two snakes will be very happy together!”

After assuring Terry that he was not romantically interested in Jean, Powell tries his routine on her. Terry, who does not need Powell’s financial assistance as desperately Jean does, sees right through his ruse. Powell, it is revealed by the well-educated and financially secured Terry, has neither a son (“that photograph has been used to advertise a certain military academy for a great number of years...[I know] because my brother went to that academy”) and nor a wife (“she’s done a lot of posing for face powder ads, I believe”). In less than a minute, Terry unmasks Powell, saving herself *and* Jean from the scandal and thus their accommodations at the Footlights Club. Powell clearly represents the unscrupulous producer who sexually exploited ambitious, or naïve young women who left their homes for a career on the stage – or the screen – while Terry represents the young woman who rises up the career ladder because she holds onto

her ideals, not because she compromises them.²⁰⁸ This was the same dichotomy – young innocent girl versus exploitative industry leader – that the press had warned real movie-struck girls about for years, a concern that the press resolved by encouraging the women, much like Terry told Jean, to “stick to your ideals.”

Friendships and antagonisms are played out across the screen at the Footlights Club in undoubtedly much the same way as they did across the floor of the Studio Club. Importantly, too, the filmmakers chose to represent multiple forms of relationships between the women, from supportive friendships to romantic rivals and everywhere in between. The filmmakers, including the actresses themselves, created images of multifaceted women who, at various times in the plot, elicit both the audience’s sympathy and its apathy. Thus, the women of the Footlights Club were complete characters with complicated motivations and actions rather than two-dimensional “good girls” and “bad girls.” Though this depiction of women was not necessarily revolutionary by the late 1930s, *Stage Door*, the film, still offers positive portrayals of working women who succeed in their public career because of the help they receive from the women around them. So much of the behavior of the women at the Footlights Club mirrored that of the women of the Studio Club, making the fictional Club a visual representation of the same values of the real Club for millions of American women.

Both Jean and Terry exemplify the nuances that the filmmakers instilled in the characters, for each character garners sympathy in some instances while inspiring disdain in others. Jean is equal parts ambitious, rude, witty, ruthless, and smart, while Terry is snobbish, determined, blunt, principled, and kind. Though Jean is first seen hurling vicious insults at Linda, she soon shows

²⁰⁸ Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 159.

herself to be an integral part of the house, articulating what Kendall calls the “populist ‘philosophy’” that the residents share.²⁰⁹ This populist ethos of the house is especially clear when Jean and the other residents openly laugh at Terry’s difficulties navigating the residents’ class status when she first arrives at the house. When Terry asks for accommodations with a private bath, the shot cuts quickly to Lucille Ball playing Judith, who lets out a loud, obvious laugh, joined by the background laughter of the other women. A few moments later, when Mrs. Orcutt tells her the price of accommodations, Terry replies, “That seems rather high, isn’t there some reduction by the week?” As the other residents laugh at her expense, Mrs. Orcutt assures her, “It *is* thirteen dollars a week.” Terry, for her part, starts out a rather unsympathetic character, as her class status clearly distinguishes her from the middle- and working-class girls of the Footlights Club. Worse, on her first night at the club, she chides the other residents for not being dedicated enough to the craft of acting – and wasting their time sitting around the living room of the Footlights Club making jokes. Her snobbery puts off most of the girls. As the film continues, however, Terry proves herself a member of the “Footlights sisterhood,” cemented by the curtain speech she gives after her successful opening night.²¹⁰

The support that the fictional residents receive from each other is an important similarity shared between the fictional club and the real club. According to Kendall, “*Stage Door*

²⁰⁹ Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 167. *Stage Door* might also fall under a category that Mary Beth Haralovich calls the “Proletarian Woman’s Film.” Unlike the woman’s film, popular in the late 1930s and early 1940s which usually focused on a female character’s sweeping, dramatic emotions as she navigates romance, the proletarian woman’s film centered its concern on the “economic parameters of woman’s social existence,” addressing how “economic realities of woman’s daily existence modify her presence within these traditional spaces.” Indeed, class and economic status have a great importance for the characters of *Stage Door*, as many of the women survive on meager earnings as they try to work their way to higher economic classes. Mary Beth Haralovich, “The Proletarian Woman’s Film of the 1930s: Contending with Censorship and Entertainment,” in *Screen Histories: A Screen Reader* eds. Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 82.

²¹⁰ The speech will be discussed in more detail later in the intermission. Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 176.

articulates a truth that was present everywhere in Hollywood yet rarely, if ever, got into the movies: that some women were happy being actresses; that some actresses sometimes helped each other.”²¹¹ The Footlights residents rally around each other in successes and in failures, just like the Studio Club residents. As Kay struggles to get the lead part in *Enchanted April*, which she believes is “her part” (she later implies that the play was based on her own life), several of the residents try to encourage her by reminding her of the rave reviews she received in a play the year before. One evening, two of the residents who performed on the stage that night return dejected because their show closed early. Clever retorts of sympathy from the other women rain down on them, showing how much more the women are invested in helping each other than competing against each other. Half of the support, it seems, comes in the women’s wise-cracks and skillful wordplay which, though humorous, also demonstrates a level of understanding and empathy among the women. One evening, Kay explains to Terry why the other residents make the jokes that Terry believes undermines their serious efforts:

Kay: You musn’t mind them... They’ll get to understand you after a while. Maybe you’ll get to understand them a little

Terry: Oh, I suppose so.

Kay: They do make a lot of noise, but it’s just to keep up their courage and hide their fears.

Terry: Well what have they got to be afraid of? Certainly they’re young enough to have courage.

Kay: Young enough to have fears, too. You saw how excited Jean and Ann got just now. And that wasn’t a job even, just a prospect of one. You don’t know what it means, waiting and hoping that some manager will interview you.

Their noise and their jokes, says Kay, function as a form of verbal support for each other, the laughter providing even the briefest relief from the struggles they are all facing. Given the fact that LaCava visited the Hollywood Studio Club to gain an understanding of what the atmosphere of an industry-specific boarding house was really like, it seems quite possible that *Stage Door*

²¹¹ Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 180.

gives a brief glimpse into how the women at the Studio Club supported each other through jokes, clever quips, and “noise” to help keep up their courage.

The fact that Kay is the one who delivers this message to Terry (and the audience) is significant, for Kay serves as a vehicle through which the importance of women supporting each other is most clearly seen. Kay is the character in the movie who needs the most support. When we first meet Kay, she is three weeks behind on rent, having been without a job for over a year. Assuring Mrs. Orcutt that she has “practically been promised a job,” Kay offers up the last of her money, only a portion of what is due, so that she can remain in the house for a little bit longer. Several residents notice, too, that Kay rarely eats, something that they all work together to remedy. After dinner one evening, Hattie (whose cooking is often mocked by the residents) sets a plate full of food in front of Kay, saying that she had been “practicing cookin’” in her spare time.²¹² Though Kay protests that she already had her dinner, Hattie insists on leaving the food there because Kay “may get hungry after a while and if I don’t hear any screams I’ll know I’m a success.” Though it is unclear if Kay eats the food, Hattie’s kind actions alert the audience that *everyone* in the club has noticed Kay’s situation, demonstrating just how thoroughly the idea of support had permeated the club’s ethos – even the hired help contributed to the populist philosophy of the house.

More than just a recipient of the support, Kay also articulates the supportive mentality that underscored the Footlights Club. On the evening of Kay’s birthday, after having just made a wish and blown out her candles, Kay hears from Miss Luther that Terry had been cast in the lead role of *Enchanted April*. The other women are outraged. “We can’t even have a birthday party without Randall or something else crabbing it” says Judith.

Olga: Why don’t you leave Randall alone, she hasn’t harmed anyone.

²¹² “I’m glad someone in that kitchen is practicing,” retorts Terry.

Eve: No, but she always looks like she's ready to start.

Kay: [sadly] Olga's right, she hasn't harmed anyone.

Eve: Well, all she did was steal the part you wanted to do.

Kay: It wasn't my part because I wanted it. Last year I took a part away from a girl who wanted it.

Eve: Oh, this is different...

Kay: [voice rising] It isn't different! Isn't there enough heartache in the theater without us hating each other?

Judith: Honey, you're crying.

Kay: [almost yelling] I'm crying because I'm happy. I've had my moment in the theater and I think Terry deserves her chance. If you say anything to her, that won't get the part for me, will it? There's going to be other parts and other plays...

Despite her supportive words, however, Kay is clearly devastated, bursting into tears over her own birthday cake. Her friends all move in to comfort her as the screen fades to black.

Even Kay's last onscreen appearance before her death is an act of support. Just before Terry leaves for the theater on opening night, Kay, who is still recovering from malnutrition and cannot come to opening night, finds Terry pacing her bedroom practicing lines nervously. Particularly stuck on one of her first lines, "the calla lilies are in bloom again," Terry asks Kay to watch her and give feedback. After the "calla lilies" line, Kay suggests that Terry hold the flowers in the crook of her arm "as she would a child. They [the male and female characters in the play] never had a child, you see..." Terry asks if Kay thinks that is what the author intended. Quietly, Kay, eyes dull, exhausted, and sad, replies, "I'm sure it is. And when she says, 'in memory of something that has died'..." Terry interrupts, realizing that Kay recognizes the play, and Kay snaps back that "it's not a play! It really happened...to someone I know." She tells Terry that Terry must be a success because it was not just Terry's opening night – it was Kay's, too. Then, almost as if snapping out of a spell, Kay sits Terry down, gets Terry a cup of tea, puts on Terry's shoes, and gives Terry some advice for opening night. As Terry is rushed out the door by Miss Luther, Kay stops her, giving her a ring that she had been given on her own opening night,

because it had brought her luck then and hopes it would bring her luck on this night too. Terry thanks her and rushes off as Kay returns upstairs, hearing the other residents wish Terry luck.

Over the shot of Kay ascending the staircase to the third floor, disembodied voices of the Club residents repeat and echo as Kay looks around confusedly, signaling to the audience that her mental state may not be fully sound. Soon, the residents' voices morph into a man's voice, similarly distorted and echoey, saying "five minutes, Miss Hamilton." Her confusion breaks into an excited smile. Kay's mind has transported her back to her own opening night, hearing the words of encouragement someone had told her before the curtain raised.²¹³ Eyes wide, smiling as if she was about to make an entrance on a stage, it is clear that Kay is having something akin to a mental breakdown. In the next scene, we learn she has fallen to her death from her third-floor window. Still, it is important to note that Kay's very last interaction with another resident is one of encouragement and assistance, despite her obvious distress and grief.

Kay is the ultimate example of how much young women needed the support of other women to succeed in the urban workforce. However, Kay is also the illustration of the tragedy that could befall young women if they did not get enough support from others. Interestingly, underscoring idea of women's aid and support, it is the women in the story who actually help Kay – it is men (representing the industry) who let her down. From the anonymous ex-boyfriend or husband (presumably a playwright) whom she "can't go back to" to Anthony Powell's exploitation of her talent for his own ambition and greed, men's lack of support ultimately lead to Kay's death, representing just how difficult and dangerous working – especially in the

²¹³ Audiences are somewhat led to assume this disembodied male voice is the "author" with whom Kay was romantically involved (if the play was based on her life), but nothing concrete is ever revealed about Kay's past.

entertainment industry – could be.²¹⁴ On the other hand, Kay’s relationships with women, from her friends to her landlady, literally save her life – at least for a while. Both a cautionary tale and an exemplar of the necessity of women’s support, Kay embodies the same challenges that the young women of the Hollywood Studio Club faced in their own house and within their own industry, along with the benefits of living in a home with other like-minded women.

Significantly, the most important relationship in the film is between two women, Jean and Terry, rather than between a man and a woman, quite atypical for 1930s Hollywood. Their relationship is dynamic and complicated, a relationship simultaneously built on a distrust underscored by class difference and a mutual respect for their shared desire for a stage career. As Terry begins unpacking her trunks in their room, Jean and Terry first test each other, engaging in a metaphorical sparring match, but not necessarily to gain dominance; this first match is Jean’s testing of Terry’s willingness to engage in the proletariat, populist atmosphere of the Footlights Club. Terry proves more than equal. Still, Kendall points out, their obvious class differences place them in adversarial positions normally played out between a man and a woman. As Terry is unpacking the three trunks of belongings she brought with her, a cross-class exchange finds the two women trading jabs and witty remarks like two boxers in the first round:

Jean: [examining a fur stole Terry has dropped on the bed] Fresh kill?

Terry: [sarcastically] Yes, I trapped them myself.

Jean: Do you mind if I ask a personal question?

Terry: Another one?

Jean: Are these trunks full of bodies?

Terry: [gesturing to two trunks] Just those but I don’t intend to unpack them.

Jean: I was just thinking if the room got too crowded we could live in the trunks.

²¹⁴ The filmmakers underscored just how little attachment Powell had for Kay despite her many attempts to audition for him, exposing his indifference toward anyone but his proteges. After Terry’s curtain speech, Ellsworth, one of Powell’s associates, says that Terry had “rather a strange quality,” and reminded him of the actress Powell had debuted last year.

Ellsworth: What was her name?

Powell: Uh...oh, Hamilton, Hamilton.

Ellsworth: Oh, yes, Kay Hamilton. Whatever happened to her?

Powell: Oh, she’s still around.

Terry: Yes, that's a good idea. [begins to pile dresses on Jean's outstretched arm resting on the top of a trunk] You don't mind helping me unpack? Oh, I beg your pardon, you're not the maid, are you?

Jean: Oh, that's quite alright.

...

Jean: [looking at a picture of Terry's grandfather] Well there is quite a family resemblance, especially around the whiskers.

Terry: That's a fairly intelligent observation for you.

The class antagonism is clear during their exchange, but each holds her ground, as if silently mutually approving of the other's efforts despite their differences. Indeed, according to Kendall, it is "their social differences that put Jean and Terry off each other, and attract them to each other."²¹⁵

Their relationship remains in flux throughout the film, they do not easily become friends, but they never fully distrust each other either. With each verbal sparring match, they slowly begin to depend on one another. "You know, you're funny," Jean tells Terry about halfway through the movie, after Terry lent Jean an ermine coat for her date with Powell. "In some ways you're not such a bad egg."²¹⁶ However, Jean's trust is betrayed, or so she thinks, when she catches Terry at Powell's apartment, the betrayal only exacerbated when word reaches the Club that Terry got the lead part in *Enchanted April* over Kay. The other residents see Terry's getting the role as treason to the populist ethics by her stealing the part away from Kay, who was literally starving to get it. Audiences know, however, that Terry paid for a doctor to visit Kay after she fainted in Powell's office, a fact which Terry wished to keep quiet from the other residents. Nevertheless, this act is very much in line with the collective atmosphere of the Footlights Club, for Terry sacrificed (to some extent) for Kay's benefit, not her own.

²¹⁵ Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 168-170.

²¹⁶ "No, as far as eggs go, I guess I have my points," replies Terry.

The dynamic relationship comes to a head just before Terry takes the stage on opening night. As the scene opens in Terry's dressing room, Jean stands over Terry, who is hunched over in a chair crying, having just learned of Kay's death.

Miss Luther: Poor darling, you shouldn't have told her. She isn't responsible for Kay's act.

Jean: She is responsible. It was Kay's part, it was Kay's life! But now it's too late...Kay is dead...Kay is dead, Kay who never harmed anyone, it's all because she [Terry] doesn't have any heart, because she's made out of ice...I'm gonna go sit out front because Kay asked me to be there. And every line she reads I'm gonna say 'that should've been Kay's line' and every move you make I'm gonna say 'that should have been Kay.' Kay, who's lying in a morgue all broken and alone. I dare you to go on tonight.

Though Terry wants to cancel the performance, Miss Luther talks her into going on, saying that everyone in the company, from the ushers to the women who clean out the theater, depended on her to give her best performance. It is in this moment that Terry truly recognizes the philosophy of camaraderie she had observed at the Footlights Club: a collective spirit, a sense of doing for others not because it is good for the individual but because it is good for all.

After a stunning performance, Terry's curtain speech is how she articulates to Jean and their fellow residents that she understands, that she is one of them, that she is sorry.²¹⁷ As she gives the speech, the camera pans across the row of seats where the other Footlights Club residents sit, all in tears as they themselves realize that Terry is one of them after all. Once the curtain has fallen, Jean quietly enters Terry's dressing room, tears in her eyes, and runs to embrace Terry, finally accepting her on behalf of all members of the Footlights Club. Their initial animosity at last melts into love, support, and friendship as Terry whispers, "Don't say anything.

²¹⁷ Terry's curtain speech is emotional and, says one audience member, "the oddest curtain speeches I've ever heard." As she speaks, the camera pans across the row of Footlights Club residents who had come to see Terry's opening night, all in tears: "I suppose that I should thank you on behalf of the company, and I know that I am grateful to you for your applause. But I must tell you that I don't deserve it. I am not responsible for what happened on this stage tonight. The person you should be applauding died a few hours ago...a young and brilliant actress, who could no longer find a spot in the theater, and it was for her more than for anyone else that I was able to go to on. And I hope that, wherever she is, she knows and understands and...forgives."

We'll go to her." With arms around each other, they leave out the back door of Terry's dressing room, Terry forsaking all of the celebrations of her opening night triumph. Fully cementing her loyalties to the Club, Terry returns to live at the Footlights Club after a successful tour in *Enchanted April*.

The unification and supportive ethos among the club residents, which now includes Terry, is underscored in the last scene, when Mary Lou, an actress from Louisiana with a distinct southern drawl, gets her first part. All the residents cheer excitedly, but upon learning that she has just one small line ("Let's go up to Westchester"), they begin to tease her, changing the rhythm and cadence of the line until it becomes a song they dance to. Terry, who, at the beginning of the film chided the girls for not taking their work seriously enough, now just sits nearby, laughing as the other residents play. It is as if she has finally recognized how right Kay was: their noise and their jokes keep everyone's spirits up; it is a way of supporting each other. At the end, too, Jean and Terry have come together as companions, much like any heterosexual couple in 1930s films. According to Kendall, Terry's return to the club after her success means that Jean and Terry "function...like a romantic comedy couple, the 'parents' of the Footlights Club, who have learned tolerance, loyalty, adventurousness, and all the other populist virtues, from each other."²¹⁸ Importantly, the leading couple demonstrated a three-dimensional relationship between two headstrong, career-minded women whose feelings and actions changed over time, something quite unusual for 1930s films.

In many ways, the final product of *Stage Door* displays a relationship between two ambitious women from different backgrounds not dissimilar to that of Rogers and Hepburn

²¹⁸ Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 180.

themselves.²¹⁹ A film about a group of young aspiring stage actresses in New York City living in a boarding house for aspiring stage actresses, *Stage Door* depicts the tension between friendship and competition for young women entering the same sector of the workforce. And in much the same way as Hepburn and Rogers put their personal disagreements aside to support each other's performance in the film, the fictional women of *Stage Door* put aside their personal animosities when the characters needed support from each other. Particularly dedicated film fans who saw *Stage Door* in 1937 may have recognized a similar ethos in the publicity of a similar institution for young women interested in the film industry in Los Angeles.

In one of the clearest parallels between the Footlights Club and the Hollywood Studio Club, the Footlights Club did not value a career over marriage or vice versa. Unlike the majority of films made during the 1930s in which love and marriage triumphed over all, marriage was not the only desirable outcome in *Stage Door*; instead the film offered multiple examples of how women might be successful in the workforce, or in the domestic sphere, or maybe even both. Similar to the Hollywood Studio Club, the desired outcome for many of the residents at the Footlights Club appeared to be careers, as demonstrated by Jean, Terry, and all the other club's residents. However, marriage was certainly still something the women pursued, as many of the residents go on dates and have boyfriends. During one post-dinner exchange at the club – after

²¹⁹ Ginger Rogers was born in Independence, Missouri and raised in the Midwest (Kansas City, Missouri and Fort Worth, Texas) by a single mother (who had written screenplays in Hollywood during the 1910s) until she was nine years old. In her teenage years, her mother was a theater critic around Fort Worth, which interested Rogers in performing. After winning a Charleston contest at fourteen years old, she toured on the Vaudeville circuit before earning a role in a Broadway hit, *Girl Crazy*, written by George and Ira Gershwin. She signed a Hollywood contract in 1930 at age 19. Katharine Hepburn, on the other hand, was born to wealthy and progressive parents in Hartford, Connecticut. Her father, Thomas Norval Hepburn, a urologist, helped establish the Social Hygiene Association and educated the public about venereal disease. Her mother, Katharine Houghton Hepburn, was a feminist activist, heading the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association, and campaigned for birth control with Margaret Sanger. While attending Bryn Mawr in the 1920s, Hepburn began performing in college plays, earning positive reviews in many of them. After graduating in 1928, she pursued roles on Broadway and in local theater companies, failing several times (but able to fall back on her family's financial resources when needed) before getting her big break in 1932 with *The Warrior's Husband*. She made her first Hollywood film that same year. Rogers, *Ginger: My Story*; Katharine Hepburn, *Me: Stories of My Life* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1991).

the residents make the prerequisite jokes about the food – Ann chides Jean for refusing to speak to Powell during rehearsals. As the women bandy about jokes of their opinions of Powell and of Jean, Olga sighs, “If it isn’t food, it’s men – can’t you talk about anything else?” Judith smirks and asks, “What else is there?” intimating that marriage could prove just as good for a woman as a career on the stage – without all the scrimping, saving, and starving that the stage usually required.

In fact, Judith is the only character in the film who gets married, to one of the Seattle timbermen she dates throughout the movie.²²⁰ In the last scene, as she descends the stairs, all of the residents cheer loudly, equally as excited for her to marry as they were for Mary Lou on getting her first part just moments before. After Judith tearfully says goodbye, in one final quip, Eve calls out, “gee, you should weep. This is the first job you’ve had in a year.” Then, as if acting as parents pushing their child to leave home for the first time, Jean and Terry clasp their arms together and literally scoop Judith up and out of the club. As Terry shuts the door, the two share a silent moment, smiling slightly at each other as if to say “well, there she goes.” Jean then shares a surprising sentiment:

Jean: Well, at least she’ll have a couple of kids to keep her company in her old age. What will we have? Some broken down memories and an old scrapbook which nobody will look at.

Terry: We’re probably a different race of people.

Jean: Maybe. Tonight I feel like sitting out in the moonlight having somebody hold my hand.

Terry’s simple statement, “We’re probably a different race of people,” reveals that she sees herself as outside the bounds of both traditional gender norms *and* traditional gendered desires (i.e. marriage). Throughout the film, Terry is only focused on her career – she is never shown

²²⁰ We only see said timbermen once at the Club, though they call Judith for dates multiple times during the film. Her future husband is played, briefly, by a young Jack Carson.

going on dates or pursuing a romantic partner.²²¹ Jean may have, to some extent, seen herself the same way; though she has one interaction with an old boyfriend, Bill, and she puts herself at the mercy of Powell in order to keep her job, Jean's reply of "Maybe," to Terry suggests that she also sees herself outside of the bounds of traditional gender norms, though perhaps not fully willing to give up her desires – she might occasionally want to sit out in the moonlight and have someone hold her hand, even if she does want a successful career on the stage. When taken together, Judith, Jean, and Terry represent three of the most desirable outcomes for Footlights Club residents – a career, a marriage, or some of both. In the era of the romantic comedy, it seems almost radical that marriage was not shown as *the* most desirable option – almost as radical as the fact that neither Hepburn nor Rogers had been dramatically swept up in the leading man's arms by the end. In this regard, the film's Club mirrored an important and unique aspect of the Hollywood Studio Club, which some of the film's watchers may have recognized: marriage was just one acceptable outcome for young women. At the Footlights Club, just like at the Studio Club, women were encouraged to pursue their goals, whatever they may be; they need not be limited to the domestic sphere any longer.

Though neither the Footlights Club nor the Hollywood Studio Club escaped animosities and tragedies, they nevertheless provided clear positive images of working women whose independence did not demand containment in marriage. Both clubs maintained a reputation as "one of the finest boarding houses" for their respective industries, which built on a foundation of

²²¹ This is in complete contrast to the Terry of the play *Stage Door*, who falls in love with David Kingsley, the communist playwright, at the end of the play. In earlier drafts of the film, both Terry and Jean had love interests by the end of the film. Incidentally, many of Terry's qualities in the movie could also apply to Hepburn, who had just one short-lived marriage, a long-term non-marital relationship with another actor, and no children, dedicating her life to the craft of acting. One has to wonder if the final version of Terry was designed around Katharine Hepburn herself. Kendall, *The Runaway Bride*, 167.

the residents' pure sexual reputations; the relationships between women in the fictional club no doubt mirrored much of the atmosphere at the real one; and each club offered multiple positive potential outcomes for its residents, not declaring that a career was better than marriage or vice versa. Thanks to *Stage Door*, the very same messages and values disseminated by publicity about the Hollywood Studio Club got disseminated to millions of more people than just those who read fan magazines: messages about pursuing public careers, about the safety provided by the illusion of middle-class respectability, about the necessity of women's friendships in difficult times, and about women's independence. However, as we will see, after the release of *Stage Door*, Hollywood ramped up its emphasis on women's responsibility to their homes and families rather than careers.

In some of the last lines of dialogue from Jean and Terry, just after Judith leaves with her new husband, Jean sighs, "Poor kid. Why she hated to leave a dump like this is a mystery." In response, Terry expresses a heartfelt sentiment: "Oh I know how she feels. To me, it would be like leaving the house where I was born." By all accounts, almost any former resident of the Hollywood Studio Club would have felt the same way.

CHAPTER 2

“All We Had Before Was the Spud”: Celebrity Women at the Sun Valley Ski Resort, 1936-1950

In the first winter Olympic Games after World War II ended, an eager, if inexperienced, American women’s ski team arrived in St. Moritz, Switzerland without a coach and with few expectations of performing well against European women who had dominated the ski circuit for years. Skiing legends Walter Prager and Alf Engen coached the American men’s team, but the only training the women’s team received was advice to get physically fit during the summer months and to avoid wearing high heels, which might stretch out the women’s Achilles tendons.²²² After unsuccessful and contradictory coaching attempts by every member of the men’s team, the women’s manager, Alice Kiaer, hired a Swiss slalom specialist, Walter Haensli, to coach the women, at least nominally. Though journalist Peter Pringsheim, writing for *Ski Illustrated* in December 1947, admitted there was “little doubt that a stronger American women’s team has never before been sent into Olympic competition,” the press corps hardly expected these women to perform well enough even to mention in their publications.²²³ “Oh,” a journalist replied when asked if they wanted to interview any members of the women’s team, “if someone breaks a leg, let us know and we’ll send that home.”²²⁴

²²² Luanne Pfeifer, *Gretchen’s Gold: The Story of Gretchen Fraser, America’s First Gold Medalist in Olympic Skiing* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, Inc., 1996): 56.

²²³ Peter Pringsheim, “Olympic Preview,” *Ski Illustrated* 12, no. 1 (Dec. 1947): 48.

²²⁴ Pfeifer, *Gretchen’s Gold*, 65.

The U.S. Women's 1948 ski team was led by veteran Gretchen Fraser, who, despite qualifying for the 1940 Games, was skiing in her first Olympics. What little press the team received was mostly focused on a talented 15-year-old Vermont native, Andrea Mead, who took first place in the slalom event and second in the downhill during the Olympic tryouts. Given the relative youth and inexperience of the U.S. team, combined with the high expectations for their Swiss and French competition, hardly anyone expected the American women skiers to place in the top ten, much less win any medals. From this point of view, the press reported, if the team could not perform as well as their competitors, then at least the team *looked* good: "Though American girl skiers are easier on the eyes than most of the foreign competitors...the blunt truth is that our feminine slalom and downhill entrants haven't much of a chance at St. Moritz against the daredevil Wurele twins of Canada and the accomplished Mlle. Georgette Thioliere of France."²²⁵ The American women were prettier, but less talented, according to the press. Sure enough, in the Downhill event, the best American skier was Brynhild Grasmoen, who finished 12th. In the Combined Slalom event, which averaged a skier's score from a slalom run with their score from a downhill run, Gretchen Fraser, quite unexpectedly, managed to win the silver, just behind Austrian Trude Beiser. The next day, February 5, 1948, featured the last Alpine skiing event for the women: the slalom. Fraser, just a day after her surprise silver-medal win, drew bib number one for the slalom competition, making her the first skier down the slopes. With a combined run time of 1:57.2, she watched as competitor after competitor attempted to beat her time. Though Swiss Antoinette Meyer finished her second run .5 seconds ahead of Fraser's second run time, Fraser's first run had been a full second faster than Meyer's. No one else had skied faster. Suddenly, Gretchen Fraser, only six days shy of turning 29 years old, "a good and

²²⁵ George Trevar of the North American Newspaper Alliance, as quoted in Pfeifer, *Gretchen's Gold*, 65.

experienced racer, but never a world-beater,” said journalist James Laughlin, was a gold medal winner – the first American skier, man or woman, to win a gold medal in any skiing event.²²⁶

Gretchen Fraser’s historic win made her an immediate celebrity. Still on the slopes and basking in her hard-won victory, she told a reporter, “I trained at Sun Valley,” words printed in newspapers around the country. After Fraser’s endorsement, Sun Valley, a ski resort in a previously sleepy little hamlet in central Idaho, was, according to Fraser’s biographer, “on ski maps forevermore.”²²⁷ Arguably, however, Sun Valley had been on ski maps for over a decade prior to Fraser’s win; indeed, since its grand opening in 1936, it had served as a winter playground for the rich and famous. Though Fraser was the first competitive woman skier to tout the benefits of Sun Valley, she was hardly the first famous woman to bring Sun Valley to the forefront of the public’s mind. On the contrary, celebrity women had been skiing, skating, and playing at Sun Valley for years prior, and fan magazines and local newspapers alike had been reporting on their activities all along. And these women were not traveling to Sun Valley simply to be seen at a popular place—they were often skiing with professionals in a newly popular form of physical recreation at a time when most women’s lifestyle and movie fan magazines still advised that women avoid strenuous exercise at nearly all cost.²²⁸

²²⁶ James Laughlin, “International Racing Spews Discord,” *Ski Magazine* 13 no.1 (November 1, 1948): 10.

²²⁷ Pfeifer, *Gretchen’s Gold*, 72.

²²⁸ For a few specific examples of how fan magazines and lifestyle magazines discouraged strenuous exercise see: “Keeping That Hollywood Figure,” *Hollywood*, February 1937, 30, Media History Digital Library from the Wisconsin for Film & Theater Research, <https://mediahistoryproject.org>; Mary Marshall, “Everything’s Under the Sun,” *Modern Screen*, August 1938, 42-43, 70, 72, mediahistoryproject.org; Madame Sylvia, “Cutting a Figure for Yourself,” *Photoplay*, March 1937, 71-73, 112; Ben Maddox, “Fine Figure Frenzy,” *Silver Screen*, May 1937, 30-31, 81-82; Throughout the late 1930s, every issue of *Good Housekeeping* included an article titled “The Beauty Clinic,” which answered supposed reader letters about the various ways American women could modify their appearance to meet beauty standards, including everything from fashion to diet to exercises for women to gain their desired result. *Good Housekeeping* Archive, Cornell University Library Digital Collections, accessed September 18, 2023.

Stories of Hollywood women at Sun Valley demonstrated that, rather than using their bodies just for nationalistic purposes of reproductive and the health of the nation, American women could also make their bodies strong and healthy for their own benefit and enjoyment as well.²²⁹ According to sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis, women have long functioned as the reproducers of the nation in multiple ways: biologically, first and foremost, as well as culturally and symbolically.²³⁰ Since the founding of the republic, American women's main social role was as wife and mother, whose contribution to cultural and symbolic reproduction was limited to teaching her children "proper" American values like self-government and civic virtue in the private home.²³¹ By the 1930s, although it was increasingly common for women to be in the workforce and to participate in politics, women's public physical recreation was severely limited. Celebrity women at Sun Valley challenged women's longstanding social role, demonstrating that their bodies had more self-serving purposes than to boost population and to inculcate young Americans with correct ideals. Even so, however, narratives that appeared in Hollywood publicity about Sun Valley and the women who skied there emphasized more traditional gender roles of the 1930s and 1940s. Examining celebrity culture and Sun Valley helps us see how the film industry ultimately worked to contain women's public physicality within the domestic

²²⁹ Linda J. Borish discusses how nineteenth century visions of "Muscular Christianity" and the "Robust Woman" from reformers Thomas Higginson and Catharine Beecher promoted the connection between individual and national health. As "health became linked with promoting Christian society," reformers like Higginson and Beecher emphasized "the importance of sound health" so that American men and women could have the necessary physical and moral energy to perform the roles demanded by their separate spheres: for men, it was developing moral character for their roles as businessmen, politicians, and members of other public institutions; for women, it was for housework and child rearing as the home's moral guardian. These same ideas remain in the public rhetoric about women's exercise by the time Sun Valley opens in the late 1930s. Linda J. Borish, "The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian: Catharine Beecher, Thomas Higginson, and Their Vision of American Society, Health, and Physical Activities," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 4, no. 2 (1987): 140.

²³⁰ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing, 1997): 2.

²³¹ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980): 248.

sphere by tying it to women's duty to the nation, even as celebrity women behaved in ways that might have encouraged women to participate in exercise simply because they enjoyed it.

While women's activities at Sun Valley were not the only means by which American women challenged the traditional gendered social order during the early twentieth century, Sun Valley was crucial to understanding the multifaceted ways that women confronted their relegation to the private sphere. Celebrity women did not use the resort as a place in which to dismantle orthodox ideas about women's proper place in society, but more as a place where women could safely confront the gender order that had existed in the United States for well over a century. Ultimately, women's activity at Sun Valley did not prove particularly revolutionary, as much of the coverage in fan magazines and fictional films encouraged women to return to the private sphere in between their public forays on the ski slopes. Women's activity at the resort did, however, promote women's place in athletic spaces nearly thirty years before Americans had any widespread interest in women's professional sports.²³² As celebrity women played at Sun Valley, they promoted ideas about how American women could use their bodies: to make themselves strong and healthy, not *just* because it would be good for future generations, but also because it would be good for them as individuals.

Unlike men who could do physical activity in public with no repercussions, women skiing at Sun Valley had to legitimize their participation in an activity seen as inherently masculine by many Americans. Women combatted potential accusations of masculinity through their glamorous and fashionable wardrobe – feminine dress negated the masculinity of the sport.

²³² Allen Guttman, *Women's Sport: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press: 1991); *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, eds. J.A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park (Totowa: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd: 1987); Ruth M. Sparhawk, Mary E. Leslie, Phyllis Y. Turbow, and Zina R. Rose, *American Women in Sport, 1887-1987: A 100-Year Chronology* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1989); Gregory Stanley Kent, *The Rise and Fall of the Sportswoman: Women's Health, Fitness, and Athletics, 1860-1949* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996); Jaime Schultz, *Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S. Women's Sport* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

Because women had to dress the part in order to avoid transgressing the gendered order it becomes clear that there was a limit to the boundaries that women at Sun Valley could cross. However, all of this boundary crossing was possible because Sun Valley had a leveling affect: a feeling that when celebrities were in town, they were just like other skiers; similarly, gender did not preclude women from enjoying the resort. Through a patina of democratization that the resort claimed (which, we will see, was limited by race and class), celebrity women at Sun Valley showed how American women could begin to push back against their traditional private roles of physical and social reproduction by experimenting with their bodies in public for their own enjoyment. In a precarious tightrope walk, women engaged in public physical recreation to resist contemporary claims that they belonged primarily in private, while the makers of fan culture argued that their public activities were no threat to their traditional private roles as wife and mother. This signaled an important but contradictory contribution to two debates in American society during the 1930s and 1940s: one over women's proper domain and the other over women's physical autonomy.²³³

Oh, Say Can You Ski: The History of Skiing and Sun Valley

The history of early skiing is limited almost exclusively to Northern and Central Europe. Evidence of skis used by Eurasian and European peoples, mostly for hunting and transport, dates back nearly 8,000 years. Such utility continued in Scandinavia for centuries.²³⁴ However,

²³³ The concept that women can play sports as long as their primary domain remains the private sphere is what Precilla Y.L. Choi calls "hegemonic femininity." Choi states that "hegemonic femininity is necessary in the world of women's sport and recreational exercise in order to prevent a diminishing of the visible differences between the masculine and the feminine." My project examines how Hollywood helped create hegemonic femininity of the 1930s and 1940s through publicity about the Sun Valley ski resort. Precilla Y.L. Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman* (London: Routledge, 2000): 8.

²³⁴ Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity: A Cultural and Environmental History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015): 30.

beginning in the early nineteenth century, Norway, in particular, used skiing as a tool for creating Norwegian nationalism as the new country struggled to differentiate itself from Sweden and Finland. Norwegian nation builders promoted skiing, both utilitarian and competitive, to make strong Norwegian male citizens through physical exertion; this would not only create strong citizens, but also a stronger nation. It was also in Norway, according to historian E. John B. Allen, that skis were first used for recreation, not just for hunting or for movement at around this same time.²³⁵ Norwegian skiing, sometimes called Telemark skiing, emphasized endurance over long treks across lowlands and traverses up and down mountains, akin to what is currently referred to as cross-country skiing. Hard physical exertion was a central tenant of this style of skiing, making it key to the development of Norwegian masculinity.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, recreational skiing in Norway was still connected to national identity, but skiing as recreation slowly began spreading across the European continent, especially as Norwegian students studied at German schools and brought the sport to the region around the Alps. Interest in the sport across the continent greatly expanded over the next several decades, especially after Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen traversed Greenland on skis in 1888.²³⁶ Alpine skiing, however, was of a vastly different character than the Norwegian style, given the geographical nature of the Alps. While Telemark skiing emphasized endurance over long distances and fairly moderate descents, the Alpine method, according to Denning, “relied less on long, sweeping turns than on short, rapid changes in direction, aided by the use of a long staff, to negotiate steep slopes.”²³⁷ Speed quickly became indispensable for

²³⁵ E. John B. Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing: From Antiquity to World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007): 39.

²³⁶ Denning, *Skiing into Modernity*, 34-36.

²³⁷ Denning, *Skiing into Modernity*, 62.

Alpine skiers, and British skiing pioneer Arnold Lunn organized the first downhill race in 1921 for the British national ski championship, though the first race was judged on style rather than speed.²³⁸ Soon, Lunn and other British skiers revolutionized Alpine skiing, with pace differentiating the Alpine method from the Nordic method. Because of its speed – and inherent danger – Alpine skiing, which exemplified masculine virtues like strength, tenacity, and physical exertion, was considered an exclusively male realm until World War I.²³⁹

Nevertheless, European women did ski. Much like men, women skied first for utilitarian purposes. As competitive skiing became more common in Scandinavia, only men were allowed to compete. It was not until 1863 that the first woman, sixteen-year-old Ingrid Olsdatter Vestbyen, participated in an official ski race.²⁴⁰ For most European women in the following decades, however, their ability to ski was dependent on the wealthy men to whom they were connected. Reflecting much of the contemporary Victorian debates over gender relations – which expected that women’s role in society was relegated to the private sphere, and any public foray must include an accompanying male – most women who skied accompanied their middle- and upper-class husbands or fathers to winter vacations. While on vacation, women had to maintain proper aesthetic standards on the slopes without showing any signs of physical exertion.²⁴¹ One female skiing advocate, Olive Hocking, declared in 1914, “It has been urged by some, it really has, that they do not want a woman to ski well – she is only expected to ‘look nice’ on the

²³⁸ It was originally judged for style, according to historian E. John B. Allen, because “being fast required effort, and effort was the last thing a lady or gentleman should do.” Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 102.

²³⁹ Denning, *Skiing into Modernity*, 45; Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 140.

²⁴⁰ Roland Huntford, *Two Planks and a Passion: The Dramatic History of Skiing* (New York: Continuum US, 2008): 75-76.

²⁴¹ Denning, *Skiing into Modernity*, 43; Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 144.

snow.”²⁴² Though opinions of medical professionals and societal expectations created significant barriers to women’s access to it, the graceful “physical mechanics” of skiing, especially the Alpine style, which required far less exertion than the Nordic style, meant that elite women continued to ski without much pushback. As women traversed up and down mountains on wooden planks, they gained a semblance of independence that had not yet been fully realized in the rest of the sporting world for women; as they kept up with men on the slopes, they began to develop a kind of equality that had yet to be seen in politics or society at large.²⁴³ Prior to World War I, skiing, then, became a crucial form of exercise and sociability for middle- and upper-class European women that would not reach the United States until at least the 1920s.

Skiing came to the United States in much the same way it came to continental Europe – through Scandinavian immigrants as early as the 1850s. These pioneering skiers, mainly in the Midwest, used long planks on their feet to get to school, work, and church during the winter in the 1890s.²⁴⁴ Between 1880 and 1910, new clubs throughout the Midwest began promoting “skisport,” skiing not for utility but for recreation and competition. Many club charters limited membership to ethnic Scandinavians, as the club founders, especially those of Norwegian descent, hoped to retain the concept of *Ski-Idraet*, or the idea that physical exercise of skiing could promote “strength, manliness and toughness” in ethnic Norwegians.²⁴⁵ Over the next thirty years, however, as native-born Americans began to enjoy the recreation, skisport took on a stronger emphasis on individual competitiveness and record-breaking achievement; it became

²⁴² As quoted in Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 143-144.

²⁴³ Denning, *Skiing into Modernity*, 46-47.

²⁴⁴ Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 216.

²⁴⁵ E. John B. Allen, *From Skisport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of an American Sport, 1840-1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993): 10.

not about building up bodies for the good of the nation, but about who could jump the farthest and ski the fastest.²⁴⁶ As the Alpine method proliferated throughout Europe, Austrian skiers, thoroughly adept in this new style, immigrated to the Northeastern United States where skiing was already prominent: the Lake Placid Club in New York state and Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.²⁴⁷ Led by Austrian skiing pioneer Hannes Schneider, they introduced a specific style of Alpine skiing, the Alberg technique, which became the predominant skiing style taught at what few ski schools existed in the United States at the time, mostly in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts.²⁴⁸

Then came the Winter Olympic Games of 1932, held in Lake Placid, New York. Only the third Winter Olympiad, the games featured three skiing events, all Nordic styles of skiing – cross-country, jumping, and the Nordic combined (which combined the scores of cross-country run and a jump). Scandinavians won all medals in all of the ski events, with Norwegians sweeping the podium in both the ski jump and the combined.²⁴⁹ The best American finish was fifth in the ski jump; but nevertheless, the public seemed intrigued by skiing as a sport. According to *The Tacoma Daily Ledger*, the local post office sold 50,000 stamps featuring the figure of a man in a ski jump to commemorate the Olympic skiing tournament, and movie theaters in Buffalo, New York advertised Universal Newsreels showing the Olympic skiing

²⁴⁶ Allen, *From Skisport to Skiing*, 65.

²⁴⁷ Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 222.

²⁴⁸ It should be noted that California had been one of the first American areas to create slopes for recreational skiing, as gold rush miners began racing on skis during the winter seasons to pass the time. However, the majority of ski historians tend to focus on the Northeast as the heart of early skiing in the United States because of the ubiquity of Austrian teachers who flocked there. Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 217.

²⁴⁹ “Swedish Star Wins Olympic Skiing Event,” *The Scranton Republican* (Scranton, PA), February 11, 1932, newspapers.com; “Youthful Norwegian Wins Ski Jump As Warmth Prevents Sled Event,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), February 13, 1932, newspapers.com.

competition.²⁵⁰ Americans' interest in skiing was beginning to grow. There was only one problem: American ski slopes were rudimentary at best, and none rivaled the resorts like those at St. Moritz and Davos, on which European skiers had been playing, practicing, and competing for over half a century.

One man was determined to change that: W. Averell Harriman, Chairman of the Board of the Union Pacific Railroad. After taking over the Chairman position from his father in 1932, Harriman found that the railroad's weakest point was passenger travel, a problem only exacerbated by the financial problems of the Great Depression.²⁵¹ His need to drive up passenger travel combined with his desire to build a place for these passengers to go led to a revolutionary new idea: an American ski resort in the West to lure wealthy skiers who usually went to Europe. While working as a banker in Europe prior to his time at the Union Pacific, Harriman noticed that his friends took winter vacations to ski resorts in Switzerland and the mountains of Austria. Though he recognized that plenty of Americans skied, especially in the East, "there was no resort in the sense of having a St. Moritz, or places with hotels and people owning property nearby."²⁵² Harriman employed Austrian Count Felix Schaffgotsch, who had developed ski resorts in Austria, to find the perfect place in the West for this new ski resort.

The exact conditions needed for an ideal resort were hard to find: Schaffgotsch required dry powder snow, sunshine, open slopes, and wooded hills for a scenic effect, all in one place. Schaffgotsch's search of the country reads like a veritable tour of the American West: Mt. Hood

²⁵⁰ "Special Stamps," *The Tacoma Daily Ledger* (Tacoma, WA), February 2, 1932, newspapers.com; "Newsreel Shows Olympic Skiing and War Horrors," *Buffalo Evening News* (Buffalo, NY), February 18, 1932, newspapers.com.

²⁵¹ John W. Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley: A History from Union Pacific to the Holdings* (Charleston: The History Press, 2020): 32-33.

²⁵² W. Averell Harriman, interviewed by Deanne Thompson, August 8, 1983, OH HAR 0058, Regional History Department (RHD), The Community Library (TCL).

near Seattle, Portland, Yosemite National Park, Tahoe, Zion National Park in southern Utah, Salt Lake City, Rocky Mountain National Park near Denver, Brighton and Alta in Colorado. He nearly found what he was looking for in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, but the state refused to allow the Teton Pass to stay open in the winter.²⁵³ After an unsuccessful first visit to Idaho, an enthusiastic Boisean suggested that Schaffgotsch travel to Ketchum, an old mining and sheepherding town in central Idaho nestled deep in the Sawtooth Mountains. The Count, originally skeptical about skiing prospects in the area, soon wired Harriman: “Among the many attractive spots I have visited, this combines more delightful features than any place I have seen in the United States, Switzerland, or Austria for a winter sports resort.” With a mile-high valley floor, a semi-arid climate that made dry powder snow, a warm sun even in freezing winter temperatures, and protection from cold Northern winds, not to mention the fact that Union Pacific’s most expensive railroad spur already ended there, Ketchum, Idaho was deemed *the* place for the first modern American ski resort.²⁵⁴

On March 25, 1936, the Union Pacific announced that, with the help of Schaffgotsch, it had purchased 3,388 acres of ranchland one mile east of Ketchum for \$39,000 – just \$10.04 per acre.²⁵⁵ At the urging of Steve Hannagan, “the prince of the press agents” – and the man who made a small unoccupied stretch of sand in Florida into the famous Miami Beach – this new resort would feature not a quaint lodge, as Harriman originally envisioned, but instead a million-dollar hotel, which would “guarantee...a lot of publicity.”²⁵⁶ In order to begin promoting the new

²⁵³ As quoted in Dorice Taylor, *Sun Valley*: (New Haven: Eastern Press, 1980): 12.

²⁵⁴ Taylor, *Sun Valley*:, 23.

²⁵⁵ Taylor, *Sun Valley*:, 26.

²⁵⁶ Michael K. Townsley, *Steve Hannagan: Prince of the Press Agents and Titan of Modern Public Relations* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2018); W. Averell Harriman, interviewed by Deanne Thompson, August 8, 1983.

resort, even before it was finished, it needed a catchy name. According to reports, some developers suggested retaining the name Ketchum, but Hannagan soundly rejected that: “There might be a few names less sexy, but he couldn’t think of any.”²⁵⁷ According to Sun Valley lore, Hannagan came up with the new name after having to strip off his heavy winter clothing when the sun came out during a visit, seeing the potential of the name to downplay the snowy weather and emphasize the warmth and comfort for potential skiers.²⁵⁸ Credit for the name is alternatively given to Harriman and Schaffgotsch, while Harriman himself stated, “we just started calling it Sun Valley. Nobody named it.”²⁵⁹ Regardless how the name came about, however, it stuck.

Harriman and crew broke ground on the resort hotel in May 1936, anticipating opening for the winter season in December seven months later. But creating the ski resort would require much more than an expensive lodge, wrote Hannagan to Harriman in 1936:

It must be a complete unit of entertainment with full facilities for winter sports enjoyment. This is one city in which roughing it must be a luxury...it must have every modern convenience....Unless a complete development is projected with the original plans, I must counsel you against any beginning. If it is to be done right in the beginning it will draw national attention, acclaim and approval. If it is half done at the start you will be years selling the progress you plan...This community has a chance to succeed only if it is an eye opener from scratch.²⁶⁰

Hannagan advised, in other words, to do it right or not to do it at all.

²⁵⁷ Townsley, *Steve Hannagan*, 154.

²⁵⁸ Having developed Miami Beach from an empty beach in a small Florida town to a multi-million dollar enterprise, Hannagan vastly preferred warmth to the bitter cold of Idaho winters, perhaps why he may have preferred to downplay the snowy atmosphere, despite the fact that snow was necessary for a ski resort. Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley*, 60.

²⁵⁹ As quoted in Townsley, *Steve Hannagan*, 154.

²⁶⁰ Confidential Memo to W. Averell Harriman from Steve Hannagan, March 28, 1936. Dorice Taylor Collection, MS-365, Aisle 4, 1936, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

Upon this advice, Harriman designed a truly modern and luxurious resort. Besides the ski slopes, the resort included a heated outdoor pool and a full-sized skating rink outside the lodge's back doors, along with opportunities to experience dog sledding and ski-joring (skiing while being pulled by a horse). To further set it apart from other ski areas in the country, Harriman wanted to create a way for guests to easily get up to the top of the ski run without exerting energy doing so. The most common way to get to the top of mountains by this time was to climb—most skiers often climbed for hours to have just a few short minutes of downhill skiing. Hannagan knew the average skier looking for a fun, relaxing vacation would be unwilling and/or unable to climb the mountains themselves. Some kind of lift would make the whole experience more enjoyable. Rudimentary forms of ski lifts already existed, with the most common being the simple, mechanical rope tow, which required skiers to hold onto a rope as the tow uncomfortably jerked them up the mountain.²⁶¹ Hannagan insisted that more comfortable mechanical devices were a “critical ingredient for the new resort.”²⁶² Harriman commissioned Union Pacific engineers with the task of creating a lift that was comfortable, efficient, and could get skiers to the top of the mountain with minimal effort. UP engineer Jim Curran developed the idea of a chairlift, inspired by similar machines that transported bananas off boats in the tropics. After several prototypes, the first ever monocable single-rider chairlift, which included a blanket for the ultimate comfort, was installed at Sun Valley.²⁶³ The chairlift has since become ubiquitous at ski resorts around the world, though the blankets have become a thing of the past.

²⁶¹ “You’d hang on and break your arms off hanging on,” recalled skier Dorice Taylor of rope tows. Dorice Taylor, interviewed by Ginger Stone, April 17 and 19, 1984, OH TAY0101, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID). The other main form of tow was the J-bar, a bar against which the skier leaned and was pulled up the mountains with the skis on the ground, used in New Hampshire, Wisconsin, New York, and Vermont. Yosemite had a sled, called the “Upski,” which took six riders at a time up the mountain. Taylor, *Sun Valley*., 35.

²⁶² Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley*, 85.

²⁶³ Taylor, *Sun Valley*., 36; Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley*: 88-90.

The inside of the hotel was to be just as luxurious and comfortable as the amenities outside. The hotel included a dining room, a bachelors' lounge, a clubroom, a game room, a barbershop, beauty parlor, its own doctor's office equipped with an x-ray, and a branch of Saks Fifth Avenue to keep visitors up to date on the latest fashions. The 220 guest rooms were decorated in the latest style, colored in pale yellows, oranges, blues, and greens, with dark reddish-brown accents on the floors and walls. "No white will be used in the interior decoration," reported the *Idaho Statesman* in August 1936. "Plenty of that will be provided in the winter landscape."²⁶⁴ Concerns over weathering caused by extreme winter conditions and fears of the fire hazard posed by a hotel made completely of wood convinced Harriman to build the lodge using cement poured into forms of pine trees, giving the hotel a convincing rustic log-cabin appearance.²⁶⁵ By the time of its completion, the cost of the hotel and resort had ballooned to \$1.5 million.²⁶⁶

But a hotel in what was ostensibly the middle of nowhere would amount to nothing without guests—and not just any guests would do. Hannagan explained his strategy: "The key is not merely to get people there but to get the *right* people there for the opening...Society is like a band of sheep...Get a few bellwethers...headed in the right direction and the rest will surely clamber after."²⁶⁷ In the months prior to its opening, Hannagan, together with Schaffgotsch, convinced Hollywood producer David O. Selznick to film a movie there during the winter of 1936, making the film's stars, Claudette Colbert, Robert Young, and Melvyn Douglas, automatic

²⁶⁴ Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley*, 83-84; Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley*, 88; "Idaho's Winter Sports Mecca," *Idaho Sunday Statesman* (Boise, ID), August 30, 1936, item #116, RM036 – Early Sun Valley Collection, Folder 7, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

²⁶⁵ Doug Oppenheimer and Jim Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography* (Boise: Beatty Books, 1976): 64.

²⁶⁶ Taylor, *Sun Valley*:, 31.

²⁶⁷ As quoted in Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley*, 100.

attendees of the grand soirée planned for the resort’s grand opening.²⁶⁸ Further, Hannagan commissioned press releases and advertisements about Sun Valley in “higher types of magazines,” like *Good Housekeeping* and other general readership publications.²⁶⁹ Hannagan’s machinations worked. The guest list for the opening day of Sun Valley, December 21, 1936, included those who frequently appeared in the society pages: Gloria Baker, heiress to the \$10 million Bromo-Seltzer fortune, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Rockefeller, Fred Pabst of the Pabst Blue Ribbon company, the DuPonts, and the Studebakers; the Hollywood set included director Wesley Ruggles, Selznick, and actresses Madeleine Carroll, Joan Bennett, and Colbert.²⁷⁰

With all the celebrities and socialites at Sun Valley on opening day, along with a \$1.5 million luxury hotel and a dinner menu that included exotic dishes, it all seemed just about perfect in the eyes of Harriman and Hannagan.²⁷¹ The only thing missing, ironically, was snow. In fact, snow had not fallen in the valley for weeks. Harriman, aware of the need to give a good first impression of his new resort, agreed to allow all guests to stay for free until it snowed.²⁷² During the party on opening night, Chicago banker Charles F. Glore approached the table where Selznick sat with Bennett, Colbert, and the women’s husbands. Glore asked one of the ladies to dance, a request which Selznick apparently found so offensive that he punched Glore in the face. Harriman and other staff were horrified – after all this work to create positive publicity, the

²⁶⁸ The film, *I Met Him in Paris*, will be examined briefly in Intermission 2 of this dissertation. Townsley, *Steve Hannagan*, 162; Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley*, 100.

²⁶⁹ “Let there Be Snow” *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), December 17, 1936, accessed November 21, 2022, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

²⁷⁰ Guests at the Opening of Sun Valley, Dorice Taylor Collection, MS-343, Box 1, item #16, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

²⁷¹ Taylor, *Sun Valley*: 45.

²⁷² W. Averell Harriman, interviewed by Deanne Thompson, August 8, 1983.

opening was ruined. They called Hannagan in New York to break the news. “What are you talking about?” Hannagan replied. “The opening ruined? This is wonderful. It will make headlines in every paper in the country.” Ever the opportunist, Hannagan reportedly sat down at his typewriter and wrote the ensuing headline himself: “Sun Valley opens with a bang.”²⁷³ Several inches of snow finally fell on Christmas day, guests now began to pay for their stay, and the New Year’s party, attended by even more celebrities and socialites, was what the newspapers deemed a “cheery affair.”²⁷⁴

What is clear is that from its inception, both Harriman and Hannagan saw Sun Valley as a place where luxury and celebrity reigned, a resort that would rival anything seen in Europe. Even prior to its opening, newspapers called Sun Valley “the American St. Moritz,” a moniker previously reserved for Lake Placid during its time as Olympic host in 1932.²⁷⁵ Using the name St. Moritz seems to indicate the Swiss resort’s reputation was fairly ubiquitous among Americans as a place of luxury, style, class, athleticism, celebrity, and, perhaps most importantly, money. Calling Sun Valley “the American St. Moritz,” a common signifier in its first two years in newspapers and other publications, was supposed to evoke that same reputation at this unique site in the western United States. To bolster this reputation for Sun Valley, Harriman and Hannagan deliberately invited some of the richest and most well-known names in

²⁷³ The headline “Sun Valley Opens with a Bang” seems to be lore that has been passed down about Sun Valley’s opening since Dorice Taylor first wrote it down during her job as Publicity Manager in the 1960s. I could not find any American newspapers that announce Sun Valley’s opening with that headline, from the local *Hailey Times* to the national *New York Times*. Nevertheless, given the ubiquity of this story and the mythos it has since created about Sun Valley, I have chosen to include it here. Lundin, *Skiing Sun Valley*, 101; Taylor, *Sun Valley*, 45; Dorice Taylor Collection, MS-343, Box 1, item #17, 15, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

²⁷⁴ “Snow Gives Idaho White Christmas,” *The Post-Register* (Idaho Falls, ID), December 27, 1936; “New Years at Sun Valley a Cheery Affair,” *The Hailey Times*, January 7, 1937, accessed November 21, 2022, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

²⁷⁵ “Winter Sports Show Opens Ice and Snow Season,” *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore, MD), December 6, 1936; “Group Plans Placid Trip To Olympics,” *The Pittsburg Press* (Pittsburg, PA), February 3, 1932.

American society and culture at the time. The resort's opening, with its sumptuous dinner and literal sparring between two members of the country's most moneyed, only served to maintain this artificial reputation until it earned it on its own. As national newspapers and, more importantly, fan magazines, published reports of celebrity exploits at the resort, Sun Valley became a household name, one synonymous with a glamorous new sport and beautiful movie stars effortlessly gliding down a mountainside of clean, untouched snow. This was exactly what Harriman wanted: "We didn't run [the resort] to make money," he said, "We ran it to be a perfect place."²⁷⁶

It is within this image of Sun Valley, one of luxury, celebrity, and perfection, that this chapter is set. Though skiing did not become a popular American sport as a result of the celebrity presence at Sun Valley nor were American women flocking to sporting clubs or athletic gyms because of celebrity women's skiing efforts this very unique site in the middle of Idaho nevertheless had a national influence. As women from Hollywood skied slopes in the Sawtooth mountains, and fan magazines reported their exploits, celebrity women's physical recreation at Sun Valley played a role in developing a new image of the American woman: one who could use her body to ski down mountainsides donned in the highest fashion for the purposes of her own benefit and enjoyment.

"Skiing is man's work, even if done by women": Skiing as Physical Recreation and Exercise

In an issue of the fan magazine *Photoplay* from April 1941, readers came across a quiz titled "How Well Do You Know Your Hollywood?" Question number six read, "She was awarded the honor of being the best amateur skier at Sun Valley," with four options for the

²⁷⁶ Van Gordon Sauter, *The Sun Valley Story* (Hailey: Mandala Media, LLC, 2011): 23.

answer: Norma Shearer, Claudette Colbert, Joan Crawford, or Irene Dunne. The answer, readers soon learned, was Claudette Colbert, who is perhaps the best example of a woman from Hollywood who often traveled to Sun Valley, not to be seen or to have her photo taken at the resort, but actually to ski.²⁷⁷ More than just skiing down the Sun Valley slopes with skill and grace, Colbert was a good enough skier that she began to participate in competitions at the resort (and even at other ski resorts). Through her behavior at Sun Valley, well documented in fan magazines, Colbert became one of the most famous examples of how women might learn to take up a new strenuous form of exercise in a very public setting. Further, because Colbert was a Hollywood movie star with all of the glamorous trappings that came with such a profession, she demonstrated that public physical activity, like skiing, provided evidence of changing gender norms: as more women exercised in public spaces, it became possible for American women to engage in public physical activity themselves.

To understand why skiing had the potential to be such an influential sport for women, we first have to examine American women's participation in physical activity and sports leading up to the 1930s. Through most of American history, sports were deemed a masculine endeavor, given their demand for athleticism, aggressiveness, and competitiveness. Women, weak and frail, were unable to stand the strain of strenuous exercise, much less the strain of competitive sport. However, as early as the 1820s, advocates for women's health began encouraging moderate exercise for girls and women, mostly, according to educator and women's rights advocate Catharine Beecher, to maintain the physical and moral energy for their roles as "wife, moral

²⁷⁷ "How Well Do You Know Your Hollywood?" *Photoplay with Movie Mirror* (April 1941), 112, <http://mediahistoryproject.org>.

guardian, healthkeeper, and housekeeper.”²⁷⁸ Exercise for women was beneficial as long as it helped women maintain their energy for their duties in the private sphere. Programs that Beecher and other women educators implemented for their female students included gymnastics and calisthenics, which allowed low-exertion activities such as walking, croquet, exercises with dumbbells and swinging clubs, and dancing. Many elite and middle-class girls’ schools and women’s colleges in the East established similar programs by the middle of the nineteenth century. Almost simultaneously, elite women began participating more frequently in various forms of sport and exercise, including horseback riding, fox hunting, tennis, and golf. Because they often participated in these sporting activities with male members of their family, as elite women had done with skiing, the pushback against elite women playing sports was minimal.²⁷⁹

With the growth of sport and physical activity among both the elite and middle classes, exercise and sport for women gained credibility in the late nineteenth century, making it more common for all classes of women to participate in exercise and sport in some way. The bicycle craze of the 1880s and 1890s was the first major sporting movement that truly opened doors for middle-class women to be athletic and independent, allowing for a freedom of movement that many women had not experienced before. In these same decades, middle-class women began founding their own athletic clubs when men did not allow them into theirs. Soon, their clubs began hosting tournaments for their respective sports, bringing a new level of competition into

²⁷⁸ As quoted in Linda J. Borish, “The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian: Catharine Beecher, Thomas Higginson, and Their Vision of American Society, Health and Physical Activities, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 4, no 2 (1987): 142.

²⁷⁹ Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, *Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021): 18; Martha H. Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women’s Physical Education in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 50; Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women’s Sport*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015 [1994]): 3-5, 12-15; Mabel Lee, *A History of Physical Education in Sports in the U.S.A.* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983): 34, 54-56.

physical recreation that most women educators abhorred. As historian Martha Verbrugge demonstrates, rather than promote competition among young women – a distinctly masculine endeavor – these educators hoped to train “young women to be refined, intelligent, active ladies, free of masculine athleticism.”²⁸⁰ “Moderation” was the cry of physical educators, which encouraged the benefits of sports for women, from health and wellness to sportsmanship and cooperation, without the stigma of masculinity. This most often meant sporting opportunities like “Play Days” in which students from various colleges met together, creating teams that mixed students from each school together to prevent interschool competition.²⁸¹

However, the women athletes themselves found ways to defy these educators’ attempts to remove competition from women’s sport. In the first decades of the twentieth century, sports for women of all classes continued to expand with the symbolic figure of what historian Susan K. Cahn calls the “athletic girl” in the 1900s and 1910s. The athletic girl, a precursor to the flapper of the 1920s, “represented the bold and energetic modern woman, breaking free from Victorian constraints and tossing aside old-fashioned ideas about separate spheres for men and women.”²⁸² During this time, basketball and tennis became the two sports most associated with women athletes, both amateur and professional. Historian Pamela Grundy argues that basketball was especially popular among high school and college women, both white and Black, as it gave them an outlet to work through the frustrations and societal pressures that came with the “changing concepts of womanhood, including sexuality, self-confidence, racial difference, political rhetoric,

²⁸⁰ Verbrugge, *Active Bodies*, 23, 61.

²⁸¹ Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 24; Guttman, *Women’s Sports*, 136.

²⁸² Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 7.

and public image” in the first three decades of the twentieth century on and off the court.²⁸³ With modified rules that took intense physical exertion out of game play, physical educators and advocates for women’s health and sport promoted basketball and tennis as appropriate for “ladies.” Women athletes, however, liked tennis and basketball because they were sports at which they could compete with each other. For lower-class women, community teams or teams attached to industrial companies began competing in various sports despite the warnings from physical educators and leaders of national sporting associations that competition was, according to Cahn, “inherently threatening to female athlete’s moral and physical well-being.”²⁸⁴

Women’s sports, competitive and otherwise, only continued to grow into the 1920s; the athletic girl bloomed in this decade. Industrial leagues grew in numbers, and the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) began sponsoring contests between women’s basketball and track and field teams. Most importantly, however, this decade saw the emergence of a bevy of amateur and professional female sports stars. Babe Didrikson Zaharias was one of the most famous, winning championships and setting records in nearly every sport possible, from basketball to golf to track and field, while constantly fighting against accusations of being too masculine. Tennis star Helen Wills, on the other hand, embodied the ideal American woman competitor, as she remained humble, timid, and shy – all ideal feminine qualities – even as she became so successful in her sport that few other women (and even some men) tennis players could seriously challenge her.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 42.

²⁸⁴ Guttman, *Women’s Sports*, 128. Tennis was also particularly popular with “ladies” as it was exclusive among the upper classes prior to the early 1900s; Grundy, *Learning to Win*, 129; Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 72.

²⁸⁵ Guttman, *Women’s Sports*, 135, 146; Susan E. Cayleff, *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995): 50, 72, 127; Larry Engelmann, *The Goddess and the American Girl: The Story of Suzanne Lenglen and Helen Wills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 109, 200.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, more than ever before, movie fan magazines began to profile celebrities who were participating in sport and exercise. *Photoplay*, *Silver Screen*, *Modern Screen*, and *Motion Picture* all published stories between 1937 and 1940 that detailed how movie stars, men and women alike, stayed physically active. It seems that most fan magazine editors found something newsworthy in the fact that so many celebrities were exercising through sports – perhaps because movie stars inspired admiration, perhaps even emulation, from female film fans who might consume products or mirror behavior based solely on the actions or consumption patterns of their favorite movie star.²⁸⁶ Reports of women stars exercising and playing sports, then, seem particularly important in this context. The fact that heartthrob Robert Taylor lifted weights or crooner Bing Crosby played golf or that movie veteran Douglas Fairbanks was particularly skilled in fencing was perhaps quite unsurprising to many female readers and probably did little to inspire any action beyond admiration.²⁸⁷ But if magazines reported that actresses Olivia de Havilland could fence with the likes of Errol Flynn, Sonja Henie could win multiple Olympic medals in figure skating, Luise Rainer had become an “expert” at archery, and tennis was the most popular sport among the likes of Ginger Rogers, Irene Dunne, and Carole Lombard (who was “considered the tennis ace among femme stars”), perhaps American women might be interested in engaging in similar activities themselves.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ In the 1920s, *Photoplay* editor James Quirk foresaw “an explosive growth of consumer culture led by movie fans,” no longer seeing the movie fan magazine reader as “a mass of giggling school girls,” but instead as a middle-class market of knowledgeable consumers. Film magazines quickly became as much about consumer culture as about movie production or celebrity gossip. Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington [D.C.]: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996): 150-151.

²⁸⁷ Ben Maddox, “In the Pink of Condition,” *Silver Screen*, January 1937 26, mediahistoryproject.org; Dick Pine, “It’s the Sporting Thing To Do,” *Motion Picture*, October 1937, 65, mediahistoryproject.org.

²⁸⁸ Maddox, “In the Pink of Condition,” pg26-27; Dorothy Spensely, “Life for Henie is Topping,” *Modern Screen*, August 1941, 31, mediahistoryproject.org; Kay Proctor, “Keeping Up the Pace,” *Photoplay*, September 1940, 58, mediahistoryproject.org; Pine, “It’s the Sporting Thing To Do,” 56-57.

The images in fan magazines of women skiing in Sun Valley, in other words, were not new. These active women, celebrity and otherwise, however, did contribute to a growing acceptance of women's ability to play in public without fear of being seen as masculine. In fact, skiing seemed to be fairly accepted as a sport women *could* appropriately participate in, even if it still required some masculine qualities. Inez Callaway Robb, a national columnist and Idaho native, wrote in 1936: "Any way you look at it, skiing is man's work, even when it's done by a woman. There may be a trace of insanity, but there's no touch of the sissy in any individual who deliberately slides down mountains on two narrow planks – with the possibility of wrapping himself around several evergreens en route...But there's no doubt that thousands of personages are willing to do just that."²⁸⁹ Robb never stated that women could not ski. On the contrary, she intimated, women could ski, but the courage it took to fly down the slopes was distinctly masculine. Still, there was no condemnation about the fact that women skied at Sun Valley, which made the resort a liberating space for women. No publication covering the resort implied or stated that women's participation in skiing should be limited because it was too masculine of an activity. This opened the ski slope as yet another appropriate sporting space for women, along with tennis and basketball courts.

That does not mean, however, that participation in high-intensity sports like skiing was necessarily encouraged by popular fan publications of the day. Article after article encouraged exercise, but very few recommended engaging in activities like running or other exercises that would raise women's heart rate or cause perspiration. Perspiration was considered unladylike,

²⁸⁹ Inez Callaway Robb, "Actors, Financiers and Socialites Hear Call of Mighty Sawtooths As Sun Valley Lodge Opens Doors," *Idaho Daily Statesman* (Boise, ID) December 20, 1936. RHD E, Folder 0176, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID). Inez Callaway Robb, a national journalist and correspondent, grew up in Caldwell, Idaho, about 180 miles south of Sun Valley, lamented the loss of bucolic Idaho that would inevitably come with a large group of celebrities "invading" the area.

these articles said, and too much intense physical exercise could lead to women developing too much definition in their muscles, making them manly and unattractive. Instead, they usually prescribed activities that would keep women slim, a look that, despite its prevalence in modern society, had only come into vogue for most Americans in the early decades of the new century, popularized by the flappers of the 1920s.²⁹⁰ In *Photoplay* from March 1937, an article titled “Curbing the Curves” stated, “Many of you have the idea that the more active you are in sports the better figures you will have. Not necessarily. In most cases you are working against yourself.” The article recommended simple exercises, more like calisthenics, to “slenderize things” (marching in place), “slimming waistlines” (swinging body from left to right), and “vanquishing tummies” (bending at the waist and touching toes).²⁹¹ Musical star Jeanette MacDonald recommended walking as an ideal exercise.²⁹² Another article advised young girls who were looking to “reduce” scrawniness to get “nine hours of sleep every night, with enough exercise of the most un strenuous type to give you an appetite and tire you out a little.”²⁹³ Even Norma Shearer, an Academy Award winning actress and one of the most popular stars of the 1930s, compiled a guide to help women “put the curves where they belong ---- Get rid of that KINK ---- ‘And put you in the PINK.’” The exercises that Shearer extolled were akin to modern yoga stretches rather than strength or cardiovascular exercises.²⁹⁴ Calisthenics were the ideal

²⁹⁰ Stanley, *The Rise and Fall of the Sportswoman*: 71-73.

²⁹¹ Madame Sylvia, “Curbing the Curves: Cutting a Figure For Yourself,” *Photoplay*, March 1937, 71.

²⁹² Carolyn Van Wyck, “Photoplay’s Own Beauty Shop,” *Photoplay*, May 1939, 10.

²⁹³ Mary Marshall, “Beauty Problems of ‘In Betweens’” *Modern Screen*, February 1938, 90.

²⁹⁴ “Norma Shearer’s Elasticized Exercises,” RHD E 0519, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID). It is unclear who this pamphlet was created for. A disclaimer on page five states that “No portion of this may be reproduced without the permission of The Community Library Association,” intimating that Norma Shearer, a regular at Sun Valley and the larger Ketchum community after the resort’s opening, made the pamphlet just for The Community Library in Ketchum.

form of exercise, but low-impact sports were not off limits to women. *Silver Screen* profiled how all of Hollywood, men and women alike, were “conceding that the exercise that should be taken is easier and far more fun when disguised as a merry sport. [Greta] Garbo’s taken up horseshoe pitching...” This same article even discussed how stars Loretta Young and Dick Powell “became so run down with all work and no health-building sports that they had to drop everything for months to recuperate,” encouraging their readers to participate in sports so that they need not face the same problems.²⁹⁵ Skiing was a perfect activity to help Americans get more exercise, according to Hollywood publicity; plus celebrities loved it.

As skiing grew in popularity, Sun Valley promoted the advantages of the chairlift, which reduced the amount of physical exertion skiers expended on their runs down the mountain, making skiing an appropriate activity for women. *Sun Valley Holiday*, a promotional movie produced by Union Pacific, described a ride on the chairlift as “inspiration without perspiration.”²⁹⁶ Another promotional video promised that all of the slopes at Sun Valley were outfitted with chairlifts, “which add many pleasurable hours of downhill skiing each day,” as it depicted a woman getting off the lift having reached the top of the slope.²⁹⁷ Sun Valley was not just a masculine space in which women’s presence was acceptable – it was actively advertised as a space where women belonged. An advertisement found in *Ski Illustrated* from December 1947 reads “Get a ‘Lift,’” accompanied by an image of a woman fashionably attired, including sunshades, sitting on the ski lift with skis strapped to her feet and ski poles in her mittened hands: “Eight fast, electrically-powered chair lifts are now in operation. That means a maximum

²⁹⁵ Ben Maddox, “In the Pink of Condition,” *Silver Screen* January 1937, 26.

²⁹⁶ *Sun Valley Holiday*, 1941, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SUN, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

²⁹⁷ *Sun Valley Winter*, 1937, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SUN, RHD, TCL.

number of runs in a day's skiing – conserving energy for enjoying Sun Valley's many other winter sports activities.” This image may have been based on a photo of actress Norma Shearer, a Sun valley regular, in nearly an identical pose on a ski lift, taken in the early 1940s, perhaps a subtle nod to the ubiquity of celebrity influence at the resort, even on the ski lifts.²⁹⁸ By using images of women, even celebrity women, to advertise Sun Valley and revolutionary ski lift, the resort's publicity intimated that skiing now required less physical exertion than and was thus an appropriate sport for all women. On top of helping skiers conserve energy, each chair on the lift included a Sun Valley-branded blanket to keep its riders warm against the cold winter air. It is clear, then, that the chairlift, with its comfort, safety, and luxury of being able to avoid an enormous amount of exertion from climbing up the mountain, allowed women at Sun Valley a great amount of freedom to enjoy a new form of physical activity without the dangers of too much physical exertion.

The health and wellness aspect of playing outdoors at Sun Valley was emphasized in contemporary publications. In many ways, this was a continuation of the Victorian tradition of middle- and upper-class Americans taking vacations to certain locales for their health, such as mineral springs in the late nineteenth century.²⁹⁹ Fan magazines continually recommended that their readers get plenty of outdoor exercise (though not of the strenuous type, of course) to complete their beauty routines. By the 1930s, with the burgeoning popularity of sports and sporting women, beauty standards had swung from what historian Gregory Kent Stanley calls the

²⁹⁸ Sun Valley Advertisement, *Ski Illustrated*, December 1947, 9, RHD Periodical – Ski Illustrated, Ski West, Western Skiing Box, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID); Lloyd Arnold, photographer, “Norma Shearer on a ski lift at Sun Valley,” photograph, Ketchum: The Community Library, RHD F 03140 File Cabinet P-3717, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

²⁹⁹ Will B. Mackintosh, *Selling the Sights: The Invention of the Tourist in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2019): 9; Richard H. Gassan, *The Birth of American Tourism: New York, the Hudson Valley, and American Culture, 1790-1835* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008): 36.

“plump, non-athletic look” to a slim – but not necessarily skinny – athleticism, reinforced by advertisements that promoted “the elegant, refined, and youthful look” of the sportswoman that had so proliferated the American fashion industry, the movies, and consumer culture.³⁰⁰ A *Modern Screen* profile on Austrian-American actress Hedy Lamarr listed getting an hour of outdoor exercise every day as one of her “Hints to Loveliness.”³⁰¹ Several years earlier, *Photoplay* advised that “no beauty schedule is complete without properly planned outdoor exercise.”³⁰² Skiing was the perfect outdoor exercise, not just because it got women outdoors, but because of a bevy of other benefits as well. Madame Sylvia, *Photoplay*’s health and wellness extraordinaire of the late 1930s, told her readers, “If you live in a section of the country where you can do some skiing, take advantage of it. It is extremely valuable for your health as it keeps you out of doors getting plenty of fresh air into your lungs. It is wonderful training for body balance and is a marvelous sport to be used as an exercise to correct bad posture and strengthen a weak back.”³⁰³ The same advertisement that featured the image of the woman on the ski lift promised “an exhilarating lift in healthful recreation and superb skiing pleasure.” The advertisement also repeated Sun Valley’s motto: “Winter Sports Under a ‘Summer Sun,’” intimating that skiing at Sun Valley could provide important sun exposure often missing from cloudy winter weather.³⁰⁴ Another Union Pacific promotional video, titled *Summer At Sun Valley* stated that Sun Valley was a place that a visitor “may enjoy physical activity, or helpful

³⁰⁰ Stanley, *The Rise and Fall of the Sportswoman*, 71, 95.

³⁰¹ Kirtley Baskette, “‘Ecstasy’ Girl,” *Modern Screen*, February 1942, 102.

³⁰² Carolyn Van Wyck, “Beauty For The Very Young,” *Photoplay*, October 1937, 99.

³⁰³ Madame Sylvia, “Curbing the Curves,” 73.

³⁰⁴ Sun Valley Advertisement, *Ski Illustrated*, Dec 1947, 9.

repose...you'll never find a better place in which to do nothing at all."³⁰⁵ Fan culture promoted Skiing and outdoor recreation, especially at Sun Valley, as public activities in which women could participate because it was good for their health,

Skiing was not the only form of exercise or sport in which women could participate while at Sun Valley. After its first two winter seasons in operation, Sun Valley remained open in the summer for the first time, providing opportunities for a wide range of activities year-round. Union Pacific Promotional Video *Spring Ski Chase* portrayed the numerous things visitors could do that did not require snow, including horseback riding, bicycling, fishing, tennis, archery, horseshoes, skeet shooting, ice skating, and swimming. All of this on top of spring skiing and snowshoeing!³⁰⁶ Because of its location in the Sawtooth Mountains, Sun Valley had snow often nearly into July, making traditional winter activities still viable even when the temperatures began warming. One poster from the early 1940s promoting summer activities at the resort featured photographs of models ice skating, golfing, swimming, shooting, fishing, tennis, and horseback riding in outfits appropriate for each activity.³⁰⁷ Every single model was a woman. Sun Valley, it seems, was attempting to promote not just the resort, but the idea that all activities offered there were ones appropriate for women.

Coverage of stars' activities at the resort within the pages of fan magazines brought an enormous amount of attention to the resort and the opportunities it offered women. A year after opening, *Photoplay* alerted the American public that "Winter sports at Sun Valley, Idaho, claim

³⁰⁵ *Summer at Sun Valley*, date unknown, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SUM, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³⁰⁶ *Spring Ski Chase*, 1941, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SPR, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³⁰⁷ "Now – Sun Valley, Idaho in Summer," Promotional Poster, Lane Family Collection RHD MS 0755, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

the ardent enthusiasm of many Hollywood stars,” intimating that the stars were indeed vacationing there for sports as much as for rest and relaxation.³⁰⁸ *Silver Screen* reported Ginger Rogers’ first and only journey to Sun Valley, in 1938, when she was determined to learn how to ski by herself. Norma Shearer’s time at Sun Valley was well-documented throughout fan magazines, especially after she married her children’s Sun Valley ski instructor in 1942. But her time at Sun Valley was not limited to romance – on the contrary, she skied often, even earning accolades for her abilities. Starting in the 1940s, the Sun Valley Ski Club, the club associated with the resort, awarded brave and able skiers one-star pins for descending Dollar Mountain, about 2,100 feet, and two-star pins for descending the 3,200 feet of the resort’s largest mountain, Bald Mountain (commonly called Baldy), without falling. Shearer and her teenage son Irving Thalberg Jr. each earned their one-star pin in January 1942, with Shearer going on to win her two-star pin some years later.³⁰⁹ Nor was Shearer the only actress to earn pins—Jane Powell earned one star during the spring ski season of 1948, and Shearer’s good friends Ann Rutherford and Ann Sothern each earned their one star one week apart in February 1949.³¹⁰ But it was not just star pins that Hollywood celebrities looked forward to on the slopes. “I couldn’t wait to get out there. As a matter of fact, I’d be on the mountain all the times [sic] if I was here...Everybody skied. Everybody skied,” emphasized Sothern. “You’d see all your friends on the hill....And I’d get on the lift and the operators always called me Annie. ‘Hi ya, good morning, Annie,’ give me

³⁰⁸ *Photoplay*, November 1938, 56, mediahistoryproject.org.

³⁰⁹ “Film Star and Son Win Award,” *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), January 6, 1942, TCL, accessed 6 December, 2022. Taylor, *Sun Valley*., 158.

³¹⁰ “Star Pin Winners,” *The Valley Sun* (Sun Valley, ID), vol.11 no.2 (April 2, 1948); vol.12 no.7 (February 4, 1949), vol.12 no.8 (February 11, 1949), Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

a slap on the little fanny and away we'd go.”³¹¹ Clearly celebrity women at Sun Valley were not simply wandering around the resort waiting to be photographed. Rather, they participated in, and were obviously succeeding at, a new sport that required some form of exertion, opening a new sporting space for American women who might want to do something similar in their own lives.

Reports often included humorous stories that reminded readers that actresses, despite fan magazine assertions that stars are “just like us,” played by a different set of rules while skiing at Sun Valley. Skiing did not just put their bodies at risk—a major crash could also derail their whole career. Peppi Teichner, one of the top skiing professionals at Sun Valley in the 1940s, wrote an article for the local *Hailey Times*, wherein he commented on the courage it took for movie stars to fly down a ski slope at breakneck speed: “If we ski instructors crack up, it doesn't matter so much....But for those movie people, it is different. If they race, they risk not only a little more salary than we get but also a whole career. I have all the respect for the courage Norma showed [while skiing for her “silver ski” prize] and I said to myself: If I should become a movie star, I would not race anymore.”³¹² Despite Ginger Rogers's efforts to sneak off to the slopes alone to teach herself how to ski on Sun Valley's Dollar Mountain in 1938, she realized she was being followed by two men from the hotel who kept a watchful eye on her. “I want to tackle this by myself,” she told the men. “I've never been on skis before. I don't want any publicity.” The two men replied that it was not her publicity they were concerned for, but the hotel's: “If you fall and break a leg it will be bad publicity for the hotel. We are here to see that

³¹¹ Ann Sothern, interviewed by Shirley Huckins, September 27, 1985, Oral Histories OH 0173SOT, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³¹² Peppi Teichner, “I Said To Myself...” *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), March 6, 1941, accessed 7 December 2022, TCL. For brief biographical information on Peppi Teichner, see “Hans ‘Peppi’ Tiechner,” U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame, accessed 7 December 2022, <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/hans-peppi-teichner/>.

you stay on your feet.”³¹³ Because of Rogers’s prominence as a dancer, the reputation of Sun Valley might never have recovered if she had been unable to dance with frequent partner Fred Astaire in future films. Similarly, when Ann Sothern began skiing at Sun Valley beginning in 1948, she always skied with an instructor to prevent major accidents. Sothen was under contract to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer during her first visit, “and if I had broken something, I would have really been in trouble.”³¹⁴ She never did break a leg, becoming one of the best celebrity skiers in the process. Female celebrities skied because they wanted to, despite the fact that a crash would prove fatal to their own career and lose their respective studios a lot of money. These women pushed back on traditional gender roles by using their bodies in risky public physical exercise, not because the studios needed or wanted them to and not because skiing would keep them physically fit for their private careers as wives and mothers or their public careers as actresses (though it would undoubtedly help them do both). They did it because they liked it.

Celebrity women skiing at Sun Valley also challenged the widely held belief among social authorities and physical educators that competition in sport would strip women of their femininity. Claudette Colbert was perhaps the most prominent example of a movie star skier who actually competed in ski races. Originally coming to Sun Valley to film *I Met Him in Paris* prior to the resort’s opening, Colbert took her skiing far more seriously than any of her famous women contemporaries. As early as 1937, the *Hailey Times* reported that she spent “considerable” time on Dollar Mountain, even having meals brought up the mountain so that she and her friends could spend as much time skiing as possible.³¹⁵ From that moment onward, it seems hardly a

³¹³ Elizabeth Wilson, “She’s Like Sparkling Champagne,” *Silver Screen*, June 1939, 69, mediahistoryproject.org.

³¹⁴ Ann Sothern, interviewed by Shirley Huckins, September 27, 1985.

³¹⁵ “Colbert Makes Impression On Mountain Top,” *The Hailey Times*, February 18, 1937, accessed 7 December, 2022, TCL.

winter month went by without Colbert making a trip out to Sun Valley. By 1940, it became clear that skiing was more than a pastime for her. A photo that appeared in the *Sun Valley Ski Club Annual* shows Colbert on her skis at the top of a hill, awaiting word from trainer Friedl Pfeifer to begin her descent – goggles on, ski poles in mittened hand, a paper bib with the number forty-nine secured over her dark winter sweater. Pfeifer’s training paid off – she took first in the Class A Women’s guest race, finishing an astonishing fifty-one seconds ahead of the second-place winner. In fact, Colbert was apparently so talented at skiing that she was listed as an alternate for the team representing the state of California in the annual interstate ski meet held in Sun Valley in 1941.³¹⁶ Pfeifer, who met Colbert when she first tried skiing in Austria in the early 1930s, recalled her ambition in skiing after learning about the Standard Race put on at Sun Valley, which had three difficulty levels—silver, gold, and diamond: “I told her she should just try for the Silver [sic], but she said, ‘No, I want the gold.’ So I trained her for it. It took about at least a week. I run with her three or four times a day...”³¹⁷ It is quite possible that this Standard Race was the same race she skied in and won in 1941, though sources are not clear on the subject. Regardless, Claudette Colbert was clearly taking her skiing very seriously, one of the few actresses who frequented Sun Valley to earn competitive accolades for her athletic abilities.

It was not just local Idaho publications that covered Colbert’s exploits in competitive skiing – they were reported in fan magazines throughout the country, which transmitted the idea that competitiveness did not automatically equate masculinity to millions of American women. After a string of excellent acting performances in the 1930s, including critically acclaimed turns

³¹⁶ “Results of the Guest Slalom Races,” *Sun Valley Ski Club Annual*, Season 1941, 21, 43-44, RM-05 Periodicals, RHD, TCL.

³¹⁷ Friedl Pfeifer, interviewed by Penney Brons, February 27, 1987, Oral Histories OH PFE 0238, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

in *It Happened One Night*, *Cleopatra*, and *Imitation of Life* all in 1934 alone, nearly every major fan magazine published multi-page articles about Colbert between 1937 and 1940, all of which mentioned her skiing abilities in some way. The earliest of the articles, from May 1938, briefly commented that when she was not busy on the set of *I Met Him in Paris*, “you can find her...skiing on one of the nursery slopes.”³¹⁸ In September of the same year, *Modern Screen* reported her attempts at skiing at Sun Valley: “[Skiing] looked very simple until I tried it,” she reportedly said. “I never did get off what they called the ‘nursery slope’.”³¹⁹ A year later, not only had she gotten off the easy slopes, but she caught the “skiing bug” during and after filming *I Met Him in Paris*. According to an article in *Motion Picture* in 1938, this bug had transformed Claudette Colbert into a strong, healthy American woman in ways that she had not anticipated, demonstrating to women readers what kind of self-confidence, strength, and health might be gained from exercise, particularly from skiing:

I made [a]...self-discovery: *I'm afraid I am the athletic type*. I'd always thought of myself as rather a delicate flower, certainly not a hardy perennial. I did rather fancy myself on the lace and tissue-paper side...I did feel that I might flop if I did...anything very *strenuous*...I have got all over that prettily fragile notion of myself. I can stand anything...I am now enjoying *very good health*....I've always had the notion that a person's type pretty much tells the story of what they are. Well, I've been deceiving myself about myself all these years!³²⁰ (emphasis original)

This quote perfectly demonstrates how reports of famous women at Sun Valley provided examples of women using their bodies for their own personal gratification in public. It further pushes back against – but does not completely break down – the gendered expectation that women were not naturally athletic. Though she appears reluctant to admit that she is athletic, this

³¹⁸ Liza, “They Met in Ketchum,” *Silver Screen*, May 1937, 82, mediahistoryproject.org.

³¹⁹ Franc Dillon, “She’s Taking It Easy,” *Modern Screen*, September 1937, 30, mediahistoryproject.org.

³²⁰ Gladys Hall, “The Self-Discoveries of Claudette,” *Motion Picture*, September 1938, 64, mediahistoryproject.org.

quote could serve as an impetus for female readers to ask if they might also be “deceiving” themselves about their athletic nature. This question, of whether women were capable of handling intense physical activity, was far from settled in society writ large when Colbert and her famous contemporaries began skiing down Sun Valley slopes. Fears that playing sports would make women *too* masculine – because it would lead to a loss of their “lady-like” qualities and thus lead to sexual deviancy – had been prominent in society since the middle of the nineteenth century. By the 1920s and 1930s, according to sports historian Donald J. Mrozek, “public excellence in women’s sport lay uncomfortably on the edge of middle-class respectability.”³²¹ In other words, American’s widespread acceptance of female athletes was finely balanced on the edge of middle-class morals. Any step beyond that edge (i.e. women becoming too masculine through sport) threatened to upend the entire balance altogether. Even in the 1930s, successful sports women like Didrikson, Lenglen, and Wills were considered exceptions rather than rules in how women should approach sports and physical exercise – they made purposeful steps to retain their femininity while succeeding in a typically masculine field, but the average American woman should not expect the same results if they played sports.

Colbert’s newfound confidence led to awards for her competitive racing, which fan magazines highlighted often. “Pinned over the mirror is one of the most important items in [her] house...a little Silver Sun hanging from a pair of skis. Claudette won this last winter at Sun Valley and it’s the pride of her life!” said *Photoplay* in 1940. This same article was quick to clarify, however, that her competitiveness was not incongruent with her current image as a feminine movie star. The article explained that Colbert, aware that she risked her career, her

³²¹ David J. Mrozek, “The ‘Amazon’ and the American ‘Lady’: Sexual Fears of Women as Athletes,” in *From ‘Fair Sex’ to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras* eds. J.A. Mangan and Roberta J. Park (Totowa: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1987): 292.

femininity, and her traditional position as wife within her marriage, had originally refrained from competing in skiing. “Now it’s different,” declared the article. “Claudette no longer is burdened by the fact that she’s the man of her family. She definitely isn’t the man of her family.” The ensuing paragraphs go on to describe her feminine wardrobe, including a quote from legendary costume designer Edith Head that intimated that Colbert may have known more about fashion than Head herself, almost as if to ensure that readers knew that Claudette Colbert, despite her success in the masculine realm of sport, was still a woman obsessed with fashion.³²² As an international movie star who had the cultural clout to push against traditional gender boundaries without being accused of deviancy, she still had to maintain her femininity, which justified her participation in a previously masculine form of sport. Whereas prior understandings of women in sports painted sporting women as socially and sexually deviant – using their bodies in public for masculine purposes – Colbert’s actions, as reported by the fan magazines, helped provide an alternative image: that sports and femininity could coexist and that the participation in one did not preclude participation in the other. As Colbert schussed down slopes and won awards in the process, she became an embodiment of liberation for women, but one which was still grounded in retaining traditional aspects of womanhood: as long as one retained certain markers and qualities of femininity, physical activity was a safe activity through which women might enjoy the use of their own bodies.

“Who cares whether or not she can ski”: Fashion and Glamor at Sun Valley

It was through fashion that most celebrity women skiing at Sun Valley managed to avoid claims that skiing and its attendant exercise threatened their feminine natures. From the very

³²² Adele Whitely Fletcher, “Hollywood At Home: How Claudette Colbert Lives,” *Photoplay*, December 1940, 70, mediahistoryproject.org.

beginning, the likes of Harriman and Hannagan seemed to recognize that, along with the promise of healthful sun and recreation, ensuring that proper fashions were always available to the glamorous people they lured to the resort, especially their female patrons, needed to be high on their priority list. The resort opened with a branch of New York's famous Saks Fifth Avenue in the Lodge to promote the latest fashions, skiing and otherwise, which, according to Dorice Taylor, "formed a background of new ski fashions designed especially for Sun Valley."³²³ By 1940, Saks had been replaced by a store of Swiss fashion designer F.A. Picard, whose designs, exclusive to the resort, became synonymous with Sun Valley in local and national advertisements. In 1949, for example, an advertisement in *Ski Magazine* for Bloomingdale's in New York City declared that "Picard of Sun Valley has been our advisor for our new Ski Shop."³²⁴ Fan magazines often referred to skiing fashions and Sun Valley in the same sentence, constantly linking the two together for their readers. It seems that as skiing became a fashionable activity, fashion houses turned to skiing for inspiration, led in large part by Picard and the actresses who bought the latest styles of fashions to American ski slopes. Serving a larger purpose than earning its wearers photographs in style magazines, fashion at Sun Valley functioned as a kind of counterbalance to the masculinity of the sport: as long as women wore the right clothes, their femininity would remain intact even as they used their bodies in traditionally masculine public pursuits.

³²³ Taylor, *Sun Valley*., 53.

³²⁴ In fact, Picard's only shop was at Sun Valley, which became known in magazine advertisements as "F.A. Picard of Sun Valley." Clara Spiegel interviewed by Michael Engl and Ginger Piotter, September 27, 1987, Oral Histories OH 0253SPI, Folder 1, Community Library Association, Regional History Department, Ketchum, ID. For one example of national mentions of Picard's pioneering role in skiing fashions, see "Twin Styles Win Praise," *Ski Magazine*, November 15, 1948 12, Periodicals Collection, RHD, TCL; Advertisement for Bloomingdale's Ski Shop, *Ski Magazine*, January 1, 1949, pg16, Periodicals Collection, RHD, TCL.

Most importantly to Sun Valley's reputation as a place of glamour as well as exercise, fashion legitimized women skiing at Sun Valley. Historian Patricia Campbell Warner notes that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, clothing that women wore while exercising in private was distinct from the clothing they wore while playing sports in public; clothing that women wore for sport in public had to be modest and in the latest style because it was "by definition clothing for interaction with men."³²⁵ For women playing amateur sports or participating in public sporting events between the 1880s and the 1910s, the price to pay for playing in public often meant wearing ankle-length skirts, long-sleeved blouses, corsets, and a hat. Women's tennis in the 1920s, however, began to change all of that. French tennis sensation Suzanne Lenglen was the most prominent figure to begin wearing shorter skirts and looser blouses while she played, which presaged the fashion trends of the flapper. More importantly, these new tennis outfits were functional, allowing for a greater freedom of movement that previous sportswear made nearly impossible.³²⁶ Lenglen's American counterpart, Helen Wills, followed in Lenglen's footsteps, recommending playing with what she called "emancipated legs," under shorter skirts, though she was careful to assert that shorter skirts did not mean that women players bare their legs completely – she instead suggested wearing sheer hose, retaining an important air of femininity that made Wills an "All American Girl" compared to Lenglen's foreign, convention-bending styles.³²⁷

Merging of the private and public forms of exercise – and sportswear – began as two social norms broke down in the early twentieth century. First, women of all classes became more

³²⁵ Patricia Campbell Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006): 6.

³²⁶ Engelmann, *The Goddess and the American Girl*, 24.

³²⁷ Jaime Schultz, *Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S. Women's Sport* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014): 29.

actively involved in sports than ever before, from lawn tennis of the upper- and middle-classes to company-sponsored basketball games and track and field events for working-class employees. Second, sportswomen who had captured the national imagination in various ways – including Lenglen, Wills, and Babe Didrikson – became idols for the clothing they wore while participating in their preferred sport. Elite and middle-class women led this merger, as the sports and leisure activities in which fashion changed the most were those that only moneyed women could afford – tennis, golf, and even bicycling to an extent. However, as historian Nan Enstad convincingly shows, working women in the U.S. in the first decades of the twentieth century often co-opted middle-class fashions, not because they wished to copy the middle-class, but because they understood that fashion had a large role to play in the “self-construction and self-expression as women, as workers, as Americans.” Though there was significant difference in quality and styles between various classes of women, fashion was an important form of consumption through which all American women constructed multifaceted identities.³²⁸

Popular culture was central to women’s identity construction through fashion. Given the ubiquity and influence of feature films beginning in the 1920s, Warner credits the movies as the factor that “more than any other, sold the ideas gleaned from sports to the public.” As women characters on the screen began wearing outfits that showed off their svelte figures in the 1930s, as opposed to the loose-fitting flapper dresses of the 1920s, “the category of sportswear was finally born.”³²⁹ Over the next two decades, according to historian Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, sportswear, a style “grounded in comfort, versatility, and accessibility,” which “created a new ideal of fashionable femininity that...lionized the working, on-the-move woman who became the

³²⁸ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 13, 19.

³²⁹ Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play*, 245-247.

epitome of American modernity,” became popular. Hollywood in particular became a breeding ground for this new Americanized form of fashion. The career woman became the model for this new practical, versatile style, and her sartorial choices became emblematic of “a new ethos of femininity that applauded freedom, mobility, youth, and individuality,” while also retaining a feminine silhouette, such as tight waistlines and fitted suitcoats, often resembling suits that working men had worn for decades. Sportswear brought “a new appreciation of so-called mannish styles,” especially trousers – which had been worn by women only for sporting purposes up through the 1920s – to the forefront of women’s fashion. Hollywood movie stars, whether playing fictional working women onscreen or living that reality in their everyday lives, became the mannequins on which American women could see these new fashions displayed. The styles of Hollywood designers Edith Head, Irene, and others created onscreen outfits that American women could adapt for themselves, providing “fashionable solutions to millions of women who sought to look glamorous without compromising their independence or pocketbook.”³³⁰ Whether playing sporting or career characters or simply being working women themselves, Hollywood’s actresses, with the help of their costume designers and the ready-made fashion industry, made sportswear, now associated with working in public, glamorous and achievable for every class of American woman.

Sportswear, then, for the first time, became so associated with women’s fashion that wearing shorter skirts or pants was no longer a threat to American femininity. Instead, designers and their customers viewed sports as a new field in which they could experiment with cutting-edge styles. Jaime Schultz argues that “perhaps in no physical activity is fashion more important,

³³⁰ Rabinovitch-Fox, *Dressed for Freedom*, 118-119, 134-137.

not just in terms of athleticism, but especially for one's presentation of self" than tennis.³³¹ There is no doubt that women's tennis in the 1920s led the way in emphasizing practicality of their outfits for the warmer months, as well as proving that sport and femininity need not be mutually exclusive. By the time Sun Valley opened in the late 1930s, no sport had so thoroughly captured the nation's imagination of how one how one should look while exercising in the winter as did skiing. Within years of the Winter Olympic games at Lake Placid in 1932, which many historians consider the event that brought skiing into the mainstream American public consciousness, skiing was no longer something only rich celebrities did. According to an article in *The Hailey Times* published just five years after the Lake Placid Olympics, "skiing has become a fundamental part of winter existence." The ski industry itself exploded after Lake Placid, but especially after Sun Valley gained national popularity, making nearly \$20 million per year by 1937. It was estimated that skiing clothing made up nearly 30% of that sum, nearly \$6 million, more than any other category of ski equipment – more than even skis and bindings (fundamental equipment to participate in the sport), which sold only half that amount.³³² This would indicate, then, that more people wore skiing fashions than actually went skiing, making fashion central to the sport in the late 1930s and early 1940s. One fashion column in *Modern Screen* promoted complete skiing outfits that cost anywhere from \$7 to \$18 in 1941 – roughly between \$150 and \$390 in 2023.³³³ Historian Barbara Burman demonstrates that in the United Kingdom in the early decades of the twentieth century, the sartorial choices that women aviators and racers made raised fears that, if men and women wore similar sporting outfits, "it will be

³³¹ Schultz, *Qualifying Times*, 17.

³³² "'Skiing' Becomes The National By-word," *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), December 2, 1937, TCL.

³³³ "Snow – Sun," *Modern Screen*, February 1941, 56, mediahistoryproject.org. Inflation numbers pulled from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Website, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.

difficult to distinguish between them.”³³⁴ Similar concerns about blurring gendered expectations had been leveled against American women in sportswear for decades.³³⁵ However, women’s skiing fashions functioned to mitigate such societal fears – women, if attired properly, would *certainly not* look like men when coming down the slopes or spending time inside the lodge.

Fashion was central to Sun Valley’s very identity as “a place where roughing it must be a luxury.” With its \$1.5 million lodge, it is very unlikely that any visitors were actually “roughing it,” as one might usually do in Idaho’s Sawtooth Mountains. Harriman and Hannagan were determined that even the most unlikely spots within the lodge should provide a sense of glamor and luxury for visitors. *The Hailey Times* reported, “Nothing has been omitted to make the far easterner feel at home as well as to add to the comfort and pleasure of guests... There is... a very up-to-date beauty parlor, [and] a beautifully equipped powder room for ladies.”³³⁶ This ensured, then, that women who visited always had the opportunity to reapply the visual aspects of their femininity after engaging in a masculine sport. Because of this commitment to luxury and glamor at the resort, Idaho newspapers exhorted their readers not only to ski, but to ski in the proper outfit: “At any rate, there is simply no excuse now for Boiseans not to be perfectly attired for the sport – whether they indulge in it on the Sawtooth slopes, or on the milder undulations of Boise’s foothills.” The accompanying photograph is of a woman attired in a fashionable wool coat with matching wool pants, loose around the legs, under which the caption reads, “Who cares whether or not she can ski? It would be much [better to] have her stand still so we could see

³³⁴ Barbara Burman, “Racing Bodies: Dress and Pioneer Women Aviators and Racing Drivers,” *Women’s History Review* 9 no.2 (2000): 318; see also Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*: 9.

³³⁵ Rabinovitch-Fox, *Dressed for Freedom*, 2.

³³⁶ “Sun Valley Lodge Opens Doors to World: Great Hotel Now Ready to Entertain,” *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), December 24, 1936, RM036, folder 3, item #040, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

every detail of this...black and white suit.”³³⁷ It is worth noting that Boise, the largest city in the state, is over 150 miles away from Sun Valley, practically a whole day’s travel given common modes of transportation of the time – never mind the fact that even residents of Boise, still recovering from the Great Depression, could likely rarely afford to go to Sun Valley, properly attired or not. This article was not promoting skiing, but rather skiing fashions, something in which any woman (at least theoretically) could participate.

Fashion was always a top priority at Sun Valley, even after its first year. Promotional films, played either at Union Pacific stations or perhaps prior to feature films in movie houses nationwide, almost always featured Picard’s ski shop as central to any trip to the resort. After introducing the concept that “anyone can learn to ski,” the movie *Sun Valley Skiing* introduced the ski shop, promising clothes that were fashionable and durable. Publicity about the resort advised that a truly fashionable woman vacationing at Sun Valley would never miss a chance to visit the ski shop. “Smart girls jockey a bit to cheat the sun and wind and still retain a snappy appearance,” suggests the movie’s narrator as the film shows an attractive and clearly fashion-conscious young woman trying on a hat in the store.³³⁸ In *Sun Valley Holiday* (1941), a young woman shops for the most recent skiing fashions at Picard’s while the narration promises some of the country’s highest fashions even in a remote place like Sun Valley:

While far away from the congested avenues, downtown crowds, and busy stores, Sun Valley places at the disposal of its guests a variety of smart stocks in smart shops, catering to any need or luxury. Costumes of use and beauty are offered in wide assortment. It should be noted, if it hasn’t already been...that a skiing costume no longer disfigures a pretty form or offends the sight...You may admire and just look, but between

³³⁷ “As She Says,” *The Idaho Statesman* (Boise, ID), December 20, 1936, RHD E, folder 0176, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³³⁸ *Sun Valley Skiing*, undated, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SUN, RHD, TCL.

you and me, she'll [the woman onscreen] have that costume with her when she leaves the store.³³⁹

In showing only young, attractive women buying the newest, most attractive fashions, promotional movies and advertisements like *Sun Valley Holiday* and *Sun Valley Skiing* intimately tied gender, skiing, fashion, and consumerism into one tidy bundle. A woman need not arrive in Sun Valley at the height of fashion – she could purchase her way into it. Men, on the other hand, need not arrive in Sun Valley with any concerns about fashion, though undoubtedly any man could have purchased fashionable skiing attire at Picard's as well. As a place where any woman with the means could buy conventional signifiers of outward femininity like clothing that justified their presence in a normally masculine space, Sun Valley became an appropriate place for women to use their bodies in public.

As skiing became fashionable and fashions turned to skiing, Sun Valley itself became fashionable as a place where anyone who was anyone was spotted. Though it is clear that most actresses went to Sun Valley to ski and participate in winter sports, many Sun Valley regulars and employees knew that some came just to be seen at the resort. Dorice Taylor, head of the Sun Valley publicity department after Steve Hannagan's death in 1955, knew firsthand about celebrities' attempts simply to be photographed at Sun Valley, and often worked closely with the movie studios to plan out the attendant press releases. Sun Valley was so popular with Hollywood stars and so often written about in fan magazines that it became a kind of place where "anyone who was anyone" was seen. Stars Shelley Winters and Rhonda Fleming, both popular in the 1950s, came just to have their photo taken as if they actively participated in the available sporting opportunities, though Taylor admitted they did not.³⁴⁰ The publicity, however,

³³⁹ *Sun Valley Holiday*, 1941, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SUN, RHD, TCL.

³⁴⁰ Taylor, *Sun Valley*., 164.

capitalized on previous reports of celebrity women's athletic endeavors at Sun Valley to insinuate that they were also participating in the now-popular sport of skiing. Photos from Sun Valley collections show Rhonda Fleming laughing as her ski instructor Tony Raeber, whose head is almost touching the snow-covered ground while his feet are strapped into his skis on the ground, shows off his flexibility and the strength of his ski bindings.³⁴¹ Another photo shows Shelley Winters sitting in reeds with Sun Valley guide Joe Burgy. Shelley herself holds a shotgun in her right hand with the barrel pointed up toward the sky, her gaze towards the gun away from the camera, while Burgy looks up toward the sky, with one dead pheasant already part of the duo's bounty.³⁴² This is not to say that Shelley Winters did not shoot the gun herself, of course, or that Rhonda Fleming did not attempt to ski, but Taylor makes clear that the actresses' studios sent them to Sun Valley specifically to have their pictures taken there, taking advantage of the resort's popularity to try to boost their own. Similarly, movie star Loretta Young, incredibly popular between the 1930s and 1950s, often visited Sun Valley, but it was her husband who did the skiing. Loretta's close friend and fellow actress Rosalind Russell (who apparently skied quite well) said of Young's time at the resort, "The most athletic thing Loretta will do in Sun Valley is sew a sequin on an evening dress."³⁴³ Flying down the snowy slopes was not necessary to gain publicity benefits from the trip – simply being photographed at Sun Valley was enough.

Using celebrities' visits to promote skiing fashions, fan magazine editors neatly and explicitly tied together physical recreation, fashion, and consumption, insinuating that physical

³⁴¹ Photograph of Rhonda Fleming and Tony Raeber, Sun Valley, Idaho: Sun Valley Publicity Department, 1958. F-06245 [P-6930] Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³⁴² Photograph of Shelley Winters and Joe Burgy, Sun Valley, Idaho: Sun Valley Publicity Department, n.d. F-00094 [P-197], Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³⁴³ As quoted in Taylor, *Sun Valley*., 159.

recreation was nearly impossible without participating in consumerism. According to Mary Marshall, beauty editor for *Modern Screen*, the key to faithfully exercising in winter was to get “a cute special costume [which] will help you get into the proper frame of mind.”³⁴⁴ In the same month that Sun Valley opened, *Photoplay* declared that no American woman’s wardrobe was complete without an outfit for all of her various sports – a shooting suit, an outfit for skating, another for riding a bike, and finally, a “ski and snow suit.”³⁴⁵ Actress Jean Parker posed in ski clothes on multiple occasions for *Photoplay*, including once in November 1938, in which Parker posed with ski poles and a pair of skis while dressed in a navy blue wool ski suit, complete with red, green, yellow, and blue embroidery on her socks and mittens. In the caption beside the photograph, editors directly linked skiing fashions with Sun Valley, declaring “Winter sports at Sun Valley, Idaho, claim the ardent enthusiasm of many Hollywood stars,” before describing the outfit and its designers.³⁴⁶ The fashionable reputation of Sun Valley even sold ordinary travel clothes, such as a *Photoplay* profile that featured actress Patricia Morison’s trip to Sun Valley and the fashionable wardrobe she took with her.³⁴⁷ Within fan magazines, the image and reputation of Sun Valley was invoked most often in conjunction with the promotion of fashions, enticing all American women to purchase clothes that, even if they were not skiing at Sun Valley themselves, made them just as fashionable as the celebrities in the magazines. In this way, celebrity women at Sun Valley demonstrated how fashion helped legitimize women in a new sporting space; simultaneously, fan magazines’ promotion of consumer products undermined

³⁴⁴ Mary Marshall, “Cool Weather Beauty Forecast,” *Modern Screen*, October 1938, 109, mediahistoryproject.org.

³⁴⁵ Kathleen Howard, “Fashion Letter for December,” *Photoplay*, December 1936, 78, mediahistoryproject.org.

³⁴⁶ “On the Avenue,” *Photoplay*, November 1938, 58, mediahistoryproject.org.

³⁴⁷ “Tips for Travel,” *Photoplay*, March 1940, 52, mediahistoryproject.org.

these challenges by highlighting consumer culture and physical beauty as practically more important than a woman's skiing ability.

Clothing was not the only consumer product promoted by fan magazines that tied together this new sport of skiing and the luxurious resort of Sun Valley. Cosmetics and skin care became another important facet for women who were venturing out to engage in winter sports, skiing or otherwise, led by example of the likes of Sonja Henie, Norwegian figure skating Olympic champion turned highly-popular movie musical actress. Articles and advertisements in fan magazines endorsed soaps, creams, and lotions that prevented "the hurt of chapped, roughened, cracked skin" from constant forays into the winter cold and wind. Accessories were not to be forgotten either: "Smoked or colored glasses are a boon to the eyes on snow jaunts and you won't catch any of the stars off on snow jaunts to Sun Valley or other places without them."³⁴⁸ That Sun Valley was the only winter sports resort mentioned by name suggests that even the average American reader knew about the resort and its reputation, thanks especially to the celebrity influence there, making the resort into a symbol that tried to contain celebrity women's challenges to traditional gender roles by promoting fashion and beauty, conventional markers of femininity, as more important on the slopes than athleticism.

Celebrities were well aware of the role that fashion played in justifying the public use of their bodies on the ski slopes. Even those who came to ski were never seen in last season's skiing fashions. Norma Shearer was constantly mentioned as one of the most beloved – and most fashionable and glamorous – celebrity women to ever visit Sun Valley. Her beautiful clothing always made an impression on local Ketchum residents and fellow celebrities alike, a signifier of her money and status. Even decades after Shearer's time at Sun Valley, a *Wood River Journal*

³⁴⁸ Mary Lee, "Protect Your Skin While Enjoying Winter Sports," *Silver Screen*, February 1938, 58, mediahistoryproject.org.

reporter asked Sun Valley residents Don and Gretchen Fraser and Kathleen Harriman Mortimer (Averell Harriman's daughter) whom they considered the most glamorous woman ever to come to Sun Valley. They all agreed Shearer was the obvious answer.³⁴⁹ Shearer's style was so memorable that Gretchen Fraser could recall the first time she "saw the movie star in a gold lamé long evening dress descending the marble steps of the Lodge dining room."³⁵⁰ But even on the slopes, Shearer remained at the height of fashion. Dorice Taylor shared a humorous anecdote of one day when Shearer wore "a luxurious white wooly coat from the Picard Shop" while riding up the ski lift to keep herself warm against the winter cold. Upon reaching the top, she asked the lift operator to send the coat back down on an empty chair. Shearer's style was apparently well-known to nearly all visitors, as "[e]cstatic teenagers watched the coat and cried 'Here comes Norma,' every time it came into view."³⁵¹ Norma Shearer embodied not only the luxury upon which Sun Valley built itself, but also the way women celebrities at Sun Valley emphasized fashion as they took to the ski slopes to justify and legitimize their presence there.

But Shearer was more than just a white mink coat riding up and down the ski lift. Even her skiing portrayed a kind of femininity that Taylor rarely used to describe how men skied, including Shearer's husband, ski racer Marti Arrougé: "Norma claimed that in skiing she would have nothing to do with steepness or speed. However, day after day, she joined Marti on the top of Baldy and skied down after him gracefully and in perfect control."³⁵² It was not that Arrougé was not graceful, but rather that his, and other men's, form of skiing often took on superlatives of

³⁴⁹ Michael Hofferber, "Video focuses on Sun Valley's story," *Wood River Journal* (Hailey, ID), February 14, 1990. RHD RM015, folder 6, item #99, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³⁵⁰ Pfeifer, *Gretchen's Gold*, 39.

³⁵¹ Taylor, *Sun Valley*:, 159.

³⁵² Taylor, *Sun Valley*:, 158.

“strong,” “capable,” and “quick.” Shearer, on the other hand, was distinctly “graceful,” both on and off the ski slopes, a much more feminine description than Taylor used for men skiers. Though Shearer was an Academy Award winner and undoubtedly one of the most famous celebrities of the early years to spend time at Sun Valley, she was gracious and giving as well. During her decades at Sun Valley, Shearer served on the Sun Valley Ski Club Board of Governors between 1947 and 1950, was the first person to donate to the new Ketchum community thrift store in 1955, and according to one Ketchum resident, was the kind of person “who’d see you from way across the room and walk over to say hello to you.” Once, in 1938, Shearer was the first driver on the scene after a car accident, after which she drove one of the passengers back into town in her car. Another Ketchum resident, only a young boy when Shearer visited, recalled how she taught him several dance steps that he used well into adulthood.³⁵³ Shearer’s warmth, wit, and kindness, all traditionally feminine traits, were noted with regularity when Ketchum locals were interviewed. Her sense of fashion and decorum, both on the slopes and off, ensured that her femininity was the first thing most people noticed and remembered. Put another way, Shearer’s fashions solidified and legitimized her role as a woman physically recreating in public, making her the most famous example of how American women might use fashion to challenge traditional, conservative expectations for women’s bodies.

³⁵³ *Sun Valley Ski Club Annual*, 1947-1950, RM-05, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID). Pam Morris, “Silver Anniversary Reached With A Gold Mine,” RHD RM-054, item #050, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).; Margaret Helminiak, “The way it was: ‘Like one big family’,” *Wood River Journal* (Hailey, ID), August 28, 1980, RHD RM-15, Folder 3, item #51, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).; “Sun Valley Party Involved in Crackup,” *The Hailey Times*, December 29, 1938, TCL; Clara Spiegel interview, September 27, 1987, tape #5.

“Ski enthusiasts are not very long on the pocketbook”: Democracy at Sun Valley?

It perhaps would not be an exaggeration to say that without celebrity influence, Sun Valley, would not have become as synonymous with skiing and winter sports as it was in the 1940s and 1950s. Even though *Life Magazine* referred to it as “society’s newest winter playground” in 1937, W. Averell Harriman had a higher goal for the resort than attracting only the rich and famous. Celebrities, in some ways, were a means to an end for Harriman. They would help bring attention to the place, and these famous skiers, especially women in their fashionable dress and with their capable skiing, could serve to entice even the average American to the ski resort, if only to catch a glimpse of Norma Shearer and her white coat going up and down on the ski lift. More than that, this chapter argues, Sun Valley was a unique site in that the way it operated allowed for some feeling of democratization in the sport of skiing – even if the reality proved otherwise. It became a place where women could experiment with their newfound physical abilities and to challenge traditional gender roles by using their bodies in public for their own personal health and amusement without fear of retribution for stepping out of their proper sphere. Because Harriman wanted “to see that *people* come up here and enjoy the place” (emphasis mine), everyone at Sun Valley, regardless of gender, age, (theoretically) race, or class, could come and enjoy themselves at this new winter wonderland.³⁵⁴

Central to Sun Valley’s status as an elite ski resort was its ski school, staffed by over 150 instructors within five years of its opening, including a host of seasoned Austrians trained in the Arlberg technique.³⁵⁵ Potential skiers could pay for as many skiing lessons as they had time and

³⁵⁴ “East Goes West to Idaho’s Sun Valley, Society’s Newest Winter Playground,” *Life*, March 8, 1937, pg 20, RHD RM036, folder 1, item #010, RHD, TCL; W. Averell Harriman, interviewed by Deanne Thompson, August 8, 1983.

³⁵⁵ Friedl Pfeifer, interviewed by Penney Brons, February 27, 1987, Oral Histories OH PFE0238, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID). Many of these Austrian instructors returned to Austria during World War II and fought with the Nazis, though a few who remained in the United States during the war were arrested in 1942 and given the choice between joining the U.S. Army or being sent to a concentration camp in the

money for, though the resort recommended at least a week's worth. Most often, new skiers would learn in a large class of at least ten students, but particularly moneyed novices could pay for private instruction. As long as they could pay for lessons, anyone could learn how to ski at the Sun Valley Ski School, just as one advertising film, *Sun Valley Skiing*, promised.³⁵⁶ Friedl Pfeifer, director of the Sun Valley Ski School between 1938 and 1942, wrote in an article published in the *Sun Valley Ski Club Annual* that "everybody can learn and practice skiing."³⁵⁷ Another promotional film, *Sun Valley Holiday* (1941), used the main character, a young woman named Jean, to demonstrate that any young woman could safely learn to ski and physically exercise without fear of social retribution. In the film, as Jean and her middle-class family prepare for a spring skiing vacation to Sun Valley, the narrator explains, "Jean too knows that a little training goes well before skiing." Then, Jean, through the narrator, suggests that her mother ought to learn how to ski during this vacation, a suggestion her mother seems to wave off without another thought. Once in Sun Valley, when the rest of the family leaves for group skiing lessons on the slopes of Dollar Mountain, Mother sneaks off to private lessons of her own. "And why not?" proposes the narrator, "She has seen and envied women much older than she enjoying sanely and safely the thrills of skiing." Not only is gender not a barrier to skiing, promises the film, but neither is age: "Middle age can grace a snowy landscape just as well as youth. And mothers need no longer sit and knit while daughter skis with Dad."³⁵⁸ Promotional materials from Sun Valley seemed to encourage similar behavior for women's public bodies as did the

U.S. Even Count Schaffgotsch, the man who wired Harriman that Sun Valley was an ideal place to build a western ski resort, died fighting for Germany on the Russian front. Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley*, 135.

³⁵⁶ *Sun Valley Skiing*, undated, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SUN, RHD, TCL.

³⁵⁷ Friedl Pfeifer, "The Sun Valley Ski School," *Sun Valley Ski Club Annual* (1939): 1, Periodicals Collection, RHD, TCL.

³⁵⁸ *Sun Valley Holiday*, 1941, Union Pacific, RHD DV 790 SUN, RHD, TCL.

actions of celebrity women. Whereas fan magazines worked to undermine women's challenges to traditional gender expectations toward exercise, promotional materials from the resort itself reinforced the idea that women's physical exercise in the public sphere was not a social threat, but an appropriate activity for women of all ages.

Even as Sun Valley proved a liberating space for women, it did not promise the same opportunities for non-white patrons. Sun Valley did not formally segregate the resort based on race. With that said, however, very few African Americans skied at Sun Valley through most of its history. The state of Idaho has always had an incredibly small Black population, and the late 1930s and early 1940s constituted the lowest population of African Americans in the state since 1910; the 1940 statewide census counted just 595.³⁵⁹ That number, however, does not account for the reasons why Sun Valley had so few Black visitors. While the monetary cost of skiing was prohibitive for most Black Americans, especially in the years following the Great Depression, even the Black middle class, according to historian Mark S. Foster, found it difficult to make inroads in leisure sports "with elitist or upper class overtones," such as tennis, golf, and, in this case, skiing. This difficulty was not necessarily because of money but rather because of the multiple barriers that society had erected to prevent racial equality.³⁶⁰ One of those barriers was transportation, as Black people faced constant discrimination on the railroads, eventually embracing the automobile as "a means of private and liberating transportation."³⁶¹ In Sun Valley's first decades, taking the train into town was the only way of reaching the resort, as

³⁵⁹ Mamie O. Oliver, "Idaho Ebony: The African American Presence in Idaho State History," *The Journal of African American History* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 42.

³⁶⁰ As far as can be ascertained, there has been no large-scale historical study done about African-Americans and skiing as a leisure activity.

³⁶¹ Mark S. Foster, "In the Face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel, and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945," *The Journal of African American History* 84 no. 2 (Spring 1999): 141-143.

roads during the winter were nearly impassable, making it difficult for Black Americans to travel to Sun Valley. Further, Union Pacific advertisements in 1940 only perpetuated the idea that the proper place for Black Americans on a train was as porters. “For a truly *Great* trip, go on a Union Pacific train,” the advertisement reads, accompanied by an image of two white travelers being served food by a Black porter.³⁶² “It’s the *pleasant, economical* way to travel,” claims the ad, intimating that part of the pleasant experience was being served by African Americans. The real role for Black people on Union Pacific trains heading for Sun Valley was not one of recreation for themselves, but for the pleasure for white patrons.

Though Union Pacific was more overt in its racism than the administration at Sun Valley, the lack of any African Americans at Sun Valley *at all* paints the picture of the resort as a place where white Americans could recreate and vacation without engaging in the complicated race relations of the time. In fact, for many Ketchum locals, Union Pacific trains and their Black porters brought them face to face with African Americans for perhaps the first time, as a short blurb in *The Hailey Times* described in February 1937: “It may be that many of the visitors to Sun Valley are seeing snow for the first time. Conversely, it is equally true that some Ketchum natives are now seeing negroes for the first time.”³⁶³ It does not seem that any of the porters made any permanent home at the end of the Union Pacific line in Ketchum; the residents of the Wood River Valley, then, struggled with race relations for only a few brief moments at a time, but it apparently sufficiently shook up their worldview enough to garner a mention in the local newspaper. It should be noted, however, that the newspaper does not characterize African Americans in negative ways, nor were there any outright bans on African Americans visiting or

³⁶² Union Pacific Railroad Advertisement, “For a Truly Great Trip,” found in *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), January 11, 1940, TCL.

³⁶³ “Seen in Ketchum,” *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID) February 18, 1937, TCL.

skiing at Sun Valley from the resort officials. Black Americans simply never came, at least through the 1950s. Sun Valley, perhaps unintentionally, became a site at which white Americans, especially rich ones, could escape the “real world,” including complex race relations that were constantly changing, as well as a civil rights movement in its infancy.³⁶⁴ Sun Valley, in many ways, became a nostalgic reminder of a bucolic western landscape reminiscent of the Old Wild West, full of gamblers, saloons, and clinking spurs where those conquering the mountains and craps tables were white. In other words, the resort was a place where anyone *could* come and vacation, but where only a select few, all white, actually did.

Memories that locals and celebrities had of the resort appear to be colored by a sense of democracy; that, at Sun Valley, celebrities and non-famous visitors mingled as if there was no difference between them at all – even if there obviously was. Several people, from Ketchum natives to celebrities themselves, mentioned how much celebrities enjoyed Sun Valley because “nobody but the publicity department cared about celebrities.”³⁶⁵ Long-time Ketchum resident Edith Ellis Hyde admitted, “Ketchum people were not the sort to rush up for autographs. We left the movie stars to themselves and they thoroughly enjoyed it.”³⁶⁶ Though undoubtedly the occasional visitor gawked at the likes of enormously famous stars like Claudette Colbert and Gary Cooper, for the most part, celebrities participated in local life in ways they may not have in other places they vacationed. Sun Valley advertisements and Hollywood publicity tied the idea of democracy to the resort, claiming that Sun Valley was a place where anyone, no matter their

³⁶⁴ Even if Sun Valley did not intentionally prevent Black Americans from visiting the resort, there does not seem to be any evidence that they went out of their way to entice moneyed Black visitors to come.

³⁶⁵ Clara Spiegel interviewed by Michael Engl and Ginger Piotter, September 27, 1987, Oral Histories OH 0253SPI, Folder 2, RHD, TCL.

³⁶⁶ Scot Kersgaard, “Edith Ellis Hyde lived here long before Sun Valley built,” *Wood River Journal* February 9, 1984, People at Sun Valley Collection RM015, Folder 20, item #419, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

gender, race, class, or level of fame, could play together. It thus retained some claims to an ideal equal American society while it simultaneously exposed racial and class limits to the current form of American democracy.

For some of the women celebrities, the area's sense of democratization so endeared them to the area that they were regular visitors in the area for decades. Though the reality of social equality at the resort was not fully realized through categories like race and class, celebrity women's behavior nevertheless extended women's public presence in Sun Valley to non-athletic endeavors. Norma Shearer, for example, not only visited Sun Valley nearly every winter the resort was open between 1938 and 1950 but became a staple in the Ketchum community during the same time. When a group of Ketchum women opened the community thrift store, called the Gold Mine, Shearer donated the first items of clothing.³⁶⁷ Ann Sothern, who began visiting Sun Valley in 1948, opened up a sewing shop in Ketchum in the 1950s. The shop offered sewing classes, sold "wonderful fabrics...and then, eventually...got into selling almost anything you wanted around."³⁶⁸ Though the business closed after six years, Sothern made Ketchum her permanent residence after suffering a nearly career-ending injury in 1974. Upon her death, she was buried in the Ketchum Cemetery.³⁶⁹

Because of the claim that everyone was equal while at the resort, romances between varied classes of people blossomed at Sun Valley, which was increasingly emphasized by the fan magazine coverage of the resort. By tying together romance and Sun Valley, Hollywood publicity began to undermine women's public challenges to traditional gender roles on the ski

³⁶⁷ "Silver Anniversary Reached With a Gold Mine," RHD RM-054 item #050, RHD, TCL.

³⁶⁸ Ann Sothern interviewed by Shirley Huckins, September 27, 1985, Oral Histories OH-286, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³⁶⁹ Margie Schultz, *Ann Sothern: A Bio-Bibliography*, RHD 92 SOT, RHD Non-Fiction, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

slopes by accentuating how celebrity women were willing to retire from public life to the private home – though few actually did. Feature films in particular emphasized Sun Valley’s reputation as a place where visitors could find a romantic partner, or an ideal location for couples already in love (see Intermission 2). Shearer, once again, was the most well-known example of this process. Two years after her first husband, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer producer Irving Thalberg, died in 1936, she first visited Sun Valley; after a few visits, she began to spend more and more time with her children’s ski instructor, Martin “Marti” Arrougé, who had come to Sun Valley from the ski team at the University of Nevada Reno. Clara Spiegel, Chicago socialite and Sun Valley regular, recalled of the couple, “practically every time I came in or out of my room, Marti was on his way [to Norma’s room at the end of the hall] and I never saw him come back.”³⁷⁰ Theirs was just more than a fleeting romance, however. *Photoplay* reported in 1942, “‘I’ve been a widow for six years,’ Norma told her friends, ‘and in those years I’ve spent too many lonely hours. Besides, my children love him. For me,’ she added with wistful dignity, ‘it’s a serious romance.’”³⁷¹ Shearer and Arrougé married in August 1942, remaining married until her death in 1983. Other romances abounded. Dorice Taylor reported that ski instructor Andy Ransom “was the first of many romances for Ann Sothern.”³⁷² Celebrity couple Roy Rogers and Dale Evans planned to spend

³⁷⁰ Clara Spiegel interviewed by Michael Engl and Ginger Piotter, September 27, 1987, Oral Histories OH 0253SPI, Tape #5, RHD, TCL.

³⁷¹ “Romance for the Lonely by ‘Fearless,’” *Photoplay*, September 1942, 33, mediahistoryproject.org.

³⁷² Taylor, *Sun Valley*., 177.

their honeymoon at the resort in 1948.³⁷³ Even in its first season, Sun Valley played host to a quick romance between popular ski instructor Hans Hauser and heiress Gloria Baker.³⁷⁴

The most well-known celebrities at Sun Valley were, of course, the movie stars, followed closely by the Eastern socialites whose names, at least, would likely have been familiar to most Americans. However, Sun Valley introduced a new kind of celebrity, whose modest fame brought with it a new challenge to conventional beliefs about women's competitiveness and the tenuousness divide between the public sphere and private sphere: female sports stars. Though the name Gretchen Fraser meant very little to most Americans prior to 1948, her achievements in skiing nevertheless launched her into the status of celebrity after her gold medal win. Soon after, however, Fraser stunned many when she appeared to renounce everything she had represented in St. Moritz. Though not a movie star, Fraser nevertheless gained fame as a woman who used her body in public for her own health and enjoyment. Her public success also served nationalistic purposes – in this case, demonstrating American superiority in competitive skiing in an international competition. However, just as Fraser was garnering the most attention as an ideal public American female athlete, she appeared to renounce everything she had represented in St. Moritz.

“Every busy woman should know these flags”: Gretchen Fraser from Private to Public and Back

Prior to her 1948 Olympic win, Gretchen Fraser had already garnered plenty of attention as a woman skier. As early as January 1940, Fraser was making headlines. That year, *The*

³⁷³ Cynthia Miller, “they knew what they wanted,” *Modern Screen*, February 1948, 14, mediahistoryproject.org.

³⁷⁴ A photo published in *Life Magazine* captured an intimate moment between Baker and Hauser; Baker rests her head in Hauser's lap as he gazes tenderly down at her. “East Goes West to Idaho's Sun Valley, Society's Newest Winter Playground,” *Life Magazine*, March 8, 1937, 21.

Oregon Statesman reported, “a girl [Gretchen]...nearly stole the show” at the Idaho State Ski Tournament held at Sun Valley. Her winning time, 2:50.3, was better than all other skiers, save for the men’s champion.³⁷⁵ Newspapers all over the country reported her skiing achievements throughout the 1940s – as far north as British Columbia, Canada, as far south as Arizona, and as far east as Vermont. However, in these early years, her name would have been limited to newspapers’ sports pages, a page likely very rarely read by the average American housewife. In the months leading up to the Olympic games, her role on the U.S. Women’s Ski Team made her name more ubiquitous in the sports pages, but news coverage of the Olympics meant her name began gracing other pages of the newspapers as well. However, in these more mainstream profiles, Fraser’s name often became synonymous with her looks and with her marital status— as if to make more palatable to the average American that a pretty, young, married woman was publicly competing in sports. An Associated Press (AP) article from January 14, 1948, described her as “Mrs. Gretchen Fraser, 28, a good-looking brunette,” (she was blonde) while a few days later, another AP article listed the marital status of the two married team members (Mrs. Rebecca Fraser Cremer, Mrs. Gretchen Fraser)³⁷⁶, while the single women of team were listed without honorifics.³⁷⁷ Understandably, the gold medal win changed a lot for the 28-year-old – but not everything. Though Gretchen was a highly decorated skiing champion, though she had worked

³⁷⁵ “Sun Valley Ski Tourney Closed,” *The Oregon Statesman* (Salem, OR) January 14, 1940, newspapers.com.

³⁷⁶ Despite the shared surname, Rebecca and Gretchen were not related. Interestingly, Fraser was Rebecca’s maiden name, while Fraser was Gretchen’s married name, having married Don Fraser (also unrelated to Rebecca) in 1939. Rebecca Fraser Cremer was cousin to Wendell “Wendy” Cram, a popular (male) ski instructor at Sun Valley for many years.

³⁷⁷ “Skier, 15, America’s Baby In St. Moritz Winter Games,” found in *Johnson City Press-Chronicle* (Johnson City, TN), January 11, 1948, newspapers.com, accessed 17 Jan 2023; Ted Smits, “United States Olympic Ski Team Chances Good As Winter Sports Classic January 30 Looms Up,” found in *The Idaho Statesman* (Boise, ID), January 18, 1948, newspapers.com.

as bookkeeper after World War II for her husband's family's gas and oil distribution company, and though she had just won the first American Olympic gold in skiing, the AP release after her win described her as a "Pretty 28 yr [old] Vancouver Wash., housewife skier." Just two days later, the AP published a photograph of Don Fraser, Gretchen's husband holding a newspaper announcing his wife's win with the caption, "Happy Husband."³⁷⁸ Gretchen's historic win and athletic achievement remained subsumed by her image as a housewife, even if she had just achieved a feat in a public sport that no other American housewife could claim.

Practically overnight, Gretchen Fraser had gone from a private citizen and wife to a celebrity whose private life was suddenly of national interest because of her international success as a public athlete. Suddenly, American women did not have to read the sports page to know who Gretchen Fraser was, as her image and reported status as housewife began to be splashed across advertisements for everything from Jantzen ski pants to enriched flour. Gretchen became particularly emblematic of the tenuous divide between public and private because, unlike many movie stars, she did not reject her role as housewife, while also promoting the possibilities of what women could achieve if they were in the public sphere. "In my dual role of homemaker and athlete, I've learned that the busier you are the more important it is to eat wisely," reads one advertisement from the Wheat Flour Institute that appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1949.³⁷⁹ The fact remained, however, that Gretchen was not a traditional homemaker – at least not yet. After her win, she embarked on a nationwide tour, accepting invitations to all public

³⁷⁸ Photocopies of both Associated Press photographs are found in the John Bechtholt Collection, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID). Originals can be found at the Tacoma Public Library Online Collections, Local History & Biology Index, Gretchen Kunigk Fraser, <https://cdm17061.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/search/searchterm/gretchen%20fraser>.

³⁷⁹ Wheat Flour Institute Advertisement, John Bechtholt Collection, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

engagements without ever missing an appointment. According to her biographer, Gretchen continuously charmed audiences across the country with her poise and modesty while humbly (and unintentionally) promoting the superiority of the United States and its women through the form of a gold medal win in the most famous international competition.³⁸⁰

Through all of this, Gretchen's connection to Sun Valley added a layer of nationalist pride to the resort, making it another place where women could go to use their bodies not just for themselves but also for the good of the nation in another way: to beat skiers from other nations in international competitions.³⁸¹ Whereas women had long been charged with promoting Americanism through teaching their children proper American ideals, Sun Valley became a place that helped prove American women's ability to disseminate American ideals in the athletic realm as well as the domestic one. Press reports of Fraser's win and training at Sun Valley gestured towards a womanhood that was flexible and malleable: the modern woman could now play sports, or even exercise to the point of perspiration, in public without potential societal repercussions. As a successful, married, and fashionable female athlete, Fraser became the ultimate embodiment of a woman who succeeded in the public sporting realm without sacrificing the ever-important femininity that detractors claimed was lost while participating in masculine endeavors like sports. In other words, as Fraser used her body in unconventional ways, she promoted American women's athletic superiority – at least on the ski slopes. She did this both by beating the European women in the competition but also, as the American newspapers noted, by

³⁸⁰ Pfeifer, *Gretchen's Gold*, 107.

³⁸¹ I am not trying to suggest that Sun Valley after Fraser's win was the only place in the 1940s where women used their bodies outside of the private sphere for the good of the nation. World War II, of course, offered plenty of spaces within the public workforce and in the armed forces. In these spaces, women used their bodies in the service of the nation and to express satisfaction in their independence and experiences. Sun Valley became another one of these sites in a post-war world, offering physical activity as both fun for themselves and potentially beneficial for the United States in spreading some of the nation's values like patriotism and democracy.

being “easier on the eyes than most of the foreign competitors.” With Fraser’s win, the American press (and even the government, in its early Cold War efforts) could now claim that American female athletes were faster and stronger than European women while they were still charming, physically attractive women – intimating that Fraser’s European competition were not. By winning *and* by looking good, Gretchen Fraser became the woman athlete *par excellence* who demonstrated American women’s athletic superiority. She simultaneously exemplified how American women who competed in sports might, as long as they did not sacrifice their femininity, prove themselves ideal American citizens in the public realm, not just the domestic one.

However, just as Fraser was at the height of promoting non-traditional womanhood, she suddenly announced her retirement from competitive skiing, declaring that she did not believe that women could have actually have it all after all. In doing so, she became a perfect symbol of how celebrity women at Sun Valley challenged, but did not fully break down, traditional gender norms. Upon returning to the United States in April 1948, she told an International News Service Reporter, “I have a husband I haven’t seen in three months and in the future I prefer a family life. I’m happily married. You can’t be that and go on racing. I am convinced you can’t have both.” Later, she would say she retired because she was “just not competitive by nature,” but her later actions mirrored her original announcement.³⁸² Gretchen retired to Washington state, giving birth to her son just ten months after the gold medal was placed around her neck. Within a year of proving that women could successfully compete in sports in public, it seemed that Gretchen had become the epitome of post-World War II American womanhood, which allowed for women’s public contributions, but ultimately created an expectation that the fulfillment of their domestic

³⁸² Quoted in Pfeifer, *Gretchen’s Gold*, 101, 108.

responsibilities should be of paramount importance for women.³⁸³ After storming onto the public scene with her performance in St. Moritz and proclaiming a new sporting frontier for young American women in the American West, she returned home, claiming that true fulfillment of womanhood – marriage and children – could not be attained unless she retired from her public life altogether.

Her image, however, remained in public for years, still promoting the idea that women might be able to achieve sporting success outside of the home, thus showing how permeable the boundaries between the public and private really were for women. Between 1952 and 1954, she became a regular feature in Wheaties advertisements. In 1952-1953, she was part of a series of trading cards released by Wheaties that appeared on the back of the company's cereal boxes – out of sixty athletes featured, she was one of just four women. Then, starting in 1953 into 1954, she was featured in two different comic-style Wheaties advertisements that appeared on the back cover and inside of a whole host of popular comic magazines: *Batman*, *Mutt & Jeff*, *Tarzan*, *Looney Toons*, *Tom and Jerry*, and *The Lone Ranger*, among several others. One advertisement featured a literally animated Gretchen skiing in her signature blonde pigtails and a U.S. ski team snowsuit, next to two much smaller illustrations of two other athletes, a skater and a basketball player, who appears to be female. The caption reads “What Sparks a Champion Sparks You! and Champions choose Wheaties!” With the figures of both Gretchen and the female basketball player, Wheaties was targeting a new audience of sports players: young girls. The other

³⁸³ According to Elaine Tyler May, World War II “underscored women’s tasks as homemakers, consumers, and mothers just as powerfully as it expanded their paid jobs,” which made it easier for political, social, and cultural leaders to justify women’s return to the home after the war was over. This return to the home was part of the process of sexual containment discussed by May. According to historian Stephanie Coontz, the success of sexual containment “depended on sexual inequality,” where women’s uncontrolled sexuality posed a bigger threat to the nation’s social fabric than did men’s. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008 [1988]: 74; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992): 40.

advertisement her image appeared in was a full-page comic-strip dramatizing the second run of a ski race. In the first panel, the illustrated Gretchen, again with her signature pigtails, declared, “I’ve been practicing and training hard for this one...including lots of **Wheaties**.” As comic-book Gretchen schusses down the slopes, the snow swirling around her, a bystander exclaims, “Look at Gretchen shave those flags!” “Yeah, what **SPARK!**”, declares his companion. In the penultimate panel, Gretchen shaves three seconds off of her first time, winning the race, the same slogan as the first advertisement appearing behind her. Unlike the first advertisement, this appears more neutral as to its target audience, simply geared towards children of all ages and genders. Though Gretchen herself claimed that sporting women could not have it all, she was one of the few sporting women in the late 1940s and early 1950s whose image might inspire young girls to begin participating in sports in the public sphere.³⁸⁴

Despite her retirement from skiing and reclamation of her role as a private wife and mother, the real Fraser did not retire from public life, participating in and associating with public organizations and institutions for the rest of her life. In the year following her historic win, she received achievement awards from the Ski Club of Great Britain, the Federation Française de Ski, the Norwegian government, and the National Ski Association of the United States, while the National Press Club named her Woman Athlete of the Year of 1948. At just thirty-two years old, she was appointed manager and coach of the U.S. Women’s Olympic Alpine Team for the 1952 Olympic games in Oslo, Norway, a role in which she helped lead the team to two gold medals (both by former teammate Andrea Mead Lawrence) in the women’s slalom events.³⁸⁵ These were the only medals of any color won by any American skier, man or woman, in these Olympic

³⁸⁴ Multiple copies of both of these comics are found in the John Bechtholt Collection, RHD, TCL.

³⁸⁵ Pfeifer, *Gretchen’s Gold*, 95.

games.³⁸⁶ Soon after her retirement, Gretchen took up causes for the benefit of the disabled, served on the board of the Oregon Institute of Rehabilitation for twenty-seven years, taught horseback riding and swimming at Rehabilitation clinics at Fort Lewis, Washington, and founding The Flying Outriggers, a ski club for veterans and others with amputated limbs. She was also an experienced equestrian in the Pacific Northwest, advocating for women's participation in Olympic equestrian events. In 1958, she was awarded a private pilot's license and was eventually inducted into the Boise chapter of The Ninety-Nines, Inc., an elite international association of women pilots.³⁸⁷ In 1960, Fraser became the twenty-first member inducted into the National Ski Hall of Fame, just the second woman with such a distinction. The only other woman to be inducted up to that point was teammate and mentee Andrea Mead Lawrence.³⁸⁸ She retired at the age of forty-nine in 1968. On February 17, 1994, just six days after her seventy-fifth birthday, Gretchen Fraser passed away in Sun Valley. Both she and her husband are buried in the city cemetery in Ketchum.

Gretchen Fraser symbolized the tenuous division of public and private for women participating in physical activity in the 1930s and 1940s. As she trained at Sun Valley, she joined a cohort of women who began breaking down barriers for women in sports – not just for those who competed, but also for those who did it for fun. She then retired from skiing, claiming that women's public ambitions were fundamentally incompatible with the private life of wife and mother. This is emblematic of the process that celebrity women at Sun Valley often faced – they

³⁸⁶ Information about medal winners from the 1952 Oslo Winter Olympics can be found at Olympic Winter Games Oslo 1952, Olympics.com, referenced 20 Jan 2023, <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/oslo-1952/results/alpine-skiing>.

³⁸⁷ Pfeifer, *Gretchen's Gold*, 113-119.

³⁸⁸ Hall of Famers, U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame, SkiHall.com, referenced 20 Jan 2023, <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers>.

could participate in public forms of sports as long as they did not openly sacrifice either their femininity or their potential to participate in domestic life (even if they did not actually uphold the norms of traditional womanhood themselves). Much like her celebrity contemporaries at Sun Valley, Fraser, however, pushed back on the societal expectation that women, once in the private sphere, had to remain there. Though she claimed that she did not believe that women could have it all or do it all, her life proved otherwise, demonstrating a tenuous divide between public and private spheres for women in the late 1940s that the film industry was trying to solidify. And just like her celebrity contemporaries, Gretchen proved that the idea of American womanhood was shifting in the 1930s and 1940s, demonstrating that American women might use their bodies not to break down conventional gender roles, but at least to challenge them, developing the strength and agility of their bodies for their own pleasure through public athletic pursuits, not just for their domestic responsibilities.

Conclusion

When one thinks of the places in which celebrity women had the most influence over national debates, the ski resort at Sun Valley would likely be one of the last places to come to mind. Today, few people outside of the state of Idaho know about Sun Valley – its reputation as a place where women celebrities experimented with being physically active in the public sphere faded as the national debate over American women’s growing public presence was redefined yet again during the 1960s and 1970s. Today, it still operates as a playground for the rich and famous, though the number of celebrities who call Sun Valley their favorite vacation spot has shrunk considerably, as other western ski resorts like Vail and Aspen in Colorado and Snowbird and Alta in Utah have surpassed Sun Valley in luxury and ease of access. Historians have tended

to ignore the influence of Sun Valley as well, viewing it from only a local level, whereas this chapter argues for the national importance of the resort. While it is true that Ketchum would likely have remained a tiny sheepherding community had W. Averell Harriman not taken a chance on the sleepy little hamlet, the ski resort at Sun Valley was a unique site in the rural mountains of Idaho with surprising national influence.

Because celebrity attendance at Sun Valley was high from the first day, it became well-known throughout the United States, garnering coverage in every nationally syndicated newspaper, several major national magazines and, most importantly for this project, in many fan magazines between 1930 and 1950. Celebrities, especially celebrity women, were doing more than just skiing at Sun Valley, however. Their behavior there contributed to a new way in which women could use their bodies for their own enjoyment and for the national good, which simultaneously challenged and reinforced traditional gender roles in American society. Significantly, celebrity women like Claudette Colbert, Norma Shearer, and Ann Sothorn provided examples of how physical recreation provided an avenue through which American women might participate in activities where they used their body for their own health and enjoyment, not just for biological reproduction. As long as women legitimized their public sporting forays by wearing the right fashions, they were protected from claims that women who were physically active threatened the gendered hierarchy by becoming too masculine in the process.

Because Sun Valley was so ubiquitous in movie fan magazines and other national publications, even the average American understood Sun Valley as an important place that offered new possibilities for women. From the latest sartorial styles to the potential for romance to the ability for women to play, Sun Valley, and its Hollywood influence, became a well-known

example of a place that liberated white, upper- and upper-middle-class women to some degree – in this case, it freed them to use their bodies in public without facing accusations of sexual misbehavior. Ultimately, however, as we have seen, women’s behavior at Sun Valley did not break down traditional gender roles of the late 1930s and the 1940s, which expected women to sacrifice their own bodily autonomy and pleasure for their families and the nation. So, when two movies set in Sun Valley were released throughout the 1940s, audiences got a glimpse into the glamorous ski resort of the stars and, they could have observed the same tension over women’s bodies at Sun Valley played out on the screen that they would have experienced had they visited the resort themselves.

INTERMISSION 2

“It Happened in Sun Valley”: Romance, Athletic Women, and an Idaho Ski Resort in *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941) and *Duchess of Idaho* (1950)

When *The Hailey Times* of Hailey, Idaho, published in December 1936 that movie makers from Paramount hoped to use the surrounding locale of Sun Valley, Ketchum, and Hailey for an upcoming film starring Claudette Colbert – and that they hoped to use 150 locals in the production – the tiny shepherding and mining community was abuzz.³⁸⁹ The news came just weeks before the ski resort at Sun Valley officially opened. Yet, even after the publication of the *Hailey Times* article, Blaine County residents could not have foreseen the influx of Hollywood people to the area, nor just how much Hollywood would claim Sun Valley as one of the industry’s favorite vacation spots. As examined in the previous chapter, it was not simply that stars came to the resort to ski or that Hollywood filmmakers came to use the scenic locale as a stand-in for other places (though many often did). This intermission will focus on the fictional image of the resort as portrayed in two studio films made during Hollywood’s Golden Age: *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941) and *Duchess of Idaho* (1950). These are two of just three films made during this era to be set in Sun Valley. The third film, *That Wonderful Urge* (1948), is only partially set in Sun Valley, and will be briefly discussed, but *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of*

³⁸⁹ “Movie Company Impressed With Ketchum Locale,” *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), December 10, 1936, accessed September 26, 2023, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

Idaho are the marquee films of this intermission.³⁹⁰ In both fictional and factual accounts, Sun Valley came to represent something more than just the perfect ski playground in a picturesque locale; it briefly became as synonymous with romance and love affairs as was Paris, France, a setting which films often held up as the paragon of romantic encounters.

Though Sun Valley has never been a prominent movie setting, *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho* each served two important functions for American audiences: first, they mythologized the elite playground in the public moviegoing imagination between 1941 and 1950. As a place where very few Americans would have the opportunity to vacation, Sun Valley on film took on a mythic quality as a Western expanse that offered complete solitude from the hustle and bustle of modern living. Part of this mythos included whiteness as a prerequisite to visiting the resort, demonstrating that Black Americans' relationship with Sun Valley was best categorized as performing labor for the white vacationers as they traveled by rail. Second, by capitalizing on this mythic version of the snowy, rural expanse that appeared to offer complete privacy, these films portrayed Sun Valley as a perfect place for two people, usually strangers, to fall in love, and in doing so, explicitly linked the resort with romance and marriage. Filmic representations of Sun Valley depicted it in much the same way as did fan magazines: the ski resort was an appropriate public space for women to experiment with enjoying their bodies through physical exercise as long as those bodies were ultimately contained in marriage, thus limiting the democratic nature of the site. Similarly, the films portrayed the ideal vacationers as white and the ideal laborers as Black, confining the space not just by gender, but by race as well.

³⁹⁰ My research shows that there is only one other film that uses Sun Valley as a setting, *Ski Party* (1965). It should be noted that after the filming of *I Met Him in Paris*, discussed below, several early Hollywood films use Sun Valley to portray other locations, such as *Stanley and Livingstone* (1939), *Mortal Storm* (1940), *A Woman's Face* (1941), *Hit the Ice* (1943), *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954), and *Bus Stop* (1956), among others. It has remained a popular location to shoot films, as some filming took place there as recently as 2018.

Thus, while the films depicted a democratic Sun Valley as a place where *anyone* could ski, the filmmakers actually contained any challenge to the racial and social order within marriage and menial labor by the end of the movie, which reinforced both separate spheres ideology and segregation well into the 1950s.

The Paramount movie with Claudette Colbert on which *The Hailey Times* reported on December 10, 1936 was eventually released as *I Met Him in Paris* (1937). Unlike the other three films studied in this intermission, *I Met Him in Paris* was not set in Sun Valley, as the resort had not yet gained its national reputation and would have meant little to audiences at the time. Rather, the Wood River Valley and the Sawtooth Mountains of central Idaho masqueraded as the Swiss Alps: “Some of the beauties of Paris [the first setting of the film] are to be thrown in strong contrast with the beauties of the wild and wooly west around Ketchum,” declared *The Hailey Times* on December 17.³⁹¹ *I Met Him in Paris*, directed by Wesley Ruggles (who, as we know, was at Sun Valley on opening night) tells the story of Kay Denham, played by Claudette Colbert. Kay, hoping to break away from a dull life and her longtime suitor Berk Sutter, travels to Paris for “a one-woman rebellion against everything that’s sweet and conventional.”³⁹² There, she meets two strangers, friends Gene Anders (Robert Young) and George Potter (Melvyn Douglas), who both romantically pursue her. Kay, originally smitten by Gene, agrees to travel with him to the Swiss Alps. George, who knows that Gene is married – a fact that Kay does not know – declares himself chaperone to join the couple in Switzerland. Once there, both of the

³⁹¹ “Paris-Ketchum Moving Picture,” *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, ID), December 17, 1936, accessed November 26, 2023. The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

³⁹² *I Met Him in Paris*, directed by Wesley Ruggles (Paramount, 1937), DVD (Universal Studios, 2013). This movie will be quoted often throughout the intermission and this citation applies to all further quotations of *I Met Him in Paris* (1937).

men embark on trying to win Kay's affections by doing a whole host of winter activities with her: skiing, ice skating, skijoring, and tobogganing – all but the last of which visitors could actually do, and were in fact filmed, at Sun Valley. In the end, Kay learns of Gene's marriage, turns down proposals from Gene and Berk (who secretly traveled first to Paris and then to Switzerland to surprise her), before realizing that she truly loves George. Like many films of Hollywood's "Golden Age," long-term developments in Kay and George's relationship are not shown onscreen, meaning that audiences could walk away believing that Kay and George marry and live happily ever after.

In *I Met Him in Paris*, Sun Valley doubled as Switzerland, with most audiences none the wiser to the difference. Nevertheless, the movie's filming location still had an impact on the growth of Sun Valley's reputation and popularity. Although it does not take place in Sun Valley, *I Met Him in Paris* is the only film analyzed here in which the principal actors filmed on location, whereas casts of the other movies filmed their Sun Valley scenes in a soundstage in Hollywood. In several scenes of the film, the actors' breaths can be seen as they say their lines, something that is not seen in any other films set in Sun Valley, even when the characters are supposed to be outside. Along with the authentic outdoor scenes, *I Met Him Paris* is also the only of the films examined in this intermission for which the main actors do their own stunts, as *Sun Valley Serenade*, *Duchess of Idaho*, and *That Wonderful Urge* were all filmed almost entirely on Los Angeles studio lots using rear projection.³⁹³ Rear projection played previously filmed scenes on a large screen behind the actors, working as a moving background in front of which actors mimicked physical activities, partially to prevent injury, and partially to save money by not

³⁹³ Gretchen Fraser doubled for lead actress Sonja Henie in skiing scenes for *Sun Valley Serenade*. Gretchen Fraser, interviewed by Gretchen Guard, September 1982, Oral Histories OHFRA0144, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

filming on location. Claudette Colbert is shown skiing on real skis in real snow –she became quite proficient after making this film – and Colbert and Melvyn Douglas are shown skating side-by-side on Sun Valley’s rink.³⁹⁴

Though *I Met Him in Paris* is not set in Sun Valley, the movie nevertheless provides an important linkage between women’s bodies in physical activity and romance at the resort that became an important formula for the movies set in Sun Valley that came after. Throughout *I Met Him in Paris*, Kay, Gene, and George participate in several winter activities that required athleticism and effort: skijoring, ice skating and, of course, skiing. In Kay’s case, however, it is the more athletic suitor – George – whom she chooses in the end. While Gene hoped to spend his Swiss vacation cuddled up with Kay inside the cozy lodge, George and Kay recreate together. Where Gene is clumsy on his skates and skis, George and Kay glide smoothly together across the ice and down the slopes, providing foreshadowing through physical movement. More importantly, Kay wins her man *because* she uses her body in physical activity, not *in spite* of it. The film’s use of Sun Valley’s landscape and its most popular feature – skiing – helped link together romance and women’s physical activity, two concepts which the later films set in Sun Valley then connected to the resort itself.

Sun Valley played a central role in two films that bookend the 1940s: *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941) and *Duchess of Idaho* (1950). Besides alluding to the setting in their titles, both movies also actively promoted the kinds of activities in which visitors could participate at Sun

³⁹⁴ Sun Valley employee Joe Burgy recalls participating in the stunt work for 20th Century Fox crews for *Sun Valley Serenade*, but reveals that the main cast never visited Sun Valley: “So the following year, people would...come back and say ‘Did you meet Sonja Henie?’ I said, ‘No, I’ve never met her.’ ‘Well, she was here for Sun Valley Serenade.” [sic] And I said, ‘No, she wasn’t.’” Joe Burgy, interviewed by Miriam Breckinridge, 1978, Oral Histories OHBUR0005, Regional History Department, The Community Library (Ketchum, ID).

Valley, serving as a gargantuan advertisement for the resort. Both films have an impressive number of similarities: athletic leading actresses, musical numbers about trains, love triangles, and several other curious musical interludes. They also both became visual examples of the kind of public physical activity for women that fan magazines had been promoting through stories of Claudette Colbert and Norma Shearer for years; now film audiences could actually *see* how the celebrity women they had read about looked while they schussed down the ski run, rather than just imagine it. Though made nearly a decade apart by different studios, these films both provide fascinating insights into one of the key images of Sun Valley in the American popular imagination: Sun Valley, and its attendant physical activities, tucked cozily away in the rural American west, was an ideal place to develop a romance. Sun Valley, then, becomes a space where the strengthening of women's bodies through physical exercise simultaneously emboldened women to use their bodies for their own enjoyment and encouraged women's return to the private sphere through marriage – the ultimate goal, allegedly, of every good American girl.³⁹⁵

Sun Valley Serenade (1941) tells the story of Ted Scott (John Payne), a piano player in a swing band led by Phil Corey (played by famous 1940s bandleader Glenn Miller). After the band wins the job of playing at Sun Valley's opening night, Ted learns that he is about to become a father, in a manner of speaking. In a wild publicity stunt, the band's manager submitted Ted's

³⁹⁵ As will be discussed further in chapter three, this idea takes much of its foundation from Elaine Tyler May's argument about the role of popular culture, especially film, in entrenching traditional gender roles in the postwar period. Whereas films of the 1920s and 1930s often depicted more economically and socially independent women, the Great Depression created a tension between the independent woman and the taming power of domesticity: "If emancipated women could be tamed by domesticity, with a man to support them and children to nurture, the family would be rejuvenated." (48) By creating this tension between domestic responsibility and individual freedom, a tension that remained in films throughout World War II, Hollywood simultaneously encouraged women's public independence and private constraint. My scholarship on Sun Valley works to demonstrate a specific instance of this same contradiction in regards to women's physical exercise in public places, like at a ski resort. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008 [1988]).

name to the U.S. government as a potential guardian for European refugee children, and the government had found a child to be placed in Ted's care. Believing the refugee to be a young girl, the band is shocked to find an attractive adult woman waiting for them at the dock. Norwegian refugee Karen (Sonja Henie) immediately falls in love with Ted, declaring him the man she is going to marry even though Ted is engaged to Vivian, the band's singer. When Ted intends to leave Karen in New York while the band plays at Sun Valley, Karen manages to sneak to the resort without Ted's knowledge or approval. Once there, she embarks on a campaign to get Ted to fall in love with her, finally winning him over in a log cabin on the mountainside. The film is punctuated by a large-production figure skating number, unrelated to the plot, for lead actress Henie, a highly decorated figure skater.

While *Sun Valley Serenade* ends with a special showcase number, *Duchess of Idaho* (1950) opens with one – a major swimming number for swimmer/actress Esther Williams. *Duchess of Idaho* follows Christine “Chris” Duncan (Williams), star of an aquacade show in Chicago. Chris's friend and roommate Ellen has a crush on her boss, Douglas J. Morrison, but Douglas does not see Ellen as anything but his secretary – even when he asks her to pose as his fiancé to get him out of dates with women in whom he is no longer interested. Douglas invites Ellen to come Sun Valley with him to work, though he soon rescinds that invitation, claiming “it wouldn't look right” if they went to Sun Valley together. Seeing how heartbroken Ellen is, Chris concocts a plot to follow Douglas to Sun Valley in order to play the vixen and “back him into a corner” so that he will call on Ellen to play his fiancée and break things up. While in Sun Valley, Chris catches the eye of Dick Layne (Van Johnson), the leader of Sun Valley's band. As the plot continues, Chris and Dick spend time on the tennis courts, the swimming pool, and even the ski slopes (the season in which the film takes place is not clear), slowly falling in love with each

other while Chris continues to pretend to be interested in Douglas. Dick, obviously unaware of Chris's charade with Doug, believes Chris is pursuing both men and disappears from the scene without giving Chris a chance to explain the situation. After a series of revelations, both couples – Chris and Dick and Ellen and Douglas – end up with the right partners and audiences are led to believe that they all marry and live happily ever after.³⁹⁶

Both of these films explicitly link together Sun Valley and romance. In the snowcapped mountains of rural Idaho, the cozy indoor atmosphere, beautiful outdoor views, and thrill of physical activity all combined to create a particularly romantic atmosphere. Fan magazines had reported on romances at Sun Valley since Norma Shearer dated and married her ski instructor in 1941-42, and *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho* only solidified the mythos of a romantic Sun Valley during the 1940s and 1950s. By making romance and marriage the end goal for characters, the films set in Sun Valley suggested that women's physical activity in public was acceptable, as long as women counterbalanced the potentially masculinizing effect of physical activity by participating in a traditional heterosexual marriage, returning to her proper role in the private sphere once she was off the slopes.

Understanding the careers of the movies' lead actresses will help explain why these two films focus so centrally on women's bodies in physical motion. Sonja Henie and Esther Williams were no ordinary actresses. Each of them had an athletic specialty that they showcased in their movies, much like Fred Astaire was known for dancing or Judy Garland was known for singing. Henie and Williams, however, were professional athletes prior to their film career: Henie was a

³⁹⁶ *Duchess of Idaho*, directed by Robert Z. Leonard (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1950) DVD (Warner Archive, 2011). This movie will be quoted often throughout the intermission and this citation applies to all further quotations of *Duchess of Idaho* (1950).

three-time Olympic gold medalist and a ten-time world champion figure skater; Williams, an Olympic-level, three-time U.S. national champion swimmer. Henie won her first Olympic gold at the age of 15 in 1928, going on to win a world championship every year until 1936. After her last win, she announced her retirement from competitive skating and signed a movie contract with Darryl Zanuck, head of 20th Century Fox in Hollywood. She became one of 20th Century Fox's biggest stars of the late 1930s, making ten movies between 1936 and 1943 before retiring from film. She then began traveling on the touring circuit with her ice-skating shows until her retirement from show business in the late 1950s.³⁹⁷ When Henie was at the height of her film stardom, 18-year-old Esther Williams was expected to win gold at the 1940 Olympics, scheduled to be held in Tokyo, but the games were called off due to World War II. With Olympic competitive swimming postponed for the foreseeable future, the teenaged Williams joined the cast of an aquacade, a music, dance, and swimming show done in front of a live audience. One of her castmates was multiple-time swimming and water polo Olympic medalist-turned-actor Johnny Weissmuller, who at the time was signed to a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to play, almost exclusively, Tarzan in a series of popular films based on Edgar Rice Burroughs's novels. Eventually, her work in the pool earned her attention from Louis B. Mayer, the head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, who happened to be scouting for an athlete/actress who could compete with the popularity of Sonja Henie. Williams signed her first MGM contract in 1941 and would go on to make twenty-three feature length films with the studio through the late 1950s.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Victoria Sharrow, *Encyclopedia of Women and Sports* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1996): 101, 332; Laura Jacobs, "Sonja Henie's Ice Age," *Vanity Fair*, January 11, 2014, accessed 25 Aug 2023, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/02/sonja-henie-ice-skating-queen>.

³⁹⁸ Esther Williams, *Million Dollar Mermaid: An Autobiography* (New York: Harvest Books, 2000).

Though they each excelled in different sports, one cannot mention Esther Williams without too acknowledging Sonja Henie. Henie pioneered the ability to transfer her athletic pursuits into a screen career, on which Williams capitalized so efficiently less than a decade later – without Henie, there is no Williams. Both women reified their sport: Henie is often credited with feminizing and glamorizing figure skating by wearing shorter skirts (women previously skated in skirts that often fell to mid-calf or lower) and incorporating dance choreography into skating routines, while Williams has been deemed the “godmother” of the sport of synchronized swimming, even serving as the sport’s commentator when it made its debut in the 1984 Olympic Games.³⁹⁹ More importantly, however, the bodies of both women skating and swimming across the silver screen revolutionized the acceptance of women’s barely-clad bodies in public at a time when many Americans saw women’s sporting bodies as potential social threats. Both women demonstrated not only that women *could* perform athletic feats at the highest levels, but, more importantly, that they could have fun doing it.

The bodies of Henie and Williams in motion provided lessons about the expression of women’s physicality even outside of sports. Performance historian Kristen Pullen argues that Williams’s physical body in her movies “supports narratives of strong, independent women,” especially as Williams, clearly enjoying using her body in the water, modeled the possibility of women using their bodies for something beyond physical or ideological reproduction. Her swimming body represented her characters’ agency, as most characters she played had “personal and professional goals” that extended beyond the private sphere; Pullen states that Williams’s films “are remarkable not only for their glorious swimming sequences but also for their

³⁹⁹ Ryan Stevens, “A Century of Figure Skating Fashion, Part Two (1890-1920),” *Skate Guard* (blog), June 23, 2016, accessed September 5, 2023, https://skateguard1.blogspot.com/2016/06/a-century-of-figure-skating-fashion_23.html; Williams, *Million Dollar Mermaid*, 394.

insistence on female independence secured by physical and emotional strength.”⁴⁰⁰ By seeing Williams swim, flip, dive through her tanks at MGM with unbridled joy, claims Pullen, women audiences could glean new insights about independence and autonomy outside of the home – that physical strength could aid in the fortification of emotional and mental fortitude that could lead to success in the public sphere. Sonja Henie, as both athlete and as actress, did the same. Henie loved perfecting her craft: “I want to do with skates what Fred Astaire is doing with dancing,” she told *The New York Times* in March 1936. At that, she succeeded. Her signature move, a “Tinker Bell toe-tip” run, was what journalist Laura Jacobs calls a “move of pure joy,” a graceful motion that resembled a bird taking flight: “she just up and took off like a bird,” remembered one young figure skater.⁴⁰¹ With her athletic body and feminine charm, Henie’s skating body demonstrated how women could enjoy independence and freedom in the public sphere – a bird breaking out of the confines of domesticity and flying for freedom. Though she only made twelve movies in her Hollywood career, Henie’s joyful and energetic performances onscreen introduced millions of Americans to the sport figure skating for the very first time. Both Henie and Williams turned their athletic ability into art, using their bodies not just for domestic utility but for their own (and others’) enjoyment as well. As some of the most visible athletes of the 1940s, these women pushed the limits of how women’s bodies were perceived by the public, making it possible for other American women to view physical recreation not as potentially dangerous but instead as a way to appropriately publicly take pleasure in their bodies.

The fact that Henie and Williams were incredibly popular during their careers indicates that American attitudes toward women’s athletic pursuits were changing. Also changing between

⁴⁰⁰ Kristen Pullen, *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014): 80.

⁴⁰¹ As quoted in Jacobs, “Sonja Henie’s Ice Age,” *Vanity Fair*.

the release of the two films were social expectations about women's role in public life. Upon the release of *Sun Valley Serenade*, the demand for women to enter the public sphere for the war effort was not yet fully realized, but millions of American women were already in the public workforce. By this time, too, Hollywood publicity began its slow move back toward depicting the home as the proper domain for American women, which accounts for Karen's athletic abilities and foreignness containment within marriage to the all-American Ted. By the release of *Duchess of Idaho*, Esther Williams had been a movie star for nearly a decade, pointing toward a more widespread acceptance of women's athletic ability even in the postwar era that saw a weakening of women's role in the public sphere. What did not change – and in fact, was more pronounced than ever – was the social expectation that American women would contain their athleticism within marriage, devoting their time to their homes and families rather than to their favorite sport. This explains why Chris, whose athleticism never posed a problem to her romantic relationship with Dick, still agrees to marry Dick at the end of the film – her skiing and swimming was acceptable pastimes as long as she was willing to retire to the public sphere in between her skiing runs and swims. To be clear, then, I am not arguing that the general expectations for American women in public became more progressive. Rather, I contend that Americans' general attitudes toward women physically exercising and participating in sport had, especially since the opening of Sun Valley, progressed to the point that women's exercise did not raise the same concerns about the breakdown of the gendered status quo as it had in previous decades, even as the divide between the public and private spheres solidified in the postwar era.

This also explains why the contrast between the athletic and non-athletic characters is much more aggressive in *Sun Valley Serenade* than in *Duchess of Idaho*.⁴⁰² In *Sun Valley*

⁴⁰² As discussed in chapter two, 1920s and 1930s women sporting heroes like Helen Wills and Babe Didrikson began to pave the way for women in sport, followed in the later decades by greater discussions of movie stars exercising in

Serenade, the filmmakers starkly contrasts the main female characters to depict how women's physicality could win the day, contrasting the sporty Henie with the pretty, but non-athletic actress Lynn Bari. Vivian, Ted's fiancée and singer in the band (Bari), refuses to participate in the winter sports. Karen, on the other hand, is a strong skier and skater. After arriving in Sun Valley, Ted approaches Vivian, who is dressed in a chic light-colored skiing pantsuit, asking where her skis are. Vivian replies in the negative:

Vivian: Now wait! You didn't really think I was going out there to go sailing over the hills and dales did you?

Ted: But that's what you're dressed for, isn't it?

Vivian: Darling, I've never skied in my life. But I could look the part. And if you just teach me the right words, I might be able to talk a good game.⁴⁰³

Like many women who visited Sun Valley, Vivian did not mind dressing the part of a skier – which, as we know, was one way that women could combat accusations about their masculinization while participating in sport. Ultimately, it is Vivian's lack of willingness to learn how to ski that costs her Ted's romantic affections. Karen, on the other hand, skis and skates like a professional, much to Ted's initial chagrin. Though he manages to avoid her advances for much of the film, Karen eventually wins him over during a nighttime ski event thanks to her skill on the slopes. After Karen, Ted, Vivian, and the band's manager attend an evening party at the Roundhouse on Bald Mountain, Vivian comments that it will take a long time to get everyone at the party back down on the ski lifts. Karen interjects, saying, "a skier never takes a lift unless

the late 1930s and early 1940s. By 1950, not only were stories of celebrity women more common in fan magazines, but the 1950s saw a rise in female sports stars (including Gretchen Fraser and, arguably, Esther Williams) and basketball became a particularly important sport for high school and college-aged girls. See also: Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Martha H. Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015 [1994]).

⁴⁰³ *Sun Valley Serenade*, directed by H. Bruce Humberstone (Twentieth Century Fox, 1941) DVD (Twentieth Century Fox, 2007). This movie will be quoted often throughout the intermission and this citation applies to all further quotations of *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941).

he's carried down on a stretcher." Ted agrees, adding sarcastically that it was an old Norwegian tradition. "Oh, it isn't that," Karen says. "But everyone would think he [Ted] was a...softie" if he did not ski down the hill. Because of her skiing ability, she engages in a ski chase with Ted before faking an injury to get him alone in a trailside cabin overnight. Though Ted soon learns that Karen was not hurt, she charms and flirts with him. As they seem together, he realizes he is in love with her. When the rescue party, including Vivian, finds Ted and Karen in the cabin only a few hours later, Ted calls off his engagement to Vivian, now calling Karen "the girl I'm going to marry." Were it not for her ability to ski competently down the mountain, Karen could not have gotten him alone, showing, in a roundabout way, that participation in sport and romance were not incompatible concepts.

By contrast, the *Duchess of Idaho*, released nine years later, in portrayed women's public physical activity as generally acceptable for all American women. Chris's physical activity is the main way she dates Dick, which is one signal to audiences that the Dick is the man that Chris is really interested in. Chris first agrees to go on a date with Dick while they are swimming together in the resort pool. The next ten minutes of film includes a montage of Chris and Dick doing nearly every activity at Sun Valley together. In fact, Chris is so physically active that Dick tells a friend, "I've never done so much skiing in my life!" Together, they even win a dance contest where Chris is crowned "Duchess of Idaho." Despite prevailing beliefs about women's physical exercise during the late 1940s, which stipulated that women should not exert themselves – or even perspire – during physical exercise, none of this physical activity ever works against Chris; on the contrary, Dick seems excited by the challenge, meeting Chris stride for stride in every activity. Dick falls in love with Chris not in spite of her athletic abilities, but because of them. For the main characters in both *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho*, their physical

strength and prowess is their best asset in winning a mate. Their muscles, clearly visible while performing their respective specialty numbers, only add to their physical attractiveness, rather than detract from it. By featuring two athletic women as main romantic leads, these movies demonstrated that athleticism was not adverse to femininity or heterosexuality.

Despite the films' images of athletic women joyfully (and publicly) celebrating their strong and feminine bodies, the movies still promoted conservative ideas about gender and sexuality. This is another tactic that moviemakers in 1941 used to balance out the potential threat of sporting women: they give Karen traditional beliefs about women's role in the private sphere.. After she arrives in New York as a refugee and Ted discovers that she is not a child, she tries to convince him to let her stay with him in New York, telling him, "I'm a good housekeeper! I can cook and sew and darn socks and everything!" A scene later, the two of them discuss what she intends to do now that she's in New York. Their dialogue highlights Karen's belief about women's domestic responsibilities:

Ted: Now look, Karen, we have to think about your future, what you're gonna do, and make plans for you.

Karen: Oh, I have plans made already.

Ted: You have? That's fine. What are they?

Karen: I'm going to find a man I like and get married. Isn't that what every girl should do?

Ted: Well...sure, sure, but what I meant was, well, what did you do in...Norway?

Karen: Looked for a man. Only I didn't find anyone I liked.

Ted: [looking confused] Well, didn't you ever think of doing something like pounding a typewriter or...or working at a beauty salon?

Karen: No. My father was a schoolmaster, I kept house for him. I'm a very good cook, you know? But when the war came, first I lost my father, and then I lost my house.

Karen explains her skills to Ted in domestic terms: cooking, cleaning, and general housekeeping. According to her, every young woman's ultimate goal should be marriage, a role for which they are prepared their whole lives by keeping house for their immediate family. Even in the 1940s, many Americans would have considered Karen's views fairly outdated. By the 1920s, ideas such

as companionate marriage – which historian Christina Simmons describes as the “effort to meld modern practices” such as women’s political, economic, and social equality “with legal marriage” – were much more common throughout the United States, while Nancy Cott argues that in the early twentieth century, “marriage ideals became less hierarchical amidst language of true love and companionate partnership.” By this time, women were a common presence in the workforce, and few “modern” women would believe that all young women should do nothing but play housekeeper to their fathers and their husbands.⁴⁰⁴

Because American viewpoints on women’s role in the private sphere were somewhat in flux during this time, screenwriters used Karen’s attitude toward women’s domesticity to subtly hint at her foreignness, her otherness. Should audiences miss the hint, Ted, played by all-American, boy-next-door type John Payne, explicitly reminds them of her non-Americanness: “Maybe in Norway they get married to pay off the mortgage or something, but here’s it’s different. You get married...because you’re in love.” This is a message to audiences as to the kind of transformation Karen will have to undergo in order to win Ted’s affections: she will have to lose her Norwegian marriage practices and adopt American ones. Further, though the United States was not yet directly involved during World War II at the time of the film’s release (August 1941), the filmmakers worked to differentiate Henie’s foreignness from Payne’s Americanness in order to clearly define ideal American traits, so as to fortify American national identity during a time of great upheaval in Europe and Asia that was, unbeknownst to the filmmakers, about to hit American shores.

⁴⁰⁴ Christine Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women’s Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 14; Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 179.

Duchess of Idaho carries on much of *Sun Valley's Serenade's* contradictory legacy, using Sun Valley as a place where women could more freely express their physicality, but ultimately as a place where that potentially threatening exertion would be circumscribed by traditional heterosexual romance. Chris's views on traditional marriage appear far less regressive than Karen's, yet she is guided by more conservative ideas when she is trying to seduce Douglas. When Douglas offers to cook her dinner, Chris replies, "Maybe before long I'll be doing the cooking." In another scene, when Douglas has to briefly return to Chicago, she offers to pack for him. "After all, I've got to get used to doing these little things for you," she tells him. What is important to note, however, is that Chris is *play-acting* domestic femininity for Douglas, as it is Douglas, not Chris, who holds the more conservative belief in women's place in the private sphere. Where the real Chris is on the tennis courts, in the swimming pool, and skiing down the slopes (not to mention a working girl), the "domestic" Chris, a side she only reveals to Douglas, offers a more traditional understanding of American femininity. After realizing that he is in love with Ellen, Douglas reveals his belief about where the proper place for women should be: "She doesn't belong in an office. She belongs in a home, a beautiful home." Douglas, in just one sentence, demonstrates the kind of societal expectations that many postwar Americans adhered to: women should not work – they belong in a "beautiful home" – which, presumably, women themselves created.

For all Chris's acting, the audiences get the sense that she does not agree with Douglas's expectation of women, much preferring skiing and skating to cooking and cleaning. Chris is a single working woman whose job, much like the job of the actress who played her, required the use of her bathing-suit-clad body in public entertainment shows. Chris never verbally claims that working outside of the home is better than marriage or vice versa, but the fact that she holds a

steady job wherein she swims for the enjoyment of others (as well as her own) marks her as a kind of antithesis to Ellen. Though she falls in love and, theoretically, gets married after the end credits roll, Chris never shuns the public enjoyment of her body in the hopes of moving into the home, nor does Dick demand that she do such a thing. Like *Sun Valley Serenade*, *Duchess of Idaho* also compares the non-athletic woman with the athletic woman. By 1950, however, the idea that women's public athleticism did not preclude romance and marriage had been depicted by Hollywood for nearly a decade since *Sun Valley Serenade*.⁴⁰⁵ There was no longer any need to emphasize the merits of women who exercised over women who did not, so *Duchess of Idaho* allows both women characters – the swimming and skiing Chris and the secretarial homemaking Ellen – to find romance with a man of their ideological equal. While the film depicts an independent woman, it ultimately contains her within marriage just as it contains her domestic counterpart. It was okay to be athletic, the film told women, but marriage was essential in to curb any potential gender or sexual deviance. All of these ideas were packed into a simple ski-vacation romance at Sun Valley.

An intrinsic part in mythologizing this romantic image Sun Valley came through the films' music, exemplified by Glenn Miller, who just happened to have a small acting role in *Sun Valley Serenade*. According to historian Lewis A. Erenberg, Miller, one of the most famous bandleaders in the country, became so popular because of his ability to merge “the two popular music strains of the 1930s – adventurous swing and romantic, more melodic sweet music – into a

⁴⁰⁵ *Duchess of Idaho* was Esther William's fourteenth film, only three of which did not feature her swimming ability in some way, meaning audiences had seen her public athleticism eleven times in eight years. Katharine Hepburn is another notable celebrity woman who was well-known for her sporting ability, as she was a avid golfer and tennis player. Only two years after *Duchess of Idaho*, Hepburn would capitalize on her athleticism in 1952's *Pat and Mike*, in which her fictional character competes in a golf competition against Babe Didrikson Zaharias, who appeared in the film as herself. If we also include the last few movies of Sonja Henie's career in examples of onscreen athletic women, it becomes clear that audiences in 1950 understood women's public physical activity in a very different way than audiences in 1941.

powerful amalgam.” This powerful amalgam was “imbued with particular conceptions of American life,” which included heterosexuality – or, at least a heterosexual marriage - as a signifier of a good citizen.⁴⁰⁶ By combining swing and romantic melodies, Miller provided the young generation with dreamy, nostalgic songs that emphasized and encouraged falling in love – which brought with it the insinuation of marriage. Miller, besides playing the role of bandleader Phil Corey, wrote the songs sung throughout *Sun Valley Serenade*. “It Happened in Sun Valley,” composed by Harry Warren and lyricist Mack Gordon specifically for the film, became one of Miller’s most famous songs because it fit in exactly with his repertoire. The lyrics encapsulate the same kind of romance that audiences were seeing visually on screen. The song also tied together Sun Valley and romance, as the song, sung by offscreen singers, played over images of Sun Valley’s most recognizable features such as the swimming pool, the hotel, and the ski slopes:

Howdy folks, let’s go for a ride
Get your favorite one to sit by your side
Cuddle up in the sleigh
Giddyap Nellie Grey and away we go
While you listen to the sleigh bells ring
You’re yodeling to your baby
You’ll feel nice and warm
No matter how cold it may be⁴⁰⁷

Though Miller himself did not write either the words or the music, this is exactly the kind of song he was known for – one that combined romantic lyrics with a light, rhythmic melody. More importantly, however, where the films *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho* linked Sun Valley and romance in visual form, “It Happened in Sun Valley” tied together the two films in

⁴⁰⁶ Lewis A. Erenberg, “Swing Goes to War: Glenn Miller and the Popular Music of World War II” in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II* eds. Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 146.

⁴⁰⁷ Glenn Miller and His Orchestra, “It Happened in Sun Valley” (New York: Leo Feist, 1941).

audio form, using the distinctly American genre of swing music created by the genre's quintessentially American bandleader.

In the two main films set in Sun Valley, music also plays an important part in delineating Sun Valley as a place where whiteness was central to public physical recreation, romance, and American identity. Both *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho* feature musical numbers by Black performers – not necessarily rare in Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s, but certainly scenes which deserve a closer inspection to understand the role that whiteness played in creating the mythic image of Sun Valley in the national imagination. Much like how Black Americans' leisure activities remained separate from Sun Valley, the filmic musical performances by Black entertainers are entirely separate from those of the white performers, while the only words said by a Black performer in either film are spoken by a train porter. By relegating Black characters to segregated musical numbers and subservient roles, the films' portrayals of race mirrored the predominant racial relations in the nation writ large and solidified whiteness as an ideal American trait that was linked to both physical activity and romantic encounters at Sun Valley.

With just one exception, all of the Black performances in these movies took place on the train to Sun Valley or on a stage prop of a train car, ensuring that the connection between Black labor and rail travel that had existed for decades remained intact for white audiences even in the middle of the century. Since the late 1860s, the Pullman Company, known for its luxurious passenger train cars, hired Black men to serve white passengers' every whim for less than a livable wage, a practice the company continued for nearly a century.⁴⁰⁸ According to historian Susan Hirsch, Pullman's white managers believed that racial minorities, especially Black people, made "good servants," best suited for menial service positions. In 1925, led by Black labor

⁴⁰⁸ Jack Santino, "Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: The Negotiation of Black Occupational Identity Through Personal Experience Narrative," *The Journal of American Folklore* 96, no. 3 (Oct.-Dec. 1983): 393.

organizer and activist A. Philip Randolph, Black porters joined together in a union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, which advocated for “self-organization” and “black empowerment,” against a company that believed them to be second class citizens. By 1940, prior to U.S. involvement in World War II, Randolph and the Brotherhood were pushing for a March on Washington to advocate for equal treatment of African Americans in defense industries, prompting President Franklin Roosevelt to issue the first executive order against discriminatory hiring practices.⁴⁰⁹ Despite the civil rights activism of the many Black porters on behalf of equality on the rails during the early 1940s, however, Hollywood still portrayed the only Black train passengers as porters well into the 1950s, as *Duchess of Idaho* demonstrates.

The staging for these train-themed musical numbers – as well as the only musical number that was set outside of a train – provides evidence of the films’ segregation practices and their role in further entrenching whiteness as an prerequisite for participation at Sun Valley. The only Black musical number in *Sun Valley Serenade* begins with a rehearsal of a Glenn Miller original song, “Chattanooga Choo Choo,” written specifically for the film, played by Miller/Corey and His Orchestra at the resort. After the band finishes their rendition, the camera pans away from them onto a set decorated with a life-size model of the end of a caboose train car, where African American actress, singer, and dancer Dorothy Dandridge enters the frame followed by the immensely talented acrobatic dancing duo the Nicholas Brothers who are dressed as train conductors. The trio sing and dance their way through a much jazzier and energetic version of “Chattanooga Choo Choo.” In just one brief moment, the all-white band is shown off to the side of the stage, but this is the only acknowledgement that the white band and the Black performers

⁴⁰⁹ Susan E. Hirsch, “No Victory at the Workplace: Women and Minorities at Pullman during World War II,” in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 243-245.

were ever in the same space. Even the opening lyrics of the song allude to race: “Pardon me, boy / Is that the Chattanooga choo choo? / Yes yes track twenty-nine / Boy you can gimme a shine / Can you afford / To board the Chattanooga choo choo?” The use of the term “boy,” commonly a pejorative address for an African American laborer, demonstrates that the only place for Black Americans on a train or in a train station is as the employees, not the passengers.

The big number of *Duchess of Idaho*, “Let’s Choo Choo Choo to Idaho” does much of the same work for the movie as did “Chattanooga Choo Choo” for *Sun Valley Serenade*. Besides bearing a striking resemblance to Miller’s train-themed song, “Let’s Choo Choo Choo to Idaho” provides another example of racial bias both in relation to Sun Valley and in society at large. Two Black porters work quietly in the rehearsal car before another Black porter enters quietly behind Dick Layne and the band’s singer, Peggy. The scene then hard cuts to the porter who just entered, who then begins to sing before being joined by three other porters, coming together to create a kind of barbershop quartet played by the Black American gospel group the Jubalaires.⁴¹⁰ Similarly to *Sun Valley Serenade*, the number in *Duchess of Idaho* shows the Black porters in the same space as the white band, even singing with Dick and Peggy at one point, but the white band and the Black singers never interact. Once the number is over there is another hard cut back to Dick and Peggy with the black porters once again in the background. The fully segregated dance number of *Sun Valley Serenade* and the choppy edits of the singing porters in *Duchess of Idaho* were purposeful, not necessarily because the filmmakers were racist themselves (though some certainly were), but because any musical number featuring Black performers had to be entirely segregated so that any “offensive” scenes could easily be cut out for copies of the film sent to

⁴¹⁰ The Jubalaires were active between 1935 and 1950, and consisted of members Orville Brooks, Theodore Brooks, Caleb Ginyard, and George McFadden.

states in the American South.⁴¹¹ Even if not done maliciously, however, the segregation of the train musical numbers capitalized on the association of Black labor and railroads, reminding audiences that only white Americans had the privilege of visiting Sun Valley for fun, whereas Black Americans took the train to Sun Valley to work, reinforcing the idea that whiteness was a prerequisite to participating in the many benefits the resort had to offer.

Though the practices employed in *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho* to segregate Black talent in movies were used by the entire film industry (and thus cannot be considered unique to these two films), the movies set in Sun Valley specifically mirror racial relations at Sun Valley itself. Neither Hollywood nor Sun Valley was explicitly segregated – Black actors *could* get roles, though the quality and quantity of the available roles were severely limited; similarly, Union Pacific never implemented any sort of policy against Black visitors, but the financial requirements and the leisure time necessary to vacation in Sun Valley were difficult, if not impossible, to achieve for most Black Americans and many white Americans. Just as train car porters were some of the first Black people that many Ketchum residents had ever seen in the 1930s, the train car porters in *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho* are the only proof of Black visitors in Sun Valley in any capacity, reminding movie audiences that whiteness became a ticket, as it were, to the benefits of physical activity and potential romance at Sun Valley.

The third Golden Age movie to use Sun Valley as a setting, deserves an abbreviated analysis, as it does much of the same as do *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Duchess of Idaho*. *That Wonderful Urge* (1948) follows *Sun Valley Serenade* in associating the resort with romance, though it leaves physical recreation out of the equation almost entirely. Unlike the other two

⁴¹¹ Ernie Smith, "Recollections and Reflections of a Jazz Dance Film Collector," *Dance Research Journal* 15 No. 2 Popular Dance in Black America (Spring 1983): 47.

films studied in this intermission, however, only fifteen minutes of the film take place in the resort. Its only purpose in the plot was as a place where romantic encounters take place, as the main characters fall in love – and allegedly marry each other – at the resort.⁴¹² It is important to note that *That Wonderful Urge* was a remake of *Love is News* (1937); given that the resort at Sun Valley had opened just months before the release of *Love is News*, Sun Valley played no part in the original storyline.⁴¹³ This suggests that the change in setting was a deliberate choice by filmmakers to capitalize on previous depictions of Sun Valley as a place for romance. Further, the only activity shown the characters engage in at the resort is dog-sledding, one that required very little athletic ability compared to skiing or skating. In *That Wonderful Urge*, then, physical activity at Sun Valley, usually the hallmark of the resort, was not nearly as important as the romance one could find there. More clearly than either of the other films, the filmmakers of *That Wonderful Urge* consciously used the association of romance and the resort to their advantage, simultaneously concretizing the image of a mythic romantic Sun Valley in the popular imagination.

For the (white) characters and audiences of *Sun Valley Serenade*, *Duchess of Idaho* especially and, to a lesser extent, *That Wonderful Urge*, one of Sun Valley's many attendant

⁴¹² *That Wonderful Urge* follows Thomas “Tom” Jefferson Tyler (Tyrone Power), a New York journalist who, on behalf of his newspaper editor, published several unflattering articles about grocery store heiress and socialite Sara Farley (Gene Tierney). With the press awaiting news of the engagement between Sara and Count Andre de Guyon, Tom follows Sara to Sun Valley, hoping to get an exclusive story about her engagement. Once there, Tom poses as a small-town newspaper manager to earn Sara's trust and glean important information for his story. To his surprise, he finds her less pretentious than he expected, and the couple spend a romantic evening in a cozy trailside cabin in Sun Valley. Though the article Tom writes is much kinder to her than his previous ones, it does not get published before Sara, learning of Tom's deception, enacts revenge. Telling other journalists that she and Tom got married while in Sun Valley, she further claims that she gave Tom a million dollars' dowry to “prove” her love, causing Tom's editor to fire him for betraying the newspaper. The rest of the movie consists of hijinks as Tom tries to set the record straight, including suing Sara, which results in a long and drawn-out legal battle. By the end, of course, Tom and Sara realize they love each other and decide to “get married all over again.”

⁴¹³ Tyrone Power also starred in *Love is News*, with Loretta Young in the Gene Tierney role.

benefits was the potential to find a spouse on the ski slopes or ice rink. In these fictional films, physical recreation and leisure combined with the bucolic locale to create the chemical reaction of love. The women in these fictional films demonstrated to a larger audience what fan magazine stories of celebrities' activities at Sun Valley had for years: that women's public physical exercise did not undermine women's domestic responsibilities but reinforced them. Audiences – perhaps for the first time, in some instances – saw images of women who found romance in Sun Valley not *in spite of* their physical prowess, but *because of* it. These fictional films, combined with the stories of actresses' activities at Sun Valley in fan magazines, provided millions of American women with depictions of a new use of their bodies in public. More importantly, this new use of their public physicality did not pose a threat to the more traditional form of femininity many American women still practiced. Similarly, these films, by featuring Black performers in small roles as train porters – rather than portray Sun Valley as a place where *anyone* could visit, ski, and enjoy themselves – instead buttressed the racist belief that Black Americans' best position in society was still, even as late as 1950, serving white patrons.

The gender and racial biases promoted by these Hollywood films had a subtle, national purpose. As white women physically recreated at Sun Valley, they had the potential opportunity to meet their future husbands, thereby all but ensuring children – and population growth for white Americans. The films set in Sun Valley encouraged women audiences to experiment with taking pleasure in their bodies in the public sphere before reminding the less than an hour later that marriage – a return to the private sphere – was still required of them. Sun Valley, both fictional and real, became a place where women could begin to challenge the existing gender system without transgressing it. Black Americans, however, could not use Sun Valley as a place to confront the racial order of American society. What the ski resort did not become, as both *Sun*

Valley Serenade and *Duchess of Idaho* demonstrate, was a truly democratic space for white and non-white visitors alike.

CHAPTER 3

“Humphrey Bogart waits on tables, Hedy Lamarr makes sandwiches”: Celebrity Women, the Hollywood Canteen, and the American War Effort, 1942-1945

On April 8, 1942, *The Hollywood Citizen-News* announced that “Hollywood’s greatest single contribution to the nation’s war effort to date” was set to launch in three weeks, on April 27. The Hollywood Victory Caravan, a special train carrying a large cast of Hollywood entertainers, would stop in thirteen cities across the United States over nineteen days to raise funds for Army Emergency Relief and the Navy Relief Society, two organizations to aid families struggling after heads-of-households joined the armed forces. At every stop, a three-hour variety show would ensue, “headed by every top star available.”⁴¹⁴ According to press releases and newspaper articles, Hollywood actors would perform in several dramatic and comedic skits, mostly original work created specifically for the occasion. Additionally, two Hollywood musicians, Arthur Schwartz and Frank Loesser, would debut an original song titled “The Moon is Down,” based on the John Steinbeck novel of the same name. All proceeds from the thirteen shows would be split evenly between the Army and Navy Relief funds.⁴¹⁵

Over the next three weeks, word trickled in from the press that stars like Cary Grant, Claudette Colbert, Olivia de Havilland, Groucho Marx, Laurel and Hardy, Eleanor Powell, and

⁴¹⁴ “Film Stars Ready to Speed ‘Victory Caravan’” *Hollywood Citizen-News*, 8 Apr 1942, Hollywood Victory Caravan – clippings, file 147, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records (MPAA WWII), Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) (Los Angeles, CA).

⁴¹⁵ Publicity Memo “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE,” [n.d.], Hollywood Victory Caravan – Publicity, file 154, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

James Cagney had signed up to join the Caravan. To their credit, the stars jumped at the chance to do their first major bit for the war effort, seeming to understand the importance of this nationwide fundraising tour. After signing on with the Caravan, Claudette Colbert commented, “Nothing ever done by actors in the history of show business has been as important as this Victory Caravan and I am genuinely proud that I have been asked to be a part of it.”⁴¹⁶ Backed by representatives of Army Emergency Relief and the Navy Relief Society, the Undersecretary of War, and several Hollywood luminaries, the Hollywood Victory Caravan was set to become, in the words of A.M. Botsford, New York representative on the Victory Caravan Committee, “the biggest show ever to hit most of these towns.”⁴¹⁷

After three weeks of intense rehearsal, the twenty-six entertainers, fourteen musicians, and about fifty aides, technicians, and executive personnel, boarded the 10-car train that would carry them to their opening one-night stand in the nation’s capital with a fundraising goal of \$78,000.⁴¹⁸ As the train moved across the country, the players perfected their routines in train cars that had been outfitted with dance floors, pianos, and musical playback apparatuses. Three days after the train left Los Angeles, the Hollywood Victory Caravan tour officially began in Washington D.C on April 30, 1942. After the show, Army Major General A.D. Surles telegraphed

⁴¹⁶ “Overview – Star Testimonials,” Hollywood Victory Caravan – press book, file 153, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

⁴¹⁷ Letter from A.M. Botsford to Arch Reeve, 13 Apr 1942, Hollywood Victory Caravan – correspondence, file 148, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

⁴¹⁸ The full roster of entertainers is as follows: Joan Bennett, Joan Blondell, Charles Boyer, James Cagney, Claudette Colbert, Olivia de Havilland, Cary Grant, Eleanor Powell, Bob Hope, Groucho Marx, Desi Arnaz, Charlotte Greenwood, Bert Lahr, Rise Stevens, Frances Langford, Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Jerry Colonna, Frank McHugh, Ray Middleton, Merle Oberon, Pat O’Brien and a “glamour chorus of starlets” Katherine Booth, Alma Carroll, Frances Gifford, Elyse Knox, Marie McDonald, Kay McKenzie, Juanita Stark, and Arleen Whelan. “H’Wood Victory Caravan Starts Service Fund Drive,” *Variety* 27 Apr 1942, Hollywood Victory Caravan – clippings, file 147, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; Letter for Hollywood Victory Caravan for Army and Navy Relief, Hollywood Victory Caravan – press book, file 153, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

Howard Strickling, secretary of the Hollywood Victory Committee, with praise for the show: “kindly convey to members and studio heads our gratitude and congratulations for a splendid caravan show here...I consider it the finest manifestation of movie peoples [sic] desire to do great work ever accomplished...it was a great show for a worthy cause [and] will bring Hollywood much deserved commendation throughout the nation.”⁴¹⁹

With these words spurring them on, the troupe embarked on the rest of their nationwide tour, beginning in Boston. From Cleveland to Chicago, St. Paul to Des Moines, and one final show in San Francisco, the Hollywood Victory Caravan racked up publicity, praise, and receipts. Altogether, the Hollywood Victory Caravan raised nearly \$650,000 – nearly ten times the original goal of \$78,000. In fact, the Caravan raised \$78,000 at its one night in Boston *alone*. Though it is clear that Hollywood and government leaders understood the power that movie celebrities had to influence the American public when they organized the Hollywood Victory Caravan, it appears that even they had not anticipated such an unqualified success. On the last day of the tour, May 12, Virginia Wright, the drama editor of the *Los Angeles Daily News*, conveyed what seems to be the nationwide consensus about the results of the Hollywood Victory Caravan and its performers: “[It] has been the film industry’s biggest contribution to the war program to date. In addition, it has accomplished something for Hollywood that was not on the original agenda. It has brought the people of the screen pretty close to the heart of America and made hundreds of thousands of friends for the film business as a whole.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ Telegram to Howard Strickling from Maj. Gen. A.D. Surles 5/1/42, Hollywood Victory Caravan – correspondence, file 148, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴²⁰ Hollywood Victory Caravan Public Relations Report, Hollywood Victory Committee – general, file 149, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; Monetary Figures for Victory Caravan, Hollywood Victory Committee – general, file 149; “Virginia Wright: Drama Editor,” *The Los Angeles Daily News*, 12 May 1942, Hollywood Victory Caravan – clippings, file 147, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

Though the show featured a number of entertaining performances, from the physical comedy of Laurel and Hardy to Desi Arnaz's energetic rumba music, it was the women's acts – and their bodies – that seemed to garner the most attention. Actress Charlotte Greenwood, particularly renowned for her high-kicking abilities, showed off her “elongated gams,” according to one reviewer; Eleanor Powell, an onscreen tap dancer famous for taps so fast they sounded like machine-gun fire, “prove[d] herself a very poised lady at the microphone, but [did] not waste much time in peeling off her dress to reveal a very delectable pair of black silk-clad legs,” before beginning her tap number; the eight young starlets on the tour seemed to perform more often as eye-candy in the skits of Groucho Marx and Bob Hope than as young women with marketable talent (which certainly they possessed). The most striking act of the night, however, was that of actress Joan Blondell. Entering the stage in a “skin-fitting black satin evening gown slit to the knee,” Blondell proceeded with an imitation strip tease, removing one piece of clothing after another. Finally, when the time came to remove her dress, the zipper in the back supposedly got stuck. Calling for help (presumably from another female cast member), she was instead chased off the stage by two male members of the troupe, to the riotous laughter of the audience.⁴²¹ Though practically burlesque in nature, Joan Blondell's act never stirred up any concern from reviewers that it was inappropriate for a woman to be revealing her body in public in this way. Rather, the act garnered positive reviews almost everywhere the tour stopped. Why? Because she was using her body and sexuality for a good cause – not for any immoral reason, but to support servicemen and their families.

⁴²¹“Caravan Show Came High but Worth It,” *News* (Dallas, TX), 12 May 1942, Scrapbook – Hollywood Victory Caravan, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA).

With her imitation strip tease, Blondell – as well as the other Caravan women – set a precedent for the legitimate use of women’s bodies in public during World War II in order to raise the morale of soldiers and support the war effort on the home front, as well as how women might use their bodies for their own pleasure, enjoyment, and fulfillment. Just five months after the Hollywood Victory Caravan made its successful tour, an institution opened that definitively cemented the role that celebrity women’s bodies would play in the public war effort: the Hollywood Canteen. The Hollywood Canteen, where soldiers could talk with, dance with, and be entertained by their favorite movie stars, became synonymous with women’s participation in the war effort during World War II, especially as every fan magazine published between 1943 and 1945 constantly referred to the Hollywood Canteen as one of the most prominent places where celebrity women contributed to the war effort. Celebrity women's behavior at the Hollywood Canteen, as described in these magazines, assured women, both Black and white, that their use of their bodies in public for wartime volunteer efforts would not cause a breakdown of the current social hierarchy. However, even as American women could begin to challenge the gendered status quo by volunteering at public institutions like the Hollywood Canteen, Hollywood publicity emphasized the importance of women’s return to the home after the war was over. This argument follows along the lines of Elaine Tyler May’s seminal work *Homeward Bound*, in which she demonstrates the “tension between traditional domestic roles and the challenges to those roles.”⁴²² During the Great Depression and World War II, while women often had to leave their private homes for the private sphere to work, many viewed women’s expanded presence in the public sphere as temporary solutions to an emergency situation but expected that women would return to their traditional domestic roles when normalcy returned. This project uses this

⁴²² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008 [1988]).

foundation to point to a specific site, the Hollywood Canteen, that provided women a way to experiment with their extended public presence while simultaneously encouraging them to return to the private sphere after the war. In other words, I argue that women's physical sacrifice at the Hollywood Canteen, and analogous sites throughout the country, primed women for the physical sacrifice the government expected them to make in a postwar society: marriage, childbearing, and childrearing.

“We Women Are At War”: World War II, Women, and Hollywood

Even from a twenty-first century viewpoint, discussion of World War II most often conjures images of intense patriotism, unprecedented sacrifice, and national unity on a scale that had rarely been seen before and has arguably not been seen since. History textbooks tell of how millions of American women stepped into the industrial workforce for the first time. Rosie the Riveter, and the women she represented, has become perhaps one of the most enduring images of the war, thanks, in part, to a public resurgence beginning in the 1980s of a flexing Rosie, in her famous denim shirt and red polka-dot headscarf, exclaiming “We Can Do It!” Though many today assume that this was *the* image of Rosie the Riveter in the 1940s, the reality is the image was used by one company, the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, for just two weeks before it was replaced by other posters also designed to boost the morale of its female workers.⁴²³ Much like the misunderstanding about the famous image of Rosie the Riveter, the typical assumptions about women in World War II – that the majority of women suddenly entered the work force in numbers never before seen and that this contributed to the reemergence of organized feminism in the 1960s and 1970s – are also not entirely correct. Maureen Honey, in her study of working

⁴²³ Sarah Pruitt, “Uncovering the Secret identity of Rosie the Riveter,” History.com, revised March 26, 2020, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/rosie-the-riveter-inspiration>.

women during World War II, demonstrates that fiction and advertisements, in conjunction with government directives, created images that temporarily liberated women but ultimately reinforced traditional gender roles. Even as government propaganda campaigns encouraged women to enter the labor force, often in traditionally male jobs, the same propaganda made it clear that “the task of women...was to preserve the integrity of family life and keep an orderly home to which soldiers could return.”⁴²⁴ Women should use their bodies in the labor force, declared the government, but not at the risk of giving up their most important bodily functions: physical and ideological reproduction through bearing and rearing children.⁴²⁵

Because World War II has been remembered as such a unique time for American working women in the twentieth century, the majority of historical studies of gender and the war focus on women’s patterns of labor. But a smaller group of scholars has studied how women participated in the war effort in ways other than working in industrial factories. D’Ann Campbell demonstrates the multitude of choices that American women made in deciding how to support the war in public while still maintaining their private home. She argues that “in the 1940s, American women of all classes and ethnic groups faced the challenge of finding a new balance

⁴²⁴ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984): 5, 47, 133.

⁴²⁵ It should be noted that much of the rhetoric around women’s public patriotic roles during the war, including its temporary nature, are very similar – if not identical – to the same rhetoric during World War I. Lynn Dumenil’s study of American women in the First World War. Dumenil aptly demonstrates that the war offered some “exciting opportunities...[for] women to take on new and more modern roles and responsibilities,” but that there was no “profound change in gender relations or women’s status” after the war was over (5). Women on the home front in the late 1910s faced similarly contradicting advice as did women in the early 1940s: images of women signaled a “new” modern woman citizen who actively contributed to the public sphere, but these messages were underscored by maternalist ideology, which stressed women’s role in “protecting the family in the midst of the crisis of war.” (60) By tying together women’s war work and domesticity, reformers and leaders reinforced “conventional notions of women’s proper place” in postwar society. This is a formula that the U.S. government and social leaders would follow less than thirty years later, as this chapter shows. Lynn Dumenil, *The Second Line of Defense: American Women and World War I* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

between their private and public roles.”⁴²⁶ Women all over the country encountered a stunning array of options to join the war effort, in both the privacy of their homes and in the public realm. While American men had almost exclusively the two options of enlisting in the armed services or working in an essential war industry, women, now walking the tenuous line between public and private, could volunteer at local relief agencies, take nursing courses and, for the first time, join women’s auxiliary branches of the armed forces – *and* they could organize neighborhood scrap drives and plant victory gardens at their homes. As Campbell states, the basic decision that American women made “involved the choice of some combination of activity in volunteer organizations, paid labor force participation, or unpaid work in the home.”⁴²⁷ Unable to control the decisions their female citizens made, the government worked with numerous industries to encourage women to make a contribution in any way they chose, as long as they contributed to and sacrificed for the greater good. From advertising to fiction stories to film, images of women flooded the consumer market to serve as object lessons in how American women ought to be helping to end the war and bring the boys home. Historian Melissa A. McEuen and sociologist Tawnya J. Adkins Covert both argue that women’s magazines, and the advertisements that appeared in them, played an especially crucial role in simultaneously encouraging women to enter the public sphere in record numbers while still promoting a separate spheres ideology. Women’s magazines were particularly important prescriptive sources in this period because, according to Adkins Covert, magazines provided “a context in which femininity [was] negotiated,” and promoted, per McEuen, “images of ideal womanhood to circumvent the

⁴²⁶ D’Ann Campbell, *Women at Work with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984): 5.

⁴²⁷ Campbell, *Women at War With America*, 65.

dramatic social and cultural changes afoot on the home front.”⁴²⁸ Women’s magazines provided a safe space where women readers could learn about and develop their own ideas about how to navigate the changing world around them without losing their femininity. Both scholars importantly note that much of the advertising landscape was aimed at the middle-class white woman, as the white middle class constituted the largest consumer base for magazines and the products (and ideas) they advertised. Leaders of government and industry also pointed to upper- and middle-class women as arbiters of proper social behavior and cultural tastes, hoping that these women could “exercise considerable influence over...their families and communities.” As consumers and as citizens, then, the middle-class white woman was the benchmark for how American women should look, feel, and behave.⁴²⁹

The years between 1941 and 1945 are one of the most studied periods of early Hollywood history, perhaps because it is an instance of complete cooperation between the American government and a private industry, not for the purposes of furthering government-sanctioned corporate greed, but – at least ostensibly – for the good of the country. Despite this, it was not until forty years after the conflict ended that scholars began to take notice of the role that Hollywood played in boosting the nation’s morale and offering up prescriptive images of how Americans could participate in a war of such unprecedented scale. Most scholarship about Hollywood during World War II focuses especially on the combat films released during this time, where men hold the lion’s share of the screen, with women barely on the plot’s periphery.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ Tawnya J. Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women Through Magazine Advertising* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011): 39; Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011): 1.

⁴²⁹ Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 10.

⁴³⁰ For studies focused on American films made during World War II, see: M. Joyce Baker, *Images of Women in Film: The War Years, 1941-1945* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980); Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II*

There appear to be very few studies dedicated to Hollywood celebrities' war efforts off screen, with fewer taking seriously reports of their extensive war work. As early Hollywood scholar Thomas Patrick Doherty astutely notes, "For all its persistence and pervasiveness...Hollywood's vision of the Second World War has had limited currency as worthwhile art or reliable history. From the vantage of half a century, the film record of 1941-45 is condescended to as quaint or condemned as duplicitous." Because of this, he argues, historians have missed "the true nature of Hollywood's war work" in which the unwritten contract of the relationship between Hollywood and American culture was fundamentally rewritten.⁴³¹ To be sure, even Doherty admits, Hollywood did enjoy patting itself on the back for doing the bare minimum. For example, Nelson Poynter, head of the Hollywood office of the Domestic Branch of the Office of War Information, complained, "'The movie makers would rather be told how wonderful they are' than face up to their responsibility 'for creating better understanding of The Issues of this War.'"⁴³² But even while Hollywood took immense credit for and pride in their war efforts, this chapter demonstrates that the entire film industry, from its producers to its stars to its publicity departments, made a mammoth effort to get all Americans behind the war, of which they had a right to be proud. Like Doherty, I show that Hollywood's contributions to the war effort during the early 1940s were among some of the most important in spreading American ideology (or

Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); M. Todd Bennett, *One World, Big Screen: Hollywood, the Allies, and World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Ralph Donald, *Hollywood Enlists! Propaganda Films of World War II* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Kathryn Kane, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Robert L. McLaughlin, *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

⁴³¹ Doherty, *Projections of War*, 2-4.

⁴³² As cited in Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 120.

propaganda), especially given its role as the most popular mass medium of the early twentieth century. What sets this study apart is its focus not on the films that came out of Hollywood – of which academic studies are plentiful – but on the stories about celebrities’ “real” lives that came out of Hollywood: how the stars themselves, not just the characters they played, helped Americans understand and participate in the war. By portraying celebrity women’s war efforts at the Hollywood Canteen, fan culture emphasized their devotion to their homes and families in order to encourage all American women to prioritize their responsibilities in the private sphere once the war was over.

“Show Business is War Business”: Hollywood and the War Effort

“Hollywood seems to be as war-conscious as any community in the nation and is definitely doing something about it,” wrote Carlisle Jones, a publicity man from Warner Bros. Studios, only months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941⁴³³. Jones’s words were not just showboating, either. Hollywood *was* as “war-conscious” as any community and it definitely *was* doing something about it. Only three days after Pearl Harbor, a group of Hollywood leaders and actors created the Hollywood Victory Committee (HVC), which would handle every request for a star’s public appearance for any war-related cause, from radio advertisements to film shorts to United Service Organizations (USO) shows. The HVC worked practically in tandem with the American government to exploit Hollywood’s influence and talent to provide morale and entertainment for American troops. With the wartime emergency, an industry that had been seen as concerned only with entertainment suddenly became an industry

⁴³³ Untitled Document by Carlisle Jones from Alex Evelove, 1942, Films – feature films related to war effort, file 14, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

that mattered for the survival of the nation. In a society that was faced with immense social changes, Hollywood, according to Thomas Doherty, “served as a guide to the new order.”⁴³⁴ In showing celebrities or fictional characters dealing with the same challenges that many film-goers faced, Hollywood similarly provided solutions and adaptations Americans could employ to meet those challenges. The motion picture industry, through the feature films and publicity it released, helped all Americans, famous and non-famous alike, make sense of and understand the war.⁴³⁵

Both the American government and the HVC understood exactly why immediate collaboration was necessary: because the film industry and the movies it produced had power and influence that even the most high-profile politicians, except perhaps the president himself, did not have. Movies could help inform Americans about the war – from how peoples in Allied nations were experiencing it to the values that true Americans should protect, whether at home or abroad. Movies could boost morale as well. Walter Winchell, popular Hollywood columnist, declared in a radio broadcast in February 1942, “The United States Government has certified the motion picture business as a necessary war industry. It is an honest recognition of the importance of the moving pictures in the American way of life.” Much like Jones’s comment, Winchell’s claim could seem like boasting, an attempt to convince the American people that Hollywood was not as frivolous as the general public often believed it to be. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself, however, legitimated Winchell’s assertion in a letter sent to the leaders of the film industry: “The American motion picture is one of our most effective media in informing and entertaining our citizens...I want no restrictions placed thereon...other than those very necessary

⁴³⁴ Doherty, *Projections of War*, 6.

⁴³⁵ The ties between the federal government and Hollywood pre-date Pearl Harbor by several years, with Hollywood working closely with the U.S. government to make politically and ideologically neutral films in the early years of Hitler’s reign and throughout the years of Mussolini’s Fascist government. The pre-war years of Hollywood are thoroughly examined in David Welky, *The Moguls and the Dictators: Hollywood and the Coming World War II* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008).

restrictions which the dictates of safety make imperative.”⁴³⁶ Though it may be overly generous to say that the film industry took up the burden of citizen and soldier morale as an act of altruism, it cannot be denied that Hollywood met the government’s challenge with an enormous amount of gusto, willingly investing thousands of workers, hundreds of thousands of hours, and immense amounts of money for the good of the nation – which, ultimately, was for the good of the studios as well.⁴³⁷

As the war wore on, the influence of Hollywood and its movies only grew. Not only could the film industry make movies that informed and entertained the American public, and use their movie stars for the same purpose, but leaders also recognized that Hollywood’s influential reach was international. Through fictional films and real stars’ personal appearances and appeals to the public, citizens of Allied nations could gain an “honest and realistic portrayal of American life,” claimed Eric Johnson, president of the Motion Picture Association, at a 1945 meeting of the industry’s top executives and producers. More importantly, Johnson continued, Hollywood had become the democratic watchdog of the world: “Ideas are the most active revolutionist[s] in the world. And the screen is the most potent instrument for conveying ideas across the boundary lines of geography...The motion picture can sell anything. It can sell tolerance. It can sell charity. It can sell the brotherhood of man.” It could even sell democracy, providing inspiration to the Allies as they grappled against forces that sought to destroy it. Without Hollywood, its films, and its people to propagate the importance of democratic values, democracy would be

⁴³⁶ Walter Winchell Motion Picture Tribute (excerpt from radio broadcast), 15 February 1942, War effort – press releases, file 404, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA); “Motion Picture Letter Issued by the Public Relations Committee of the Motion Picture Industry,” Vol. 1 No. 5 (Nov. 1942), War effort – press releases, file 404, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴³⁷ Roughly 85 million Americans – about 3/5 of the population – attended the movies every week. Hollywood was massively profitable during the war years. Bennett, *One World, Big Screen*, 7.

weakened, and the war would possibly be lost. *With* Hollywood, however, the United States had yet another weapon to wield to generate soft power as a cultural and political influence in a worldwide conflict.⁴³⁸

It was in this milieu of discourse about Hollywood as both domestic educator and international watchdog that the HVC operated. Soon after its inception, a subcommittee of the HVC created a document for all Hollywood stars to sign, pledging their full cooperation with the HVC and their full support to the war effort. Called “Enlistment for the Duration,” this document used rhetoric and a vocabulary often used to denote military service:

To help the defense program of the United States of America and to bolster the war-time morale of civilians as well as men in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, I hereby *enlist* in the work being done by the Hollywood Victory Committee of Stage, Screen and Radio. In an effort to *serve my country* in an efficient, organized manner, I will fulfill requests for free entertainment of any nature only when these requests are approved by the Hollywood Victory Committee for Stage, Screen and Radio. Toward this end, I shall try to fulfill any reasonable request in their program of free entertainment. It is my understanding that this pledge does not interfere in any way with my obligations as contained in any contract to which I am now subject or will be subject in the future. (emphasis mine)⁴³⁹

By using the same language as the military, the HVC deliberately likened Hollywood’s war work to the kind of war work that soldiers were doing. Hollywood entertainers could begin to equate their cooperation with the HVC as enlistment in a very special kind of military – one that fought with images, words, and actions rather than with guns.

The HVC also hoped that this pledge would legitimize Hollywood’s war work in the eyes of the public. Much like the scholars writing about the era forty and fifty years later, Americans in the 1940s must have viewed the HVC’s pledge with skepticism, seeing it as overinflation of

⁴³⁸ FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE [466-19], Public Information Committee of the Motion Picture Industry, file 292, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; Bennett, *One World, Big Screen*, 48.

⁴³⁹ FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – NBC Broadcast, 1942, Hollywood Victory Committee – press releases, file 222, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

what stars were really doing.⁴⁴⁰ In fact, the rumors that Hollywood players were not willing to participate in the war effort became so egregious that Fred W. Beetson, chairman of the HVC, and Charles K. Feldman, chairman of HVC's Hollywood Talent Committee, released a statement that read, in part, "At no time has any star or player or any other individual refused a request of the Hollywood Victory Committee...Every star or player who was asked [to perform in war-related broadcasts] was eager to do the job. More stars asked for the privilege of participating but the choice of casting was made entirely by the proper authorities of the Hollywood Victory Committee." This statement refutes any ideas that the American public naively swallowed any and all propaganda released by any government agencies, least of all from Hollywood. Rather, it demonstrates that American film fans were cognizant of the publicity machine at work, so much so that it was difficult for many Americans to believe that elite movie stars, living in their mansions in the Hollywood Hills, were actually sacrificing anything for the greater good. It likely appeared to them that actors and actresses were doing the bare minimum for the war effort before returning to their opulent lives, and enthusiastically patting themselves on the back in the process.⁴⁴¹

Following the release of the joint statement of Beetson and Feldman, Hollywood and the HVC stepped up efforts to ensure that stars *were* doing their part and that they were publicly visible while doing it. Some of the biggest male stars joined the armed forces – Clark Gable served in the Army Air Corps, enlisting in August 1942; Tyrone Power enlisted in the Marine

⁴⁴⁰ Especially after some studio heads tried to get draft deferments for certain Hollywood workers, especially actors, there must have been some public discourse from the American public that voiced skepticism about actors' willingness to participate in the war effort. Renov, *Hollywood's Wartime Women*, 60; Ernest V. Heyn, "Should Stars Fight," *Photoplay*, May 1942, 27.

⁴⁴¹ FROM THE HOLLYWOOD VICTORY COMMITTEE FOR STAGE SCREEN AND RADIO (PRESS INFORMATION SHEET ATTACHED), n.d., Hollywood Victory Committee – press releases, file 222, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

Corps around the same time. James Stewart enthusiastically spent the duration of the war as a fighter pilot for the Army Air Corps, earning his second lieutenant's commission just after Pearl Harbor; Robert Taylor joined the Navy and was commissioned a lieutenant junior grade, though he never saw combat, serving instead as a flight instructor. Prolific directors like Frank Capra and John Huston joined the Army Signal Corps using footage that they themselves shot, both at home and on the front, to make government propaganda films and wartime documentaries.⁴⁴² Numerous celebrity men who were turned down for army service for various reasons helped on the home front where they could: on HVC sub-committees, acting in combat films, or joining domestic or overseas USO and War Bond Tours. According to a digest published in March 1943, approximately 5,200 Hollywood workers were serving in the military (roughly 30% of the industry's manpower), including 941 actors (stars and extras alike), with an additional 540 men working in a vaguely titled "war industry."⁴⁴³ Hollywood men, just like "ordinary" American men, were expected to join the armed forces or the war industry – but what of the women?

⁴⁴² Most, if not all, of these men volunteered for military service despite attempts from studio executives to get their stars exemptions from the draft. James Stewart, from a family with a history of longstanding military service, was drafted prior to Pearl Harbor, but was originally rejected because he was ten pounds underweight. He claimed a friend operated the scales for his second weigh-in, making him one of the first major Hollywood stars to enter the war; Starr Smith, *Jimmy Stewart: Bomber Pilot* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2005): 30. Prior to her death, Carole Lombard had encouraged her husband, Clark Gable, to enter the armed forces. After her death, he enlisted in the Army, flying in five bomber missions in Europe and ended the war with the rank of major; Scott Harrison, "From the Archives: Clark Gable joins the Army," LATimes.com, Jan. 2, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/visuals/photography/la-me-fw-archives-clark-gable-joins-the-army-20190102-htmlstory.html>. After enlisting the U.S. Marines, Power was considered too old to fly in combat zones, so he volunteered to pilot cargo planes that he thought would allow him access to active combat zones. He remained in the Marines reserve for the rest of his life, earning the rank of major in 1957. Tyrone Power on TogetherWeServed.com, <https://marines.togetherweserved.com/usmc/servlet/tws.webapp.WebApps?cmd=ShadowBoxProfile&type=Person&ID=282669>. Frank Capra, an Italian immigrant, gave up his career as a director and took a commission as a major in the U.S. Army, as he had "an intense desire to prove his patriotism to his adopted land." *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture, Vol. 1* eds. Tom and Sara Pendergast (Detroit: St. James Press, 2000): 428-429.

⁴⁴³ Roy Hoopes, *When the Stars Went to War: Hollywood and World War II* (New York: Random House, 1994): 44, 88, 153, 162, 247; Doherty, *Projections of War*, 71; "A Digest of Hollywood War Effort – Men in the Armed Forces 3/1/43," Hollywood – digest of Hollywood effort, file 28, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA).

“Like any other ‘woiking goil’”: Hollywood Women and the War Effort

Women throughout the war years faced a constant, confusing, and contradictory set of messages about potential roles they could play in the war effort. American women should break with traditional values of staying home by entering the work force, while simultaneously subsuming their own goals, desires, and identities to become “caretakers of national ideals and normalcy,” as Maureen Honey states.⁴⁴⁴ The ultimate goal of wartime propaganda was to ensure that, even as women entered into the public in unprecedented ways, their traditional roles as wife and mother would be preserved during the war years. The messages that came from Hollywood, from the films it produced to the stories fan magazines published, contained many of the same contradictory messages: even as celebrity women volunteered (not to mention worked) in public spaces, fan magazines always emphasized their domestic qualities, that they were maintaining for their husbands off at war. However, the efforts of individual celebrity women as published in fan magazines also provided multiple examples of how women could contribute to the war effort in very public ways, opening up spaces for women to experiment with using their bodies in public without fear of being accused of sexual immorality.

Beginning with the Hollywood Victory Caravan, the HVC enlisted Hollywood women for practically any activity that promoted the war cause. Despite this, many scholars have elided discussions of how hard celebrity women worked for the United States’ war effort. Indeed, author Roy Hoopes’ even claims that the only thing that celebrity women contributed to the war was their cheesecake and pin-up photos. While it cannot be denied that famous women’s sexualized bodies significantly influenced how their wartime contributions were received, any examination of sources from World War II Hollywood demonstrates that celebrity women did

⁴⁴⁴ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 7.

much more than just pose seductively for photos meant to boost the morale of overseas servicemen. Ordinary American women were expected to sacrifice time, money, and energy to boost the morale of the servicemen in their own families, to prove their personal patriotism by volunteering, and to maintain their homes on top of everything else. Celebrity women, too, sacrificed time, money, and energy to entertain and boost the morale of their domestic audiences and overseas troops, to prove that Hollywood was indeed doing its part in the war, and to maintain their own homes on top of everything else. In other words, celebrity women became national examples of the role that the average American women were to play in their own communities.⁴⁴⁵

The U.S. government and Hollywood propagandists, recognizing just how influential celebrity women could be, wanted to ensure that influence was used for proper causes. Just as the amorphous “Hollywood” had immense power to influence Americans to act in the best interest of the nation, so too could Hollywood women in particular play prescriptive and informative roles for American women who read fan magazines, went to the movies, and listened to the radio. Despite the clear class divide between stars and their fans, celebrity women’s actions had the potential to encourage American women to engage in similar, if not exactly the same, behavior. In February 1943, Dorothy Ducas, chief of the Magazine Section of the Office of War Information, wrote Arch Reeve, publicity director of the Hollywood Coordination Committee, requesting that studio publicists use the Magazine War Guide, which was a list of topics, usually war-related, “likely to be of public interest three months from date of issue.” Recognizing the importance of Hollywood stars in the war effort, she asked Reeve and other publicity managers to make more deliberate use of the guide:

⁴⁴⁵ Hoopes, *When the Stars Went to War*, 92.

In the April-May Guide you will see an item on page 7 called “Renaissance of Walking.” What I hoped for when I sent the Guide out was that the studios would take pictures of stars walking to work, walking to previews, perhaps clocking the miles they walk each day for both health and saving of tires. I feel certain that a picture of Lana Turner, or Joan Crawford, or Bette Davis titled “Let’s All Get Started Walking” would inspire many readers of the magazine to take the walking campaign seriously.⁴⁴⁶

Though presumably some male stars would have been available for such a spread, all of the potential examples that Ducas gave were women, likely because fan magazines’ predominantly female readership knew their responsibility to save their tires from extensive wear. Ducas’s letter went on to suggest “a story about a Canadian star who has visited Canada in wartime and gives *her* impressions; confessions of a star as to how *she* learned to edit her conversation so that she does not discuss matters which have to do with security...” (emphasis mine). In using female pronouns to suggest magazine stories about unnamed stars that would inform and encourage readers in their own efforts, Ducas, a government official, knew that Hollywood women had a larger role to play than just posing for scantily clad cheesecake and pin-up photos: they had the potential to literally get the whole country moving.

The average American citizen had many of the same volunteer opportunities as did Hollywood women, a point that film industry leaders hoped to drive home through fan magazine articles. Popular actress Ida Lupino earned the rank of Lieutenant in the Women’s Ambulance and Defense Corps of America, a California-specific corps organized to work with national defense. Starlet Carole Landis was a Commander of the First Division of the Aerial Nurse Corps of America, working “from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day she isn’t in a movie and attends classes at night in first aid, radio transmitting and receiving and clerical duties.” She assisted the FBI in taking fingerprints for airplane plant workers, and volunteered any extra time to Bundles for

⁴⁴⁶ Letter from Dorothy Ducas to Arch Reeve, February 16, 1943, Office of War Information, file 287, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA).

Bluejackets, an organization originally meant to provide clothing and other items for sailors, but which also operated canteens around the Los Angeles area. Actress Linda Darnell began studying automobile mechanics while in the Women's Defense and Ambulance Corps. Claudette Colbert, whose husband was a practicing physician, became an "expert 'bandage-er'" and began teaching other actresses how to do the same; she also volunteered one night a week at Fort McArthur for the Volunteer Army Canteen Service, serving sandwiches, donuts, and coffee to visiting soldiers. Even young 16-year-old starlet Jane Withers headed the Junior Division of Hollywood's branch of the American Women's Voluntary Services, whose duties included picking up empty coffee thermos jugs that had been dropped off at various camps by the Adult Division on Saturday nights, "transmitting and fulfilling orders given juniors by senior members," and entertaining young army units with barbecues and sports contests. Veronica Lake took an air raid warning training course at the Los Angeles Control Center, working between midnight and six a.m. as an airplane spotter for three days a week, even when in films. Stars, starlets, stars' wives, and stars' mothers all volunteered as Red Cross nurses or aides. Popular 1930s star Kay Francis even organized and financed a Red Cross production unit in Hollywood, which furnished supplies for troop units, repaired equipment, provided furniture for hospital recreation rooms, and produced knitted materials, among other tasks. Dozens of famous stars and starlets volunteered their time and energy to U.S.O shows and tours. Nearly all of the organizations in which celebrity women volunteered had branches or analogous institutions nation-wide. Though it is difficult to determine just how influential celebrity women's examples really were for American women, there is no doubt that creators of fan culture believed that the average American might be willing

to volunteer in the same way as her favorite star did, publishing stories about Hollywood women's efforts in the hopes of getting female fans to do exactly that.⁴⁴⁷

While Hollywood and the U.S. government hoped to encourage American women to use their bodies to volunteer and sacrifice in public, they made sure to emphasize that sacrificing did not have to mean their becoming unfashionable and plain. Women's clothing became another arena in which celebrities became prescriptive. With wartime shortages of certain kinds of fabric, women's sartorial choices became just as central to patriotic citizenship as did ration books and scrap metal drives, as proper clothing helped women retain their femininity even as their public paid and volunteer work threatened it. Hollywood, ever the tastemaker of national clothing trends, understood that it was part of its responsibility to encourage appropriate fashion consumption while also promoting fashionable styles. During the war years, top Hollywood designers began making film costumes that used simpler and cheaper fabrics without sacrificing flair. "American women and designers are not going to be taken aback by the government restrictions on the length of skirts, size of sleeves and other orders issued by the War Production Board," wrote Edith Head, chief costume designer at Paramount Studios. "Instead they will rise to the occasion by using more imagination and ingenuity in design and fabric than has heretofore been necessary."⁴⁴⁸ Designers like Vera West of Universal Studios and Irene of Columbia Studios began cutting down on material used in costumes and began using domestic materials rather than

⁴⁴⁷ "Women in the War" Hollywood Women's War Effort, n.d., War Effort – Hollywood, file 398, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA); No Title, n.d., War Effort – Hollywood, file 398, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; "Bundles for Britain: Sending Warmth (and Woolens) to a Nation at War," from Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park, pg3, accessed 5 July 2023, https://fdr4freedoms.org/wpcontent/themes/fdf4fdr/DownloadablePDFs/IV_StatesmanandCommanderInChief/06_BundlesforBritain.pdf; "Description of Wartime Activities", March 13, 1942, War Effort – Hollywood, file 398, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴⁴⁸ Edith Head, "War Production Board Fashion Influence," April 30, 1942, War fashions –press releases, file f.406, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA).

imported fabrics like lace and metallics.⁴⁴⁹ “There is nothing to fear from American made materials,” designer Orry-Kelly wrote.⁴⁵⁰ Cotton, with a long history in the United States and one of the textiles that could be bought with ration points, became a particularly patriotic fabric, according to one press release: “It is patriotic to wear cotton and besides, the designers say, there are untold possibilities for glamour in this material...Even with other cloths available, many of the stars are displaying cotton frills from head to toes in recent pictures.”⁴⁵¹

With Hollywood designers and the stars who wore their fashions prominently displaying how they were making their sartorial fashions with government restrictions in mind, rather than in spite of them, they were demonstrating how American women need not – and indeed should not – sacrifice their femininity to participate in the war effort. As fabrics had to stretch further than they had prior to the war, silhouettes became slimmer, designs became simpler and emphasized practicality, making it easier for every woman, no matter her job or volunteer effort, to be fashionable and feminine. In doing so, Orry-Kelly stressed that these fashions became more accessible to the American public than ever before: “Any woman observing film styles has a right to feel that they are available to her as well as to the star who wears them.”⁴⁵² In the fact that American women could wear the same fashions as their favorite movie stars, it made it seem like Hollywood stars were, in the words of twenty-first century fan magazines, “just like us,”

⁴⁴⁹ Press release draft “Hollywood, June ____”, n.d. Hollywood – effect of war on, file f.29, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴⁵⁰ Memo from Orry-Kelly to Alex Evelove, June 11, 1942, War fashions – press releases, file f.406, MPAA World War II Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴⁵¹ Press release draft “Hollywood, June ____”, n.d. Hollywood – effect of war on, file f.29, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS. For secondary sources on cotton, see: Meghann Mason, *The Impact of World War II on women’s fashion in the United States and Great Britain*, PhD Dissertation (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2011), ProQuest: 8; D. Clayton Brown, *King Cotton in Modern America: A Cultural, Political, and Economic History since 1945* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011).

⁴⁵² Memo by Orry-Kelly to Alex Evelove, June 11, 1942.

sacrificing material without sacrificing their womanhood, something for which every other American woman should strive. This Hollywood publicity worked in tandem with government propaganda that was in the process of developing, as historian Melissa McEuen cites, a “greater clothes consciousness among women of America.”⁴⁵³ By becoming more aware of how to use rationed materials to create clothing, women could begin to measure their patriotism through clothing: if a woman was clothed appropriately and stylishly in public, and saved material while doing it, she was both a good citizen and a good woman. Fashion, much like at Sun Valley only a few years before, became a deliberate way to promote and legitimize femininity and a proper version of public womanhood, but during the early 1940s, it was also a way to signal proper female patriotism as women, celebrity and non-celebrity alike, began stepping into public roles previously reserved for men.

Of course, there were several things that Hollywood women did for the war effort that only those who had money, few domestic responsibilities, and an entire industry backing them could perform. Bond tours, for example, were one of the most common and effective ways that celebrity women appeared in public for the war effort. Starting with the Hollywood Victory Caravan through seven War Bond Tours and a Victory Bond Tour, celebrity women trekked across the country to solicit war bond sales. Bond Tours were arguably Hollywood players’ most successful war contribution; the Hollywood Victory Committee estimated that, by December 31, 1945, nearly \$5 billion worth of War Bonds had been sold by celebrities on tour. Celebrity women contributed more than just their time and talent on these tours, however. Women, quite literally, gave from their bodies and personal effects in exchange for war bonds. One wartime publication documented how Ginger Rogers gave up her shoes – which she had worn on stage –

⁴⁵³ McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 137.

for a \$10,000 war bond purchase, while Irene Dunne auctioned off her earrings for a \$30,000 bond sale. Veronica Lake, whose long, blonde hair was the trademark of her film career, sold one lock of her hair for a \$25,000 war bond, and another lock at another fundraiser for \$186,000. In Cleveland, Ohio, Marlene Dietrich kissed – on the mouth – every plant worker who raised the amount of his bond subscription. Though some actors gave up some articles of clothing on bond tours, women like Dietrich sacrificed their personal space and put their sexuality on display, ostensibly performing sexual favors, in ways that men never had to, all for the American war effort.⁴⁵⁴

Just months after the United States entered the war, one Hollywood star literally gave her life for the nation, becoming the example of the ultimate sacrifice, which, women were told, they would not be called on to make in the future if they supported the war effort *now*. Actress Carole Lombard was the first major Hollywood star to embark on a bond tour in mid-January 1942, only a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Her first stop was her hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana, where she sold \$2 million worth of bonds in just one night. Though she was scheduled to take a train back to Los Angeles, she was anxious to return home quickly and boarded a plane instead. At 7:07pm on the evening of January 16, 1942, Lombard's plane hit Olcott Peak, a mountain about 30 miles southwest of Las Vegas, killing all twenty-two of the flight's passengers instantly. Lombard's death devastated the Hollywood community, her husband Clark Gable, and millions of fans around the country. She was immediately lionized as Hollywood's first wartime tragedy. Fan magazine *Photoplay* reported that, aptly, Lombard's last public appearance ended

⁴⁵⁴ "The Hollywood Victory Committee," July 1946, Motion picture industry – report on wartime activities, file 284, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA); "Information for Al Delacorte," n.d. Hollywood Victory Committee – press releases, file 230, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; No Title, n.d., War effort – Hollywood, file 398, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

with her leading the Indianapolis crowd in the national anthem, cloaking some of her last known moments in patriotism. The article continued, however, to use Lombard's death as a bond-selling device, capitalizing on the nation's grief over her death:

Psychologists say that the way to give value to our emotions is to turn them into action. All of us who felt sincerely sorrowful about Carole Lombard should now turn that emotion into an action for which she died: the purchase of United States Defense Bonds. We can write a worthy epitaph if millions more of us go immediately to our post offices and banks to buy as many stamps or bonds as we can afford – in memory of Carole Lombard.⁴⁵⁵

Even in death, Lombard's body – which never fully belonged to her because of her profession as an actress – became a canvas upon which to reflect and project appropriate forms of patriotism. Her death, and the loss of her body for both entertainment and potential fundraising purposes, would serve, Hollywood hoped, to encourage American women to participate in the war effort. Lombard made the ultimate sacrifice; surely American women could sacrifice their time, money, and energy, both in memory of Carole Lombard and in order to avoid Lombard's fate.

And, of course, it cannot be ignored that a major way that Hollywood women contributed to the morale of the boys overseas *was* through pin-up and cheesecake photos. As women in the public eye, celebrity women's bodies were always on display and constantly sexualized. World War II only heightened that fact. During the war, it practically became part of an actress's job to be photographed dressed – or undressed, as it were – in hardly any clothing and to pose seductively in images which were promptly shipped overseas to keep up American soldiers' morale. Though the thinly veiled justification was that pin-up photos would remind the boys of the kind of wholesome women they were fighting for, these images utilized celebrity women's bodies for the sexual service of the nation by curbing the sexual appetites of American men overseas – or so military and social leaders hoped. Because pin-ups presented an image of a sexy

⁴⁵⁵ Ruth Waterbury, "What the Loss of Carole Lombard Means to Clark Gable," *Photoplay*, April 1942, 68-69.

all-American girl, like Betty Grable, whose pin-up photo is recognizable even in the twenty-first century, the soldiers would not be tempted to pick up foreign sex workers, thereby decreasing the threat of venereal disease to American troops. Additionally, argues Melissa McEuen, pin-up photos of celebrity women, especially Grable, became objects “for mainstream America to use in its development of the wartime feminine ideal.” Even as she was posed in a bathing suit that barely covered her buttocks, Grable’s “average” qualities that came through in her film performances and public appearances, such as “respectability, modesty, whiteness, and heterosexuality,” represented the best version of American womanhood.⁴⁵⁶ The proper American woman was sexy, but not slutty; she could pose in pin-ups as long as she retained ideal qualities in her demeanor. In previous decades, photographs of women’s nearly naked bodies would have signaled an entirely different set of negative attributes, but wartime conditions suddenly made it acceptable for women’s sexuality to be visible in public – because it was good for the troops’ morale, and thus good for the nation.

Nonetheless, concerns about women’s sexuality were alive and well between 1941 and 1945. Dancing was one of the activities that social and cultural leaders viewed with suspicion, especially the jitterbug, the most popular dance during World War II. The way that young men and young women threw themselves together on the dance floor signaled a kind of loose sexuality and loss of respectability that leaders feared would lead to a collapse of morality, ultimately ending in loss of American men’s morale – and the war. Celebrity women were not automatically exempt from accusations while on the dance floor, either. A woman, even a famous one, who danced too closely or too enthusiastically with a strange man could face claims of deviant sexuality. However, there existed one site in Hollywood where women, famous and non-

⁴⁵⁶ McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 86-90.

famous (or, rather, soon-to-be famous) alike, could jitterbug with abandon without any fear of major repercussions because of its reputation as a place where democracy and patriotism flourished: the Hollywood Canteen.⁴⁵⁷

“The best show in Hollywood is served up nightly”: The History of the Hollywood Canteen

“There are few accomplishments in my life that I am sincerely proud of,” wrote Bette Davis in her first autobiography. “The Hollywood Canteen is one of them.”⁴⁵⁸

Led by stars Bette Davis and John Garfield, film studio employees received backing from 42 unions and guilds affiliated with the film industry to create a Canteen in Hollywood that mirrored the Stage Door Canteen in New York City, where off-duty servicemen could mingle and interact with famous Broadway actors. With other leaders of film industry unions, Davis and Garfield created an executive committee to ensure that they raised enough money and recruited enough volunteers to keep the Hollywood Canteen sufficiently staffed every night. They quickly generated enough publicity to meet their first two goals. Members of the Musicians’ Union Local 47 knew of an old, abandoned nightclub, called The Barn, on the corner of Cahuenga and Sunset Boulevards, mere blocks from where many of the studio lots had been located in previous decades. After signing a lease “for the duration of the war,” members of the unions – carpenters, painters, electricians, decorators, artists, and illustrators – descended on the dilapidated building, volunteering countless man-hours to turn it into an alluring facsimile of an old Western saloon, complete with wagon wheel light fixtures and rustic wooden beams across the ceiling. According to one press release, by the time it was finished it represented “a value of \$15,000,” but because

⁴⁵⁷ Meghan K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008): 136.

⁴⁵⁸ Bette Davis with Michael Herskowitz, *This ‘N That* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1987): 123.

of the volunteer efforts, the whole cost came in at just \$200. “A famous star sent a check for this amount.”⁴⁵⁹

Two months prior to its opening, the *Daily News* reported that Canteen committee members persuaded Columbia Studios and the owners of Ciro’s restaurant, one of the most famous restaurants in town, to donate money earned from the premier of the film *The Talk of the Town* and the reopening of the restaurant (which had been closed for a time) to the Hollywood Canteen, “giving it the first funds for its treasury.” With this money, they planned a premier for the Hollywood Canteen to rival any movie opening. The tables would be turned, however, as the “stars” would be the men in uniform and the movie stars would be the adoring public, paying \$50 per seat to sit in the bleachers and “watch the proceedings.” This would be the only time that anyone out of uniform would be allowed to be guests at the Hollywood Canteen, with one exception: each night, four civilian spectators could pay \$25 per person (roughly \$450 in 2023) to sit at “the Angels’ table” to watch the proceedings (but not participate).⁴⁶⁰ Otherwise, a uniform was the price of admission - but only for enlisted men, as officers had their own clubs around town. A week prior to opening night, actress Irene Dunne, standing in for Bette Davis at a luncheon of film luminaries, revealed the mission of this new institution: “The purpose of the Canteen is to build up low morale – if there be any – of men in the armed forces. It is to be an open home for these boys and we will seek their approval and cooperation.”⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ “Details of Hollywood Canteen – Organization and Opening,” Hollywood Canteen Folder, file 32 MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; Cal York, “Inside Stuff: Cal York’s Gossip of Hollywood,” *Photoplay*, January 1943, 8.

⁴⁶⁰ The Angels’ Table proved so popular that Canteen leaders added a second Angels’ table. The Angel’s Tables brought in an added \$6,000 of revenue per month. Lisa Mitchell and Bruce Torrence, *The Hollywood Canteen: Where the Greatest Generation Danced With the Most Beautiful Girls in the World* (Duncan: BearManor Media, 2012): 42.

⁴⁶¹ “Details of Hollywood Canteen – Organization and Opening,” Hollywood Canteen Folder, file 32, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; “what a premiere! Stars pay way in, public included out,” *Daily News* (Los Angeles, CA) September 15, 1942; Jane Lockwood Ferrero, Hollywood Canteen Diary, October 31, 1942, file u-232, Jane Lockwood Estate Collection (JLEC), Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los

Finally, after two months of work, the Hollywood Canteen opened on October 3, 1942. “Practically the whole movie colony” came out to “watch soldiers, sailors and marines enjoying themselves at Hollywood’s expense,” according to the *Daily News*. At least 200 celebrities paid the fifty-dollar entrance fee, as the Canteen’s coffers were \$10,000 richer by the end of the night (over \$182,000 in 2023). So many servicemen came that they had to let them in in shifts every hour and a half to prevent overcrowding. The biggest bands of the country, including those of bandleaders Kay Kyser and Duke Ellington, played not only on opening night, but were scheduled to play at the Canteen several times per week. Some of Hollywood’s most recognizable stars volunteered for Canteen duty on opening night: Irene Dunne, Spencer Tracy, Hedy Lamarr, Joan Crawford, Charles Boyer, Lana Turner, Rita Hayworth. Americans who, due to their civilian status, would never be able to see the Hollywood Canteen, could instead listen to one of two coast-to-coast broadcasts on opening night, with an extensive list of hostesses as part of the broadcast: Loretta Young, Veronica Lake, Betty Grable, Deanna Durbin, and Judy Garland, among several others. And of course, Hollywood Canteen President Bette Davis oversaw the proceedings, telling the immense crowd, “Tonight we see our dreams come true. This campaign represents an all-out partnership. I hope all you boys who enter will enjoy yourselves and know

Angeles, CA). “L.A. leaders told Canteen aims; Olson praises work,” *Daily News* (Los Angeles, CA) September 24, 1942; Inflation Calculator from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed 14 July 2023, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

that all of Hollywood is your host.”⁴⁶² From this night forward, the Hollywood Canteen was open every night from 7:00pm until about midnight.⁴⁶³

Over three thousand members of Hollywood guilds signed up for volunteer duty at the Hollywood Canteen. Roughly ten percent of them worked at the Canteen during open hours: 300 volunteers operated it every night in various capacities, from hostesses to busboys to doormen, office girls, and stage management. All Canteen workers had to be employed in the motion picture business, or in a related industry. The majority of these industry volunteers, of course, were not big stars, but rather ordinary members of motion picture guilds. The big names were still plentiful. Celebrities volunteered most often as busboys and hostesses, but those with stage talent, such as singing, dancing, or comedy, entertained the servicemen on the Canteen stage, which included a full orchestra stand. Entertaining the men meant providing food and non-alcoholic drinks for free, as well as signing autographs and, if the star was a woman, dancing with them. As average G.I. Joes ate, drank, and danced, celebrities they had only seen on screen were making the food, bussing away dirty dishes, and dancing with them. According to Canteen rules, every serviceman who wore a uniform, no matter his race or ethnicity, was welcome, though such a rule was controversial in practice, thus adding another level of complexity to the topsy-turvy nature of the Canteen. Part of the site’s appeal, it appears, was the reversal of social roles: the soldiers were the real stars – the truly elite members of society, no matter the color of their skin – while some of the richest and most privileged citizens performed manual labor to

⁴⁶² “But it was all true, nevertheless,” *Daily News* (Los Angeles, CA), October 5, 1942; “Film Canteen Opens Tonight,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 3, 1942; *Hollywood Citizen News*, October 5, 1942 in Hollywood Canteen Clippings, file 176, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA); Bette’s Davis’s comments quoted from *Los Angeles Examiner* (Los Angeles, CA), October 4, 1942, in Hollywood Canteen Clippings, file 176, AMPTP Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴⁶³ “Facts About the Hollywood Canteen,” Hollywood Canteen Folder, file 32, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

cater to their every whim. Sherrie Tucker, in her study of memory at the Hollywood Canteen, called this the Canteen's "superdemocratic power...the inaccessible Hollywood creature offered by a grateful nation to a lowly private."⁴⁶⁴

As a place where onscreen heroes entertained, served, and treated the servicemen like the country's real heroes, the Hollywood Canteen provided an important dichotomy for movie fans who may have been trying to emulate the stars' volunteerism in their own lives. As Tucker states, "somehow, by enabling the crossing of lines that typically served as barriers to U.S. democracy [such as race and class], the Hollywood Canteen accrued status as simultaneously unusual within the nation, and representative of the nation."⁴⁶⁵ This unique/typical dichotomy also applied to women's bodies at the Canteen. Because the Hollywood Canteen was much like any other USO canteen in any city throughout the country, it was typical of hundreds of thousands of American women's volunteer experiences. Yet, there was no USO canteen like the Hollywood Canteen, because of who could volunteer there, because of the ubiquity of Hollywood stars every single night, and because of the role that celebrity women, and their bodies, played while volunteering there. The unique/typical dichotomy of the Hollywood Canteen is a factor that sets the Hollywood Canteen apart as an important wartime volunteer institution: there, Hollywood women used their bodies to volunteer in ways that encouraged American women to find and volunteer at analogous institutions in their own towns; at the same time, the Hollywood Canteen allowed only film industry women volunteers, making it one of the most elite volunteer spaces in

⁴⁶⁴ Kay Proctor, "The Hollywood Canteen From Hollywood's Angle," *Movieland* April 1943, 33; "Hollywood Canteen," Motion picture industry – report on wartime activities, file 284, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; Scrapbook No. 5 – Hollywood Canteen (compiled by Herman Lissauer), Warner Brothers Research Albums Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA); Sherrie Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy: The Social Geography of Memory at the Hollywood Canteen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 113.

⁴⁶⁵ Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 6.

the country. At the Hollywood Canteen, celebrity women's bodies, previously only accessible in a darkened movie theater, briefly belonged to the servicemen of the nation. Because celebrity women used their bodies for a good cause, their efforts at the Canteen helped legitimize all American women's bodies in public - as long as women's bodies were being used to help win the war.

"The boys can take as many as they like": Women's Bodies at the Hollywood Canteen

Its unique stable of workers notwithstanding, the Hollywood Canteen operated much like other USO canteens around the country. Though the local USO endorsed the Hollywood Canteen's work, the Hollywood Canteen was privately owned and operated so as not to take resources from the official USO canteens in the area. However, the structure of volunteer workers was practically identical between the Hollywood Canteen and other clubs around the country, centered around two important female figures: the junior hostess and the senior hostess. In USO-sanctioned institutions, junior hostesses were young, single women, usually under the age of 25, who provided company for the servicemen, operating as quasi-sweethearts to remind soldiers for whom they were fighting. Senior hostesses, on the other hand, were most often married women over 35 years old, who served as surrogate mothers or sisters for the young men, talking to the men about more "serious" life problems, sewing insignias on the men's uniforms, baking and cooking for the canteen, and chaperoning the interactions between the junior hostesses and the men. In her study of women's work at USO canteens, Meghan K. Winchell summarizes the function that both junior and hostesses served at these volunteer clubs: they "extended private acts of nurturing and caretaking to the public sphere...[making] their usually private work visible and rendered unpaid yet vital services as mothers and sweethearts to the

state and the military.” In canteens all across the country, including in Hollywood, junior and senior hostesses used their bodies in traditional ways (such as baking and dancing) for unconventional ends (such as gaining self-satisfaction in being able to do good “for the boys”).⁴⁶⁶

As women who used their bodies in public, hostesses, especially junior hostesses, were at risk for accusations of sexual immorality. As recently as the turn of the twentieth century, the presence of women, especially working-class women, in commercial spaces often led to suspicion of prostitution or sex work. However, in the first decade of the century, a new form of sexual behavior called “treating,” where young women engaged in some form of sexual activity – not necessarily intercourse – with young men in exchange for payment of leisure activities such as theater tickets or dinner, became more common among young Americans. Because cash was not exchanged for access to a woman’s body, treating provided a new moral space where women could experiment with their sexuality without the label of sex work. By the 1930s and 1940s, though a young woman often might exchange some semblance of her bodily autonomy for the opportunity to engage in a public leisure activity, the increasing presence of women in the public sphere did not mean that a woman’s body was for sale, as it had in the previous decades. By the middle of the twentieth century, according to Elizabeth Alice Clement, “women’s presence in commercial space did not signal sex for sale as much as sex for barter.” During the Second World War, it became clear that the bargain between society and women was this:

⁴⁶⁶ Clipping from *Hollywood Citizen News* (Hollywood, CA) August 25, 1942 in Hollywood Canteen Clippings, file 176, AMPTP Records, MHL, AMPAS; Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 12, 1.

women could use their bodies in public as long as they used them to support the patriotic war effort.⁴⁶⁷

Clement argues that during World War I, young women framed their desire for male company and sexual activity in patriotic terms, seeing “sex as a valid way of expressing patriotic sentiments or at least supporting soldiers and their sacrifices.”⁴⁶⁸ Women in World War II did the same. At USO Canteens, women’s public sexuality was made acceptable because of the reputation for sexual purity of the junior hostesses. Winchell demonstrates that USO authorities most often recruited junior hostesses out of the white middle class, hoping that the sexual respectability of these young women would “domesticate servicemen and prepare them to return to their homes and family life.” Simultaneously, junior hostesses’ sexual reputations upheld canteens and clubs as a place for “wholesome” sexual companionship, as they were sexually unavailable to the servicemen. Junior hostesses were sexually viable young women, but as middle-class women with non-sexual reputations, leaders expected that they would curb servicemen’s sexual appetites – almost as if inoculating American servicemen against the dangers that came with “picking up” foreign women while overseas. Such was the contradictory nature of women’s war work: by working for the USO, Winchell says, junior hostesses “became public women because they completed their war work outside the home, a kind of tame form of sex work,” yet they had to provide “wholesome sexual companionship” to servicemen without performing any sexual acts.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 212, 145, 147.

⁴⁶⁸ Clement, *Love For Sale*, 144.

⁴⁶⁹ Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 107, 116, 111.

The Hollywood Canteen was no different than the USO in this regard. The leaders of the Hollywood Canteen had to be particularly careful in recruiting hostesses so as to avoid being charged with damaging young women's reputations precisely because of the many accusations Hollywood had faced for corrupting American youth since its inception, as discussed in chapter one. Celebrity women were not of paramount concern for Canteen leaders, however, as their bodies had been in public, both onscreen and in fan magazines, without major social consequences for years prior to their volunteer efforts. It was the young women who had yet to reach success that recruiters had to be careful of, as their sexuality had not yet been tested and found – if not wholesome – acceptable on some level.⁴⁷⁰ One 1943 fan magazine article about the Hollywood Canteen declared,

Extreme care is exercised in the selection of these volunteers, particularly the dancing girls, for obvious reasons. Careful policing (but not snoopery interference with the fun) also is done by military police, shore patrol, and the Canteen's own senior hostesses and Officer of the Day for the same reason: the Canteen must be kept a clean and decent spot for young servicemen to visit.⁴⁷¹

To the editors of the magazine, the reason that young women needed to be vetted before becoming a junior hostess was so obvious that it almost did not need to be explicitly spelled out: young women had the potential to threaten the proper social and sexual order of things if the Hollywood Canteen did not do its due diligence to keep servicemen – and by extension, the nation - safe.

The Hollywood Canteen employed the services of both junior and senior hostesses, though the divisions between the two were much less clear at the Hollywood Canteen than at other USO institutions. Starlets or other less famous Hollywood women (such as animators and

⁴⁷⁰ "Premiere to Build Fund For Canteen," *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA) August 25, 1942, newspapers.com.

⁴⁷¹ Proctor, "The Hollywood Canteen from Hollywood's Angle," 34-35.

members of non-acting Hollywood guilds) worked as junior hostesses, while older actresses, older guild members, and stars' mothers acted as senior hostesses. What set the Hollywood Canteen hostesses apart from those of the average canteen, however, was the middle ground that the most famous women stars occupied, as they could be both junior and senior hostess at the same time. Most of the women celebrities who volunteered, based on age and marital status, would have been considered senior hostesses in a typical USO setting, yet at the Hollywood Canteen, they functioned like junior hostesses, sitting with, talking with, and dancing with the servicemen. Once again, the Canteen provides a particularly striking example of the typical/unique dichotomy: Hollywood women spent time and energy hostessing at the Hollywood Canteen, just like thousands of other American women, but they were not as easily categorized as junior or senior hostess.

There were multiple reasons for this lack of categorization. One was that, in much the same way that moviegoers watched images of women's bodies onscreen, assigning various values to them based on visual clues, servicemen could assign any value to celebrity women's bodies at the Hollywood Canteen that they desired. Whereas the typical senior hostess was the mother and the typical junior hostess was the sweetheart, celebrity women could become anything the soldier wanted or needed – a mother, a sweetheart, a sister, or even a combination of all three. Movie magazine *Screenland* quoted one serviceman as allegedly saying of young, attractive singer and Hollywood Canteen worker Ginny Simms, “she reminds me of three people: my mother, my kid sister, and the girl I'd like to be hitched up with.”⁴⁷² Because of the lack of strict categorization of junior and senior hostess at the Hollywood Canteen, celebrity women functioned as almost anything the servicemen needed them to be. Further, with the Hollywood

⁴⁷² Michael Sheridan, “1,000,000 Men and a Girl,” *Screenland*, March 1944, 67.

Canteen aiming to be a sexually reputable space, both for servicemen and for junior hostesses, celebrity women's bodies played an integral part in maintaining that reputation: they could be sexually attractive while also being wholesome enough to simultaneously remind the men of their mothers and sisters, making sexuality wholesome in the process.

The Hollywood Canteen made women's bodies not just physical reminders of the women the servicemen may have been fighting for, but it could also change a woman's sexual categorization, transforming a senior hostess, who otherwise would have deemed sexually unattractive, into a sexually viable junior hostess. Greer Garson, who played a long-suffering British mother in the 1942 war-themed film *Mrs. Miniver*, given her age (she was in her late thirties during the war years), would normally have been cast in a senior hostess role. Her very existence at the Hollywood Canteen, however, made her body potentially sexually attractive. An article in *Screenland* relayed a story of a group of servicemen who entered the Canteen and, upon seeing someone they recognized as a movie star (Garson), could not decide who it was. "She looks like Greer Garson, except younger," was the consensus among the men, "But [it could not be her because] Greer Garson is more the mother type." Later in the evening, Garson danced with one of the men, who told his companions, "Brother! Can she dance. The surprise is 'Mrs. Miniver' is just a young girl like [younger actresses] Hedy Lamarr and Dotty Lamour. She's light as a feather on her feet. She's got instinctive rhythm!"⁴⁷³ Just as celebrity women's bodies at the Hollywood Canteen could make sexuality wholesome, celebrity women's bodies at the Hollywood Canteen could also make the wholesome sexual.

Dancing, one of the main duties for junior hostesses, was the most central way that women at the Hollywood Canteen – and at canteens around the country – used their bodies for

⁴⁷³ Rachele Randall, "Who Dates 'Mrs. Miniver?'" *Screenland*, February 1943, 22, 72.

the good of the nation. Popular hostesses could dance with upwards of a hundred men per night, even if they did not want to. Jane Lockwood, Hollywood Canteen junior hostess, described what a typical night looked like for her: “I was never cut in on so much [and] where the real compliment lies is the fact that the same [servicemen] would cut in 3 [and] 4 times. I really lost all my envy for the ‘glamour girls’ and there are plenty around, too.” Celebrity women at the Hollywood Canteen knew exactly how other junior hostesses felt. Betty Grable allegedly held the record for continuous dancing at the Canteen, dancing with over three hundred soldiers in just one hour. On another evening, Linda Darnell danced with 209 men in Army uniforms alone. To ensure that every junior hostess, or potential junior hostess, used her body correctly in the canteen space, *Movieland* even published a small column titled “How to Dance with a Serviceman,” which “gives out with rules for Canteen and USO Center workers who want to rank A-1 with Uncle Sam’s boys.” Another article, called “How to be an Armed-Force Riot” asked five women stars for tips about what to do to “make every military engagement a victory” in settings like the Hollywood Canteen.⁴⁷⁴ Dancing was such a crucial aspect of the Hollywood Canteen that celebrity women became public experts on a new way women could properly use their body for the nation – boosting the morale of men in uniform.

Most of the instructions that celebrity women provided for readers required that women give up their own physical and emotional comfort so that the servicemen could enjoy what could potentially be their last fun evening of the war – or even their lives. Both “How to Dance with a Serviceman” and “How to be an Armed-Force Riot,” emphasized the idea that servicemen’s comfort and enjoyment should be hostesses’ paramount concern. “How to Dance with a

⁴⁷⁴ Jane Lockwood Ferrero, Hollywood Canteen Diary, November 21, 1942, JLEC, MHL, AMPAS; Kirley Baskette, “A High Kick and Hot Lick,” *Modern Screen*, March 1945, 79 ; Kay Proctor, “Canteen Anecdotes from a Canteen Hostess,” *Photoplay*, November 1943, 87; Sheila Ryan, “How to Dance with a Serviceman,” *Movieland*, May 1943, 61; “How to be an Armed-Force Riot,” *Photoplay*, July 1943, 54.

Serviceman” focused on women’s physical actions: “Don’t embarrass a soldier by asking him to try rhumbas, tangos and such. Let him teach you some of the steps he enjoyed back home.”⁴⁷⁵ Hostesses should put their dancing knowledge and physical comfort aside so that her dancing partner felt like he was in charge. Even celebrity women were not immune to this advice. Fan magazine *Modern Screen* printed a story of a young serviceman who “suspected” that his dance partner was an actress, but - much like the young men who did not recognize Greer Garson - he could not place who she was. As the music picked up, the man, “a confirmed jitterbug,” asked his partner if she would like to learn some of the newest dance moves. She agreed, watched “intently[,] and conscientiously followed his lead.” Much later, the young man realized who his dancing partner had been: Ann Miller, one of the most famous onscreen dancers of the 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁷⁶ Miller likely knew far more about the newest dance moves than this young man from the Army Air Corps, but she set all of her knowledge aside, and danced with an inferior dance partner, so that the serviceman’s confidence and masculinity remained intact.

“How to be an Armed-Force Riot,” on the other hand, provided several pieces of advice on how to provide emotional comfort to the soldiers and sailors. Actresses Ann Sothorn, Betty Grable, Marsha Hunt, Anne Shirley, and Paulette Goddard gave advice such as “follow their lead...talk about *them*,” “treat him like one of the family,” and “let him see how proud you are of him.” Each woman explained her piece of advice by emphasizing that women’s behavior should boost the men’s morale and confidence: “They love it when you allow them to be gallant,” advised Ann Sothorn. Marsha Hunt suggested, “After those long hours of marching, the boys love being ‘at ease.’ Let them feel that way in your company. Make it seem as if *they* were doing

⁴⁷⁵ Ryan, “How to Dance with a Serviceman, 61.

⁴⁷⁶ June Streibig Letter to the Editor, “I Saw It Happen,” *Modern Screen*, May 1944, 12.

you a favor by being *your* guest. And so they are.”⁴⁷⁷ According to these fan magazine articles, women talking about themselves or leading on the dance floor could embarrass the servicemen and jeopardize their masculinity, which could ultimately lead to defeat in the war. The articles further demonstrate that women who volunteered during World War II were expected to perform normally private skills, such as the emotional labor of boosting men’s confidence and making them feel at ease, for strangers in public. Because the opinions and experiences of the likes of Ann Sothern, Ann Miller, and Marsha Hunt were published in fan magazines, celebrity women at the Hollywood Canteen became literal guidebooks for how all American women could successfully (and legitimately) use their bodies to entertain U.S. servicemen.

At the Hollywood Canteen and those around the country, women had to be willing to put their physical comfort on the line potentially to their own detriment, often giving up their bodily autonomy in the process. In 1944, former junior hostess and radio actress Florida Edwards sued the Hollywood Canteen for injuries sustained while dancing with a serviceman. On October 31, 1942, Edwards, doing her patriotic duty as a junior hostess, accepted a request to dance with a marine. The marine, highly skilled in jitterbugging, began throwing Edwards around the dance floor in typical jitterbug fashion. The jitterbug, with its roots in African American culture, was known for its energetic movements, with the dancers (themselves called jitterbugs) flailing their limbs and throwing bodies—their own and their partners’—across the dance floor. In response to the attorney’s question as to why Edwards did not just “stand still” to discourage the marine, Edwards replied, “Well you don’t stand still with a jitterbug. They don’t let you. I couldn’t get away. I yelled for help. Then I opened my mouth and screamed. But jitterbugs scream

⁴⁷⁷ “How to be an Armed-Force Riot,” 54-55.

anyway.”⁴⁷⁸ Within moments, she had crashed backwards into the bandstand, losing consciousness, dislocating her tailbone, and injuring several vertebrae upon hitting the ground. After her injuries confined her to her home for well over a month, Edwards lost her regular radio job. Edwards sued the Hollywood Canteen for \$17,250, eventually winning the suit for a more modest \$8,710.⁴⁷⁹ Even after filing the lawsuit, however, she was not bitter about her experiences at the Canteen: “I really don’t dislike jitterbugs. I just dislike jitterbugging. And I love the Canteen, but I did get hurt dancing the jitterbug.” She never criticized her dance partner nor the Canteen for her loss of body autonomy, only for the physical repercussions that came with that loss. As Florida Edwards’s injuries demonstrated, women’s bodies at the Hollywood Canteen were often a kind of patriotic public property while in the arms of servicemen. When dancing at the Hollywood Canteen, their bodies were in use for the morale of the boys, legitimizing the use of women’s bodies in public for wartime volunteer efforts.⁴⁸⁰

Florida Edwards’ unfortunate experience notwithstanding, women celebrities at the Hollywood Canteen also became examples of women using their bodies not just for servicemen’s morale, but also for fun for themselves. While volunteering in public certainly provided American women with the self-satisfaction of participating in the war effort, volunteering, could make the war a little bit more fun for them as well as for the soldiers. Though World War II propaganda rarely encouraged women to volunteer because it was fun, fan magazine reports on

⁴⁷⁸ “Jitterbugging Described in Canteen Suit Trial,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1944, newspapers.com.

⁴⁷⁹ In 2023, \$17,250 is worth roughly \$305,000, while the settlement, \$8,710, is worth about \$154,000. Inflation calculations from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm. “\$17,250 Suit Charged Jitterbug Hurt Her,” *The Independence* (Long Beach, CA), April 18, 1944, newspapers.com.

⁴⁸⁰ “Canteen Hostess Wins Suit,” *The San Bernardino Daily* (San Bernardino, CA) May 3, 1944, newspapers.com; Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 116, 147; “Being ‘Icky’ Makes Girl Feel Like ‘Floogie-Boo,’” *Herald Express* (Los Angeles, CA), April 20, 1944, Concetta E. Ribauda scrapbook on the Hollywood Canteen, Box 1, 7093, Special Collections, University of Southern California (Los Angeles, CA).

Hollywood women's war efforts often emphasized how much stars enjoyed volunteering to make the activity more appealing to potentially hesitant citizens. In one *Screenland* article, Betty Grable, the most popular celebrity of the war years, chastised Hollywood women who did not dance with servicemen at the Hollywood Canteen: "Of course a lot of the glamorous stars, who do their dance on Saturday nights at the Mocambo and Ciro's [two popular night clubs in Los Angeles], haven't gotten around to jiving, and they are afraid of being made to look silly on the canteen dance floor. That's ridiculous. After all, it's all for fun and cheering up the soldiers, not for close-ups."⁴⁸¹ Joan Crawford did not even think of the Canteen as work: "But my conscience wouldn't let me call dancing with the soldiers at the Hollywood Canteen *work*. That's fun!"⁴⁸² Even Shirley Temple, just sixteen when *Screenland* published a small story about her wartime efforts, enjoyed her time dancing at the Hollywood Canteen: "'I like smooth dance, and I don't mind mild jitterbugging,' Shirley continued. 'But the way they dance at the Hollywood Canteen-! Is that a kick!'"⁴⁸³ In 1944, *Modern Screen* described an interaction between a serviceman and 17-year-old Warner Bros. star Joan Leslie, where a young man self-consciously tells Leslie of his expectations when he came to Hollywood:

'I got in a couple days ago, and I was pretty thrilled, especially coming from overseas. Hollywood's something wonderful to us fellows, and I kept looking for something wonderful to happen, but nothing did. Then they told me about this place. One guy said I'd see movie stars and another guy said, 'Nah, nobody shows up,' and I walk in and there you are. And now – well – now here I am talking to you.' He flushed, conscious of having been carried away. 'I hope you don't mind. What I'm trying to say is – on account of seeing you, Hollywood hasn't let me down.'
'Why should I mind?' said Joan gently. 'You've said some very nice things, and it makes me feel very good.'

⁴⁸¹ Betty Grable, "What It Takes to Be a Pin-Up Girl," *Screenland* July 1943, 67-68.

⁴⁸² Joan Crawford, "These Lives Are at Stake!" *Photoplay* July 1943, 49.

⁴⁸³ May Mann, "Shirley Scotches Those Romance Rumors!" *Screenland* April 1944, 87.

That boy, symbolizing many, is why Joan goes to the Canteen week after week – every Tuesday night.⁴⁸⁴

While there was fun to be had at the Hollywood Canteen, the site also offered women opportunities to feel good about themselves, not just because they were contributing to the war effort but also because the servicemen could return the favor and help the women feel good too. As celebrity women used their bodies in public at the Hollywood Canteen to have fun as well as for patriotic purposes, they demonstrated how volunteering their bodies in public for the war effort helped not only the servicemen – women could enjoy the use of their own bodies too.

Integrated Dance Floor? Race and Nationality at the Hollywood Canteen

But not all who volunteered at the Hollywood Canteen were considered equal, despite its democratic reputation. Indeed, the Hollywood Canteen had a complicated relationship with people of color, especially African Americans, and foreign immigrants. Bette Davis and John Garfield fought hard for integration against Hollywood Canteen board members who wished to keep the club segregated. A prominent African American newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, asked Bette Davis if the Canteen should disallow interracial dancing on the dance floor. “Of course not,” she declared, “let them dance if they want to.”⁴⁸⁵ Because of statements like this, the Hollywood Canteen quickly gained a reputation as a racially democratic space, a reputation which authors Lisa Mitchell and Bruce Torrence praise in their history of the Canteen.⁴⁸⁶ Sherrie Tucker, however, demonstrates that not everyone remembered the Canteen as a racial utopia.

⁴⁸⁴ Marcia Daughtrey, “Canteen Kid,” *Modern Screen*, April 1944, 109.

⁴⁸⁵ “Bette Davis Overrides Objection To Mixed Couples At Hollywood Canteen,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 16, 1943, newspapers.com.

⁴⁸⁶ Mitchell and Torrence, *The Hollywood Canteen*.

Even if the Canteen dance floor was somewhat integrated, many servicemen of color remembered that it was not “integrated in an equal way,” claiming that they were only allowed to dance with non-white women - if they were allowed to dance at all.⁴⁸⁷ Women of color who volunteered at the Canteen faced an even greater challenge.⁴⁸⁸ Their bodies represented neither the ideal Canteen hostess nor the ideal American woman – and as such garnered far less mainstream press coverage than their white counterparts, yet they still volunteered their bodies for the good of the nation. At the Hollywood Canteen, Black women’s bodies were important to the war effort, even as the women themselves gained fewer benefits from helping the war effort succeed than their white celebrity contemporaries.

Because nearly all fan magazine stories focused solely on the efforts of white women, readers likely would have gleaned an important message that, though not necessarily said out loud, underscored the entire American war effort: the ideal American citizen was white. In her study on the role that advertising and consumerism played in the creation and maintenance of femininity during the war, Melissa McEuen demonstrates how consumer products advertised to women – from skin lotions and soaps to nail polish and stockings – promoted a very specific image of the American woman: she exuded “an authentic American heritage blending middle-to upper-class lives, work and leisure pursuits, and relative ‘whiteness.’”⁴⁸⁹ These kinds of images were plastered across movie screens, on the pages of magazines, and throughout government

⁴⁸⁷ Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, xxi, 162.

⁴⁸⁸ Tucker includes some discussion of African American servicewomen and hostesses during World War II, but she admits that “black hostesses are absent from many accounts” of the Hollywood Canteen, and no black servicewomen with whom she conducted oral histories remembered visiting the Canteen. However, her work on the “integrated dance floor” was central to the discussion of race in this chapter. I build on her scholarship by examining the coverage of black women’s patriotic efforts in fan magazines.

⁴⁸⁹ McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 8.

propaganda, leaving very little room for Black bodies in an integrated war effort. Black women faced a doubly difficult challenge during wartime: like their white counterparts, they had to prove that their bodies were crucial to the war effort through various public volunteer efforts; unlike white women, however, Black women had to prove that their radicalized womanhood was not a threat to the status quo, a kind of mirror image of the larger Double V campaign undertaken by Black leaders and the Black press: victory against fascism abroad, and victory over racism at home.⁴⁹⁰ Advised by white political and social leaders to put any ill feelings over racial discrimination aside for the duration, Black women were encouraged to put their country before their race and support the war effort as often as possible.⁴⁹¹

Hollywood – hardly the shining example of an integrated industry – *did* try to include African Americans in the industry’s war effort. On May 15, 1942, the first meeting of the Negro Sub-Committee of the Hollywood Victory Committee convened at the home of Academy Award winning actress Hattie McDaniel. The sub-committee was comprised of eight other prominent black actors, including Louise Beavers, Lillian Randolph, and Ben Carter. The Negro Sub-Committee operated as an analogous Hollywood Victory Committee for performers of color, organizing and supplying Black entertainment for Black troops in the Pacific, and, ironically, “integrate its work with the general program” of the HVC. However, black performers usually

⁴⁹⁰ This campaign was launched by black newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier* in January 1942 after a letter from black cafeteria worker James Gratz Thompson, who asked, “Should I sacrifice my life to live half American? ... Is the kind of America I know worth defending?” Under this campaign, the black press, insisted that blacks were American citizens, “and as such, had a duty to fight, work and die for America,” pushing back against ideas that the war was a “white man’s war.” Matthew F. Delmont, *Half American: The Epic Story of African Americans Fighting World War II at Home and Abroad* (New York: Viking, 2022): xi-xii; 110.

⁴⁹¹ Maureen Honey demonstrates that Black wartime media often positioned African American women as “social activists, whether they were entertainers, mothers, domestic workers, or trailblazing WACs and welders.” Black women within Black culture symbolized a postwar social order in which racial equality – and thus the promise of democracy – might be more fully realized. Maureen Honey, *Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999): 258.

performed only for Black troops, and often in places no other stars wanted to go. Nevertheless, many important Hollywood wartime committees *were* integrated – Hattie McDaniel, Ben Carter, and Ethel Waters were all members of the HVC Actors’ Committee, chaired by white actor James Cagney, and in August 1944, black actor Clarence Muse accepted membership on the integrated Executive Board of the HVC.⁴⁹²

Though Hollywood took a generally more tolerant stance toward integration than many American cities, the mainstream press rarely mentioned the wartime efforts of Black performers.⁴⁹³ Part of the reason for the absence of stories about Black performers was because studio publicity departments sent press releases about African Americans almost exclusively to the black press. Secretary of Hollywood’s Public Information Committee, Arch Reeve, sent a memo to film producer Glendon Alvine, which describes how the Hollywood publicity machine viewed creating and releasing any publicity for Black actors:

I am enclosing ten copies of a Hollywood Victory Committee story on Hattie McDaniel and other important subjects aimed directly at the Negro press. This is done not so much for getting space as good will. I don’t know just how seriously the Negro problem has hit you as it affects our industry, but it has been shoved in my face repeatedly... I plan to work fairly closely with Hattie McDaniel. Every so often I plan to release a story quoting her. These stories will, of course, go just to the Negro press. I think that possibly through her we can do a pretty good job.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 92; “DT,” file 220, Hollywood Victory Committee – negro talent, Motion Picture Association of America World War II Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Los Angeles, CA); “For Immediate Release 425-20,” file 220, Hollywood Victory Committee – negro talent, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS; “For Immediate Release 4211-5,” file 220, Hollywood Victory Committee – negro talent, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴⁹³ Maureen Honey shows that mainstream media, from recruitment posters to newsreels, rendered the over 600,000 African American women contributing to the war effort “virtually invisible.” This is also true, I show, with fan magazines. Honey, *Bitter Fruit*, 2.

⁴⁹⁴ Letter from Arch Reeve to Glendon Allvine [sic], April 26, 1942, file 158, Hollywood Victory Caravan – publicity, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

Hattie McDaniel's body – and how she used that body for the war effort – became an object with which Reeve hoped to placate Black citizens' calls for stories about African American celebrities' contributions to the war effort. Reeve issued a press release in April 1942 that read, "The important activities of colored players in the war effort were recognized when Academy award-winner Hattie McDaniel was appointed a member of the Hollywood Victory Committee to head a sub-committee in charge of this division."⁴⁹⁵ In other words, to Reeve, the appointment of just one Black woman, McDaniel, became representative of all black performers' war efforts, making it easier for white publicity managers to justify releasing few stories to the black press and even fewer to the mainstream white press. Because African American bodies like McDaniel's were not the ideal American bodies, fan magazines and publicity departments rarely reported on them, which functioned to maintain a segregated society by emphasizing that the ideal American woman was white.

However, Black women, famous and non-famous alike, could be found at the Hollywood Canteen on a regular basis. Canteen President Bette Davis and Vice President John Garfield insisted on integration for hostesses, performers, and servicemen. When Board Members put up a fight, integrated guilds that had pledged support for the Canteen threatened to withdraw, and the color line was finally broken. Davis even invited Black soldiers to attend the premier of *The Talk of the Town* and the afterparty at Ciro's, which had been segregated prior to that. As a result of the efforts of Davis et al, the Canteen earned its reputation as "the very pinnacle of democracy," according to Sherrie Tucker.⁴⁹⁶ Davis and Garfield worked to ensure that the Canteen was a welcoming space for Black performers, Black hostesses, and Black servicemen, many of whom

⁴⁹⁵ "For Immediate Release 424-21," file 155, Hollywood Victory Caravan – publicity, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴⁹⁶ Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 6, 92.

were fighting for equality in Hollywood, in the United States, and in the world. Black entertainers like Horne and Beavers criticized the lack of integrated USO camp shows and entertainment, as well as argued for more dignified film roles for African American performers. During the war, many were involved with larger civil rights organizations like the NAACP.⁴⁹⁷ According to Meghan Winchell, most USO clubs in integrated cities permitted Black servicemen to visit, but few welcomed Black women as junior hostesses, “tacitly implying that black women were unable to meet white women’s standards of femininity and respectability.”⁴⁹⁸ The Hollywood Canteen, then, was several steps ahead of the national USO, making it an ideal example of how democracy in America should have worked – race did not preclude anyone, serviceman or hostess, from having an enjoyable time at the Canteen (theoretically, at least). With that said, however, much as the Negro Sub-Committee served to keep white HVC members from having to fully engage with contemporary race relations, the Hollywood Canteen created parallel positions for Black and white volunteers rather than form integrated units. Where white junior hostesses had white hostess captains (senior hostesses who managed the junior hostesses on duty that night), Black junior hostesses had Black hostess captains. These positions proved to be analogous, but not exactly equal. One of the duties of Black hostess captains was to corroborate stories when junior hostesses reported that “observations of racism” were met with ambivalence by white canteen authorities – something that white hostess captains never had to do.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Lena Horne was a prominent NAACP activist. James Gavin, *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lean Horne* (New York: Atria, 2009); Ben Carter and Hattie McDaniel were also prominent World War II era Hollywood Black activists. A former Hollywood Canteen hostess, dancer Maggie Hathaway, would go on to found the Beverly Hills NAACP in 1962.

⁴⁹⁸ Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 53.

⁴⁹⁹ Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 190.

The reality of the supposed democracy at the Hollywood Canteen, as in much of the country, was that the club was integrated, but it was not equal – especially for Black women. While some former servicewomen of color who visited the Canteen recall full integration without any problems, several others remembered being relegated to the upper balcony where they could do nothing but sit and listen to the music. Famous Black women like Horne and Dorothy Dandridge did appear at the Canteen as hostesses like their famous white counterparts, but there were fewer of them, and they were expected to dance mostly with Black servicemen, while the white celebrity women could dance with any soldier who asked them. Importantly, the activities of Black celebrity women received hardly any press in mainstream fan magazines, while white women’s war exploits were splashed across nearly every page of every fan magazine. In refusing to publish stories of Black women’s efforts toward war causes, Hollywood publicity perpetuated the image of the ideal American woman during wartime as white, making it easy for Hollywood leaders to continue to exclude Black entertainers from mainstream films and fan magazines. Black women, famous and non-famous alike, like their white counterparts, could use their bodies in public for the good of the nation by providing company and fun for servicemen fighting in the war. Unlike many white celebrities, however, Black women celebrities also used their bodies to try to gain equality for Black citizens in the Army, in society, and in Hollywood. Black women’s bodies both helped make the Hollywood Canteen “the very pinnacle of democracy,” while their absence in fan magazines, in contrast to the entertainers’ goals, unintentionally served to keep black Americans in a segregated Hollywood – and a segregated society.

For those stars whose nationality, rather than race, made them potentially suspect, the Hollywood Canteen served as a site where they could demonstrate their loyalty to the United

States. The film industry was one of the few industries in the country in the early twentieth century where (white) immigrants could become leaders of their field, and many actors who came to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s found immense success in Hollywood. As a result, several European stars were in the United States when war broke out and many more fled Nazi-occupied territories for the United States. Some male stars returned to their home countries to serve in their nation's armed forces, but most entertainers, both men and women, remained in the United States for the duration. If they were from an Allied country, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, or France, immigrant celebrities often faced the difficult task of either supporting both countries in some way, or choosing one over the other – preferably the United States over their home country. British actresses like Ida Lupino and Greer Garson volunteered for the American and Canadian war efforts, while each of their husbands, also British, served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Though the British and American alliance against the forces of fascism would have served as a kind of protective cloak over British citizens in Hollywood without having to demonstrate loyalty, many nevertheless set out to prove to the American public that they were indeed behind the Allies, and especially the United States. Their patriotism, the public could rest assured, was secure.⁵⁰⁰

However, if the foreign star was from an Axis country, they had to work overtime to prove their fealty to the U.S. Doing so, however, garnered acclaims of proper patriotism from fan magazines. At the Hollywood Canteen, German actress Marlene Dietrich did “everything from cutting cake, washing dishes, serving at the snack bar, to doing her turn in the evening shows,” just some of her many contributions to the American war effort. She also knitted scarves, sweaters, and mittens for servicemen in between filming, participated in War Bond tours, did an

⁵⁰⁰ Joseph Wechsberg, “Debunking the Lupino Legend,” *Movieland* October 1943, 85; Rachele Randall, “Who Dates ‘Mrs. Miniver?’” *Screenland*, February 1943, 22.

overseas USO tour for American troops in Europe, visited wounded servicemen in hospitals, and performed “the weekly broadcast in six different languages to countries under the Axis heel,” among several other volunteer efforts. Married acting couple Hedy Lamarr and John Loder, who met at the Canteen, were both foreign-born.⁵⁰¹ As if to prove their patriotism for their adopted country, they spent even their date nights volunteering at the Hollywood Canteen.⁵⁰²

As one of the most public forums of patriotism on display, the Hollywood Canteen became the perfect place for foreign-born Hollywood entertainers to demonstrate their commitment to democracy and to the American cause. At the Canteen, the ideal American immigrant was on full display – one that gave up the habits and behaviors of their former country in service of their new country. By volunteering the use of their bodies at the Hollywood Canteen, foreign-born celebrity women offered up their bodies to the American war effort, not by reproducing children like their American-born contemporaries, but by reproducing American values and ideals for other (white) immigrants to emulate. When immigrant stars promoted American values in public, both the American audiences and the celebrities themselves began to view these stars as proper *American* patriots. After the war, both Ida Lupino and Greer Garson – and several other British actors and actresses who remained in the United States during the war – became American citizens, validating the time and energy they put toward the American war effort. As the site that made such celebrity efforts possible, the Hollywood Canteen helped Americanize immigrant stars, and volunteering at USO canteens and other volunteer opportunities could do the same for average immigrants.

⁵⁰¹ Lamarr was Austro-Hungarian, Loder was British.

⁵⁰² Maude Cheatham, “Hollywood Canteen Celebrates,” *Screenland*, November 1943, 83; Constance Palmer, “From Apple Strudel to Cheese Cake,” *Screenland*, March 1944, 27; Hedy Lamarr (As told to Leon Surmelian), “I, Hedy,” *Photoplay*, March 1945, 55.

Just as fan magazines worked in immigrants' favor, magazine writers could also work against them if they were not participating in the war effort properly. Gossip columnist Hedda Hopper – whose syndicated columns in Hearst papers heavily contributed to the perpetuation of a white supremacist ideology in the middle of the twentieth century – had nothing but words of condemnation about a foreign actress who had not participated in the war effort like Hopper thought she ought to:

Take Greta Garbo and the baloney that she's the most co-operative actress in Hollywood. Well, that's one [lie] I can't tell....Her lack of co-operation in the war effort is a matter of record. She even refused to do a broadcast for the Red Cross, never put in an appearance at the Hollywood Canteen or any of the USO centers, and to my knowledge has never visited one of our Army camps. Maybe she writes out big checks in secret for our war funds. But I never heard of it. And so far as I'm concerned, she can go back to Sweden and stay there.⁵⁰³

Unlike Ida Lupino, Greer Garson, or Hedy Lamarr, Greta Garbo did not throw herself wholeheartedly into the American war effort, making her the undesirable kind of immigrant – ungrateful and lazy. To make it work, Garbo's native country, Sweden, though officially neutral, was under Nazi control for most of the war, branding her as even more suspect. Garbo was the very opposite of immigrant celebrity women like Lupino and Garson: the immigrant who does not sacrifice for her new country. Garbo's lack of participation in the war effort was so egregious that, according to Hopper, that Garbo did not even deserve to remain in the United States. Just as participation at the Hollywood Canteen could serve to Americanize celebrity women (and similar volunteer efforts could Americanize other immigrants), failing to do so at sites like the Canteen could de-Americanize those who did not.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰³ Hedda Hopper, "Lies I cannot tell about Hollywood," *Photoplay*, March 1944, 82.

⁵⁰⁴ Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

“The Soldiers’ Sweetheart”’: Romance as Reward

With so many female bodies in public at the Hollywood Canteen, the site straddled the line between acceptable and deviant sexuality. For the most part, the patriotism associated with the Canteen legitimated celebrities’ efforts there, as well as ordinary women’s efforts in various volunteer opportunities in their own communities. To government and cultural leaders, however, women’s independence through new wartime labor and social opportunities threatened to upend the existing social order. Government officials held traditional ideas about men and women and their separate spheres, which they used to create mobilization campaigns and strategies that emphasized the temporary nature of women’s public labor and volunteer efforts. Concerned about getting women to willingly return to their homes after the war, government officials began to promote the ideology that single women were a threat to the family and thus, to the nation. In her seminal work on the relationship between the state and the institution of marriage, Nancy Cott argues that “marriage is the vehicle through which the state can shape gender order.” Marriage holds enormous importance for the public social order as a way to control gender relations, sexuality, and population growth, among other things.⁵⁰⁵ In her essay on marriage during World War II, Elaine Tyler May demonstrates that the government actively promoted the “traditional” nuclear family as central to American identity in order to ensure that women, even after tasting a newfound independence during wartime, would “be willing to settle down to family life” when the war was over. Government propaganda creators had to walk a difficult tightrope, emphasizing the importance of women in the home while also appealing to women’s sense of patriotism in order to entreat them to mobilize in public for the war effort. They did this

⁵⁰⁵ Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 3, 179.

by underscoring heterosexual romance and marriage as another patriotic act for women. A good wife, who was doing everything to love and support her enlisted husband, was the truest American citizen.⁵⁰⁶

Hollywood was central in the dissemination of this idea. From fictional characters to fan magazine stories, images of women as wartime wives and sweethearts flooded the cultural market. In the 1940s, the “woman’s film” genre, which featured plots that were both women-centric and aimed almost exclusively at women audiences, was at its zenith. More often than not, romance featured heavily in the plots of wartime women’s pictures, constantly portraying wartime romances as passionate, intense, and, quick, as characters often married within days of meeting. According to film scholars, this genre was so popular for one main reason: they allowed women to be the subject of their own desire rather than the object of men’s desires. In other words, in women’s pictures, unlike in gangster movies or Westerns or any number of other genres, it is the desire *of* the women characters that moves the plot along rather than the desire *for* the women characters.⁵⁰⁷ Usually at the core of female characters’ desire (and the desire of female audiences) was, of course, the desire for love and marriage, something the woman’s film portrays with particular efficiency, with exciting melodramatic plots and sweeping romantic climaxes designed to rouse stimulating emotions from the feminine audience.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 63; Elaine Tyler May, “Rosie the Riveter Gets Married,” in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II* eds. Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 133. See also: May, *Homeward Bound*.

⁵⁰⁷ During the war, according to film scholar Mary Ann Doane, female characters’ femininity was “intimately articulated with patriotic nationalism.” Similarly, Alison L. McKee explains, the woman’s film during the war more directly gendered the concept of desire as feminine than women’s films in the previous decade because in the 1940s, the woman’s film often portrayed desire in middle- and upper-class characters, glamorizing and heightening the excitement romance brought with it. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): 29; Alison L. McKee, *The Woman’s Film of the 1940s: Gender, Narrative, and History* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 5

⁵⁰⁸ These films can still do that even in 2023 – this citation is from personal experience.

Fan magazines' portrayals of romance tended to be less dramatic, but magazines nevertheless still reported on women celebrity's marriages, highlighting that even famous women were not exempt from falling in love with men in the armed forces. Articles in every fan publication tell of how the featured woman was filling her days after her husband joined the war effort. The stories often emphasized the romantic aspect between the subject and her husband, such as how they kept in touch while apart, or stories from before their parting, glamorizing the institution of marriage through the war years. Though the subjects of the published stories belonged to the country's economic and cultural elite, whose household wartime sacrifices varied drastically from the average American's (Loretta Young admitted to having a maid and two cars in an article extolling how much Hollywood women were sacrificing for the war), these articles served at least three purposes: first, to show that not even Hollywood elites were exempt from sacrifice and that stars were "just like us"; second, to encourage American women to emulate the examples of Hollywood celebrities; and third, to emphasize the virtues of marriage even in an unpredictable wartime world in securing a postwar future for the United States.⁵⁰⁹

The Hollywood Canteen further played a part in asserting the importance of marriage during war by reporting on several wartime romances that played out across the Canteen dance floor, thereby solidifying the ideal woman volunteer as white and heterosexual. As a site dependent on heterosexual interaction, the Hollywood Canteen became a perfect staging area for how romance, and marriage, became the appropriate reward for women who used their bodies in the war effort. According to fan magazines, at least four famous Hollywood married couples met

⁵⁰⁹ Gladys Hall, "Hollywood Women Have Gone to War," *Screenland*, May 1944, 88; For some examples of articles that discuss celebrity women's marriages during wartime, see: Lucille Ball As told to S.R. Mook, "Intimate Notes of a Wartime Wife," *Screenland*, February 1944; Joseph Wechsberg, "Debunking the Lupino Legend," *Movieland* October 1943; Helen Louise Walker, "Keep 'Em Smiling," *Photoplay*, January 1943; Jane Wyman, "My Soldier," *Modern Screen*, January 1943.

while volunteering at the Hollywood Canteen. The most famous was undoubtedly the marriage between everyone's sweetheart, Betty Grable, and world-famous trumpeter Harry James, who met on a night that James's band was playing at the Canteen; similarly, Susan Hayward and Jess Barker met when Susan was a hostess and performer and Jess served as M.C. for the entertainers. Two couples - actress Hedy Lamarr and actor John Loder, and singer Dinah Shore and actor George Montgomery – met around the same time, as hostesses and busboys, respectively, and married after courtships of similar length. In mentioning the Hollywood Canteen specifically in all of the articles that detail the four celebrity marriages, fan magazines linked the heterosexual milieu of the Canteen with its patriotism, providing a blueprint for how their readers could combine the two ideals in their own lives and volunteer efforts.⁵¹⁰

Through the glamorization of love and marriage in fictional films and fan magazines alike, Hollywood promoted the idea that if women used their bodies for patriotic reasons at canteens or in other volunteer efforts, they would be rewarded by finding love and securing a good marriage, fulfilling the images of romance portrayed by celebrities in fan magazines. At USO canteens across the country, including at the Hollywood Canteen, junior hostesses were forbidden from making dates with servicemen outside of the club. That did not stop romances from blossoming, however.⁵¹¹ In a private journal, Jane Lockwood, actress, writer, and Hollywood Canteen junior hostess, detailed a love affair that lasted only hours due to the nature of wartime canteen work. During her shift at the Hollywood Canteen on February 6, 1943, Lockwood engaged in brief, playful banter with a serviceman, but he soon disappeared into the

⁵¹⁰ Adele Whitely Fletcher, "What About Betty Grable and Harry James?" *Photoplay*, August 1943 25; Elizabeth Wilson, "Susie Loves Jess!" *Screenland*, November 1944, 25, 65; Sally Jefferson, "Gay Romance," *Photoplay*, September 1943.

⁵¹¹ Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 118.

crowd, and Lockwood did not see him for the rest of the night. After her shift was over, she was stunned to bump into the serviceman who had spoken to her earlier in the evening. As the minutes passed, he offered to walk her to the next bus stop, and conversation came easily between them. When he took her hand in his later in the evening, she did not resist. About an hour later, as the last bus of the night approached, he kissed her – and she missed the bus. Having to resort to hitchhiking to get home, the two shared a vehicle “with several others,” yet even in the company of strangers, he sat with his arm around her, holding her hand. Before finally parting, he kissed her one last time and they separated, never to meet again.⁵¹²

Despite its temporary nature, Lockwood found this experience profound: “I couldn’t understand why this was happening to me, the prude, the conservative – afraid of strangers, let alone kiss[ing] them. I didn’t laugh or seem embarrassed...I did not feel strange or silly.” The only thing she ever learned about this man was his hometown and where he was stationed, yet she was not embarrassed to be intimate with a complete stranger. Because she met him at the Hollywood Canteen, where she was using her body to do her patriotic duty, she did not seem concerned that she had used her body and sexuality inappropriately. The Hollywood Canteen, and the allowances it made for women’s bodies in public, allowed Lockwood to use her body in a new way - having an intimate moment with a stranger which resulted in nothing but a fling that lasted only hours - without the stigma of sexual deviancy. Fan magazines never published Lockwood’s story; indeed, it is unlikely they would have, as the ending went against the grain of stories about romance at the Canteen they usually published. Where romances between Canteen workers like Betty Grable and Harry James ended in proper marriage, Lockwood’s did not. What

⁵¹² Jane Lockwood Ferrero, *Hollywood Canteen Diary*, February 6, 1943, JLEC, MHL, AMPAS.

Lockwood's story does demonstrate, however, is that, whether contained in marriage or not, volunteering at places like the Hollywood Canteen could lead to romantic encounters.⁵¹³

The Canteen's claim as a site of democracy extended not just to gender, race, and ethnicity, but to romance as well. At the Hollywood Canteen, and only at the Hollywood Canteen, could an average American serviceman walk in and share a private moment – or maybe more – while dancing with one of the country's biggest movie stars. According to fan magazines, the personal interactions between the servicemen and the beautiful women they had only seen on screen would fortify the men's morale. *Photoplay* quoted one young man exclaiming, after dancing with popular young actress Deanna Durbin, "Gosh! If I can dance with Deanna Durbin, I can dance with the world." Actress Dorothy Lamour tried to start a conversation with another young serviceman, who replied, "No, please don't talk. Just dance and let me dream." In a letter home to his girlfriend Mabel, a young man named Joe, apparently frustrated by a lack of letters from her, wrote, "All right, I don't care if you don't answer my letter. I've just had a dance with Marlene Dietrich."⁵¹⁴ To the average American soldier, fan magazines reported, one night at the Hollywood Canteen had the potential to boost their morale for a moment – or perhaps even longer.

In February 1944, *Screenland* even published a fictional story of the lasting effects of a connection made between an unnamed serviceman and unnamed movie star titled "Canteen Romance." In the story, after the movie star and the soldier finished dancing, they shared a moment of vulnerability as the serviceman admitted he would "be in the thick of it soon." As a

⁵¹³ Proctor, "The Hollywood Canteen from Hollywood's Angle," 33; Jane Lockwood Ferrero, *Hollywood Canteen Diary*, February 6, 1943, JLEC, MHL, AMPAS.

⁵¹⁴ Kay Proctor, "Canteen Anecdotes from a Canteen Hostess," *Photoplay*, November 1943, 84; Cal York, "Inside Stuff: Cal York's Gossip of Hollywood," *Photoplay*, January 1943.

parting gift, the movie star unpinned the gardenias she wore “not so very far, the soldier thought, north of her heart,” and offered them to him. As the young man put the flowers in his pocket, contemplating kissing his dancing partner, she dashed off to help in the Canteen kitchen. The story then cuts to the soldier on an unspecified hot, dusty, war-torn landscape at some point in the near future. As he remembered the last moments he shared with the movie star, he felt the gardenias in his pocket. Finding his military company under barrage of gunfire from the enemy, the soldier offers to sacrifice himself so that his fellow soldiers could escape the trap. Just before running into the path of the enemy fire, he felt the gardenia petal in his pocket rustle “without anything written on it except one word – a word, perhaps, like destiny.” At the very moment the soldier lay dying, thousands of miles away, the movie star suddenly began to feel faint. She explained to her director, “I was thinking about a boy just now – a boy I danced with at the canteen...I gave him a couple gardenias...and he put them in his pocket. I wonder how long he kept them – in his pocket?” Readers know that he kept them – in a romantically tragic irony worthy of any film screen – until his death. At the Canteen, the story claimed, even short romances, like that of Jane Lockwood, could have lasting impacts, providing moments of comfort and love to soldiers even in the direst circumstances.⁵¹⁵

For those celebrity women whose use of their body at the Canteen led to romantic encounters, and sometimes marriage, the Hollywood Canteen tied together women’s (hetero)sexuality with patriotism, implicating the fulfillment of one with the fulfillment of the other. In other words, if a young, single woman executed her patriotic duty by volunteering for the war effort in some way – whether at canteens or elsewhere – then the promise of romance and marriage promoted by Hollywood and the U.S. Government would come to fruition. In a

⁵¹⁵ Margaret E. Sangster, “Canteen Romance,” *Screenland*, February 1944, 26-29, 72-75; Jane Lockwood Ferrero, *Hollywood Canteen Diary*, February 6, 1943, JLEC, MHL, AMPAS.

society that emphasized a gendered order that relegated women to the home with husbands as the economic provider, it appeared that marriage offered women the best path to a happy and economically successful life.⁵¹⁶ During the war years, the Hollywood Canteen ultimately legitimized the use of women's bodies in public by making romance and marriage the reward for putting themselves in situations that potentially threatened their physical safety and social reputations. Like canteens around the country, the Hollywood Canteen became a safe space for women to use their sexuality in public for two reasons: first, it made their sexuality socially acceptable because it was associated with a patriotism and democracy; second, women's use of their sexual bodies had to the potential to lead to marriage – and marriage ensured population growth, ensuring the survival of the nation. Ironically, then, just as the Hollywood Canteen validated the appropriate use of women's bodies in public, it simultaneously became a site that encouraged women's move back into the private sphere.

Conclusion

The Hollywood Canteen officially closed on Thanksgiving, November 22, 1945, an estimated three million servicemen having passed through its doors in just over three years. In its brief lifespan, the Hollywood Canteen became practically synonymous with celebrity patriotism in fan magazines. Famous women performers of every caliber, from number one pin-up girl Betty Grable to radio actress Florida Edwards, used their bodies at the Hollywood Canteen to comfort, talk with, and dance with servicemen who were risking their lives for the United States. When fan magazines reported on celebrity women's exploits at the Canteen, women stars quickly became examples of how American women might use their bodies in their own volunteer efforts,

⁵¹⁶ Cott, *Public Vows*, 157.

encouraging women to get involved in any way they could. More importantly, however, as celebrity women danced with, sang for, and even did a strip-tease for American servicemen (Joan Blondell recycled her bit from the Hollywood Victory Caravan at the Hollywood Canteen), they demonstrated that women's bodies in public were not a social threat as long as their physical efforts supported the war giving room for women to begin to challenge the gendered social order with the increased presence of their bodies in public spaces.⁵¹⁷ However, even as the Canteen became a kind of liberating space for women, its liberating possibilities were limited by race. Though the Canteen claimed an integrated dance floor, the reality proved otherwise. Ultimately, however, with the closing of the Hollywood Canteen also came the closing of the era that seemed to promise a redefinition of American womanhood. Even as participation in the war effort allowed for a greater acceptability of women's bodies in public, it also emphasized the temporary nature of war work. The Hollywood Canteen was never meant to exist outside of the wartime emergency. Neither, claimed the government as the war came to an end, was the ubiquity of women's bodies in public. The use of women's bodies for the nation reverted from public ideological reproduction back to private physical reproduction – the good American woman was no longer the woman who threw herself into public efforts to support the troops but rather the woman who gave up her public participation for a private family. In the postwar era, fictional women characters in film were no longer women who sacrificed their daily comforts so that the U.S. military could have metal and rubber. Now they were the mothers who diligently cooked, cleaned the home, and raised children in the private sphere while husbands worked in the public sphere. By the end of the decade, celebrity women were often extolled in the Hollywood press as good wives and mothers, with fan magazines conveniently forgetting to

⁵¹⁷ "Hollywood Canteen," Motion picture industry -- report on wartime activities, file 284, MPAA WWII Records, MHL, AMPAS.

remind their readers that Hollywood women were career women before they were family women.

INTERMISSION 3

“Gettin’ Corns For Her Country”: Women’s Bodies and the Limits of Democracy in *Hollywood Canteen* (1944)

When columnist Kay Proctor asked, “What is the Hollywood Canteen?” in the April 1943 edition of *Movieland* magazine, readers might have wondered the same thing themselves. Though articles promoting the Hollywood Canteen in Los Angeles had appeared in fan magazines as early as December 1942 – two months after the Canteen opened – few had articulated exactly what the Hollywood Canteen was and what purpose it served. It was a place that servicemen could attend and a place where celebrities volunteered their time and effort, fan magazines made clear, but what did the inside look like? Were the celebrities *really* there? Did servicemen *really* come visit? Wasn’t the Hollywood Canteen just a place in Hollywood where movie stars could be seen for a dance or two before promptly returning home, claiming their daily patriotic duty done? Well, there were “two ways of answering that oft-asked question,” according to Proctor: “One is a matter of facts and statistics. The other I have learned from the many hours I have worked there.” In the article, Proctor answers first with facts and figures before turning to the second way of answering “that oft-asked question”:

[The Hollywood Canteen is] the gracious and patrician Mary (Mrs. John) Ford supervising the thousand and one details of the kitchen and snack bar and scrubbing table tops when the need arises...It’s the beloved sixty-year young Mary Gordon, elbow deep in steaming, sudsy dishwater for five-hour stretches and spunky enough to accept a mischievous sailor’s dare to “cut a rug” with him on the dance floor. It’s Billie Burke babying a soldier and inventing excuses to serve him after curfew in defiance of all the rules and Beulah Bondi, reminiscing with a marine and easing loneliness by reminding him of his Aunt Beulah in Cross Creek, Iowa, or Mapleton, Maine.

It's Deanna Durbin, gayly dancing with tall smoothies or runty clods and making them feel important. It's Hedy Lamarr, present every Friday night, regardless, signing autographs for hours on end and adding a personal touch to each...

... It's the score of nameless women who crowd their own household tasks that they may work quietly at their background jobs in the Canteen kitchen and just as quietly depart, their sacrifice unsung...

In brief, the Hollywood Canteen is but another symbol of the American way of life. It is the real Hollywood that lies beneath the glitter, tinsel, and glamour of the town.⁵¹⁸

Proctor's words are full of sentimentality, painting the Hollywood Canteen as a place of never-ending sacrifice, hard work, and countless hours spent on the domestic front lines on the part of Hollywood stars – especially women, as the above passage demonstrates – to ensure that U.S. servicemen and their allied brothers received the attention and first-class treatment they so richly deserved. But, despite her attempts to describe the club both physically and ideologically, even Proctor's article does little to clarify exactly what the Hollywood Canteen looked like or felt like for readers, nearly all of whom would never get the opportunity to enter the Hollywood Canteen and experience the place themselves.

Hollywood Canteen, a Warner Bros. feature film released in December 1944, changed all of that. For the first time, on movie screens across the country, civilians could enter the Hollywood Canteen. There, along with a fictional serviceman who serves as their access point to this mysterious place, they are treated to an unending series of star cameos, staged musical numbers, and an entire club's worth of wartime patriotism and propaganda. Modeled after the United Artists' film about the Hollywood Canteen's sister club in New York, *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), *Hollywood Canteen* features roughly forty-five minutes of plot in a two-hour movie, the rest of the time made up of celebrities performing a song or acting in comedy sketch in a succession of vaudeville-style acts. Though *Hollywood Canteen* and *Stage Door Canteen* provide little plot, they nevertheless are chock-full of messages designed to help audiences

⁵¹⁸ Kay Proctor, "The Hollywood Canteen: From Hollywood's Angle," *Movieland* April 1943, 33.

understand why American involvement in the war was necessary and why volunteering at patriotic sites like the Hollywood Canteen was important for everyone – celebrity and non-celebrity alike. These messages included ideas about democracy, race, and gender as the American government and Hollywood worked together to define what a good American looked like, spoke like, and acted like during a time that demanded the solidification of a distinct American identity. *Hollywood Canteen*, while purporting to depict one of the most democratic places in the country to audiences who would never see it, simultaneously exposed the limits of how far that democracy could go in the Canteen and in the country writ large, particularly for women and people of color. While white servicemen like the fictional Slim and Brooklyn of the film and got nearly anything they could desire at the Hollywood Canteen because of their role in the military, *Hollywood Canteen* belies the realities of the real Hollywood Canteen, depicting a space where servicemen of color and women civilians of all races volunteering at the Canteen were expected to make sacrifices for the war effort based on societal ideas about race and gender that became more entrenched in American society especially after the war was over.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁹ Very few scholars have analyzed *Hollywood Canteen* as a text, perhaps because it is often categorized as an unrealistic and hyper-patriotic depiction of Hollywood's World War II vanity project. Just as in chapter three, Sherrie Tucker is the only scholar to have analyzed the film version of the Hollywood Canteen. Her discussion of the film is not a plot analysis in relationship to the real Hollywood Canteen, but an examination of Warner Bros.' production of the film in relation to FBI surveillance at the Club. She argues that the differences between the fictional film account of the Canteen and the account of the Canteen through official government surveillance files become lenses through which we can understand how national memory about the Canteen gained through the film shaped how state memory about the Canteen, found in FBI files, and vice versa. Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, chapter eleven. Because of the close ties between film industry labor unions, the Canteen, and actors like Bette Davis and John Garfield whose labor sympathies came under suspicion as Communist, the FBI employed at least one undercover officer at the Hollywood Canteen to sniff out potential problems that may be of national interest. The FBI surveillance also abhorred mixed-race dancing that the Canteen board demanded at the Canteen, leading one informant to claim that "the Hollywood Canteen is under control of Communist elements, and it was a Communist inspired project from the beginning." (as cited in Tucker, 258).

The only other scholar I have found that even mentions *Hollywood Canteen* is Bernard F. Dick who, in his work on World War II films, *The Star-Spangled Screen*, in which he says that the "all-star extravaganza [*Hollywood Canteen*] is Hollywood's least noteworthy tribute to woman." Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2022): 187.

I must make one clarifying note before we begin. *Hollywood Canteen* and the other films studied in this intermission have both fictional characters played by professional actors and professional actors playing themselves in cameos. While I will always refer to the fictional characters by their first names, as is often customary in film analyses, the actors' cameos present more complicated identification. Though actors appear to be playing themselves, whether in a musical number or in a small speaking part, I argue that, because their performances were scripted, and thus manipulated to portray the persona that audiences knew (or perhaps to surprise the audience by going against type), they were playing characters of themselves rather than their "real" selves.⁵²⁰ Therefore, while it is customary to refer to real people by their last names in historical accounts, I am going to treat the actors appearing as themselves in *Hollywood Canteen* as I would fictional characters, referring to them by their first names. However, if a celebrity is mentioned outside of the plot of the film, I will continue to refer to them by their last names.

And with that, on with the show!

Before we sit down and enjoy *Hollywood Canteen*, we may be better served by first visiting the screening room next door to watch two of the film's stylistic predecessors, *Stage Door Canteen* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. Though the focus of this intermission is *Hollywood Canteen*, it will be useful to refer to back *Stage Door Canteen*, as the two films bear such striking similarities, even sharing the same writer, Delmar Daves. *Stage Door Canteen* was released three months before *Thank Your Lucky Stars* and a year and a half before *Hollywood*

⁵²⁰ Take, for example, a moment in the film when a soldier, dancing clumsily with Patty Andrews, literally bumps into actors Peter Lorre and Sydney Greenstreet, both known for playing underworld tough guys in their movies. In menacing tones, they interrogate the soldier about his intentions with Patty. When Peter asks the soldier if he would mind stepping outside with him for a moment, the man quickly excuses himself, clearly afraid of the men and the reputations that preceded them. After the soldier leaves, Peter says forlornly "All I wanted to ask him is to join me in a cigarette." "He doesn't trust us, Peter," Sydney replies. "No," Peter sighs. "And we are such gentle people."

Canteen, making it the first of this unique genre of wartime entertainment films studied in this intermission.⁵²¹ Because it was based on the Stage Door Canteen in New York City, just as how *Hollywood Canteen* was based on the real Hollywood Canteen, *Stage Door Canteen* allows for a nearly direct comparison to *Hollywood Canteen*.

Stage Door Canteen opens on a transport train carrying a load of Army soldiers, where audiences are introduced to four soldiers, whose nicknames correspond with the states they are from – almost as if to remind audiences that it would take Americans from every quadrant of the country to win the war: California (West), New Jersey (East), Dakota (North), and Texas (South). Stationed on a base near New York City awaiting orders, the soldiers are given 24-hour passes and advised to use that time to “store up some memories” to take with them when they are shipped out. California, New Jersey, Dakota, and Texas all find themselves at the Stage Door Canteen and face to face with some of the biggest Broadway and film actors in the city. Three of the four men find junior hostesses that catch their eyes at the Canteen.⁵²² Dakota, who told his fellow soldiers that he was “off women for the duration,” meets Eileen, a stage actress more interested in her career than in finding love. Though they have a rocky start (and with the help of two more 24-hour passes for the soldiers) Eileen and Dakota predictably fall in love, with Eileen even breaking the rules to meet him after her shift was over at the Canteen. After spending an innocent night together on the roof of Eileen’s boardinghouse, Dakota and Eileen agree to marry the next day, but the men’s battalion is shipped out that very morning. Outside of the romantic

⁵²¹ About two weeks prior to the release of *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, MGM released their own version of a wartime entertainment picture that followed a very similar premise as *Thank Your Lucky Stars* called *Thousands Cheer* (1943) starring Kathryn Grayson and Gene Kelly. I have decided not to include *Thousands Cheer* in this intermission, as it has very little connection to *Hollywood Canteen* other than by genre, especially as compared to *Stage Door Canteen* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*.

⁵²² California, Dakota, and Texas are the ones who find girls they like at the Canteen. New Jersey, already close to home, meets up with, and eventually marries, his hometown girlfriend, so all four of them find love by the end of the film.

plot between a soldier and a hostess, visitors of the Canteen (along with the audiences of the movie) are treated to performances by the likes of dancer Ray Bolger, singer Ethel Merman, Black performers Count Basie and Ethel Waters, and famous ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his dummies Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd.⁵²³

Just a few months after the release of *Stage Door Canteen*, audiences could flock to the theater to see another wartime entertainment picture, *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. This film opens with singer Dinah Shore (playing herself) singing the title song during a broadcast of comedian Eddie Cantor's radio show. Two members of the small studio audience are Farnsworth and Dr. Schlenna (played masterfully by character actors Edward Everett Horton and S.Z. Sakall), two theater producers who are scouting talent for a charity benefit called "Cavalcade of Stars." Hoping to sign the singer to the benefit, they come up against the egotistical Eddie Cantor (played by himself), who has Dinah under contract. Eddie will allow Dinah to appear in the Cavalcade only if he is made chairman of the benefit committee. As Eddie takes command of the show (making changes for the worse), down-on-their-luck singers Tommy Randolph (Dennis Morgan) and Pat Dixon (Joan Leslie) scheme with their friend Joe Simpson, who bears a striking resemblance to Eddie Cantor, to get Tommy a number in the show.⁵²⁴ As we follow the plot, songs are both integrated with the plot and unintegrated numbers serving as a "rehearsal" of a big star's musical number for the benefit.⁵²⁵ The film features the only onscreen musical

⁵²³ *Stage Door Canteen*, directed by Frank Borzage (Warner Bros., 1943), DVD (The Film Detective Restored Version, 2015). This movie will be quoted often throughout the intermission and this citation applies to all further quotations of *Stage Door Canteen* (1943).

⁵²⁴ Joe Simpson is also played by Eddie Cantor.

⁵²⁵ An integrated musical number moves the plot along and is used to illustrate an important plot point or characters' emotions. Unintegrated musical numbers are usually standalone numbers that often have little to do with the plot. The idea of integrated and unintegrated (sometimes known as aggregate) musical numbers can be traced back to Martin Rubin, *Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 41-44.

performances of dramatic actors Bette Davis, Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, and Ida Lupino, as well as numbers by several other actors who did not commonly use their musical talent onscreen, such as John Garfield and Ann Sheridan.

Despite its release date, *Thank Your Lucky Stars* focuses much less on the war than does *Hollywood Canteen* or *Stage Door Canteen*. In fact, the war plays no part in the plot at all; the only mentions of the war come from a few musical numbers. These musical numbers add an air of comedy or sentimentality to the normally somber topic of war, helping, in a way, to keep the war at arm's length for the duration of the film. For example, Bette Davis (as herself) sings a song, "They're Either Too Young or Too Old," in which she laments the loss of eligible bachelors to the military: "What's good is in the Army / What's left can never harm me" she sings in one line.⁵²⁶ Only a few numbers later, Tommy sings "Good Night, Good Neighbor," during which he serenades a young woman, wearing a Miss Latin America sash, on the stoop of the Pan American Club for Women. "Good Night, Good Neighbor" clearly functions as a dreamy, romantic reference to Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy of non-intervention in, and mutual cooperation with, Latin American countries. Despite these and other brief allusions to the war in unintegrated musical numbers, the characters never face food shortages, never have to use ration books, and do not have to participate in blood, rubber, or metal drives. *Thank Your Lucky Stars* stays as far away from the war as a movie set during World War II possibly could.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁶ Bette Davis, "They're Either Too Young or Too Old," by Arthur Schwartz and Frank Loesser, 1943. This song was nominated for Best Original Song at the 16th Academy Awards in 1944.

⁵²⁷ The proceeds of *Thank Your Lucky Stars* were earmarked for the real Hollywood Canteen in Los Angeles. Every major performer in the film was given a \$50,000 paycheck, which was then summarily donated to the Hollywood Canteen – overall, over \$2,000,000 was raised for the Canteen from the salary "donations." James Spada, *More Than a Woman: An Intimate Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993): 195. \$50,000 in 1943 equals just over \$900,000 in 2023. Inflation numbers pulled from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Website, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.

Both *Stage Door Canteen* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars* functioned as a sort of blueprint for *Hollywood Canteen* to follow. Though *Hollywood Canteen* and *Stage Door Canteen* would crank up the amount of patriotism and tone down the amount of plot as compared to *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, these movies all maintain – perhaps even further entrench – an important ideology about gender during wartime. First, all three prescribe love and marriage for young American women, thereby reinscribing expectations that women sacrifice their body for the good of the nation for the war’s duration and beyond. *Hollywood Canteen* and *Stage Door Canteen* emphasize marriage more than does *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. Romance between Tommy and Pat is alluded to, but by the end of the movie, it does not appear that they are any more than close friends. However, Davis’s number comically emphasizes being faithful to her man in the armed forces, if only because the men who remained on the home front were too young or too old:

And flying over Egypt
Your heart will never be gypped,
And when you get to India
I’ll still be what I’ve been to ya
I’ve looked the field over
And lo and behold!
They’re either too young or too old!⁵²⁸

Though Davis had a very public role as the President of the Hollywood Canteen, her role in *Hollywood Canteen* promotes women’s faithfulness to their private personal lives as a central aspect of American women’s wartime experience, stressing the existing social hierarchy that made women subservient to men.

The second ideology that these movies inscribe is the limited role that white social and cultural leaders believed that Black Americans should have during wartime and postwar society. Like the movies set in Sun Valley, *Stage Door Canteen*, *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, and *Hollywood*

⁵²⁸ Davis, “They’re Either Too Young or Too Old,” Loesser and Schwartz, 1943.

Canteen each have only one musical number with any Black performers. Because a comparison of the Black numbers in the two *Canteen* movies will be discussed later in the intermission, a few words on *Thank Your Lucky Stars*'s Black musical number, "Ice Cold Katie, Won't You Marry the Soldier" are necessary. The number, led by Hattie McDaniel, takes place on a busy Harlem streetcorner where fashionable, well-dressed Black Americans gossip on stoops, fan themselves out the window on a building's upper floor and pass each other on the sidewalk or street. On the doorstep of a house sits prolific character actor Willie Best as the soldier, Private Jones, ringing the home's doorbell. Hattie begins a musical exposition about "Ice Cold Katie" Brown, who refuses to marry her soldier boyfriend, Jones, before he leaves for war. Over the course of the number, the Army comes calling for Jones, Katie finally agrees to marry him, and a wedding takes place before he leaves with the Army. A year prior to this film's release, in July 1942, Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, had implored Hollywood filmmakers to avoid creating racist and hurtful stereotypes of Black characters in their films. This scene was one of Hollywood's attempts to answer White's plea. However, none of the Black performers have speaking roles in the movie, though a few Black extras can be seen outside of the segregated musical numbers. Studios conceded that Black Americans could play characters other than domestic workers or lazy ne'er-do-wells, but the white studio bosses were not yet ready to embrace the idea of a fully integrated Hollywood movie, even as Black celebrities continued to challenge their marginalization in the industry and all Black citizens' exclusion from social equality.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁹ Harry Levette, "Walter White and Willkie Seek Ban On Southern War Movie Roles," *The Kansas City Plaindealer*, July 31, 1942. See also: Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade To Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Hollywood Canteen follows a nearly identical structure as *Stage Door Canteen*, including following a soldier with a hometown nickname. After the extensive opening credits play over the swirling, cursive, neon writing of the Hollywood Canteen sign, audiences are transported to a tropical landscape, with palm trees waving in the breeze as the waves of the ocean lap onto the sand. “This looks like a quiet, peaceful little island in the South Pacific, doesn’t it?” asks a male narrator. “Well it is...since the United States Army took it over!” The film cuts quickly to an American flag being hoisted up a makeshift flagpole in the middle of a tropical jungle. Here, on the island of New Guinea, we are introduced to Cpl. Slim Green (Robert Hutton) and his friend Sgt. Brooklyn Nowland (Dane Clark), two injured soldiers awaiting their return to the United States to convalesce. One night, while watching a movie starring Joan Leslie, Slim reveals that he has a crush on the actress, soon after which the soldiers are sent back to Los Angeles for medical care. After Slim and Brooklyn are healthy enough to be sent back to the Pacific, we see Slim spending his last few days wandering around all the famous sights of Hollywood and Los Angeles before a restaurant worker tells him to go to the Hollywood Canteen, where, the worker says, he might even be able to meet a celebrity. He hopes one of the celebrities is Joan Leslie.⁵³⁰

Once at the Canteen, Slim comes face to face with a whole succession of major film stars playing themselves: comedian Joe E. Brown, actresses Jane Wyman and Barbara Stanwyck, and actor Jack Carson. With every new celebrity, Slim expresses that he *really* hoped to meet Joan Leslie, who, he learns, is not working at the Canteen that night.⁵³¹ Canteen president Bette Davis

⁵³⁰ *Hollywood Canteen*, directed by Delmer Daves (Warner Bros., 1944), DVD (Turner Entertainment, 2008). This movie will be quoted often throughout the intermission and this citation applies to all further quotations of *Hollywood Canteen* (1944).

⁵³¹ Jane Wyman was Ronald Reagan’s first wife, married to him from 1940 until 1949. In one exchange in *Hollywood Canteen*, actor Jack Carson, in reference to Slim’s infatuation with Joan Leslie, jokes with Wyman, “Don’t get your hopes up [about Slim]. He’s been Leslie-ized!” Wyman quips back, “Oh will you stop? I’ve been Reagan-ized!”

and vice president John Garfield concoct a plan to make Slim's dream come true. Bette calls Joan into the Canteen (though she does not tell her why) while John pretends that Slim has won a fake contest and the contest's prize is a kiss from Joan Leslie. When Joan arrives, she agrees with the plan, though she adds nervously, "Aren't we going to be introduced first? I hope!" to which Bette just laughs. After kissing Slim, Joan wishes him luck and the two part ways. Slim convinces Brooklyn to attend the next night, where he experiences much of what Slim did the night before. Slim and Brooklyn have such a good time that they return the next night, when Slim becomes the one millionth visitor to enter the Hollywood Canteen. Among the prizes he wins is a date with any actress he wants.⁵³² He, of course, chooses Joan Leslie. Over the course of the evening, Slim and Joan fall in love, sharing an intimate moment in her backyard after their date. After a series of unfortunate events the next day, Slim boards the train to leave Los Angeles without getting a chance to say goodbye to Joan. Joan, for her part, hoped to see Slim one last time, but her car runs out of gas in the middle of a gas shortage. Hitching a ride to the train station with an Army Major, Joan arrives just as the train begins to leave. Joan and Slim declare their love for each other, leaving each other with promises of a postwar life. As the train pulls away, Joan stands on the platform, looking forlorn, as the screen fades to black.

Hollywood Canteen appears to be a movie truly of its time. It mostly provides visual proof of Hollywood bragging both about their stable of stars and about the industry's contribution to the war. An incredibly dated film, it holds little value for the majority of twenty-first century Americans and, at two hours long, patience for braggadocious 1940s Hollywood

⁵³² This fictional account was based on the real 1,000,000th visitor to the Canteen, Sgt. Carl Bell of Texas, who entered on September 1943, less than one year after the Canteen opened. Bell was greeted and kissed by actresses Lana Turner, Marlene Dietrich, and Deanna Durbin, gifted a gold wrist watch, a wardrobe suitcase, a toilet case, a wallet, and two days in Hollywood getting the VIP treatment. Deanna Durbin even bought and shipped gifts for Bell's wife and children. "The millionth soldier to visit the Hollywood Canteen," *Movieland*, January 1994, pg. 84; "Stars Kiss Canteen Guest No. 1,000,000" *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California) September 16, 1943.

begins to wear thin even for the most seasoned classic film watcher.⁵³³ Even Sherrie Tucker, who has published most of the scholarly work about the Hollywood Canteen and its film, admits she has difficulty taking the film seriously.⁵³⁴ Despite the challenges the film presents, it is nevertheless worth examining because it is an idealized snapshot of Hollywood during wartime. Though undoubtedly exaggerated, the film's depiction of the Hollywood Canteen provided influential images and suggestive representations of the role of people of color and women during wartime. As discussed in chapter three, the real Hollywood Canteen became a place where celebrity women could model unconventional ways of using their bodies in public for patriotic purposes. *Hollywood Canteen* highlighted such celebrity women's public patriotic physical wartime sacrifice, while simultaneously presaging postwar expectations that women move from the public realm back to the private one. Similarly, the film illustrates an incredibly limited role for African Americans in the war effort, reflecting a widespread attitude among many white Americans who believed that Black Americans' contributions to the war effort were much smaller – and mattered less – than those of white Americans.

By the time of the release of *Hollywood Canteen*, two years had passed since studios had agreed to Walter White's request that Hollywood create more roles for African American actors, asking that those roles be less stereotyped and more dignified than domestic workers or lazy, illiterate characters. Two years was apparently enough time for Warner Bros. filmmakers to forget that promise almost entirely. *Hollywood Canteen* features just one musical number by Black performers, The Golden Gate Quartet, dressed as Army pilots to sing "The General Jumped at Dawn." The technical set-up is simple: the quartet enters stage left with quartet

⁵³³ I am the "seasoned classic film watcher" in question.

⁵³⁴ Sherrie Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy: The Social Geography of Memory at the Hollywood Canteen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 288.

member Bill Johnson sitting on a prop bomb, which two other members push onto the stage in front of the facsimile of a small airplane. The song's lyrics depict an Army that is multiracial, an Army that promised that Black flyers and soldiers were the comrades, the equals, of white flyers and soldiers:

The General had a groovy crew,
A million lads and I'm telling you,
There were white men, black men, on the beam.
A real solid all-American team.⁵³⁵

U.S. Army units were not yet integrated by the time the Golden Gate Quartet sang their song.

The quartet, then, sang of an unrealized vision of the Army. Importantly, however, the image of four strong, young African American men in flight uniforms sitting on a bomb singing about an integrated military was supposed to signal to white audiences that young Black men were just as willing and able to bravely serve their country as their white comrades.⁵³⁶

“The General Jumped At Dawn” is a short number, clocking in at less than two minutes of screentime, after which the quartet are never seen again – nor is any Black performers anywhere except in the background. Throughout the number, the quartet never moves more than five feet across the stage, staying almost exclusively around the prop bomb and plane. When compared, for example, to the number in *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, which includes an entire Harlem streetcorner built on a soundstage and several speaking and singing parts for prominent African American players, “The General Jumped At Dawn” only barely meets Walter White’s plea to make more prominent and more dignified parts for African Americans in the film industry. While the Golden Gate Quartet ostensibly portrays a more dignified role of Black Army

⁵³⁵ The Golden Gate Quartet, “The General Jumped At Dawn,” written by Larry Neal and Jimmy Mundy *Hollywood Canteen* (1944); Members of The Golden Gate Quartet were Bill Johnson, Orlandus Wilson, Henry Owens, and Clyde Riddick.

⁵³⁶ Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 302.

Air Force pilots, the number comes across as a bare minimum effort on the part of Warner Bros., who less than a year before, made “Ice Cold Katie,” which, though problematic in itself, portrays a somewhat nuanced Black middle-class community filmed on an entire soundstage. Just a year after *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, Warner Bros. gave African American performers just two minutes onscreen. According to Sherrie Tucker, the original treatment of the *Hollywood Canteen* script included a discussion with John Garfield about his recent USO trip to Italy, in which director Delmer Daves hoped to include “a merited spot in the picture” for Black servicemen who had bravely fought in the Italian campaign, as he had done in *Stage Door Canteen*.⁵³⁷ Obviously, this scene did not materialize in the final script, leaving the film with a one-dimensional depiction of African American soldiers. Even worse for the makers of *Hollywood Canteen*, nearly eighteen months prior, *Stage Door Canteen* featured Black American excellence on screen in the form of fictional Black fighter pilot Johnny Jones (played by Caleb Peterson). When Dakota is being introduced to Johnny, a fellow pilot points out a Distinguished Service Cross Medal pinned to Johnny’s chest. Johnny modestly dismisses the medal as “just a ribbon” before he is pulled away to the dance floor by a Black hostess. Especially in comparison to the representation of African Americans in both *Stage Door Canteen* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, *Hollywood Canteen* demonstrated, quite outright, that Black Americans were expected to be part of the war effort, but in limited roles that, once complete, would be almost entirely forgotten.

If the role for Black men in *Hollywood Canteen* is small, the role for Black women is barely noticeable. Whereas women are central to the African American musical numbers in *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (Hattie McDaniel et al.) and *Stage Door Canteen* (Ethel Waters singing with Count Basie), the only Black women in *Hollywood Canteen* are seen on the Canteen dance

⁵³⁷ Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 304-305.

floor, usually as part of a soldier-hostess couple jitterbugging or watching the onstage talent perform. Some extras may wander in and out of frame behind principal actors, but none of them have any lines. Still, Tucker points out, even this little bit of integration in the fictional Hollywood Canteen was more inclusive than the newsreels or movie magazine articles about the Canteen, which depicted the real Hollywood Canteen as entirely white.⁵³⁸ Unlike in the previous two movies, Black women's voices in *Hollywood Canteen* are entirely silent, though their bodies were still necessary for the war work happening at the real Canteen – and, by extension, to the nation. Government authorities told Black women that their bodies kept the men of their own race fighting in the war, as is clear by the fact that Black women do exist in the fictional (and real) Canteen space. However, *Hollywood Canteen* illustrates the contemporary belief that Black women's contributions to war work were merely background, literally, to white women's efforts. In *Hollywood Canteen*, like millions of Black women across the country, Black women work tirelessly without recognition for their families, communities, and race while white women received far more public attention for the same work.

If *Hollywood Canteen* lacks a significant presence of African American actors and performers, other performers and servicemen of color have it even worse, used almost as props to illustrate the diversity of the club. Like “Good Night, Good Neighbor” from *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, *Hollywood Canteen* does have a Latin-infused musical number in the film, led by American pianist Carmen Carvallaro, followed by a lively Flamenco number by duo Rosario & Antonio. Just as the Black performers, however, none of the Latin American performers have any dialogue. Other than this, the only people of color seen on screen appear in short bursts, referred to in two different moments. The first comes in the “You Can Always Tell a Yank” musical

⁵³⁸ Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy*, 300.

number by actors Dennis Morgan and Joe E. Brown. As Joe sings the following lyrics, the camera cuts to brief images of servicemen of color in Allied uniforms who are in the background enjoying the number:

You can always tell a Yank
by the way his glass will clank
with a guy from Rome and a guy from Pinsk
and a guy from Shanghai, Wales, and Minsk
...
You can always tell a Yank
By his friends on either flank
There's a guy called Slim and a boy named John
And a kid named Chang and his friend Ewan⁵³⁹

The lyrics combined with the images of Chinese fighter pilots and Italian soldiers give the illusion that the Canteen was a truly multicultural, multiethnic site. Filmmakers employ a similar tactic during Slim's final speech at the Canteen after he wins all the prizes as the one millionth serviceman. As he mentions each Allied nation, the camera cuts to a one or two servicemen of each Allied nationality centered in the frame, smiling slightly when Slim mentions them:

I happen to be number one million, but I just represent every fellow who's ever come here. Gosh, I might have been a soldier, a flyer, or sailor of the British commonwealth of nations. Or a Chinese air cadet here to learn how to fly. I might have been one of our good friends from Russia, or one of our own colored boys. I might have come from the Philippines across the Pacific or from down under, from New Zealand or Australia or maybe been a free Frenchman. I might have been one of the boys from South America or from our next door neighbor, Mexico or maybe escaped from Norway or the Netherlands or Denmark or Greece or Poland or Czechoslovakia or any of the countries. I might have been wearing kilts like a Scotsman, but believe me if I was, you could see my knees shaking right now.

No foreign serviceman – that is, no foreign serviceman *of color* – is given a speaking part. Some French and British servicemen have a few lines, but these are foreign servicemen who *look* the most like Americans (i.e.: they are white). The film also demonstrates the limits of the allyship,

⁵³⁹Dennis Morgan and Joe E. Brown, "You Can Always Tell a Yank," written by Burton Lane and E.Y. Harburg, *Hollywood Canteen* (1944).

especially for Allied servicemen who looked different from white Americans. The Hollywood Canteen of *Hollywood Canteen* claims to be democratic but that democracy is limited especially by race. Servicemen of color could come to the Canteen and enjoy all the same benefits as white servicemen – after all, democracy and equality is what made America so great and what the war was being fought over – but white American men took center stage at the fictional Canteen almost all of the time.

Despite its failure to accurately depict racial relations at the real Hollywood Canteen, American filmmakers nevertheless depicted the fictional Hollywood Canteen as an example of patriotism, democracy, and Americanism that leaders hoped to instill in the populace. In this case, music plays a central part in portraying that patriotism on film. During the men’s (and audience’s) second night at the Canteen, the Sons of the Pioneers take the stage to sing a Cole Porter classic based on a poem by Robert Fletcher, “Don’t Fence Me In.” The musical group is dressed in Old West costumes, complete with cowboy hats and bolo ties, singing in front of a real campfire while a giant prop cactus and pioneer wagon looms behind them. Soon, popular Western star Roy Rogers, riding his trusty horse Trigger, enters and joins in the song. The costumes, lyrics, and melody of the song evoke images of the American West, full of wide-open spaces where white cowboys rustled cattle and fought in “Indian wars,” which any red-blooded (white) American ought to long for:

Give me land, lots of land under starry skies
Don’t fence me in
Let me ride through the wide open country that I love
Don’t fence me in
...
Just turn me loose, let me straddle my old saddle
Underneath the western skies
On my Cayuse, let me wander over yonder

Till I see the mountains rise.⁵⁴⁰

The oft-repeated phrase “Don’t Fence Me In,” conjured the mythic American West in audiences’ minds. According to Frederick Jackson Turner, as white settlers moved westward, one of the driving forces of frontier settlement was creating “a society of [which] the most distinctive fact was the freedom of the individual to rise under conditions of social mobility and whose ambition was the liberty and well-being of the masses.”⁵⁴¹ In other words, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the American West was the opportunity it afforded for any (white) person to gain wealth and rise up the social ladder. This means, then, that “Don’t Fence Me In” could also be interpreted as the reason the soldiers were fighting: so that democracy, so crucial to American identity, could be retained and freedom would reign supreme. In other words, the Sons of Pioneers, representing all Americans, seemed to be saying to the Axis powers: “Don’t (or rather, “you can’t”) fence me in.” As if solidifying the latter interpretation, the Andrews Sisters sing a slightly faster, swing-style reprise of the song. In the Andrews Sisters’ hands, “Don’t Fence Me In” loses much of its American West connotations, replaced instead by a kind of a modernity that melds together the country’s Western past with its faster-paced future – almost as if the Andrews Sisters brought the country into the present time without losing its old sentimentality. By combining the Old West with Modern Hollywood, the Andrews Sisters’ reprisal of “Don’t Fence Me In” encourages white American audiences to find a commonality in a shared past and a shared future, foundations upon which to solidify a white American identity in the face of national existential threats.

⁵⁴⁰ The Sons of the Pioneers, Roy Rogers, and the Andrews Sisters, “Don’t Fence Me In,” written by Cole Porter and Robert Fletcher, *Hollywood Canteen* (1944).

⁵⁴¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, “Contributions of the West to American Democracy,” in *The Turner Thesis: Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History* ed. George Rogers Taylor (United States: Barakaldo Books, 2020): 46.

Solidifying American identity is central to another song in *Hollywood Canteen*, the aforementioned “You Can Always Tell A Yank.” With a military-like marching tempo, reminiscent of military bugle calls, “You Can Always Tell A Yank” not only reminds audiences of the Allied forces with whom they are fighting (“a kid named Chang and his friend Ewan”), but also sets out ideal qualities of American servicemen:

You can always tell a Yank
By the way they call him Hank
By the way he talks and the way he thinks
And the way he likes to buy you drinks
You can always tell a Yank
...
He’s the kind of guy
Who wants a Yankee-doodle deal
Wants his apple pie
And his Constitution
He’s the kind of guy
With a lot of sock appeal
And he hates to heel a heel

According to Dennis, Joe, and the songwriters, American men are friendly, intelligent, physical (“sock appeal”), and love quintessential American symbols like apple pie and the Constitution.

But one verse gets at the heart of what truly makes an American:

You can always tell a Yank
By the way he drives a tank
To defend a thing called democracy
And save the world from tyranny
You can always tell a Yank.

This verse describes exactly what was at the heart of the Hollywood Canteen the club and *Hollywood Canteen* the film: the celebration and promotion of democracy. Throughout the war years, Hollywood believed itself to be a kind of democratic watchdog; Around this time, Warner Bros. released a statement that read: “We have been proud of these ‘Patriotic films,’ as they have been called, and we continue to thank Providence that we have, and always have had the freedom

to make them and display them to Americans and others who would like to follow the American system.”⁵⁴²

For those who wished to follow the American system of democracy, *Hollywood Canteen* offers an even more obvious definition only a few minutes after “You Can Always Tell a Yank.” After their second evening at the Canteen, Slim and Brooklyn are bunking down at the Hollywood Guild Canteen, a kind of temporary boarding house for soldiers on furlough in Los Angeles without a place to sleep. As they undress, Brooklyn begins to think about his evening, saying he thought Hollywood was “all false fronts” until he visited the Canteen: “I don’t wanna be sloppy about this but it kinda got me, all them famous people being friendly and democratic...democratic... democracy! That’s what it means, Slim! Everybody equal like tonight! All them big shots listening to little shots like me.” With this recognition, Brooklyn sits down on the bed only to realize that the cane he had been using for balance while healing his leg injury was missing – he had walked and danced without his cane all evening. It was almost as if the democracy healed Brooklyn’s injuries – a kind of metaphor for the power of democracy throughout the world as Hollywood portrayed it: if countries followed the American way – the democratic way – the rifts within and between nations would heal just like Brooklyn’s leg.

In the plot of *Hollywood Canteen*, one of the most prevalent forms of democracy at the Canteen was the democracy of romance – that the Hollywood Canteen made it possible for a big shot like Joan Leslie to fall in love with a little shot like Slim. While such romances were usually prohibited at the Canteen and there is no evidence that any sustained romance between a movie star and a serviceman like this ever actually happened, such a romance seemed possible because of the democratic feeling that the filmmakers of *Hollywood Canteen* deliberately baked into

⁵⁴² Carlisle Jones from Alex Evelove, “War + Escapist Pictures” (n.d.), f.14, MPAA WWII Records, MHL.

every scene. Interestingly, both *Hollywood Canteen* and *Stage Door Canteen* feature a romance between a hostess and a serviceman, which would have been strictly forbidden at the sites themselves because of the rules limiting hostesses' interactions with servicemen outside of the club. As discussed in chapter three, however, Joan Leslie, as a celebrity woman, occupied a sort of grey middle category of hostess, as compared to stage extra Eileen in *Stage Door Canteen*, whose romance with Dakota would have been entirely prohibited because of her position as junior hostess. In fact, *Stage Door Canteen* emphasizes what happens when junior hostesses break the rules to meet servicemen outside of the Canteen: in the opening scene, audiences follow a group of junior hostesses to the stage door entrance and watch as junior hostess Lillian loses her volunteer pass because she met up with a soldier outside of the Canteen.

Yet for the women of *Hollywood Canteen* and *Stage Door Canteen*, the loss of any volunteer pass was worth what the women were gaining by meeting up with – and eventually marrying, the audience could presume – the servicemen they met at the Canteen. Where the real *Hollywood Canteen* proved that romance could serve as a reward for patriotically sacrificing their bodies in the war effort, the fictional *Hollywood Canteen* (and the fictional *Stage Door Canteen*) takes this ideology a step further, demonstrating that romance and marriage were among the most patriotic thing a woman could do. In *Stage Door Canteen*, Eileen secretly meets up with Dakota, and, after spending a night together on the roof of her apartment building, they decide to get married the next day. Though Eileen knows that she will lose her ability to volunteer at the *Stage Door Canteen* if she meets with Dakota, she clearly believes that marrying Dakota would provide more patriotic benefits than continuing to volunteer at the Canteen after he was shipped off. Likewise, Joan in *Hollywood Canteen*, whose meetings with Slim were personally sanctioned by canteen bosses Bette Davis and John Garfield, does not face the same

threat of the loss of her privilege to volunteer as does Eileen, but she still gives up her time for a man she had never met before and whom she may never see again because she feels it is part of her patriotic duty. Undoubtedly, the filmmakers and governmental leaders who had a hand in making *Hollywood Canteen* hoped that American women all over the country might follow Eileen's and Joan's footsteps during their own wartime romances.

In fact, *Hollywood Canteen* served as a kind of visual guidebook for all the rules and expectations for women's volunteering (and sacrificing) at canteens that fan magazines laid out. One scene in particular visually depicts some of the fan magazine advice discussed in chapter three. During his first night at the Hollywood Canteen, Brooklyn is stunned to be approached by actress Ida Lupino, who asks him to sit down, at which time – after Brooklyn looks her up and down several times with a sly smirk – conversation ensues:

Brooklyn: As a rule, Miss Lupino, movie stars don't interest me. But you...you're different.

Ida: [chuckles] Really, Sergeant? In what way?

Brooklyn: Well, uh, as Frenchie in my battalion would say, you have a certain *je ne sais caw* – [that's] French.

Ida: [enthusiastically] Oh! Is it?

Brooklyn: Yeah. We adventurers pick up quite a bit as we travel all the earth.

Ida: I bet you're not kidding. Well, go on Sergeant, speak to me some more in French...

Brooklyn continues on, uttering badly mangled French phrases, pausing after every phrase to give Ida the English translation. As Brooklyn speaks, a French soldier approaches Ida and, in French, asks her for an autograph, to which she replies perfectly to him in the same language. After the soldier leaves, Ida turns back to Brooklyn, who asks, "What language was that?" Clearly embarrassed when Ida informs him it was the very language he was "teaching" her, Brooklyn tries to backtrack, but she tells him encouragingly, "You were doing very well!" In asking, even encouraging, Brooklyn to continue speaking to her in French despite his obvious butchery of it, Ida is following a modified version of one of Sheila Ryan's rules of "How to

Dance with Servicemen”: “Don’t embarrass a soldier by asking him to try rhumbas, tangos and such. Let him teach you some of the steps he enjoyed back home.”⁵⁴³ If Ida, in this case, had written a similar rule for a fan magazine, it would have read something like: “Don’t embarrass a soldier by showing him that you know a foreign language better than he does. Let him teach you what he has learned from his military experience.” *Hollywood Canteen* visually enacted fan magazines’ advice about how to interact with servicemen, emphasizing that women’s main role at the Hollywood Canteen, and canteens around the country, was to comfort the servicemen – whether soothing their loneliness or “learning” languages or dances from them.

As demonstrated by Florida Edwards’ experience, discussed in chapter three, much of the comfort that soldiers got from women while at the Canteen came at the detriment of women’s autonomy over their own bodies, a fact that is at once acknowledged and unquestioned in *Hollywood Canteen*. After Eddie Cantor performs a musical number with young starlet Nora Martin, he invites a random soldier up to the stage, asking Nora, without her onscreen consent, to kiss him. Despite Joe E. Brown’s admonition to Slim at the beginning of the film that servicemen could have anything they could reach for *except* the hostesses – women were a kind of public property for the men while they were at the Canteen. Joan Leslie provides another example, as her body is offered to Slim without her consent, which she alludes to when she asks, “Aren’t we going to be introduced first? I hope!” just before Bette Davis and John Garfield usher her upstairs to kiss Slim. At the Canteen, even celebrity men’s bodies were not entirely their own, the prime example being S.Z. Sakall, an Hungarian-American actor known for his jolly nature, charming accent, and large jowls. Affectionally pinching his chubby cheeks must have been a running cultural gag at this time, as in both *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (where he plays a fictional

⁵⁴³ Sheila Ryan, “How to Dance with a Serviceman,” *Movieland*, May 1943, pg61

Dr. Schlenna) and *Hollywood Canteen* (where he plays himself), characters ask to pinch his cheeks. It becomes clear, then, that at the Hollywood Canteen, according to *Hollywood Canteen*, everything – including celebrities’ bodies – were at the servicemen’s disposal.

Dancing, just like at the real Canteen, was the main way that women sacrificed their comfort and bodies in the film. Just after Ida Lupino reveals to Brooklyn that she knows French, Brooklyn, embarrassed, finds Slim at a table with actress Irene Manning. As Slim and Irene continue their conversation, Patty Andrews, one part of the popular swing music group The Andrews Sisters, sits down at the table, groaning, “Oh, Irene, do you think dancing will ever come back? My feet feel like fire bricks.” Patty is referring, of course, to the intense jitterbugging on the Canteen dance floor. Only minutes later, Patty takes to the stage with her two sisters, singing “Getting’ Corns For My Country,” which glamorizes and patriotizes the pain and discomfort women go through while jitterbugging at canteens:

I’m getting’ corns for my country at the Hollywood Canteen
The hardest workin’ junior hostess you’ve ever seen
I’m doin’ my bit down here for Uncle Sam
I’m a patriotic jitterbug, yeah, yeah, that’s what I am
I’m getting’ corns for my country, you should see the pounds fly
I’m getting’ down the waistline and I don’t even try⁵⁴⁴

Not only is dancing with servicemen at canteens patriotic, but it even has aesthetic benefits like weight loss. The main refrain of the song, “getting’ corns for my country,” very explicitly states that the discomfort women feel after dancing with several servicemen is worth it because, not only was it good for the hostess’s waistline, but it was for the good of the nation. Another line seems to insinuate that the patriotic fervor that comes with jitterbugging will also sustain them when they get tired: “We’re getting’ corns for our country though the goin’ is tough / When we

⁵⁴⁴ The Andrews Sisters with Jimmy Dorsey and His Orchestra, “Gettin’ Corns for My Country,” written by Jean Barry, Leah Worth, and Dick Charles, *Hollywood Canteen* (1944).

think we can't go on / we find we can't get enough." When fan magazines published statistics like Betty Grable's record of dancing with three hundred soldiers, or published stories about celebrity women at the Hollywood Canteen as discussed in chapter three, *Hollywood Canteen* and its songs like "Getting' Corns for My Country" made the pain and discomfort women would undoubtedly face while spending night after night on the dance floor with dozens or even hundreds of servicemen an entirely noble pursuit – one that made women true patriots.

By the end of *Hollywood Canteen*, it becomes increasingly clear that the film did two main things: first, it entertained audiences with a glimpse into an otherwise mysterious place; second, it gave Hollywood (and Warner Bros. in particular) an opportunity to brag about its stable of stars and, more importantly, the industry's participation in the war effort. However, *Hollywood Canteen* contains several other, not necessarily subtle, messages about democracy, race, and gender during the early 1940s. Democracy, clearly on the forefront of every American's mind during the war years, made it possible for, everybody to be equal. *Hollywood Canteen* does not carry out this promise as much as its makers may have liked, instead demonstrating the limits of democracy at the Hollywood Canteen, both fictional and real, especially for people of color and for women. African Americans certainly had dignified roles in the war, as evidenced by dressing the Golden Gate Quartet in flyer suits during "The General Jumped At Dawn" number. However, the fact that that musical number was not followed up by any substantial role, or even any lines, by Black actors illustrates that their participation in the war effort was severely limited to segregated musical numbers and, in the real world, segregated military units. As examined both in chapter three and in this intermission, women, especially celebrity women, were central to the mission of the Hollywood Canteen. Their bodies, from their hands making sandwiches to

their feet on the dance floor, kept the Canteen running and immensely popular until its closing in November 1945. Their public bodies, however, were not their own while at the Canteen, demanding a sacrifice of their independence and autonomy – in many ways, similar to the kind of sacrifice that men who enlisted in the military made – to ensure that men’s morale was high to win the war.

Unknowingly, of course, these messages helped shape the postwar United States. As we know, Black Americans did not fully gain victory over racism at home in the postwar period, as Jim Crow laws in the South and racism and bigotry in the North upheld racial discrimination until the Civil Rights movement in the late 1950s into the 1960s. In Hollywood, very little changed despite Walter White’s plea to make more, and more dignified, roles for African Americans.⁵⁴⁵ It would take at least another decade for Black actors like Sidney Poitier to gain any significant foothold in front of the camera, much less behind it. For white women, the physical sacrifices they made for the nation during the war became a precursor to the physical sacrifices for the nation they were expected to make after the war. By promoting romance, even in a wartime entertainment picture like *Hollywood Canteen* (and even *Stage Door Canteen*), Hollywood continued to emphasize that women’s paramount concern should be finding a husband with whom to settle down and make a home. The use of women’s bodies in biological and ideological reproduction, as well as for their husband’s sexual satisfaction after the war was, in a way, an extension of the use of her body for ideological reproduction and men’s morale (and, to be frank, sexual satisfaction) during the war. The conservative move back into the home during the postwar period, where women’s main role was only as wife and mother, became a

⁵⁴⁵ Matthew F. Delmont, *Half American: The Epic Story of African Americans Fighting World War II at Home and Abroad* (New York: Viking, 2022); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

major source of dissatisfaction that eventually led to the Women's Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁴⁶

It was within this milieu – with women returning to the home in droves at the urging of their government and Hollywood – that a Swedish actress went to Rome to make a movie with an Italian director and was summarily denounced on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

⁵⁴⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, chapter nine; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000); Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

CONCLUSION

“I believe Ingrid Bergman is one of the most powerful women on this earth today,” announced Senator Edwin C. Johnson on the floor of the United States Senate on March 14, 1950. “I regret to say a powerful influence for evil.”⁵⁴⁷

Even after an examination of the preceding decades to explain why Senator Johnson was so determined to declare an actress one of the foremost opponents against the institution of marriage, his use of the word “evil” seems slightly hyperbolic. However, we begin to understand why Johnson felt so strongly about Bergman’s situation: he was acting in a historical moment when American cultural and social expectations were turning back toward rigid separation of spheres, where women’s primary domain was once again expected to be the home. Fan culture, especially fan magazines, had long painted Bergman as the perfect wife, mother, and woman, an all-American immigrant who portrayed American values as (or perhaps even more) efficiently than her native Swedish ones. Just six months before Bergman left for Italy, Hedda Hopper wrote a glowing profile of the actress, which ended concluded that Ingrid Bergman was “not only a great actress but a human being, warm with feeling and the capacity to love ideals and her fellow man.”⁵⁴⁸ Bergman’s betrayal came when she violated the traditional social norms that fan culture had portrayed her executing to an exceptional degree.

⁵⁴⁷ Senator Johnson, speaking on S. 3237, on March 14, 1950, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 96, pt. 3: 3285.

⁵⁴⁸ Hedda Hopper, “Ingrid Bergman Talks,” *Modern Screen*, December 1948, 29, 81-85, [https://media historyproject.org](https://media.historyproject.org).

It was probably not just because fan magazines had put Bergman on an unrealistic pedestal that Johnson felt so deeply about Bergman's situation. Partially to blame, too, was the general turn that movie fan culture took toward conservative gender norms, aligning closely with ideologies promoted by the American government following the close working relationship between the government and Hollywood during the war. As we have seen, Hollywood publicity tended to push more traditional gender roles as compared to stars' real behavior, which became more obvious as the decades passed. By the time of the Senate meeting on March 14, 1950, the film industry was deeply invested in maintaining a rigid separation between the public sphere and the private in the United States, much more invested than they had been in the previous twenty years.

When the Hollywood Studio Club first opened in 1916, fan culture was still in its infancy and the studio system had not yet cemented itself as the central mechanism to the success of the movies. As a boarding house for women hoping to succeed in the film industry, the Hollywood Studio Club offered up images of autonomous young women succeeding in a public career. The key to the Studio Club women's claim to the public sphere was their respectability, made up of two important factors: whiteness and middle-classness. The Club's residents had to uphold middle-class values, part of which meant maintaining (or at least appearing to maintain) a pure sexual reputation. In exchange, however, residents received a safe, well-respected place to live, incredibly supportive residents and Club leaders, and strong connections to the industry – all things that gave them a significant advantage over other boarding houses and hotels in Los Angeles. Lastly, though marriage was an acceptable outcome for residents, so too was a career, demonstrating a freedom for young women to choose if they want to remain in the public sphere. Profiles of the Studio Club that appeared in fan and general interest magazines emphasized the

autonomy of the young women who lived there, demonstrating to a large audience that young women working in the public sphere did not pose the same social and cultural threat that many leaders, Will Hays among them, claimed they did. The Studio Club is the only site examined in this project that presented liberating options for women that fan magazines did not actively undermine – at least, not until after long-term director Marjorie Williams, the true force behind the Club’s success, retired in the late 1940s.

Stage Door (1937) represented much of what the real Hollywood Studio Club stood for. Though the play on which the movie was based was inspired by the Rehearsal Club in New York City, director Gregory LaCava clearly infused aspects of the Studio Club into the fictional Footlights Club: respectability, support between women, and equal emphasis on career and marriage. The fact that the filmmakers chose to make the two main characters female (as opposed to one male character and one female character) and casting fiercely independent and headstrong actresses like Katharine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers for those parts, is not insignificant. The film points to the same ideas about American women working in the public sphere as did the Hollywood Studio Club: women’s public bodies were not a social or cultural threat. *Stage Door* builds on the foundation laid by the Hollywood Studio Club in disproving the notion that women’s presence in the public sphere did not jeopardized the established social hierarchy.

In the late 1930s, celebrity women began using their bodies in public in a new way: skiing. With the creation of the Sun Valley ski resort in the mountains of central Idaho, women took to the slopes in the latest fashions, exercising not just because it was good for their health but because they liked it. The clothing they wore served more functions than just to make the stars look glamorous, however; their sartorial choices legitimized their participation in a

normally masculine sport. As fan magazines reported celebrity women like Claudette Colbert and Ann Sothern skiing, winning awards, and looking great while doing it, magazine writers and editors made the ski resort a place where women could use their bodies in public without posing a threat to the social and cultural expectations of women. However, as the years passed, fan magazines began to increasingly include narratives about romance and marriage, which began to undermine the challenges to traditional gender roles that celebrity women set forth on the Idaho mountainsides. So too did Sun Valley symbolize an American womanhood based in whiteness, consumerism, and physical fitness. Still, the divide between public and private remained porous even as social and cultural leaders tried to concretize those categories, as demonstrated by Gretchen Fraser. As the first American Olympic skiing medalist in history, Fraser was a woman whose sporting achievements for the U.S. ski team thrust her into the public spotlight. Reclaiming her rights as a public citizen, Fraser retired to become a more traditional wife and mother – only to continue to remain in the public sphere for the next fifty years. Sun Valley, as a place that allowed women to enjoy their physical abilities, permitted Fraser the opportunity to cross the public/private divide so many times, demonstrating how American women might do the same in their own lives.

Sun Valley became such a well-known site that, in three films of Hollywood's Golden Age, the resort promised romance and marriage because of, not in spite of, women's athletic ability on the slopes. With main characters played by figure skater Sonja Henie and swimmer Esther Williams, two of those films, *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941) and *Duchess of Idaho* (1950), portrayed the athletic woman as feminine and glamorous rather than mannish and unladylike. But even as these beautiful, athletic actresses skated and swam across screens, baring their bodies in short skirts and bathing suits, the plots of these movies still underscored that women's

primary responsibility was to the private home. Even in *That Wonderful Urge* (1948), which used Sun Valley as a setting for less than twenty minutes, romance and the resort went hand-in-hand. By connecting Sun Valley to romance these Hollywood films aligned with fan magazines in pointing toward a more clear separation of spheres in postwar American society.

Celebrity women's participation in the war effort during World War II is particularly instructive about how Hollywood contributed to postwar gender expectations. The Hollywood Canteen, a Canteen for servicemen staffed by Hollywood stars, was particularly dependent on celebrity women to perform emotional, physical, and cultural labor for the good of the nation's servicemen. At the Canteen, celebrity women regularly sacrificed their physical comfort and bodily autonomy, demonstrating how women's bodies were important for the nation: for the morale of men in uniform. As the country's elite worked for average American soldiers, its leaders claimed a democratic and patriotic reputation. Fan magazines also cited celebrity women's participation at the Canteen as clear examples of how American women might engage in wartime efforts in their own communities. Importantly, as the war wore on, publicity increasingly emphasized celebrity women's marriages, children, and homes along with their work at the Canteen. Fan magazines even offered romance and marriage as a reward for women's wartime sacrifices. Despite the Canteen's claim as a democratic space, this chapter also reveals the limits of democracy at both the Canteen and in the country; while the leaders of the Canteen claimed an integrated dance floor, fan magazines rarely acknowledged racial integration of the Canteen in their pages. Within fan culture, then, celebrity women volunteering at the Canteen became representative of an ideal American wartime and postwar woman who was deeply patriotic, devoted to her role within her private home, and almost exclusively white.

When the *Hollywood Canteen* film came out in 1944, it did little to dispel the limited image of an ideal American citizen as white, as it featured only one African American musical number in its two hours of runtime. Much like its sister films, *Thank Your Lucky Stars* and *Stage Door Canteen*, *Hollywood Canteen* offered an incredibly limited image of democracy for people of color and for women: it highlighted celebrity women's public patriotic physical wartime sacrifice while simultaneously foreshadowing the physical postwar sacrifice that the American government expected women to make. Through lead actress Joan Leslie (playing herself) who falls in love with average serviceman Slim, filmmakers of *Hollywood Canteen* demonstrated that marriage and motherhood was the most important patriotic sacrifice a woman could make for her country. From the performances of the ever-patriotic Andrews Sisters to Ida Lupino patiently letting Brooklyn woo her in butchered French, celebrity women at the fictional Hollywood Canteen portrayed ideal American women's sacrifice and efforts for the home front war effort.

By the time Edwin C. Johnson called Ingrid Bergman a "powerful influence for evil" in March 1950, movie fan culture was well-recognized among the general populace as a dominant cultural force capable of spreading multiple ideologies. There had been nearly four decades of film and fan culture that, likely in Johnson's mind, justified his claims that Bergman's behavior was so dangerous. If Bergman's scandal had happened in the 1920s, it might have been swallowed up as just another story of the moral degeneration of Hollywood. Thirty years later, however, it made international headlines for months, painting the previously saintly Bergman as a major social threat. Though Bergman herself was never a prominent figure at any of the sites examined, the sites played a role in Bergman's story. Throughout the course of her career, the publicity coverage about these sites increasingly emphasized women's responsibility to the public sphere, which helped drive the larger cultural expectation that women's true duty to her

country was to marry and raise a family. By the time Bergman left for Italy in April 1949, the divide between the public and private spheres had grown more solid. This solidification is what made Bergman's transgressions so upsetting to American leaders like Hays and Johnson.

After Edwin Johnson's denouncement, Ingrid Bergman did not return to the United States for ten years. Her first post-scandal American film role was in her Academy-Award winning performance in *Anastasia* (1956) (which had been filmed in Europe), but her first public appearance in the country was not until the Academy Awards ceremony in 1959 when she presented the award for Best Picture. By then, she had divorced Roberto Rossellini, married Lars Schmidt, a Swedish theatrical producer, made five films in Europe, and performed in a French adaptation of *Tea and Sympathy* on the Theatre de Paris stage. It seems that by the time Bergman took the Pantages Theater Stage in Hollywood for the 1959 awards ceremony, the strict gender public/private divide was once again beginning to dissolve. Audiences seemed to have welcomed her back with open arms.⁵⁴⁹

Part of American audiences' willingness to forgive Bergman her folly after a decade may have come from changing social expectations for women. Though a full-scale movement of women's rights was still a few years away, the fan magazines' retelling of Bergman's story no longer focused on how she deviated from an American womanhood based primarily in the home with a husband and children. Instead, they painted Bergman as a victim of circumstance, stuck in

⁵⁴⁹ Of course, not all Americans were glad to see Bergman back in the United States. Take, for example, two letters to gossip columnist Louella Parsons published in the same *Modern Screen* article in July 1959: "Helen, Doris and Gracie of Victoria, British Columbia: *Miss Bergman has made plain her contempt for Hollywood in many interviews in Europe. Why was she invited to be a special guest at Hollywood's greatest annual event?* Mrs. Elvira Bosson, Denver, Colorado: *Ingrid Bergman should have been nominated for INN OF THE SIXTH HAPPINESS. She is a great actress and her private life is her own. It was just plain Justice that Hollywood brought her from Europe to Highlight the Academy presentations...*" Louella Parsons, "Letter Box," *Modern Screen*, July 1959, 24.

a marriage that she found unfulfilling and controlling. After Bergman's divorce from Rossellini, fan magazines began to reify Bergman's image. Whereas ten years before, publicity had portrayed her as an inherently immoral person, by 1960, Bergman was remade into a good person who made a bad decision.⁵⁵⁰ This suggests that women in the late 1950s and early 1960s were challenging the strict gender expectations that social and cultural leaders had demanded in the 1940s and 1950s, just as American women, famous and non-famous alike, had been doing for decades.

For the next thirty years, Bergman continued to work in films and the theater in both the United States and Europe. It seems that America had forgiven her for her national betrayal. Then, on April 19, 1972, Senator Charles H. Percy of Chicago took to the Senate Floor to discuss Ingrid Bergman once again:

Mr. President, one of the world's loveliest, most gracious, and most talented women was made the victim of bitter attack in this Chamber 22 years ago. Today I would like to pay long-overdue tribute to Ingrid Bergman, a true star in every sense of the word. Recently, Miss Bergman's appearance at the Eisenhower Theater in the Kennedy Center, where she played the leading lady in G.B. Shaw's "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." During her stay here it was obvious that she has the overwhelming admiration and affection of the American people – both for her brilliance and sensitivity as an actress, and for her courage, poise, and warmth as an individual.

...

I know that across the land, millions of Americans would wish to join me in expressing their regrets for the personal and professional persecution that caused Ingrid Bergman to leave this country at the height of her career. And I believe they would also join me in expressing our overwhelming admiration, affection, and respect for her today. Miss Bergman is not only welcome in America. We are deeply honored by her visits here.⁵⁵¹

Within fifteen years of Edwin Johnson's condemnation of Ingrid Bergman, she was back on top. For American women who had seen an active promotion of women's return to the public sphere

⁵⁵⁰ See: "I not bring another child into the world only to give it pain: Ingrid's Fifth Child," *Modern Screen*, July 1959, pg. 61, 75-76.

⁵⁵¹ Senator Charles Percy, speaking on April 19, 1972, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 118, pt. 11: 13370.

by the American government and Hollywood during the middle of the century, Bergman's post-scandal public success may have offered even more liberating options for American women, white and Black, in the midst of a largescale social revolution.

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