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"Puerto Rico Libre!" (1936)
by Alice Neel

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“I paint my time using people as evidence.”

Alice Neel

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Arcadian Visions of the Past

Mark Rice

A couple of years ago, my wife gave me a book about my childhood hometown of Richland, Washington, a small desert city where I haven't lived for more than twenty years. The book, a pleasantly slim volume simply titled *Richland*, is one in a series of photographic histories of communities around the United States published by Arcadia Publishing. Like all of Arcadia's books, *Richland* is packed full of photographs, and its pages showed many of the buildings, neighborhoods, and desert landscapes that I had known intimately as a child but had mostly forgotten about after so many years. I was surprised, when I sat down to look at the book for the first time, to find myself filled with an intense nostalgia for a place I was always yearning to leave as a child. For hours that day I flipped through the pages, moving backward and forward, letting one visual cue after another spark memories from my childhood. I simply couldn't put the book down. When we went to visit my brother, he too was quickly charmed by what he saw and we embarked on a lengthy remembrance of our shared past.

The pleasure I derive from looking at *Richland* is shared by many thousands of people who page through similar books all around the United States, each of us caught up in one of the biggest success stories of the publishing industry in the recent years: Arcadia Publishing, specifically its signature "Images of America" series of books. In 2000, *Publishers Weekly* named Arcadia Publishing one of the nation's fastest growing publishers (Milliot, "Small"), and a 2005 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* called Arcadia Publishing the "biggest thing in the history book business these days" (Nolte). The attractively designed, sepia-toned covers are instantly recognizable in bookstores, gift shops, and libraries throughout the United States, bearing titles such as *Italians*

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in *Albuquerque* and *Around Cooperstown*. Drawing from local photographic archives, and written by community history-minded authors, the books are visual feasts that can be quite fun to look at, and they generally receive positive local press. Over 3000 titles have been published in the series since 1993; on average, there are sixty “Images of America” books for each state. With each book containing more than 200 images, it is easy to see how significant a resource for historical photographs “Images of America” has become.

Arcadia Publishing was founded in 1993 as the American subsidiary of UK-based Tempus Publishing. It was a good time for such a venture because, in the words of the historian Mike Wallace, the United States was “on a heritage binge” (x) in the 1990s. The so-called “culture wars” were in full swing then. After more than two decades of scholarship that challenged consensus models of American history and, instead, presented stories of struggle, conflict, and compromise that gave shape to modern America, a well-organized conservative backlash had emerged. On the one hand, debates roared about how the past should be represented in high school history curricula, museum exhibitions, and Hollywood films. On the other hand, for a great many Americans, the past was an uncomplicated place that they could vicariously experience through weekend visits to historical sites or antique stores. Corporate America was attuned to this trend, with articles bearing titles such as “Age, Sex, and Attitude Toward the Past as Predictors of Consumers’ Aesthetic Tastes for Cultural Products” (Holbrook and Schindler), and “Nostalgia and Consumption Preferences: Some Emerging Patterns of Consumer Tastes” (Holbrook) published in a variety of marketing journals.

A business venture tucked inside the heritage market that flourished at century’s end, Arcadia Publishing carefully shapes the story of its ascent to read like a straightforward story of capitalist success, and the company takes pride in its Horatio Alger-like struggle to achieve respectability. A 2003 promotional flyer celebrating the company’s 10th anniversary reads, in part:

As with most new ideas, we were told that it wouldn’t work, and we set out to prove that it would. As it turned out, the sales of Arcadia’s first titles outshone our wildest dreams. We presented the new sepia-colored photographic histories to bookstores and during that first holiday season we simply could not get books

to stores quickly enough. We have some very fond memories of delivering boxes on Christmas Eve, and some fonder memories of celebrating the fact that our hard work had paid off. (“10 Years”)

Presenting itself as a model of American individualism—pointing out that Arcadia started out as “a one-woman operation,” for example—the company assures that they “had no idea how the concept might be received” (“10 Years”), underscoring their participation in a risk-taking capitalistic venture that resonates so deeply with the American public, and that is often celebrated in the books the company publishes. That the series began as part of an international collaborative with a focus on local history goes unmentioned in this telling.

The company’s anniversary flyer seems to have been carefully worded so that the image the company promotes about itself is in sync with the image of the past found in its books. The use of the phrase “fond memories” in the context of looking back to the company’s first year echoes the nostalgic framing of the past found in the series, while references to the “holiday season,” delivering boxes on Christmas Eve, and the celebrations surrounding the success of that first year lend a sense of cheerful gift-giving and goodwill to the endeavor. This Norman Rockwell-like vision of a cottage industry neatly segues into a description of the powerhouse business enterprise that Arcadia has become: “Between 1993 and the new millennium, Arcadia Publishing saw many changes: we recruited, expanded, opened new offices, and added cutting-edge book production technologies[....]We now have four offices across the country and more than 2,000 titles in 10 different series” (“10 Years”). Currently headquartered in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, Arcadia Publishing was “one of South Carolina’s fastest growing companies in 2002” (“Arcadia Publishing Moves”). In its creation story, Arcadia Publishing reveals itself as a recapitulation of American industrial history.

While Arcadia’s commercial success is undeniable, the stated goal of “publishing a series declaring itself to offer the history of American communities” (“10 Years”) invites challenges to its use of historical photographs, as well as the company’s creation of a standardized and commodified vision of the past. There is something to admire in these books, which treat small towns as seriously as large cities, and in many cases may be the only historical treatment of a community. Moreover, by

allowing non-professional historians access to a publishing opportunity that is not a vanity press, Arcadia Publishing appears to operate in a uniquely democratic vein of historical inquiry. This apparent democratization calls to mind Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that Americans "prefer books which may be easily procured, quickly read, and which require no learned researches to understand. They ask for beauties self-proffered and easily enjoyed; above all, they must have what is unexpected and new" (Tocqueville). On each of these counts, the "Images of America" books hit the mark. Of course, de Tocqueville was somewhat skeptical about democracy, and a correspondingly healthy skepticism about Arcadia Publishing's visions of the past is warranted. My analysis draws from information provided by the company itself, as well as from the books that I have examined.

Ample evidence can be found in Arcadia Publishing's promotional materials that the "Images of America" series is best understood in the context of the recent heritage binge noted by Wallace. The company's website (www.arcadiapublishing.com) proclaims that its mission "is to make history accessible and meaningful through publishing books that celebrate and preserve the heritage of America's people and places."¹ As was previously suggested, for many Americans an "Images of America" book may be the only source readily available for studying their local history. As a result, Arcadia Publishing is able to play a significant role in shaping contemporary attitudes toward the past, particularly for those readers more interested in their own local history than in wider historical forces. Because an "Images of America" book may be the only historical study published for a given town, it can easily take on the status of the definitive treatment of the subject whether or not the author or publisher intended it to be so. This is quite a role to play for books whose central guiding questions are "What did the town look like in the past?" and "Who lived here?" ("10 Years").

Asking what a place looked like and who lived there can only go so far in terms of illuminating the role that historical events played in shaping contemporary social realities. As Wallace notes, the pasts encountered in heritage sites "remain segregated from the present. We rummage around in them for pleasure or profit, we appropriate them, we consume them, but we do not think it crucial to understand them in order to understand ourselves" (x). It seems to me that a similar dynamic is involved in reading an "Images of America" book. The books work well

as entertainment, but they often don't help readers truly understand how the past gave rise to current dynamics of a community. To give one brief example, in the book *Richland*, careful attention to the faces found in the photographs reveals that "who lived here"—a town of negligible size until its role in the Manhattan Project of World War Two—was almost exclusively Euro-Americans. Not until I moved away from Richland at the age of 18 did I realize how monochromatic my hometown was despite its presence in a part of the country with a large Hispanic population and despite considerably more diverse populations in neighboring towns. Much later, I learned that Richland was a "sundown town" as the sociologist James Loewen notes in his book of the same title. In the case of Richland, at least, "who lived here" was defined largely by who was—and who wasn't—*allowed* to live there, though the "Images of America" book doesn't reveal anything about that dimension of the town's history. Readers of *Richland* with no understanding of the city's past as a sundown town would have no way of understanding why only white people lived there, and it is quite possible that the town's racial homogeneity would go largely unnoticed by many readers as they paged through the book.

According to Katie Kellet, Arcadia Publishing's director of publishing, the company's goal is to create "a nostalgic view of what life was like in that community in days gone by" (Kellet). This stated attempt at nostalgic images of the past frequently lead Arcadia's books to ignore historical conflicts, further isolating the past from the present. One example from the book *Rochester Neighborhoods* can illustrate. Like many other American cities in the 1960s, Rochester, New York (where I now teach), was rocked by urban unrest, with the most serious uprising in 1964. In many of the Arcadia books on Rochester, the topic of urban unrest is not addressed at all. In *Rochester Neighborhoods*, the reality of this unrest is confined to a single photograph of National Guard members in riot gear with Gordon Howe, the Monroe County Manager, inspecting them. All of the men are white; all of them are smiling. The riots seem to present no serious threat to the established social order. In fact, the caption notes that the Guard members were not called into action. As a result, the only photograph that deals with the riot studiously avoids the riot. If this section of the book is meant to show the historical facts of Rochester in the 1960s, the authors could have chosen images that indicated the reasons behind the growing racial tensions in

the city or the impact of the riot on the community. However, because the stated goal of Arcadia's books is to provide a nostalgic look at the past, it makes sense that troubling times tend to be ignored or else are shown through comforting images that downplay darker chapters of the community's past. This is one of the more problematic dimensions of the "Images of America" books: the company conveys local history as an experience shared through comforting, nostalgia-driven books that frequently minimize social and economic tensions.

Arcadia Publishing's success is in many ways a measure of its tight control both over the design and production of the books and its skills in marketing them. By providing readers with historical photographs drawn from thousands of archives around the country, Arcadia is able to both create and then satisfy a market for its books. To answer the guiding questions about what a place looked like and who lived there in the past, the editors of Arcadia write: "[O]ne would need to search archives, to quiz the oldest residents of the town, or to seek snippets in books on other subjects. For anyone with a thirst for history or anyone who cared about where they and their ancestors had come from, there was simply not enough out there" ("10 Years"). What the company seems to mean is that there were not enough local history books available to answer these basic questions; that without such books it would take too much effort to seek out the answers to the questions that the company has decided are the most important to ask. Arcadia recognized that there could be a market for snapshot versions of the past that would be created by and for local residents less interested in understanding the complexities of the past than in reading fun, user-friendly picture histories. By developing efficient production and marketing systems, Arcadia was in a good position to become the well-oiled machine it is today.

Explaining the success of the "Images of America" series, Steve Strunsky, a writer for the *New York Times* writes: "Arcadia is neither a nonprofit nor a vanity press. It picks up all production costs, which are kept down by using a standard format, and pays its authors modest royalties. Because of each book's limited marketability, Arcadia relies on sheer numbers of titles, which can sell several thousand copies each, to add up to a worthwhile sales volume." The company declines to reveal average sales figures, noting that the number of titles sold is partly dependent on the size of the community that the book addresses. In recent years, however, the company has sought to expand from the

regional market to begin publishing books with a more national appeal (Milliot, "Arcadia," 115). Kate Everingham, the director of sales for Arcadia Publishing, states that the company sold more than 1.5 million books in 2006, and in the first four months of 2007 sold more than 500,000 copies of the 4,000 titles published from 1993-2006 and the 246 new titles introduced up to that point in 2007 (Everingham). Authors receive an 8% royalty on the \$19.99 price that is standard for the "Images of America" books (Dinan 53).

Strunsky's description of Arcadia's model for success is revealing. He notes the company's priorities of keeping down production costs and relying on large sales of low cost goods in order to maximize profits. Arcadia manages all dimensions of its product, from controlling issues of format and content to handling its own distribution and sales. Indeed, in some respects, Arcadia's business approach reflects what George Ritzer calls "the McDonaldization of society." Ritzer lists four key elements that define McDonaldization—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control through nonhuman technology (Ritzer 15-17)—all of which are evident in Arcadia's books. Like many franchise businesses in which consumers expect a recognizable, predictable product or service no matter which part of the country or world they are in, readers of Arcadia Publishing's books can expect a very familiar product, whether they are reading *The Historic Core of Los Angeles* or *Davenport: Jewel of the Mississippi*.

Arcadia's production process directly affects the content of the books it publishes. Because Arcadia Publishing places tight limits both on the content and the scope of the books it publishes, it narrows the range of options open to the books' authors of how best to address their subjects. Arcadia is able to reduce typesetting and printing costs by limiting text to brief introductions and image captions, using a standardized cover design, and mandating a strict limit of exactly 128 pages. The standardized format, page length, and cover design allow readers to quickly identify the series. Significantly, the same standardization also suggests that all of the books are of equal quality, despite the facts that not all of the books are written by trained historians, and that "Arcadia Publishing does not have an internal peer review or fact-checking process" (Kellet). By keeping the price of the books under 20 dollars and promoting the large number of images to be found inside, Arcadia promises readers an affordable and detailed tour through local

history. Finally, the technologies used to quickly, efficiently, and affordably print a large number of titles constrain the range of methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of local history.

Despite the huge numbers of titles and the geographic range of the series, both of which would suggest a need for diversity, standardization is the most salient features of the books. (Looking at a stack of Arcadia books on my desk, my six-year-old son quite sensibly asked me if the same person wrote all of them.) This standardization serves as a built-in marketing strategy for a company that until recently relied almost completely on local publicity and word-of-mouth to promote its books. Once a person knows what an “Images of America” book looks like, it becomes easy to spot them in town after town. Each book’s front cover has a single full-bleed sepia-toned photograph that can also be found inside the book (though without the sepia toning) and that frequently shows residents engaged in some kind of social activity such as dancing, attending a parade, or working. A red-bordered black Palladian banner at the top provides the book’s title, and a smaller banner at the bottom names the author. The cover photograph continues across the spine and onto the back cover, the remainder of which is black and contains a brief summary of the book, an image of the state with the location of the community marked with a red star, and the state flag. The book design seems intended to promote pride in local heritage. The sepia toning is a metonym for “the olden days,” which for many Americans is nostalgically recalled as a simpler era when community bonds were stronger than they are today. Whether or not intentional, the standardized theme continues within the pages of the “Images of America” series as different communities can come to look almost indistinguishable, with one street-car scene virtually interchangeable with the next.

The nostalgic nature of Arcadia’s visions of the past is reinforced by the other book series the company publishes (e.g. “Images of Baseball” and “Images of Rail”) as well as by the company’s website, which was awarded the 2006 “Best Publishing Website” award from the Web Marketing Association. When visitors first visit the website, they are greeted with slow violin music that sounds as though it had been lifted from a Ken Burns documentary. As the music plays, a company motto appears: “Within every photograph, in every American city, are stories to be told.” The words fade out, and a series of photographs appear in slide-show format. Each photograph is sepia-toned, and each appears to be

from the 1920s or earlier. The first image shows a group of travelers who have pulled to the side of the road on a hill overlooking a small town, gathered in and around their large convertible to gaze down at the pastoral scene below. The second looks down on a busy city street filled with Model T’s and trolley cars. The third is taken from the stands of a baseball game, the audience a sea of straw hats and white shirts. The fourth is an up-close view of a trolley car on a city street. The fifth shows a group of workers standing in front of a row of wagons that have just been made in the large warehouse behind them. The images provide a quick glimpse of what readers can expect to find in the “Images of America” books. From rural idyll to maturing town or city, the books show growth and change, and celebrate both hard work and leisure activities.

When the slide show is complete, the website allows viewers to click on a map of the United States in order to do a geographic search for titles in their area. Viewers can also choose which series of books they want to browse through. The website’s sepia toning is consistent throughout, and the words “heritage” and “nostalgia” are used frequently to frame the way Arcadia views the past. The different series are oriented to different market segments—railway buffs, sports enthusiasts, etc. Pleasant reveries of the past are promoted over scholarly rigor or methodologically grounded interpretations of historical photographs. Bucolic (indeed, Arcadian) scenes of supposedly simpler days of yore are showcased, accumulating into an extensive catalog of historical images that show a great deal, but actually reveal little about the past.

As noted earlier, Arcadia’s standardization of history continues on the insides of its books as well. Each book in the “Images of America” series is 128 pages in length and includes an introduction and multiple chapters organized by the author. As might be expected, the chapters frequently are organized spatially (particularly in books dealing with large or medium-sized cities), moving readers in and around the community, taking a look at the passage of time as it appeared in specific neighborhoods. Some authors maintain tight control on chronology along with their spatial organization, moving forward through time page-by-page, while other authors move back and forth more freely through time, preferring a thematic approach over a strict chronology. With either approach, however, the emphasis in the “Images of America” series is on appearance, with the implicit reasoning that to

know what a place looked like in the past is to know the history of that place. This spatial arrangement is a key feature of the books and reflects the “who” and “where” questions that guide the series. Arcadia places little emphasis on explaining how the past had any influence on the present; the books I’ve looked at frequently ignore how and why things happened in the past, and what the consequences were of political, economic, social, or cultural shifts. In this sense, the books are actually quite ahistorical, presenting the past as a series of things that happened seemingly in a vacuum.

The standardization of the books makes it easy for readers to assume that all of the history contained within is roughly co-equal in terms of chronology, significance of historical events, accuracy, and quality of writing, despite the very real variations in each of these. Every town, neighborhood, or topic is worth 128 pages of information, no matter what. Thus, Levittown, at slightly more than 50 years old, merits precisely as much attention as Santa Fe, which has been inhabited for several hundred years, and Gettysburg’s history is no more significant than that of Gilroy, California. It is tempting to view such an approach as a laudable democratization of history, but Arcadia’s reasons for such a radical leveling of the past stem largely from a desire to manage costs through standardization.

While it is true that any town can have multiple titles written about it, and one can argue that these titles build larger portraits of larger places, individual titles stand alone, and little effort is made to indicate that any book is only a partial story for a particular city and that readers should buy additional books for a more complete history. Indeed, because the format of the “Images of America” books provides both a spatial and a chronological tour of the subject, readers may be left with the impression that a coherent and complete story has been told in each book. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that a small town couldn’t have multiple titles written about it as well, just as long as there are enough photographs to fill the pages and enough authors willing to write the captions. The only limit to Arcadia’s books is the limit of the marketplace—as long as there are people willing to write them and buy them, new titles will continue to be published.

The format and the design of Arcadia Publishing’s books raise important questions about the way the company approaches history; the uses of historical photographs in its books deserve even closer scrutiny.

Upon first glance, historical photographs seem like natural paths into the past because, as the Lawrence Levine has written, every photograph “seems to be the quintessential objective document—reality in black and white—and thus makes a greater claim on our credulity than other types of documents” (269). Most people are inclined to believe what they see in photographs, particularly older photographs that record a time before computer software made image manipulation as simple as it is today. Given that “[m]ost of Arcadia’s customers are over 45 years old and somewhat less immersed in technology than younger Web surfers” (Dyszel), it is likely that the Arcadia’s main market readership is even more trusting in photographic images than younger readers would be. In addition, the captions that are written by the books’ authors help anchor meanings in the photographs and are offered as objective statements of fact and not as the subjective interpretations of the images by the authors, which they routinely are.

In some ways, the use of photographs in the “Images of America” series echoes the use of photographs in pictorial histories in the late nineteenth century as recounted by Gregory Pfitzer in his book, *Picturing the Past*. The criticisms leveled one hundred years ago remain appropriate today:

Given the potential for manipulation and artifice in the production of photographic images, it is no wonder that many questioned whether photos were really any more useful than pictorial illustrations had been in the pursuit of accuracy in the study of the past[....]At least with illustrations, the reader of pictorial works knew that “some interpretive recreation” was implied and that the illustrator of historical events acted self-consciously at some level as a representational artist. With the photograph, the assumption of objectivity gave observers the false security that they were in the presence of images that required no interpretation, when, in fact, the camera’s seeming “impartiality” imposed more analytic demand than less. (225)

Pfitzer goes on to note that the “uses and misuses of photographs remind us that, as with pictorial illustrations, the context for the transfer of visual information is crucial to an understanding of its meaning” (228), and critics in the late nineteenth century were quick to complain about

the too-casual use of photographs in historical texts. For much of the twentieth century, pictorial histories receded into the background, but they became prominent once again in the latter decades of the century. In the 1970s, photographic histories were published widely in the nostalgia ushered in by the nation's Bicentennial celebration, leading historians and cultural theorists to point out the challenges of using photographs as historical resources. In his own discussion of the "beguiling" nature of photographs, Levine points out that "[p]hotographic images, like statistics, do not lie, but like statistics the truths they communicate are elusive and incomplete" (262).

Writing about nineteenth-century photographs of the American West, the historian Martha Sandweiss outlines a range of theoretical and methodological concerns about the ways in which photographs are put to use to illustrate, describe, or understand the past. Echoing Levine's observation about the inherent subjectivity of historical photographs, Sandweiss notes that historical photographs are "deeply selective sorts of evidence," and points out that, in addition to the photographers' selection, many important dimensions of the past, including "economic forces, political ideologies, [and] long-term weather cycles are not easily photographed" (327). Again, such dimensions of the past are largely absent in Arcadia's books, confined—at most—to brief asides in captions of photographs that show something else. Sandweiss writes that photographs "can evoke a sense of familiarity that belies the essential unknowability of the past" (10) an apt description of the problematic nature of Arcadia Publishing's reliance upon historical photographs.

Sandweiss argues that in addition to considering the subject found in photographs, historians have a responsibility to approach historical photographs both *in* history and *through* history. That is, historians need to make an effort to understand "the circumstances of [a photograph's] making, the photographer's intent, the public function of the image, [and] the ways in which it was received and understood by contemporary audiences." At the same time, historians need to pay attention to the life of a photograph once divorced from its original context as it "might have moved into archives or attics, museums or scrapbooks, and the ways in which it has been reinterpreted over time" (9). In the "Images of America" books I have examined, there is little apparent effort to understand photographs either *in* or *through* history. In a related vein, important issues about a community's past are necessarily left unexam-

ined if no photographs show them. Moreover, photographs are routinely presented as easily understood documents that reveal some essential truth about the subject without much more than a brief caption of context.

Two examples from three of the books published about Rochester will serve to illustrate how Arcadia's visions of the past play out in one particular place. In many ways, Rochester is a fairly typical medium-sized northeastern city. Its economy boomed through the late nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century but has since been in decline. Its population has also shrunk, with workers moving into successively farther suburbs or to the newer Sunbelt cities. The declining fortunes of cities like Rochester can easily provoke nostalgia for a past seen either as more prosperous or more unified, and the "Images of America" books published about Rochester seem intended to strike these "mystic chords of memory." The titles about the city include *Rochester's Downtown*, *Rochester's Dutchtown*, *Rochester's South Wedge*, *Rochester's Lakeside Resorts and Amusement Parks*, *Rochester Labor and Leisure*, *Rochester's Leaders and their Legacies*, and *Rochester's Historic East Avenue District*.

The photographer Allan Sekula states, "the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the *possibility* of meaning" (Sekula 7). Indeed, in the "Images of America" books, photographs can talk on a multitude of meanings, depending on how they are used. In more than one instance, an individual photograph appears in multiple books written about Rochester, with different authors putting the photograph to different uses. For example, in *Rochester Labor and Leisure*, Donovan Shilling captions a photograph of a row of riverfront buildings: "Perched above the Genesee River is this row of venerable Front Street shops. One shop owned by Archie Lipsky Poultry, at 60 Front Street, had the advantage of the river for disposing of chicken feathers. The Reynolds Arcade and the former Genesee Community Bank Building are in the background" (24). The book doesn't specifically say that the poultry shop is included in the row of buildings shown in the photograph, or whether the shop was even in business when the photograph was taken, but that kind of historical veracity is not deemed necessary. Instead, the photograph is used to visually build an anecdote about the specific activity of a single business owner. It may be that Shilling wanted to recount the anecdote about Archie Lipsky and had to find an image to anchor the story. As it

is presented, there is no clear connection between Shilling's text and what the image actually shows.

Shirley Cox Husted and Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck use the same photograph in a slightly cropped format for a very different purpose in *Rochester Neighborhoods*: "Riverside tenements demonstrate the constant need for better housing for the poor. As new buildings are erected, areas with older structures eventually become low-rent areas where absentee landlords neglect to improve their deteriorating property" (37). Their approach is more sociological than is Shilling's, and their caption hints at a historically grounded struggle between tenants and landlords for acceptable housing at affordable prices. Nevertheless, Husted and Rosenberg-Naparsteck are constrained from diving very far into this analysis. For one, the emphasis on heritage over historical analysis routinely seen in the "Images of America" books may present obstacles for authors who want to spend some of the limited page length on topics that their readers might find troubling. The formal demands of the book add another obstacle to attempts to deepen analysis. With text largely limited to the captions of photographs, authors of the "Images of America" books are frequently constrained to raising a topic, showing it briefly, and then moving on to another topic.

Reading these two Rochester captions alongside each other, the photograph's meaning becomes confused. Neither book makes a clear effort to ground the image in its original context, and, as the art historian Estelle Jussim reminds us: "Without context—the context of other photographs, the context of the economic and political realities of the time, plus *the context in verbal terms* of how the image related to those realities—there can be little chance that a single picture can convey[...]its intended meaning" (Jussim 110). Is the photograph used in these two books one of thriving—albeit precariously perched—commercial buildings, or is it a photograph of dilapidated housing? Is the photograph quaint or is it troubling? Are the buildings in the background to be seen only as names, or are we to read them as evidence of patterns of urban growth and decline? The answer, of course, depends on which Arcadia book one reads. There are still other, equally important, questions that go answered. Who took the photograph? When was it taken? Why was it taken?

Even if it is impossible to trace the original context of this photograph, there are established methodological approaches to the study of

historical photographs of buildings and street scenes, as well as to professional portraits, to newspaper photographs, and to the amateur snapshots that make up the bulk of the "Images of America" books. In his 1984 study of urban photography, *Silver Cities*, Peter Bacon Hales provides a useful framework for understanding and interpreting many of the kinds of historical photographs found in the pages of the "Images of America" series. Hales points out that photographers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "defined and ordered their contemporaries' understanding of the urban environment, its perils and potentials. Their vision of the city became the heritage of modern America." In order to accurately understand historical photographs it is important to understand these photographers because, as Hales points out, they "were cultural messengers, and their messages both reflected and defined how Americans saw their cities" (3).

Recognizing that all photographs are the result of tensions and negotiations between their makers and their intended audience, that different kinds of photographs are made for different reasons, and that all photographs are artifacts of the technological capabilities of their day, it becomes clear that the photographs used in the "Images of America" books are far from being the objective, transparent windows into the past that they claim. In the time they were made; in the time when they found their ways into the archives from which the authors drew them; and in their current use in the books, the photographs remain embedded in an ongoing struggle for the power to represent, and, as a result, to shape Americans' understanding of the past. Hales goes on to argue that the "urban photographic tradition in America had been born out of a tremendous cultural need—the need for an essentially agrarian republic to come to terms with the process of industrialization and urbanization which was rapidly engulfing it and threatening the myths which sustained and defined the culture" (280). Significantly, it is this same transition from rural to urban that Arcadia Publishing uses in its website, as I described above. Far from presenting such a shift as full of cultural uncertainty, in the "Images of America" books that period of American history is now comfortably remote and useful for a marketable nostalgia.

By treating historical photographs as objective statements about the past and that they elucidate in their brief captions, the authors of the "Images of America" books have wide latitude in influencing how readers will understand the images. Authors also anchor how they want the

photographs to be understood by the ways in which they sequence the photographs. For example, Shilling precedes the photograph discussed above with an image that shows the façade of a Front Street business and a caption noting that the street “had enormous character,” and he follows the photograph with another façade view from Front Street. In his book, then, the photograph comes to be understood as something like a topographical view, a simple recording of an urban block, Front Street seen from behind and from the front, a collection of businesses that Shilling colors with his captions.

Husted and Rosenberg-Naparsteck also use the photograph as an indicator of the city’s riverfront heritage, but with more emphasis on the social impact of urban change. In *Rochester Neighborhoods*, the image that precedes the one in question is a much more recent photograph of a tour boat coursing through the Genesee River. The subsequent photograph is of another row of dilapidated buildings in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Similar to the language used in the caption for the Front Street photograph, the authors note: “Buildings near the canal were among Rochester’s first buildings and were therefore the first to deteriorate after the canal was relocated.” Together, then, the sequence of photographs and their accompanying captions tells readers that Rochester’s early history was tied to the Genesee River and the Erie Canal, that the older districts deteriorated because the canal was relocated, and that in recent years the main role of the river and canal is to serve tourism. That tourism has become one of the ways that civic leaders have tried to stanch the recent economic bleeding of industrial cities like Rochester goes unexplored here.

As this analysis of the use of a single photograph in two books makes clear, historical photographs in the “Images of America” books serve primarily as visual examples or evidence for author-chosen meaning. On the surface this is not surprising, given both the readiness with which many people embrace the notion of photographic objectivity, and the implicit trust that forms the basis of the relationship between the author and her or his readers. In a supposedly historical context, however, the result is the weakening of the photograph’s usefulness for achieving a richer understanding of the past. After all, if a photograph can mean whatever the author wants it to mean, then it doesn’t really mean anything at all. With this in mind, it becomes evident that despite marketing the books as pictorial histories, the information that gives any

real historical meaning at all in the “Images of America” books is primarily textual, relegating the photographs to illustrations of the points that the authors make in their captions. The captions are necessarily short, however, leaving the authors in a bind: neither the images nor the text allow them to go into significant historical analysis because both the images and their captions are largely “snapshot” descriptions.

Arcadia Publishing tries to downplay this tension between photograph and text in its promotional and marketing materials. As one of the company’s flyers states: “Each book is complete with over 200 rare, vintage images from the early days of photography chronicling a particular city, town or region. Each photograph is accompanied by in-depth historical information” (“Images of America”). The use of the words “rare” and “vintage” here suggests a precious quality to the images and, by extension, to the books themselves; this description, however, is a bit misleading, and is used primarily as a marketing device. As seen in the photograph of the tour boat in the Genesee River, recently made photographs are routinely printed alongside older photographs, sometimes juxtaposed to make a rhetorical statement about the changes found in the community, and sometimes shown in a manner demonstrating continuity and enduring community values. For example, *Richland* includes many photographs of high school activities from the 1970s, and shows some individuals that I recall from my own childhood. The book even includes photographs from as recent as 2001—hardly the stuff of “rare, vintage images.” The books on Rochester similarly include very recent photographs alongside the much older photographs.

Reading Arcadia’s books soon reveals that the promotional claim of “in-depth historical information” accompanying each photograph exaggerates the rigorousness of the historical methodology employed by some of the authors. As noted previously, Arcadia Publishing does not fact-check the books it publishes, nor does it engage in an external peer-review process, as is done with scholarly history books. As seen in the photograph used both by Shilling and by Husted and Rosenberg-Naparsteck, the anecdotal approach taken by many authors frequently turns to speculation that, while perhaps lively and enjoyable, has little to do with historical analysis. To give another example, Shilling writes about a photograph of a group of young women posed by an early model automobile in his book *Rochester’s Lakeside Resorts and Amusement Parks*: “The dancing, partying, and great bands attracted many of the area’s

lasses to the Elmheart's dance hall or the ballroom of the Manitou Beach Park. This trio of young ladies can't wait for the evening festivities to begin. Perhaps they each found some male companion who enjoyed ukulele music" (49). Shilling's caption is pure speculation and has no grounding in the photograph itself beyond what Shilling has projected onto it. Employing a voice that seems intended to spark pleasant recollections of supposedly more innocent times, Shilling presumes to know what the women are thinking and feeling. However, as Martha Sandweiss reminds us: "It is easy to imagine that we understand the expression on a subject's face[...]And yet, of course, we cannot. The instinctive empathy we can feel for photographic subjects can push us to assume more than we can truly know about the actual subject of the image" (6). Shilling cannot even say for certain where the photograph was made, but he uses it to represent a particular kind of place and assigns the women a particular role to play in the evening he has imagined. Shilling's breezy captions may make for fun imaginings, but they hardly qualify as history.

These are important matters despite the temptation to smile and shrug at the laxness of this kind of history. Arcadia Publishing has an increasingly prominent role in shaping the way that many Americans understand the histories of their local communities. The company's steady growth suggests that Arcadia will not be slowing down as a publishing phenomenon anytime soon. Indeed, it may give rise to competitors following similar approaches to the past, further complicating the roles played by archival photographs in contemporary pictorial histories. Moreover, the notion of "archival photographs" may become increasingly complicated as a result of Arcadia's success. While the "Images of America" books draw from existing archives of photographs, the series is becoming an archive in its own right. That is, while each book in the series is its own product, the uniformity of the books and the expansiveness of the title list make it likely that students and historians will turn to the books as ready sources of historical photographs for further study. Indeed, Arcadia Publishing may well become one of the largest archives of historical photographs in the United States.

The historian, Robin Kelsey, writes: "The producers of archives have [...] claimed and defended the completeness, authenticity, and reliability of their holdings" (5). While Arcadia Publishing has not yet reached a level of "completeness" (in terms of amassing photographic histories of every community in the United States), their business model leans in that

direction. Moreover, the company already suggests that their books offer authenticity and reliability. This is a problem. As the artist and writer, Shawn Michelle Smith, writes:

Even as it purports simply to supply evidence, or to document historical occurrences, the archive maps the cultural terrain it claims to describe. In other words, the archive constructs the knowledge it would seem only to register or make evident [...] Once an archive is compiled, it makes a claim on history; it exists as a record of the past. The archive is a vehicle of memory, and as it becomes the trace on which an historical record is founded, it makes some people, places, things, ideas, and events visible, while relegating others, through its signifying absences, to invisibility. (7-8)

From this, we can see that while the "Images of America" books can be quite successful in evoking pleasant ideas of the past, Arcadia Publishing limits the range of historical understanding available to the books' readers. As a result, the "Images of America" books may, in fact, erase the past as much as they illuminate it.

Note

1. Since writing the above in 2006, the company's website has changed.

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The Columbia Journal of American Studies

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Blue Collar, White Hat: The Working-Class Origins of Celebrity Superstar Jacques Pépin

Grace Russo Bullaro

The late guru of French cuisine, Julia Child, has called Jacques Pépin the best chef in America and he is routinely referred to as a celebrity super-star. Chef, author, television personality, painter, educator, he is the author of more than two dozen cookbooks, has been the host of numerous television cooking shows, for which he has won an Emmy, and is the Dean of Special Programs at the French Culinary Institute. These are only a few of his accomplishments. How did Jacques Pépin, visiting America on a lark in 1959, at the age of twenty four, and for what he erroneously thought would be merely a short time, end up with such an illustrious career? And what does his ascent tell us about achieving success in the United States? Furthermore, how does the course of his career illustrate the vicissitudes that have occurred in the world of cuisine and the image of the chef? Jacques Pépin, unlike many other celebrity chefs, is informed and articulate about the past and present of the food industry. In this interview he offers many fascinating insights that answer these questions and invite us to contemplate the central role that the world of food plays in our individual and collective lives. Indeed, the interview illuminates how the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the food industry reflect the entire philosophy of a culture.

We have explored issues related to the food industry and its many facets in interviews with television chefs Lidia Bastianich and Daisy Martinez that have appeared in previous issues of the *Columbia Journal of American Studies* and its online version.¹ With Ms. Bastianich we

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examined the notion of geography and topography (i.e. *terroir*) and the literal and metaphorical role they play in the cultivation of food and the expression of cultural identity. We scrutinized some of the ways that globalization has led to the reevaluation, indeed redefinition is not too strong a word here, of fundamental concepts such as culture and cultural purity. We explored the manner in which a transplanted national cuisine, when imported by immigrants, gives birth to a hyphenated avatar such as Italian-American cuisine.

In the interview with Daisy Martinez, we focused on the Latino community. Once again we probed the boundaries of cultural identity by asking our chef and educator, What constitutes Latino identity in view of the enormous diversity that the term subsumes? How do a Chilean, a Brazilian and a Cuban, for example, embody Latino culture despite their disparate customs and practices? What are the common denominators that allow us to speak of a Pan-Latino identity? Concomitantly, we addressed the important issue of socio-economic uplift and other demographic trends in the Latino community and the impact that they have had on the food and restaurant industries.

Building on this previous work, in the present interview with Jacques Pépin we focus on the role and the image of the chef and how they have evolved in the last few decades. Thanks in great part to the emergence of the FoodTV Network, which has without doubt revolutionized the food industry, the chef, once considered little more than a blue-collar worker chained to the stove, has now become a figure of glamour and excitement. It is not an exaggeration to say, since the comparison is often made in the media, that the chef is today's rock star. This is borne out by the enrollment figures in culinary schools such as the French Culinary Institute and the Institute of Culinary Education, where students are willing to pay very large sums in order to pursue a career that they hope will confer on them the coveted title of chef. Jacques Pépin provides an intriguing perspective on the history of this evolution, remembering a time when the life of a young boy apprenticed to a chef was little better than that of an undergraduate undergoing a brutal hazing. The two different systems that Chef Pépin discusses, the traditional French system of *apprentissage* and the current American system of a one year course of study at a culinary institute, illustrate not just two ways of learning the trade, but they offer an incisive commentary on two philosophies regarding education,

the work ethic, our aspirations and our definitions of success—in short, a snapshot of two societies and two time periods.

Equally intriguing are Jacques's views on today's American consumer and how to reconcile his or her gustatory and aesthetic demands with the chef's desire to achieve personal expression and financial success. And he has some excellent advice for young chefs attempting to break into the trade and aiming for that success. Furthermore, having personally known some of the greatest chefs of the last fifty years, Jacques Pépin, the man who was personal chef to French President Charles De Gaulle in the past and who presently is in a small and influential circle of international celebrity chefs, is in a unique position to identify and comment on the qualities that set apart the great chef from the mere celebrity, and to report on the status of French cuisine in America today.

Interview

Grace Russo Bullaro: I know that you prefer to do interviews cold, without looking at the questions. Is there a particular reason?

Jacques Pépin: It's not that I am against it. It's just that I believe that a discussion of food in general, is not such an important thing that you have to be extremely well prepared. So, whatever comes out, comes out; what emerges is your feeling about the world of food in general. If I was preparing for a special exam, I would have to do some research but this is not the case here. Doing the interview cold makes for more spontaneity. It is more natural to do it this way.

GRB: You said something very interesting right now, that food, "is not so important." I myself get the impression from watching TV shows currently, that food has never been of greater interest to people. It seems that they can't get enough of the shows, the entertainment, the products. Everything related to food has become a major industry. How do you feel about this current trend?

JP: It is true, there is a paradox in what I said because the food industry represents over \$800 billion dollars now. Everyone is involved and

there is no aspect of social science that cannot be filtered through food whether it is anthropology or history, sociology, and so forth. So it is a very important subject in that context, but what I was alluding to is that I do not put the greatest chefs on a par with the greatest painters. I think we chefs are artisans to start with. Sure, some of us have some talent, some others like Thomas Keller or Jean-Georges Vongerichten have a great deal of talent, but still in my book this doesn't equate to being a great painter like Picasso. It is fine to have talent, but we are still soup merchants. That being said, it is true that the world of food is not only amazingly complex but also all-encompassing in the sense that everyone is involved in it in one way or the other.

GRB: Yet, I think it would be fair to say that cuisine has never held such a respected place in our culture. Can you tell us the story of your Ph.D. dissertation and why you abandoned it? I believe that the anecdote would illuminate the ways in which the social climate of those days was different from today's—especially in regard to the respect that cuisine commands today.

JP: Certainly. I left school when I was 13 in France, after I had passed the Certificate of Primary Studies. To be fair, I should add that it was simply of my own free will—my brother is an engineer and, in fact, I was doing very well in school. In France if you do well in school, you can go on all the way to university without paying for anything, so if I had wanted to, I could have continued my studies. I just want to make it clear that this was not a decision that my mother imposed on me; it was what I wanted to do. While I was still attending school, I was also learning the restaurant trade by helping my mother in the first of the restaurants that she would eventually own. This one was a bistro that she opened shortly after the end of World War II, in a little town called Neyron, about ten miles away from where I was born, Bourg-en-Bresse near Lyon. By 1949, when I was fourteen years old, my parents and I realized that if I was to make a career out of cooking, I would have to become an apprentice in a big restaurant. So, instead of staying in school, I went into an apprenticeship at the Grand Hôtel de l'Europe in Bourg-en-Bresse. However, in those days the chef was not a respected or prestigious figure, as he is today, and certainly not on a high social level. I furthered my cooking knowledge in Paris, working my

way up the scale of restaurants by following up one *apprentissage* with another, each time learning more; and even more significantly, being exposed to the styles of different chefs. At the same time I pursued the studies that I had abandoned for seven years in an “unofficial” manner by attending the Comédie Française and the Opéra Comique. Back then this kind of entertainment was the cheapest around, cheaper even than the movies because the government supported them. This meant that I was acquiring a kind of cultural education too, the complete repertoire of the French theater. When I came to America, I was eager to learn English and so I entered the Columbia University English for Foreign Students program in the School of General Studies. I did this for a couple of years and then eventually got a general equivalency diploma (GED), which was necessary since I had never finished high school. Eventually, I earned a B.A. from Columbia University and later I was accepted in the graduate school to work towards a Ph.D. (with an M.A. thesis that I wrote on Voltaire along the way). I finished most of the requirements for a Ph.D., but at that point I owned “La Potagérie,” a restaurant in New York City, and I knew that the degree would be simply for my own gratification. I had already made the decision that I was not going to change the direction of my life, which was cooking. Yet, being more educated put an end to my complex about the lack of it, and psychologically it was very important to me. In addition, I agreed with Oscar Wilde who said, “Having an education prevents you from falling into the deadly trap of taking educated people so seriously.” Food being my world, I proposed to write my dissertation on the subject of food in French literature. I was fascinated by the presence and role of food in many works of literature. For example, Ronsard, one of the poets of La Pléiade wrote an *Apology of Field Salad*. I would have traced these references all the way to the twentieth century. Let’s not forget the centrality of Marcel Proust’s *madeleine* in *Remembrance of Things Past!* So what I had in mind was a survey of French cooking, but in the context of civilization, talking about the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot, the Chevalier de Jaucourt, Voltaire, Balzac and Zola, and so on. When I discussed my plan with the French department, they said, “Are you crazy?” So I gave up and maybe I shouldn’t have because God knows, plenty has been written about the subject subsequently.



Grace Bullaro with Jacques Pépin.

GRB: You were really ahead of your time. Today, writing about food and its many connections to civilization is a significant part of cultural studies. What year was that?

JP: It must have been in or around 1970. Ironically enough, I later taught at Wesleyan University in the summer program and someone from Boston University invited me to teach in a new program in Culinary Education that they were starting there. That was the time when my daughter Claudine was about to go to college, so when they asked me to teach at Boston University on a regular basis, we made a deal—and that’s how Claudine went to college! I taught at BU for the school of hospitality (and still teach there), the students graduated with a B.S. in Hotel Management. Eventually however, about twenty years ago, Julia Child and I managed to convince Silber, the President of Boston University at that time, to create a program at BU, a Master of Liberal Arts with a concentration in Gastronomy. To my knowledge, Boston University is the only college that offers this degree—we’ve come a long way from the time when it was considered trivial and frivolous to write a dissertation connecting food and literature. Now

even in courses in the medical field they talk about food, tracing its path—from the physiological point of view—from entry to exit. In the department of art, they talk about food and the Impressionist period, from the beautiful white asparagus in Manet to the selection of fruit in the still lifes of Monet and Van Gogh. Almost all topics can now be filtered through food and that makes it very interesting. But anyway, I never wrote my dissertation.

GRB: You still have time, and as we have been saying, now food is a hot topic even in academia.

JP: I've thought of that. Actually, at Boston University they said that I could write it if I wanted to.

GRB: You have known some of the greatest chefs of the past half century. In what ways do you think the chef's world is different today?

JP: That's an interesting question, Grace. We can really say that in the old days the chef did not come out of the kitchen; didn't want to come out of the kitchen; didn't know he could come out of the kitchen. This was true probably up to the time that Paul Bocuse gave birth to what came to be known as the *Nouvelle Cuisine*, in the 1960s. After that, the cook started to make appearances in the dining room. I went into that business in 1949, when I left home. Well, it certainly was not "to become famous," because that possibility did not exist. Up to thirty years ago any good mother would have wanted her child to be a lawyer, an architect, a professor, but not a cook. Now the cooks are "geniuses." What has led to this change? I am not complaining. I am part of the trip, and I have been part of it and it is great. But I do not take it too seriously.

GRB: How would you compare the training that today's aspiring chefs get to the practices of your generation?

JP: It is totally different now because when I was an apprentice, we stole the trade, we didn't learn it. The chef never told you anything. You asked, "What is this? What is that sauce?" He would have told you "*c'est une sauce nonote*," which means nothing at all. They never gave

anything away, and then all of a sudden after a year, they told you: "Ok, tomorrow you start at the stove," and you said, "Who me?" Yet somehow through some type of osmosis you had learned and you started working the tricks of the trade. As I said, you stole more than you learned. They made it difficult for the apprentice and certainly after three years of this "old school" type apprenticeship, I would have never been able to do what the students do here after six months of courses. However, I was much faster with a knife and other technical skills because of the endless repetition I had performed. Here at the French Culinary Institute, the students pay a fortune, so we cater to them, we show them, we explain to them. Usually they are here to start a second career, the average age of our students falls between 25 to 40. Another factor to consider is that today's young American chefs, whether young or not-so-young, usually start much later than we did and because they are also more educated, they learn much faster. Because they bring a decent education with them, they are learning in two ways, both in a hands-on approach and in acquiring book knowledge about the world of food and chefs. On the other hand, on the technical level we were more complete because as an apprentice not only was there no pay, but you were expected to go on repeating and repeating the same skills, trying to incorporate or absorb the techniques which then became second nature. For me, this is still a very important part of the trade. This is why in my television shows I can be cooking and at the same time talking about ingredients, texture, color, and so on. When you have internalized technique the way we did, you never have to think about your skills anymore. Let me give you an example of the consequences of weak skills: you see a beginner cutting an onion, and you ask him a simple question like, "do you have any salt?" He gets totally disoriented because he is so focused on performing just that basic task. As long as you are like this, you cannot go forward in your career. Whether it is in painting, in cooking, in cabinet making or any other craft, you have to become a good technician and repeat and repeat until you reach the point where you have so internalized those skills that they become an unconscious part of you. Likewise in painting, which as you know is another one of my passions, you can work three years in a studio and learn how to mix yellow and blue to make green, and what you can do with a spatula or with your finger or with a brush; you can know everything about the law of perspective, and

after three years you start to go outside and you do one painting after another. Would that make you an artist? Not really. You are a good technician. However, if you do have talent, whether that is as a chef or as an artist, you now have the means in your hand to bring that talent to fruition. As an additional illustration, let's just say that a chef who is talented but not a technician would be able to produce great food, but not consistently. It would take this chef twice as much time as it would take me; he or she would have more food left over and—wouldn't be able to reproduce it on a scale required in a restaurant setting.

GRB: Is one form of “apprenticeship” more crucial than the other in forming a chef? I see a lot of celebrities on the FoodTV Network who seem to have little more than rudimentary skills.

JP: And yet their food might be better than mine in the plate and this is the proof of the pudding.

GRB: Are you referring to their creativity?

JP: Well, creativity, yes. I know a lot of chefs who are technically very good. They can run an efficient and cost-effective kitchen; their food comes out pretty good, but it will never be very good. It stops at the level of technical virtuosity. Conversely, I know people who are relatively not great technicians but have a great sense of taste. Ultimately, great chefs like Jean-Georges, Daniel Boulud, or Thomas Keller would be both good technicians as well as have natural talent in the sense of taste. They bring a great deal of their own being to their cooking. In the end, the way you judge food is more a narcissistic reflection of yourself than of the food. If I were to go to the ten restaurants in the world or in New York, which have been pronounced by critics to be the best in terms of service, food, atmosphere or experience, I would probably pick out four as being extraordinary, another four as being very good, and a couple that I'd say: “I don't get it.” What I am saying is that the four that I'd pick as the best would be so merely because they happen to coincide with my sense of taste, my sense of esthetic, my sense of food in general; so it is a narcissistic reflection of my own taste. I cannot escape that to a certain extent. I remember that one Christmas I was working with André Soltner, who is one of the

greatest chefs in existence, in upstate New York where we both had a house. For Christmas, he brought a pâté of pheasant and I made a pâté of rabbit. His pâté was perfect. It was moist, it was creamy, perfect! But for me it needed seasoning, it needed salt. That was not a mistake. Conversely, I served my pâté of rabbit and he told me, “It's good but I think you marinated it a bit too long, it is a bit strong.” Yet for me it was perfect. You have to realize that even if you want to be objective, you still cannot escape yourself.

GRB: So what would it take to be complete as a chef?

JP: I know people that are very good technicians and can work very fast, that have a little bit of talent, and will do very well because they are hard workers, they are always on time, they are good with the employees. They also have many others qualities like cleanliness. These all go into making up a whole persona of a chef if you like. I know other people that are very talented but impossible to work with. Working at the stove in a big restaurant requires a team effort. What you might be saying is good, but you cannot be yelling it. That does not encourage a good atmosphere in the kitchen. There is no formula by which you say: you need to have so much of this, so much of that. It is a mixture of all those things. Then too, it depends on where you are. For example, the market in N.Y. or in Chicago is going to be much harder than in a small town where you do not have too much competition. In the big cities chefs are kind of forced by the public to be more inventive, to be more creative, and to be more different for the sake of being different. This is a thing that has become especially noticeable in the last few years.

GRB: Do you mean that the restaurant scene is very unstable and volatile in the States?

JP: Yes, that's exactly it. Let me illustrate a contrast: When I was a child, my father took me to Fernand Point in Vienne, one of the three Michelin star restaurants of France. This was very well known for several dishes but one of them was the *fois gras en brioche*. My father had had it when he was young, and I took my daughter twenty years later to have the same *fois gras* specialty. These dishes remain forever on

the menu because they become classics; the same for the salmon in sorrel sauce at *Troisgros*. Today in the States things are different because at restaurants like Thomas Keller's or Jean-Georges', the menu must change all the time. They would be criticized if they didn't change their menu. For the mighty god of novelty, you have to change and one can become breathless with that type of thing. Especially with young chefs who want to be different, to shock, to be esoteric, to do something that people have never seen before. If you can find a special ingredient that no one has heard of, that is often what the public is looking for.

GRB: What advice would you give a young chef?

JP: I'd say that young chefs put too much on the plate. You have three, four, six, seven types of vegetables, two type of oils, different types of herbs, and that towering presentation! When I go to dinner with food critics or food writers (I also write about food), often they will ask me, because I'm a chef, "what is that exactly? Is it good?" "Yes," I say, "it is very good, but I have no idea what it is. I think it is a filet of rabbit or a breast of whatever." So I tell a young chef that ideally you should be able to recognize the ingredients in a dish even blindfolded. You should be able to tell me, "this is chicken, it has mushrooms in it. I think it is deglazed with wine," etc. That would mean that the flavors in the dish are "clean" and honest. The dish has integrity. That being said, there are two approaches to food. The first time I came to America and the first time I tasted apple pie, I thought it was utterly disgusting. I said: "Gee, what did they put in the apple? They put in cinnamon, mace, nutmeg; there is no more taste of the apple." The apple tart in France is flavored with just butter and sugar, so you taste the apple foremost. Throughout my years, especially while I was working at Howard Johnson's, I have learned to like a standard American apple pie but still, it is the combination of apple, butter, cinnamon and the other spices that creates a taste all its own. So we either go back to Brillat-Savarin and Curnowsky, who rightly said that things should have the taste of what they are, or you can conceive of food more as a symphony, an assemblage of ingredients that blend to create a new sensation. Both can work well as long as it is not a question of adding something to the plate simply for the sake of seeing it on the plate. I believe that as you get older, whether we're talking about cooking or any other art,

you tend to take away from the plate rather than to add to it. Eventually, you get to the essential and you are left with a ripe tomato and a good olive oil on top and that's it. You do not want to fool around with anything else anymore. It reflects the human longing to reach the essential.

GRB: Are you becoming a purist?

JP: Yes. I do not know if the word is purist but certainly to do away with the embellishment, with all of the marginal things which are relatively unimportant and just go to the essence of something.

GRB: What about the saying that we eat with our eyes before we eat with our mouths? You do not believe in that?

JP: Yes, I know the saying, but it is deplorable when two thirds of the world is dying of hunger if we need to titillate your palate and excite your eyes so that you will consent to swallow whatever there is on your plate. When more than half of the world is suffering from famine, then morally there is something disquieting about placing such an emphasis on presentation. It is ridiculous. Even though I am interested in art, maybe it is paradoxical, but I have never really emphasized the presentation very much and I get crazy when I see a chef cleaning that plate around and around while it is getting colder and colder. I say, "Send that plate out! I do not care about that drop of something on the side." The essence of food is in the taste as the essence of painting is in the viewing, as the essence of music is in the hearing. Perhaps in the creation of pastry and chocolate you can decorate more; we can afford to decorate more without compromising the taste. However, for hot food it is more important to put it on the plate and to serve it as fast as you can.

GRB: In your autobiography, you describe the kitchens that you knew as: "no recipes, no books, no democracy." I've already asked you about the lack of recipes and books in those kitchens where you served your apprenticeship, but let me ask you now: isn't today's "democracy" in the kitchen, the idea that team work has supplanted the chef's autocracy, a highly inefficient way to run a commercial kitchen?

JP: The answer to that is probably yes, because a chef is like the captain at the helm of a ship. You have to run the kitchen and if you are a good chef, you can do it in a democratic way. We go back to Voltaire and the *monarque éclairé*, the enlightened monarch who is able to govern efficiently and still be good to the people. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the alternative to democracy in the kitchen is total anarchy or that the “monarch” should be a tyrant. But if you work at Jean-Georges’ or at Daniel’s you must expect to work through their sense of esthetic. As an apprentice you are not there to impose your taste, you are there to come and learn and do what the chef wants. And this is the whole idea of learning cooking. You work for two years with Jean-Georges and you say: “Yes, chef!” You do exactly what he wants. Then two more years with Thomas Keller and then two years with someone or other, and after eight or ten years of learning in this way and filtering the food of those people through yourself, you have accumulated a body of knowledge. Eventually, you are going to develop your own taste this way. You will adopt what you like from all these styles, form your own esthetic sense, and your own taste. In short, you will develop a personal style. At that point, you open your own restaurant and now it will be you who will say, “I want it done this way.” However, that doesn’t mean that you do not talk with the guys you work with, you talk to your sous-chef and perhaps even compromise. It is not a democracy; it is the point of view of a chef. This is what creates the “soul” of a restaurant, the unmistakable style that you may like or not like but it stands out as unique. That is a very important thing that is often lost with the young chefs who panic when business is slow and so they do a little bit of Tex-Mex, a little bit of this and a little bit of that. The restaurant loses the most important thing, which is its own identity. So going back your original question, no, the kitchen cannot really be a democracy, only in that way can a point of view be imposed—and having a point of view is what makes a great restaurant.

GRB: It seems to me paradoxical that when the pretense of democracy collapsed, the superstar chef emerged. What do you think is the connection with that?

JP: It is an interesting point of view. I can tell you that in my time the

chef stayed behind the stove and I believe that he was even more dominant from that position. I remember that when I was a kid, whether I worked at the Plaza Athénée or for Maxim’s [in Paris], in all the great restaurants the chef would be in charge of the food and the sommelier decided what to drink with it, without even talking to the chef. I only learned when I came to the US that the chef could also talk about wine as well as the right pairing. The chef is still the boss in the kitchen. But today there is a lot more to being a star chef than cooking. Wolfgang Puck or Jean-Georges, for example, are good examples of what it takes today. They are good enough to imprint their personality on their chefs-in-training so that the chefs can perpetuate it in all the restaurants that they own, and these are usually numerous. Now chefs are as much businesspeople as they are chefs. They create empires consisting of multi restaurants, products, cookbooks, endorsements of cooking equipment, and so on.

GRB: Yet, you too are a celebrity chef and are engaged in many other kinds of activities.

JP: Yes, I do many things that are on the periphery—I don’t mean of the food world but that do not involve standing behind the stove. I teach at Boston University and at the French Culinary Institute, I write books, I’ve had a column in the *New York Times* for eight years. I even do consulting work for restaurants. I know that if I had a restaurant, I would do none of these things. All I would do would be to stand behind the stove from morning to night and that’s it. I have been through that and I know that there is no escape if you own a restaurant.

GRB: Unless you delegate.

JP: Some people are good at that; I am not particularly good at that. The best for me would be to own a restaurant with someone like my dearest friend, Jean-Claude Szurdak. We have worked together fifty years; we are like an old couple. People have told us that when we work, we do not talk, but I give him what he needs before he asks me and he gives me what I need before asking him—at the same moment too. However, having a restaurant with him might feel comfortable, it

might make for consistency, but it would not be good on the creative level because we think more or less the same way. I have had several restaurants, but in 1974 I was in a terrible car crash and ended up with fourteen fractures; that event acted as a catalyst to push me towards something different. This was a time when cooking schools were opening up right and left. I was then writing for *House Beautiful* and finishing my degree at Columbia University. I started doing some cooking demonstrations and moving into the directions that are my present occupations: teaching cooking, writing books, doing consulting work, television, etc. Believe me; all this is easier than owning a restaurant.

GRB: In your book, *The Apprentice*, you mention that “nouvelle cuisine” liberated you from the French classics. Why is liberation from a respected heritage a good thing? Should we throw it all out? What should we put in its place?

JP: It was not a total replacement. *Nouvelle cuisine* was just a few years away when I was working at the Plaza Athénée in Paris. In the classical tradition we cut the tomatoes all in one direction, for example, and I never thought of cutting them in any other direction because it was so engraved in my brain that you do it this way—and this way only. French cuisine is one of the few that started with a set of rules devised by people like La Varenne in the XVII century. Because of the political stability in France under Louis XIV, it became possible to establish certain parameters and certain rules that everyone adhered to. Eventually, a vocabulary and a set of practices evolved that everyone recognized and adhered to. For example, *mirepoix*, *julienne*, deglazing, all refer to something specific. In traditional French cuisine we still teach this way. Of course, after you have learned it you can reject the whole thing; but the act of rejecting something already implies that you have acquired it, otherwise there is nothing to reject. Italian cuisine, on the other hand, which can be as great or even greater than French cuisine, is totally different in its evolution and practices. You can work in Italy and make extraordinary food with different chefs, but not one of them will agree with another—but then, Italy did not become a unified country until 1861. In the Italian system the imprint of the chef is even more noticeable. Nevertheless in France, for better

or for worse, everyone adheres to the fundamentals as to ingredients and techniques. And this is what we teach here at the French Culinary Institute. That’s why people like Wiley Dufresne or Bobby Flay or many of the stars come here and learn how to cook, even though by the time that they leave and open their restaurants their style may have nothing to do with French cooking.

GRB: A lot of them go into “fusion” now.

JP: Yes, fusion and especially confusion.

GRB: And the two go together?

JP: A lot of young chefs go crazy expressing themselves—they have to “sign” that platter as if it were a painting to say: “I made it. I made it.” And the irony of this is that whether you like it or not, you cannot escape your individuality anyway. Let me give you an illustration. In a course that I teach at Boston University, I have one menu that I consider the perfect meal for the students to master: roasted chicken, a salad of Boston lettuce, a bowl of potatoes. This is a very simple menu, but in order for the result to be excellent, they must master the essentials. If I have fifteen students, the first thing that I say is, “Do not try to be creative and do all kinds of things to impress people. Just be yourself and do it as well as you can.” Well, it never fails that out of fifteen chickens, four or five of them will be under cooked, three or four over cooked, a couple will be burned, some will be totally cold, some totally unseasoned. Only a couple will be perfect. I know that I will always end up with fifteen totally different chickens. I remind young chefs of their inescapable individuality when they try to “sign” a plate just to be different. I sometimes go to a place along the water near where I live in Connecticut where they do a great lobster roll. All it has is a hot dog roll browned in butter, fresh lobster in the middle, and salt, pepper and butter—and this is it. A lobster roll can be as memorable as a lobster soufflé or some other extraordinary dishes. Again I would say to a chef, “You do not need extraordinary imagination to do it better than anyone else. Just keep it simple, have the freshest ingredients and do it well.”

GRB: I wonder if that approach can work in a place like America today.

JP: Oh yes. It can. Absolutely.

GRB: It seems to me that we are so infatuated with novelty that we no longer pay attention to the basics and to quality.

JP: No, absolutely not. Years ago I remember reading an article in the *New York Times* about the new restaurants opening up in New York costing nine, ten, or twelve million dollars, and I wondered how can young chefs ever get into the business? So I said, “that’s it, I am going to open a restaurant in Connecticut for less \$50,000 from the ground up.” At the time I was doing some things for the newborn FoodTV Network and I asked them if they wanted to record it. They said yes, so we documented the entire experience and eventually turned it into a one hour show. Naturally, in order to accomplish this difficult goal, we had to do a lot of the work ourselves. I put down the quarry tile on the floor; my wife painted the walls. I had heard about a school in New York that was changing their stoves and they had to pay \$1,000 to have them carted away, so we said we would take them and fix them up. We got what would have been very expensive stoves for free. We went to auctions too and we decorated with beautiful little posters. The result was a really nice French Bistro. We did it for \$48,000 including \$3,000 to \$4,000 for inventory of food and wine before we opened.

GRB: And what was the concept of the bistro?

JP: Simple French with quality ingredients. When the diners sat down, we started bringing big trays of pâté, different types of salads, French bread freshly made in the restaurant; we served six different kinds of hors d’oeuvres. This is how it is done in France in a bistro. We had a blackboard on which were listed six choices for the main courses of the day. There was always a steak on the menu to be on the safe side, as well as a fish, a stew, a shellfish, and a roast. The vegetables were also very important. We would have something like a gratin of cauliflower and a stew of peas as the vegetables of the day and there were always three desserts to choose from. All this was offered at a prix fixe. It was all very simple really. People loved it very much. I think that if you open this kind of simple restaurant anywhere and you do it well,

people will realize that they are getting value for their money. It’s that simple and that difficult at the same time.

GRB: If I’m not mistaken, all your TV programs have been on PBS. Can you describe the differences between the PBS approach to cooking shows and that of the FoodTV Network? Do you think the FoodTV Network has changed the very nature of the culinary concept?

JP: I think the answer is yes to all of those questions. It certainly has changed the nature of the culinary world because of the exposure and the idolization of the chef. All of that has been flabbergasting for me. You see young women like Rachael Ray becoming stars in a relatively short period. However, I myself have been sharing in the bounty. I have been on PBS for close to a quarter of a century. I like PBS. I don’t have to take account of the sponsor. In fact, I do not have the right to work for the sponsors or to endorse their products. To a certain extent, they allow me to do pretty much what I want. However, working for public TV is certainly less lucrative than network television because it’s not as if you get residuals each time your show is aired. Still, I am not complaining because I have sold thousands of books that I would not have sold if I hadn’t been on PBS. I feel I have a niche there. I have been invited by the FoodTV Network several times to do a show, but the problem is that they would not allow me to also stay on at PBS. They claim that I would “cannibalize myself,” so at least for the time being I have no intention of leaving PBS. I’m starting a new series this summer. I think PBS is the only channel in the USA that is not commercial television.

GRB: What do you think of the idea that the cooking programs on PBS are more instructional, whereas the FoodTV network is all about entertainment? Does the instructional part suffer as a result of their emphasis on entertainment?

JP: I don’t know if the right word is suffer. How you feel about this is determined by your reasons for watching television. Many people who never even cook watch cooking shows for the entertainment value. And that’s fine too. I happen to prefer the instructional emphasis because I’m a professional chef and I teach cooking. One thing that I do not

understand though, is how an organization like the FoodTV Network, a channel dedicated entirely to food 24 hours a day, does not address some serious topics. If we had a television channel dedicated to, let's say, plastic surgery, wouldn't we expect to see programs about the latest developments in the field? But here we have a channel dedicated to food, yet we do not know why we are the fattest people in the world, what the kids are eating in school, anything about the agricultural business, bioengineered food or pesticides. We don't know about food franchises or the distribution of food. We don't learn about the connections of food to the arts. We do not get advice from dieticians and nutritionists; there is none of this. All we have are chefs jumping around—which I do not criticize, that is what I do for living. But I believe that having a few of these kinds of shows would be fine, as long as the rest would deal with some other important topics. I guess the program planners do not feel they have to provide this kind of *variety* because the public wants to be entertained. Personally, I feel that if a channel is dedicated 24 hours a day to the food industry it should, at the very least, include some investigative reports on restaurants—something like *60 Minutes*, let's say.

GRB: What does it take today to be a celebrity in America?

JP: More than anything else, it is a question of luck, certainly of being in the right place at the right time; of knowing what people want to hear at that moment. We so-called celebrities live in our own mini worlds, although without question after being on television a number of years at some point, you do transcend that mini world. Essentially however, what this means is that although you might be a big celebrity in the world of cooking, outside of this little circle no one knows who you are. This of course is true in all the arts. If you're a lover of architecture, you will certainly know Le Corbusier. But if you ask the man in the street who he is, he will have no idea. When I go to the Food and Wine Festival in Aspen, there are five thousand guests. People will come up to me and tell me, "I watch all the cooking shows on television and you are absolutely the best." Well the way I see it, this is a kind of self-selected group. They like me so they come to tell me that. Those who like Bobby Flay will go to him and tell him the same thing. Those who like Emeril will tell him, and so on. So really, you can't take being a celebrity too seriously and let it go to your head.

GRB: That's a very sensible attitude to have towards celebrity. And what are your upcoming projects?

JP: Well, in addition to the new cooking series that I mentioned before, I am doing another show for PBS that was inspired by a number of ideas: the three tenors, the Charlie Rose interviews, and the cooking community. It is called "The Artist's Table." I will be interviewing famous celebrities from the world of the arts: cinema, music, and painting. Of course, it will be someone who loves food and wine and we will also cook together. This will give us a chance to explore the ways in which their art permeates the food and how the food influences their art. We filmed the first show last week with Itzhak Perlman. We shot it in his penthouse in New York. We talked for hours and had a great time. I think it will be a great show and I am really excited about it. It will probably air in the spring of 2008 on PBS as a one hour special. If it goes well and we get funding, we will do more interviews, maybe Sophia Loren who is a great cook and loves food. That would be a very exciting thing to do.

GRB: I must tell you that you strike me as one of the most balanced of the celebrity chefs and you seem to be very secure in yourself.

JP: Yes, maybe that's true, but I am older than a lot of the others. Cooking is a very important and serious part of my life and even though cuisine can also be considered an art, it cannot compare with some of the others. Being a great writer, composer, painter, or a sculptor, that takes genius.

Note

1. "Grace Bullaro Interviews Lidia Bastianich on Terroir, Cuisine, Globalization and Cultural Identity." *Columbia Journal of American Studies* Vol. 8, 2007: 174-192 and "Daisy Martinez Discusses Passion, Latino Culture and Cuisine." In *Columbia Journal of American Studies Monthly* (Online Magazine) Feb. 2007. [http:// www.cjasmonthly.com/Daisy_ Martinez.html](http://www.cjasmonthly.com/Daisy_Martinez.html)

Casting Teutonic Types from the Nineteenth Century to World War I: German Ethnic Stereotypes in Print, on Stage, and Screen

Peter Conolly-Smith

“When the war started,” actor-director Erich von Stroheim wrote in 1941, looking back on World War I, “the enemy, of course, became the arch-villains, and quite naturally their appearances and actions had to be exaggerated in their extreme.” While wartime screen-Germans’ actions included “every heinous crime from throwing babies through a window to rape,” von Stroheim recalled, their appearance conformed to the established visual stereotype of Germans that had existed in America since the nineteenth century—beer-bellied, crew cut, and mustachioed—now updated for war with spiked helmets, jackboots, monocles and riding crops. “I clicked my heels so that the spurs tinkled,” von Stroheim wrote, “and bowed with a snap from the waist.” As America’s favorite screen “Hun”—he traced his ancestry to Prussia and “possessed all the physical and facial requirements”—von Stroheim built his early career playing villainous German officers in films such as *The Unbeliever*, *The Hun Within*, and D.W. Griffith’s *Hearts of the World* (von Stroheim X4) [Figure 1].

For the “man you love to hate,” as von Stroheim was billed, to enact what was in effect a vicious parody of his own ethnic heritage indicates the difficulties Germans faced in America during World War I. Descended from an ethnic culture formerly held in high esteem, Germans during the war found their home country demonized in American mass culture. On wartime propaganda posters, in political cartoons, and in film, German soldiers were portrayed as sadistic killers. How German-American immigrants understood such images is uncertain, but one may assume they recognized the Huns displayed in

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Figure 1: D.W. Griffith’s *Hearts of the World* (1918)—the most famous of several World War I-era anti-German films. Courtesy Library of Congress.

the popular culture—their transatlantic kin by blood and language, after all—to be a mere hyphen removed from themselves, at least to American eyes. One way for German immigrants to prove their American-ness, ironically, was to confirm—but not conform to—the stereotype; that is, to accept its claim that Germans were rapists and babykillers, but then take pains to establish that they, German-Americans, were not. To prove their worthiness, in other words, Germans were forced to participate in the national pastime of Hun-baiting, to demonize their country of origin and, thereby, disown their heritage.

This unenviable tension—which Japanese-Americans and Muslim Americans too have experienced at different moments in American history—contributed to a collective gesture of ethnic disavowal among Germans that led ultimately to their complete absorption into the mainstream of American culture, and hence their literal disappearance as a recognizable group in American society. Thus, although more Americans in the nineteen sixties traced their ancestry to Germany than to any other country, Germans “as a group, [had] vanished,” according to Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan’s 1963 study *Beyond the Melting Pot* (311; emphasis in original). This essay examines the role of ethnic stereotypes in German-Americans’ post-World War I disappearing act, beginning with the stage and cartoon caricatures of the nineteenth century and culminating with the films of World War I. As for other ethnic groups, Germans’ popular stereotype had always wielded a double-edged blade. Protesting it as offensive served only as a tacit admission that there was something sufficiently accurate about the caricature that it hit home; yet accepting, or shrugging it off in hopes of disarming the stereotype, signaled a willingness to distance oneself from one’s core characteristics that led ultimately to ethnic erasure.

These conflicting attitudes—acceptance of and resistance to the anti-German stereotype—met head-on at the turn of the century as established, culturally conservative Germans of several generations’ standing by the late nineteenth century were joined by a more recent wave of urbane early twentieth-century arrivals, many from major cities like Berlin and Hamburg. Older Germans’ outlook was, to some degree, based on their having left Germany at a time when the mass media that later perpetuated anti-German stereotypes in America—in particular comic strips and film—had not yet come into existence in Germany. While such early to mid-nineteenth century arrivals were perhaps willing to accept ethnic stereotypes on stage—after all, in the “*Volksstück*” (the people’s play) Germany had its own stage tradition that poked fun at country bumpkins and the backward ways of the German hinterland—these same Germans later took offense at seeing themselves mocked, then demonized, in comics and film.¹ To members of this older generation, the mass media that disseminated anti-German imagery after the turn of the century became associated with America, and their rejection of such imagery was as much a repudiation of the stereotypes themselves, as it was of American culture.

To more recent immigrants, however, whose experience in Germany prior to leaving had already exposed them to mass-circulating dailies and film, American culture seemed less foreign, and its offerings, less offensive. Indeed, they recognized that what their already-established fellow Germans rejected as *American* was, in fact, *modern*. Having grown up experiencing modernity in Germany, these new arrivals consequently more easily assimilated its offerings in America. This embrace of the modern, expressed not only through an appreciation for film and comics but also in one’s choice of newspaper, as we shall see, should not be thought of as anti-*German*, however. On the contrary, in times of war—throughout the period of American neutrality during the early years of World War I, for example, from 1914–April 1917—recent German immigrants displayed as pronounced a pro-German nationalism as their more established countrymen. Their German patriotism tempered by their early willingness to accept the bumbling German stereotypes of American mass culture, these same Germans later took the lead in the process of ethnic disavowal that, corroborating Glazer and Moynihan, resulted ultimately in their community “vanishing.” The role played by the German ethnic stereotype in this process, as it was contested, consumed, even perpetuated within the community and chronicled in the pages of its ethnic press, lies at the core of this essay.

The Evolution of the German Ethnic Stereotype

Like blackface and minstrelsy before it, ethnic parody’s original impetus in nineteenth-century American culture was to demean those it targeted. On stage, ethnic stereotypes “originated as a function of social class feelings of superiority and[...]express[ed] the continuing resistance of advantaged groups to unrestrained immigration” (Boskin and Dorinson 97). Drawing as much on the perceived behavior of immigrants as on their stereotypical appearance, ethnic parody relied on the “readily identifiable”—that is, visually, on “such recognizable traits as modes of dress, style of head and facial hair” and, behaviorally, on “occupations, generalized qualities of character or demeanor, and, of course, dialect” (Diestler 36, 38). For the Irish, among the oldest butts of American ethnic humor, the stereotype included, next to a comic Irish brogue, muttonchops, a pugnacious demeanor, and a

simian appearance. Germans, in turn, had atrocious accents and were hairy, rotund, and dull. Whereas the Irish bristled at the caricature—the Order of Ancient Hibernians reportedly protested such representations so vehemently that ethnic comedians sometimes “feared for their lives”—Germans more readily made peace with their portrayal on the American stage (DiMeglio 44). They believed perhaps that such stereotypes, although ludicrous, held positive potential; that as ethnic historians have argued, “the humor of ridicule may support the ladder for upward social mobility” (Boskin and Dorinson 98). “In a polyethnic culture,” Werner Sollors explains, following this line of reasoning, “communities of laughter arise at the expense of some outsiders and then reshape, integrate those outsiders, and pick other targets.” In other words, by laughing at themselves as portrayed as “Other” on-stage, ethnics in the audience defined themselves as *non-Other*, as “American.” “The community of laughter itself becomes an ethnicizing phenomenon,” Sollors suggests, “as we develop a sense of we-ness in laughing with others” (Sollors 133, 132). When endured as ritual acts of cultural hazing to which all immigrants were subject in America, ethnic stereotypes thus doubled as negative role models that taught the “newly arrived[...]how not to act” (Linneman 38).

Certainly, Germans on the eve of World War I had learned from the evolution of their own stereotype over the course of the nineteenth century. In the antebellum period, theirs had been a well regarded community, thought to exemplify “hard work, thrift, and determination,” and to be possessed of a “valuable[...]rich heritage of music, art, and literature as well as a standard for civilized behavior.” Contemporaries may have occasionally mocked Germans and “found them somewhat amusing,” Leonard Dinnerstein writes, but overall “did not much mind them” (72, 85, 87). The opinion of one such contemporary, James M’Cune Smith, is typical of this generally positive, if sometimes ambiguous attitude. M’Cune Smith found Germans to be characterized by “persistent vitality, strong nationality, intelligence, and a capacity for organized effort.” Even their faults he turned into virtues. Thus it was true that “the Germans still drink,” he acknowledged—indeed, Germans’ well-known love of beer generated significant criticism among the host culture and contributed to the stereotype of the German as pot-bellied, with beer stein in hand [Figure 2]. Still, there was “a mildness about their ‘lager bier,’” M’Cune Smith allowed, that



A GERMAN BEER GARDEN IN NEW YORK CITY ON SUNDAY EVENING.

Figure 2: Germans figured prominently among “People Who Oppose Our Sunday Laws,” according to Harper’s Weekly, 1859.

was “altogether different from the fiery fluid” he associated with the Irish, frequent foil to the Germans, and generally held in much lower esteem (84, 85).

Following Germans’ contribution to the cause of the Union during the Civil War—more troops were recruited from their ranks than from any other immigrant group in the country—their collective reputation continued to improve. As one contemporary German immigrant wrote home to his parents, “For us Germans this war is very good, for since the Germans have shown themselves to be the keenest defenders of the constitution, and provide entire regiments[...]they’re starting to fill the native [-born] Americans with respect. Now the Americans don’t make fun of us anymore” (Kamphoefner, Helbich, and Sommer 402).² Later historians agreed. John Higham, for example, writes that, “During the post-Civil War age of confidence, the initial distaste for German customs had rapidly worn away. Public opinion had come to accept the Germans as one of the most[...]reputable of immigrant groups[...]law-abiding, speedily assimilated, and strongly patriotic” (196).

Changes in the domestic political scene, however, led to changes in perception. Prior to the war, Germans as a group had generally kept to themselves, rarely getting involved in American public affairs. Indeed, M’Cune Smith had considered them to be a community

characterized by political “inertia” which, “combined with their ignorance of the English language,[...]with[e]ld the Germans from a direct interference with the politics of the day” (85). Their confidence boosted by the post-war boon to their reputations, however, combined with the continuing growth of their ranks in America’s urban workforce, led Germans in the Gilded Age and early Progressive Era to become prominently involved in working-class politics. By the eighties and nineties, German-Americans led the national labor movement, holding influential positions in the American eight-hour-day movement, the Socialist Labor Party, the New York-based Communist International, the anarchist movement, and trade unions throughout the nation (Keil 71-94). Predictably, this political engagement caused their public image to suffer a setback. “Almost all our Socialists come from Germany,” *Truth* magazine complained. “There is something in the German intellect, or the German diet, or the German atmosphere which breeds the spirit of discontent” (qtd. in Linneman 35).

Regardless of the significant differences between the various strains of German-American working-class radicalism—between anarchists, socialists, and communists, for example—and regardless of the existence of a substantial German-American middle class, Germans across the board now came to be associated with the likes of New York-based agitator Johann Most, known for his heavy German accent and “frequently lampooned in political cartoons as the quintessential rabble-rousing anarchist” (Waldstreicher 31). Portrayed as “be-whiskered, foreign-looking[...]bomb in one hand, pistol in the other,” it mattered not that, in reality, “Most usually dressed in a business suit and had neatly trimmed hair,” according to Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace (1097). The caricature had simply picked up on the German stereotype’s earlier trademark elements—the drunken, hairy German holding forth in a smoke-filled beer hall—and had politicized it to suit the new circumstances of the day. In the popular press, Germans were now demonized as “rag-tag and bob-tail cutthroats of Beelzebub from the Rhine, the Danube, and the Elbe”; “socialist vipers[...]the enemies of general society” (qtd. in Barnard 133; Poore 60).

This too was but a temporary stage in the continuing evolution of America’s public perception of the German, however, as historical circumstances again ushered in a new variation of the stereotype. The

gradual decline of German immigration towards the end of the nineteenth century, the socio-economic rise of many of those Germans who had previously numbered among the working poor, and the concomitant increase of “new immigrants” who took their place resulted in a change of guard in the American labor movement. Writing for the United States Immigration Commission, Isaac Hourwich thus found, in 1912, that “the greatest activity in the field of [labor] organization coincided with the unparalleled immigration of the past decade [...]from Southern and Eastern Europe.” Ignoring the formerly dominant Germans, he concluded that “the origin and rapid growth of organized labor in the United States are contemporaneous with the period of the ‘new immigration’” (30-31).³ Germans’ rehabilitation was thus brought about as much by their diminished visibility in radical politics as it was by the increased visibility of those who had replaced them. When a second-generation Polish immigrant, Leon Czolgosz, assassinated President William McKinley in 1901, the resulting wave of nativism was directed almost exclusively towards immigrants of Southern and Eastern European descent. Germans, now lumped in safely with the “old immigrants,” escaped unscathed (Higham 111, 196).

Along with Germans’ return to grace, their caricature, too, shed its more vicious aspects. The staple characteristics that had always defined it remained intact, to be sure: the stereotypical German of the turn of the century was as bewhiskered and besotted as before, his heavily-accented dialect still dotted with the usual “py chiminies” and “py gollies.” But the bombs, pistols, and politics were relegated to the past. In print, the caricature found its most famous incarnation in the hugely popular “Katzenjammer Kids,” America’s first comic strip, introduced in William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Morning Journal* in 1897. In weekly and later daily installments, the strip showed and told the misadventures of an extended German immigrant family: the demon twins Hans *und* Fritz, their rotund Mama, and her common-law husband the Captain who, along with his bearded sidekick *der* Inspector, was the constant victim of the twins’ anarchic pranks. Their dialogue as stereotypical as their appearance—all characters spoke in German English pidgin—the “Katzies,” as they were affectionately known, found their stage counterpart in vaudeville’s so-called Dutch Act. Its prefix an Anglicization of “Deutsch” (German), the Dutch Act “relied on heavy German dialect and stereotyped ‘national characteris-

tics' for its humor" (Allen 221). Most famously performed by Joe Weber and Lew Fields ("py gollies, itd's as clear as der nose on your face"), Dutch Act comedians' speech, costume, and physical appearance in "peaked cap, short coat[...]padded stomach[...]and] shoes [of] the large wooden type called 'dugouts'" embodied the German caricature on stage and, soon thereafter, on the silent screen—no longer a threat to society, by the early twentieth century, but still an object of humorous ridicule (Diestler 33; Gilbert 74).

Contesting the Stereotype in the German Ethnic Press

It was precisely at this juncture that opinion within the German immigrant community began to diverge. Established Germans of older vintage had accepted or, in any case, endured mid- to late-nineteenth-century stereotypes in literature (*Little Women's* Professor Baehr, for example), in illustrated magazines such as *Harper's Weekly*, and on the stage (even on their own immigrant stage, as John Koegel has shown), but they now balked at the caricature's more recent incarnation in vaudeville, on-screen, and in the comics (Koegel 274-76). The *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, for example, established in 1834 and, as the oldest and most venerable of all German-language newspapers in America, the acknowledged voice of the community's middle class, found vaudeville's German and his screen and comic strip cousins offensive. German caricatures in the funny pages, the newspaper wrote in 1913, were "the product of an imbecilic mind[...]a stupid and unhumorous travesty" that represented "a lapse in taste at once miserable [*jämmerlich*] and deplorable [*bejammernswert*]." The (not so) veiled references to the Katzenjammer Kids will not have been lost on the readership. "Such a German does not exist," the newspaper growled on a separate occasion, "yet American comic strips perpetuate the model because readers laugh at him." And, on vaudeville's Dutch Act: "Such a ridiculous impossible distortion, this small pot-bellied fellow with his drooping mustache and dull eyes, replete with his wooden slippers, balloon-like hat, his long-stemmed pipe, beer glass, and pretzel. Where has one ever seen a German of this type?[...]We German-Americans," the *Staats-Zeitung* concluded, "do not laugh at him."⁴

Forceful as the *Staats-Zeitung's* rejection of the stereotype was, there were other, equally influential newspapers within the communi-

ty that disagreed, such as the popular *New Yorker Morgen Journal*, established in 1895 and later called the *Deutsches Journal*. This newspaper self-consciously catered to more recently-arrived German immigrants, capitalizing on their prior exposure to modern mass media by presenting itself as the nation's most up-to-date German daily, whose modern appeal surpassed the ethnocentric focus of the *Staats-Zeitung* and other such publications. Readers of the upstart *Journal*, in turn, similarly positioned themselves in conscious contrast to older German immigrants. In the classified ads in which they offered their services on the job market, for example, they emphasized their youth and recent arrival, and their willingness to take on work that required English-language skills, indications that they were willing to deviate from the ethnic norm, not only on the job market, presumably, but in the cultural realm too.

In the *Deutsches Journal*, many of these new arrivals found a natural forum. William Randolph Hearst-owned and as shrill and garish as the yellow press baron's other newspapers, the *Journal* was, like its more famous English-language sister publication, the *New York Morning Journal*, characterized by an embrace of modernity expressed, in great part, through a strong visual appeal. The "paper's lay-out was excellent," Hearst biographer David Nasaw has written of the English-language *Journal*—and the same is true of its German version—"with texts and drawings breaking through columns to create new full-page landscapes and sensational bold headlines that seized the eye and quickened the imagination" (Nasaw, *Chief*, 102).⁵ Aside from Hearst's trademark banner headlines, the two sister publications' visual appeal was achieved through graphics, photographs, editorial cartoons and, not least, their regular inclusion of a comic section, the *American Humorist*, introduced on December 12, 1897 as "eight pages of polychromatic effulgence that make the rainbow look like lead pipe" (Dunn 177). The weekly and later daily "funnies" featured in this section included the adventures of the above-mentioned Katzenjammer Kids, whose antics can be found reproduced—and translated into German—in the earliest surviving copies of the *German Journal* [Figure 3]. While the *Staats-Zeitung* condemned the Katzies as "imbecilic[...]travesties," in other words, the *Journal* sold them right back to their source of inspiration, the German immigrant community. In so doing, the newspaper assured its readers that by consuming such



Figure 3: A German-language translation of the Katzenjammer Kids in Hearst's German Journal. Reprinted with permission of King Features Syndicate.

images, they were engaging in a pastime so universally-enjoyed that it transcended the narrow concerns of ethnic purists such as the *Staats-Zeitung*, whom the *Journal* mocked as backward, “slow, boring, and long-winded.”⁶

As proof of its comics' universal appeal, the *Journal* pointed out that even while “our humorous supplement, *Die Lustigen Blätter* [the funny pages] numbers among its contributors the best-known American cartoonists,” their fruits—including in particular the Katzenjammer Kids—were as popular in Germany as they were in America. Thus a much-publicized special issue of the *Journal* published for distribution in Berlin reportedly elicited great enthusiasm there, not least for its comic strips: “[Berlin] readers were particularly impressed with the ‘look’ of the paper[...]with its many supplements[...]and its funny pages,” the *Journal's* correspondent wrote. In as *ur*-German a locale as the Tiergarten, Berlin's largest public park, he spotted two young women who—just two among thousands he claimed to have seen that day—sat “with expressions of mirth, reading the pranks of the Katzenjammer Kids in the *Journal's* colored, humorous, comic supplement.”⁷ If urbane Berliners laughed at the stereotype without taking offense, such reportage implied, then surely German-Americans could too.

Indeed, for German immigrants to have accepted, even laughed at their representation in comics and on the vaudeville stage testified to how far they had come. To such Germans, the Dutch Act of Weber and Fields—upon whom the *Journal* lavished much favorable publicity—and the comic strip antics of the Katzenjammer Kids represented parodies of how they (and, more importantly, their predecessors) had once acted, looked, and spoken. In this incarnation German ethnics were ridiculous to the host society and even to themselves. This was precisely what they no longer wished to be, nor to be seen as, and by laughing at the caricature, they distanced themselves from its Old World associations. As Miriam Hansen observes, “the stereotypes [of ethnic parody] provided a foil for a new, ostensibly middle-class identity or, rather, for an identification with a specifically American myth of success that blurred all class and ethnic distinctions” (59). For immigrants to whom assimilation into mainstream modern society was a goal, laughing at ethnic stereotypes—especially their own—was one way to signal their arrival.

Backlash on Screen: *The Battle Cry of Peace*

While its outlook helped define the *Journal* as a forward-looking publication more in tune with the trends of modernity than the rival *Staats-Zeitung*—aside from featuring comic strips, the Hearst-owned newspaper also endorsed mass culture in its every other articulation, from the music of Tin Pan Alley to film—still, there was a potential danger in its strategic embrace of all things popular. Should the culture turn on Germans as it had in the past, should their standing in America receive another setback as it had following their engagement in working-class politics during the Gilded Age, and should their stereotype once again be imbued with vicious characteristics in result, the newspaper that so wholeheartedly embraced the caricature would be left with little choice but to accept it in a new, less favorable form. Remote as the likelihood of this may have seemed in prewar America, it is precisely what happened with the onset of the European War in 1914.

Although the United States remained neutral for the first two and a half years of the war, its mass culture had galvanized American public opinion into a decidedly anti-German attitude long before 1917. True, President Woodrow Wilson famously appealed to the American public to display neutrality in “word and deed,” and even prevailed upon the motion picture industry, which made good money showing both documentary and fictional war films, to follow suit. Obliging, the National Board of Censors asked “picture patron [...]not to demonstrate in favor of either side when war scenes were shown,” and further suggested that producers during the years of neutrality “treat[...]in a restrained manner[...]scenes which tend to arouse race [i.e., ethnic] hatred” (Isenberg 98). Such well-meaning directives did not prevent the American film industry from turning out a number of unashamedly anti-German films prior to America’s entry into the war, however, all of which made flagrant use of a German stereotype more vicious than anything previously seen in American culture. While these films elicited much comment, they drew no official censure and made huge profits at the box office, leaving those in the immigrant community who had embraced the German caricature—and film—in a potentially awkward position.

The first in the American cycle of anti-German films was *The Battle Cry of Peace*, produced and directed by J. Stuart Blackton and

released in August of 1915. Already, the recent sinking of the *Lusitania* had caused a wave of anti-German hysteria to wash over the nation. A fierce public debate raged over the degree of the United States’ level of preparedness, should war come to its shores, with well-known hawks such as Theodore Roosevelt and newly-appointed pro-British Secretary of State Robert Lansing urging President Wilson to strengthen America’s defenses. *The Battle Cry of Peace* thus came “into the field at a moment when every American is faced with the realization [that] this country is in a general state of what is termed ‘unpreparedness,’” the trade journal *Variety* wrote. As such, “it is a film that will come in for nation-wide discussion.” There could be little doubt as to the film’s stance on the issue. Blackton’s was “an animated, arresting, and sometimes lurid argument for the immediate and radical improvement of our national defenses,” the *New York Times* noted in its review, “designed to make many a person in each audience resolve to join the National Guard[...]and to write to his Congressman by the next mail.”⁸

In making its argument, *The Battle Cry of Peace* echoed the ongoing national debate between those urging pacifism and isolation and those arguing for preparedness. The film’s main characters are members of two families, the Harrisons and the Vandergriffs. John, one of the Harrison sons, who later dies defending his sweetheart, is in love with Virginia, one of the Vandergriff daughters, whose father is a prominent peace advocate. In a key scene, John tries to persuade Mr. Vandergriff to abandon his pacifist stance and join a preparedness drive, but the old man refuses. In illustration of his folly, and picking up on another contemporary national preoccupation—German espionage⁹—Mr. Vandergriff has foolishly taken into his confidence a certain Mr. Emanon, who is later exposed as the mastermind of a network of enemy spies, among them Virginia’s own governess. If the notion of their private residence having been infiltrated by foreign spies was not enough to discredit the film’s pacifists, the fact that Vandergriff’s later peace rally is bombarded by an advancing enemy fleet helped drive the point home. As Vandergriff releases a flock of doves, a shell comes crashing through the wall behind him. There was, the *Times* noted dryly, “nothing in the least bit subtle” about the film, which “generally advance[d its] argument by bludgeon strokes.”

As important to its argument as its nod to contemporary concerns regarding preparedness and espionage was the film’s portrayal of the

enemy. Following the naval attack, “[New York] city capitulates and the invader is on our shores,” *Variety* wrote. “They swarm our streets and their hosts are innumerable.” In keeping with the official policy of neutrality, the invaders remained unidentified by name. Nevertheless, their “battle dress was suspiciously Teutonic, right down to the spiked helmets,” according to film historian Michael Isenberg, their “demeanor match[ing] the atrocity stories which had recently emerged from Belgium and Northern France” (Isenberg 102). “Avowedly the invading force is of no particular nationality and the leading spy is called ‘Emanon,’ which you may spell backward if you wish,” the *Times* commented. “But it is difficult to escape the impression that you are expected to recognize the nationality. They are certainly not Portuguese.” Spelling things out more clearly still, *Variety* wrote, “There can be no doubt in the minds of anyone who witnesses the screen presentation that Germany is pointed at. This is quite apparent in the general type of men who have been selected to represent the invading forces.” These men sported Kaiser Wilhelm-like mustaches and, “although essentially comic opera soldiers,” according to Kevin Brownlow, “set the style for the American film presentation of the Hun for the duration [of the war]” (36)—a comment that indicates just how deftly a formerly humorous, “comic opera” caricature could take on vicious dimensions [Figure 4].



Figure 4: 1915's *The Battle Cry of Peace* marked the transition from “comic opera” Germans to American cinema's later wartime Huns. From the author's collection.

With Germans portrayed as “generally frightful, sadists, and rapists to a man,” as Clyde Jeavons has described *Battle Cry's* supposedly anonymous invaders, one might have expected the German-American press to take offense (28). The conservative *Staats-Zeitung*—however its disapproval of the medium of film as the “much-reviled, lowliest of all the arts” as well-established as its disdain for German ethnic caricatures—deigned not to comment on *The Battle Cry of Peace* at all, as if to ignore the film might diminish its punch.¹⁰ More outspoken voices in the conservative camp of the German ethnic press, such as that of George Sylvester Viereck, New York-based publisher of the flagrantly pro-German weekly *Fatherland*, condemned the film's politics. *The Battle Cry of Peace*, Viereck editorialized, was an “atrocity,” bankrolled by a “secret British propaganda fund” and “produced by[...]the munitions makers and the [pro-British J.P.] Morgan crowd to popularize the idea of having Congress vote millions to be swallowed up by the manufacturers of shells and shrapnel”—an assessment that was in fact not too far off the mark: machine gun manufacturer Hudson Maxim's involvement with *The Battle Cry of Peace* was well known (he appeared as himself in the opening reel) and the film was indeed “supported and probably financed by advocates of immediate intervention on the side of the British,” according to a later historian (Nasaw, *Going Out*, 207).¹¹

Most interesting was the response of Hearst's *German Journal*, whom *The Battle Cry of Peace* placed in a doubly uncomfortable position. Not only did the film's negative typecasting reflect poorly on the newspaper's own dissemination of the German ethnic caricature, its anti-German message also ran counter to the *Journal's* politics. In line with all publications owned by the famously anti-British Hearst (only more so, given its ethnic target audience), the *Journal* was openly pro-German in its perspective on the European War, a stance also shared by the *Staats-Zeitung*, Viereck's *Fatherland*, and most other German ethnic publications in America.¹² Although unpopular, such views were technically permissible during America's period of neutrality, and were abandoned only after America's entry into the war. What distinguished the *Journal's* position from those of its rivals in the realm of the German ethnic press was the newspaper's simultaneous embrace of mass culture in general and both film and German ethnic stereotypes in particular. This odd combination of predilections left the

politically pro-German *Journal* facing the issue of whether to promote an anti-German film so successful—*The Battle Cry of Peace* was seen by fifty million people—that it could not easily be dismissed (Brownlow 33).

Caught in this bind, the *Journal* was forced to choose between its cultural and its political inclinations and, interestingly, favored the former. Thus *The Battle Cry of Peace* was deemed “a sensational photoplay, by far the most tremendous film” ever shown at New York’s Vitagraph Theater. Emphasizing the film’s entertainment value over its politics—“the images of destruction are so intensely realistic, that the audience shudders in terror”—the *Journal* discreetly sidestepped altogether the issue of the invaders’ apparent identity. In its only nod to the film’s overall orientation—again in keeping with the politics of Hearst, who was as well-known for his anti-Japanese sentiments as he was for his pro-Germanism—the *Journal* stated merely that the film’s “creator seems not to recognize the danger posed to our Pacific coastline by Japan’s insatiable greed for land; he instead moves the location of his drama to New York,” which is threatened (improbably, the newspaper suggested) by a “strong” but otherwise unidentified “foreign power.” Aside from this one criticism, the *Journal* concluded that the film was a “shining” example of motion picture art, with not a single word wasted on its anti-German stereotypes.¹³

It was a disingenuous review, intentionally ignoring the film’s most outstanding and memorable feature—its ethnic typecasting—in order to avoid drawing attention to the undeniable truth that the *Journal* itself traded in the same type of imagery, if with less vicious intent. Of all the contemporary reviews, the Hearst-owned newspaper’s was the only one to ignore this central aspect of *The Battle Cry of Peace*; and of all German-language newspapers, it was the only one to recommend patronage of the film. This overall strategy—lauding anti-German films for their spectacle and entertainment value while ignoring, and later rationalizing, their negative ethnic stereotypes—would be the one the *Journal* was to pursue throughout the remaining period of American neutrality, with long term consequences that would ultimately contribute to the community’s demise.

Civilization and The Fall of a Nation

The next films to present the screen Hun to the American (and German-American) public were released in 1916, a year before the United States’ entry into the war. Both epic in their scope, *Civilization* was produced by Thomas Ince, while its rival at the box office, *The Fall of a Nation*, was the brainchild of Thomas Dixon. *Civilization* was marketed as an antiwar film; *The Fall of a Nation*, as an argument for preparedness. “Diametrically opposed in ideology” though they may have been, both however made equal use of extreme anti-German imagery (Slide 97). *Civilization* tells the story of the monarch of an unnamed kingdom who plunges his nation into war but is brought to his senses when Christ incarnate shows him the horrors he has unleashed upon his people and the world. As *Variety* pointed out in its review of this spectacular film, although “the ‘foreword’ in the program announces the spectacle as a pure allegory, the mythical kingdom is palpably German, the soldiers and many others being unmistakably Teutonic types, their hair brushed back, with various mannerisms and other indications tending to create that impression.”¹⁴ Isenberg adds that the fictional kingdom’s monarch “wore a spiked helmet and rammed a declaration of war through his rubber-stamp parliament,” and that “the comparison [to] the Kaiser was made quite clear when the captain of one of the mythical king’s submarines received a message to ‘sink liner *Propatria* with full cargo of contraband. Passengers used as blind. Disregard sentiment’”—an obvious allusion to the sinking of the *Lusitania* (147).

At least *Civilization* claimed to promote peace, albeit by showing battle scenes of extreme brutality.¹⁵ Thomas Dixon’s *The Fall of a Nation* could lay no such claim to pacifism and, if anything, outdid its rival in the violence of its battle sequences. The film was an “unbridled photo play of the battle, murder, and sudden death species” in full agreement with “the new insistence on a greater consideration of our national defenses,” according to the *New York Times*.¹⁶ Its producer Dixon, well-known as the author of *The Clansman*, the literary model for the previous year’s blockbuster *The Birth of a Nation*, had conceived of *The Fall of A Nation* as a sort of sequel to that famous film: an illustration of how even a great united nation could be conquered if it failed to assimilate its immigrants—specifically its German immigrants, as the

film hinted none too subtly. In this respect, *The Fall of a Nation*, which “begins in the [then-] present, presumably 1916, and ends about 1919[...]can[...]be defined as science fiction,” according to Dixon’s biographer Anthony Slide: a cautionary tale that tapped into the nation’s anxieties regarding its unpreparedness and that exploited the public’s increasingly ambiguous view of the German immigrant population (100).

Before the backdrop of a fictional war raging in Europe, the film’s villain, multi-millionaire Charles Waldron, claims to be a peace advocate but secretly recruits an army of immigrants to prepare the way for one of the European belligerents’ planned invasion of the United States.¹⁷ As in *The Battle Cry of Peace*, the very moment of the peace movement’s triumph (the defeat of a bill in Congress that would have strengthened the nation’s army and navy) signals the invasion, this time readied by the unnamed ethnic enemy within. “As foolish Americans celebrate a great peace jubilee, explosions rock New York and soldiers in dull brown uniforms march down Broadway[...]headed by Charles Waldron, now identified as Prince Karl von Waldron.” The film ruthlessly caricatures famous real-life peace advocates such as Henry Ford and William Jennings Bryan, “shown, with flowers in their hands, approaching the enemy and subsequently facing humiliation” (Slide 96) [Figure 5]. More ruthless still was the film’s caricature of the invaders and the immigrant traitors, “twenty thousand [of whom] rise and capture New York from the National Guard,” according to *Variety*, “aided by a powerful fleet bringing 150,000 invaders with Krupp guns and other modern war devices [...]The horrors of invasion are vividly depicted, with rape and rapine rampant.”¹⁸ Scene after scene, Slide writes, “documents the looting of New York, the rape of its women, and the murder of its men by citizens of an unidentified country who wear Germanic-style uniforms and have strong Germanic names” (96). “The enemy is a debt-ridden participant of the current war,” the *Times* offered helpfully, “a country of incredible efficiency whose commanding officers are given to mustaches strangely like the Kaiser’s. You have one guess as to what country Mr. Dixon had in mind.”¹⁹

The German ethnic press, for one, had no problem identifying the film’s villain, nor its intent. George Sylvester Viereck pronounced *The Fall of a Nation* an “abortion,” whose “one purpose is to traduce the German race and make the German people appear as the enemies of



Figure 5: “The audience fairly yells with delight,” the *New York Times* wrote in its review of Thomas Dixon’s *The Fall of a Nation*, when peace advocates William Jennings Bryan and Henry Ford were “seen peeling potatoes for the Invaders.” From the author’s collection.

the United States. Any American with a drop of German blood in his veins,” he editorialized in his weekly *Fatherland*, “must have his feelings outraged by the attempts to show the Germans as invaders resorting to the most fiendish violations of humanity[...]Nothing in the category of bestiality is omitted in order to incense public sentiment against the German people.”²⁰ Viereck re-printed approvingly letters to the editor condemning the film for its anti-German stereotyping and the fact that the members of the invading army were “made to think, to feel, to act[...]according to the philosophy of the state currently imputed to modern Germany,” right down to their appearance, replete with “German helmets and brutalized caricatures of typically German faces.” In full agreement, Viereck noted that “such is the impression made by the film on the majority of those who have witnessed it,” concluding elsewhere that the *The Fall of a Nation* was “absolutely deficient in interest and can only disgust those who have the least sense of art.”²¹

Interestingly, Viereck reserved less venom for the film's rival at the box office, of which he wrote only that "a similar film is now exhibited under the title '*Civilization*'"—testimony that the ostensible pro-peace orientation of the latter film, notwithstanding its equally offensive typecasting, was perhaps less objectionable than the preparedness message of *The Fall of a Nation*.²² After all, German-Americans as a group generally still hoped to keep America out of the war during this late phase of American neutrality, a goal more in step with the pacifist message of *Civilization*.²³ The *Staats-Zeitung*, too, appeared to view that film as the lesser of two evils. Although the venerable newspaper would probably have preferred to ignore both films entirely, it did concede, in response to a reader's letter inquiring which of 1916's war epics was the more suitable for German-American patronage, that only *Civilization* came close. Although offensive in its depiction of Germans, the newspaper wrote, "the film is harmless in this realm compared to what has been achieved by others"—a reference, no doubt, to Dixon's *Fall of a Nation*. It was the only comment the *Staats-Zeitung* made on either film as they ran, simultaneously, during the spring and summer of 1916.²⁴

All the more intriguing was the response of Hearst's *German Journal*, which—while lavishing attention and praise on *both* films—aired more in favor of *The Fall of a Nation*, a renewed illustration of its willingness to subordinate its still solidly pro-German political inclinations to its popular-cultural leanings. True, the *Journal* recognized the fundamental difference between the films, noting that *Civilization* "preaches a crusade against war," whereas *The Fall of a Nation*, "on the other hand, appeals to [our] preparedness for battle." Yet, the latter film was deemed "even greater than *Civilization*" in terms of the "technical apparatus employed in the staging of its battle sequences," i.e., was greater in its entertainment value, always the decisive factor in the *Journal's* final analysis.²⁵ Not that its rival was deficient in the latter realm: "the skills on display [in *Civilization*], both in terms of its acting and its overall staging, provide genuine pleasure and the film as a whole is an achievement worthy of respect," the newspaper wrote in its initial review.²⁶ In like manner, the *Journal* lauded *Civilization's* opposition to war, an opposition the newspaper shared, in particular in relation to the possibility of the United States being drawn into the

European conflict on the side of the Allies. "The film's popularity is a result of its tendency to oppose war," the *Journal* wrote approvingly, then artfully rationalized the inclusion of violent scenes of carnage in a supposedly pacifist film: "The gruesome battle scenes are not shown to thrill, but in order to depict the true horrors of war."²⁷ Yet despite the grandeur and right-heartedness of the film's battle scenes, they always came second in comparison to the truly "excellent battle sequences" of *Fall of a Nation*, a long and glowing review of which ended, typically, with a brief nod to *Civilization* and an acknowledgement that, yes, "it, too, offers unusually and wonderfully staged scenes."²⁸ No doubt, however, it was *The Fall of a Nation* that was the season's "foremost attraction[...]. It has been a long time since any film has drawn such attention and led to as much discussion as Dixon's giant achievement," which, "since its premiere[...] has been entirely sold out."²⁹

The larger point of interest here, of course, is not that the *Journal* favored one film over the other—nor even that it privileged the one found to be more offensive by most other German newspapers—but that it embraced both films despite their extreme anti-German typecasting. Rather than sidestep the issue as it had with the previous year's *Battle Cry of Peace*, the Hearst-owned newspaper this time tackled the films' German stereotypes head on. In so doing, it established once and for all that its long-established willingness to accept, indeed embrace, German ethnic stereotypes such as the Katzenjammer Kids extended also to the wartime Hun-baiting of American film. The newspaper thus acknowledged the anti-German bias of *Civilization*, but added that "the circumstance that the evildoers are shown parading about in Prussian uniforms and with Prussian mustaches should not prevent us from watching this film, which, in terms of its overall conception, offers much that is outstanding."³⁰

A similar sort of reasoning was applied to the even more offensive portrayal of the immigrant traitors in *The Fall of a Nation*: "Following the general *zeitgeist*, it is once again the evil 'Hyphens'" who were cast as the villains, the *Journal* wrote. Indeed, in a great but little-known twist of film history, the extras hired by Dixon to portray the film's immigrants were in fact German: unemployed German army reservists called up for duty but stranded in New York, unable to return home because of the British naval blockade. Those who didn't look sufficiently "German" were reportedly given fake mustaches. Even this was

justified by the *Journal*, however: “He has been criticized for the German faces in the invading army, Dixon says, but he hired these people only because they were hungry and jobless. Five hundred Germans, many of them army reservists, had sought him out for possible work,” the newspaper explained, and thus turned an act of ethnic typecasting into a humanitarian effort to aid the immigrant poor. In any case, all casting issues aside, the film was compelling “because the battle sequences have been achieved through incredible technical expertise” and offered “splendid military scenes.”³¹ As for *Civilization*, in other words, so too for *The Fall of a Nation*, cinematic spectacle trumped ethnic sensibilities, making both films suitable for German immigrant consumption despite their negative stereotypes.

More still, the *Journal* implied that patronage of such films would aid its readers in their ultimate assimilation into American culture, which increasingly emerged as one of the Hearst-owned newspaper’s unstated goals. Thus, it specifically advised readers to refrain from feeling ethnic outrage at the negative portrayal of Germans on-screen, with the objective of becoming part of a larger, American mass audience instead. Just as laughing at vaudeville’s Dutch Act had once helped German audience members distance themselves from the stereotype, and had thereby sped their incorporation into an Americanized “community of laughter,” the newspaper implied, so hissing at the screen-Hun could now work towards the same goal. Thus, “although German-Americans will not like everything shown in *Civilization*, still the film is commendable for its overall message”; and, “even if parts of the film are offensive to German-Americans, a visit to the [Criterion] Theater is nevertheless well worthwhile.” True, *Civilization* would hardly appeal to Germans back home, the newspaper acknowledged, where its message and imagery would be “prohibitively and energetically opposed,” but as German-Americans, the *Journal* insisted, its readers needed feel no such compunction: the film’s appeal cut across “all classes and rank, all races and religions” and, in its universalizing potential, made equals (i.e., “Americans”) of all who watched it.³²

The same held true for *The Fall of a Nation*: “Much has been written for, and much against the film. The fact remains, however, [...] that even those [presumably of German origin] not in agreement with all the film shows must acknowledge its technical excellence.” As

important as “Dixon’s denial that his film is anti-German,” the *Journal* wrote, was his larger objective: “He is turning against imperialism, regardless of whether it is German or Allied in origin, and has recognized and held up American democracy as the only salvation.” As such, the film “emphasizes that all immigrants, no matter their national origin, must be Americanized as quickly as possible,” a goal with which the *Journal* itself wholeheartedly agreed. That *The Fall of a Nation* and its message were aiding in the realization of Dixon’s lofty principles was illustrated by the fact that the film was being patronized by “patriotic associations of all sorts,” the newspaper reported—not just American associations,” as it clarified a few days later, “but also associations of citizens born abroad,” including Danes, for example, and, to clinch the argument, a New York-based German men’s choir.³³ It was not as ethnic Germans, of course, that the *Journal* encouraged its readers to patronize these films, nor even any longer as German-Americans, at this late stage of the game, for as hyphenated Germans their residual sense of ethnicity may yet have caused them to take offense at the films’ negative ethnic stereotypes. Instead, readers were now encouraged to consume these anti-German caricatures as—indeed, in order to *become*, and join the ranks of—“patriotic Americans.” The actual experience itself of consuming such images, in other words, was presented as facilitating German immigrants’ metamorphosis into Americans. By checking their ethnic pride at the door, they eschewed all former national and cultural affiliation and, in the words of David Nasaw, “affirmed their inclusion in a great American public” (*Going Out* 220).

Disappearing Acts

Seasoned by decades’ worth of daily comic strips as well as their newspaper’s promotion of vaudeville’s Dutch Act, anti-German films, and its generally assimilationist thrust, readers of the *Journal* were uniquely positioned among wartime patrons of the German press to take this final step of ethnic disavowal and become full-fledged Americans: to disappear fully, that is, into the fabric of American life. Certainly, the tumultuous events of the months following 1916’s *Civilization* and *The Fall of a Nation* would have encouraged such a step. The break of diplomatic relations between Germany and the United

States in February of 1917, the publication of the notorious Zimmermann Telegram in March, and the American Declaration of war in April caused a frantic realignment of loyalty among the German ethnic press and its readership. No longer were displays of pro-Germanism as those formerly practiced by the *Staats-Zeitung* and Viereck's weekly *Fatherland* permissible. In fact, the passage of the Espionage Act in June of 1917 ruled the expression of such sentiments illegal and Viereck, for one, found himself justifying his former utterances before a Grand Jury. Even though no disloyalty was proven, he emerged from the episode with his reputation tarnished, an object lesson to other German-language editors and publications.³⁴

Even the divided loyalties of the Hearst-owned *Journal*, which, despite its pro-German political leanings had always displayed a profoundly American cultural predisposition, would no longer do in these trying times: "100% Americanism" became the order of the day following the United States' entry into the war, an objective best reached among immigrants by "Erasing the Hyphen," according to the New York City Mayor's Committee on National Defense (129). On March 2, the *Journal* began printing miniature American flags along the top border of its editorial page in visual indication of its loyalty. Not long thereafter, it changed its name from the *Deutsches Journal* ("America's Greatest German Newspaper," according to its masthead) to *New Yorker deutsches Journal* (note lowercase "d")—"An American Paper printed in German in behalf of American Unity and Universal Democracy."

In keeping with the pattern established during the years of American neutrality—only more so, now—the *Journal* continued promoting films that featured anti-German stereotypes: late 1917's *The Spy*, for example, which "attempted to lay bare the German government's spy network in this country," according to Isenberg, and "came complete with false whiskers [...] and other indispensable apparatus" (183) [Figure 6]. In a particularly pathetic display of patriotism, Hans und Fritz, the Katzenjammer Kids, became Mike and Aleck, the "Shenanigan Kids," claiming Dutch ancestry for the remainder of the war and only reverting back to their German selves in 1920—an event the *Journal* itself was not to witness (Horn 164). For in its most drastic display of patriotism, the newspaper on April 21, 1918 placed an English-language notice on its front page. "In a supreme sacrifice in



Figure 6: Following the United States' entry into the war, the German Journal continued promoting even more anti-German Films. *The Spy* (1917) featured "false whiskers" and "other indispensable apparatus" of the genre, according to Michale Isenberg. *Deutsches Journal*, 1917.

behalf of American unity," the *Journal* wrote, it was suspending publication with immediate effect. Thus, in the first of several disappearing acts, the Hearst-owned newspaper simply ceased to exist.³⁵

Interestingly, the *Staats-Zeitung*, which had formerly referred to its rival as an anti-German "sensational rag of cheese cloth," immediately

cast itself in the role of the *Journal's* heir apparent.³⁶ On the very day the latter publication folded, the *Staats-Zeitung*, as hyper-American now as it had once been pro-German, ran the following bilingual front-page message: "To the Newsdealers. The *Deutsches Journal* having suspended publication, we would appreciate your recommendation of the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* to the former readers of the *Deutsches Journal*." The German-language version of this plea added a note to *Staats-Zeitung* readers assuring them of the newspaper's continued "efforts to be both an outstanding advertising medium, and also a mediator for the understanding of American institutions."³⁷ If, among those American institutions, the *Staats-Zeitung* meant to include film, however—the medium it had once denigrated as "the lowliest of all"—it was unable to bring itself to wholeheartedly embrace this formerly despised stepchild of the arts. "The film industry's products remain what they always have been: a trivial pastime for overgrown children," the newspaper sniffed in 1918: "entertainment for the masses—for the less educated who are not inclined to engage in serious thought."³⁸

Former readers of the *Journal* who turned to the *Staats-Zeitung* in hopes of finding coverage of the film industry's staple fare of war movies were thus to be disappointed. Released within days of the *Journal's* folding in April 1918, D.W. Griffith's epic *Hearts of the World*, for example, the most famous of America's wartime anti-German films, ran for weeks in New York without so much as a single mention in the *Staats-Zeitung*. Perhaps the newspaper, notwithstanding its newfound American patriotism, could simply not stomach the extreme anti-German imagery to which the film stooped, including its scenes of "violence, violation, and blood-letting," and "girls harassed by German officers who had trapped them in an underground dugout" (Nasaw, *Going Out* 217). It was precisely the kind of film whose spectacular action sequences—all "impressively realistic," according to the *New York Times*—would have justified its obnoxious Hun-baiting in the pages of the former *Journal*.³⁹ Despite a professed desire to attract its erstwhile rival's readership, however, the *Staats-Zeitung* ignored the film.

Not that there is any evidence of the *Staats-Zeitung* having succeeded in its effort to win over the readers of the now defunct *Journal* in the first place. On the contrary, the *Staats-Zeitung* experienced a precipitous decline in circulation following America's entry

into the war, even after its 1919 merger with a lesser German daily, the *New Yorker Herald*.⁴⁰ It is unlikely, therefore, that the *Staats-Zeitung* absorbed the *Journal's* fifty thousand readers, whose own mysterious disappearance represents the second vanishing act of this story. For those wondering, an insight once offered by sociologist Robert E. Park suggests where the readers left homeless by the folding of the *German Journal* may have gone. Writing in 1925, Park noted "that the most successful of the Hearst papers, the *New York Evening Journal*, gains a new body of subscribers every six years. Apparently it gets its readers mainly from immigrants. They graduate into Mr. Hearst's press from the foreign-language press" (96). In fact, judging from available circulation figures, it seems quite possible that Hearst's German-language readers went directly from the *Journal*[...]to the *Journal*—to Hearst's English-language *Evening Journal*, that is, whose circulation swelled by tens of thousands from 1918-1920, as well as to its morning edition (and the *German Journal's* longtime English-language sister publication), now called the *New York American*, whose Sunday circulation increased by 200,000 during the same time period. Even though it is impossible to ascertain the identity of those included in these anonymous figures, it is probable—indeed, likely—that former readers of the *German Journal* numbered somewhere within their ranks.⁴¹ After all, what more logical place to go, after years of patronizing a Hearst-owned German-language tabloid, than to the English-language press of the publisher whose paper had for years been a force in shaping their worldview and cultural inclination and, in so doing, had readied them for this decisive step toward their full Americanization.

If one accepts the hypothesis that the increased circulations of the *American* and the *Evening Journal* were at least partially the result of new readers gained from immigrant and, more specifically, from German-American ranks, the large increase of the Sunday circulation of the *American* is of particular relevance. It helps explain how even German readers not yet proficient in the use of the English language may have made the transition. For a lavishly illustrated Sunday paper like the *American* was, Park noted, one "a man would buy even if he could not read it. He went in for the pictures, first in black and white and then in colors[...]then followed the comic section and all the other devices with which we are familiar for compelling a dull-minded and reluctant audience to read" (Park 96). Certainly, former readers of the

German *Journal* would have re-encountered in the *American* all their favorite comic strip characters, and enjoyed anew the mischief of the Katzenjammer—now Shenanigan—Kids, no longer translated into straight German but instead speaking in their original, and ridiculous, “Dutch”-English pidgin. Here, too, they would have found ads and reviews promoting Weber and Fields, still performing their Dutch Act to packed houses and, of course, coverage of Griffith’s *Hearts of the World*, which the *Staats-Zeitung* ignored, but which the *American* called “a monster success” and “the greatest motion picture of them all.” No longer compelled to rationalize the anti-German bias of mean-spirited ethnic stereotypes, Hearst’s no-longer-German readers of the *American*—“An American Paper for American People”—would have shuddered along with all others at the newspaper’s description of the film’s portrayal of life under “the iron heel of the invader” and its depiction of “German officers[...]holding a wild orgy” and “attacking French girls[...]with harrowing consequences.” Perhaps, too, they would have joined in “the wild cheers from the audience” at the sight of “the newly arriving American soldiers[...]shown marching with[...]the Allies [as they] retake the village.”⁴² If so, such a response would at last have heralded their irreversible disavowal of all former German national loyalty, and would have signaled once and for all their arrival as full-fledged Americans.

“Since assimilation was an ultimate goal,” sociologist Morris Janowitz once noted, “the success of the immigrant press could in some part be measured by its ability to destroy itself” (19). Judged by this measure, Hearst’s German *Journal* was certainly a success, as was the assimilation of its formerly German ethnic readership, whose members in a manner of speaking also “destroyed,” or at least re-invented themselves as American. Ultimately, even the *Staats-Zeitung* and its readers could not but follow suit. Within a generation of the war, by the early 1950s, the newspaper’s circulation was down to just 25,000, at which time the once defiantly ethnocentric *Staats-Zeitung* was reduced to “present[ing] its readers a crossword puzzle, book reviews, letters from readers, gossip about Hollywood, radio, and television,” all “according to the standard [American] pattern.” The once proud flagship of the German-language press in America—itsself now effectively a thing of the past—had become, in the words of Carl Wittke, historian of German ethnic journalism, a publication “like any

other American city daily” (290-91).

Finally, along with the German-language press and its readers, the German ethnic stereotype too gradually disappeared from the post-war American socio-cultural landscape. Looking back, Erich von Stroheim, who had himself portrayed one of Griffith’s pillaging Huns in 1918’s *Hearts of the World*, noted that the stereotype had always been “exaggerated in the extreme. The typical German officer [during World War I],” he wrote, exchanging one stereotype for another, “was tall, blond, blue-eyed and generally handsome, but you couldn’t arouse the hatred of the audience against a chap like that.” In order to achieve such hatred, the stereotype had therefore borrowed from earlier, nineteenth century conceptions of the German as a crew-cut, beer-swilling, mustachioed buffoon and added elements taken from his more vicious, bomb-throwing incarnation during the anarchist scare of the eighteen eighties. Thus was created the “fearsome monstrosity” of the wartime Hun. Some twenty years later, however, with Germans once again positioned to be America’s enemy abroad, the old stereotype was not resurrected. “Today,” von Stroheim observed in 1941, “we abstain from our former exaggeration.” Contemporary films vilifying the Nazis “use[d] good-looking men for German officers,” he wrote, who were “by no means the types we remember from the good old days” (X4).

Anecdotal as von Stroheim’s assessment was, its overall thrust is verified by a review of World War II-era propaganda. Gone were the beer-bellied, hairy-faced Huns of yesteryear: though as evil as ever, the Nazis of Hollywood and American print culture’s war posters, and fifth columnists too, were generally trim and clean shaven, physically indistinguishable from Americans.⁴³ In a way, it made perfect sense. Having helped German-Americans during World War I recognize their ethnic traits, habits, and appearance as markers of otherness and therefore as potential liabilities, and having thereby facilitated their embrace of a self-consciously American identity instead, the former ethnic stereotype had fulfilled and, in consequence, outlived its purpose. After all, ethnic parody only works if its target is identifiable. Yet in postwar America, bumbling Germans and marauding Huns had become signifiers without a referent. In terms of their political influence, historian Austin App observes, Germans “had been eliminated” (36). Similarly, in terms of ethnicity, they had contracted “a sort of cultural amnesia,” according to Frederick Luebke: “They spoke almost no German and

knew little of German culture. Few participated in ethnic associational activities of any kind. Their ethnic heritage had almost no importance for their daily lives” (295). They had, in a word, vanished as a recognizable ethnic group in American culture and society, and along with them their caricature had too. Facilitating the community’s vanishing act, the present essay has argued, had been one of the caricature’s tacit objectives all along. In this respect, the post-World War I disappearance of the stereotype—which had evolved for more than a century but was now finally laid to rest—represents the best evidence of its own success.

Notes

1. See Koegel on the German theatrical tradition of the *Volksstück* (272-76); demographic statistics on German-American arrivals can be found in the annual reports—the *Jahresberichte*—of the German Society of the City of New York, 1884-1915.

2. On Germans during the Civil War, see for example Faust, Chapter 16. Not all viewed Germans’ contributions as positively as they did themselves, however. In fact, the subject was one of considerable controversy at the time, with some accusing German regiments of gross incompetence—see Reiss 360-62. Nevertheless, the overall verdict was a positive one. Looking back on the war from the vantage point of 1903, for example, President Theodore Roosevelt retrospectively lauded the “all-importance of the American citizens of German birth and extraction towards the cause of the Union and liberty” (Rippley 60).

3. On the decline of German influence in the labor movement, see also Burrows and Wallace (1024-26, 1106).

4. “Ausgeburten hochgradig verblödeter Gehirne[...]Eine jämmerliche und bejammernswerte Geschmacksverirrung”; “Einen derartigen Deutschen giebt [es] einfach nicht[...]aber die amerikanischen Witzblätter halten an der Schablone fest, weil ihre Leser darüber lachen[...]Jenes lächerliche, unmögliche Zerrbild, das einen kleinen dickbäuchigen Gesellen mit hängendem Schnurbart und blöden Augen, mit Holzpantoffeln, Ballonmütze und langer Pfeife, mit Bierglas und Pretzel zeigt. Wo hat man jemals einen derartigen Deutschen gesehen?[...]Wir Deutsch-Amerikaner lachen nicht darüber”; *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 1 August, 1913, 6; 19 September, 1913, 6. Translations mine, as are all that follow.

5. On the German-language *Journal*, influential in the early twentieth-century German community but little-known among historians, see Conolly-Smith, Chapter 3.

6. “Langsamkeit, Langweiligkeit und Langstieligkeit”; *Deutsches Journal*, 25 September 1913, 8.

7. “Die Mitarbeiter [der] ‘Lustigen Blätter’[...]sind die bekanntesten amerikanischen Karikaturenzeichner”; “Besonders imponiert dem Publikum die[...]Aufmachung und Ausstattung der Zeitung[...]mit ihren prächtigen Beilagen[...]und den Lustigen Blättern”; “Lasen sie mit vergnügten Gesichtern in der bunten, komischen, humoristischen Beilage des ‘New Yorker Deutschen Journals’ von den Streichen der Katzenjammer Bösewichter und derlei lustiges mehr”; *Deutsches Journal*, 13 December 1915, 8; 28 September 1913, 1; 10 October 1913, 8.

8. *Variety*, 13 August, 1915, 17; *New York Times*, 7 August, 1915, 8.

9. In July of 1915, just weeks before the release of *The Battle Cry of Peace*, United States Treasury Department Secret Service agents had uncovered a German espionage ring operating out of New York and Washington D.C., whose plan to buy up American munitions and airplanes in order to deny their delivery to the Allies was reported by *The New York World* to sensational effect. A lively account is found in Traxel, 178-83.

10. “Die vielgeschmähte, niederste Kunst”; *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 24 January, 1913, 6.

11. George Sylvester Viereck, “Anti-German Propaganda in Films,” *The Fatherland*, June 24, 1916, 4 (20): 315.

12. On Hearst’s anti-British views, and his support for Germany during the period of American neutrality, see Nasaw, *Chief* 245-47.

13. “Ein [...] Sensations-Photodrama, bei weitem das Grossartigste [...] Die Zerstörungs-bilder sind so krass realistisch, dass ein unheimlicher Schauer durch das Publikum geht[...]Der Verfasser scheint die Bedrohung unserer Pazifikküste durch die unersättliche Landgier Japans nicht zu erkennen; er verlegt den Schauplatz seines Dramas nach New York[...]einer starken Auslandsmacht[...]glänzend”; *Deutsches Journal*, 12 September, 1915, iii, 3. On Hearst’s anti-Japanese views, see Nasaw, *Chief* 242-44.

14. *Variety*, 9 June 1916, 17.

15. Isenberg notes that the film’s ostensibly “pro-peace” message should be understood as Ince “attempting with some success to cash in on the early popularity of films that decried war. He certainly was no pacifist himself, as his later war films were among the most bloodthirsty and patriotic of their kind” (99).

16. “America Is Invaded Again In the Films,” *New York Times*, 7 June 1916, 11.

17. Although both the invaders’ and the immigrant traitors’ national identity remained unnamed, as ever, *The American Film Institute Catalog* bluntly describes the *The Fall of A Nation*’s plot as showing “a German-backed conspiracy to overthrow the United States by arming the nation’s immigrants” (Hanson and Gevinson 260).

18. *Variety*, 9 June, 1916, 23.

19. *New York Times*, 7 June 1916, 11.

20. “Anti-German Propaganda in Films,” *The Fatherland*, 24 June, 1916, 4 (20): 315.

21. “How some of the Movies Poison the Minds of the People”; “Victor Herbert Defends ‘The Fall of A Nation’”; “Anti-German Propaganda in Films,” *The Fatherland*, 19 July, 1916, 4 (24): 372; 5 July, 1916, 4 (22): 346; 24 June, 1916, 4 (20): 315.

22. “Anti-German Propaganda in Films,” *The Fatherland*, 24 June, 1916, 4 (20): 315.

23. It was a goal also shared by the Wilson administration, incidentally, which later that year successfully ran its candidate under the re-election campaign slogan “He Kept Us Out of War.” It is telling, in this respect, that Wilson willingly endorsed *Civilization*, and even allowed a hand-written note of congratulation to Ince to be reproduced in the film. In turn, later historians agree, the film “played a considerable role in Wilson’s victory in 1916” (Brownlow 74). For contemporary accounts of the mutual benefit Ince and Wilson derived from their relationship, see “The Movies,” *New York Times*, 15 October 1916, X9. When Dixon asked for an endorsement for *The Fall of a Nation*, on the other hand, Wilson refused, despite the longstanding friendly relations between the two men. “I think the thing a great mistake,” the president wrote Dixon upon having read a plot synopsis, perhaps mindful of the peace platform upon which he planned to build his reelection campaign: “There is no need to stir the nation up in favor of national defense[...]I should deeply regret seeing any sort of excitement stirred in so grave a matter” (qtd. in Slide 91; on the longstanding personal relationship between the

two men, see 20).

24. "Der Film ist harmlos in Vergleich zu dem, was von anderer Seite auf diesem Gebiet geleistet wird"; *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 8 August, 1916, 4.

25. "[Civilization] predigt einen Kreuzzug gegen den Krieg[...]einen Appell für Kreigsbereitschaft dagegen enthält Dixons [Fall of a Nation][...]Der technische Apparat, den er bei der Aufnahme und Inszenierung der Schlachtenbilder in Anwendung gebracht hat, ist hier noch grösser als bei Civilization"; *Deutsches Journal*, 27 June, 1916, 4; see also 13 June 1916, 4.

26. "An den gebotenen Leistungen, den schauspielerischen sowie denen der Regie konnte man sich wirklich freuen und der Riesensfilm als solcher ist eine Respekt gebietende Leistung"; *Deutsches Journal*, 3 June, 1916, 5.

27. "Das Lichtspiel [ist] vor allem seiner gegen den Krieg gerichteten Tendenz wegen beliebt[...]Die fürchterlichen Bilder aus dem Schlachtengetümmel werden nämlich nicht gezeigt, um dem Publikum einen Nervenkitzel zu verschaffen, sondern um ihm die Greuel eines wirklichen Krieges abschreckend vor Augen zu führen"; *Deutsches Journal*, 9 July, 1916, iii, 3; see also 11 July, 1916, 4; 23 July, 1916, iii, 3; 6 August, 1916, iii, 3.

28. "[Fall of a Nation] biete[t] hervorragende Schlachtenbilder[...]Auch dieser Film [Civilization] bietet ganz ungewöhnlich grossartigen szenischen Aufbau"; *Deutsches Journal*, 13 June, 1916, 4.

29. "Ein Zugstück ersten Ranges[...]Seit langer Zeit hat kein Film so viel Aufsehen erregt und zu soviel Diskussion Anlass gegeben, wie Thomas Dixons letzte Riesenschöpfung[...]Seit der Premiere[...]bis auf den letzten Platz ausverkauft"; *Deutsches Journal*, 11 June, 1916, iii, 3.

30. "Der Umstand, dass die Bösewichter in preussischen Uniformen und dito Schnurbärten umherstolzieren sollte uns nicht davon abhalten, den Film zu betrachten, welcher an manchen Stellen Hervorragendes in Bezug auf Inszenierung bietet"; *Deutsches Journal*, 6 June 1916, 4.

31. "Bezeichnend für den Geist der Zeit ist der Umstand, dass es wieder die bösen Hyphens sind[...]der Film an sich verspricht interessant zu werden, da die Kampfszenen mit einem ungeheuren technischen Apparat aufgebaut sind[...]bringt glänzende Soldatenszenen"; "Die deutschen Gesichter in der Invasionsarmee, so sagt Dixon, seien ihm zum Vorwurf gemacht worden. Er habe aber diese Leute nur genommen weil sie hungrig und ohne Arbeit waren. 500 Deutsche, davon viele Reservisten, hätten sich bei ihm zur Arbeit gemeldet"; *Deutsches Journal*, 6 June 1916, 4; 13 June, 1916, 4.

32. "Wenngleich Deutsch-Amerikanern nicht alles gefallen wird, was der Film Civilization zeigt, [...]ist] das Lichtspiel seiner Tendenz wegen zu loben"; "Wenngleich manche Stellen im Film dem Deutsch-Amerikanertum anstössig erscheinen müssen, so lohnt sich doch ein Besuch des Theaters in hohem Masse"; "energisch verbieten"; "Leute aller Klassen und Stände, aller Rassen und Religionen"; *Deutsches Journal*, 11 July, 1916, 4; 20 June, 1916, 4; 3 December, 1916, ii, 4; 23 July, 1916, iii, 3.

33. "Viel ist für den Film, viel ist gegen ihn geschrieben worden. Die Tatsache bleibt bestehen, dass[...]selbst derjenige, der nicht mit allem einverstanden ist, das geboten wird, muss anerkennen, dass auf technischem Gebiete Hervorragendes geleistet wird"; "bestreitet[...]dass sein Film anti-deutsch sei [...]Er, Dixon, wende sich nur gegen den Imperialismus, gleichgültig ob deutscher oder alliierter, und als einzige Rettung vor dem Übel habe er die amerikanische Demokratie erkannt und gepriesen[...]nur betonen wollen[d], dass alle Einwanderer, gleichgültig welcher Nationalität, sobald wie möglich amerikanisiert werden müssten"; "Patriotische Gesellschaften aller Art"; "nicht

nur amerikanische patriotische Verbände, sondern auch Vereinigungen von im Auslande geborenen Bürgern"; *Deutsches Journal*, 11 July, 1916, 4; 13 June, 1916, 4; 20 June, 1916, 4; 9 July, 1916, iii, 3.

34. On Viereck, who was suspected, but never indicted for wartime espionage, see Keller 142-44, 151-52; on the Espionage Act, see Stone 146-73.

35. *New Yorker deutsches Journal*, 21 April, 1918, 1.

36. "Sensations-Käseblatt"; *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, December 20, 1914, 6; on the Journal's alleged anti-Germanness, see, for example, 7 June, 1913, 6.

37. "Nicht nur ein treffliches Neuigkeitsblatt und Anzeigenmedium, sondern auch eine Mittlerin des Verständnisses für amerikansiche Institutionen"; *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 21 April, 1918, 1.

38. "[Die] Erzeugnisse...[der] Filmfabrikanten[...]bleiben, was sie sind: eine Spielerei für grosse Kinder[...]Unterhaltung der Masse. Der weniger gebildeten und der weniger zum Nachdenken veranlagten Masse"; *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 17 April, 1918, 6.

39. *New York Times*, 5 April, 1918, 13.

40. The gradual decline in the circulation of the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold* can be charted by a comparison of the figures listed in *N.W. Ayer's and Son's Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Son), 1910-1920. On the *Staats-Zeitung* merging with the *Herold*, see Wittke 289-90.

41. This argument is developed in greater detail in Conolly-Smith, 275-82. Circulation figures are found in *N.W. Ayer's and Son's Newspaper Annual* for the relevant years.

42. "Film 'Hearts of the World' Another Griffith Triumph"; "'Hearts of the World' Griffith's Greatest Triumph"; *New York American*, 6 April, 1918, 11; 11 April, 1918, sec. 2:3.

43. See, for example, the gallery of screen Nazis in Anthony Rhodes 152-4. Although he continued to represent screen-Germans in the nineteen forties, von Stroheim wrote, he "modified according to the new standards as much as I could" (X4).

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From Internment to Containment: Cold War Imaginings of Japanese Americans in *Go for Broke*

Edward Tang

Hollywood producer Dore Schary thought he had a terrific idea. Constantly alert for compelling storylines, he decided in 1950 to make a motion picture about the Japanese American experience during the Second World War. Writer-director Robert Pirosh, an Oscar-winner for his screenplay in *Battleground* (1949), a Schary production about the Battle of the Bulge, agreed to collaborate on the new project. The result was *Go for Broke*.¹ Released by MGM studios in 1951, the film revolved around the adventures of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a highly decorated, all-volunteer Japanese American unit that participated in the Allied campaigns in Italy and France. What distinguished *Go for Broke* from other war movies of the time was its subject matter, soldiers of Japanese descent who fought for the United States, and its predominantly Japanese American cast. Remarkable as well was the film's acknowledgement of internment, however sporadic and implied. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the federal government suspected the loyalties of 110,000 immigrant Japanese (Issei) and their American-born progeny (Nisei) and forced them into concentration camps scattered across the western United States. That many of the Nisei soldiers of the 442nd were fighting overseas to prove their loyalty to the very nation that imprisoned their families made their stories all the more extraordinary.²

Yet *Go for Broke* was far from perfect in its telling of bravery and sacrifice under demanding circumstances. Just as the film honored the Nisei's military accomplishments, it also hid from view the broader tragedy of internment. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated the unprecedented mass incarceration of the Issei and Nisei through Executive Order 9066. The directive came in part from pressure applied by local and state politicians in the West as well as farmers associations desiring Asian-owned property.³ Early Japanese

victories in the Pacific after Pearl Harbor only inflamed suspicion and fears about the Japanese Americans; few within mainstream society decried their removal from homes and businesses to imprisonment in the camps. Some Nisei consequently felt the need to display their allegiance by donning an American uniform. But many other Japanese Americans, acting from their own sense of patriotism, resisted the U.S. government's hypocrisy in calling them to arms. Audiences of *Go for Broke* therefore viewed the depiction of only a portion of eligible Nisei men who were prepared to sacrifice their minds and bodies in service to the state.⁴ Beneath its "war film genre" veneer then, *Go for Broke* introduced a problematically selective narrative for mass consumption.

It was the Cold War, however, that guaranteed the picture's favorable reception. Once the Second World War ended, venues within American popular culture—films, books, and magazines—regularly constructed narratives that hailed democracy's victory over totalitarian regimes. Alongside Schary's *Battleground* and *Go for Broke* appeared such war pictures as *Command Decision* (1948), *Halls of Montezuma* (1950), *The Flying Leathernecks* (1951), and *Battle Cry* (1955), among others.⁵ With communists at home and abroad replacing the fascists as enemies of the state, popular literature and film in the early Cold War period emphasized the United States as a benevolent, pluralistic, and freedom-loving nation.⁶ Racist perceptions that the Japanese Americans were distrusted aliens who required incarceration ill-fitted this mythic framework. The recent triumphs over the Axis powers thus overshadowed memories of internment, regardless of the troubling inconsistencies that it exposed within national commemorations of the "Good War." If recalled at all, the removal of Japanese Americans to fenced, barren landscape was for many other Americans merely a regrettable moment of wartime hysteria. In this Cold War environment, the predominant imagery of Japanese Americans as unassimilable foreigners took a new turn. As this essay will suggest, popular storylines in the 1950s, including *Go for Broke*, began envisioning the Japanese Americans as early archetypes of the model minority stereotype. This tactic served to celebrate the opportunities available within a democratic society while also arguing for the need to contain communism overseas.⁷

Several scholars working in Asian American studies have situated the creation of a model minority stereotype within the social contexts of the 1960s. During this time, magazine articles first used the phrase "model minority" to trace the successful integration of Asian Americans into mainstream society through their education, thrift, respect for

elders, and work ethic. Sociologists and other critics attributed this success to Asian values that honored family, discipline, and sacrifice. As a result, Asian Americans appeared to overcome racial prejudice and enjoy higher levels of material comfort and social status than other ethnic minorities. By emphasizing such a myth, these writers also offered a brazenly simplistic and harmful critique of the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans and others who sought federal assistance for their plights, the magazine editorials argued, had only to emulate the methods by which Asian Americans attained prosperity in the United States. If one failed to advance economically or socially, then that failure was surely one's own fault. This pernicious line of thought, even if well-intended, meant to counteract the increasing presence of urban riots, black militancy, as well as the general social unrest that pervaded the decade. The model minority stereotype became a rhetorical and imagistic weapon designed to silence protest against the social structures that caused injustices and inequalities in the first place.⁸

Yet historian Robert Lee has contended that prior versions of the model minority stereotype arose during the late 1940s and early 1950s. He positioned this emergence within three distinct Cold War concerns: "the red menace of communism, the black menace of race mixing, and the white menace of homosexuality."⁹ The domestic threats that fervent anticommunists made of labor unionists, civil rights advocates, and homosexuals went hand in hand with fears about these groups' perceived treasonous activities weakening national security. As proto-model minorities, Japanese Americans supposedly helped soothe these anxieties through their already tested loyalties and successful ethnic assimilation that all but guaranteed their complicity in maintaining the status quo. Once released from the internment camps, the Issei and Nisei simply wanted to rebuild their lives. Because of the collective shame and traumas endured—lost property and businesses, separated families, feelings of alienation and despair—Japanese Americans sought a return to normalcy and remained relatively quiet about their experiences.¹⁰ As a cultural artifact of the 1950s, *Go for Broke* certainly belongs with Lee's argument for redefining, if not expanding, our understanding of how the model minority stereotype worked. The film conferred visibility to the Nisei volunteers as initial renditions of the model minority when they conquered German soldiers as well as American prejudice through their efficiency, loyalty, and hard work. Their military service for the nation then provided the way in which Japanese Americans as a whole became accepted into American society without threatening its stability.¹¹

Missing from these discussions on the model minority myth though is how it functioned within a Cold War transpacific imaginary. Domestically, the reenacted wartime heroics of the 442nd in *Go for Broke* offered moviegoers a reassuring narrative, one that suggested that the American principles of freedom and democracy would remain ascendant in trying times whatever the nation's contradictory practices against its racial minorities. And the Nisei offered living proof of this enduring patriotism.¹² But the message was also vital to U.S. foreign policy initiatives in containing the spread of communism overseas. The film's portrayal of the Nisei as early model minorities was part of a broader debate within American popular culture about these global concerns. Seeking to enhance its international image, the United States competed for anti-communist allies in Asia, particularly in Japan after its defeat in the Second World War. Statesmen and cultural commentators alike purposefully advertised the benefits of an "American way of life," one that emphasized economic opportunity, material comfort, and political equality, to lure developing nations away from Soviet or Chinese spheres of influence. Occupied Japan, once a despised adversary of the United States, now proved a valuable asset in promoting American economic and military interests in the Pacific theater. In this sense, reinventing the image of Japanese Americans as loyal citizens implicitly corresponded throughout the 1950s with remaking the Japanese as loyal anti-communist allies.

It is no accident that the acceptance of Japanese Americans as prototype model minorities coincided with U.S. foreign policy initiatives in postwar Japan. Christina Klein's work on containment culture is useful here when she examines the intersection between popular culture and American foreign policy stances toward Asia. Both emphasized not only a culture of containment but also a culture of integration that educated Americans about the nation's fight against communist encroachment in the Pacific. "Eschewing containment's language of barriers," she argues, foreign policy makers "used the language of transnational 'flows' to illustrate this interdependence" of military alliances and global markets between the United States and Asia.¹³ Novels, popular magazines, films, and plays about Asia corresponded with the strategy of winning hearts and minds within the United States by facilitating a sentimental bond between American audiences and Asian subjects. By creating more intimate knowledge about Asians through print, songs, and images, cultural producers participated in teaching the American public about the nation's political and economic investment in international relations (14).

Klein's culture of integration can be applied to how American popular culture portrayed the implied relationship between Japanese Americans as model minorities and Japan as a model ally. Since occupying Japan in 1945, the United States wanted to secure its post-war successes by rebuilding its former enemy into a country that would limit the expansion of communism. During the Korean War, Japan provided key installations for U.S. military operations from 1950 to 1953. Because of an already developed industrial base, Japan was also becoming a significant trading partner in the region wherein the U.S. and its allies hoped to surround and potentially shrink Soviet and Chinese power through a global capitalist network. What must be amended to Klein's argument is that these aims reverberated within domestic perceptions of Japanese Americans and how internment became side-stepped as a problematic subject. Strangely enough, what hurt the Issei and Nisei most during the Second World War—their suspected national and ethnic ties to Japan—now appeared in a small way to help their public image when they posed as ideal American citizens. Not coincidentally then, the larger strategy for U.S. policy makers and within American popular culture necessitated integration on both domestic and international fronts: assimilating the once maligned Japanese Americans into the nation's population and incorporating a once defeated Japan into the anti-communist coalition. Doing so required sustained championing of a free global market as well as the ideals of liberty and equality. In turn, debates framed within this culture of integration minimized the visibility of internment within the United States and denied that Americans pursued neocolonialist objectives in the Pacific.¹⁵

One of the most popular of periodicals, *Reader's Digest*, informed its audience about these interrelated issues. That is, not only were Japanese Americans capable of giving their lives to the cause of democracy but Japan was also proving itself a reliable partner in the struggle against communism. A 1952 *Reader's Digest* article caught this moment of diplomatic and cultural transition between the United States and Japan with its sub-banner: "Our strongest bulwark against Soviet attack from the West may, ironically, be our former enemy." The writer, Major General Charles Willoughby, was the Chief of Intelligence for General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers during the occupation of Japan. To defuse any suspicion about this new American ally in the Korean War, Willoughby described the loyalty of the Japanese: "It would have been easy for [the Japanese] to cripple our

war effort in the ports serving Korea. But not a single serious act of sabotage, no hint of political blackmail disturbed our operations. On the contrary, the Japanese worked for us willingly and cheerfully" (16). Here the general portrayed Japan as a model ally nation with a population eager and docile enough to serve American expansionist interests in the Pacific. Indeed, Willoughby's evaluation assured American readers that the Japanese wholeheartedly embraced their conquerors. This assessment would further discount any accusation, especially from communists, of U.S. intentions to dominate the region.

Attributes of dependability and hard work applied as well to the domestic scene. One writer defended the interned Japanese Americans and their loyalty during the Second World War in similar terms as General Willoughby's when dismissing fears of sabotage. In 1950, *Reader's Digest* presented a story on a Nisei soldier, Frank Shigemura, who died in combat. Because of this ultimate sacrifice, the overall treatment of the Issei and Nisei by the U.S. government seemed unduly harsh. "After Pearl Harbor," the author observed within the broader context of racial prejudice, "wild rumors of sabotage made [the Japanese Americans] our most persecuted minority group. Exhaustive investigations by Army, Navy and FBI showed that not one act of sabotage was committed [by them]" (17). The figure of the Nisei soldier encapsulated the efforts and fidelity of the larger population of Japanese Americans, who because of their patriotism were incapable of subversive activities. Placed alongside General Willoughby's later assessment of Japanese behavior during the Korean War, Shigemura's heroism and death anchored a narrative that reassured American audiences of domestic and overseas loyalty to the United States.

Nisei soldiers who served in the Army's Military Intelligence Service as translators in occupied Japan embodied this link between their duty to the United States and the integration of Japan into an American-led alliance. During the occupation, Kan Tagami became the personal interpreter of General MacArthur. This high-level position gave Tagami opportunities to act as a liaison between the American military and the Japanese government. He even recalled meeting the Emperor Hirohito wherein the sovereign praised the young Nisei, stating, "You are a bridge between our two nations." Harry K. Fukuhara similarly noted: "Overnight, bitter enemies became close working-partners, and the Nisei linguist soldiers played an important role in cementing this relationship." Both Tagami and Fukuhara emphasized that as interpreters the Nisei significantly helped to restructure Japan by

distributing food to the general populace, establishing school curricula that emphasized democratic ideals, reforming farming practices, and introducing baseball to villagers. That the Nisei performed such dedicated acts served to promote their model minority image as well as to convince the Japanese of American benevolence. Yoshito Fujimoto more directly associated the Nisei's role in Japan with the Cold War era. Arriving in Yokohama in 1945, he and two other American officers initially had to share a hotel room with three Soviet officers because of a lack of facilities in the war-torn area. "We decided to be friendly with [the Soviets] and offered to shake hands," Fujimoto recollected, "but surprisingly they turned their backs on us. Yes, you can bet that the cold war[...]started this day." On the other hand, the Nisei's mere presence in Japan advanced American interests against the communists in additional ways. Fujimoto recorded that as he toured Tokyo, the Japanese would stare at him because of his Japanese face and American army uniform. "The Japanese citizens had thought that Niseis never served in the U.S. Army," he observed, "and they were impressed by the U.S. Army's democratic system or policy in dealing with its own soldiers."¹⁸

Other periodicals continued to associate Japan's status with those of Japanese Americans. In 1957, Christopher Rand reported in the *New Yorker* on the rising popularity of Japanese Americans in light of Japan's new role in the Pacific: "In general, the [N]isei, the first crop of real Japanese-Americans, appear to stand well with the public at large, partly because of their fine war record, and partly, I believe, because of the recent switch in American sentiments toward Japan."¹⁹ The writer invoked the 442nd regiment as a representative of the entire Nisei populace, correlating military service with "real" American citizenship. Rand's observation, however, both reveals and hides much of the nation's "sentiments" about Japan and Japanese Americans. The writer conflated American domestic and foreign policies by celebrating the nation's recruitment of Nisei soldiers while acknowledging the altered world of foreign relations in which Japan became an important U.S. supporter in Asia. At the same time, by focusing on the military accomplishments of the Nisei, Rand glanced over the greater issue of domestic racism entrenched within U.S. policymaking, specifically about internment.

Popular periodicals throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s did portray Japanese Americans as loyal citizens who had adjusted well to the trauma of internment. Articles, editorials, and other news features noted that the Nisei displayed such admirable traits as adaptability to demanding circumstances, fidelity in the face of suspicion, and forgive-

ness of those who wronged them. These were characteristics from which to take comfort against the backdrop of a surging communist menace. Starting in the late 1940s, magazines earnestly attended to the Japanese Americans' plight once the communist threat emerged in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China. The *Christian Century's* editorial page for May 4, 1949 carried two headlines that made the connection clear: "Communists Invade South China" and "More Signs of Recovery From War Hysteria." While nervously recording the Chinese Nationalists' retreat from Mao's Red Army, the paper also found some hope in the world when U.S. state courts reinstated citizenship to several previously interned Japanese Americans.²⁰ Others too saw the fundamental link between how the United States treated its own citizens and the growth of communist governments overseas. "In a day when democracy seems to be diplomatically on the defensive," the *Saturday Review* noted in 1947, "it is heartening to find proof of its vitality" in the case of Hawaii where Japanese Americans participated fully in daily life, and in the Japanese American soldiers of the 442nd regiment. Arguing that communism endangered the sanctity of democratic societies, the magazine put forth the Nisei's loyalty and service as proof of the nation's fairness and acceptance of ethnic minorities. But the Nisei war record provided the primary allure of democracy's strength. As the article noted, "The thing above all others that lifted the Japanese-Americans from the undeserved abyss of hatred and mistrust was their military record."²¹

In the mid-1950s, periodicals continued to admire the Nisei soldiers and their interned families as early versions of model minorities. In 1956, *Reader's Digest* praised the 442nd but did so by also privileging its exploits over the broader sufferings of interned Japanese Americans: "[T]he conduct of the evacuated Japanese and, above all, the superb military record of the Nisei had brought about a reversal in the feelings of most other Americans toward them." The article attempted further to diminish the meanings of internment by describing the mass of Japanese Americans as "evacuated" as opposed to interned or imprisoned, hinting that the forced removal to the camps were for their benefit and safety. But the writer avoided the implications of his word choice and ended with a now-familiar message: as model citizens the Nisei had earned their place in American society, whatever the setbacks, giving others optimism that hard work and self-sacrifice would still remain the bedrock ideals of a democracy.²² By repeatedly emphasizing this message, the racial frenzy invoked against Japanese Americans

would appear as incidental to, rather than fully embedded within, the nation's ideals, history, and social structure.

Yet the nation's attitudes toward the Japanese Americans and Japan were never this straightforward or simple. A few Japanese Americans contested or complicated prevailing Cold War memories that downplayed the significance of internment. Monica Sone's 1953 memoir *Nisei Daughter* and John Okada's 1957 novel *No-No Boy* recorded the tenuous existence of being both Japanese and American, an identity that cast the Nisei as perpetual foreigners in their native land. Artists such as Chiura Obata, Henry Sugimoto, Miné Okubo, and others left visual testaments of camp life through their paintings, sketches, engravings, and photographs.

Even in the travel magazine *Holiday*, a Nisei writer, Jobo Nakamura, disclosed in 1954 his ambivalence about his life in the United States when reuniting with relatives in Japan. During the Great Depression, his family lost its soda fountain business and labored in canneries and farms in California to make ends meet. Because of continual financial hardship, however, Nakamura's mother and sisters returned to Japan. The author and his father remained in the United States hoping to acquire some savings and consequently suffered imprisonment during the Second World War. Relocating to Chicago after the war, Nakamura earned a college degree and then returned to California. After a separation of seventeen years, he traveled to Japan to see his mother and sisters. Given its publication venue, the article contains much of the usual descriptions of customs and sights to see, but the tone is one of nostalgic loss and loneliness. The mother, remembering her difficult life in the United States, refused to go back. His former Issei neighbors who repatriated to Japan rather than face internment recalled bitter memories as well. At the same time, Nakamura's "heart fluttered red, white and blue" when seeing an American airbase near Osaka or attending a baseball game and hearing American music in Hiroshima.²³ He despaired of the destruction, poverty, and homelessness in postwar Japan, opining that in the United States, the resurging Japanese American community would have quickly relieved hungry beggars and orphans. Arriving back in California though, Nakamura mourned that his days were now "far lonelier" since his visit to Japan. He admitted to a less than satisfying existence when "trudg[ing] home from my workbench each evening" and eating "a glum meal in the little hamburger stand patronized by impecunious college students and single, lonely men."²⁴ With little hope of luring his

mother and sisters from Japan, and not wanting to resettle there, Nakamura could only look toward an estranged life in the United States.

From another perspective, more than a few popular periodicals refused to accept unreservedly the new world order, expressing deep ambivalence about Japan as a new U.S. ally. Many writers viewed Japanese Americans as model minorities and Japan as a model ally to foster their sense of national destiny and cultural superiority in spreading liberty and democracy throughout the world. But they worried that Japan just as easily could reject the purported benefits of an American-style democracy and fall into the communist orbit.

One need search no further for this apprehension about keeping Japan under American dominion than in *Look* magazine's April 5, 1955 edition, which carried a piece entitled "Japan: Partner or Problem?" This short essay summarized some of the major concerns during the early to late 1950s that Americans expressed about their new relationship with Japan in the Cold War era. The writer, Eric Johnston, observed that Japan's economic renewal after the Second World War was imperative to U.S. interests. Not only was Japan needed as a global trading partner but also as an anti-communist ally. But the situation was becoming dire. Japan had enjoyed a brief period of economic growth during the Korean War when the United States spent hundreds of millions of dollars by its very presence in the Pacific region fighting against North Korea and China. Yet afterward, Japan's economy began to decline as it had done before the Korean conflict. Part of the reason for this financial instability was that Japan could not recover on its own. Before and during the Second World War, Japan had extended its empire throughout East Asia. But in defeat, Japan held few natural resources of its own to stimulate development since the loss of its colonial possessions in Manchuria and Southeast Asia. In turn, hardly any country wanted to buy products that postwar Japan offered. As a result, Japan recorded large trade deficits with Australia, Canada, and the United States for such necessities as cotton, wheat, rice, and other sundries.²⁵

And here arose the "problem" for the United States. If nations of the free world refused to concede to more balanced trade agreements with Japan, then surely the communists would. "This state of affairs may seem pretty remote to an Alabama field hand, a Pennsylvania miner, a Kansas farmer or an Illinois businessman," wrote Johnston, "[b]ut it concerns us all intimately." Working within a culture of integration, Johnston desired to educate American readers of Japan's

plight, one that would soon affect the United States adversely. Japan's potential trade relations, particularly with China, would "invite political friction with the West," in which "the Reds could hope that political alliances could follow economic ties." "As a Red satellite," the article warned, "Japan would be the biggest prize of the Far East." To counteract such an undesirable situation, the writer offered global capitalism as the sure remedy: "The best guarantee of peace and strength in the Far East is expanded trade and expanding markets. It is in our power to help Japan determine her destiny."²⁶ This conclusion indicated that American investment, both monetary and military, was still essential in the region, if not for Japan's sake, then undoubtedly for U.S. national interests.

The level of anxiety about communist encroachment in Asia generally and about Japan's intentions in particular instigated a public debate within popular periodicals that differed mainly in intensity and tone. Some concurred with the *Look* magazine article that the responsibility rested on the shoulders of the United States to lift Japan out of its fragile economic condition. "What happens in Japan," wrote Helen Mears in a 1950 *Harper's Magazine*, "will seem like an unequivocal test of American sincerity and American capacity for constructive leadership." Indeed, "Japan will not be much of an advertisement for our American way, either among the Japanese or among the people of Asia in general" should the United States fail in preventing political and economic chaos from erupting in the Pacific theater. Other editorials sounded a similar note. Unhappy with the insufficient amount of aid Japan was receiving from the United States, the *Nation* warned in 1955: "If in the future the fearful cry goes up, 'Who lost Japan?' the American obscurantists [in Washington, D.C.] can look to themselves for the answer." The writer harkened back to the rhetoric used when China became communist, urging a strengthened American commitment to Japan to halt a potential repeating of history.²⁷

Others feared the repercussions of Japan trading with China, but also wondered about the consequences for Americans at home. *U.S. News & World Report* noted in 1950 that were it necessary to block any agreements made between the two Asian nations, "it would cost U.S. taxpayers about \$200 million dollars a year to compensate Japan for its loss of trade in Communist China." The American public, the article suggested, could not possibly support such a financial burden over an unspecified amount of time. Yet within the same essay, the magazine displayed a map of the Pacific theater in which a thick line labeled "The

Outer Line of U.S. Defense" encompassed the islands of Japan from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south. This imaginary boundary separated Japan from the menace posed by the Soviet Union, North Korea, and China, proving its importance to U.S. interests in the area. Then there were Japan's own self-interests to consider. Four years later, the same periodical worriedly noted: "The Japanese, after years of depending on American aid and promises, are beginning to look around, to wonder if they might not do better by cutting some U.S. ties and coming to terms with Communist Asia." The editorial intimated that the American public had to seriously ponder the questions surfacing about U.S.-Japan relations. To what extent would Americans be disposed to invest in Japan to retain its loyalties? Could the Japanese be trusted even with the bounty of U.S. aid? Whatever the costs or consequences, *Collier's* magazine put the equation succinctly in 1956: "A Japan harnessed to Russia and Red China could lure what is left of independent Asia into the Red camp and tip the scales fatally against the West. A prosperous Japan on the side of the free world remains a valuable ally."²⁸

As a Cold War text, *Go for Broke* belonged in part to these ongoing debates about portraying Japanese Americans as model minorities and about U.S. foreign policy initiatives in Asia during the 1950s. At the time of the film's release, internment still resonated as a disquieting topic. Some editorial hand-wringing over democracy's failures continued to focus on the need to rectify the nation's evacuation and internment of innocent civilians. Writers remarked on the irony of fighting totalitarian regimes during the Second World War while incarcerating some Americans simply because of their ethnic origins. One author for a 1949 *Saturday Review* observed that internment "is not an account of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy but [...] of how we penned up 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry—two-thirds of them American citizens."²⁹ In light of this view, several film critics remarked that *Go for Broke* spoke to the heart of the American creed: that freedom and democracy would prevail over other ideologies because of the nation's tolerance for its ethnic minorities. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the film was "an eloquent preaching for the American democratic process as a leveler of racial barriers." The *New Yorker* chimed in: "Besides being entertaining, the picture should be enlightening to those Americans who tolerated the wartime program of tossing non-combatant Nisei into prison camps euphemistically known as relocation centers."³⁰ For these critics, the film indicted internment and racial hatred as insufferable to

the democratic process since the Nisei practically embodied and advertised the nation's best attributes.

Go for Broke emphasized the integration of the Japanese Americans into a national narrative that called for ethnic pluralism and patriotism in the fight against totalitarian societies. But the consequence of presenting such a storyline that exclusively focused on Nisei soldiers meant that the greater internment experience would become invisible. Interestingly, Dore Schary revealed in his autobiography *Heyday* that he originally planned to produce a drama on the internment camps. Much of his motives stemmed from his outrage when Japanese Americans became "victims of terror and panic, losing their homes, farms, equipment, and security." "That crime against them," he continued, "we wished to report." Robert Pirosh liked the idea, but never could develop a screenplay to either his or Schary's satisfaction.³¹

Despite this setback, Schary continued to search for a marketable topic, still committed to bringing the project to fruition. After debating other possible ideas with his director, Schary decided on the more uplifting story about the all-Nisei combat unit. One major reason for this shift, as he recounted, centered specifically on "the tensions of the 'cold war'." From this short but explicit statement, we can see how Schary's remembrance may have disclosed other possible reasons for his failure to make a film about internment. On the international front, to offer such a production at this time would have overtly compromised the integrity of American democracy in its propaganda war with communist states. How would it appear to the rest of the world when a supposedly freedom-loving society incarcerated its own citizens? Furthermore, Schary may have been swayed in filmmaking choices by memories of his confrontations in 1947 with the House of Un-American Activities Committee over the Hollywood blacklist. Appearing before the committee, the producer defiantly insisted that he would work with any talented individual, communist or not. Contemplating ideas for a film on the Japanese American experience a few years afterward, Schary may have thought that depicting internment camps would have invited more hyperbolic attacks on his patriotism and criticism of the nation.³² Preferring instead to film the 442nd regiment's story, Schary subscribed to the Hollywood cliché of underdogs successfully overcoming an obstacle, here racial hostility, to showcase American openness to ethnic diversity.

This narrative had mass appeal for both American and overseas filmgoers. Schary later boasted about *Go for Broke*, "The picture was a success; as an ironic lagniappe, it was a roaring hit in Japan."³³ The

reminiscence again is brief and undeveloped, but his intentions are clear about the film's impact. The Cold War had become an important factor in influencing his decisions about movies that indirectly encompassed both domestic and foreign policy debates. Other films like *Japanese War Bride* (1952), *Tea House of the August Moon* (1956) and *Sayonara* (1957) expressed similar sentiments about the reciprocal interest that Japanese and Americans had toward one another at this time. In 1950, *Commonweal* declared that after the Second World War, "the Japanese became people again" as opposed to the disparaging stereotypes of war propagandists. This new perspective affected the realm of popular culture, wherein "Hollywood used handsome Sessue Hayakawa in a Humphrey Bogart picture, and the photographers began to concentrate on Tokyo jitterbuggers, baseball players and the easy-to-look-at Oriental chanteuse." In 1955, the *Saturday Evening Post* agreed, emphasizing that "the American occupation of Japan has aroused American interest in things Japanese perhaps as much as it aroused Japanese interest in things American."³⁴ Possibly in this way, *Go for Broke's* success in Japan helped to assure its occupied inhabitants that Americans, despite their initial prejudices and faults, were fair-minded and appreciative toward their own citizens of Japanese ancestry, and thus indirectly, toward their Asian allies overseas.

Because of this altered mindset toward Japan, Hollywood as a whole acknowledged more sensitivity when portraying former adversaries of the United States. When reviewing *Go for Broke*, film critic for the *New York Times*, Thomas F. Brady, also considered how war pictures would be affected by the Korean War, thematically linking Schary's production about Nisei soldiers with U.S. foreign policy efforts in East Asia. He specifically noted the "changed orientation of the world" because of the ongoing conflict. With Japan now a U.S. ally in the fight against communist foes, Japanese atrocities during the Second World War were problematic to translate onscreen, and films about the Pacific theater became complicit in tweaking public memory. Brady reported on rumors that Twentieth Century Fox's production, *American Guerilla in the Philippines* (1950) "would be re-edited to minimize the villainies of the Japanese." On another front, RKO's re-issue of *China Sky* (1945) "caused a good many raised eyebrows because of the insidious comparisons it contained between the Chinese and the Japanese and because of its constant repetition of the epithet 'Nipponese devil dwarfs'."³⁵ In fact, the State Department, acting on behalf of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, requested that the Motion Picture Association of America not distribute

these and other films in Japan.³⁶ In light of this situation, *Go for Broke*, because of its glorification of the Nisei, performed well for Japanese moviegoers. Then again, *Flying Leathernecks*, produced in the same year as *Go for Broke*, could not be released in Japan since it showed John Wayne and other Marine characters battling the Japanese over Guadalcanal. Now that the communist Chinese were the enemies and the Japanese were U.S. allies, memories of the Second World War, in which the roles between these Asian nations were reversed, had to be reconceived for both domestic and overseas audiences that inhabited an age with altogether different foreign policy initiatives.³⁷

Go for Broke reflected these new contexts and viewpoints. While charting the Nisei's experiences in training and combat, the plot also follows Lieutenant Michael Grayson (Van Johnson) as a bigot placed in charge of leading the Japanese American soldiers. Because of the Nisei's valor under fire, the lieutenant and other doubting white infantrymen become convinced that Japanese Americans are worthy citizens who had been unjustly treated. Several reasons for this major plotline can be easily discerned. MGM studios marketed *Go for Broke* as the successor to *Battleground*, another film that Van Johnson headlined. Accordingly, the promotion strategy behind *Go for Broke* was to attract viewers already familiar with Johnson's work in his earlier films. *Go for Broke* also belonged to the popular trend of the "race picture." In this formula, the main character, usually a white male, renounces his former prejudices against a particular group, especially when having his life saved under extreme circumstances by one or more of the persecuted minority. "Hollywood's current concern with the problem of racial and religious prejudice," the *New York Times* noticed in September 1950, "continues to lead movie-makers into new explorations of this apparently inexhaustible subject." Having already dealt with issues like anti-Semitism (*Gentlemen's Agreement*, 1947) as well as African Americans (*Pinky*, 1949; *Home of the Brave*, 1949), "the screen now is about to speak in behalf of the Japanese-Americans, or Nisei" in *Go for Broke*.³⁸

This conversion narrative made for enlightening drama. But it also held larger implications for the global contest between democracy and communism, particularly if Americans conscientious about domestic racism had reservations about their nation's abilities to attract Japan's allegiance. *The Nation* posed a question in 1958 when documenting Earl Warren's career as California's Attorney General in the 1940s: "Can a man who looks upon the 'colored' races as inferior, or fundamentally

different, change his mind?" Warren had suspected Japanese Americans as disloyal because of their ethnic ancestry and devotedly enforced internment as a necessary policy. He later renounced this view and as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court presided over the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. The article notably surmised that Warren's change in feelings toward Japanese Americans was due to their military service, which in turn made him more accepting of all racial minorities. As the *Nation* profile made clear, however, this reversal of earlier repugnant attitudes carried significance beyond any individual, given that the United States actively competed with communist states for potential allies. "[T]he larger part of the human population is colored," the writer stressed. "If we fail to overcome prejudice at home, our leadership will never be accepted in Asia and Africa and the Middle East."³⁹ In *Go for Broke*, Lieutenant Grayson's personal transition from bigot to appreciative soldier spoke to the Cold War culture of integration. Showing Grayson's acceptance of Japanese Americans as fellow Americans demonstrated a change of heart that, at least metaphorically, encompassed domestic and foreign policy concerns. As Cold War expectations went, those who had supported internment and then renounced their former racial views would join the rest of the nation in recognizing and welcoming Japan as a valuable ally.

Concerns with international relations converged with race relations in one key scene from the film when Grayson and his men capture a German position while campaigning in Italy. Taken prisoners after the skirmish, the German soldiers look in shock when they see American forces with Asian faces approaching. "What kind of troops are these? Chinese?" a confused officer asks Grayson. The lieutenant jokingly explains: "Japanese. Didn't Hitler tell you? Japan surrendered and they're fighting on our side now." Audiences would have recognized this statement as a reference to their own Cold War era since Japan was indeed a U.S. ally at the time of the film's appearance. The contexts of the Korean War would also have been familiar to the film's viewers. Particularly in 1950-51, when *Go for Broke* was produced and released, the military situation in Korea proved disastrous for the United States. North Korea had attacked its southern neighbor, pushing past the 38th parallel. But United Nations forces, mostly comprised of American soldiers, repulsed the invasion back north near China's border along the Yalu River. This engagement and proximity then brought Chinese troops into the conflict by the hundreds of thousands. The Red Army drove the Americans southward until in mid-1951 the Chinese were

stopped and the war became a stalemate. To U.S. diplomats and Pentagon officials, the situation demanded that Japan become an ever more vital player in the region, wherein attempts to rearm it intensified to provide an additional military presence in the American line of defense.⁴⁰

The rearmament of Japan in one sense corresponded with the arming of Nisei during the Second World War. The sight of Japanese American soldiers battling Nazis in *Go for Broke* would remind audiences of a past that proved righteous and certain just as rearming Japan would ideally guarantee a stronger deterrent against communist forces in the Pacific. Film scholar Peter Biskind notes that because of the uncertainties of the Cold War—stalemate in Korea, indiscernible enemies domestic and foreign—movies about the Second World War nostalgically represented conflict in more clear terms of good and evil.⁴¹ *Go for Broke* belonged to this postwar genre but on a grander stage since the Nisei soldiers had to overcome racism at home as well as Nazis abroad. This narrative pattern also suggested that selfless and faithful Nisei men and the Japanese overseas could be depended upon as staunch allies.

Go for Broke also prescribed to what Biskind has called the “corporate-liberal” war film of the 1950s, which “gave the army good grades, first because they were interested in prosecuting the Cold War, second because it was an easy way of illustrating the necessity of sacrifice, and third because it was an organization permeated by the Social Ethic” of respecting the group over the individual.⁴² *Go for Broke* adhered to this theme of consensus, but not in the usual way because of the film’s subtext of internment and the racism that provoked it. The corporate-liberal principle, however, only reinforced what the film attempted to disclose about racial prejudice. This ethos dictated that Grayson submerge his faults and prejudices to the institution of the Army. Before his transformation to enlightened American, Grayson is a self-interested character who feels comfortable only with his fellow Texans. When first assigned to the Nisei regiment, he asks for a transfer to his old Texas division, noting with distinct glumness: “A guy gets into the war to fight the Japs and ends up fighting with them.” Yet, along with the Nisei’s determination and heroism, the Army also works on his prejudices, making Grayson conform to its wishes. Several times, Grayson’s superior officers admonish him for his insubordinate outlook. The commanding officer at the training facility in Camp Shelby, Mississippi upbraids Grayson for his racism, rejects his request for a

transfer, and lectures him about the Nisei’s American citizenship. At another moment, Grayson has a prolonged flirtation with a woman in Italy and his unit moves along without him. Grayson manages to catch up, but the regiment’s captain threatens him with a court martial, snarling: “Ever since you’ve joined the outfit you’ve been the one man in this company who’s been out of step. You’d better pick it up, Lieutenant, and pick it up fast[...]!” This rebuke comes on the heels of the captain’s praise of Grayson’s men, who understand and carry out orders with efficiency.

Throughout the film, decisive moments reveal Grayson’s progress. During one instance on the transport ship taking the troops to Europe, Grayson reads an army manual about his expected behavior toward the Italian civilians. The book warns him that the citizenry had been influenced unduly by fascist propaganda about the coarseness of American soldiers. The troops should then resist the temptation to reinforce that propaganda with their own biases. “Racial prejudice,” the text announces, “is abhorrent to our American concept of Democracy.” The telling words operate on two levels. Domestically, they reproach Grayson’s and others’ discrimination against the Japanese Americans because he reads the manual and then glances toward his men, presumably thinking about his past thoughts and behaviors. With regard to foreign policy, the manual also advises conscientious attempts to win the hearts and minds of the Italian populace suffering under a fascist government. Americans, the manual notes, “may gain the future consideration and support of the Italian people in our effort to restore world order.” The timing of these words not only applies to the Nisei soldiers and the soon-to-be occupied Italians, but also forecasts future relations with other peoples and nations that either may be led astray by the communists or that now experience occupation by U.S. forces such as Germany and Japan. Here again, the film speaks to the Cold War period by merging domestic and foreign policy issues in which the treatment of racial minorities on the home front coincides with the broader agenda of integrating other cultures and nations into an anti-communist alliance.

Go for Broke reveals another turning point in Grayson’s conversion through his encounter with a fellow Texan, Sergeant Wilson Culley. Grayson gets his wish in getting reassigned to his former Texas division, but only because the unit needs the artillery power of the 442nd when campaigning in France. But when the two groups merge, we see that Culley is a bigot in the same mold as Grayson had once been. By this

time, Grayson is fully accepting of his men, even lecturing Culley about the Nisei in almost the same words that the Camp Shelby commander had used to reprove Grayson at the beginning of the film. To this admonishment, Culley growls: "What are you, a Jap-lover or something?" Grayson has no choice then and fights Culley to defend the Nisei soldiers' honor. By beating Culley, a former friend, Grayson also rejects his past beliefs and actions. The film exposes the transition from race prejudice to gratitude not only within the individual but perhaps within the nation as well.

One must be cautious though in viewing Grayson's growing appreciation for his Nisei charges as representative of the nation's since he and Culley are the only outwardly racist characters in the film. Others in the Texas battalion certainly appear more accommodating to the Nisei's presence. As the two units exchange greetings, one Nisei calls out "Howdy, partner" to a Texan, who in turn responds, "Aloha!" At a tavern, we see Nisei and white soldiers performing a hula dance together. The commanding officers at Camp Shelby and in the field are appreciative of the Japanese Americans from the start and scold Grayson about his prejudices. When the Nisei troops first march by to embark on their overseas journey to Europe, one officer readily endures correction by a Nisei subordinate as the officer calls out the roll, often erroneously, of Japanese surnames. *Go for Broke* thus displays Grayson and Culley as exceptions to the more idealized, consistently tolerant, average white American. Racial prejudice then is not entrenched but merely a correctable nuisance within the nation, a message that attempts both to discount internment as a domestic oversight and to convince other nations of American goodwill.

But the film divulges inconsistencies about tolerance and prejudice when taking on the subject of internment. Given the premise of portraying the Nisei as model minorities that everyone else should aspire to, then why the need for internment in the first place? Why also the necessity for segregated Nisei units directed only by white officers? The commanding officer at Camp Shelby, in lecturing Grayson about the Nisei, actually defends internment not through war hysteria but from uncertainty about the Japanese possibly attacking the West Coast. Thus the film's message is: on the one hand, it is a pity that the Japanese Americans are incarcerated, but on the other hand, the U.S. government had little choice in evacuating them for defensive purposes. No character in the film mentions racial prejudice as a prime motivation. The onscreen readiness of the Nisei to serve in the military, however,

circumvents this troubling issue about the prevalent racism within American society. Once the Japanese American soldiers prove themselves as team players in this corporate-liberal society, they are enthusiastically welcomed, even at the expense of an individual like Lieutenant Grayson. The broader fight against communism meant that responsible Americans had to condemn bigoted views expressed by people like Grayson to the point where he would then readily accept the status quo of this imagined pluralism.

Go for Broke revealed the nation as a benevolent institution in allowing for the recruitment of the Nisei, but in the process, reframed the history of internment. At the film's beginning, two texts materialize onscreen to establish the circumstances of forming the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. A quote first appears from Franklin D. Roosevelt made on February 1, 1943 authorizing the use of Japanese Americans in the military. Justifying the decision, he presented the nation as racially tolerant: "The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry." Roosevelt reinforced the mythic narrative that the nation looks to its population as one that expresses its "Americanism" internally, that these values would never be racially marked. This message served to override Roosevelt's previous Executive Order 9066 to commence internment, which would only undermine his more tolerant declaration to enlist the Nisei, should anyone remember. But with the nation in the midst of the Cold War, Roosevelt's statement about "Americanism" reminded citizens of their higher sense of idealism and patriotism that set them apart from the communists within the United States as well as those overseas. And so Executive Order 9066 and the internment it authorized was conveniently forgotten.

Following Roosevelt's statement is a list of numerical facts about the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and 100th Infantry Battalion (another Nisei unit from Hawaii). The record consists of their numerous medals and honors as well as other combat statistics. Out of the approximately 18,000 men who comprised the 442nd at one time or another, they earned 18,143 medals and seven Presidential Citations while suffering 9,486 casualties. As these impressive numbers come into view, the audience sees a montage of tired but determined soldiers' faces marching past the camera. The uniformed bodies of the Nisei thus appear within American memory as the predominant Cold War focus as opposed to the faces behind the barbed wire of internment camps. The

statistics also hide other significant numbers about internment: the sixteen assembly centers where the Issei and Nisei first congregated, the fourteen internment camps in which they were imprisoned, and the hundreds of millions of dollars figured from their losses in property, profits, and wages over a one to four-year span, depending on the length of their incarceration.⁴³

Despite its shortcomings, *Go for Broke* on the most basic level is an extraordinary testament to the accomplishments of the 442nd, giving due credit to the men who fought and sacrificed for the nation. Reviewers praised the authenticity of *Go for Broke* because of its use of actual veterans from the 442nd regiment, and the film is historically important in allowing these men to represent themselves.⁴⁴ The film openly celebrates ethnic pluralism as well, in which the Nisei retain some aspects of Japanese culture, but mainly to assist the American war effort. Battalion members speak Japanese as coded messages over the radio so that German soldiers would not be able to understand transmitted orders. The Nisei also mutter curses in Japanese behind Grayson's back as one of the few ways to resist his authority and earlier attitude toward them. On the whole, this salute to cultural uniqueness never threatens to mar the Japanese Americans' efforts to assimilate into the larger society because many of the soldiers emphasize their readiness to adapt to their circumstances. The film intimates that the 442nd was just like any other army regiment in which ordinary GIs, whatever their grumblings, endured the hardships of basic training and overseas campaigns. But unlike most other regiments, the Nisei soldiers had to prove their courage in battle time and again despite having their families imprisoned back on the mainland.

In this sense, *Go for Broke* is a memorable document because of its subtext of internment as well as its emphasis on Nisei characters that move beyond typical Hollywood stereotypes of Asians. Internment as experience and memory clearly informs the film by providing a compelling narrative undercurrent that defines the Nisei characters' identities, motives, and actions. What audiences learn from the Nisei soldiers in *Go for Broke*, however inadequately, is the rampant prejudice practiced against them. When gathered in their barracks at Camp Shelby, the recruits voice their frustration in which prewar jobs were scarce for them despite their high level of education. A few soldiers send packages to and receive letters from family members in the internment camps. But the moments are all too brief since the film highlights how segments of this population volunteered to demonstrate their loyalty

and patriotism.

Within the film, three of the soldiers from the 442nd represent the varying moods of hopefulness and anger at their situation, from which they weigh the successes and failures of the American experiment in ethnic diversity. Tommy (Henry Nakamura) is the pint-sized optimist; Sam (Lane Nakano) is the self-assured leader; and Chick (George Miki) is the surly pessimist. Tommy, an orphan whose parents were killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor, volunteers to avenge their deaths. Though thwarted in his desire to fight the Japanese, he constantly assures his colleagues that everything will turn out for the best once they prove their fidelity to the nation through military service. Sam is the protagonist from which audiences learn the most about the interned families when he receives letters from his fiancée. In one correspondence, the woman recounts to Sam how the 442nd has lifted the spirits of those in the camps. But in a later mailing, Sam's patience gets tested when he hears that his brother, released from a camp and finding a job picking beets in Idaho, only ends up getting harassed by the local white population. Sam for a split second turns dour, only to have his mood bolstered by his friend Tommy.

Chick consistently reveals his discouragement if not utter disdain for a nation that had rejected the Nisei's claims of citizenship in the first place. Chiding Tommy, Sam, and the others for their seemingly blind devotion to the nation, Chick explains that he had arrived from Iowa, and though never having been interned, joined the army since no better employment was available at the time. Chick becomes more agreeable, however, when the film historically reenacts the 442nd regiment's triumphant rescue of the 36th Texas Division, which had become surrounded by German forces in the Vosges Mountains of France. In a convenient narrative twist, Sergeant Culley, the racist bully and friend of Grayson's, is part of the trapped contingent, and once liberated, welcomes Chick as his equal and comrade. The two extremes of characters, the Texas bigot and the Nisei cynic, thus find common ground in the larger conflict against the Nazis.

Go for Broke gave voice and visibility to the Japanese Americans even as it evaded the more demanding subject of the internment camps and the systemic racism that conjured them. But in the mid-1950s, few voices contested the tragedy of internment and its broader meanings, emphasizing instead the vigor and endurance of the Japanese Americans. The *Saturday Evening Post* in 1955 even appeared to excuse the nation's treatment of Japanese Americans by hinting that this

catastrophe actually helped their social status: “Amid such shattering experiences California’s Japanese-Americans naturally could not suspect that, by an ironic twist of fate, they were destined to become major beneficiaries of the long and savage war between Japan and the United States.” Surely, the article continued, “[a]s a direct result of the Pacific war, Japanese residents of California have lifted themselves higher in a few postwar years than they had done in the preceding half century” (45). Foreshadowing descriptions of the “model minority” in the 1960s, *Reader’s Digest* optimistically reported in 1956: “Today these [...] Japanese-Americans are enjoying a prestige, a prosperity and a freedom from prejudice that even the most sanguine of them had never hoped to attain within their own lifetime.”⁴⁶ Overly cheery in rhetoric and dismissive of the racism still encountered by Japanese Americans, the article cited several examples of their success, from increasing college enrollments and accomplishments in science to the Nisei’s military service and the Issei’s ability to apply for U.S. citizenship. As virtual success stories, the writer suggested, the Japanese Americans proved that despite passing moments of racial discrimination, American democracy was thriving.

To emphasize how assimilated the Issei and Nisei really were, several writings highlighted how they appeared more American than Japanese. In one case, police and the FBI suspected an Issei, Kotaro Suto, of espionage after the attack on Pearl Harbor and searched his home. But all the supposed secret papers they found, observed the *Reader’s Digest* in 1954, were “unredeemed Liberty Bonds from World War I, copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address and a dog-eared *Boy’s Life of George Washington*.” The *Saturday Evening Post* also remarked on the successful integration of the Japanese in America by noting what a Japanese diplomat said about Nisei soldiers stationed in Japan: “I don’t know what the United States does to Japanese who are born there, but it does something which makes them even more foreign to us than other Americans are!” The article recorded as well how Miss June Aochi, the 1955 Beauty Queen of the Lil’ Tokyo Festival in Los Angeles “speaks no Japanese.” In deference to her elders, she could “bow and nod her head in the distinctive Japanese manner,” but this ancient custom, the writer assured his readers, “is losing its hold even upon the older generation in the United States.” By marking the dissolution of “foreign” elements within the Japanese American communities, these articles acclaimed the triumph of the white American mainstream.⁴⁷

These self-assured observations stood in distinct contrast to how others perceived the extent of Japan’s adaptations to U.S. power. Collier’s remarked in 1956: “The new Japan is fermenting a mash of new ideas and old customs [...] mixing political democracy with feudal loyalties [...] The nation that once meekly did what a handful of leaders told it to is now outspokenly divided on every major issue.” The writer assumed that American ideals and policies would benefit Japan in casting off its more traditional ways, only to fret: “Japan is on her feet—but headed where?”⁴⁸ Such unknowing, ironically, was the price of introducing democracy and its ensuing contentiousness to a hierarchical society. Japanese Americans, on the other hand, presented an altogether different story. As popular periodicals in the United States would have it, the Issei and Nisei became more successfully “Americanized” by shedding any cultural aspects of being Asian. As a consequence, they also served to mask the nation’s own racial hierarchy and iniquities. With a prevalent sense of uncertainty about Japan’s intentions in the Pacific, white Americans looked to the assimilation of Japanese Americans as reassuring, that whatever its faults the nation’s cause at home and abroad was incontrovertibly just.

Go for Broke coincided with this cultural narrative of assurance by minimizing the dreadful history of internment, providing instead a portrait of Nisei soldiers as prototypes of the model minority stereotype to advance the nation’s larger mission to rewrite its past and celebrate its values. As a product of the Cold War, *Go for Broke* also fitted within the culture of integration, in which Americans attempted to engage global allies, especially in Japan, as a way to contain communism overseas. It is this intersection of foreign and domestic agendas that make *Go for Broke* a historically significant film.

Notes

1. Dore Schary, *Heyday: An Autobiography*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), 226-227.
2. Several works on internment include: *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians*. Forward by Tetsuden Kashima (Washington, D.C.: The Civil Liberties Public Education Fund; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps U.S.A.: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Michi Nishiura Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America’s Concentration Camps*, Updated Edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996); Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Tetsuden Kashima, *Judgment Without Trial: Japanese American Imprisonment during World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

3. A deeper history of racial hatred and oppression spurred internment. Since the mid-nineteenth century, white nativists portrayed Asians as a “yellow peril,” a dangerous horde that if allowed to remain in the United States would undermine society with their allegedly foreign and unassimilable ways. Out of this collective phobia emerged a host of legal restrictions placed on Asians regarding immigration, citizenship, property ownership, education, interracial marriage, and job opportunities. Much of the history of Asian exclusion in the United States dates back to the 1790 Naturalization Act, which declared that only “free white persons” could become American citizens. With regard to Japanese immigrants, several U.S. and state laws restricted their ability to enter the country, earn citizenship, or obtain property. The 1875 Page Law barred contract laborers as well as prostitutes and criminals. The 1907 Gentlemen’s Agreement made between President Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese government ensured that Japan would deny passports to its laborers if the United States was their destination. The 1913 Alien Land Law passed by the California legislature prohibited Japanese immigrants from buying or leasing land in that state. The 1924 Immigration Act (or National Origins Quota Action) barred all Asian immigration to the United States, except for Filipinos who were colonial subjects. Scholarship on the history of legal restrictions on Asians in America, as well as their resistance against these measures, is quite lengthy and beyond the more specific purposes of this essay. For brief discussions about the obstacles faced by the Japanese up to their internment, see *Personal Justice Denied*, 27-46; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, Updated and Revised Edition (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 1998), 42-53, 179-229; Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 45-61, 81-100; Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 100-282.

4. In February 1943, the U.S. government decided to register the 21,000 eligible Nisei men in the internment camps for possible military service. As part of this process, Army officials circulated a loyalty questionnaire. Of particular importance were Question 27, which inquired about the Nisei’s willingness to serve in the armed forces, and Question 28, which asked for a swearing of their allegiance to the United States. (This latter question also applied to those in the camps’ general population who asked for work leaves or resettlement in non-restricted areas.) Not surprisingly, many Japanese Americans were outraged at the motives behind the document, even so far as to answer “No” to both questions. See *Personal Justice Denied*, 185-212; Weglyn, *Years of Infamy*, 134-73; Eric L. Muller, *Free to Die for Their Country: The Story of the Japanese-American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

5. During the Second World War, Hollywood was already producing feature films that glorified democracy in its struggle with fascism. See Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1985); Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Philip D. Beidler, *The Good War’s Greatest Hits: World War II and American Remembering* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

6. Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). War movies in particular focused on stories of multiethnic platoons (usually including white soldiers from Jewish, Slavic, or Italian backgrounds) working in common cause against the enemies of democracy. See Richard Slotkin, “Unit Pride: Ethnic Platoons and the Myths of American Nationality,” *American Literary History* 13 (Fall 2001): 469-498.

7. Film critics, literary scholars, and others have given more recent attention to the topic of Asian Americans in film and other mass media, although little has been written about *Go for Broke*. For some general works on Asian American film, see *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts*, ed. Russell Leong (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Visual Communications, Southern California Asian American Studies Central, Inc., 1991); *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism*, eds. Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); Jun Xing, *Asian America Through the Lens* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998); Peter X. Feng, *Identities in Motion: Asian American Film and Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); *Screening Asian Americans*, ed. Peter X. Feng (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

8. Keith Osajima first traced the rise of the “model minority” stereotype to a 1966 article by sociologist William Peterson in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled “Success Story, Japanese-American Style.” See Osajima, “Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s,” in *A Companion to Asian American Studies*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 215-225. Refer also to David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 149-181; Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 39-77; Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, *Racial Attitudes and Asian Pacific Americans: Demystifying the Model Minority* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

9. Robert G. Lee, *Oriental: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 146.

10. *Ibid.*, 153-161. Not until the 1960s with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and the 1970s when the Asian American Movement became institutionalized did Japanese Americans openly challenge or lend their voices to the stories about internment. See William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Diane C. Fujino, *Heartbeat of Struggle: The Revolutionary Life of Yuri Kochiyama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

11. In 1947, *Survey Graphic* depicted the Japanese Americans’ attempts to integrate into postwar life as a lesson of “model minority” behavior for all Americans, including whites. After closing the internment camps, the War Relocation Authority found temporary housing for some Issei and Nisei in a New York City hostel. The hostel director noted that his guests were “polite, quiet, friendly, and confused[...]but they do not complain—they just keep trying.” Indeed, as the director continued, “Many members of the famous 442nd Battalion have come to the hostel. They come gratefully, almost silently. A Caucasian American in their position would be bitter.” See “Between Moves: Glimpses of a Japanese American Hostel.” *Survey Graphic* March 1947: 199.

12. In his essay on *Go for Broke*, Tak Fujitani delineates the contradictory impulses of domestic racism and national narratives of democratic triumph. See Fujitani, “*Go for Broke*, the Movie: Japanese American Soldiers in U.S. National, Military, and Racial Discourses,” in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, eds. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 239-266. Fujitani, however, does not put his convincing discussion into an international context regarding U.S. foreign policy in Asia.

13. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 47.

14. *Ibid.*, 19-60. Klein’s work coincides with a number of others that emphasize the concept of American orientalism. Derived from Edward Said’s influential books, *Orientalism* (1979) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), this group of attitudes, values,

and behaviors reveals how white mainstream society in the United States imagined Asians as racially different and inferior to reinforce the nation's dominant social structures. Yet even as "orientalism" became integrated into these social structures through writings, fashion, material objects, or media, Asians contested or complicated this idea through their voices or bodily presence. For instance, see John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sheng-Mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); John R. Eperjesi, *The Imperialist Imaginary: Visions of Asia and the Pacific in American Culture* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2005).

15. Scholars who have written separately on internment and on U.S. imperialism have used the phrase "absent presence" to describe how these significant historical events could be downplayed or forgotten within American collective memory. Because internment or American expansion into the Pacific presented troubling inconsistencies within the national narrative of liberty and democracy, the intentions behind these movements became selectively ignored even as they were quite apparent in the very makeup—the history, language, and imagery—of the United States. For example, internment had been so widely reported, so much on the forefront of the nation's mindset, and yet the phenomenon had to be dismissed, rendered invisible, when commemorating the "Good War." Similarly, American military interventions in the Philippines, China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (beginning from the 1890s to the 1970s) were also well-known within American public culture, yet blithely discounted as empire-building efforts. On the "absent presence" of internment, see Marita Sturken, "Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment," *positions* 5 (1997): 687-707; Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). See also Elena Tajima Creef, *Imaging Japanese America: The Visual Construction of Citizenship, Nation, and the Body* (New York: New York University Press, 2004). For work that discusses the "absent presence" of American imperialism and its relation to Asian American studies, see Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Bascara expands on the work of William Appleman Williams and Amy Kaplan. Refer to Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959; New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc, 1972); and Kaplan, "Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press), 1993, 3-21; idem, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). See also Michael Rogin, "'Make My Day!': Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics [and] The Sequel," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, 499-534. My essay places the "absent presence" of internment and American overseas efforts within the same historical moment during the 1950s.

16. Major General Charles Willoughby, "Tribute to Japan." *Reader's Digest* Feb. 1952: 57.

17. George Grim, "We Deeply Feel Honored." *Reader's Digest* Sept. 1950: 72.

18. Kan Tagami, "Recollections of the Japanese Occupation." <http://njavc.org/projects/occupationessays/kantagami.pdf> (accessed 10 Jan. 2007); Harry K. Fukuhara, "Military Occupation of Japan." http://njavc.org/projects/occupationessays/harry_fukuhara.pdf (accessed 10 Jan. 2007); Yoshito Fujimoto, "Occupation." <http://njavc.org/projects/occupationessays/yoshitofujimoto.html> (accessed 10 Jan. 2007). The Nisei's memories

of winning Japanese hearts and minds lacked any mention or overt condemnation of internment, even though some of them or their families had been incarcerated in the camps.

19. Christopher Rand, "A Reporter at Large." *New Yorker* 16 Nov. 1957: 135.

20. On the topic of those Japanese Americans who renounced their citizenship as a protest to internment, see Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 175-201; David E. Collins, *Native American Aliens: Renunciation of Citizenship by Japanese Americans during World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985).

21. "Editorial." *Christian Century* 4 May 1949: 547; Bradford Smith, "Test of American Democracy." *Saturday Review* 7 June 1947: 20, 21.

22. Albert Q. Maisel, "The Japanese Among Us." *Reader's Digest* Jan. 1956: 192.

23. Jobo Nakamura, "A Nisei Visits Japan." *Holiday* Feb. 1954: 68-70.

24. *Ibid.*, 55.

25. For historical background, see Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1999).

26. Eric Johnston, "Japan: Partner or Problem?" *Look* 5 April 1955: 104.

27. Helen Mears, "Japan: Challenge to Our Prestige." *Harper's Magazine* July 1950: 73; "Reluctant Ally." *Nation* 10 Sept. 1955: 215.

28. "Japan: Costly Base for U.S." *U.S. News & World Report* 17 Feb. 1950: 27; "Another Ally Grows Restive." *U.S. News & World Report* 17 Dec. 1954: 45; Peter Kalischer, "Japan." *Collier's* 2 March 1956: 58. See also Demaree Bess, "The Japs Have Us on the Griddle Now." *Saturday Evening Post* 4 April 1953: 24-25, 68, 70-71.

29. Bradford Smith, "A Blot on Our Escutcheon." *Saturday Review* 20 Aug. 1949: 16.

30. B.R. Crisler, "Van Johnson in 'Go for Broke'; Alan Ladd Stars in Melodrama." *Christian Science Monitor* 14 June 1951: 4; "The Current Cinema." *New Yorker* 2 June 1951: 93. See also Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review." *New York Times* 25 May 1951: 31; J.D. Spiro, "Hollywood Digest." *New York Times* 17 Sept. 1950: 113.

31. Schary, *Heyday*, 226, 227. The *New York Times* also noted in October 1950 and June 1951 that Schary wanted to frame the narrative through an interracial romance between a Nisei woman and a white man. Schary rejected this idea because it would stir controversy and, in his words, be a "poor remake of 'Madame Butterfly'." See James W. Merrick, "Shooting the Works." *New York Times* 15 Oct. 1950: X5; Robert Pirosh, "Everything Went According to Plan Exceptâ." *New York Times* 3 June 1951: 99. For a more developed discussion of the "Madame Butterfly" stereotype, see Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

32. Schary, *Heyday*, 158-67.

33. *Ibid.*, 227.

34. "Remember Pearl Harbor." *Commonweal* 10 Feb. 1950: 479; Demaree Bess, "California's Amazing Japanese." *Saturday Evening Post* 30 April 1955: 83.

35. Thomas F. Brady, "Filmland Strategy." *New York Times* 9 July 1950: X5.

36. Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 77-79.

37. Depicting the Japanese and Japanese Americans as loyal and hard-working citizens in the 1950s did not stop those in the U.S. government or within mainstream society from now suspecting Chinese Americans as communist agents or sympathizers with ties to China. See Daniels, *Asian America*, 283-316; Gloria Heyung Chun, *Of Orphans and Warriors: Inventing Chinese American Culture and Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 71-

96; Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940-1965* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 152-184.

38. J.D. Spiro, "Hollywood Digest." *New York Times* 17 Sept. 1950: 113. See also *New Republic* 4 June 1951: 23.

39. Bradford Smith, "Education of Earl Warren." *Nation* 11 Oct. 1958: 206, 208. Although Warren never publicly apologized for his role in internment, as Supreme Court Chief Justice, he did confess to his law clerks his utmost regrets about it. That he could support integration in *Brown v. Board of Education* rested, ironically, on his reference to the Court's 1944 ruling in *Korematsu v. United States*. Here the majority upheld the government's incarceration of Japanese Americans, deciding that racial classifications could be used when national security was at stake. Segregating African Americans, Warren argued a decade later, had nothing to do with national security. See Jim Newton, *Justice for All: Earl Warren and the Nation He Made* (New York: Penguin/Riverhead Books, 2006), 138, 320.

40. John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: New Press, 1993), 179-189.

41. Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 59.

42. *Ibid.*, 61.

43. Service statistics can also be found in *Personal Justice Denied*, 258. For a map of the locations and number assembly centers and internment camps, see *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience*. Ed. Lawson Fusao Inada (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000), 418. For estimates on Japanese American financial losses, see Daniels, *Asian America*, 290-92.

44. See "New Films," *Newsweek* 28 May 1951: 89; Bosley Crowther, "Getting to Know Them." *New York Times* 10 June 1951: X1; Merrick, "Shooting the Works," p. X5.

45. Bess, "California's Amazing Japanese," 38-39.

46. Maisel, "The Japanese Among Us," 182.

47. Ben Funk and James Monahan, "Happy Where Heart Is." *Reader's Digest* June 1954: 3; Bess, "California's Amazing Japanese," 83.

48. Kalischer, "Japan," 59.

In the Streets of Harlem: Race and Textures of Space in Helen Levitt's New York Photographs and the Levitt-Agee Documentary Films¹

Vojislava Filipcevic

"If I could do it," remarked James Agee in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, "I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs[...]" Agee was perhaps less extolling a visual language than suggesting the difficulty of "communicating about the true nature of reality" (Agee and Evans 10; Kramer 21). This interactivity between the impossibility of language and representational (in)capacity of the image would find its fully self-aware expression decades later, in the New York photography of his friend, Helen Levitt. In an introduction to her book of photographs, Agee called Levitt's poetic visual technique "an unobtrusive but irrefutable manifesto of a way of seeing," praising her sensitivity to spatial representation and her sense of rhythm (Levitt and Agee x). In collaboration with Agee, Janet Loeb, and Sidney Meyers, Levitt also made two documentary films in East and Central Harlem, *In the Street* (1948/1952, d. Helen Levitt) and *The Quiet One* (1949, d. Sidney Meyers).

In contrast to the literature that evaluates Levitt's art as atemporal or acontextual,² this article examines her photographs and the two films as mediations on public space, racial diversity, and belonging. The East Harlem of *In the Street* and the Central Harlem sequences in *The Quiet One* convey spatial tensions and suggest social dislocations within public spaces and neighborhood places.³ The films visualize the spatial enclosure of the agency of dwellers, exploring the social elasticity of spatial traversals and recalling images⁴ of inner-city neighborhoods at the brink of transformation preceding urban renewal and white flight.⁵ The article contributes to the body of literature that traces the ways in

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which urban “material changes” might be intimately, albeit inadvertently, implicated in aesthetic interventions (Tallack 85). The films’ pans and tracking shots of the streets recall the “maelstrom of modern life” (Berman 15-41), echoing with post-war crises, about which the films’ narratives are, nevertheless, silent. This set of visual tropes and silences that resonates with material transformations and proposes the alternate aesthetics of seeing the streets is metaphorically named the *agitated city*.⁶

Ways of Seeing the City: Visual Styles and Social Contexts in Levitt’s Photographic Art

Agee compared Levitt’s New York street photography to “the best of jazz,” highlighting her ability to “perceive the aesthetic within the real world” (Levitt and Agee viii). Agee, however, obscured the figurations of rhythm, movement, and energy that constituted the jazz of photography of the 1940s, and neglected to engage with the racial and gendered contexts of images of minority residents taken by white photographers. Although he cites the significance of urban contexts and Levitt’s spatial aesthetics, his observations taper off towards suggestions of ritualistic communalism. Levitt’s subjects appear to Agee as members of ancient culture[s], “primordial and royal, being those of hunting, war, theater, and dancing” (Levitt and Agee xiv). Agee’s mixture of exoticism, othering, and ambivalent appreciation for urban life differed, however, from Levitt’s own, even if her aesthetic stance appeared consistent with Agee’s arguments for a synthesis between the social realist and avant-garde tendencies (Davis 97).

Inspired by the work of the socially progressive Photo League, of which she was a member in the 1930s, Levitt, however, eschewed active engagement in political and social causes (Phillips 33-39, 26). Framing residents, social life, public spaces, and the streets of New York’s poorest neighborhoods, Levitt neither presented her subjects as “noble heroes of poverty and desolation” (Marcus 127), nor intended her photographs to become “social or psychological document[s]” (Levitt and Agee 7).

While her opus contrasts with the discourses of poor urban quarters associated with, for example, Engels’ accounts of Manchester slums, Jacob Riis’ advocacy photographs of the Lower East Side, the expository documentaries such as *Why We Fight* (Nichols 34-38), and even Gordon Park’s photographs of Harlem youth and Walter Rosenbaum’s socially committed works,⁷ Levitt remains perhaps the sole female



Figure 1: Helen Levitt, New York c. 1940. Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

photographer to almost exclusively photograph low-income and minority neighborhoods (Phillips 20-21).

Shot at the edges of New York’s diverse neighborhoods, Levitt’s photographs manifest democratic impulses that avoid embeddedness in identity.⁸ Alan Marcus (2006) has observed that Levitt’s photograph of a group of boys playing on the sidewalk on the Upper East Side promotes an unfettered multicultural ideal positioned outside of society. The photographer directs the viewer to concentrate on the play of children and the multiple frames within the image.⁹ A multicultural interpretation might then be inferred retrospectively, yet it seems encouraged by Levitt’s democratic aesthetics [Figure 1].¹⁰

Levitt’s public spaces evoke Michael Walzer’s account of “open-minded” urban plazas, engaging with social experiences of the street—yet, they are neither sites of alienation nor trajectories within a village-like community. The subversive aspects of playfulness validate, rather, Marshall Berman’s interpretation of the carnivalesque qualities of street life.¹¹ Levitt’s imagery of urban decay encircles but does not always hinder the agency of urban dwellers,¹² appropriating the vitality of the street through an aesthetics of “immemorially routine acts of life” (Levitt 1). An interaction between urban experiences and a photographic perception, however, questions such routine acts through alternations of gazes, movements, and unexpected street encounters. The subjecthood of children, unaware of, or unconcerned with, social mores, recalls the



Figure 2: Helen Levitt, New York c. 1940s. Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

Baudlaireian quest for an outward orientation of the self. Social diversity and the quality of “publicity” (Young 240), moreover, facilitate the trajectory from the inward towards outward spaces (Sennett 123). Further, the disrupted boundaries between public and private spaces prompt an aesthetic search for a democratic space beyond the frame.

Commonly framing a multi-racial group of children, Levitt’s racial contexts can further appear seemingly accidental, as in a photograph of four girls observing soap bubbles.¹³ The understated interest in race and neighborhood space escapes the pitfalls of identity-based difference. Instead, the oscillations between the motion of bodies and the immobility of the built environment highlight the tensions between subjectivity and belonging, racial as well as gendered. Unlike Morgan and Marvin Smith’s Harlem portrayals, Levitt’s images view subjectivity as a *process* of shaping individuality and the photographer’s perception [although perhaps the Smith brothers’ image of a Harlem boy, “Robert Day playing Hi-Li” (1937), may have served as an inspiration]. Max Kosloff notes the ambivalence in the photographer’s gaze, as well in the gaze of her subjects, in another image of black men standing by a



Figure 3: Helen Levitt, New York, c. 1940. Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

postbox on a street corner in Harlem, at once self-assured and vulnerable, observing Levitt’s camera and also ignoring her. The imbalance between shunning the self and attempting to interact with others mediates gendered and racial anxieties within public spaces, suggesting, the “eroticism” of urbanity (Young 239) [Figure 2].

Crime photojournalism and the shot-on-location noir films of the late 1940s often attempt to tame the city, and, indirectly, the woman. Levitt’s spaces of discovery and surprise liberate identities, yet retain a sensation of threat and instability, suggesting the horrifying motif within the “snapshot” of the subject being “lost in space” (Huysen 33), as one might anticipate happening to the four girls [Figure 3].

Images of children in disguise, wearing facial masks or hoods, possess oneiric qualities, suggesting the opaqueness of their identities. Children’s masks deride the forced impositions of difference on the part of the adult world, incomprehensible in its rigidity. These images of uncanny phantasmagoric identities demonstrate Simmel’s notion of urban strangeness and the implied impossibility of fully fathoming complex urban diversity.¹⁴ In photographs where the Halloween celebrations are apparent, the children’s identities can be seen as embodiments of urban strangeness (in Figure 4). In other images, Levitt renders the scenes of masked children as if they were directly extrapolated from neighborhood space. Performative capacities within public spaces expose the artifice of disguise against the setting of decay,



Figure 4: Helen Levitt, New York, ca. 1940s—Halloween as an Urban Phantasmagoria and a Social Image. Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

suggesting that the photographs could be interpreted as unsettling social images [Figure 4]. Children in black clothing with white hoods in vacant or derelict lots evoke racialized contexts of spatial segregation and social neglect of minority neighborhoods. Levitt's agitated city is shaped by tensions between the intimate and public experiences of the street, between the processes of subjectivity-formation and belonging in the context of marginalized subjects' claims on public spaces.

The Levitt-Agee Films and the Documentary Form: Street Scenes in Motion¹⁵

In the Street and *The Quiet One* depart from Levitt's photographic opus. The artist herself has disavowed the films as art works of collective compromise and has perhaps come to view cinema as artistically limiting, constraining her project of freezing within the social imaginaries a moment that deceptively transcends the contexts (See Phillips, 1991). The films, unique for this historical period in their documentary focus on New York's black, Latino, and diverse neighborhoods, in fact offer intricate maps of spaces, subjectivities, and contexts of racial exclusions.

In the Street is an observational silent documentary with poetic elements, while *The Quiet One* represents an amalgam of several different types of documentary genre—expositional, performative, and in select sequences poetic—and includes dialogue and an expository voiceover. *In the Street* can further be seen an assemblage of cinematic *miniatures*, and *The Quiet One*, a documentary *feuilleton*, if the terminol-

ogy that Andreas Huyssen applied to urban spaces in Rilke, Kafka, Kracauer, and Benjamin's writings could be transposed to the context of film. The complex documentary network in both films is illustrative of Benjamin's distinction between painting and cinema. "The painter maintains his work at a natural distance from reality; the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web" (Benjamin and Arendt 233). Rather than being drawn into the web of street life as in metropolitan films such as *Berlin, Symphony of the City* (1927, d. Walter Ruttmann), or dancing in the city rhythms of the poetic documentary *A Bronx Morning* (1931, d. Jay Leyda), however, the films chart visual trajectories within public spaces as "the dwelling place[s] of the collective" (Benjamin and Tiedemann 423).

Shot in East Harlem on 103rd and 104th Streets in 1945 and 1946, the sixteen-minute film *In the Street* was directed by Helen Levitt; the cinematographers included, in addition to Levitt and Agee, the painter Janice Loeb who financed the film's production. *The Quiet One* was filmed between 1946 and 1948 in the streets of Central Harlem and in a rural area of Esopus, upstate New York, and was theatrically released in New York in the winter of 1949. This 65-minute documentary was directed by Sidney Meyers, written by James Agee, Janice Loeb, and Sidney Meyers, and the cinematographers included Richard Bagley for interior shots, and Levitt and Loeb for documentary segments. Meyers, a former violinist with the Cincinnati Orchestra, later collaborated with Ben Maddow, Joseph Strick, and Helen Levitt on an alternative art drama *The Savage Eye* (1959). *The Quiet One* won awards at the Venice and Edinburgh film festivals in 1948, was lauded a "masterpiece" equal to Vittorio de Sica's *Shoeshine* (1946) by Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times*, and received Oscar nominations for best documentary in 1948 and for best script and story in 1949 (Horak 149-150). Walter Rosenblum argued in *Photo Notes* in 1949 that "*The Quiet One* rescue[d] the documentary film from the hollow shell that Hollywood was forcing it into" (Horak 150).

In the Street depicts a seemingly randomly observed collectivity of urban dwellers, children, women, and the elderly, who are for the most part Latino and black, although the camera captures as well passersby and residents who appear to be of Italian, Jewish, or Eastern European descent.¹⁶ *In the Street* was filmed with hand-held 16-mm Kodak Cine K and Cine B cameras in an attempt to capture everyday occurrences without the residents' knowledge of being observed. Most of the shots are in medium or medium long frames¹⁷ with the camera held slightly below the view of an average-height adult, as if a child were observing.

The Quiet One is a film about delinquency that concerns Donald, a ten-year old black boy abandoned by his parents and living with his grandmother in Harlem (Horak 149). The film is introduced by the following inter-title: "This film was made in New York City and at the Wyltwick School for boys in Esopus, New York. Wyltwick is a school for boys of New York City who have reacted with grave disturbance of personality to forms of neglect in their homes and community, and who for various reasons of age, race, and maladjustment are not cared for by other agencies." According to Robert Sklar, "a central goal of the film was to valorize the work of the [Wyltwick] School councilors and psychologists" (5). The film is divided into four sequences, a shorter one at the beginning taking place in bucolic Esopus, the second, flashing back to the Harlem neighborhood that the boy had to leave temporarily, the next sequence chronicling the boy's struggles to integrate in the school in Esopus, and the fourth anticipating the boy's return to the city.

The film features a non-professional actor, as in neo-realist narratives such as *Los Olvidados* (1950, d. Luis Buñuel) or *The Bicycle Thief* (1948, d. Vittorio De Sica) in which a city boy represents a social type (Kracauer 98-99). *The Quiet One*, however, delineates the boy's uniqueness, setting him apart from the Harlem neighborhood, presented neither as a black enclave nor a New York ghetto, but rather, as the narrator identifies, a poor area of an American metropolis. The trope of the child in the cinematic city is symbolic of the boy's outsider status, a marker for a social outcast.¹⁸ The voiceover commentary, written by Agee and narrated by Gary Merrill, ties the boy's story to the family dissolution, and urban mental health and housing problems, adopting a compassionate but also a didactic tone, often supported by rudimentary psychoanalysis. Agee's screenplay for Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955),¹⁹ also includes the motif of children as victims of crises, in this case the Great Depression.²⁰ The motif of childhood in Agee's work suggests a mediating link between a poetic experience and the traumas of uprootedness caused by economic and political crises. The racial dimension in *The Quiet One* also seems constricted by this framework.

Bill Nichols has argued that observational cinema conveys a "sense of unmediated and unfettered access to the world" (43). Documentary narratives allow for broadening the scope of the urban field of experience by deliberately patterning the contingency, concealing as well as reshaping the urban imaginary under the guise of the incommunicable reality. Through montage, film stretches the scope of imaginary over

actual spaces. Although the environment of *In the Street* is a largely devastated urban area, the film does not offer a portrayal of poverty, even if the montaged contingency never obscures this context. In *The Quiet One*, the cinematographers do not pause to highlight inequality or segregation, although several shots suggest an uneasy coexistence of blacks and whites in the streets of Harlem. Racial divisions appear in the back of the frame—the billboards, advertisements, and movie posters feature smiling blond women—yet Levitt never shows these images in close-up. The cinematographers present the city from the point of view of a black child who does not yet perceive social obstacles; the voiceover provides a social commentary of the boy's travails, while remaining silent about racial exclusion.

Sklar has observed that the Harlem street scenes represent "distinguishing elements of the film's cinematography" (6). In capturing contingency in the Harlem neighborhood sequences, the film presents a panorama in which no sense of hierarchy is accorded to images. As in *In the Street*, the camera emulates a child's perception through Donald's point of view, presenting visual information that seems categorized solely by space. The cinematic city emerges as a set of "fragments of space" (Lefebvre 97). The segmented spatial perception is tied to Donald's discovery of the neighborhood boundaries through exploration and experience, as his roaming charts a pathway of an emerging adult identity. This urban "school of life" suggests a public domain in which the social consciousness is shaped, yet which is not devoid of the psychological experience of urban strangeness.

The fragmentation of cinematic space does not fragment identity, however, but attempts a process of a reconstitution of the self. Both *In the Street* and *The Quiet One* emphasize the primacy of the spatial order in discovering an emergent sense of identity. The urban experience allows for the negotiation between the self and the social environment, suggesting the elasticity of the spatial domain of film, and the condensation of the temporal dimension of cinematic identity. The emphasis on the stark limits of spatial enclosure of agency in *The Quiet One*, however, contrasts with Levitt's photographs. Although the film does not solely emphasize spatial segregation, the urban normative value of "social differentiation without exclusion" (Young 238) is further delimited in the case of flâneurian traversals in *The Quiet One*. In contrast, *In the Street* is more concerned with the fluidity and agitating potential of traversals, in which, as Juan Antonio Suarez Sanchez has noted, the cinematic form as well as the image of restless movement rep-

resents a “counterpoint to the teeming life of city streets” (Sanchez 393).

Following the ebb and flow of the sidewalk, the film suggests that the urban dweller resides not merely within the bounded space but also within the alternate public environment created by movement, city sounds, and the gaze. This represents an imaginary domain of the agitated city trope, which probes the elasticity of the spatial contrast. While the camera motion is accelerated in the metropolitan films of the 1920s, in the case of the Levitt-Agee documentaries, the motion is associated with the perception of the walker, who is split into two, a child flâneur, and a cinematographer flâneuse.²¹ The hand-held camera aligns the cinematic motion between its lens and an urban experience, by tracks or pans behind a child or a woman walking, matching the speed of movement, suggesting an interchangeable position of the spectator who at once travels through the streets and watches. *In the Street* deliberately avoids making sense of these images or categorizing them.²² Unlike in Paul Strand’s and Charles Sheeler’s *Manhatta* (1920), however, anxiety is not derived from an enchantment with the city, but is mediated by unpalatable agitating tensions that reside beyond the space of the cinematic frame.

Siegfried Kracauer compared *In the Street* to the British documentary entitled *Housing Problems* contrasting the latter’s disengaged reportage style in which residents of an underprivileged quarter describe in detail housing decay, to Levitt-Agee’s imaginative vision and their “unconcealed compassion for the people depicted” (Kracauer 203). But Kracauer argued as well that *In the Street* failed to engage with the material reality of the ghetto through the film’s lack of structure and its too random selection of street scenes. Further, behind “unbiased reporting,” the film revealed to Kracauer a projection of the filmmakers’ inner images and “aesthetic cravings” superseding in this manner veracious representations by “pictorial penetrations or interpretations of the visible world,” rooted in the 1920s avant-garde (Kracauer 203). Kracauer’s reading seems to have influenced as well more contemporary evaluations of the film that further stress subjective cinematography and the film’s formal characteristics²³ that anticipated the 1960s techniques of movement-matches and jump cuts.

Kracauer seemed to tie social engagement to a didactic sociological commentary misreading the film’s subtle social images.²⁴ The film and Levitt’s book of photographs, also entitled *In the Street*, create an impression of being shot in one season (and in some sequences, even in one day) even though its sixteen-minute footage was actually filmed over



Figure 5: The Abandoned City: Helen Levitt, 99th Street, New York c. 1940s. Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

several years and the photographs date from 1938 to 1948. The images suggest the persistence of the ghetto: over a decade of relative prosperity in the U.S., poverty and urban decay seem to persist in East Harlem. The editing oscillates between still figures (often women or elderly men) and figures in motion (children playing, running, dancing; women, traversing the streets). The East Harlem block is an *agitated social space* and an *immobile physical space* of abandonment left to decompose as an area of urban blight. The film withdraws from any attempt to redeem material reality in Kracauer’s sense²⁵—in effect recording a physically crumbling neighborhood, months before it would be completely obliterated by urban renewal. These tensions can also be discerned in Levitt’s photographs such as *99th Street* [Figure 5].

Socio-spatial Contexts: Screening the Abandoned and Inhabited Cities

Both films are set in what could be termed *the abandoned city*. Understood in economic and racial terms, the abandoned city repre-

sents “the place for the very poor, the excluded, the never employed and permanently unemployed, the homeless and the shelter residents. A crumbling infrastructure, deteriorating housing, the domination of outside impersonal forces, direct street-level exploitation, racial and ethnic discrimination and segregation, the stereotyping of women, are everyday reality” (Marcuse 97).

In *In The Street*, dilapidated housing and crumbling infrastructure can be seen in virtually every frame; most of the residents appear partially homeless or trapped in decaying tenements. The structural abandonment contrasts with the intensity of spatial traversals and sidewalk activity, pressing the spectator to follow the motion and to avoid the snapshot effect of the backdrop.²⁶

The material grounds of cinematic imaginaries are not simply the fingerprints of visual evidence. It could be argued that the Levitt-Agee documentaries in fact obscure visual evidence, in particular of racial exclusion, while being rooted in the materiality of the cinematic city. Still, further, these films were shot in segregated neighborhoods deemed by planners as blighted, and share the “structures of feelings” of the counter-hegemonic discourses of “slums.”²⁷ The films’ city sequences highlight the practices of everyday life absent from the master narratives of urban renewal. While Edward Dimendberg’s study of film noir has provided a model for similar analyses, it neglected to adequately consider, however, documentary narratives, racial or gendered contexts, and diverse public spaces.

While social contexts cannot be examined in detail here, a brief account of neighborhood settings is in order. In the 1940s, a separation of three neighborhoods, Italian Harlem, Spanish Harlem, and Black Harlem marked a growing racial divide, as white residents continued to leave the neighborhoods (Brandt 24). Harlem became a black neighborhood following the rampant property speculation 1903-1905. Black migrants came from southern cities and towns and were for the most part not of rural origin, unlike those who settled in Chicago. Unlike in other cities, Harlem did not experience major racial disturbances before the 1930s, a fact that is attributed to New York cosmopolitanism, political representation of blacks, and their different social status in New York (“a position of wardship”), which although exaggerated in estimate, might have, according to Janet Abu-Lughod contributed to Harlem’s rise in prominence during the 1920s cultural renaissance period (Abu-Lughod 84-87). The area, however, started losing its white population during the period 1914-1929 as it was transformed into an

almost entirely black neighborhood. The number of native-born blacks in New York grew from less than 100,000 in 1910 to 325,000 in 1930—most of whom lived in Harlem. “Competition for jobs and doubling up in scarce housing were already problems[...]before the Depression struck. And when it did, the Harlem of the 1920s became the segregated deteriorating zone of the 1930s, increasingly isolated from the city around it” (Abu-Lughod 84-87). The Harlem riots, which took place in 1935 and 1943, are attributed to the detrimental socio-economic conditions (in the 1930s the area was overcrowded with high rates of illness and crime and poor educational facilities), unemployment, and the problem of police brutality (particularly affecting black youth). In response to the conflict, several housing units were built, including the 574-unit Harlem River Houses. The 1943 riot is attributed to an even more complex set of factors including the persisting segregation, the disproportionate lack of benefits for black soldiers, and the overall poor living conditions in Harlem. It was considered a “paradigmatic event presaging a series of racial outbreaks” in the late 1960s in American cities (Abu-Lughod 196). Although riots never took place in East Harlem, the neighborhood experienced an equally turbulent set of transformations.²⁸ In the early 1940s the area was already congested, with 20% of Manhattan’s population occupying 10% of its territory, with unsanitary conditions; in 1950 “fifteen to twenty-five babies in Spanish Harlem were bitten by rats each week” (Stern, Mellins, Fishman 863). Unlike North Harlem, East Harlem was always a relatively poor area.²⁹

Robert A. M. Stern and his colleagues refer to the urban renewal projects in East Harlem as “one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of postwar American urbanism” (863). Robert Moses’ slum clearance program started with James Weldon Johnson Housing, a 1,300-unit housing project completed in 1947 on a super-block between 112th and 115th Streets between Park and Third Avenues. Lewis Mumford deemed the project “grim” and of an “inhuman scale.” This project was only the beginning of one of the largest slum clearance areas in New York. In 1957, *The New York Times* reported that “the biggest concentration of public housing is cutting a swath through Harlem. In a mass attack on one of the worst areas in the metropolitan area, the New York Housing Authority is leveling 137 acres of slums. Hardly a street from Madison Avenue to the East River, between 97th Street and 115th Street has been left untouched. Blocks of old, dark buildings have been ripped out, letting in sunlight and air” (Stern, Mellins, Fishman 864). The language of the news report, which proceeds to praise the

super-block model of urban renewal, applies military and war jargon to a poor minority area. The projects are “cutting a swath” in a “mass attack” which is “leveling” areas and “ripping out” buildings.

As Patricia Cayo Sexton has noted, “East Harlem has suffered in some ways from public investment. Its life has been, to some extent, sterilized by project living; and old neighborhood bonds have been broken, for good or evil. But the sickness of East Harlem comes much less from public investment than from private and, to a less extent, public neglect” (44). Further, the housing policymakers failed to consult the residents or the social workers. The projects altered the demographic and economic composition of the neighborhood, “tore down diversity and put up a high-rise ghetto” (44).³⁰

Robert Caro reported further that in the 1930s there were virtually no playgrounds in Harlem. “One reformer notes: In winter months, when the sun is most needed, it is not uncommon sight to see herds of children blocking the streets in sections where a little sun has been allowed to penetrate because there happen to be a few low buildings on one side of the street” (337).³¹ This discourse associates childhood with the experience of wilderness, positioning children outside of society; in the Levitt-Agee documentaries, this visual image can be read as a critical discourse of neighborhood decay and neglect.

In 1932, only two playgrounds existed in Harlem. Robert Moses built 255 playgrounds in New York City during the 1930s and only one in Harlem (Caro 510), while denying that the neighborhoods of Harlem were neglected or overlooked. Ballon and Jackson have most recently argued that the projects built benefited greatly the area in particular by providing construction and maintenance jobs to blacks. A *New York Times* reporter writing in 1950 could still notice “that playgrounds for many Harlem children were vacant lots, in which ‘bare-legged’ children played ‘on dumps of broken glass, rusty cans and refuse’[...]” (Caro 512)—a depiction that again recalls Levitt’s photographs.

The cinematic form in the two documentaries is suggestive of the resistance potential of the practices of everyday life, although *The Quiet One* also posits the limitations of this trope through the images of urban rubble. The Harlem street sequences in *The Quiet One* expose the relationships between the built environment within the frame and the socio-spatial universe beyond it, prefiguring the spatial geometry of Antonioni’s cinema in which the frame “pre-exists that which is going to be inserted within it” (Deleuze and Boundas 174). The street scenes in the first film are, in contrast, more tension-wrought, filmed by a

highly mobile camera. The void seen in the films’ vacant lots recalls the cinematic city ruins of the bombed European cities. “The war brought with it a tabula rasa that was an essential exercise for modern planning” (Jacobs 117).

Linkages between social conflicts and visual landscape are developed in Virilio’s work (1989), which posits the ocular machine in relationship to the war machine; Bruno (2002) elaborates the argument further to incorporate cinematic mapping and travel in relationship to warfare and conquest. The agitated cinematic city in the sequences of decaying housing, urban ruin, and neglected infrastructure in *In the Street* might be compared to the Berlin of the “rubble films”³² cycle, including Roberto Rossellini’s *Germany Year Zero* (1948). This aspect of the films questions Kracauer’s emphasis on the redemption of material reality (Kracauer 202-214), but also challenges contemporary readings of *In the Street* that downplay the significance of social contexts and root the films solely in the avant-garde tradition.³³

Rubble appears in *The Quiet One* in the eerie sequence of the grandmother’s search for Donald, as she crosses through a vacant lot of the destroyed buildings. In another shot, Donald passes by a group of children playing in the sand of a vacant lot and he angrily destroys their trinkets. In one sequence, as the grandmother takes Donald to school, other children can be seen accompanied by parents—the camera displays vacant lots, then rows of tenements and a large Rice Krispies billboard with a blond model smiling. This image remains uncanny in its embeddedness in the neighborhood, as Kracauer noted, “as if the camera had just now extracted them from the womb of a physical existence and as if the umbilical cord between the image and the actuality had not been severed” (164). The film’s Harlem sequences are in this manner positioned within the abandoned as well as the inhabited city. The setting renders *The Quiet One* as “fundamentally a social film” (de Moraes 378), as well as a film that allows for dream-like impressions triggered by the cinematic engagement with the “stark reality” (Kracauer 164).

Rubble in *In the Street* appropriates the city’s material structure in a different sense as well, evoking in Benjamin’s terms a recycling motif through the children’s re-appropriation of the built environment (Benjamin and Demetz 68-69). The rubble is neither fenced off nor a waste-site. Rather, the rubbles are freely traversed, the sites of play. Seen in the contexts of the “abandoned city,” as defined above, their systemic abandonment possesses a haunting quality suggesting Benjamin’s landscape that “haunts, intense as opium.”³⁴ The landscape is haunting



Figure 6: The Country and the City in *The Quiet One* (1949).
 Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

because it is at once a part of the abandoned city as well as intensely used by the residents.

The child's body is intimately connected to the maternal body of the city; according to de Certeau, "[i]t is through that experience that the possibility of space and of a localization (a 'not everything') of the subject is inaugurated" (109). *In the Street* suggests, in Lefebvre's terms, the manner in which spaces of representation (the films' recording of everyday life) can inadvertently contest representational spaces (the narratives of urban renewal). The slum is a "place of camaraderie," and a space of creativity—a set of neighborhoods in which "children felt impelled to make various marks upon a given world" (Coles 6), although this aspect appears more emphasized in Helen Levitt's photographs than in the documentary film.

The Quiet One's presents as well an alternate abandoned city that can be understood in relationship between "natural and social space,"³⁵ exemplified in the contrast between Esopus and Harlem. The film suggests opposing tendencies present in Agee's critical and literary opus—a questionable longing for a return to the land, and an apparent understanding of the impossibility of the rural alternative (Lofaro 13, 17). The social sphere is the space of the street in which encounter, assembly, and simultaneity delineate the environment. The cinematic street offers endless permutations delimited by specific points of accumulation or sites of consumption, yet neither does it represent an arena of easy connections nor a mere reflection of social circumstances. In contrast, the rural scenes have a poetic quality, upholding a typical nature-culture divide in which nature becomes an arena of healing (the river as a nurturer, for example), a place where the self can be encountered, and in part controlled, without the jarring urban visual stimuli. Nature is also the setting of a storm, the place where the boy's wounds must be confronted, where communal living is learned precisely because a return to nature is ultimately impossible [Figure 6].

Public Spaces: The Street Battleground and Theater

Material grounds of imaginaries cannot be easily claimed through the juxtaposition of contexts against cinematic spaces.³⁶ Within the Levitt-Agee opus, however, the materiality of public space and its discursive construction are of particular significance. An examination of social and reception contexts is especially illuminating in presenting these linkages.

First, the racial problem is at the same time central to, and also

silenced in, the film. The first inter-title in *The Quiet One* emphasizes that race is not the primary theme but suggests that the problem of delinquency affects different groups. Vinicius de Morles writes, “instead of exposing [the racial] problem, it disguises it with the outer appearance of the misery in which it hides. At no point in the commentary, or rather in the poetry, written by James Agee, is the word ‘Negro’ used. The black and white are all children, touched by the same evil, abandoned and unloved” (Morales 376). The sensitive treatment of a black child’s social and psychological position could in itself be seen as an endorsement of integration. The film engages with the racial divide by recording and relating images of diversity and mixing in public spaces.³⁷ This is particularly striking if contrasted with sociological history evidence. Abu-Lughod noted, “by 1943, Harlem was so large, racially homogenous, and densely settled that during the hostilities [of 1943] only armed police, among the white population dared to enter” (Abu-Lughod 196).

The anecdotal evidence indicates, however, that the filmmakers and the reviewers initially saw the racial contexts in a single-minded fashion. Bill Levitt (Helen Levitt’s brother) reported in an interview that the crew was criticized by “an old hard-line Party members who took a good look at the film and decided that it was a corrupt version of America, and that it was impossible to make a film about a Negro child in which you didn’t show police brutality, any more than you could show a picture about Nazis without showing barbed wire fences. He was talking about the problem of black people in the United States, and he wasn’t talking about the film” (Levitt, Loeb, Bill, et. al. 117). While the Party-member’s comment reflects a simplification of the racial problem and of the film’s narrative, the filmmakers’ insistence upon evading the racial contexts, as if cinema exists safely outside of the social orbit, appears equally uninformed. Horak’s research showed that during the shooting the crew was “harassed by the police,” who “instructed them to ‘move on’” (Horak 149), and Loeb, who financed the film’s production from her personal assets, claimed that “one distribution house said that if we’d make it a white boy, we’d make a million dollars[....] I think that may have been the first time that we were aware that we had made a film about Negro children.” Bill Levitt stressed, “But we never were able to distribute it in the South except in black theaters—absolutely mad” (Levitt, Loeb, Bill, et. al. 138). The film that did not wish to tackle the race problem found that it had encountered one. In “occupied Germany [the film] was refused distribution because the Southern

colonel who was in charge didn’t want Negro and white children mixed as they were in the film.” The filmmakers further puzzled European critics, suspicious of the white artists’ Harlem films—in France, where “underground film people” supported the film, according to Bill Levitt, the critics “couldn’t reconcile the film with us being who we were, so they write up stories about us being a group of American Negroes.” The complexities of the ideological stance are further notable in the audience reception; in France, again, the film was embraced by groups considered politically in opposition—the Communist Party and the Catholic Church, in the U.S. as well the Communist party members first endorsed the film, but then argued that “there must be something wrong with [the film]” when Christian groups have praised it. And for the filmmakers’ avoidance of ideological context, the film without an ideology proved able to be made to serve such a purpose when it was shown in Russia by the American Embassy to “demonstrate that film is free in America” (Levitt, Loeb, Bill, et. al. 138).

The filmmaker’s downplaying of racial contexts was thus deceptive, as not only the reception of film, but the segregated cinematic spaces in the film indicate. *The Quiet One*’s tropes of connectedness and distance, of the vitality of street life, are shaped by the narrative of the boy’s exclusion. The role of minority children is particularly salient in this context; although the voiceover avoids the emphasis on race, the cinematic city space and the audience reception space is racialized.

As Annette Insdorf has observed of Francois Truffaut’s films, cinematic identities of children are shaped by their lack of awareness of accidents, suggesting their outsider position and precariousness of their condition (151). The children of *In the Street* appear fearless; left to their own devices, they do not perceive danger from the street. Even as Levitt repeats the tropes of joyful play and freedom of discovery of space, followed by a painful defeat in violent brawls, and a child’s capacity to bounce back from hurt, the film tends to avoid apparent juxtapositions. The fearlessness of children and the interactive social existence shapes a critical social discourse, which dispenses with the images of fright of minority areas.

“To practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and salient experience of childhood; it is, in a place, *to be other and to move toward the other*” (Certeau 110). This primal notion of othering—here transferred to the contexts of childhood—entails a relationship with the exposure of difference in public spaces. But as a socio-spatially constructed act it is also problematic in two respects.

First, writing about East Harlem in early 1960s, Sexton chronicled urban renewal, concluding that the fact that Puerto Rican, black, and Italian residents of the area “make this an interesting, in some absurd way even an attractive, community is a great tribute to their own personal resources. The physical part of the community, both old and new, seem engaged in mortal combat with its citizens to prevent the emergence of the esthetic, the imaginative, the pleasant” (48). The citation juxtaposes the environment and the community’s resources, positing the impossibility of the aesthetic within contexts of *urban* poverty, an impossibility challenged by Levitt’s photographs and two documentary films.

Second, as Sorlin has noted, “cinematic images are contrived by middle-class adults who, unwittingly, emphasize the relations of their social circle and age groups, and forget or misinterpret the concerns of other groups” (Sorlin 108). This raises substantive problems in cinema studies within the contexts of the outsiders’ recordings of minority residents, who might be seen as subaltern objects of representation.³⁸ This notion is echoed in the silences of the Levitt-Agee films, yet not reduced to explicit otherness.³⁹ *In the Street* and *The Quiet One* offer rare empathetic and interpretative documentaries made in the 1940s in Harlem. Moreover, unlike many neorealist and urban reportage documentaries, the two films do not mythologize place, project a specific vision of history, or speak on behalf of the residents of Harlem.⁴⁰

This recalls the notion of the spatial enclosure of agency and Levitt’s photographs of children actively shaping the very same neighborhood. The camera, for instance, zooms in on a drawing of a doorbell on a wall with an inscription in child’s handwriting, “button to secret passage: press,” suggesting a Lefebvian intersection of spaces of representation with social practices. This could be seen as an mere imaginary escape but the image does not emanate despair. The spatial environment is not only a container inhabited by the uprooted, impoverished dwellers, but an arena actively re-imagined, responded to, or reinvented through everyday practices. In this manner the publicness of the environment, the imaginative acts within it—the spaces of representation—through practices of everyday life socially produce space. The inscription demands haptic contact with the material structure of the wall to activate the imaginary space that would alter the spatial practice. The hand-written note against the materiality of the wall highlights the impermanency and the randomness of the act in contrast to the larger oeuvre of the city [Figure 7].



Figure 7: Helen Levitt, New York, c. 1939. Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

The notion of impermanency is central to the critical cinematic cities of the 1940s, as is evident as well in the inter-title that introduces *In the Street*: “The streets of a poor quarter of great cities are above all a theater and a battleground. There, unaware and unnoticed, every human being is a poet, a masker, a warrior, a dancer and in his innocent artistry he projects against the turmoil of the street, an image of human existence. The attempt of this film is to capture this image.” The rhetoric of urban war zones, echoing the notion of “mortal combat” in Sexton’s account of discourses of urban renewal in East Harlem, is discernable in the reference to a “battleground.” Further, *In the Street’s* visual metaphors link a street theater with creativity and a survival capacity (the image of a bird affixed to a cane; children playing “flour tag”). The film expresses, in Lefebvre’s words, the *textures of space*. Thus “the *texture* of space affords opportunities not only to social acts with no particular place in it and no particular link with it, but also to a spatial practice that does indeed determine, namely its collective and individual use: a sequence of acts which embody a signifying practice even if they cannot be reduced to such a practice” (Lefebvre 57). In light of the social contexts examined above, Lefebvre’s notion becomes at once apt and problematic. The very claim on the street is a result of a lack of space—for playing, growing up, and learning; the activities of children are displaced on the street as a form of appropriation of space. A macabre vision of agitation appears in *In the Street* as the play turns into combat: children wearing masks hit each other with stockings filled with flour which then tear and burst, as it were, creating an impression not unlike that of explosives.



Figure 8: The Street as a Battleground: *In the Street* (1948/1952).

Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

A hyperbolic comparison is intentional given that an evocation of an urban combat zone is suggested by the term “battleground” in the inter-title. These acts of children in the film can be linked to a larger spatial practice in Lefebvre’s terms—the ruination that is taking place around the neighborhood that in the first postwar decade became the largest urban renewal site in New York [Figure 8].

Helen Levitt intended *In the Street* to be called “I hate 104th Street,” presenting the title-photograph of a child’s note handwritten on a wall in the neighborhood, but decided against it.⁴¹ This decision accords with Levitt’s inadvertent suppression of social contexts. But as we have seen, the identities that Levitt captures, while not over-ridden or erased by social constructs, are created and shaped in response to the urban neighborhood—on its walls the dwellers make their mark. The neighborhood space is not a mere container or a dead-end street, yet the fluidity of movement in the film counteracts the potential to renew the place. The overwhelming energy expressed by movement is drained, depleted, and extinguished in the streets photographed. The emphasis on motion does not seem suggestive of the children’s necessity to move

on or progress (unlike in *The Quiet One*, for example). Its potential fades behind the stillness, its speed and motion, and self-destructs. The omitted inscription, “I hate 104th Street,” is rendered apparent, questioning the imaginative capacities of spaces of representation proposed by the “secret passage” inscription.

Flâneurie, Loitering, and Urban Decay

In the Street visualizes spatial poetics in de Certeau’s terms; it represents a rendition of a “walking rhetoric,”⁴² of two stylistic figures, synecdoche and asyndeton.⁴³ This can be seen in the images of the child who stands in for the flâneur, in which the child’s experience stands for the marginal subject, as well as presents a fragment in multiplicities of urban experiences.

Apart from Donald’s solitude, children on the street in *The Quiet One* are always accompanied and cared for by the adults, yet these images suggest the restriction of freedom or joyfulness of discovery. The condition of the *The Quiet One*’s outcast black child thus limits flâneurie as much as it also visually upholds the significance of street life. Benjamin has noted that “[i]ntoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets” (417). Lefebvre has argued that space unleashes desire (97) and this can be seen in a nascent adolescent form through the eyes of the child flâneur. But Donald senses intoxication only when he is observing a pregnant woman on the street or actors on movie posters, suggesting his need for intimacy and his search for interior spaces of shelter. “This relationship of oneself to oneself governs the internal alterations of place (the relations among its strata) or the pedestrian unfolding of the stories accumulated in a place (moving about the city and traveling). The childhood experience that determines its spatial practices later develops its effects, proliferates, floods private and public spaces, undoes their readable surfaces, and creates within the planned city a “metaphorical” or mobile city, like the one Kandinsky dreamed of—‘a great city built according to all the rules of architecture and then suddenly shaken by a force that defies all calculation’” (110).

Although the trajectories of a virtually homeless black child in the segregated Harlem of the 1940s do not constitute a narrative of resistance, they are suggestive of alternate spatial practices. In contrast to Jane Jacobs’ critique of urban renewal in which the safety of children is assured by the “eyes on the street,” the streets of East and Central Harlem shown in both films are at once a zone of freedom, but also of

threat and conflict; play there is not an innocent activity. Further, Donald in *The Quiet One* and the children in *In the Street* appear ignored by the “eyes on the street” (Jacobs 35). The films contest the nostalgic discourses associated with the cinematic New York of the late 1940s, the city of white prosperity.

Furthermore, although cinematic spaces commonly echo the Simmelian notion of the intensification of nervous stimuli, Donald's character in fact escapes to the streets to settle down, as it were. Donald's street experience suggests tropes of loneliness, dislocation, and traumas of uprootedness—the conditions that question flâneurie. But the film does not propose a narrative of social determinacy in the boy's loitering—the street cannot serve as a substitute for shelter. As James Agee's narration articulates, “Of course the streets of a city can be a wonderful school, freedom is wonderful too. But if you are as lonely as Donald is all you learn is more loneliness, and Donald's kind of freedom is solitary confinement. Everybody else has some place to go, some definite thing to do and after a while you even want to go home.”

The urban experiences in *The Quiet One* heighten Donald's isolation, recalling the chilling *gesellschaft* suggestive of the cinematic noir cities. As the filmmakers shoot apparently from a vehicle in motion, no one seems to notice the lone boy *In the Street* as he passes by a local market. Benjamin writes, “dialectic of flâneurie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man” (420). Donald becomes the hidden person, the undiscoverable, marked by racial difference and paid attention to by those who would take advantage of him. Sequences shot on residential streets contrast with those on a commercial block, however. In Benjamin's words, “The flâneur is an observer of marketplace[...] He is a spy for the capitalists, on assignment in the realm of consumers” (427). This argument obtains more ingenuous connotations in the case of an abandoned child, as Donald does not seem to desire products as much as interactivity and contact. In contrast to the lively residential streets of the East Harlem documentary, the residential blocks in Central Harlem of *The Quiet One* echo the abandoned city trope.

The flâneurie questions a romanticized urban liberty; although Donald finds liberty in the ability to traverse the neighborhoods, the image of the child in the city is a product of family and social neglect. Other aspects of flâneurie are endorsed in the film. “The ‘colportage phenomenon of space’ is the flâneur's basic experience.” [...] “The space

winks at the flâneur: what do you think may have gone on here?” (Benjamin 418) This experience is intensified in the case of a child's perception of the street, which distracts him and, for a moment, removes painful memories from view. The experience of the street becomes a souvenir in the memory repertoire that supplements, and subdues, personal memories. The city streets create a psychological space, a shelter for new experiences and memories, even if they cannot provide a response to Donald's social condition. In this manner, the film proposes that a Lefevrian connection between the representation of space and representational space will remain incomplete. The city of the mind-image and the city of social experience cannot be easily aligned.

Although the central social image of the two films is this gap between the promise of the city and the experience of its abandonment and segregation, the films also contest the call of the Situationists' Manifesto to exalt the practices of everyday life over artistic expressions. “That which changes our way of seeing the streets is more important than what changes our ways of seeing painting” (qtd. in Tallack 85). As if anticipating both the Situationist quest and its limitations, Levitt and Agee suggested that the change in ways of seeing the streets necessitated an alternate optic within photographic and film art. In the two films, images and imaginaries of everyday practices adopt a particular shape by being enmeshed with the city streets; they capture, in David Rodowick's terms, the film art's “quotidian dramatic expression” (Rodowick 108). The cinematic spaces of the Harlem documentary films sought further within images in motion the possibilities for an expanded scope of agency of everyday acts, without denying the tensions between aesthetic domains and social practices.

Cinematic Public Spaces: Unintended Infrapolitics⁴⁴ and the Dialectics of Flâneurie

The Levitt-Agee films' dialectic of seeing is evident more in visual images than in rhetorical devices, recalling the impossibility of communicating, in Kracauer's terms, the “stark reality.” A shot, for instance, in which the still camera observes the solitary child of *The Quiet One* withdrawing into the back of the frame could be tied to Benjamin's “angel of history” (40) [Figure 9]. The silent violence of this image suggests the “wreckage” of a world in which the social costs of neglect (Donald's losses) become visualized and apparent precisely at the moment in which they cannot be accounted for. *In the Street* commences with a



Figure 9: *The Quiet One* (1949). Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

short sequence that captures an impossibility of achieving progress—a slow motion traveling shot follows a boy on a bicycle trying to hold the back of a truck, which slowly, gradually escapes his reach; the spectator loses the sight of the boy and sees merely decaying streets.

In contrast to the anti-urban documentary *The City* (1939), the Levitt-Agee films display urban decay and endorse urbanity. It has been noted that the films' focus on everyday expressions and activities in the public sphere represents a form of ambiguous cinematic infrapolitics, and in Benjamin's terms, a dialectic of flâneurie (Benjamin and Tiedemann 420) by making visible the hidden person's existence. In Kracauer's words, the film is "expressive of an outspoken, very cinematic susceptibility to street incidents;" it captures the "flow of life" (203, 71). Further, Marcus has noted that Levitt "occupies an uninhibited, fragile, dance-like space to avoid imposing on her subjects and risk altering their natural behavior" (Marcus 124). The candid camera allows for the suspension of performative aspects of identity for the ocular machine, but urban identities observed already perform for the street audience; the cinematic street becomes a veritable "theater of social action."⁴⁵

Levitt's photographic work in the collection also entitled *In the Street* shows, according to Robert Coles, that in the "Spanish Harlem of the 1940s,[...]there were no terrible gang wars;" rather, Levitt depicts streets of "civility and gentility" (Coles 6). Elements of turbulence are, however, evident in *In the Street*, presenting as well energy, creativity, and the resource capacity of youth and their warrior spirit. These scenes can be read as forms of Bakhtinian carnivaleque (Horak 146), in the sequences which include urban performances (Horak 140-149), as it were, by children in Halloween costumes. But the sequences of street brawls remain far more conflictual than scholars have observed. *In the*



Figure 10: The Skyline in *The Quiet One* (1949). Courtesy Laurence Miller Gallery, NY.

Street is suggestive of the aspects of the agitated city trope tied to crises and the discourses of inner-city decline that became pervasive within the American public sphere starting with the closing years of World War Two (Beauregard 366).

Visualizing the street as a "theater" and also a "battleground," Levitt, Agee, and Loeb showed the East Harlem dwellers' assertion of urban existence through everyday expressions of uniqueness. As Kelley notes in *Race Rebels*, ghetto residents articulate resistance through unconventional public culture that includes daily acts and forms of opposition in the workplace, residences, and in public spaces (230). *In the Street* does not, however, suggest that these acts are motivated by despair. Rather, it highlights the tension between an impossibility of altering the environment ("I hate 104th Street"), and a child's desire to claim space (the "secret passages").

In the two documentary films, the agitated city trope suggests that sources of contention lie *outside* of the minority areas.⁴⁶ These forces shaping cinematic cities of *In the Street* and *The Quiet One*, are both discernable and also unpalatable. The last shots of *In the Street* render an urban uncanny in the latter sense—two nondescript figures walk away from the camera disappearing down the street. *The Quiet One* ends with a dubious quest to redeem space in Benjamin's terms. "Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption" (Benjamin and Arendt 254) [Figure 10].

The cinematic city shot introduced by Agee's final words in *The Quiet One* suggests, however, a quality of "stark reality" that redeems not history but recovers instead the cinematic visual language—the skyline view is one of the most sinister, the most unsettling, and most oddly contemporary among hundreds of noir sequences of the 1940s. The

establishing shot is of Harlem at dusk, with its tenement roofs and the elevated train station, with only a solitary human figure seen. In an open window, as a woman retreats into the apartment, the camera moves closer to examine a back alley, dark window holes, and finally the street below the elevated platform where two boys seem to be fighting. One of them escapes and runs away into the depths of the city. Only the barely discernable shadows of the streets are visible in this establishing shot. A memory-image of the city of loneliness as remembered by the boy and a documentary shot of the streets of Harlem observed by the cinematographers in late 1940s have merged into one.

The “traumas of unrecoverable space and time”⁴⁷ in *The Quiet One* offer, nevertheless, a visual resolution—among the film’s last sequences is also a shot of Donald sorting his photographs, suggesting a conscious, emergent-adult arrangement of memory. Making sense of one’s life entails a specifically cinematic process of editing—the ordering of images, removing from view, setting aside, without perhaps obliterating. The streets of Harlem that provoked rage in one child and where, perhaps, another was inspired to create a “button to a secret passage” form this image-composite of the intensely public, spatially segregated and, set against abandonment and rubble, flâneur-desirous spaces of modernity.

Notes

1. I have benefited from the thoughtful comments and encouragement of Ira Katznelson, Richard Peña, Stuart Klawans, Paula Massood, Robert Sklar, Andreas Huyssen, Herbert J. Gans, Elliott Sclar, Marshall Berman, Martha Kuhlman, Joseph Entin, Noam Elcott, Mark Noonan, and the editorial board of *Columbia Journal of American Studies*. I am thankful to Stephanie Cordes for proofreading the article draft and to Bob Scott, Columbia University for technical support.

2. See for example, Thomas Dikant, “Helen Levitt: 10 Photographs,” *PhiN* 25/2003: 1–25, no. 1 (2003) as well as Horak’s emphasis on subjectivity in Levitt’s films, Jan-Christopher Horak, *Making Images Move: Photographers and Avant-Garde Cinema* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), p. 160.

3. Following Lefebvre, I treat space as a dynamic system, produced and reproduced, in particular by the forces of capital (local, national or global) and state actions, and representing a site of struggle. Place refers not merely to a geographic area but to local processes and webs of social relations; places are gendered as well as marked by ethnic, racial, and socio-economic differences. See, John Urry, “The Sociology of Space and Place,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*, ed. Judith R. Blau (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 7–14.

4. See, Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies, 1939–1990*, Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*, J.M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*.

5. On New York history and urban theory in this context, see especially, Abu-Lughod, *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America’s Global Cities*, Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar*

Fate of U.S. Cities, LeGates and Stout, “The City Reader,” Marcuse, “The Layered City.”

6. The agitated city trope is examined in my dissertation, “The Agitated City: Urban Transformations and Cinematic Representations of the American Metropolis, 1929–1950,” which focuses on critical urban imaginaries in New York films, 1929–1950.

7. In Levitt’s close photographic circle, moreover, her aesthetic path followed urban trajectories apart from her colleagues Walker Evans and William Klein. Further, unlike the Harlem photographers Morgan and Marvin Smith who sought “opportunity and cultural richness where others saw simply misery and social despair,” Levitt neither excluded images of poverty, nor did her images juxtapose human misery against a richness of cultural expression. Morgan Smith and Marvin Smith, *Harlem: The Vision of Morgan and Marvin Smith* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), p. 7.

8. Sennett, *The Spaces of Democracy, Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

9. See, Michael Walzer, “Pleasures and Costs of Urbanity,” in *Metropolis: Center and Symbol of Our Times*, ed. Philip Kasinitz (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

10. Predating struggles for desegregation and also displaying an intense awareness of the racial inequalities in urban America in particular as New York’s other neighborhoods became more diverse, Levitt avoids direct social commentary, yet demonstrates “a profound respect for the hardihood of people suffering and surviving.” Cassandra Longer, “Helen Levitt,” *Women’s Art Journal* Spring/Summer (1994): p. 36.

11. See, Marshall Berman, “Take It to the Streets—Conflict and Community in Public Space,” *Dissent* Fall (1986).

12. The point is not to question Levitt’s and her critics’ emphasis that the choice of photographing in poor neighborhoods was inspired by the visual attractiveness of liveliness, but rather to investigate how social contexts speak through the type of aesthetic vision that Levitt embraced. Phillips notes “her determination to see the streets as places of aesthetic beauty, rather than social contexts.” See, Phillips et al., *Helen Levitt*, p. 25.

13. Her biographers note the appreciation of “the demonstrative, warm culture [she found] represented among black people” and “her affinity to jazz, the active street life and her genuine liberalism.” Phillips et al., *Helen Levitt*, pp. 35, 32.

14. Simmel’s reference here is to the unclassified diversity of Berlin at the turn of the 20th century. This example is used metaphorically in the context of Levitt’s photographs. Georg Simmel, cited in Sennett, “Cosmopolitanism and the Social Experience of Cities.”

15. The two films represent collaborative projects. While Sidney Meyers’ directorial contribution for *The Quiet One* and Janet Loeb’s financing of both films from her own assets are not meant to be de-emphasized, this article focuses on the urban cinematic spaces in the two films for which the foremost creative contribution can be credited to Helen Levitt and James Agee. *In the Street* was directed by Helen Levitt and according to Robert Sklar, Agee joined Levitt while she was shooting on the streets of East Harlem. Discussion with Robert Sklar, New York, 9/11/2007.

16. A sequential description of *In the Street* is as follows: The film depicts New York children some of whom are ill-kempt and only half-dressed; left on their own devices, they play in the streets with found objects or pieces of decomposing urban infrastructure. The camera frames women and children gazing vacuously from the windows of shoddy tenements. In one shot, a woman in the window appears immobile and expressionless, as if she were an inanimate object; in another a woman abruptly moves, glancing dismissively at the cinematographer as she puffs her cigarette. In a set of shots that last several seconds children pass wearing unusual Halloween costumes—a black toddler dressed in an unusual cape passes by and fearlessly crosses the street; two children are kissing; a boy embraces a girl, then steps back and punches her in the head,

two other girls come to comfort her; a couple that appears of different ethnic descent embracing in the street; a boy or a girl in what seems to be an older person's baggy bakery-worker dress marches by; an elderly man is playing on the stoop with an animal that might be either a cat or a small dog; again, children walk by wearing surreal and sinister Halloween masks, one black child runs around wears a mask that resembles a white hood; an infant hungrily licks a tenement window pane; a solemn boy standing next to him stares into, and through, the camera; a woman walks by holding about a four-foot stick at whose end is affixed a real, or perhaps a mechanical, bird that is frantically clapping its wings in an attempt to fly; children engage in rough fights with stockings filled with flour (the game is known as "flour tag"); elderly residents push children away from the residential sidewalk; in perhaps the most spirited scene, a neatly dressed group of Latin and black girls dance, smile for the cinematographers, make faces in close-up in front of the camera; the film ends with a semi-abstract image of two female figures in unusually shapeless black clothing retreating away from the camera along an overpass into the city.

17. The camera avoids establishing shots almost entirely, and only occasionally includes medium close-ups in the shots of children and women looking out of the windows; in one shot, several girls move into the frame, approaching the cinematographer and creating their own close-ups.

18. As Annette Insdorf has observed in the context of Truffaut's films. Annette Insdorf, François Truffaut, Rev. and updated ed. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 151.

19. In addition the screenplay for *The Night of the Hunter*, Agee adapted for screen *The African Queen*, wrote film reviews for *The Nation*, and a teleplay "Mr. Lincoln" for the CBS program *Omnibus* in 1952-1953. Daniel Feller, "James Agee's "Mr. Lincoln": The Historical Record," in *Agee Agonistes: Essays on the Life, Legend, and Works of James Agee*, ed. Michael A. Lofaro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), p. 127.

20. In the film, a protagonist explains his series of robberies and murders, "I robbed that bank because I got tired of seein' children roamin' the woodlands without food, children roamin' the highways in this year of Depression; children sleepin' in old abandoned car bodies or junk-heaps; and I promised myself I'd never see the day when my youngins'd want." James Agee. Quoted in Mary E. Papke, "The Failure of Narrative and the Efficacy of Dreams in the Night of the Hunter," in *Agee Agonistes: Essays on the Life, Legend, and Works of James Agee*, ed. Michael A. Lofaro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), p. 149.

21. This is also evident in the camera angles shown, in which the streets of cities in the 1920s are often observed from above, from the rooftops, while the camera in the Levitt documentaries observes almost always from the street level. On urban flâneuses, see, Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990).

22. James Agee's ambiguous quote at the back of the Arthouse Inc. videocassette of *In the Street* reads, "It is good to think, better to look and think, best to look without thinking." See, Inc. Arthouse, *In the Street* [1948] (New York, NY: Arthouse Inc., released in association with Cecile Starr, 1996).

23. Such as held-held camera and the editing style. See, Horak, *Making Images Move: Photographers and Avant-Garde Cinema*.

24. Kracauer then proceeded to develop the arguments that favor Vittorio de Sica's neo-realist semi-fictional urban narratives over detached, albeit socially-conscious, reportage of the British documentary School and the compassionate yet in his view non-judgmental engagement with material reality in *In the Street*. In reference to *Housing Problems*, ironizing Joris Iver's remarks on *Borinage*, a documentary about Belgian min-

ers, Kracauer quipped, "human suffering, it appears, is conducive to detached reporting; the artist's conscience shows in artless photographs." Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, pp. 202, 02-14.

25. This is not merely because of the filmmakers' primary concern for their subjects. See Langer's emphasis on the persistence of the "suffering and surviving" of children. Cassandra Langer, "Helen Levitt: Essays by Sandra S. Phillips and Maria Morris Hambourg [Book Review]," *Women's Art Journal* (1994): p. 35.

26. In brief shots, women are seen sweeping the streets, and walking the dogs on the sidewalk; elderly residents, Jane Jacobs' "eyes on the street," sit and observe the activities of children, but also forcefully expel a group of unruly kids from the sidewalk. Regarding "eyes on the street" and sidewalk safety. See, Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 35.

27. For instance if compared to references to the discourses of underprivileged areas contained in the official documents from the same period of time. Frederick H. Allen, B. T. Fitzpatrick, and Bowery Savings Bank of New York, *Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment in the City of New York*, Bowery Briefs; (New York: Bowery Savings Bank, 1956), W. E. Reynolds and United States. Public Buildings Administration., *Post-War Urban Redevelopment* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Works Agency, Public Buildings Administration, 1946), Coleman Woodbury, *Rethinking Urban Redevelopment*, Urban Redevelopment Series; No. 1 (Chicago: Public Administration Service, 1949).

28. During the 1940s East Harlem changed from a predominantly Italian-American neighborhood to a Latino neighborhood, the number of Puerto Rican residents increasing from 30,000 in 1930 to 250,000 in 1949. By 1940, 20% of the area was native-born black; the ratio increased to 30% in 1950. Patricia Cayo Sexton, *Spanish Harlem; an Anatomy of Poverty*, [1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 9.

29. Stern et al. argue that East Harlem did not have middle-class brownstones or other better quality housing, while Patricia Cayo Sexton noted in early 1960s, that "East Harlem (and Central Harlem even more so) contains many sound and beautiful old buildings[...]They need renovation and renewal." See also, Sexton, *Spanish Harlem: An Anatomy of Poverty*, p. 43.

30. The whites that could move out did and almost half of all tenants in East Harlem's nine public developments were black by the time Sexton conducted fieldwork; about one in three was Puerto Rican, and about one in five "other." Sexton further argued that the greatest opponents of urban renewal were the clergy and the professionals and noted that rent strikes and community organizing resulted in rehabilitation of select buildings but that the result of those policies had been limited. Ballon, *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*.

31. Caro, quoting a Harlem mother from before Robert Moses became Parks Commissioner: "We have to work all day and we have no place to send the children. There are kids here who have never played anyplace but in the gutter[...] After a building program that had tripled the city's supply of playgrounds, there was still almost no place for 200,000 of the city's children—the 200,000 with black skin—to play in their own playgrounds except the streets or abandoned, crumbling, filthy, looted tenements stinking of urine and vomit; or vacant lots carpeted with rusty tin cans, jagged pieces of metal, dog feces and the leavings, spilling out of rotting paper shopping bags, of human means[...] If children with black skin wanted to escape the heat of the slums, they could remove the covers from fire hydrants and wade through their outwash, as they had always waded, in gutters that were sometimes so crammed with broken glass that they glistened in the sun." Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1974), p. 337.

32. See, Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001).

33. See, Horak, *Making Images Move: Photographers and Avant-Garde Cinema*.

34. The citation is from Mallarmé. Cited in Benjamin and Tiedemann, *The Arcades Project*, p. 416.

35. According to Lefebvre, “the form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity. But what assembles and what is assembled? The answer is: everything that there is in space, everything that is produced either by nature or by society, either through their co-operation or through their conflicts. Everything, living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols. Natural space juxtaposes—and thus disperses: it puts places and that which occupies them side by side. It particularizes. By contrast, social space implies actual or potential assembly at a single point, or around that point. It implies, therefore, the possibility of accumulation (a possibility that is realized under specific conditions).” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 101.

36. Film art in particular uniquely captures a dialectic in which the materiality of the city is evident, but in which it is also subverted and challenged through the point of view of protagonists. But this discursive and visual reshaping, as so many films from the 1930s and the 1940s demonstrate, is never too far away from the range of metaphorical meanings associated with what was in the popular press termed “slums” or blighted areas, or from the prevailing urban discourses and artistic visions. The creation of cinematic discourses does not occur in a vacuum but neither do material grounds, even in the case of documentary visions, strictly determine the density or depth of cinematic spaces.

37. For example, the first sequence shows a white boy playing with black boys; a sequence on a Harlem street shows two working class men, one white, one black carrying in a large couch together; the street scenes include whites and blacks living side by side yet also apart.

38. These documentaries contrast, however, with contemporary films that present conflicts in minority areas as inherent to them or derived solely from local actors and conditions.

39. While *In the Street* represents a lyrical meditation on urban life and includes avant-garde stylistical elements, and *The Quiet One* is a social documentary, both films challenge mainstream visions of minority residents without claiming to speak for them or represent their stories. Indeed, the films present a sharp contrast with the imaginaries of black neighborhoods in films of the period, including in critical noir. See, Stam, “Permutations of Difference: Introduction.”

40. In contrast, see for example Forgacs’ critique of *Rome Open City*: “the patriotic myth presented in the film was one example of a very widespread production of such myths, to which many other neo-realist films and texts, as well as memoirs and historical records of the resistance contributed. They all responded to a strong collective need to erase parts of the past, commemorate other parts, and produce a good memory of the war capable of expelling painful or traumatic memories.” See, Forgacs, *Rome, Open City (Roma Città Aperta)*, p. 69.

41. Levitt’s reasons for this are not known. Cited in Horak, *Making Images Move: Photographers and Avant-Garde Cinema*.

42. Levitt’s visions are a result of her own flaneuse experience. As Wolf notes, “the dandy, the flaneur, the hero, the stranger—all figures evoked to epitomize the experience of modern life—are invariably male figures.” The photography that Levitt created depended upon the ability of her solitary strolls. Noir, more than any genre of the period, presents lone female strollers but they are the femme fatale or the fallen woman, often the murder victim. Women seen in the Levitt films are idlers, strollers, housewives, vendors, students, eccentrics, charmers, lively girls, dancers, grandmothers, etc.

Moreover, the rapport of children towards Levitt in *In the Street* is striking—they smile for her, adjust themselves for a group portrait, dance in front of the camera, make faces and walk into close-up, yet there is no suggestion of an explicit nurturing aspect. Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*, p. 41.

43. The former “expands a spatial element in order to make it play the role of a ‘more’ (a totality) and take its place (the bicycle or the piece of furniture in a store window stands for a whole street or neighborhood). Asyndeton, by elision, creates a ‘less,’ opens gaps in the spatial continuum, and retains only selected parts of it that amount almost to relics. Synecdoche replaces the totalities by fragments (a less in the place of a more); asyndeton disconnects them by eliminating the conjunctive or the consecutive (nothing in place of something).” Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 101.

44. See, James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

45. “A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is one picture of the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.” Benjamin and Arendt, *Illuminations*, p. 257-58.

46. In contrast, for example, in Spike Lee’s New York or Hanif Kureishi’s London, sources of conflict are manifested in the neighborhood and seem derived from them. See, Paula J. Massood, *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film, Culture and the Moving Image* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

47. In a related argument, Dimendberg has suggested that films noir whose narratives incorporate imagery of urban decay can be seen as anticipatory critical discourses of urban renewal. Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*.

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Alice Neel: The Painter and Her Politics

Gerald Meyer

"I believe what I am is a humanist.
That's the way I see the world."

Alice Neel

Alice Neel (1900-1984) lived a life as compelling as her art; she was America's greatest social-realist expressionist portraitist,¹ whose paintings reveal both the inner lives and the social reality of their subjects. In addition to their psychological acuity, what makes her portraits so fascinating is their sociological accuracy. They reveal not only her subjects' personalities, but their social—even political—reality. Her paintings are also autobiographical: She painted "what, where, and how she lived" (Allara, "Object," 12).

Neel painted and lived in poverty and obscurity until the age of sixty-four, when a cascade of honors she was earlier denied began to flow to her. The turning point took place in 1964 when one of her portraits was selected for inclusion in a retrospective, "Recent Painting USA: The Figure," at the Museum of Modern Art. Between 1926 until 1962, Neel was given six one-person gallery exhibitions; between 1962 and her death in 1984, she had sixty shows (Allara, *Pictures*, 164, 169, 5). In 1974, the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York City, mounted a major retrospective that included fifty-eight of her paintings. A spectacular posthumous exhibit at the Whitney in 2000, which showed seventy-six works, traveled to the Philadelphia Museum of Art,

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and three other major American museums (Belchers 2).

Today, Neel is widely considered to be “the preeminent [American] portrait painter of the twentieth century.” Others have called her one of the most important women artists of her time (Naples 8-9), and “the finest portraitist that America had produced since 1900” (Allara, *Pictures*, 298, fn 22). A director of the Whitney, Jack Baur, ranked Neel as one of the most significant figure painters in American history, and credited her with “preserving the art of painting the figure for four decades” (Belchers 3). William Paul, another student of Neel’s work, insisted that her paintings’ “concentration on the human predicament is unique in the century” (13). An early and astute student of Neel’s work stated that there was no painter “who can rival her ability not only to capture an unmistakable likeness, but to invest it with inner life so that[...]the painting seems more alive than the person represented” (Harris 6).²

In May 2007, *Alice Neel*, a documentary film directed and produced by her grandson, Andrew Neel, was released. Andrew skillfully melded into a coherent narrative a wide variety of sources—historical footage, photographs, and interviews (vintage and recent) of family members, fellow artists, friends, and critics. His film traces her career largely through the prism of family, and most specifically her sons, Hartley (Andrew’s father) and Richard who present the most sustained point of view about Alice (Andrew Neel). Although not entirely without relevance to her art, the drama of Neel’s family life—some of it truly tragic, but most fairly mundane—could have reprised the story of any working-class woman of that period determined to have a career in the arts.

Throughout the film, the humanism of her paintings and her own evolved humanity shine through, but *Alice Neel* omits an essential component of her life—Neel’s devotion to the Communist movement from the onset of the Great Depression (and very likely even earlier) until her death in 1984. In an interview about making *Alice Neel*, Andrew was asked whether there was anything he regretted leaving out? He responded, “It was unfortunate that I had to leave out my bit on communism and politics. It was one of the last things to go. But in the end, I decided her humanitarian politics were quite [clearly depicted in the film], so I didn’t think it was an egregious omission” (*Vulture*, nymag.com). When queried about this lapse at the question-and-

answer session after the first screening of *Alice Neel* in New York City, Andrew forthrightly admitted that the absence of material about his grandmother’s extensive involvement in the Communist movement was a “mistake.” He explained that every time he inserted material about his grandmother’s political life, “it threw the film out of whack artistically.” He further stated that he was producing another version of *Alice Neel* “for educational purposes,” which would contain six minutes of material about her politics.

There were two places in the film, however, where the introduction of Neel’s involvement in the Communist movement would have naturally flowed out of the narrative: Neel’s involvement with The Works Progress Administration’s Federal Arts Project; and the film’s extensive interviews with Alice’s closest friend in the Party, Philip Bonosky, who wrote for the *Daily Worker* and its successor the *Daily World*. Neel illustrated Bonosky’s article, “Walk to the Moon,” published in the *Daily Worker*, his short stories “The Wishing Well” and “I Live on the Bowery,” and *A Bird in Her Hair*, a collection of his short stories published by the Party’s publishing house, International Publishers (Temkin, “Chronology,” 168-169; Belchers 205). Surprisingly, with the exception of a review by John Perreault, who characterized Neel as a “jolly Stalinist to the end” (*Artopia*), none of the two score reviews of *Alice Neel* remarked upon the omission of Neel’s politics from the film.³

To varying extents, most of the scholarly works and texts accompanying portfolios of reproductions of Neel’s work make some mention of her involvement with Leftist causes. But these studies, intended for specialized audiences, tend to hold back (or dampen down) information associating Neel to the Communist Party. They also fail to adequately discuss how her political commitments influenced her paintings. For example, when discussing her social outlook, the text of the catalogue for Neel’s exhibition at Loyola Marymount University omits any mention whatsoever of the Communist Party. Her politics are consigned to the caption for *Don Perlis and Jonathan* (1982), a poignant portrait of a father and his severely retarded son. There the curator reminds the reader that this portrait shows “her political sympathies, which are always with the disadvantaged and against those who use power to protect themselves rather than to solve the basic needs of humanity” (Sutherland 72).

In other cases, assumptions, without any evidence, are made that distance her from the Party. In their otherwise sensitive and searching biography of Alice Neel, Gerald and Margaret Belcher relegate her political choices to a “group-think” reaction. The Belchers maintain that Neel joined the Communist Party because “it was ‘the’ thing to do [during the Great Depression] for anyone with a social conscience.” The Belchers begin talking about Neel’s association with the Communist Party near the end of the book, where they state, “the party recognized Alice as a member, and Alice actively pursued her connection” (159, 205). However, the authors fail to integrate this information into their overall interpretation of Neel’s life and work. The outstanding exception to this distorted view appears in the most important work yet to be published about Neel: *Pictures of People: Alice Neel’s American Portrait Gallery*, by Pamela Allara, who upfront and throughout her book, fully comprehends how integral Neel’s political beliefs and associations were to her values and her art.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) thought Neel’s association with the Communist Party was of sufficient importance to assemble on her a large dossier (156 highly redacted pages of which the FBI released under the Freedom of Information Act). According to the files, Neel had been under investigation from 1951 until 1961. However, a memo dated 1952, which “recommends that this case be reopened to determine if a Security Index card should be recommended for Alice Neel,” indicates that she was a person of interest to the FBI prior to that date. In any case, no records of the earlier surveillance have been released (FBI file, #2). The FBI twice sent a pair of agents to interview Neel at her East 108th Street apartment. The first meeting, held on October 11, 1955, was terminated five minutes after the FBI agents arrived because Neel had other visitors. At the second meeting, which took place six days later, Alice turned the tables on the agents. Their thirty-five-minute interview reported, “She refused any information concerning her activities, associates, or affiliations[....]Attempts were made to engage the subject in conversation on any point with negative results and accordingly the interview was terminated” (FBI file, #3). A subsequent memorandum maintained that the FBI ended the interview, because “The subject became adamant in her refusal to furnish any information to this Bureau.” (Neel’s sons remember her asking the agents to sit for portraits.)⁴ Although her dossier is filled with inaccuracies,

the testimony of one informant was not too far from the mark. The informant characterized Neel as “a well-known Communist artist [...]and] a romantic Bohemian type Communist” (FBI File, #1).

This essay shows how, once we fully integrate her politics into her life and art, Alice Neel’s commitment to Left, and specifically Communist, political principles and associations make her choices explicable and organic. These decisions include the selection of the men in her life (including the fathers of her sons), the individuals she chose to paint, and most important the aesthetic principles she adopted and adhered to until her death. Maintaining an awareness of Neel’s politics increases the viewers’ appreciation and comprehension of her work and especially her commitment to social-realist expressionism long after curators, critics, and gallery owners had consigned this style to the dustbin. Knowledge of her politics provide context and reveals the wider meaning of her paintings. This essay brings this part of her life together in a concentrated way so as to correct what can reasonably be viewed as a misrepresentation of a major American artist’s life, and therefore her work.⁵

Early Life

Until she became a senior citizen, lack of money constrained Alice Neel’s life. Alice, the fourth of five children (one of whom died in childhood), was born on January 28, 1900 into a lower middle-class family, who raised her in the small town of Colwyn, in the vicinity of Philadelphia; Alice later described it as “benighted, unenlightened, and obscured by darkness” (Belchers 26). Her father was the head of an accounting office of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company in his locality. Her mother, whose family of origin was more prosperous than her own, was a housewife, whom she described as being “very intelligent, well read,” took her to Philadelphia to see *Faust*, the Pavlova Dance Company, Ignacy Paderewski, and Sarah Bernhardt. Late in life, Alice commented favorably on her mother’s ability to discuss American authors with greater fluency than her “left-wing intellectual” companions. Alice described her parents’ household as “mother dominated.” In *Dead Father* (1946), Alice captures the father whom she loved but wished could have been a bigger person. In 1953, Neel painted *Last Sickness*, a portrait of bathrobe-clad (yet once formidable) failing

mother, whom she diligently cared for in the year before her death in 1954. Throughout their lives, Alice's parents, and especially her mother, were an important part of her life (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 12, 92; Belchers, 23, 24, 212).

Upon graduating from high school, Alice worked as a secretary. A combination of her own resources, parental help, and scholarships allowed her to attend the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now the Moore College of Art and Design). Her parents expected that the institution's focus on watercolors would train their daughter to become a book and magazine illustrator. Once enrolled, however, Alice transferred to the painting division of the school, and in 1924 earned the equivalent of a modern Master of Fine Arts (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 17).

While at Moore, Alice embarked on a passionate love affair (her first) with Carlos Enríquez, a tall, dark, and handsome Cuban from a wealthy family, who had artistic ambitions of his own. His reputation grew over time and he is now hailed in his native land as an important artist (Sánchez; Bondit). In 1925, Alice and Carlos married and they soon embarked for Cuba, where they lived with Carlos's parents (whom Alice described as being "much higher than bourgeois"), at their palatial home in Havana's exclusive Vedado District.

Like many destined to become life-long leftists, early on, Neel reacted to oppression in the lives of others. While entering the Pennsylvania School of Design to begin her day of learning and painting, she had long noticed the white-haired scrubwomen, haggard and stiff, who were simultaneously leaving the school. In Havana, where she was surrounded by masses of impoverished people, many with hands outstretched seeking coins, this reaction intensified. After finishing their leisurely multi-course dinners, her in-laws, with various family members in tow, strolled along the Malecón, the promenade bordering Havana Bay. One of her biographers believe Alice and Carlos excused themselves from this hoary (and boring) ritual and boarded a bus to the heart of the city, where they painted the poorest people who sat in the shadows of the deserted commercial center (Belchers 75-76, 63). These naturalistic paintings, reminiscent of Chicago's Ashcan School, captured both the plight and the inherent dignity of the lowest members of Havana's social hierarchy (*Beggars, Havana*, 1926).

After seven or eight months, the tension between the *haute bourgeois* lifestyle of Carlos' family and the young couple's strident

bohemianism was resolved. Carlos and four-month pregnant Alice moved to a small apartment in a community of struggling artists and writers, interspersed in La Vibora, a poor neighborhood near Havana's waterfront. She later recalled the place as a small society where "the artists and the writers, and the poets all got together," an environment not greatly unlike the contemporaneous Greenwich Village (where she would live soon after her return to New York City).

During her short stay in La Vibora, Neel ingested a heady mixture of art and leftist politics that would propel her life's trajectory. At that moment, Cuba's president, Gerardo Machado, closed the University and embarked on the establishment of a dictatorship. Their community, which included expatriates from other Latin American countries, was a hotbed of Left politics, where Marxist treatises vied for attention with radical poetry.⁶ In this hothouse atmosphere, Neel discovered that art was a political act, and she quickly determined which side of the barricades she was on. Later, she directly ascribed her ardent Leftism to Carlos. "This Cuban husband had given me a Latin American mentality. I hated everything American. I saw us as the 'Colossus of the North'" (Belchers 80; Geldzahler 3).

By 1927, Alice left Cuba with their new-born daughter, Santillana, for the States, where she returned to her parents' home. Carlos soon followed, and for the next two and one-half years they lived, and tried to continue painting, in a single furnished room (with a bathroom which was shared with others on her floor), on West 81st Street in Manhattan's Upper West Side, "far out of Art's way." Unable to afford oil paints and canvases, Alice and Carlos painted watercolors. Two weeks before her first birthday Santillana died of diphtheria. Overwhelmed by grief, Alice stopped painting. In November 1928, Alice gave birth to Isabella. Unable to earn more than a few dollars as a commercial artist, Carlos stayed home with Isabella while Alice worked full time in a bank. Personal tragedy and the Great Depression conspired to defeat whatever hope their relationship might have had (Belchers 77-79, 82).

After Alice and Carlos separated in 1930, Alice left Isabella in the care of the Enríquez family (1). Once again returning to her parents' home, Alice experienced a major nervous breakdown, which entailed a serious suicide attempt and prolonged stays in two mental institutions. Alice's recovery began when she picked up her paintbrushes. In the

hospital, her first subjects were fellow patients. Reflecting her nascent Leftism, she never painted the hospital's professional staff. When a psychiatrist asked her to draw him, she refused saying, "I won't draw you. You're the enemy" (*Futility of Effort*, 1930) (Belchers 81-96, 143; Temkin, *Alice Neel* 15; Hills, "Alice by Alice," 38).

These experiences engendered a series of surreal, almost grotesque paintings, many of which depicted blurry, ominous images of infants (*Well Baby Clinic*, 1928-1929; *Requiem*, 1928). Neel left behind these biographical works when she later took up political-social themes. Carlos returned to see her a few times and he proposed reconciliation. At times, Alice expressed some regrets about not pursuing this course, but her truest sentiments were revealed, late in life, when she wrote off Carlos as "a frivolous character" (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 36).

Upon her recovery in 1932, Alice settled in Greenwich Village, where she found a new companion, rakishly handsome Kenneth Dolittle, an able-bodied sailor who fancied himself a photographer, with whom she settled down in a tiny apartment, at 33 Cornelia Street, in the center of a thriving Bohemia (*Kenneth Dolittle*, 1931). Through Dolittle, Neel first met rank-and-file Communists. These articulate, courageous radicals fascinated Alice. One of them was Pat Whalen, a longshoreman who helped spearhead a Communist-led insurgency against the brutal and corrupt leadership of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA); as a result, the leadership's thugs frequently beat him (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 52). *Pat Whalen*, 1935, shows him staring forward out into the world with steely determination, while his clenched fists resting on the June 16, 1935 issue of the *Daily Worker*, whose headline announces trade-union uprisings in the steel and coal industries [Figure 1]. The power of his conviction and his determination to help these strikes succeed, so successfully limned in his portrait concealed the fact that he was no more than five-feet tall and weighed only 120 pounds (Hapke 111). Together with Whalen, Neel joined her comrades and supporters in waterfront rallies protesting the corrupt and dictatorial leadership of the ILA (Paul, np).

Neel's sexually charged relationship with Dolittle, who also happened to be a notorious opium addict, freed her from the boredom of Colwyn. However, this liaison led to an unmitigated catastrophe. In 1934, enraged with drug-fueled jealousy, he wrecked violence against her by burning three hundred of her watercolors, that closely docu-

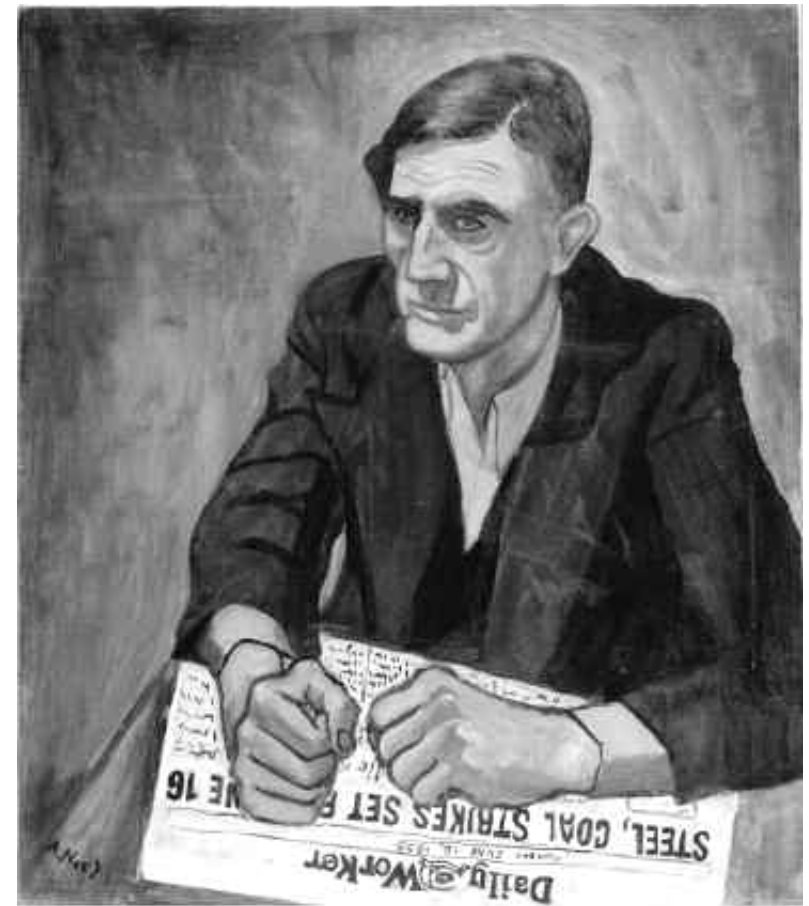


Figure 1: Alice Neel. *Pat Whalen*, 1935. Oil on canvas, 27" x 23". Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, New York. Gift of Dr. Hartley Neel. The Estate of Alice Neel.

mented her life, and by slashing fifty oil paintings. (After Neel achieved some measure of success, she had some of the slashed oils restored.) Late in life, Alice described Dolittle's assault on her work as "a frightful act of male chauvinism, [carried out] so that he could control me completely" (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 52; Belchers, 156, 158; Hills, 58).

The source of Dolittle's rage was Alice's relationship with John Rothschild, a Harvard-educated scion of a very wealthy family (*John with Hat*, 1935; *John in Striped Shirt*, 1958). Never regularly employed, among other things, he organized student tours to the Soviet Union through the official Soviet tourist bureau, Intourist. In full fight from Dolittle, Rothschild set her up in a hotel. Once she got on her feet,

Alice reestablished herself in an apartment on a working-class block on West 17th Street, where she remained, with some brief interruptions, until 1938 (*West 17th Street*, 1935) (Allara, "Object," 8). John first met Alice in 1932, when she exhibited at the Washington Square Art Show. He was immediately smitten with Alice and her paintings. (Out of fear of the local Catholic clergy's anticipated consternation, the organizers withdrew *Degenerate Madonna* [1932].) For decades, John softened the severity of her day-to-day life, in ways small and large. He offered her refuge after Dolittle's rampage. In 1935, Rothschild may have contributed to the purchase and the on-going expenses of a cottage her parents purchased for her, which was four blocks from the beach, in Spring Lake New Jersey. Here she spent part of every summer with her sons; her parents joined her and helped her defray the expenses of maintaining the house. In addition to regularly giving her money, he located purchasers for her art. Until the end of his life, Rothschild wined and dined Alice. Early on and continuing for many years, there was also a sexual relationship, documented in some near-pornographic watercolors so erotic that they were not shown publicly until 1997 (*Untitled*, 1935; *Alienation*, 1935) (Temkin, 88, 89; Belchers 160; Mackensie; Hills, "Alice by Alice," 130).⁷

The Works Project Administration

The Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) saved Neel's life and her life's work. Aside from a rare sale, from 1933 until 1943 Neel's sole income derived from New Deal arts' projects. Initially, she earned a \$30 per-week stipend (a generous sum for a young artist during the Depression) from the Public Works of Art Project; in 1935, the WPA (which replaced the earlier agency) paid Neel \$103 per month. Fierce opposition from Republicans and some Southern Democrats to the WPA, and most especially its arts' projects, brought about decreases in its appropriations. Consequently, Neel's stipend was reduced to \$95, in 1937 to \$91, in 1939, to \$90 (Temkin, "Chronology," 164-165). Neel joined the easel-painting division of the WPA, which, in addition to providing artist materials, allowed her to work from home. In return, the bureau required that she deliver a finished oil painting once every four to six weeks, depending on the size of the canvas (Belchers 171).

Neel came close to losing this coveted job because her starkly naturalistic city scenes were not selected by administrators of public institutions to adorn public schools, libraries, hospitals, etc. (*Ninth Avenue El*, 1935) The supervisor of the project deemed *Fish Market, Upper Park Avenue* (1939) too bloody; he admonished her, "Not everyone likes blood as much as you do." Neel dutifully reduced the amount of blood shown in the painting (Park 80). Alice obligingly took the canvas home and scraped off some of the red paint. In 1943, when the FAP was converted into the Graphic Section of the Wars Services Division, she was one of the final eleven artists supported by this remarkably advanced New Deal initiative. Thereafter until the mid-1950s, aside from an occasional sale of a painting and some help from friends, Neel lived on a meager allowance from the Department of Welfare (Belchers 173, 180; Temkin, "Chronology," 167; Taylor 517).

While working with the WPA, Neel painted her most blatantly political paintings; the most frequently reproduced of which is *Nazis Murder Jews* (1936). Right in the center of the canvas—in front of phalanxes of workers marching in a Communist torchlight parade carrying red banners emblazoned with the hammer and sickle—a typical worker of that period holds aloft a placard with the "Nazis Murder Jews" statement. (The painting, which had disappeared, was rediscovered in 1997.) (Mackensie, np). When confronted with the accusation that the painting was propagandistic, Neel responded, "If they had paid attention to paintings like this, the Nazis might not have had a chance to kill all those people" (Belchers 246). A less successful composition, *Uneeda Biscuit Strike* (1936), also depicts workers taking political action. In this oil painting, Neel shows mounted police running down strikers holding aloft signs "Lockout: Uneeda Workers," while onlookers either ignore or react in a variety of ways to this outrage (Allara, *Pictures*, 68, 70, 71).

The WPA was Neel's artistic boot camp. It imposed deadlines, which in part explains Neel's voluminous output. The federal program gave her the opportunity to concentrate on painting. The security the WPA provided was a priceless gift for Alice, which in addition to helping her improve her craft, gave her a firmer sense of herself as an artist. When one of her WPA colleagues (imagining he was being complimentary) dubbed her "Alice Neel, the woman who paints like a man!" she retorted that she "did not paint like a man but like a woman—but

not a woman who was supposed to paint china" (Chase 10). The termination of WPA resulted in a tragedy for Alice Neel that approached the destructiveness of Dolittle's savage attack on her work nineteen years earlier. Somehow, the undistributed WPA canvases were sold as spoiled canvas to wrap pipes for four cents per pound; Alice was able to buy back ten canvases from an art dealer who had bought (perhaps second-hand) some of the discarded canvases (Castle, np; Temkin, "Chronology," 168; Hills, "Alice by Alice," 79). Neel always acknowledged her debt to the WPA. In 1972, the *Daily World* published Neel's only published book review: a laudatory review of *The Dream and the New Deal: The Federal Writers' Project*, by Jerre Mangione, where she had an opportunity to fulsomely praise the Federal Arts Project in specific and the WPA in general.

El Barrio

In 1938, Alice fell in love with José Negrón (Santiago),⁸ a talented guitarist and singer (Alice often said she deeply regretted not having a phonograph record of his performances), ten years Alice's junior. One evening, she put on a silver lame dress and went to one of José's performances at La Casita, a Greenwich Village nightclub operated by a refugee from Franco's Spain, and invited him home (Allara, *Pictures*, 135). Alice's paintings of José show a brooding, dark and handsome man, who she believed "had a spiritual streak." She celebrated his almost feminine beauty in a series of oils, crayon-on-paper, and watercolors (*José*, 1936; *José and Guitar*, 1936; *José*, 1935). In *Puerto Rico Libre!* (1936), Neel shows José with a guitar with the sheet music in front of him on a table, the title of which, "Puerto Rico Libre!," signals to the viewer that he sang the ballads and folkloric music associated with the *independentista* movement, so popular in that era (Miller, np) [Figure 2]. The same year, Alice moved with José Negrón to 10 East 107th Street in Spanish Harlem, where she paid \$25 per month rent. Alice's move with José to El Barrio in Manhattan echoed her earlier move with Carlos to La Vibora in Havana. Both were communities of the poor, which nurtured leftist politics and alternative culture. José, who had abandoned his wife and infant daughter to live with Alice, left her shortly after Richard was born.

Within a couple of years, she moved one block north to a third-

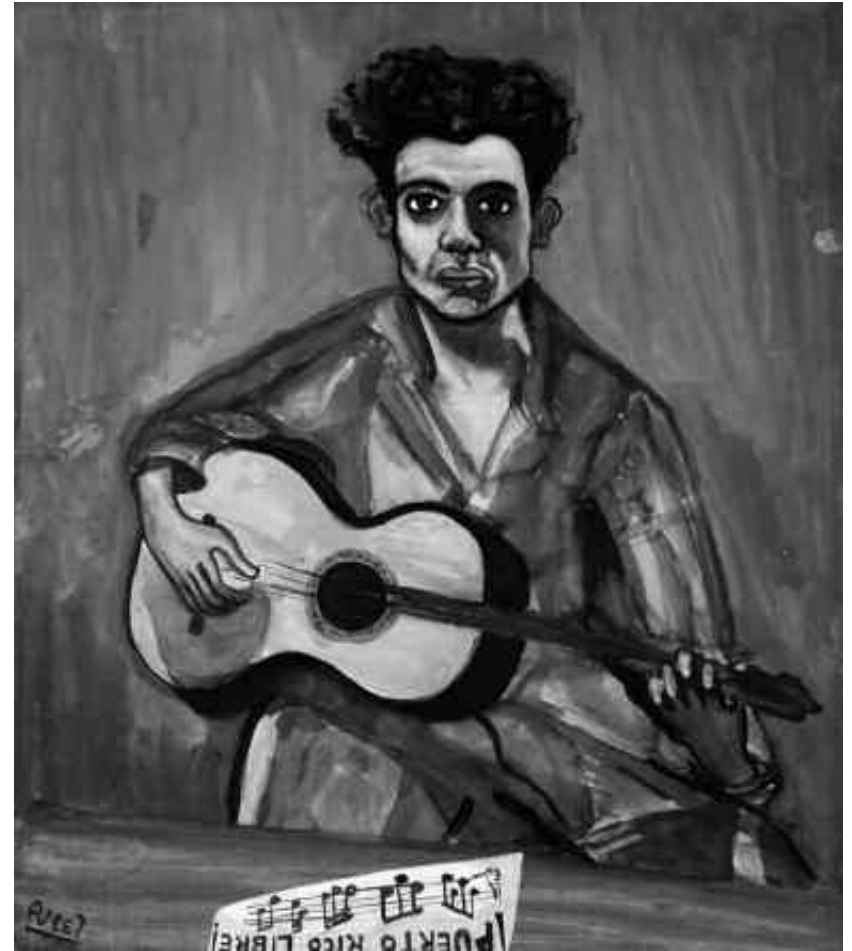


Figure 2: Alice Neel. *Puerto Rico Libre!*, 1936. Watercolor/paper, 15 1/2" x 12 3/4". The Estate of Alice Neel.

floor apartment, at 21 East 108th Street, a wider-than-usual, second-floor railroad flat, which featured a large living room with two windows facing south, where she did most of her painting (Geldzahler 3; Temkin, "Chronology," 167). Mostly she painted portraits, but she also painted the tenements she could see from out her living-room window (*Sunset in Spanish Harlem*, 1958). Unfortunately, after two years he left her for another woman. Sometime later, Negrón worked as an English teacher in Mexico and when Alice, Richard, and his first wife, Nancy, visited him in 1969, he had become a vicar in the Episcopal Church (Allara, *Pictures*, 135; Paul np; Hills, "Alice by Alice," 66).

Alice lived in El Barrio for twenty-four years. Not only did Neel find El Barrio vibrant and colorful, her Spanish was fluent enough for her to live comfortably there.⁹ Also of consequence to Neel, Spanish Harlem was a bastion for Vito Marcantonio, the radical congressman, and the only community in New York City that consistently gave a plurality of its vote to the American Labor Party (Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio*, 144-172; Meyer, "Puerto Ricans," 650-654).¹⁰

Later in life, Neel stated, "my kids had a much better life than I had." Whatever their complaints might have been growing up in East Harlem, she felt it was far better for them to live there than to have spent those formative years rusticated in Colwyn, Pennsylvania. Alice was able to ensure that any disadvantages that Richard and Hartley might have experienced from living in a poor minority neighborhood were duly compensated for. They spent their summers pleasantly on the Jersey Shore, and with the help of full scholarships, attended the Rudolph Steiner School in Manhattan and for their high school years another Steiner school, the High Mowing School, in New Hampshire. Both boys attended Columbia College on full scholarships. After graduating from Columbia, Richard attended Columbia Law School and Hartley Dartmouth, where he received a Masters in Chemistry and then went to Tufts Medical School, the University of California, Berkeley, and Harvard for his medical training (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 93; Belchers 210; Estate of Alice Neel).¹¹

Sometime after 1940, Neel changed from painting cityscapes (*Longshoremen Returning from Work*, 1936)—in some ways similar to Reginald Marsh's painting and Ben Shawn's photography—to portraiture (Temkin, "Self," 21; Neel, "Alice by Alice," 12). Neel described herself as "a collector of souls," (a reference to Chichikov, the protagonist of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*), and nowhere did she better accomplish this mission than through her East Harlem portraits where she painted people of every imaginable shade, who were presented in the fullest individuality yet as part of an accurately understood social reality (Neel, "Statement," np). These portraits (so many of which were of children) are a triumph of a politically informed social humanism. Her sitters were her neighbors; some of whom (such as Antonia and Carmen Encarnación) lived together with her in the same building (*Black Girls*, 1959). She repeatedly painted George Arce: each portrait revealing a more worldly-wise, even angry boy. Ultimately, Alice

corresponded with Georgie when he served time in Attica (*Georgie Arce*, 1955; *Two Girls*, 1959) (Hills, "Work," 189). In the words of Mike Gold (most noted as the author of *Jews without Money*, the proletarian novel *par excellence*), "Neel's [portraits] reveal not only [Spanish Harlem's] desperate poverty, but its rich and generous soul" (Belchers 207). In 1975, when explaining her move from the Greenwich Village to Spanish Harlem, Neel told an interviewer that she "found more truth in Spanish Harlem[...]than there is in all these festival places."

In one of her best East Harlem portraits, *T.B. Harlem* (1940), Neel documented the advanced tuberculosis of a twenty-four-year-old Puerto Rican, Carlos Negrón, José Negrón's brother (Temkin, Rosenberg, 43; Checklist 180) [Figure 3]. In this searing portrait, where eleven ribs were removed, snow-white bandages cover twenty-



Figure 3: Alice Neel. *T.B. Harlem*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 30" x 30". National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Gift of Wallace and Wilhemina Holladay. The Estate of Alice Neel.

four-year-old Carlos' wound, which boldly contrast against his light-brown skin. The title, *T.B. Harlem*, reminds the viewer that this grievously wounded young man with his piercing eyes is suffering from tuberculosis, the disease most directly linked to the conditions of poverty so prevalent in Spanish Harlem (El Barrio). Neel once remarked that its subject "had the face of Puerto Rico" (Paul 17; Hills, "Alice by Alice," 71). The white bandages are remarkably similar to the white sign in her painting *Nazis Murder Jews*. In both paintings, the white space prevents the viewers from being distracted by the painting's beautiful colors and effective composition; these paintings will not allow the viewer to evade their messages. Neel also painted Carlos' wife and three children in *The Spanish Family* (1943)—uncustomarily for one of Neel's paintings, all look in irremediable distress (Allara, *Pictures*, 138).

Social Realism and Communist Aesthetics

Alice Neel's choices—where she lived, her life partners, what she read—stemmed, to a large degree, from her Communist politics. More pertinently, it determined her subjects and her aesthetics. Alice was first drawn into the Communist Party's orbit via her participation in the Artists' Union, which organized artists to demand government patronage of the arts. *Art Front*, the Artist Union's journal, published an illustration based on her painting *Poverty*, later renamed *Futility of Effort* (1930), which she had painted in 1930 in remembrance of the death of her first child, Santillana. In 1936, *Nazis Murder Jews* earned "honorable mention" in a contest sponsored by the American Artists' Congress, a Communist Party-led organization dedicated to "achieve unity of action among artists on all issues which concern their economic and cultural security and freedom, and to fight war, fascism, and reaction." This painting was shown in the American Contemporary Art (ACA) Gallery, an institution founded in 1932 by a group of artists closely associated with the Communist Party (including Stuart Davis, Louis Lozowick, and Moses Soyer). Its director Herman Baron is remembered for remarking, "drawings and paintings can fight too." This gallery also showed her work in 1938, 1950, and 1954 after other venues were closed to her (Hemingway 36, 123, 136-144; Temkin, "Chronology," 165-166; Hapke 262). The far-reaching activities of the

Communist Party among artists during this period directly stemmed from the WPA's Federal Arts Projects. The WPA brought artists together in large enough numbers that they could, for the first time, arrive at a sense of themselves as a group, which had more than their craft in common. It also instilled an aesthetic which Neel deeply absorbed. In concurrence with the Federal Arts Project's mission of recording American society in all its individuality and variety, during this period, the subjects of her portraits were mostly East Harlem residents (*Call Me Joe*, 1955; *Spanish American Family*, 1950). Not surprisingly, Neel's painting appears closer to the photography of Walker Evans and Bernice Abbot than other contemporary social-realist painters.

Soon after José Negron exited, Sam Brody (the "spouse" referred to in the FBI statement above) and Alice embarked on a twenty-year relationship; in 1941, he fathered Hartley. A film critic for the *Daily Worker* and a founding member of the Film and Photo League (later named the Photo League), which encouraged photographers "to illuminate and record the communities in which they lived," Brody championed Neel's painting and undoubtedly contributed to her perseverance. Sam can also be credited with bringing social-realist photography to her attention. His extremely unstable and violent behavior toward Alice, and especially Richard, blighted the relationship. Neel dismissed Brody as "left wing but utterly egocentric; he thought everyone was a moron" (*Sam*, 1940). Their relationship ended in 1958 (Temkin, "Chronology," 167; Temkin, *Alice Neel*, 26-27, 46; Belchers 179, 213; Hills, "Alice by Alice," 68, 130).

In Neel's work, the social and the subjective content are balanced and integrated, truly synthesized to give greater meaning to both. Neel compared her work to Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*; she wanted her paintings to serve as a social and historical documentation of her times (Hemingway, 247).¹² She explained, "I want my portraits to be specifically the person and also the Zeitgeist" (Chase 8). Just months before her death, Neel defined the Zeitgeist of her times: "The whole 20th century has been a struggle between communism and capitalism" (Castle, np). Elsewhere, she stated, "Art is a form of history, [and] I have been fortunate to record so many decades" (Allara, "Alice Neel," 32). Neel knew that Marxist theory, regardless of its application, insisted that phenomena could only be understood by grasping the tension and interaction between its specificity and its general historical context.

According to the aesthetic theory of Gyorgy Lukács, the preeminent Marxist literary theorist, her one thousand watercolors, drawings, and paintings (the majority of which stayed in her possession simply because there were no buyers) accomplished the major goal of social realism—this sprawling gallery placed distinct individuals within a context of time and place in ways that most often suggested the possibilities of changing that context. Neel was keenly aware of this goal. In her own words, she reported “I love to paint people torn by all the things that they are torn by today in the rat race in New York” (Hills, “Work,” 187). She said, “I paint my time using people as evidence” (Allara, “Alice Neel,” 33).

Few of Neel’s paintings are as overtly political as *Nazis Murder Jews*. However, in 1953, she created, *Eisenhower, McCarthy, and Dulles*, which Allara describes as “an ambitious pictorial commentary.” This large canvas, which may have been inspired by the execution of the Rosenbergs that June, links the domestic repression of the Left with the United States’ intervention against progressive regimes; it depicts the three leaders of United States’ politics as semi-human/semi-animal avatars of destruction hovering over a globe turned to the northern half of the Western hemisphere, where a blood-red blotch covers the northern part of Central America (Okun, plate 20; Allara, *Pictures*, 102). In this painting, the red blotch represents Guatemala, where the left-leaning administration of Jacobo Árbenz (which had been legally elected in 1951) came under tremendous United States-sponsored pressure and was ultimately overthrown in 1954, by an armed force trained and financed by the Central Intelligence Agency (Anderson 147-51).

In a very real sense, *all* of Neel’s paintings were political. She hinted at that supposition herself when she enunciated the key philosophical concept in Marxist philosophy. In looking back at her career, she said, “I wanted to see all things and their opposites” (Belchers ix). Even her cityscapes, which have been described as “complex and psychologically compelling,” reflected a social engagement. Though unpopulated, Neel’s painting of East Harlem’s backyards, fire escapes, tenement windows, and façades are as warm as the people who lived in these spaces (*Fire Escape*, 1948; *Rag in Window*, 1959). Depicted after snowfall, her paintings transformed these rough environments into places of—albeit ephemeral—calm and beauty (*Snow on Cornelia Street*, 1933). Neel’s cityscapes contrast with the detached, one



Figure 4: Alice Neel. *Rag in Window*, 1959. Oil on panel, 33" x 24".
The Estate of Alice Neel.

could say, chilly canvases of the infinitely better known Edward Hopper. Allara astutely terms them “social realist cityscapes,” which present a communal rather than a personal vision,” which humanizes these environments [Figure 4].

Although she never entirely stopped painting cityscapes and still lifes, Neel’s social commitment was decisively transferred to another genre—portraits. Later in life, she affirmed, “When portraits are good art they reflect the culture, the time and many other things” (Allara, *Pictures*, 150-151; Hills, “Alice by Alice,” 134; Allara, “Object,” 6).

However, Neel's historical vision is simultaneously a personal vision, because she knew of, and appreciated and cared deeply about the people she painted. She painted people who were either in or around her life and activities. This explains the multiple paintings of family members and close friends and lovers that typify her *oeuvre*.

Some of her very finest portraits comprise an iconology of Communists and other radicals, who were ignored or demonized in the wider society: *Mike Gold, In Memoriam* (1967), *Kenneth Fearing* (1935), *Moses and Raphael Soyfer* (1973), *Harold Cruse* (1950), and individuals who were close to the Left, such as *Linus Pauling* (1969) and *Bella Abzug* (1976). There is reason to believe that Neel's assiduous proliferation of an iconology of Communist leaders—including *Gus Hall* (1980), the Party's General Secretary from 1959 until his death in 2000—paralleled the use of portraiture for this purpose in the Soviet Union. According to Allara, her portraits of Communist activists, artists, and leaders reflected her "insistence that these leaders will not be written out of American history—or into it simply as enemies or crackpots" (*Pictures* 122-123). Painting portraits of Communist activists and leaders could not convert anyone to Communist ideology or convince anyone to join the Communist Party. They could, however, be of great importance to those who already were convinced of the rectitude of the Communist movement. For Neel, these portraits must have represented a deeply felt political act of restoring the dignity of men besmirched and abused by a system she viscerally despised. Unlike her other portraits, which so often focused on individuals' quirkiness, those of Communist leaders and activists convey people with vision and inner-strength (*Art Shields*, 1950). A memo about her painting portraits of Communists was dutifully deposited in the FBI file (FBI file, #11).

Curiously, Neel failed to include in her pantheon Communist woman political leaders, such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Claudia Jones, or Communist woman cultural celebrities like Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, or Muriel LeSeuer. There was one exception. In 1951, Neel painted *The Death of Mother Bloor*, which depicted a diverse group of people filing past the open coffin of Ella Reeve (Mother) Bloor, a popular leader and formidable orator whose appearance at strikes repeatedly emboldened the workers (Allara, *Pictures*, 101). Alice Neel did ask Annette T. Rubinstein, a life-long leftist activist and literary critic, to sit for a portrait. Unfortunately, she declined. Alice met

Rubinstein at her home on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where she hosted monthly meetings of the Writers and Critics Group (a remnant of the once formidable Communist-led National Council of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions), which attracted Left intellectuals including Ring Lardner, Jr., Louis Harap, and Charles Humboldt (Hemingway 209; Meyer, "Rubinstein," *passim*).¹³

What is so extraordinary about Neel's artistic decisions was her continued commitment to expressionistic social realism after this style of painting had been abandoned by most of her colleagues and scorned by the art world. In part, this is explained by her earliest exposure to the American realist tradition, notably the realists Robert Henri and Thomas Eakins, both of whom had worked and taught in Pennsylvania Academy in Philadelphia. Henri was one of the first American artists to paint portraits of African Americans as individuals with (first) names; he insisted "Art cannot be separated from life," and that painters had to embrace "a fresh, new concern for everyday objects." She also ingested Eakins' homoerotic—yet thoroughly unidealized—male nudes (Temkin, "Self," 14; Allara, *Pictures*, 302, 189, 274; Belchers 51; Allara, "Object," 6).

Especially during the period of the Popular Front, the Communist Party elevated questions of the arts and the aesthetics employed in their creation remarkably high on its list of concerns. Neel represented an exemplar *par excellence* of the Party's hopes for a socially conscious contemporary artist. Her paintings were accessible art, which depicted ordinary people of all races and ethnic backgrounds in ways that captured and dignified their actual state of being. Neel's sympathy for the Left—and the Communist Party in particular—never wavered. In 1937 it became explicit when she signed on to a manifesto of leftist artists (the "New York Group") that declared, "[Progressive goals] can best be transformed into living art by utilizing the living tradition of painting. There must be no talking down to people; we number ourselves among them. Pictures must appear as aesthetic images, which are social judgments at the same time" (Temkin, "Chronology," 166). This statement was intended not so much to announce to the world the leftist intentions of these painters, as to tell the Left, and the Communist Party in particular, that paintings were more than weapons in the class struggle; they were works of art which could not be judged solely by their subject matter. Paintings would

ultimately be judged by aesthetic standards; progressive, socialist, communist messages or themes did not exempt a work of art from this verity. Neel never forgot this message.

Portraiture has always been associated with aristocratic concerns for commemoration and “immortality.” Especially when combined with a flattering rendition of face and figure, portraiture has been almost universally considered to be a “quintessentially bourgeois form” (Glueck np; Mackenzie np). Few of Neel’s FAP colleagues and even fewer of her Communist comrades would have been able to reconcile portraying the single poor worker or a dispossessed tenant farmer “by looking him squarely in the face [....]” (Hapke 89). Portrait painting would seem to contradict Neel’s Leftism. The preferred, dare one say, prescribed genres for leftist painters were didactic works most accessible to large numbers of passersby: the mural, as well as posters and other graphic modes adaptable to mass-production and mass-distribution. Neel never painted a mural and only in the last seven years of Neel’s life did she create a small number of lithographs, etchings, and silk screens, which one reporter said, “summoned an impeccable attention to the personalities of her sitters” (Smith C29). Early on, Neel explained away the apparent contradiction between her choice of aesthetic approach and genre. In the early thirties, when Philip Rahv baited her for painting *individual* portraits, she retorted, “Well, one plus one plus one is a crowd” (Hills, “Work,” 187). Later in life she helped explain her illustration of the social dimensions of her portraits by her pre-painting methods. The sitters came to her home and whatever props found their way into these paintings came from its furnishings. Generally, her sitters were painted wearing clothing of their own choice. Then, while she prepared her canvas, she casually talked to her subjects. Soon “they unconsciously assume their most characteristic pose, which in a way involves all their character and social standing—what the world has done to them and their retaliation” (Hills, “Word,” 189-190).

Neel’s socially engaged portraiture resembles the German expressionists, especially Otto Dix and George Grosz (Neel, “Alice by Alice,” 188). The German expressionists—most of whom were leftists, and some, Communists—blended a subjective mode into their realist portraits. Their subjects seem to be either oblivious to the chaotic circumstances that surround them or anxiously stare off into the

distance as if they could see on the horizon the impending doom of fascism. Neel neatly explained her attraction to expressionism: “I didn’t see life as [Renoir’s] *Picnic in the Park*. I wasn’t happy like Renoir.” Alice Neel’s own take on this subject was that “I do a combination of realism and expressionism” (Neel, “Alice by Alice,” 7-8, 13, 90). Neel’s portraits are grounded in a social reality for reasons beyond style. Neel asked people to sit for her without ever expecting them to buy the finished product. Neel rarely painted for a patron. However, she occasionally accepted a commission, the sitter for which she felt she owed nothing more than her truth (Sutherland 6).

Neel’s other major influences include Francisco Goya and Vincent Van Gogh. What has been said about Neel—“her portraits have an emotional trenchancy that transcends physical likeness” (Glueck np.)—can equally be said about Goya’s psychologically acute portraits of his royal patrons. Both of these artists created portraits unstinting in their revelation of their subjects’ character. In addition to his portraits, Neel revered *The Disasters of War*, which documented and protested Napoleon’s crimes against the Spanish people; when she saw this painting in the Prado, she stated, “I was moved to tears.” Neel also noted that Goya’s etchings serve as “evidence that the artist can be socially committed without lowering his level” (Neel, “Since 1970,” np; Neel 134). Van Gogh’s expressionistic impressionism certainly inspired Neel and provided ammunition to those on the Left who, in opposition to the Party’s admonishments to create optimistic, unambiguously political art, insisted on incorporating modernist technique into socially based art. An exhibition of Van Gogh’s paintings at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936 helped solidify this point of view. When asked whether she believed that a viewer could discern the politics of an artist from his/her work, Neel replied “I think you can if you look at two or three paintings[....]Well, in politics and in life I always liked the losers, the underdog. There was a smell of success that I didn’t like. It always implied a certain kind of conformity” (Geldzahler 5, 6).

Two Communist giants of the art world, Louis Aragon and Fernan Leger, strongly argued in *Art Front* in 1935 for widening the parameters of what was stylistically acceptable for Communist artists. This liberalization in the Communist movement’s attitude toward artistic expression freed the hands of Alice Neel and other Communists who wanted to move beyond agitprop, pro-proletarian art (Allara,

Pictures, 70). Never a detached observer, Neel proved that portraiture could be used to advance the socialist cause. No one made this point better than a non-Communist, William Paul, who in the Foreword to the first important published collection of Neel's paintings, wrote "The personal images in Alice Neel's work not only reflect her life, they also provide metaphors related to the politics, economy, and philosophies of contemporary life[....]There is no peace or tranquility in her paintings, only agitated recognition of the inevitable struggles on this earth" (7). Another student of Neel's work noted that "her paintings come across as social statements[....]Faces show oppression, and sometimes anger and oppression" (Braff LL11).

Alice Neel and the Communist Party

Alice Neel joined the Communist Party in 1935 (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 60). It is unclear at what point Alice dropped out of the Party, or whether she dropped out and later rejoined, or whether she had ever dropped out at all.¹⁴ While the exact dates of Alice Neel's membership in the Communist Party are unlikely to be ever known; however, it is uncontested that her relations with Party members and initiatives remained constant throughout her life. It is of some interest that in 1955 the FBI noted its "New York Office is in possession of no information which would indicate that the subject or the subject's spouse have defected from or have been expelled from the CP" (FBI file, #7).

Alice was not reluctant to participate in the most ordinary of Party work, even its drudgery. Soon after she joined, she walked the picket lines demanding union recognition at May's Department store (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 60). During the McCarthy Era, bystanders threw eggs at, and even assaulted, the marchers in the annual May Day parades. In spite of the potential for unpleasantness and even danger, Alice wheeled Hartley and Richard in a red wagon the length of the parade route. When V. J. Jerome, the Party's arbiter in artistic matters, was released from prison in 1957, after he had served a three-year sentence for violating the Smith Act's injunction against "conspiring to overthrow the United States government," Neel dutifully called at his home for a welcome-back visit (Belchers 206; Ceplair 327). According to a FBI informant, Neel was not always content with doing the routine work of an activist. She reported that Neel "complained that

the Party has given her nothing more important to do than to pass out leaflets and paint signs" (FBI file, #12).

As an unrecognized artist, Alice Neel did not suffer the loss of stature and commissions during the McCarthy Era as had so many artistic luminaries—such as Ben Shawn, Rockwell Kent, William Gropper, William Zorach, and Raphael Soyer—associated with the Communist Party. Along with other social-realist artists, Neel was marginalized—even ridiculed—by the hegemonic aesthetic of abstract expressionism. This was not an entirely spontaneous process. The United States governmental agencies helped devalue social realism and promote abstract expressionism, during the fifties. For example, through its International Council, the Museum of Modern Art promoted abstract expressionism as "The New American Painting." In the program accompanying the exhibit, Alfred Barr, MoMA's Director, explained that in contrast to the social realists, the abstract expressionists "defiantly reject the conventional values of the society which surrounds them, but they are not political engagés[....]" (Felshin 30). The general disdain for social realism in the art world ensured that Neel could not emerge from obscurity. There was one decided advantage attendant with her obscurity: Neel had few commissions and therefore chose her own subjects. Hence, her oeuvre is more directly attached to her own life and concerns than that of other, more successful painters.

The Communist Party, though in much diminished capacity, offered Alice her only outlet for her work. Mike Gold (who also served as an arbiter of aesthetics for the Communist Party) arranged for an exhibition of her work at the New Playwrights' Theatre (a Communist Party creation) during April and May 1951. Neel's FBI file includes a memo that recorded that the exhibit presented twenty-four of her paintings including *Fish Market in Harlem* (1950); *Unedea Biscuit Strike* (1936); and *Save Willie McGee!* (1950). The cover of the exhibition's catalogue reproduced *T. B. Harlem*. In the catalogue's introduction Gold wrote, "Alice Neel has never allowed [the artistic establishment] to dehumanize her. This is heroic in American painting where for the last fifteen years, humanity has been rejected[....]In solitary and poverty, Alice has developed like a blade of grass between two stones[....]Alice Neel is a pioneer of socialist realism in America" (Hills, "Alice by Alice," 89-90).¹⁵

The next year, on March 27, Neel presented an enormously successful slide presentation of her work at the Party-run Jefferson School for Social Science. Once again her Party comrades helped her: Sam Brody produced the two-hundred colored slides of her paintings; Philip Bonosky coached her presentation; Gold introduced her, and Joseph Solman provided critical commentary. Solman, who shared with Neel a life-long commitment to the Communist Party and to social realism, long championed Neel's work. In 1933, he invited Neel to share a two-artist show at a Greenwich Village bookstore. In the catalogue of her 1950 show at the ACA Gallery exhibit, he praised her "great intensity." He then added, "I can say without any doubt, Alice Neel is the best portrait painter in America today." The Jefferson School slide show became the template for scores of slide shows that a few years later Neel would begin presenting as part of her determined, and ultimately successful, campaign to break out of her professional isolation (Belchers 206-207; Temkin, "Chronology," 169, 164; Hemingway 41; Allara, *Pictures*, 298).¹⁶ At the Jefferson School, Alice attended classes in Marxist philosophy taught by Howard Selsam, the Marxist philosopher, in literary theory by V. I. Jerome, and in Marxist aesthetics by Sidney Finkelstein, a Party intellectual who popularized Marxist cultural theory over a wide range of artistic forms (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 86).¹⁷

Neel remained politically active into advanced old age. In 1968, she joined the protest decrying the absence of women and African-American artists in the Whitney's exhibition "The 1930's: Painting and Sculpture in America" (Temkin, "Chronology," 171, 173). Neel (along with Raphael Soyer)¹⁸ was one of four white artists to participate in an effort organized by Benny Andrews, an African-American social-realist painter, to protest against the Metropolitan Museum in 1969 for failing to include in its collection works by African-American and other minority artists. Andrews remembers that despite Alice's "trouble with her legs," she joined the African-American artists on the picket line in front of the Metropolitan. He recalled, "she was fighting against all of the things that I was fighting against, and she was very conscious of what was happening against African Americans and Puerto Ricans." (In 1972, Neel painted an acutely revealing dual portrait of Benny and Mary Ellen Andrews.) (Temkin, "Undergoing Scrutiny," 73). In May 1971, Neel picketed the Whitney, protesting the exhibition

"Contemporary Black Artists in America," which many African-American artists thought of as ill-conceived. In September 1971 she joined the protest in front of MoMA, where a coalition of African-American artists and authors protested Governor Nelson Rockefeller's bloody suppression of the desperate revolt at Attica State Prison. (Temkin, "Undergoing Scrutiny," 72-73; Temkin, "Chronology," 171, 173).

In ways big and small, Neel maintained her association with Communist Party. A year before her death, one study of Neel noted that along with the *New York Times*, Neel read the *Daily World*—the successor of the *Daily Worker* (Hills, "The Work," 189). In 1978, she wrote a letter to Fidel Castro (which was never posted) requesting permission to paint his portrait. As she explained, "My experience, my political allegiances as well as my work as a painter have been influenced by the same forces as those which brought about the Cuban Revolution[...]" (Allara, *Pictures*, 277, fn 10).

In 1981, Neel became the first American artist to have a major retrospective in Moscow. Philip Bonosky, then Moscow correspondent for the *Daily World*, organized an exhibit sponsored by the Artists' Union, consisting of seventy of her paintings (Hills, "Work," 189). Along with her sons, she stayed in Moscow for ten days, at her own expense (Neel had previously traveled with John Rothschild to the Soviet Union in 1970.) (Blair 44; Temkin, "Chronology," 172; Castle np). Neel's continued pro-Soviet stance is captured in an interview published in a *Daily World* article entitled "Art for Détente," where she is quoted as saying: "The Soviet Union wants peace and friendship and Brezhnev has offered any number of times to talk to this country[....] This country is now warlike and a threat to the world. Reagan has said the government doesn't owe anybody anything. In the Soviet Union you get free medical care—everything is free. There the government owes you everything" (July 1981).

Neel contributed drawings and sketches to *Masses and Mainstream*, a monthly which provided a vehicle for writers and critics, as well as illustrators, remaining within the Communist Party's orbit.¹⁹ Neel created two covers for *Masses and Mainstream*—in 1961, a portrait she had painted much earlier of the Marxist writer Kenneth Fearing (who used Neel as the model for the protagonist for his novel *The Big Clock*), at the time of his death, and *Relief Cut*, an ink-on-paper illustration of an impoverished family sitting around their kitchen table

(*Masses and Mainstream*, April 1950). In 1948, along with another Communist painter, Charles Keller, Neel sketched the twelve major Communist leaders, who were on trial for violating the Smith Act, which prohibited conspiracies intended to teach the violent overthrow of the United States government. These sketches include *The Martyr* (1949), a portrait of the presiding judge, *Harold Medina* (1949), and *Angela Calomaris* (1949), a Daumieresque drawing of one of the ex-Communist witnesses (Allara, *Pictures*, 100). In 1958, the June issue of *Mainstream* published four of her drawings, including Sam Brody, a study of a brooding, perhaps spent, aging man (Neel, "Four Drawings," 46-48). In 1952, *Masses and Mainstream* published her *Save Willie McGee!* (1958), which shows picketers in Manhattan's Union Square, amassed around Zorach's statue of Benjamin Franklin, demanding clemency for McGee. Alice had earlier attended a vigil for McGee at that spot. (Willie McGee was legally lynched; in 1951, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal to stay his execution in Jackson, Mississippi for allegedly raping a white woman, with whom he had had a long-standing sexual relationship.) (Bella Abzug; Temin, "Chronology," 168; Allara, *Pictures*, 103-104).

In January 1955, a controversy broke out in the pages of *Mainstream* between Albert Maltz, the short story and screenwriter, and Bonosky over *Morning, Noon, and Night*, a five-volume novel (three of which were published), which dramatized a struggle between miners and their bosses in Gallup, New Mexico, in 1934 to 1935. Written by Philip Stevenson, a blacklisted screenwriter writing under the pseudonym Lars Lawrence, the novel depicted a Communist organizer as hesitant and, at times, ineffectual. Neel joined Bonosky, in criticizing the novel as implicitly anti-Party (Neel, "Letter," 62; Ceclair xx).²⁰

Belated Recognition and the Women's Movement

In 1962, Neel moved across town to a rambling eight-room flat, in a decaying Victorian apartment building, at 300 West 107th Street, near Broadway, where she lived until her death. It boasted a north-facing living room with a bay window, which like her apartment in El Barrio, served as her studio (Temkin, "Chronology," 170). She painted almost all of her portraits in one or the other apartments.

Consequently, the same wall moldings, side tables, and chairs, and later a large rubber tree, provide the background and props for her portraits.

In 1958, after asking Brody to leave, Alice began seeing a psychotherapist for two years. The therapist encouraged her to take actions, which would gain her recognition for her work (Neel, "Alice by Alice," 103; Belchers, 214). Neel embraced her therapist's suggestions to break out of her professional isolation. Looking back to that moment, she said, "I would bite rat tails if it would get me recognized." Shortly before Neel moved from East Harlem, her subjects—though not her style—changed. She began to seek out sitters who could launch her career by arranging for shows or writing articles about her work. These, in most case outstanding portraits, included: *Frank O'Hara* (1960), an unusually unflattering portrait of someone, who in addition to being a renown poet was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art; *Ellie Poindexter* (1962), art dealer; *Henry Geldzahler* (1967), curator of twentieth-century art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and *Andy Warhol* (1970) (Temkin, "Self," 26-27; Temkin, "Undergoing Scrutiny," 68; Belchers 212). Hubert Crehan notes that it would be a mistake to interpret Neel's inclusion of these sitters as "purely a career move"; these subjects also reflected a new, self-assertive view of herself as a member of the art world (Crehan 47).

Neel continued to paint arresting portraits of working class people of color (*Carmen and Baby*, 1972; *Drafted Negro*, 1965), but these sitters became far fewer in number. Some of this was due to her relocation to the predominantly white Upper West Side. While it was a part of New York City's vibrant leftist artistic and cultural world, the specific district where she resided was decidedly unfashionable. Neel had always painted people close at hand. There are multiple portraits of family members and close friends. While living in East Harlem, she also painted middle and upper class subjects. In part to compensate for Richard and Hartley's scholarships, Alice painted one portrait per year that was auctioned off by their school and Rothschild did locate wealthy friends for her to paint. These sittings occasionally took place at his downtown apartment, and the subject often did not purchase their portraits. After she moved to the Upper West Side, she painted African-American political activists and artists (*James Farmer*, 1972; *Faith Ringgold*, 1978) and continued to produce reverential portraits of Communist activists and leaders. Neel had not abandoned her

commitment to the poor and to people of color—the central concerns of the Communist movement. She had expanded her range of concerns to those who experienced oppression because of their gender and/or sexual orientation, groups included in the political arena by the New Left. Neel summed it up, when she said, “I always loved the working class and the most wretched, but then I also loved the most effete and the most elegant.” Neel also painted explicitly political drawings and paintings during this period. In addition to contributing drawings to anti-Vietnam War exhibitions, she painted *The Great Society* (1965), which depicts six old people staring and shuffling about some sort of cafeteria or perhaps nursing home dining room (Hills, “Alice by Alice,” 64, 112, 128).

These professional contacts soon brought about a breakthrough in New York City’s volcanic art world. Readers whose eyebrows arch knowingly upon learning this, should realize that without these latter-day portraits of the city’s artistic power brokers, Neel’s earlier paintings would have remained indefinitely stacked, one against the other, in her apartment, perhaps to share the fate of the store of WPA paintings that were disposed in 1943 and her *oeuvre* destroyed by Dolittle in 1934.

It is no coincidence that the art world’s recognition of Neel’s occurred during the early, militant stage of the women’s movement for equal rights. (A renewed interest in representational art and portraiture also played a significant role in Neel’s new-found celebrity, but this subject is outside the boundaries of this essay.) Oddly, Alice Neel did not give much credit to the burgeoning women’s movement for her late-life recognition. In part, this was a consequence of her socialization in the Communist movement, which prioritized actions leading to racial equality and the strengthening of the labor movement. The underlying assumption in classical Marxist literature is that oppression of women would be resolved through the success of the working class in the on-going class struggle. In an article published in the *Daily World* in April 1971, while celebrating “opening of new horizons and hopes for half of the human race,” Neel repeated the Marxist proposition that “women’s real liberation cannot occur without some change in the social organization[....]Property relations which reduce everything to the status of ‘things’ and ‘objects’ have also reduced women to the status of ‘sexual objects’” (Neel, April 1971, *Daily World*). It is clear, however, that interest in Alice Neel came disproportionately from

women (in addition to her Communist comrades). It is women who have authored the major studies and catalogues documenting and championing her work. Between 1973 and 1975, Neel participated in at least eight exhibitions of women painters. Posthumously, women’s identification with and interest in Neel’s work persists. In 2005 the National Museum of Women in the Arts, in Washington, D.C., assembled almost seventy of Neel’s female portraits.

Alice Neel’s own life, as much as her ideological predilections, made it difficult for her to embrace enthusiastically the women’s liberation movement. She explained, “My own house was not bossed by the father, my mother was the real head-of-the-household type, she was smarter and she was just the boss. My father didn’t even care to be boss” (Castle np). A few years before her death, she reported, “My life was pure women’s lib in a way. I had a very hard life, and I paid a price for it, but I did what I wanted” (Blair 44). Earlier she said, “I never thought it was a man’s world, I thought women were always here, even through they may not have participated fully” (Hills, “Alice by Alice,” 77). In June 1971, in her doctoral address when she received an honorary degree from Moore College of Art, Neel said, “I have always believed that women should resent and refuse to accept all the gratuitous insults that men impose upon them” (“Statement,” np).

Neel painted men with unabashed sensuality. Her willingness to portray men in this fashion—and later even as odalisques—was rare for a woman painter. The brash sexuality of these portraits projects Neel’s bohemian (or in the language of the 1960s, “liberated”) approach to her relationships with men. All of her partners were leftists, but with the exception of Rothschild and at times Sam, they were incapable of expressing genuine affection and unself-interested concern for her well-being. None of them made good husbands or fathers; significantly both sons bear her last name and Hartley’s unusual first name is in fact Alice’s mother’s maiden name. But she got from these men what male artists have long gotten from their female lovers—sensual pleasure and acceptance of her life choices. After Carlos, she never again married and perhaps, more importantly, after her debacle with Dolittle, her apartments were exclusively in her own name. In a sense, she had lived a liberated life long before women’s liberation prevailed.

In one way, Alice Neel did participate in the early women’s liberation movement. Her portraits were Neel’s most effective feminist statements—fully one-half of them are of women. There are working-



Figure 5: Alice Neel. *Andy Warhol*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 60" x 40". Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. Gift of Timothy Collins. The Estate of Alice Neel.

class madonnas, career women, and lots of pregnant women (*Pregnant Woman*, 1971; *Maria*, 1964)); there are women who seem filled with a secure sense of self and even self-importance, and women who are fighting not to be crowded off the canvas by their expansive spouses. Their struggles, their successes are dignified and celebrated in Neel's outpouring of paintings of people.

Closely related to Neel's somewhat belated embrace of the feminist movement was her increasingly close relationship and association with gay men. Her poignant portrait of *Andy Warhol* (1970) is widely appraised as a masterpiece, and perhaps her single best painting



Figure 6: Alice Neel. *Geoffrey Hendricks and Brian*, 1978. Oil on canvas, 44" x 34". The Estate of Alice Neel.

[Figure 5]. Just months after he had been shot, and almost killed, by an enraged hanger-on, Neel convinced him to remove his shirt. Naked from the waist up, wearing a truss, with scars on his chest, with closed eyes, Warhol exudes vulnerability and a type (artistic perhaps) of sainthood, a gay (modern) Saint Sebastian (Mackensie, np.). Although their relationship is poorly documented, Neel and Warhol bonded. Two brave souls—the political outsider and the sexual outsider—deeply felt their kinship. Although not well understood at the time, Warhol and Roy Liechtenstein's sudden celebrity in the early 1960s broke the monopoly of abstract expressionism and thereby opened up the possibility for the acceptance and appreciation of representational painting

of many different styles. Another gay artist, Robert Mapplethorpe, photographed Neel shortly before her death (Temkin, "Chronology," 176). Of all the couples Neel painted, the pair who shows show the greatest degree of warmth and affection for each other was immortalized in *Geoffrey Hendricks and Brian* (1978) [Figure 6]. Late in life, Alice had become sympathetic and drawn to gays. The only gay she painted in her earlier period, *Christopher Lazar* (1932), caricatured the Greenwich denizen, who was pilloried by Neel's description of him as "the queen of the homosexuals" (Hills, "Alice by Alice," 47).

Conclusion

This essay expands and focuses on the proposition that Neel's work was inspired and sustained by her on-going commitment to the Communist movement. Neel created "an alternate vision of social realism," which sought to document (much in the way of the great social-realist photographers) family members, the people of El Barrio, Communist Party activists and leaders, and much later countercultural individuals and gay couples (*David Bourdon and Gregory Battcock*, 1970). Distancing (or worse yet ignoring) Neel from her political associations and beliefs does no justice to her life and work. As one reviewer of the exhibition "Alice Neel in East Harlem" explained "Ms. Neel was clearly one of those artists who believed that having a philosophy of life and making art were in-separately intertwined" (Braff LL11). Alice Neel maintained her pro-Communist allegiance until the end of her life. The poster of Lenin on her kitchen wall grew frayed and fly-splattered, but it hung there until the end (Belchers 243). In an interview, on October 14, 1984, published a few months before her death, she expressed her disapproval of the behavior of the translator assigned to her for the Moscow exhibition. She then quickly added, "Don't put this in the paper, though, because I would never criticize the Communist Party." She then pulled back some of her fealty to the Party by saying, "Although I don't think there is any haven for the soul today" (Castle np).

Notes

1. This article will refer to Neel as a "portrait painter"; others refer to her as a "figure" painter, because as often as not she painted her subjects as fully standing or lying down.
2. Neel received awards from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1976, from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1976, the Benjamin Altman Figure Prize of the National Academy of Design in 1971 (Blair 44). In 1979 she was invited to the White House by President Jimmy Carter to receive the National Women's Caucus for Art Award (Bauer np). Alice Neel achieved the recognition, even celebrity, few today would deny she had long deserved.
3. In 1972, Neel painted John Perreault, which depicts the subject lounging in full frontal nudity is one of Neel's most provocative oils.
4. In addition to the solicitation of information from informants, the FBI placed "a thirty-day mailcover[...]on 21 E 108th Street" (FBI file, #4). A 1955 memo to J. Edgar Hoover noted that Neel was not recommended for detention in time of national emergency and that "her name should be deleted from the Security Index, inasmuch as this office does not have any evidence of CP membership within the past five years" (FBI file, #5). Nonetheless, FBI surveillance continued until 1961, when a memo "recommended that the subject be deleted from the Reserve Index as her last membership was in 1948 and there is no evidence of front group participation" (FBI file, #6).
5. The inclusion of this part of Neel's story also contributes to the revisionist school of the historiography of the Communist Party. In contrast to the standard historical works about the CPUSA, her decades-long relationship with the Party shows the organization—at least at the local level—as tolerant of a wide spectrum of lifestyles, of permitting differences among its members, and of empowering its women members (Schaffer passim). Her story also strongly suggests that historians may have concluded their studies of the Communist Party prematurely; that its influence, albeit on a much smaller scale, persisted well past the cut-off dates of the standard histories of the Communist Party.
6. While living in La Vibora, Alice met Alejo Carpentier, the renowned writer and musicologist, who helped found the Communist Party of Cuba; after decades of exile, Carpentier returned to Cuba to support the Fidelista Government (Belchers 80).
7. John outlived his fortune and his credit. When he died, he was in debt for one million dollars. Ultimately, Alice was able to reciprocate this otherwise one-sided relationship. In 1970, after she had gained some prosperity of her own, she welcomed John into her apartment, where he lived until his death in 1975 (Allara, *Pictures*, 227; Temkin, "Chronology," 163, 165, 167, 172; Temkin, "Self," 21; Belchers 208-209).
8. Neel incorrectly refers to José as Santiago. Estate of Alice Neel to Gerald Meyer, Dec. 2, 2008.
9. An FBI informant reported in 1953 that aside from Neel and her family "all persons residing at the above address are Puerto Rican" (FBI file, #8). Richard, of course, was one-half Puerto Rican, so the informant was inaccurate on this count. Neel's FBI file substantiates the rule that the Bureau's dossiers are filled with inaccuracies and trivia, are notoriously inaccurate sources of information. In her case, the FBI filed away these gems: that she was "the daughter of a socially prominent family in Philadelphia"; and "the subject has two missing teeth which are very noticeable when she smiles" (FBI file, #9). In addition to these inaccuracies and inanities, there is the testimony of an anonymous informer that José relocated to Puerto Rico, where he was a professor and had earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy. The informant added that Neel occasionally brought Richard to Miami, Florida, where he spent some time with his father (FBI file, #10).
10. In addition to her extraordinary paintings, Neel was a fairly decent poet. Here is

a brief excerpt from her journal that explains her intense attachment to El Barrio. "I love you for electing Vito Marcantonio, and him for being what he is. And for the rich deep vein of human feeling buried under your fire engines your poverty and your loves" (Allara, *Pictures*, 127).

11. To her chagrin, her sons absorbed none of their mother's life-long romance with Communism. Richard's conservative politics ("conservative" relative to Alice's, that is) inspired Alice's unflattering 1979 portrait, *Richard in the Era of the Corporation* (1969). From her perspective, things were little better with Hartley. In an interview conducted shortly before her death, Neel reported disapprovingly that "Hartley, who has no political consciousness, once said, 'What good would it be to be rich if there were no poor?'" (Castle np). Nonetheless, it is clear that she adored her sons.

12. Neel's portraiture sharply contrasts with another realist-expressionist portrait painter, Frida Kahlo, who also spent most of her adult life as a member of the Mexican Communist Party. Kahlo repeatedly painted herself; Neel first painted herself when she was eighty—in the nude (*Self Portrait*, 1980). Nevertheless, what Diego River said about Kahlo equally applies to Neel. They both "painted, at the same time, the exterior and the interior of herself and the world" (Rosenberg 34-35, 14; Allara, "Object," 27).

13. Neel's participation in the activities of a Marxist writers and critics group speaks to the wide scope of her knowledge and interests. Neel, like so many on the Left, was a self-taught intellectual. Her interviews reveal her facility to quote and engage with a long list of intellectuals and artists. The year before she died, Neel explained to her interlocutor her positions on feminism and other topics by referring, among others, to Rebecca West, H. G. Wells, Nikolai Lenin, George Bernard Shaw, Simone DeBeauvoir, Edward Gibbon, Oskar Kokoschka (Hemingway 248; Castle np). Allara posits, "[Neel's] extensive knowledge of art and literature permitted her to forge her art from a very broad base" (Allara, *Pictures*, 7).

14. On the question of Communist Party membership, it is useful to remember Michael Denning's warning, in his splendid book on the culture of the Popular Front, against "fetishization of Party membership and an overemphasis on the narrative of affiliation and disaffiliation" (Denning xviii). Formal membership was neither foremost on the minds of the participants, nor a priority of the Communist Party USA, which operated semi-clandestinely throughout its history.

15. FBI agents kept under close surveillance Alice Neel's exhibition, at the New Playwrights' Theater. A three-page memo included a list of exhibited paintings; it noted that in the program of "The Big Deal," a play written by Ossie Davis, which was performed at the New Playwrights' Company, there was this advertisement "Alice Neel: Class in Painting and Drawing" (FBI file, #13).

16. A short *Daily Worker* article described Neel's presentation as being met by an "enthralled audience[....]which frequently broke out into applause." They heard Neel discuss "the problems of the realistic [style] and the working class painting" (*Daily Worker*, April 2, 1953, 7)

17. The Jefferson School, which at its height boasted five-thousand students per term, closed its doors in 1956 after the Subversive Activities Control Board demanded that it register as a Communist-controlled organization. Faculty and students alike were now threatened with severe penalties attendant with any association with the Jefferson School. This danger became palpable when the FBI and other governmental agencies began photographing attendees and teachers alike upon their entering and leaving the school (Gettleman 398-399).

18. Neel shared along with Elizabeth Olds the distinction of being among the few portraitists among the hundreds of politically committed artists associated with the

Communist Party (Hapke 88-113).

19. In 1948, in response to their declining circulations, the Communist Party merged the monthly (previously weekly) magazine of general interest, *New Masses*, with its cultural monthly *Mainstream*, which had been founded in 1946, to create the awkwardly titled, but generally first-rate monthly, *Masses & Mainstream*. (In 1957 its name was changed to *Mainstream*.) In addition to Neel, *Masses & Mainstream* published illustrations by Ben Shawn, Antonio Fransconi, Jacob Lawrence, Jack Levine, Philip Evergood, and Anton Refregier (Hemingway 214). Bonosky recalls that the journal's editors, who later published her drawings, initially rejected them for being "unrestrained, satirical exaggerations" ("Bonosky on Alice Neel," PhillipBonosky.com).

20. The departure in 1960 of its talented managing editor, Charles Humboldt, and the dead hand of dogmatism deflated *Mainstream* to what Annette T. Rubinstein (who served on its board) aptly described as increasingly "more characterless and isolated, [which when it] expired in 1963, was the final notable American Communist literary publication" (Rubinstein 469-470; Peck, 554-555).

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Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction: In Critique of Culture(s)

Aristi Trendel

The definition of the terms high and low culture which are, in fact, as Herbert J. Gans has shown, the two ends of a continuum, is no easy task. It seems that the term *culture* itself is "one of the two or three most complicated words in English" (90) if we look back at its Latin origins and its various uses over the centuries. However, Roger Scruton, in *The Dictionary of Political Thought*, ventures a rough definition: "Outside that technical usage (the anthropological one) the term 'culture' is usually reserved for habits, customs and attitudes that are specific to leisure. In this usage it is common to distinguish between 'high' and 'low' culture, the first requiring educational attainments for its exercise and understanding, the second no more than membership in society" (109-110). If Scruton declares that the distinction between the two is neither sharp nor obviously significant, Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism and the Logic of Late Capitalism*, points to the downright effacement of the frontier between high and mass culture as a fundamental feature of all postmodernisms. Although from a postmodernist perspective these terms might thus appear obsolete, they persist in a modernist logic which Flannery O'Connor shares.¹ We are, in fact, dealing with a writer who is herself canonical and both aware and wary of the distinction between high and low culture, categories admittedly much easier to recognise than to define.²

In *Mystery and Manners*, a series of essays that explains her writer's credo, Flannery O'Connor defines herself as "a serious writer" (48) because she is devoted to "what Maritain calls 'the habit of art' [...] a certain quality or virtue of the mind" (64). In these essays she fully professes her writing premises: "The basis of art is truth both in matter and in mode. The person who aims after art in his work aims after truth, in an imaginative sense, no more and no less. [...] Now

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you'll see that this kind of approach eliminates [...] any concern with the motivation of the writer except as this finds its place inside the work. It also eliminates any concern with the reader in his market sense" (65). The difference between a commercial writer and a creator appears clearly in this statement. The former is user-oriented while the latter is creator-oriented. But what about the reader? He/she has, indeed, been crossed out in his market sense but not as a *sine qua non* presence in the communicative chain. O'Connor remains attentive to his/her needs, sensitive to his/her appeal: "I used to think it should be possible to write for some supposed elite, for the people who attend universities and sometimes know how to read but I have since found that though you may publish your stories in *Botteghe Obscure*, if they are any good at all, you are eventually going to get a letter from some old lady in California, or some inmate of the Federal Penitentiary or the state insane asylum or the local poorhouse telling you where you have failed to meet his needs" (48). Differences between high culture sender and low culture receiver are considerably reduced in terms of quality, and literature appears as an Esperanto spoken both to the privileged and the underdog. A high culture product, even beyond the reach of the general public, could still retain some appeal to readers who do not belong to the cultural elite. Flannery O'Connor touches upon the question of accessibility of high culture to the majority and unwittingly brings up an inevitable question: should so-called "high" culture be valued as preferable to "low" culture? In her short stories she extensively examines the issue of culture in an "imaginative" way (to use her own adjective). Since a writer's sensibility and work is germane to the definition and deployment of culture, I would like in this essay to examine her stance on high and low culture, as it is represented in her short fiction. I will argue that O'Connor, throughout her short fiction, adopts a critical position on culture, whether highbrow or popular, highlighting its moral and spiritual shortcomings. The writer's inquiry into culture is thus influenced by her "anagogical vision," which she defines, borrowing from the medieval commentators of Scripture, as the one that has "to do with the Divine life and our participation in it" (*Mystery and Manners* 72).

Culture and its Discontents

It is quite likely that O'Connor's religious beliefs have fashioned her approach to culture. Culture in her short fiction is not an ultimate

value, and T. S. Eliot who, in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, criticized Mathew Arnold for considering it as more comprehensive than religion, would agree with her. However, while T. S. Eliot seems to adopt an elitist view of culture, this is certainly not the case with Flannery O'Connor. The elite in her short fiction is terribly wanting. Although, as she has stated, the stories she has written "are for the most part about people who are poor, who are afflicted in both mind and body, who have little—or at best a distorted—sense of spiritual purpose" (*Mystery and Manners* 32), there are a considerable number of intellectuals, artists, and teachers who fail in the mission imposed by their supposed superiority. This potentially culture-creating and culture-transmitting group is not only incapable of advancing culture in any meaningful way and of enriching the lower levels; it is also often destructive. Flannery O'Connor does not seem to think very highly of the high-minded and the high-brow. I would like to take a closer look at her depiction and perception of the high culture representatives in her stories and speculate on the reasons that motivate her position.

As a matter of fact, recurrent traits and patterns characterize her intellectual characters. The lack of accomplishment common to all of them is most prominent in the figure of the aspiring writer. Nabokov, in his post-*Lolita* novel *Pale Fire*, drew a subtly ironic picture of such a figure.³ O'Connor's irony is more devastating, both in her early stories and those written in her years of maturity. In "The Crop," one of her first texts, a middle-aged woman is writing a story about sharecroppers, which is interwoven with the framing story. This *mise-en-abyme* provides an ironic comment on the creative process. Miss Willerton is ignorant of the people she is writing about and obsessed by her concern to find "an arty subject," in the narrator's words. The title of the story, in its double reference, concrete and metaphorical, becomes the last ironic wink at O'Connor's uninspired writer. Miss Willerton's characters lose their produce, but so does their creator who loses her literary crop and, unable to finish her story, turns to a more "arty subject," the Irish. She is not going to finish the new story either, as her knowledge of the new subject is equally stereotypical. The term "culture" is conjured up here in the original meaning of the word, *colere*—to cultivate and worship. Both Miss Willerton and her characters cultivate, the former the mind, the latter the earth, but the narrator's joke is on the worshipper of culture, Miss Willerton.

Much more dramatic and with graver undertones, "The Enduring Chill," a later story which typically exemplifies O'Connor's deepening

"anagogical vision," is not devoid of comic elements either. O'Connor sums up the story in a letter to Alice Morris, fiction editor of *Harper's Bazaar*: "A wretched young man arrives at the point where his artistic delusions come face to face with reality. What I really mean is arty delusions, but you can maybe make it better" (*The Habit of Being* 271). O'Connor is reluctant to use the adjective "artistic" and prefers the slightly pejorative one "arty" for her character, Asbury Porter Fox, who is coming back from New York to his mother's farm to die. The New York experience has put an end to his illusions: "I have no imagination. I have no talent. I can't create. I have nothing but the desire for these things. Why didn't you kill me too?" (364), he writes in a Kafka-like letter to his mother, whom he holds responsible for his failure. Thus he considers his mysterious illness and his self-proclaimed imminent death as "a gift from life" (370). Throughout the story, Asbury, in an effort to redeem his life, idealises his artistic impotence and dramatises his death, while an accumulation of ironies discredits the character. He is the butt of the narrator's irony: "When people think they are smart—even when they are smart—there is nothing anybody else can say to make them see things straight, and with Asbury, the trouble was that in addition to being smart, he had an artistic temperament" (361). As Asbury enters the dreaded farm with a groan, his sister, who has a psychosomatic view of his condition, exclaims, "The artist arrives at the gas chamber" (363). In the most comic exchange of the story, Asbury looks down on the old Jesuit priest because he does not know Joyce and thus he does not qualify as "a man of culture," while the priest tells Asbury's mother at the end of the meeting: "He's a good lad at heart but very ignorant" (377).

But dramatic irony is particularly forceful in the story. Art is not sending him death as he had hoped, and, as the reader has known all along, his illness is finally diagnosed as undulant fever, "the same as Bang's in a cow" (381) in the doctor's words. Asbury caught this bug drinking non pasteurised milk during his egalitarian experiments with his mother's black workers. He wanted to experience a moment of communion drinking out of the same cup with them, and neither of the two workers told him that the milk was dangerous. The pathos surrounding his predicament is debunked by the bathos in the anticlimactic ending. As the main character is fully stripped of his illusions, a religious metaphor crowns Asbury's predicament. His awakening is likened to the descent of the Holy Ghost not in fire but in ice. The character's doom is perversely engineered by his idolatrous rapport to

culture and his hubristic aspiration to become a creator.

Asbury brings up the *puer aeternus* motif which characterises Flannery O'Connor's intellectuals and is best exemplified in "The Comforts of Home." Her reaction to a Freudian interpretation of this story is worth noting: "Oedipus never entered my mind [...]. If the Oedipus business is visible in it, it is so because it is in nature, not because I worked with that in mind. I don't think any good writer would do such a thing. Unless the Greenwich Village hack variety," she says in a letter to the teacher and writer Cecil Dawkins (*The Habit of Being* 375). Oedipus is, as Bellemin Noel would say, in the unconscious of her text, and whatever the writer's intention, intellectual development seems to be at odds with psychological maturity in her short stories. Thomas, in his forties, is a fully-fledged scholar, a historian who writes about the first settlers in the country. Richard Giannone, in his study *Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist*, explores the importance of desert life and ascetic spirituality in her fiction. He sees in Thomas a slothful anchorite who settles back into "domestic tranquillity" (184). The guardian angel of his peace and serenity is his mother: "His own life was made bearable by the fruits of his mother's saner virtues—by the well regulated house she kept and the excellent meals she served" (386). Her only shortcoming, apart from being a non intellectual, is, in the narrator's words, her "daredevil charity." The son's scholarly order is shattered by the intrusion of a nineteen-year old ex-prisoner who monopolises his mother keen on saving the lost girl. Throughout the story Star is referred to as "the slut" (383) which is intensified with adjectives that have an incremental effect: "the little slut" (395), "the criminal slut," "the dirty, criminal slut" (403). Indeed, Thomas's language is constantly enriched, as the presence of the girl turns him into a quipster; looking at her picture he observes that "the average age for criminality is steadily lowering" (386). He rationalises his animosity towards her using his erudition: "if Antony of Egypt had stayed at home and attended to his sister, no devils would have plagued him." (386). He also justifies his repulsion and contempt for the girl by thinking how superior he is to her in terms of class. Throughout the story, Star is described from Thomas's point of view in terms of popular culture: "The face was a comedienne's in a musical comedy" (384). "She let out a loud tormented-sounding laugh in imitation of a movie monster" (397). Nevertheless, the text is interspersed with clues that reveal the limits of Thomas's intellect: "The girl had caused a disturbance in the depths of his being, somewhere out of the reach of his

power of analysis" (393). Thomas's rational mind is powerless before his fundamental helplessness in the face of uncontrolled and ill-sublimated drives that point to the character's immaturity.

As a matter of fact, what discloses Thomas's infantilism and lack of autonomy is the dead father's omnipresence, a paternal voice who constantly urges him to "be a man" (393), i.e., to become like him. Just like Hamlet, Thomas is plagued by his father's ghost and accuses his mother of filial neglect, but the son, instead of leaving home as he has threatened, follows his father's injunctions to "plant his gun in Star's pocketbook" (402). He thus seeks to provide incriminating evidence for theft to the sheriff and get rid of the intruder. If the girl is "a moral moron" (385), as Thomas claims, this recourse to deceit exposes a breach of morality on his part.

There is little doubt that O'Connor seems to expect from "high" culture the aesthetic, intellectual and moral development associated with *Bildung*—one of the German terms for culture. Thomas's moral failure exposes this type of culture as incomplete. Moreover, his mother's accidental murder, appearing in the Oedipal scenario as a parapraxis, i. e., unconsciously willed, questions his maturity. While putting the gun into the girl's pocketbook, "Tomsee" (as Star calls him) is caught in the act, and, turning the pistol on her, he accidentally "plants" a bullet into his mother's heart. This act of supreme violence seals the character's fatal flaw: "the anchorite" worships a fake God.

While highbrow culture is exposed as useless and dangerous, lowbrow fares no better. The sheriff, a film noir-like character, reads into the scene a tabloid story which characteristically disregards and distorts truth for the sake of sensation: "He saw the facts as if they were already in print: the fellow had intended all along to kill his mother and pin it on the girl. [...] Over her body the killer and the slut were about to collapse into each other's arms" (404). O'Connor's criticism of culture is not limited to the high variety but reaches out to the *homo vulgus*. But I am going to return to O'Connor's comprehensive critique of culture which is recurrent in her short fiction.

"The Comforts of Home" illustrates a common pattern in O'Connor's stories: a low culture intruder invades the domestic order and exposes the intellectual's frailty. Hulga, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy, is another angry intellectual who, like most of O'Connor's characters of culture, suffocates in a rural environment. Her mind and her degree, which are her pride, are not seen in the same light by her mother and the rest of the country people in the story: "Mrs. Hopewell

could very well picture her there [in a university] like a scarecrow and lecturing to more of the same" (276). Although "she looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity" (276), she lets herself enter the game of seduction offered by a nineteen-year-old Bible salesman. Manley Pointer succeeds in taking her for a walk by asking her a nonsensical question worthy of a Zen Buddhist Master, "You ever ate a chicken that was two days old?" (283). The seduction scene takes place in a hayloft and reads like a tutorial. The girl, who calls herself a nihilist and declares that she is "one of those people who see *through* to nothing" (287), condescendingly plots to seduce the supposedly innocent country boy and then guide "his inferior mind" into "a deeper understanding of life" (284). Pointer, through an exchange of clichés paradoxically appealing to the girl, as Carole K. Harris demonstrates (Harris 52), manages to take off her wooden leg, the object of his erotic attention. She offers a philosophical speech, while he produces "his offerings at the shrine of a goddess" (289)—a bottle of whisky, condoms and a deck of obscene cards. When the girl tries to offend him and gets hysterical, he steals her wooden leg and her glasses, informing her in an instructive farewell, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" (291). He turns out to be a fetishist and a collector (albeit, not as dangerous as John Fowles's) of female prosthetic parts. Nowhere else in O'Connor's stories has the humiliation of an intellectual been so complete. Hulga's nihilism pitted against the young man's, whose brand is a way of being and a way of acting, appears as a pose, as artificial as her leg. This wooden leg, a permanent locus of vulnerability, finally becomes a symbol of stolen illusions that had thrived on "high" culture. Highbrow and lowbrow nihilism, the former proudly condescending, the later plainly insulting, point to a spiritual desert. They both establish power relations as they become instrumental in humiliating the human subject who finds himself/herself trapped in an existential dead end.

The erotic episode in this story, rare in O'Connor's short fiction, is almost devoid of sexuality. The eroticism is mainly described through displacement. As erotic attention is transferred upon a lifeless limb in "Good Country People," the lover's role is shifted onto an animal in "Greenleaf." Mrs May, who looks down upon her employees' poor English, "Greenleaf English" as she calls it, finally finds herself pierced by the bull she has been chasing, her "uncouth country suitor" (312). Although Mrs May has no intellectual leanings, her remarks on the correct use of language cast upon her an intellectual role, and her

landowning status seems to authorise her to assume a superior view over her intellectual inferiors. The clash of cultures exemplified through the mastery of language is built along class lines. The final scene, reminiscent of a Greek myth that exposes the union between a human and a beast, points to Mrs May's loneliness. O'Connor's universe is a frigid one. Her high culture representatives (or characters who seem to play such a role) are usually men without women or women without men stranded on a frustrating farm. Thus a correlation could be established between highbrow culture and repressed sexuality in O'Connor's short fiction. No effective sublimation occurs to redeem her characters.

Her teachers fare no better. Their common denominator is ineptness and impotence at best, destruction at worst.⁴ Her pedagogues, self-assigned or not, evoke Goethe's view of teachers as commented on by George Steiner, who probes into pedagogy in his essay *Lessons of the Masters*: "Goethe's disdain for the academic was notorious. 'He who can, does. He who cannot teaches.' To which modern wags have ended: 'He who cannot teach teaches in schools of Education.'" (69). Those who teach and those who teach in schools of Education are equally inept and pathetic in O'Connor's short fiction. In "The Barber," one of her early stories, a college teacher vainly tries to articulate his political position in favour of a liberal candidate for the benefit of his barber. Although both his philosopher friend and his wife advise him against arguing, he writes a speech and reads it out during a shaving session. As the speech is met with hilarity, Rayber loses his temper, and, in a scene worthy of a slapstick comedy, he hits the barber, shouting the edifying words: "Do you think I'd tamper with your damn fool ignorance?" (25). Then the teacher pushes past the people in the barbershop and rushes out into the street, still half-lathered and fully-bibbed. O'Connor opts in this story for a pictorial representation of failing pedagogy and heavily relies upon comedy.

From a comic register in her early fiction, O'Connor moves to a tragic one in a late story, "The Lame Shall Enter First," where the suicide of a boy who recently lost his mother is provoked by his father's neglect. Sheppard, a recreational director and volunteer reformatory counsellor, takes a keen interest in Rufus, a lame adolescent with a high IQ, and decides to save him through education. O'Connor, the grotesque poet of the mutilated body, places a club foot instead of a wooden leg at the centre of this story. "The monstrous club foot" is invested with all the charitable passion of the widowed counsellor. The

criminal adolescent rejects the new shoe Sheppard offers him, along with the educational help of his self-assigned tutor, the huge library he puts at his disposal by giving him his house key, as well as the telescope and the microscope he buys for him. In the ensuing battle of wills and war of nerves, Sheppard is defeated in spite of his conviction of superior strength: "I'm stronger than you are and I'm going to save you. The good will triumph" (474). Indeed, there is a hitch. O'Connor, in a letter to Dawkins, exposes her character's flaw: "The story is about a man who thought he was good [...] when he wasn't" (*The Habit of Being* 490). Rufus's insights denounce the educator's weaknesses: "He don't know his left hand from his right" (454). "He thinks he's Jesus Christ" (459). In spite of Rufus's claim that his educator offered "immoral suggestions" (480), O'Connor does not turn her character into a paedophile,⁵ but dramatises his fatal flaw, the lack of discernment. This character flaw takes a tragic turn when his own child is involved. Sheppard's belief that "Norton was not bright enough to be damaged much" (463) by the criminal adolescent is erroneous. While the counselor is unsuccessfully trying to awaken Rufus to intellectual pursuits, the adolescent, a maleficent exegete, is successfully instructing the disconsolate child by reading and interpreting the Bible for his young pupil. The lame adolescent stole the copy they use from a ten cent store before the boy's eyes, thus turning him into an accomplice. Rufus's distorted interpretation of the Holy Book drives Norton to suicide. Sheppard's epiphany at the end of the story cannot redeem his double failure. "The Lame Shall Enter First" illustrates the devastating effects of the failure of pedagogy, the most important tool for the transmission of culture. O'Connor seems to suggest that the ineffectiveness of culture stems from its broken bond to spiritual life.

There is little doubt, then, that those who think in O'Connor's short fiction, whether intellectuals or pedagogues, are useless but not harmless. Why such an authorial fury against them? In *Pnin* Nabokov draws a highly satiric portrait of academia while adding a considerable amount of tenderness in his narrator's vision of Pnin, the unfortunate professor. When O'Connor takes up her pen, teachers and intellectuals are turned into caricatures. O'Connor clearly targets them to denounce the shortcomings of culture, notably its moral deficit and spiritual void. The author seems to point at an internal link between high culture and the exacerbation of narcissism which accounts for the power relations that underpin high and low culture. The pride which the "high culture" representatives take in the possession of culture,

institutionally deemed as superior, is a prop to self-assertion and glorification. Conversely, "low culture" representatives fight back and reassert their own values. O'Connor, does, however, seem to place higher expectations on people whom she would see as "cultured," in her view, they should show a greater commitment to moral and spiritual concerns. In his essay "Redefining Culture," Herbert Marcuse makes an important observation, stating that, only if we excluded cruelty, fanaticism and non-sublimated violence, could we define culture as a process of humanization. However, he ascertains, these forces and their institutions do become part and parcel of culture (*Culture et Société* 316). As long as such a state of things persists, culture, "high" or "low," could not meet O'Connor's moral requirements; it only reaps scorn. But in the overall economy of her stories, the representative of high culture, whose supposed mission is to elevate and to educate, seem to bear the full brunt of failure.

Although high and low culture clash in her short fiction, it is made clear that one is not superior to the other. Indeed, O'Connor goes further afield in her criticism of culture. I would like to turn to two stories where the two cultures no longer clash, while they compete for power, but "clasp" in a close collaboration, as their representatives jointly turn dangerous and destructive. "The Displaced Person" and "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" provide a gripping social and political commentary on culture(s). Withdrawal from society and into the invisible church advanced in "You Can't Be Any Poorer than Dead" seems, then, no effective strategy. The author's struggle consists in driving home to the reader the limits and flaws of culture(s).

George Steiner, in *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture*, points out that "an analysis of the idea and ideal of culture demands the fullest possible understanding of the phenomenology of mass murder as it took place in Europe from the Spanish south to the frontiers of Russian Asia between 1936 and 1945" (33). He criticizes T. S. Eliot for not facing the issue in his *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*. O'Connor faces the issue in her longest story, "The Displaced Person," published in 1954, where she extends the examination of mass murder by setting her story in America. Mr. Guizac, a surviving, supposed-to-be-Jewish Pole, is brought by a Catholic priest to a Georgia farm where he is eventually murdered by its occupants. The intruder in this story no longer exposes the frailty and moral confusion of the high or lowbrow but reveals the shaky foundations of Western culture. The title of the story bears the mark of the Displaced

Persons' Act of 1948 which opened the United States to refugees and caused Americans great anxiety over the influx of foreigners. Mr Guizac is the quintessence of the foreigner, or stranger. He and his family are referred to as "the displaced persons" throughout the story. Julia Kristeva gives a relevant definition of the stranger: "The stranger is the one who works. [...] he still considers work as a value, a fundamental right, [...] the zero degree of dignity" (*Etrangers à nous-mêmes* 30, my own translation). This description fits Mr Guizac who invests himself totally in his work though he is very poorly paid. The owner of the farm, Mrs McIntyre, is delighted with his efficiency but never ceases to see him as a stranger: "She didn't know anything about him except that he did the work. The truth was that he was not very real to her yet" (219). Mrs Shortley, the hired labourer who is on closest terms to the landowner, cannot perceive Mr. Guizac's humanity either, as the narrative voice reports her fascination with Mr. Guizac and his family: "Every time she had seen them in her imagination, the images she had got was of the three bears [...] with wooden shoes and bright clothes" (195). His difference is bound to become threatening and disruptive on the farm. As Kristeva observes, "The stranger represents such a great challenge to the group's identity [...] that few among us could pick up the gauntlet" (*Etrangers à nous-mêmes* 62 my own translation). Her characters eliminate the castaway who disturbs the balance of the farm. The black workers are faced with the danger of losing their job and so are the Shortleys who reject him from the very beginning. The holocaust invades the farm through a newsreel Mrs Shortley has seen at the cinema, and the mass grave that haunts her memory becomes one of the leitmotifs in the story.

It is worth noting that, when all her anxieties conflate and focus on the contamination of English by the invader's language, a simile makes the dead bodies in the newsreel and the infected words indistinguishable: "She saw the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unreformed, flinging mud on the clean English words until everything was equally dirty. She saw them all piled up in a room, [...] like the naked bodies in the newsreel" (209). While Mrs Shortley, just like Mrs May in "Greenleaf," watches over the purity of the English language—which is, ironically, a high culture concern—Mrs McIntyre, a white supremacist, safeguards the purity of the race. Both women, though they are not high culture representatives in the strict sense and do not belong to the same class, seem to watch over the preservation of the so-called purity of the status quo on the farm—its culture—and are

united in their efforts against its contamination by a stranger. Shaken by the Pole's intention to marry his cousin to one of the black workers, Mrs McIntyre decides to fire him. Confronted with the moral obligation to keep him and unable to get out of this ethical quagmire, she participates in the murder of the "Jew," which is prefigured in the text before it actually takes place: "she narrowed her gaze until it closed entirely around the diminishing figure on the tractor as if she were watching him through a gunsight" (224). Mr Guizac is crushed under Mr Shortley's tractor before her consenting eyes and those of her black and white workers: "She had felt her eyes and Mr Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion for ever" (234). The farm, which appears at the outset as a labour camp thriving on the "Jew"'s productivity, turns into an extermination camp. To borrow a now familiar phrase from Hannah Arendt, the banality—or bureaucracy—of evil brings together the different social classes, from the landed owner down to the illiterate Black, ironically eliminating any differences in power based on culture, race, or class. They are all finally persecuted by the same sense of guilt as indicated by the sudden departure of Mr. Shortley and Sulk as well as Mrs McIntyre's nervous ailment.

This Americanisation of the holocaust broadens responsibility so as to include everyone in Western culture. Steiner, in his *In Bluebeard's Castle*, advances his own explanation of the holocaust and presents the Jew as "the bad conscience of Western history" (45), as "a second Fall" (46): "By killing the Jews Western culture would eradicate those who invented God" (41). In the course of O'Connor's story, the "Jew," supported by the Catholic priest, becomes Mrs McIntyre's bad conscience: "She began to understand that she had a moral obligation to fire the Pole and that she was shrinking from it because she found it hard to do" (233). In this confusion of moral obligations, the incapacity for transcendence is revealed in the characters' indifference to the peacocks, a symbol of transfiguration in the text. "Christ will come like that" (226), says the priest, looking at the peacock's spreading tail.

But what, exactly, is the identity of O'Connor's stranger? As many critics have remarked (Baumgaertner, Bleikasten, Giannone), O'Connor wants her "Jew" to be a Christly figure, over-determined in the text. "As far as I'm concerned," says Mrs McIntyre angrily to the priest, "Christ was just another D.P." (229). Exterminated Jew equals crucified Christ, and in this exchange of identities, the writer makes her point both about the human capacity for evil and about the mind's discernment of

evil. Thus O'Connor places upon culture no longer a mere moral commitment but an eschatological demand. Everybody, the wealthy and the dispossessed, on the old and the new continent, wears the red badge of guilt. O'Connor's vision of culture is certainly spiritual. In her view, Western culture, in its high and low manifestations, suffers not only from a serious moral deficit but also a spiritual one.

"A Late Encounter with the Enemy" features a wasteland of American culture, or, to use Guy Debord's concept, a society of the spectacle. O'Connor depicts a spectacular vision of culture which is, as Debord says, "the visible negation of life" (*La Société du spectacle* 19, my own translation). Both low and high culture are vehicles for the spectacle's blinding force. The story focuses on a hundred-and-four-year-old man, a foot soldier in the American Civil War who, by the necessities of the spectacle, is turned into a general and exhibited on cultural occasions as a symbol of Southern values, of a glorious, undying past.

O'Connor's old man in the wheel chair is a parody of *geron*, the ancient Greek figure of wisdom. He does not "have any use for history" (135) and has no "more notion of dying than a cat" (139). His speech consists of curses, and his body is "as frail as a dried spider" (140). A spark of vanity keeps his mind alive: "He considered that he was still a very handsome man. When he had been able to stand he had measured five feet four inches of pure game cock. [...] he would not wear teeth because he thought his profile was more striking without them" (135). This man is transformed into an image, processed and packaged, commodified and "fetishized." O'Connor ushers the readers into the wings of the production of images, the powerful motion-picture industry. George Sash's spectacular identity is engineered by the promoters of a Hollywood film. The foot soldier is thus promoted to a general and conferred a glamorous uniform and a prestigious name, General Tennessee Flintrock Sash of the Confederacy. In this fancy outfit and with this high-sounding name, he is carried onto the stage of the film premiere. It is Sash's mirror-stage. The man becomes his fabricated image and a puppet in the hands of those who pull the strings of symbolic productions according to the principle of iconocracy.

O'Connor makes a spectacle of "high" and "low" culture. The story is built as an accumulation of spectacles which unfold on a succession of actual stages: the stage of a cinema house, a museum's exhibit room, the stage of a graduation ceremony. The first spectacle involves the film premiere that established the tin general's inaugural image. In terms of

frequency this premiere is repetitive in the text as it becomes part and parcel of Sash's "mental Disneyland" (*Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist* 86) peopled by the celebrities and pretty girls who paraded on the stage. The second set of spectacles takes place in the Museum exhibit rooms and Old Southern homes where the fake general's emblematic presence is appreciated as the narrative voice reports: "Every year on Confederate Memorial Day, he was bundled up and lent to the capitol City Museum where he was displayed from one to four in a musty room full of [...] historic documents" (139). The event of the general's visit to the museum is iterative.⁶ The singulative⁷ event that crowns the text takes place in the present of the story, marks its beginning and ending and throws light on the title. Sash, in his last moments of his life, finds himself on the stage of a graduation ceremony. His sixty-year old granddaughter, who is a teacher, studious and resentful, belatedly gets her degree after twenty fruitless summer courses: "When she returned in the fall, she always taught in the exact way she had been taught not to teach" (135). Finally fulfilled is her obsessive wish to have the general attend her graduation in order to show "what he stood for, or as she said, 'what all was behind her' [...] the old traditions! Dignity! Honor! Courage!" (135). Sally Sash adopts her grandfather's Hollywood identity. As Debord states, "The spectacle is not a set of images, but a social rapport among people mediatized by images" (16). Like Debord, O'Connor traces the root of the culture-spectacle in the economy. The life and death of the alienated old man—who became himself an instrument of alienation when the motion-picture industry took over his fate—are directed by the imperatives of the economy.

Popular culture icons frame the story. In the beginning the narrative voice informs the reader of the General's predilection for "parades with floats full of Miss Americas and Miss Daytona Beaches and Miss Queen Cotton Products" (134). At the end of the story, his corpse in the wheel chair, carried by the young scout who accompanied him, is waiting in line after the ceremony at the big red Coca-Cola machine by the side of the auditorium. It is highly ironic that regional distinctiveness is asserted only to be better lost to the dominant national culture whose emblem is the Coca-Cola machine. (It is also worth noting that the Coca-Cola Company has its headquarters in Atlanta.) The story's ending most uncannily sets up a disquieting picture which displays a touch of pop art and German expressionism. The association of the imagery of commercial art, employed by the pop artists for their own

ends, with the deformation of the image, characteristic of German expressionism, produces a surprising effect: the rise of metaphysical anxiety in a society where business has the monopoly of meaning. The story thus reads as the epitome of “a world in which the spiritual has no place” and “one in which everything is for sale,” as Jon Lance Bacon describes the society in *Wise Blood* (Flannery O'Connor and *Cold War Culture* 125).

Does the author mean to denounce capitalism and destroy its false gods as Debord did? Given O'Connor's negative stance on Communism, it is certain that the author expects no proletariat to stir up the revolution, for it was accomplished two thousand years ago by a single man who changed the course of history. Her main hypo-text is the Bible, and the title of the story seems to evoke Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. There in chapter fifteen the procession of glory triumphs over death. At the sound of the trumpet the dead are raised incorruptible and are changed. The reader can see parallels between this Biblical scene and the parades and processions that abound in the story, particularly the one of graduates marching black and menacing towards the dying general. Predictably, he cannot stand up to death; he is wheeled along the long line of parched pilgrims, the modern devotees of the Coca-Cola machine. As Bacon makes clear, O'Connor's Catholicism gives her a position from which to take critical distance on consumer culture and denounce the pervading materialism of American society. In this respect, according to Bacon, it is the Catholic writer who overrides the Southern one (*Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture* 138).

It is no wonder then that the American critic sees in O'Connor “an advocate of cultural resistance” (*Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture* 139), a resistance which, resting on her Christian beliefs, seems to lessen the gap between high and low culture. In her indictment of Western culture, O'Connor adopts a double strategy in her short fiction: on the one hand, in stories like “The Comforts of Home” and “Good Country People,” she depicts the conflict between “high” and “low” culture in such a way as to debunk the superiority of high culture; on the other hand, in stories like “The Displaced Person,” she demonstrates how characters from different classes or cultures collude in a devastating act of violence in which everyone is rendered responsible. However, it would be unfair to disregard the praise the author lavishes on both “high” and “low” culture. “Parker's Back,” the most intriguing story in O'Connor's short fiction, displays a full trust of, and fascination with, culture(s). But an in-depth analysis of this story,

where there is a scheme of complementariness and cooperation between cultures, can only be the starting point of another essay.

Notes

1. André Bleikasten calls her “a sobered-down modernist” (*Flannery O'Connor* 22).
2. cf. Paul Elie “solidly canonical, fixed in the lens of literary posterity: anthologies conferences, monographs, appreciation societies.” (*The Life You Save May Be Your Own* ix). Elie could have added the French program of the national teachers' qualifying exams in his list.
3. Nabokov's narrator, the editor Charles Kinbote instead of explicating John Shade's poem tells insanely his own story.
4. O'Connor's demands upon pedagogues seem all the greater since she considered herself as a repressed teacher, and the theme of guidance is quite prominent in her stories.
5. cf. Boccaccio's commentary, *pedagogus ergo sodomiticus*.
6. Term in narrative theory coined by Gérard Genette: telling once what happened numerous times.
7. Genette: telling once what happened once.

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Aunt Harriet's Hate Mail: Rejecting the Editor

Molly McQuade

"Harriet Monroe"

I can remember how I found my way
Up to her office when the sky hung thin.
Along the street a vender bent within
A flower stall; I took a small bouquet
Of purple violets. Her eyes were gray.
Finding a bowl to put the flowers in,
She talked, and I discerned a heroine[...]

—Dennis Murphy (1936)¹

[...]one did not think of the shortness of her stature
when she was sitting at her desk, and only for a moment
when she arose.

—Richard Eberhart (1936)²

My Dear Miss Monroe

Harriet Monroe, the founding editor in 1912 of *Poetry* magazine, seemed to value the hate mail she received. She collected it in a file, which she labeled "knocks." The knocks bring stray, sundry dead readers and writers to life in oddly flamboyant, unguarded performances, as though the audience for American poetry surely could strike back. Wrote one Walter Surrey in an undated letter to Miss Monroe:

I think, indeed I know, that there are poets in America, but I
make the assertion that they knock in vain and will continue

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to knock in vain at the gate of Miss Harriet Monroe, in whose magazine from the beginning I challenge you to find [...] a single poem which can justly be called great when measured by the standards of literature, of beauty, of philosophic thought, and of originality.³

No less than *The Dial* magazine seemed to agree with Mr. Surrey, calling Monroe's periodical "an impudent affront to the poetry loving public" [sic].⁴ In reply to *The Dial's* attack, an editorial in the *Chicago Record Herald* newspaper produced another: "If *Poetry* [magazine] is no good, just step on the insect; don't try to knock it out with a succession of body blows" [sic].⁵

Sometimes her knocks came from rather lofty places. On September 14, 1914, Monroe received a knock from the Dean of a Chicago cathedral. Opined the Reverend Walter Taylor Summer:

My dear Miss Monroe—

[...]How two-thirds of the poetry that has appeared [in *Poetry*] could be reckoned as poetry or as containing anything particularly inspiring, is beyond me. As I can't adapt myself to it, and it only irritates me to think I can't, I am going to escape making myself unhappy trying to understand it—by ceasing to read it.⁶

The Reverend added: "I really cannot stand[...]Ezra Pound".⁷ Pound, who then served as *Poetry's* foreign editor, often couldn't stand the magazine, either. In one letter from his voluminous correspondence with Monroe, Pound thundered, of the magazine's contents: "MIT GORD! but this stuff of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is twaddle[...]Surely this good lady should shine as a patron rather than as a contributor."⁸

On August 8, 1915, Monroe received a knock from S. R. Floraunce, cashier of the Webster County Bank in Red Cloud, Nebraska.

Gentlemen:

I am in receipt of the August number of *Poetry*, and herewith enclose a draft of .15 [cents] to pay for same. When I subscribed I was under the impression that the magazine was devoted to poetry, but find I was mistaken. Please pardon the

error, and drop my name from your list [...]⁹

Still, many of the attacks on Monroe never made it into her "knocks" file, for many came from the very poets whose work she published in, or at times rejected from, the magazine. She filed their hate mail, charily, under each author's name. By them, as well as by others, Monroe the editor found herself rejected, rejected, and rejected. Her official wars crowd such files. Her warfare is what best defines her as an editor, for anyone who cares to observe from a distance.

Sometimes, she was forced into the warrior role. Otherwise, she seemed to choose the role, and to savor it. For, as Ellen Williams has observed, Monroe had invented a new kind of periodical, published for the sake of poetry and poets at a time when poetry generally was relegated to the margins of most American magazines. As Williams has remarked: "A good many American magazines in the first decade of the twentieth century were interested in printing serious fiction or essays[...]But they used poetry only as humbler papers used advertisements for patent medicines, as a convenient filler for the unused half or quarter column at the end of an article."¹⁰ For this reason, Monroe "felt that the indifference of the magazines was a cause, not merely a sign, of a decline of poetry in America."¹¹ As the editor recollected in her own autobiography, "Every art but poetry seemed to be more or less effectively encouraged and rewarded."¹² Monroe thus serves as an important transitional figure, redefining the role of the editor, and its authority; as an impresario of poetry, she could model herself after no known immediate predecessors. To restore some measure of public palpability to American poetry, warfare evidently impressed her as a useful means and strategy. But she also took war personally. She wrote in an editorial in *Poetry*, "Next to making friends, the most thrilling experience of life is to make enemies."¹³ She savored her rejections by others. As this editor saw it, "the normally healthy person may accept" what she called "dagger scratches" as "tributes to his vitality."¹⁴

Some of her editorial wars were high-minded; others were less so. More than a few wars were provoked by Monroe's determination to make internal cuts in poems that she hoped to publish, cuts made—if necessary—above a poet's protests, or even without the poet's knowledge. Wallace Stevens, whose poem, "Sunday Morning," was much amended by the editor, responded with a wry diplomacy to the lash of

her pencil by writing in a letter to Monroe, "You are an encouraging person, if there ever was one, and I am grateful to you not only for that, but because, in addition, you give me an opportunity to do what you want, if I can. I shall try."¹⁵

Ezra Pound put it less sweetly in 1930, when he commented, "Miss Monroe has occasionally mutilated a work by excisions[...]"¹⁶ Of course, Pound was well known for his own editorial bravado, brandished frequently when making cuts in the poems of other poets, sometimes without their knowledge or consent. Ironically, Monroe considered Pound to be one of her main instructors in what she called a "salutary discipline" by which her "incrustations of habit and prejudice were ruthlessly swept away."¹⁷ And yet, not swept away entirely or always; for the files of enraged letters from Pound complaining of Harriet to Harriet outweigh those of any other author who contributed to *Poetry* in her era, and they testify mightily to what lengths an editorial war may lead.

At times, Pound faulted Monroe for failing to build "any kind of arena for combat" in her magazine.¹⁸ What caused her failure, according to him? Her unduly "catholic" taste; she left the door she left open, famously, to all styles of writing.¹⁹ In 1917, five years into his term as foreign editor, Pound mocked *Poetry's* "almost oppressively respectable reputation for respectability," as he was to do again and again.²⁰ Soon enough, he would leave Monroe's masthead, fulminating and frustrated. In 1931, he recalled their interminable combat in a letter to her: "Not weariness but indignation (beginning with the 2nd number) and overcome time after time, divorced me from *Poetry*."²¹ Yet, Pound's notion of a needful war, and its conduct, differed essentially from Monroe's. Later in the spring of 1931, he defined it to her in a letter: "I don't in the least mind opposition. I regard it as being there to be eliminated."²² As his sometime opponent, annoyingly, she did not often defer or succumb to him, although she did admire him. Nor, as an editor, did she share his knowing, ruthless dictatorial braggadocio.

Nevertheless, writers had every right to respond in self-defense to Monroe's editing and to her cuts. T. S. Eliot, for instance, ceased to send his work to *Poetry* for consideration after, in the September 1916 issue of the magazine, she removed a line from his poem, "Mr. Appollinax," without first asking Eliot's permission. (The line may have impressed her as unduly attractive to the censor: "He laughed like an irresponsi-

ble foetus.") Yet, almost regardless of the outcome, Monroe seemed to thrive on meaningful conflict. In a letter to William Carlos Williams, with whom she often sparred about the matter of poetic revision, she wrote, "Perhaps it is inevitable that the editorial mind should grow stilted. If you see evidence of it in *Poetry*, 'Please punch my face in order to save my soul,' as Ezra says. I am very gratefully yours."²³

The plea to "punch my face" was not made idly. Monroe genuinely courted combat, so long as, in literary terms, to her it seemed significant. How unusual was the extent to which she did this, compared with other career editors of any place or period, might defy an attempt to document the comparison; it would seem wiser, instead, to document selectively Monroe's meaningful receipt of punches, as well as their sometimes perplexing aftermaths. For other editors after her have not done as she did. The tendency to incite or tolerate editorial conflict in order to clarify candidly the founding principles of poetry is a tendency that has not survived her well.

Not only do few editors of poetry follow in Monroe's footsteps as a consciously scrupling and consistent warrior. In fact, many have chosen to impugn her. John Timberman Newcomb has claimed, "Though *Poetry* has always maintained a significant place in modernist literary history, many influential accounts are remarkably grudging. Their unwillingness to credit Monroe's accomplishments reveals longtime tensions and repressions of modernist history-writing."²⁴ Among the grudging are a respected later editor of *Poetry*, Daryl Hine, who described Monroe as "a strong-minded literary spinster."²⁵ Kenneth Rexroth called her "a provincial suffragette" of poetry.²⁶ Only a few years ago, the poetry critic and editor Herbert Leibowitz dismissed Monroe, during an interview, as "a minor figure in a major role."²⁷ Jayne Marek observes, "The denigration and dismissal of Monroe throughout much of modern literary history constitutes a telling example of the fate of any women [editors]; reexamining her contributions to that history requires a change of perspective that allows her to be seen on her own terms."²⁸

Indeed, Monroe remains broadly controversial today, at least in memory, for imposing her will, within the inevitable boundaries of an editorial taste, on poets who were often quite reluctant to receive it. Poets of her time, together with their allies, have sometimes striven to portray her with pugilistic negativity, less as she really was than as they

wished she were, perhaps partly in order to justify (or adjust) the fate of their poetry in *Poetry*. Their complaints, some shy of a century old, still rustle now and then in the contemporary ear, whispered anon by living poets who are no more friendly to editors, dead or alive, than any others were.

The well-known yet frequently misunderstood case of poet Hart Crane's editorial war with Monroe offers an opportunity to reexamine in depth the context of that war and its long-lasting consequences for both opponents, as well as for poetry more generally, contradicting long-held assumptions about Monroe. Was Crane "bullied," as the contemporary American poet X. J. Kennedy has suggested, mirthfully, or did the "vestal" Harriet instead initiate and wage, with some justice, necessary literary combat?²⁹ Was her war with Crane needed? Was it salutary? Do traces linger in the record of her "maternal instinct toward poetry," so-called by the mercurial Pound, or did the warrior seem to lack that instinct? What was the fracas with Crane truly about, and why does it still matter?

Although, in recent years, a small but growing number of scholars have explored the biographical context for Monroe's editing, little contemporary criticism or scholarship has addressed her actual editorial practice. That is my goal in this essay. I look at the paradoxes of an editorial relationship that is as significant, potentially, for the construction of American literary modernism as it is revealing of an ongoing struggle between writer and editor.

As John Timmerman Newcomb has commented, "The magnitude of *Poetry's* importance to modernism has never been appreciated."³⁰ Part of the magazine's importance originated in the editor's taste for combat, not only with such an avatar as Pound, but with many others. The relationship, in particular, of Monroe and Crane also offers a test case for culpable editorial idealism and for high-minded authorial mischief. Though editors are better known for the business of rejecting authors than authors are known for the periodic professional obligation to reject their editors, how might editorial practice be reconstrued as the product, in part, of regular, emphatic rejection by authors of an editor?

She Said

The shared work of poet and editor is more often rumored or hidden than made public. But, for reasons best known to herself, the sixty-six-year-old Harriet Monroe chose to share with the readers of *Poetry* her rather arduous work with Hart Crane, then aged twenty-seven, on his poem, "At Melville's Tomb."³¹ Published in the October 1926 issue, well into her tenure as *Poetry's* editor, and untouched editorially by Monroe, the poem was not Crane's only contribution to that number. For in the back pages, by mutual consent, also appeared their editorial correspondence about "At Melville's Tomb," dubbed as "A Discussion with Hart Crane."³² There, editor and writer found themselves in basic disagreement about the poem. To publish the debate was an idea of the editor.

If Monroe, as she candidly acknowledged, could not quite grasp the manner or the meaning of Crane's poem while she read it, then she could take the unusual and paradoxical step of questioning the poem even while she published it. Most editors would not have done as she did: her decision could have exposed her to ridicule and hatred, undermining to an editor's purview and accrued authority. Paradox in motive also characterized Crane in their encounter. For he need not have seized the opportunity she gave him to compose a substantial manifesto in response to her, thereby publicizing his very own editor's misgivings about his poetry; instead, he could have scrawled but a few sentences, leaving well enough alone. Yet from the struggle with an editor he claimed, or tried to claim, a victory of rhetoric at Harriet's tomb. His was an open letter of rejection to her.

The terms of their struggle were clearly expressed by the editor in the four concise paragraphs of her initial salvo to Crane, published in *Poetry*. Monroe remarked:

Your ideas and rhythms interest me, and I am wondering by what process of reasoning you would justify this poem's succession of champion mixed metaphors, of which you must be conscious. The packed line should pack its phrases in orderly relation, it seems to me, in a manner tending to clear confusion instead of making it worse confounded.³³

Crane's far more extensive and elaborate reply occupies eighteen

long and abstract paragraphs, suggesting:

My poem may be elliptical and actually obscure in the ordering of its content, but in your criticism of this very possible deficiency you have stated your objections in terms that allow me, at least for the moment, the privilege of claiming your ideas and ideals as theoretically, at least, quite outside the issues of my own aspirations. To put it more plainly, as a poet I may very possibly be more interested in the so-called illogical impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness (and their combinations and interplay in metaphor on this basis) than I am interested in the preservation of their logically rigid significations at the cost of limiting my subject matter and perceptions involved in the poem.³⁴

Monroe responded to him in five crisp paragraphs, observing:

No doubt our theories and ideals in the art differ more or less fundamentally, yet I would not deny to the poet the right to take certain of the liberties you claim. I think he can take as many as he succeeds with without mystifying his particular audience; for mystery is good, but not mystification.³⁵

Finally, she noted in a concluding note addressing *Poetry's* readers, "The editor would rather not have the last word, but as Mr. Crane contributes no further to the discussion, we must pass it on to our readers."³⁶

Not only the inclusion of their written debate, but also the positioning of the poem and the prose commentary, in primary and subordinate locales, respectively, suggests a complex interplay of editorial and literary motives, motives often ignored or neglected by critics and poets in years to come. Monroe's positioning of poem and commentary serves to jar fundamentally the expected context for reading poetry in periodicals. The reasons why it jars: conventionally, publication of a poem in a magazine heralds arrival, positively. But in this case, an editor allows herself to engage in a bout of adversaries more typically conducted behind closed doors—and to it she invites spectators. Indeed, Monroe questions the very poem she has chosen to publish in her magazine, and by implication she questions her decision to publish it. By breaking with precedent in challenging her own editorial authority, she entices others to do the same. Surely she invites

readers to break with other precedents, and to ask other questions of poetry, also. Her point is to question, openly; to educate; and to learn. Pound's entreaty to her, when she had first announced to him her intention to establish a magazine of poetry, may still have been resounding in Monroe's ear, fourteen years after: "Can you *teach* the American poet that poetry is an art, an art with a technique, with media, an art that must be in constant flux, a constant change of manner, if it is to live? Can you *teach* him. [...]" [*italics mine*]³⁷ She was bound to teach, and hoped to learn.

Regardless, her "discussion" with Hart Crane was anything but an inquisition. Had Monroe hankered for one, she could have gone to pains, editorially, to make it happen. For example, she could have penned a lengthy attack on the poem, rather than merely questioning it, or she could have found editorial means of minimizing Crane's response to her questions. In the service of inquisition, she could have presented poem and commentary more prominently together, one directly after the other, sharing virtually the same space in a self-contained section within the magazine. She could even have placed the poem with the commentary first in the issue's contents. Instead, she placed the poem near other poems by other poets on page 25, and settled the editorial exchange with Crane on pages 34 through 41, following articles by other authors and preceding the book reviews that by tradition closed the issue. Her placement allowed readers to find the poem, and perhaps to read on further until discovering, by chance, the commentary on it.

By placing the commentary in the back, the editor all but insured that it would not be read alone, without the poem. Therefore, the commentary probably couldn't discourage readers from reading "At Melville's Tomb." For Monroe, the debate over the poem evidently took second place to the poem. Thanks to her, readers in 1926 could read Crane's poem without entering the debate; they might read the poem but never encounter the discussion, and thus decide the poem's merits by themselves.

Nonetheless, the poem, written in sixteen lines, took up much less space than the debate. Thus the commentary, in its own way, might appear unmissable—monumental, even—once noted by a reader who had passed on to the closing pages of *Poetry*. By contrast, in terms of that sheer bulk, the poem could appear dwarfed. Monroe might have

chosen to postpone the commentary to a future issue if she had considered it largely incidental to the poem. The fact that she spent a significant portion of her limited editorial space on her two short letters to Crane and on his much longer letter to herself suggests an editorial conviction in opening up debate to a larger public, though not to a public beyond the reach of *Poetry's* immediate audience; to that degree, sensationalism was not Monroe's motive.

It seems important to remember that Monroe was under no obligation to publish Crane, nor need she have published that poem in particular. As the magazine's founding editor, she made final editorial choices. (She went on to publish more poetry by Crane, after "At Melville's Tomb.") Moreover, she could have insisted on editorial changes in his poem as the condition for its publication; in many cases, with many other writers, she did no less. Yet Monroe declined to impose her will in those ways on Crane. Instead, at her wish, the poem duly appeared in the magazine, and it appeared at a significant distance from the disputatious correspondence.

Even before his extensive conversation with Monroe about "At Melville's Tomb," the demands of editors were not unknown to Crane, and his complaints about editing were not unknown to them. Indeed, when considering "At Melville's Tomb" earlier for *The Dial*, Marianne Moore had insisted on deleting the fourth stanza, while inviting Crane to consider sending the poem to another magazine if Moore's request struck him as objectionable. It did strike him in that way, although on another occasion he submitted to her editing for the sake of receiving a fee of twenty dollars.

A few years before her death, Monroe received a letter from Pound containing his valedictory decree on editing: "Good editing, as I see it, means the most effective presentation of the best of whatever is at hand."³⁸ The "presentation" of the troublesome Crane poem seemed to be uppermost on Monroe's mind.

He Said

As she informed *Poetry's* public, which included Crane, in their exchange: "The editor would rather not have the last word, but as Mr. Crane contributes no further to the discussion, we must pass it on to our readers."³⁹ Yet in fact, Crane labored mightily, elsewhere, to "have

the last word" in hate mail discussing her, though not sent to Monroe. While he was busying himself with a formal reply to his nettlesome editor, one calculated to carry the ring of stoic artistic integrity, Crane was also sounding off, *sub rosa*, to a few of his sidekicks and allies, mustering an unofficial effort to intensify and broaden his rejection of her. Although Monroe may have been seen as almost a peer by his cronies, at least nominally, Crane was their active, undisputed cohort, writing to them in an effort to rally support for himself and to recruit them for further attacks on "Aunt Harriet," as she was called by him.⁴⁰

On September 28, 1926, Crane wrote to the critic Kenneth Burke:

I'm not modest in saying that I think I come off very well with the woozy old spinster[....]If you have a thought militant enough to demand registration, on one side or t'other,—why don't you mask it in perfectly decent terminology and frighten the dear old wench[....][*italics mine*]⁴¹

As the appointed publicist of himself and his poetry, in what must have struck him as an odious career emergency, Crane evidently sought to swell his gang of one. He recognized the advantages of ushering Burke to his side. Perhaps less vulnerable to the charge of lugging a special interest into battle, a critic such as Burke might wage war more credibly than a fellow poet could. A critic might come to genuine aid of a poet, if he were to "mask" his "thought" in "perfectly decent terminology," as Crane advised.

Despite Crane's seeming confidence in recruiting, a tension rises from his letter to Burke. The tension rises from the clash between Crane's assertion, on the one hand, of coming off "very well" in his epistolary struggle with Monroe, and from his simultaneous effort, on the other hand, to downplay, debunk, and even deride the whole "squabble," as if he had not come off well at all, and could not banish his chagrin. "I'm[...]*making the usual fool of myself*," he declared.⁴²

To don the mask of critic, writing hate mail, also may have struck him as false. For, regardless of his sidelong taunts, Crane's ambivalence about the Monroe debate did show some respect for the seriousness of the issues raised. As he said to Burke, "The problem under the gavel is vital in modern art."⁴³ If it were not, then why bother to beat Monroe the editor back, at all? While Crane contested her with a poet's will, he resented doing it, too, because he felt that he had no choice. Why

should a poet have to enter that fray, when the better fray of writing new poems could have summoned him? Because, as he may have suspected, when the gavel “fell,” we would hear it.

He may not have supposed that an editor, traditionally silent, would prove audible over the long span. Yet, even now, she can be heard. And so, it seems advisable to compare more closely Monroe's campaign with his own on behalf of “At Melville's Tomb.”

Unlike Crane, Monroe did not enlist others in support of a chosen position—hers. Unlike Crane, she did not attempt self-vindication, but an inquiry, instead. Also unlike Crane, she did not present herself as other than she really was or really meant; she wore no “mask.” Perhaps she was forthrightly candid to a fault. She never pandered to him or to their shared audience. In all of these ways, and in others, Monroe showed a degree of independence that seemed to irk him deeply, possibly because it was not so very different in nature or impulse from the independence of the poet himself, when writing his poems. (In fact, Monroe was a poet, albeit a “minor” one.⁴⁴) Her independence affronted him because he had assumed that he owned independence as a poet's prerogative. Her editorial creativity served to rival his poetic ingenuity. Their division of labor, between editor and poet, was unexpectedly called into question by the shared magnitude of their imaginative ambition. This left Crane feeling thoroughly uneasy.

While he perceived Monroe as a small-minded attacker of integral poetic values—and of himself—this was far from the role she had decided to assume. But it was simpler, perhaps, for him to think of her as he did. For then he wouldn't have to take her at her word. He wouldn't need to concede anything to her. He could scoff at an inferior, or toady trickily to her, without losing face.

The complexity of Monroe's probable motives passed him by completely, in part because Crane was preoccupied with an urgent need to defend his creed and his career in public. Perhaps most bizarre, he never paused to ponder her desire to publish the poem in the first place. In his mind, was she obliged to do so? Could there have been no other worthy editorial decision? Was his position—and was his poetry—the only kind possible? To Crane, was he infallible? Was his poem?

Owning Poetry

If the editor preferred not to have “the last word” during their editorial exchange in the pages of *Poetry*, that was because she wrote in deference to the poet, whose words had given her reason to write in the first place. (Likewise, Monroe's words had given Crane reason to write his prose reply to her. Some thanks are owed to an editor for provoking him to reject her.) Monroe only published “At Melville's Tomb.” She didn't claim to own it. Only the poet could do that.

Still, if Crane were to “own” not just the poem but also the version of poetic virtue ascribed by him to it, then his methods might have seemed to serve him well, in his reply to her: he could reject her creed; explain his own; explain his poem, thus answering some of her questions; ally himself protectively with elder master poets and critics who lay beyond her reach, presumably, if not beyond his; disingenuously “apologize” for any of his possible failings or excesses; claim the high ground; exclude her from it.

Crane did all of these things in his rebuttal of what he regarded as her gratuitous onslaught. The inconsistencies apparent in his shifting critical strategies suggest, as does “At Melville's Tomb” itself, the innately paradoxical mind of this poet. To announce in his rebuttal of Monroe that “I don't wish to enter here a defense of the particular symbols employed in my own poem,” and then to do exactly that, may seem only a minor example of his characteristically unconscious self-contradictions.⁴⁵ But to assert that “pure sensibility” can take full responsibility for the “apparent illogic” guiding a poem's mixed (or unmixed) metaphors is another case, for Crane never bothered in his reply to define or offer details of what he meant by such a “sensibility.”⁴⁶ Left marooned on the page, the phrase “pure sensibility” is one to which he clung in order to justify himself and to oust her from his elected coterie of ranking poets and critics.

More inconsistencies hover in his epistolary essay. When Crane cited but two metaphors from the poetry of William Blake and T. S. Eliot to verify and vindicate his belief that ellipticality is not a bad quality in a poem, he ignored—blindly, or knowingly—the stated foundation of Monroe's objections to his own use of metaphor, which was for her the main issue. Whether clear, unclear, or elliptical, one metaphor at a time did not interest Monroe. What perturbed her about

his poem was its virtual governance by a succession of mixed metaphors that in her view served to constrict it, because they diverted the poem's energy—and the reader's attention—from the emotional truth of the poem to its formal methods, namely that of “telescop[ing] three or four images together by mental leaps.”⁴⁷ The impact of Crane's strategy upon Monroe felt, as she conceded, quite uncomfortable: “I must admit that these phrases in your poem are for me too elliptical to produce any effect but mystification (this until you explained them).”⁴⁸

Ironically, Monroe did not want to have to ask a poet to explain a poem. As a poet herself, this would have seemed intrusive: why force anyone else to do it? A poem might imply, suggest, describe, declare, et cetera; and if so, it would never need to explain itself. To that limited extent, she saw eye to eye with Crane, although he didn't realize it. He merely noticed an editor spitefully conducting an uncalled-for skirmish, uncalled-for because if she rebuffed his method, then why should she publish his poem? And if she published his poem, then why should she attack its merits? Still, what Crane and his sympathizers failed to understand about Monroe above all was her underlying motive: to educate.

To educate, in her view, meant asking questions about the confusions that beset her about the poetry. Otherwise, Monroe would not have asked those questions. But to educate also meant opening up debate to each and every bystander—to her valiant regular subscribers, her sometime browsers, and her unsung prospective readers who had not yet read a single issue of *Poetry*. What held these motley audiences together? Only Monroe, and the writing in her magazine. As she knew too well from reading and replying to the “knocks” of her incoming hate mail, almost nothing could unite her readers or their tastes, except perhaps for a tentative curiosity about what they might next find in *Poetry*.

She wouldn't second-guess them, yet by asking questions unlikely to be asked by the meek or by the elite, she could give them all something to think about. But of course, not everyone wanted to think, whether about poetry, *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe, or Hart Crane.

They Said

Unlike most poems first appearing in *Poetry*, Crane's would never

quite detach itself from the context bestowed upon it by Monroe, not from her commentary or from his own, not even when his poem and his commentary appeared separately in future books. But the critical context continued to accrue, as more of Crane's private writings gradually came to light.

As previously mentioned, Crane had bragged to Kenneth Burke in 1926 of coming “off very well with the woozy old spinster.”⁴⁹ Such remarks remained unpublished until years later, when Crane's letters were issued in book form. Perhaps partly for lack of those letters, his fate at the hands of Aunt Harriet, and the fate of his poem, too, have tended to lead both the writer and the writing toward the lustrous glory earned by heroic American male martyrdom. As Allen Tate saluted him in 1927, “If [Crane] is not our twentieth-century poet as hero, I do not know where else to look for him.”⁵⁰

It is also true that some critics have dismissed Crane consistently, over the years, as a flawed yet brave transgressor for what the Crane enthusiast Waldo Frank called, in 1933, Crane's characteristic “obscurity,”⁵¹ caused in part by the dense array of what Monroe had already termed his “champion mixed metaphors.” But more critics have reckoned Crane to be a peculiarly heroic American original, writing in the footsteps of Walt Whitman, who rightly would not take lightly what Herbert Leibowitz disdained, in 1968, as Monroe's “literal-minded” complaints.⁵² By contrast, in 1975, the scholar Richard Strier characterized Monroe's approach to Crane's poem as “rather Ransome-like.”⁵³ Electing to speak for both the majority and the minority of Crane's critics over the long span, the Crane scholar Langdon Hammer noted in 1993, “The ambition and originality of Crane's poetry have never been in doubt, for either its admirers or its detractors.”⁵⁴

Even so, the critics of Crane have occasionally won critics of their own. As Alfred Kreymsbourg commented in 1929, Crane's “critics and propagandists, anxious to interpret the difficulties and remove all obstacles between the poet and a prospective audience, have done a number of sound things and a number of silly. I confess I used to find the hosannahs distasteful; they distracted the ear from the intrinsic merits of Crane's poetry,” i.e., its very difficulty.⁵⁵ When the poet Genevieve Taggard reviewed Crane's debut book, *White Buildings*—which contained “At Melville's Tomb”—for the *New York Herald Tribune* on May 29, 1927, Taggard criticized laudatory critics such as Frank and

Tate, whom she painted adversely as “intellectuals,” for “making Mr. Crane’s poetry a cult, exclusive and cryptic.”⁵⁶ She wrote, “I like Crane’s poetry better than the things claimed for it; it is possible that Mr. Crane needs rescuing from his admirers.”⁵⁷

Despite her assertion, in 1942 Horace Gregory observed:

Although *White Buildings* (1926), Crane’s first book, did not receive the praise from its reviewers that had been lavished by [Allen] Tate in his introduction to the volume, it established him among those who were willing to read poetry with balanced respect and enthusiasm.⁵⁸

Gregory also noted, “In America Crane’s reputation was at its height in 1933, the year that *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane* appeared, edited by Waldo Frank [...] Of all Crane’s critics who knew him personally Frank was the most officious and successful in attracting public recognition.”⁵⁹

Gregory believed that in *White Buildings* “eight poems [...] may be read today with the same delight of perceiving actual poetry and rediscovering individual expression that they conveyed nearly twenty years ago.”⁶⁰ Of those eight, “At Melville’s Tomb” was singled out by Gregory as one of only four that “have an air of authority that we define as ‘timeless.’”⁶¹ Interestingly, Gregory’s essay about Harriet Monroe in the same volume, *A History of American Poetry, 1900-1940*, took pains to emphasize her primary role in leading a national American “poetic renaissance.”⁶² (The well-known Crane-Monroe dispute went unmentioned by him.) In Britain, as Gregory saw it, “Crane’s poetry has been belatedly discovered by younger writers, and today its influence has taken root in the poetry of those who represent a neoromantic school.”⁶³

Max Eastman was among those American naysayers who felt, as late as 1969, that

If you pick up a book by Hart Crane [...] I think the first feeling you will have is that the author isn’t telling you anything. It may seem as if he isn’t telling you anything because he doesn’t know anything. Or it may seem that he knows something all right, but he won’t tell. In any case he is uncommunicative. He is unfriendly. He seems to be playing by himself, and offering you somewhat incidentally the opportu-

nity to look on.⁶⁴

Eastman, as it happened, had been a friend of Crane’s. About “At Melville’s Tomb” he remarked:

The poem seems simple enough and very sincere and also in a way beautiful. But does it not tantalize you with a certain reticence? To me it is one of the most exasperating of attractive things.⁶⁵

Eastman found himself exasperated despite the fact that, in their influential anthology and teaching guide, *Understanding Poetry* (1938), Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren had already argued, on behalf of “At Melville’s Tomb,” that “[t]he general meaning of the poem is easy enough. The poet says that the spirit of the writer whose imagination was so vividly engaged by the sea, and who saw such grandeur in man’s struggle with it, though his body might be buried on land, would find its real abiding place in the sea.”⁶⁶ However, even Brooks and Warren noted the poem’s “very rich and perhaps tangled imagery.”⁶⁷

Crane’s mixed reviews may suggest accurately and honestly the range of response, over time, to the risky business of the poet’s “absolutist” originality, to borrow an adjective from Crane.⁶⁸ For instance, in Louis Untermeyer’s *Lives of the Poets: The Story of One Thousand Years of English and American Poetry* (1959), Untermeyer both praised and scolded Crane. “One of the most hazardous efforts to fuse outer complexity and inner chaos was made by Hart Crane,” wrote the critic.⁶⁹ “He perfected a kind of compressed metaphor in which comparisons were stripped to their skeletal ideas.”⁷⁰ Yet, in so doing, “Crane’s lack of discipline colors (or discolors) his poetry. Discarding the usual progress of thought, he piled up emotional and pictorial effects. One image set off another until *an entire chain of metaphors was ignited*” [italics mine].⁷¹ Aunt Harriet, where are you?

Only a distinct minority of critics have seemed to value the Crane-Monroe debate on its own terms. Jacob Isaacs, who did so, offered a skeptical perspective on modernism’s main trends. In a book of 1952 that reconsidered poetic modernism and its discontents, Isaacs proclaimed, with reference to poets such as Crane, and to the Crane-Monroe incident:

The trouble with our age is that it is a morbidly self-conscious age. We want to know what we are doing while we are doing it. We shout about the unconscious, but we do not trust it. We want to have it both ways. The poet should trust his unconscious, whether he afterwards conducts a court-martial on its activities or not.⁷²

Isaacs found Crane's reply to Monroe worthy of reflection as an exploration of poetic self-consciousness. However, the poem itself could not be "put forward as one of his best."⁷³ To Isaacs, the poem was merely "interesting,"⁷⁴ mostly because of what Crane "said about it" to his editor.⁷⁵ Observed Isaacs, "It is not often that the poet tells us in detail what he means, or meant, at least not often publicly."⁷⁶ Moreover, in the Crane-Monroe correspondence, believed Isaacs, Crane went so far as to reveal "his modern mechanism."⁷⁷

Continued Isaacs, "I wish this kind of comment were more frequent and more accessible in this country. We want more inside information, even if the poet sometimes proves that our guess is as good as his."⁷⁸ Despite his characterization of the Crane "court-martial," Isaacs also defended Monroe:

The editor who had first printed the poem was puzzled, and wrote to the poet for enlightenment, as we would often like to do.⁷⁹

Along the way, Isaacs also added his own provisional reply to Monroe's questions posed to Crane. The answer comes across now as belatedly intelligent—and charmingly modest. Max Eastman would have appreciated it.

Remember the subject, Herman Melville, the author of *Moby-Dick*, remember the turmoil the reading of *Moby-Dick* produces, even in an ordinary mind, remember how it led D. H. Lawrence into nightmare speculations, and then ask if it is inappropriate for the poet to take his imagery from the tortured mysteries of the sea.⁸⁰

Omitting Prose

When trying to understand the controversies over Crane's poem or

the Crane-Monroe commentary on it, after decades of critical swash-buckling, we might return to certain salient facts of the editorial history.

For one, in the earliest biography of Crane to receive consistent praise—*Hart Crane* by Philip Horton, published in 1937—an appendix collects Crane's letter to Monroe, here titled "From Mr. Crane to the Editor [Harriet Monroe]," but does not include Monroe's letters to him or any discussion of the context for Crane's letter, while also collecting two letters from Crane to others, and his essay, "General Aims and Theories." The implications, for a reader: Crane indubitably wrote exclusively from pure and noble motives, and these are likely to aid in ensuring his literary immortality as a vaunted American hero. Any editor's role in the above would appear to be negligible.

Also consider the 1968 Oxford University Press edition of *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, edited by Brom Weber, whose selected prose includes Crane's letter to Monroe, here titled "A Letter to Harriet Monroe," but does not include Monroe's letters to him. The implications, for a reader: as with the Horton volume, Crane emerges clearly as a vaunted hero. However, the more copious selection of prose in the Weber volume serves to emphasize still further the intensity of Crane's heroically pure prose ventures.

As a third example, think of Langdon Hammer's more recent edition of Crane's selected letters, published in 1997 by Four Walls Eight Windows. Crane's letter to Monroe is included in full, but hers to him are presented in edited form, omitting her reluctant yet revealing final say on the dispute: "The editor would rather not have the last word, but as Mr. Crane contributes no further to the discussion, we must pass it on to our readers." The implications, for a reader: Crane seems a martyred American hero, Monroe a likely martinet.

Editorial practice, conducted in the posthumous wake of the poet and his editor, with its rites of omission or deception, has in Crane v. Monroe served no one well enough: not the poet, not the editor, and not the reader.

Rewriting Crane

In the complicated social lives of Crane and Monroe's intertwined yet obfuscated texts, the most paradoxical and extreme critical intercession of them all cannot fail to hold the eye. In her now little-known

New York Herald Tribune review of Crane's *White Buildings*, a review published on May 29, 1927, the American poet Genevieve Taggard focused with perverse, visionary vim upon the fate of four Hart Crane quatrains in particular.

I have followed [Crane's] work for several years and read, besides, his controversy with Harriet Monroe over a poem included in this volume, "At Melville's Tomb," where Mr. Crane made the mistake of explaining in prose what his verse was trying to do. However sincere his explanation, it was a mistake to make it. No poem should require such a defense. And although I got more out of the poem, and glimpsed for the thousandth of a second several times, what the poem's beauty was, I was able after reading to see that he had not done on the page of the poem what he had said he had done in the prose controversy. If Crane had stuck to his guns and refused to aid his reader, his reader in time might have aided him by inventing a real poem to uphold this overtone.⁸¹

The unabashed Taggard next unveiled her own "attempt at a rainbow of overtone," as she put it, to "uphold" his.⁸² That is, she rewrote Crane's poem, for the benefit of New York City readers, of a Sunday afternoon.

"At Melville's Tomb"

Often beneath the wave, wide from
this ledge,
The dice of drowned men's bones
he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he
watched
Beat on the dusty shore and were
obscured.
And wrecks passed without sound
of bells,
The calyx of death's bounty giving
back
A scattered chapter, livid hiero-
glyph

The portent wound in corridors of
shells.

Then in the circuit calm of one vast
coil,
Its lashings charmed and malice
reconciled,
Frosted eyes there were that lifted
altars,
And silent answers crept across the
stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant con-
trive
No farther tides [...] High in
the azure steeps
Monody shall not wake the mar-
iner.
The fabulous shadow only the sea
keeps.⁸³

Crane's original poem read:

"At Melville's Tomb"

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,
The calyx of death's bounty giving back
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,
The portent wound in corridors of shells.
Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,
Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,
Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars;
And silent answers crept across the stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive
 No farther tides [...] High in the azure steeps
 Monody shall not wake the mariner.
 This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.⁸⁴

Crane is not on record as having read, remarked upon, or rejected Taggard's published rewriting of his poem, although he certainly could have read it and remarked, and rejected. Or did his friends of the time? His foes? What did Aunt Harriet think of it?

Nor does the long critical literature on Crane seem to take note of the sympathetic, respectfully insolent Taggard's novel intervention in the fairly tumultuous life of this poem. She managed to reject his editor, while also making full use of Monroe's editing. Likewise, Taggard both affirmed and rejected Crane, the poet and avenging critic.

The reactions of ordinary New York City newspaper browsers of the *Tribune's* motley Sunday book-review section are also unknown. Did they sidle away from scanning the paper's celebration of William Blake, on page one, to squint instead at Taggard's poetic liberties, or to enter an internecine literary brawl?

Notes

1. From letter of Dennis Murphy to *Poetry* magazine, 1936. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box IV, Folder 12.
2. From letter of Richard Eberhart to Morton Dauwen Zabel, editor of *Poetry* magazine, 1936. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box IV, Folder 12.
3. Letter of Walter Surrey to Harriet Monroe, undated. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box 2, Folder 4.
4. Prospectus containing press quotations about *Poetry* magazine, undated. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box 9, Folder 2.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Letter of Walter Taylor Sumner to Harriet Monroe, September 14, 1914. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box 2, Folder 4.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Letter of Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe, undated. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box 7, Folder 9.
9. Letter of S. R. Floraunce to Harriet Monroe, August 9, 1915. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box 2, Folder 2.
10. Ellen Williams, *Harriet Monroe and the Poetry Renaissance: The First Ten Years of Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 5.
11. *Ibid.*, 6.
12. Harriet Monroe, *A Poet's Life: Seventy Years in a Changing World* (New York: MacMillan, 1938), 268.

13. *Ibid.*, 212.
14. *Ibid.*, 121.
15. Letter of Wallace Stevens to Harriet Monroe, undated. Harriet Monroe/Poetry papers. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Box 23, Folder 1.
16. Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, 98.
17. *Ibid.*, 268.
18. Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 276.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 183.
21. *Ibid.*, 309.
22. *Ibid.*, 276.
23. Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, 272.
24. John Timberman Newcomb, "Poetry's Opening Door: Harriet Monroe and American Modernism," *American Periodicals*, Vol. 15, No. 1. (2005), 7.
25. *Ibid.*, 8.
26. Kenneth Rexroth, *The Rexroth Reader* (London, 1941), 120-121.
27. Unpublished interview with Herbert Leibowitz by Molly McQuade, 2004, New York City.
28. Jayne Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: "Little" Magazines and Literary History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 25-26.
29. Kennedy, *The Lords of Misrule*, 80.
30. Newcomb, "Poetry's Opening Door: Harriet Monroe and American Modernism," 7.
31. Hart Crane, "At Melville's Tomb," *Poetry*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (October 1926), 25.
32. Hart Crane and Harriet Monroe, "A Discussion with Hart Crane," *Poetry*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (October 1926), 34-41.
33. *Ibid.*, 35.
34. *Ibid.*, 35-36.
35. *Ibid.*, 40.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound*, 43.
38. *Ibid.*, 312.
39. Crane and Monroe, "A Discussion with Hart Crane," 41.
40. Hart Crane, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, edited by Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), 83.
41. *Ibid.*, 276.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. Ann Massa, "'The Columbian Ode' and Poetry, A Magazine of Verse: Harriet Monroe's Entrepreneurial Triumphs," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (April 1986), 52.
45. Crane and Monroe, "A Discussion with Hart Crane," 37.
46. *Ibid.*, 36.
47. *Ibid.*, 40.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Crane, *O My Land, My Friends*, 276.
50. Allen Tate, *The Forlorn Dilemma* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), 156.
51. Waldo Frank, *In the American Jungle* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937), 97.
52. Herbert Leibowitz, *Hart Crane: An Introduction to the Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 133.
53. Richard Strier, "The Poetics of Surrender," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Autumn

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54. Langdon Hammer, *Janus-Faced Modernism: Hart Crane and Allen Tate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), xiv.

55. Alfred Kreyenbourg, *Our Singing Strength: An Outline of American Poetry (1920-1930)* (New York: Coward-McGann, 1929), 603.

56. Genevieve Taggard, "An Imagist in Amber," *New York Herald Tribune Books*, May 29, 1927, section 6, 4.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska, *A History of American Poetry 1900-1940* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1941), 472.

59. *Ibid.*, 480.

60. *Ibid.*, 472.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, 141.

63. *Ibid.*, 480.

64. Max Eastman, *The Literary Mind* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1931), 57.

65. *Ibid.*, 94.

66. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1938), 333.

67. *Ibid.*, 362.

68. Leibowitz, *Hart Crane*, 126.

69. Louis Untermeyer, *Lives of the Poets: The Story of One Thousand Years of English and American Poetry* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959), 713.

70. *Ibid.*, 711.

71. *Ibid.*, 713.

72. Jacob Isaacs, *The Background of Modern Poetry* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1955), 84.

73. *Ibid.*, 81.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*, 80.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*, 83.

79. *Ibid.*, 84.

80. *Ibid.*, 81.

81. Taggard, "An Imagist in Amber," 4.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

84. Crane, "At Melville's Tomb," 25.

Selling Tituba: The Packaging of Race, Class, and Gender

Maha Marouan

Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba, sorcière...Noire de Salem* (1986) is a fictional account of the slave Tituba, who was accused and tried for witchcraft during the famous Salem witch trials of 1692. Playing a central role in the Salem witch trials, she was the first to declare her involvement in witchcraft practices in the community; her confession launched one of the worst witch cases in early American history. However, despite the large quantity of literature produced on the witches of Salem, Tituba's story remains largely absent from historical and literary records—a point which supplied much of Condé's motivation for crafting the novel.

Tituba's historical confession provides the factual ground for Condé's project. In her trial Tituba tells an extraordinary story of consorting with the devil; she describes a coven in Boston and talks about witches flying on broomsticks, manipulating her audience by consciously using iconography widely familiar to the seventeenth-century Puritan imagination. Tituba's extraordinary testimony, which turned her from a scapegoat to a central figure in the expanding prosecution in Salem, allows Condé to examine the politics of race, class and gender involved in Tituba's testimony. Most importantly, Condé's use of an autobiographical narrative made through a fictionalized account of Tituba's personal confession offers a counter-story to her historical testimony, and allows for an examination of the politics of ethnicity implicated in self-referential genres by black women writers. Through Tituba's confessions, Condé interrogates the representation of ethnicity in self-referential genres in contemporary writings, and plays on the banal preconceived views of the ethnic subject that those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture are expected to assimilate to and exhibit in their writings. Thus, while on

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the surface Tituba seems to be exhibiting her Otherness for her Western audience, a detailed reading of the text shows that Tituba resists this stereotyped view of herself as the Other.

To highlight the novel's resistance to performing ethnicity, one might usefully consider Rey Chow's critique, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which explores the politics of cross-ethnic representation. Chow discusses the turn towards the ethnic self as a form of production. The continuous staging of the ethnic self in contemporary cultural politics, according to Chow, takes the form of confessions through self-referential genres such as autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and journals. She argues that the tendency towards self-referential genres indicates the change in the ethics of representation. Self-referentiality is seen as a way out of the problems associated with representing others or "speaking for" them. Thus, the turn towards the self, according to Chow, becomes the only "appropriate" form of representation.¹ Yet, the turn towards the self as the only legitimate form of representation, Chow argues, is highly problematic, because: "the self and the so-called freedom that comes with it, a freedom that is always imagined as freedom from power and from domination, are, strictly speaking, effects of power."² Thus, the insistence on self-referential genres as liberatory needs to be questioned and the phenomenon of ethnic minorities turning to self-referentiality needs to be seen and understood within these power relations. Tituba's historical confession supplies the factual ground for Condé's exploration of the power dynamics involved in self-representation, and questioning of the mechanisms by which we read others through stereotyping. Tituba manipulates the law and the judges in her trial. She responds positively to the accusations against her. Her confession expresses her savvy acculturation to Puritan thought, and how she uses the Puritan imagination to manipulate her audience. However, the credibility of Tituba's testimony rests on her status as an outsider to Puritan culture.³ Like Tituba, Condé also manipulates her readers by establishing in the preface an intimate relationship between her and Tituba. She states: "Tituba et moi, avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées a personne"; "Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else."⁴ Here Condé becomes Tituba's

confidante and the only one who knows Tituba's "true" story.

That Condé, a native of Guadeloupe (which is still a department of France) is writing this story in French, and publishing it in France, for a French audience, indicates an existing colonial relationship.⁵ Even the origins of the novel are intriguing in this regard, for Condé claims to have first conceived the novel when asked by Simone Gallimard, the French publisher and director of Mercure de France to write a story about a woman from the Caribbean. Arguably, in the resulting text Condé is staging for Mme. Gallimard and for French white middle-class liberal readership a model of ethnicity they expect. Again, similar to Tituba, Condé's status as both an outsider and insider to the French culture allows her strategically to undercut notions of identity and otherness,

Following its initial publication in French in 1986, Condé's novel was translated into English in 1992 as *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. This essay examines the novel's packaging in both the French and the English versions, shows how they target specific gendered and racial audiences through their respective layouts, and explores the way in which Tituba's religious and racial identity are exploited by both versions to attract their specific targeted readerships. That is, I explore the way the French version was commodified to suit an audience of white middle-class French women, while the translation to English, released six years later, was marketed as a historical narrative, and became instantly linked to African American neo-slave narratives. Finally, I assess how these varied marketing strategies work to obscure the complexities of Condé's attempt to parody and problematize precisely the same conventional reader expectations of "women's fiction," "historical fiction," and works by women of color that have been used by publishers to market her novel.

Although Condé did not have any ideas about the topic initially when Mme. Gallimard solicited a story about a Caribbean woman, she decided to follow Gallimard's proposition after she came across Tituba's story.⁶ The novel was commodified to suit an audience of French women, and earned Condé France's *Grand Prix Littéraire de la Femme*, classifying Condé as a writer of Women's fiction.⁷ This classification proves ironic since a detailed reading exposes the novel as a parody of



Figure 1:

feminist writings, containing an abundance of clichés about women and their spirituality.

The cover of the first French edition (1986) features an illustration depicting Salem village by Pierre-Marie Valat [Figure 1]. Flames rise from among the buildings, forming an enormous dark cloud that casts a shadow over the village. This scene alludes to the witch trials of Salem, which grew into an uncontrollable craze threatening the village peace and casting a shadow over its people. The cover's layout establishes a direct connection between Condé and her heroine. The words "Moi, Tituba, Sorcière" in large white print are framed between Condé's name and the description "Noire de Salem" in smaller orange print. Manzor-Coats argues that this visual layout, which connects Condé to the subtitle "Noire de Salem," anticipates the textual strategy Condé uses in the epigraph where an "intimacy" between Condé and Tituba is established. "Tituba et moi, avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées à personne"; "Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told

me things she had confided to nobody else."⁸ The cover for this edition, unlike later editions, provides the reader with the novel's genre: "Histoire romanesque" (Romantic Story/ Romance) situating the novel within a feminine tradition.

The back cover maintains the same visual layout of the title and Condé's name, except that the colors are different. The opening sentence on the back cover quotes from the novel's first paragraph narrating Tituba's mother's rape. This reference to rape, which symbolizes women's disempowerment in a patriarchal society, signals an audience concerned with the oppression of women. This edition thus tries to cultivate sympathy for Tituba's story as a woman's story. The following paragraph is a commentary making an analogy between Condé's "sorcière noire," and "les sorcières blanches, celles qui furent pendues et qui inspirèrent *Les sorcières de Salem*, d'Arthur Miller"; (The white witches, the ones who were hanged, and inspired Arthur Miller's *Witches of Salem*). Drawing this parallel between Condé and Miller's fictive accounts of the Salem witch trials, the cover cleverly forms a link with American literature. The title's descriptive "Noire de Salem" (which later editions drop) works to form this connection and to attract the reader's attention to an American theme. In her interview with Ann Scarboro—who also writes an Afterword to the English version of Condé's novel—Condé contends that she wanted to call the novel "simply *I, Tituba* but the publishers said that was a bit laconic as a title and added "*Black Witch of Salem*."⁹ This detail sheds light on how marketing strategies work to shape the novel's packaging. The back cover's last comment significantly also makes the link between *Moi, Tituba, sorcière... Noire de Salem* and Condé's previous work, *Ségou*, which had been favourably received in France: "De la saga africaine de *Ségou*, Maryse Condé est allée vers une chronique plus intimiste, une "histoire romanesque" qui reprend cependant les grands thèmes traités dans ses livres précédents: *Les murailles de la terre* et *La terre en miette* (*Ségou* I et II)," (From the African saga of *Ségou*, Condé moved to a more intimate chronicle, a "romance," which again deals with the major themes Condé has explored in her previous work, *Segou* I and II). Here, the marketing strategies attract a female audience by stressing the intimacy of Condé's account, but without undermining its historical aspect. The paragraph conveys the impression that while *Moi, Tituba, sorcière... Noire de Salem* explores the same historical top-

ics or “grands thèmes” that *Ségou* treats, it is a “plus intimiste” chronicle. Again, the intimacy of Condé’s account is conveyed primarily through its autobiographical nature, where Tituba seems to be directly speaking/confessing to the reader. The novel’s genre is exploited here, giving the impression that Condé’s account fits within the conventional strand of autobiographical writings by women of color, where the Protagonist appears to exhibit herself through clichéd images of ethnic Otherness—i.e. a magical exotic being organically connected to her ancestral spirits. Actually, Condé’s literary project aims to parody and subvert these clichés.

The two 1988 editions published by Mercure de France in the Folio series remove the novel from its historical context. The subtitle “Noire de Salem” is omitted and replaced by an ellipsis. The assertion of the novel’s genre “Histoire remonesque” is also dropped. Manzor-Coats argues that because Condé obtained *Le Grand Prix Littéraire de la Femme* for her novel in 1987, the novel was already secure within the category of Women’s Fiction by the time these subsequent editions appeared, which explains the omission of the novel’s genre.¹⁰ The illustrations on the front covers as well as the plot summary in the Folio series back covers demonstrate how these editions play on the politics of ethnicity, supporting a gendered and exoticized reading of the text, and how this process is paralleled by a de-emphasizing of the novel’s historical themes.

The front cover of one edition of the Folio series depicts a beautiful and enigmatic black woman [Figure 2]. Her half-frizzy hair and brown skin suggest racially mixed origins. She is standing alone in the darkness with a determined look in her eyes, completely covered in black. She holds tightly to what looks like a stick decorated with a snake. This is a clear suggestion of a traditional spiritual and medical healer. Moreover, Tituba is standing in the woods with shadows of trees behind her. In the background, the vivid orange sunset fades into darkness. The portrait of Tituba dominates. The vivid orange stands in contrast with her dark silhouette. The shadows of trees behind her enhance her enigmatic and exotic nature: the snake, the wild hair, Tituba standing alone in the forest in the dark—all hint at Tituba’s dangerous nature, and conjures the stereotypical imagery of Voodoo. Tituba is clearly a Voodoo priestess—which again suggests a connection to Miller’s portrayal of Tituba in *The Crucible*. Text on the back cover states:



Figure 2:

Fille de l’esclave Abena, violée par un marin anglais a bord d’un vaisseau negrier, Tituba, née a la Barbade, est initiée aux pouvoirs surnaturels par Man Yaya[...]Maryse Condé la réhabilite, l’arrache a cet oubli auquel elle avait été condamnée et, pour finir, la ramène a son pays natal, la Barbade au temps des Nègres marrons et des premières révoltes d’esclaves.; (Born in Barbados, Tituba, the daughter of the slave Abena, had been raped by an English sailor on the slave ship and initiated into supernatural powers by Man Yaya. Maryse Condé saved her from the oblivion into which she had been doomed and, eventually, brought her back to her homeland, Barbados during the time of the maroons and the first slave revolts).

This portrayal of Tituba as possessing supernatural powers fits clichéd writings about women’s empowerment through spirituality and connection to the occult. Tituba’s possible involvement in the slave revolt also suggests her heroism. Given its pairing of themes of female empowerment with imagery suggestive of exoticized racial Otherness, this edition’s packaging seems engineered to attract a specifically white female audience. It provides a sharp contrast with the plot summary

in the first edition:

Ainsi commence le roman que Maryse Condé a consacré à Tituba, fille d'esclave, qui fut l'une des sorcières de Salem. Comment Tituba acquit une réputation de sorcière à la Barbade, comment elle aima et épousa John Indien, comment ils furent tous deux vendus au pasteur Samuel Parris qui les emmena à Boston puis dans le village de Salem. C'est là, dans cette société puritaine, que l'hystérie collective provoqua la chasse aux sorcières et les procès tristement célèbre de 1692; (So begins the novel that Maryse Condé dedicated to Tituba, daughter of a slave, who was one of the witches of Salem. How Tituba won the reputation as a witch in Barbados, how she loved and married John Indian, and how they were both sold to the Reverend Samuel Parris, who took them first to Boston and then to the village of Salem. It was in this Puritan society that collective hysteria triggered the witch-hunt and the sadly notorious 1692 trial.)

Importantly, there is no mention of Tituba's supernatural powers in the first edition's plot summary, as it emphasizes more the novel's historical grounding than it appeals to racial exotica.

The other Folio edition, also published in 1988, shows an illustration on the front cover by the nineteenth-century French artist Marie-Guilhelmine Benoist, *Portrait d'une négresse* [Figure 3]. The painting shows a black woman seated, half-naked, modeling for the artist. Her right breast is exposed to the viewer. Her hair is elegantly wrapped in a white headscarf. She gathers a garment, of the same color and material, around her body, just below her breasts. The white clothing creates a contrast with the blackness of her skin. The model's dark color is also enhanced by the blank background and its clear pastel color. Tituba here is domesticated, as suggested through the tamed hair, the white garment, the pastel colors of the background and her passive demeanor, which provides a contrast with the illustration on the front cover of the previous Folio edition, where Tituba looks mysterious and dangerous and the background colors are more vivid and energetic. Despite the individualization of this 1988 Folio portrait, she remains anonymous and silenced, as indicated from the painting's title. She is merely a "négresse," without name or identity, and her passivity is highlighted by the pale color of the background. Even more, the painting establishes a parallel between Condé and the black model,



Figure 3:

who is also from Guadeloupe, and a parallel with Tituba, who is also a black woman from the Caribbean who was rendered silent and anonymous by historical records.¹¹

The novel's 1986 edition seems to target a white gendered audience, but without a de-emphasizing of the novel's historical theme, unlike the subsequent Folio series editions which downplay the novel's historical aspect. It seems that Condé's French award for the novel put a stamp on her work as Women's Fiction, limiting her target audiences, as reflected in the marketing strategies of the Folio editions, which exploit Condé's "ethnicity" and support a gendered and a rather exoticized reading of the novel. While the first French edition cover plays on the female readers' identification with Tituba's story as a woman's story, especially with the reference to Tituba's mother's rape, the later Folio editions seem to focus more on Tituba's exotic otherness. She is represented as either the dangerous voodoo priestess figure, or the passive, demure "négresse."

There is a telling juxtaposition between the French editions of *Moi, Tituba, sorcière ... Noire de Salem* and the American ones, wherein the politics of ethnicity are displayed differently. The translation to English obscures Condé's authorial motifs by heavily politicizing the novel and shaping it as a quasi-neo slave narrative. The edition by Ballantine Books (1992), for instance, includes an illustration that consumes only a quarter of the cover's space, depicting Tituba in court [Figure 4]. Tituba is wearing a long plain dress, and a headscarf; she is handcuffed, with her back to an unfriendly audience. She faces two white women, and a girl who is pointing at her accusingly. A judge with an unfriendly face is standing on a pedestal on one side of the courtroom. This illustration depicts Tituba's trial and shows her as trapped in a hostile environment. Tituba, however, does not seem to be intimidated by her audience. She stands erect, and proudly defiant. The exotic looking images of Tituba in the Folio French versions stand in striking contrast to her portrayal in this illustration.

This Ballantine Books cover focuses less on the individualized portrait of Tituba, and more on the historical moment of Tituba's trial, thereby reflecting an attempt to position the novel in a slave narrative

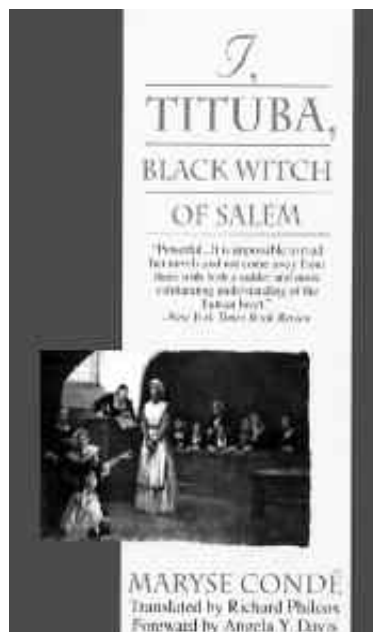


Figure 4:

tradition, a genre which is not prominent in Caribbean literary tradition, but eminent in African American literature and well known to an American readership.¹² Furthermore, Angela Davis's name is printed on the front cover, in addition to her comment extracted from the *New York Times Book Review* just below the title. The back cover shows even more clearly the novel's particular politicization. There are extracts from *The Boston Sunday Globe*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and the last blurb is by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. These extracts from respected newspapers and a comment from a highly influential African American literary critic such as Gates surely put a stamp on Condé as a political black woman writer. *The Boston Sunday Globe* states:

Stunning [...] Maryse Condé's imaginative subversion of historical records forms a critique of contemporary American society and its ingrained racism and sexism.

Significantly, the words "historical records," "racism," and "sexism," do not occur on the covers of any of the French editions. The plot summary on the back cover notably highlights Tituba's journey from the Caribbean to the United States, forming the link between Caribbean and African American diasporic histories:

From the warm shores of seventeenth-century Barbados to the harsh realities of the slave trade, and the cold customs of Puritanical New England, Tituba, the only black victim of the Salem witch trial[....]

This focus on history and the politics of racial identity contrasts with the summary on the back cover of the French versions. The book's first page contains comments about the novel from *The New York Times Book Review*, *Boston Sunday Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal* and a blurb from another well-known neo-slave narrative author and critic, Charles Johnson. Extracts from the *Boston Sunday Globe* further emphasize this connection between the African American and Caribbean shared histories of enslavement and displacement:

Condé restores a vital link in the spiritual and cultural chain that connects Caribbean and American descendants with their African ancestors, and helps create for them an alternative to the colonial and post-colonial traditions from which they have been excluded.

This focused publicity is intended for a readership that is not familiar with Caribbean literature. According to Caroline Rody, who examines writings by contemporary Caribbean writers such as Jean Rhys and Maryse Condé in *The Daughter's Return*: “Anglophone Caribbean literature is still foreign to U.S. English studies, and francophone literature all the more foreign, in the original or in translation,”¹³ which explains to a large extent the attempt to accommodate differences, and assert the novel as a quasi-historical neo-slave narrative, highlighting the characteristics that Condé’s revisionary narrative ostensibly holds in common with African American narratives. With blurbs from other well-established African American critics, the Ballantine English edition tries to portray Tituba as a noble victim of oppression, rather than as the exotic figure suggested by the French editions.

The English language edition by Caraf Books (1992) depicts on its front cover a black woman with a dull and solemn face [Figure 5]. Her African features are more pronounced than those of the exotic Tituba with mixed race features who is depicted in the covers of the French Folio series. The face is seen through what seems to be a fence, which makes it quite difficult to detect her gaze. The variations of red and orange in the background reinforce both the intense and the somber expression on the woman’s face. The exotic Tituba of the French covers is replaced by an intense looking woman for a U.S. readership. In this way, the Caraf cover seems to be targeting a more political and serious audience than the one targeted by the French versions.¹⁴ The first part of the title “I, Tituba” is quite prominent, and printed in big letters, as if to express Tituba’s protest against her omission from history.

Both the Ballantine and Caraf English editions have a foreword by Angela Davis, and an afterword by Scarborough, in addition to a glossary, revealing further the elaborate attempt to politicize the novel. It is important to note that the French versions do not contain a foreword, or an afterword, and contain only brief translations in footnotes rather than an elaborate glossary. As Ballantine and Caraf are undoubtedly well aware, the story of Davis, who was falsely accused, judged by an all-white jury, and sent to prison for sixteen months in 1970, resonates with Tituba’s story. Davis writes: “Tituba looked for her story in the history of the Salem witch trials and could not find it. I have looked for my history in the story of the colonization of this continent and have found silences, omissions, distortions, and fleeting, enigmatic

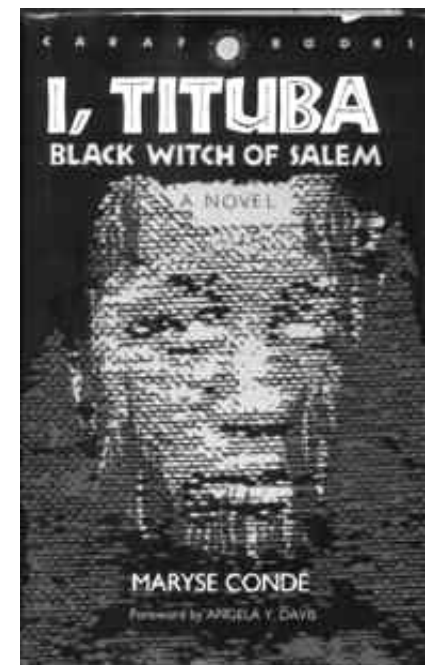


Figure 5:

insinuations” (ix). The Salem trial here becomes an allegory for Davis’s trial and for the trials of African Americans in the U.S. more broadly.

Contrary to the marketing strategies that attempt to promote *Moi, Tituba* as a conventional novel where ethnicity is being featured in a straightforward manner, a textual analysis of the novel shows a complex narrative strategy, where Condé is consciously producing familiar images in order to challenge racialized and exoticised perceptions of what is recognisably ethnic. As I noted earlier, the fact that Condé, a native of Guadeloupe (which is still a department of France) wrote this story in French, and first published it in France, for a French audience, signals an existing colonial relationship. But how does Condé address this relationship as a postcolonial author writing for a French/colonial audience?

Condé comments in numerous interviews on the limited notions

a French readership has about Caribbean writings: "In France I have a rather hard time counteracting the exotic fashion in which West Indian literature as a whole is perceived."¹⁵ While Condé writes from within the European canon and uses French, she creates a narrative mode which allows her to resist the linguistic and cultural domination of the centre. On a textual level, Condé uses a subtle parody to challenge stereotypical nuances of ethnicity. Her use of parody, which dominates the narrative, works to undercut and question received notions of identity. Condé deconstructs these notions mainly through her play on Tituba's witchcraft, which provides a framework for the interrogation of religion, race and gender. While Tituba's witchcraft functions as a symbol of women's empowerment against patriarchal culture, it also allows Condé to parody heroic myths about women of color. This tension between the commitment to creating a powerful female figure and the desire to satirize Tituba emanates from Condé's awareness of the politics of ethnicity often exhibited by black women writers in self-referential genres.

Condé's choice of witchcraft reflects the spirit of the twentieth century, where the metaphor of the witch has been revalidated by different feminist movements as a symbol for their struggle against the oppression of women.¹⁶ Through witchcraft Condé creates a positive symbol for women, whom men historically attempted to repress by persecuting witches. After her death, Tituba returns as a heroic figure and a radical witch who inspires oppressed men and entices them to fight for their freedom: "Car, vivante comme morte, visible comme invisible, je continue a panser, a guérir. Mais surtout, je me suis assigné une autre tache...Aguerrir le coeur des hommes. L'alimenter des rêves de liberté. De victoire. Pas une révolte que je n'aie fait naître. Pas une insurrection. Pas une désobéissance." (268; "For now that I have gone over to the invisible world I continue to heal and cure. But primarily I dedicated myself to another task[...]I am hardening men's hearts to fight. I am nourishing them with dreams of liberty. Of victory. I have been behind every revolt. Every insurrection. Every act of disobedience." 175) Tituba's practice becomes of political importance. She turns into a revolutionary figure and a positive icon for women. Symbolically, Tituba passes on her witchcraft to her adopted daughter: "Je lui révèle les secrets permis, la force cachée des plantes et le langage des animaux. Je lui apprend à découvrir la forme invisible du monde, le

réseau de communications qui le parcourt et les signes-symboles." (270; "I tell her the secrets I'm allowed to share, the hidden power of herbs and the language of animals. I teach her to look for the invisible shapes in the world, the crisscross of communications, and the signs and symbols" 177). Tituba's instructions to her daughter assert the continuity of her witchcraft, and the continuation of a heroic Caribbean female tradition.

Yet, the role of the heroic witch given to Tituba after her death is countered by Condé's skepticism, which simultaneously undercuts Tituba while attempting to register her as a heroic figure. Tituba's mock heroism is accentuated through her communication with the dead spirits of her deceased ancestors. Tituba's mother and Man Yaya, from whom she constantly seeks guidance and protection, hardly provide her with any. Instead, they warn her about men in a comical way "Les hommes n'aiment pas. Ils possèdent. Ils asservissent." (29; "Men do not love. They possess. They subjugate" 14). By mocking Tituba's relationship to the ancestors, Condé parodies black women's autobiographical writings. The symbolic voice of the ancestor, which often represents wisdom and guidance in these writings, becomes comical and ineffective in Condé's text. Condé remarks, "I know that in any female epic, some elements must be present, and I deliberately included them," adding that the "presence of the invisible (the conversations with the mother and with Mama Yaya) is deliberately overdrawn" (212). Thus, while celebrating Tituba's sorcery, Condé is also aware of the absurdity of certain overstated stereotypes about witches in their psychic powers and connection to nature. This awareness is apparent in the following passage where Condé highlights Tituba's powers in an exaggerated fashion. Tituba reports:

Elle [Man Yaya] m'apprit à me changer en oiseau sur la branche, en insecte dans l'herbe sèche, en grenouille coassant la boue de la rivière Ormonde quand je voulais me délasser de la forme que j'avais reçue à la naissance. (22; She taught me how to change myself into a bird on a branch, into an insect in the dry grass or a frog croaking in the mud of the river Ormond whenever I was tired of the shape I had been given at birth. 10)

This hyperbolic representation of Tituba's sacred approach to the

natural world is meant to highlight the mock-epic characteristics of witchcraft. Condé here uses Tituba's confessional voice to manipulate readers and produce an image of Tituba that is recognizably ethnic. This ambivalence in the representation of Tituba permeates the novel.

Condé also satirises white feminism through Hawthorne's nineteenth-century classic heroine Hester Prynne, who Condé relocates to seventeenth-century Salem and turns into a decidedly ahistorical character who espouses twentieth-century views on feminism. In this regard, Condé's anachronistic Hester is more radical and rebellious than Hawthorne's heroine. She wants to write a book about a model society ruled by women. In the following dialogue between Tituba and Hester, Condé parodies the position of white women vis-à-vis black women:

[j]e voudrais écrire un livre où j'exposerais le modèle d'une société gouvernée, administrée par les femmes! Nous donnerions notre nom à nos enfants, nous les élèverions seules [...]

Je l'interrompais moqueusement:

—Nous ne pourrions les faire seules, tout de même!

Elle satirisait:

—Hélas non! Il faudrait que ces brutes abhorrées participent l'espace d'un moment [...]

[...] Elle finissait par rire et m'attirait contre elle:

—Tu aimes trop l'amour, Tituba! Je ne ferai jamais de toi une féministe!

—Une féministe! Qu'est ce que c'est que cela? (159-160)

("I'd like to write a book where I'd describe a model society governed and run by women! We would give names to our children, we would raise them alone [...]"

—I interrupted her, poking fun: "We couldn't make them alone, even so!"

—"Alas, no," she said sadly. "Those abominable brutes would have to share in a fleeting moment [...]" She ended up laughing and drew me close to her.

—You are too fond of love, Tituba! I'll never make a feminist out of you!"

"A feminist? What's that?")

In this passage Tituba mocks Hester's feminist project, and refuses to be indoctrinated by her ideas, echoing many black women's attitude towards white feminists' views in Condé's own time.¹⁷ Condé here is

mocking the separatist impulses of radical feminism, and plays on a historical tension between white and black women.¹⁸ Hester's views echo white middle-class feminists' tendency to speak of women as a single concept and to analyse gender in isolation from other systems of oppression. Condé shows how this perspective seems at odds with Tituba, a poor, uneducated black woman, the same way white feminist projects have often seemed at odds with the lived experience of most black women, whose main concern has been the struggle against the oppression of racism and poverty.¹⁹ Tituba's resistance to Hester's views reflects her attitude throughout the novel. Tituba exists in that space in-between, constantly challenging set notions of identity.

Notwithstanding the elements of parody, Condé utilizes Tituba's encounter with Hester to explore female solidarity and the possibility of cross-racial friendships. She maps a new destiny for Hester, who kills herself and the daughter she carries, thus rewriting and recreating a controversial Hester—one who challenges Christian doctrine since suicide is forbidden by Christianity, and defies white Puritan notions of morality and female heroism as articulated by Hawthorne. Condé even goes as far as to suggest a homoerotic relationship between Hester and Tituba, thus further destabilizing traditional notions of female heroism. Hester and Tituba's solidarity is based on their resistance to white Christian discourse. Notably, this resistance is symbolized by their refusal to confess. Hester refuses to confess to adultery, and instead kills herself and her unborn daughter, while Tituba gives false confessions both to the judges and to the reader who is continuously faced with Tituba modifying her story. By killing herself Hester refuses to conform to Christian values and patriarchal notions of morality, while Tituba's false confession symbolises her resistance to exhibiting her ethnicity. The narrative of confession remains highly significant in the novel, symbolising women's resistance and solidarity against essentialist discourses. The resistance to criminal confession is also an implicit resistance to the concept of confession in Christianity. With their refusal to confess and with their over-elaboration and satirical exaggeration of confession, both Hester and Tituba challenge Puritan theology and condemn the historical oppression of women and the execution of witches in the name of religion. Thus, while Condé foregrounds feminist concerns, her novel is also playing on conventions of the "woman's novel" in a complex way, something that the French editions'

marketing seems to dramatically oversimplify.

While the symbol of the witch functions as a source of women's empowerment, Tituba's sorcery also becomes the mirror through which Condé interrogates racial and cultural discourses. Arthur Miller's misidentification of Tituba as a black woman who practices Voodoo in *The Crucible* reflects stereotypical notions of blackness and their association with evil. Especially given the fact that the historical records refer to the actual Tituba as Native American, and her deployment of magic as identifiably English—under the instructions of her neighbours—a contemporary literary rendition of Tituba as a black woman practicing voodoo is very telling in the context of America's race relations.²⁰ Tituba appears in Miller's play as a black woman who conspires with the devil, dances wildly in the woods, sacrifices chickens, and drinks chicken blood, although there is no historical evidence that refers to Tituba practising "black magic," or being involved in wild dance rituals. The racial misidentification of Tituba and her connection with black magic fits the American stereotype of an enslaved black woman. Miller also portrays her as weak and characterless; she turns mad at the end of the narrative and starts mumbling about the devil: "Oh, it be no Hell in Barbados. Devil, him be pleasure-man in Barbados, him be singin' and dancin' in Barbados. It is you folks—you riles him up' round here; it be too cold' round here for that Old Boy. He freezes himself in Massachusetts, but in Barbados he just as sweet."²¹ This passage reinforces the idea of the devil's association with blackness. Miller suggests that while the devil is feared in the U.S., he is loved and embraced in Barbados! Further, Miller's Tituba speaks Pidgin English, expressing a sharp contrast with the language used by the actual Tituba, as recorded in official documents, and also with the language used by Condé's Tituba.²² Miller, unfortunately, is still viewed in the popular mind as the authority regarding the Salem witch trials, and his representation of Tituba has shaped to a great extent public memory and popular culture. His portrayal of Tituba sheds light on how racial prejudices are deeply embedded in American memory.²³ It seems ironic, then, that while Condé is trying to write against the demonizations of Tituba of the sort perpetuated by Miller, the French Folio edition front cover alludes to Tituba as a voodoo priestess. The irony is greater still when the French editions make an analogy between Condé's Tituba and Miller's play. Condé reveals in her interview with

Scarboro: "I don't have any knowledge of witchcraft... The recipes that I give in the novel are merely recipes that I found in seventeenth-century books: how to cure people with certain plants, what kind of prayers to say in certain circumstances, and so on. I found that in books printed and published in America or in England" (206).

Condé also challenges set notions of identity through language. As a postcolonial writer Condé uses specific linguistic modes in order to assert distinctiveness. She consciously chooses to import Creole words in order to foreground cultural distance, and allow the reader to view the difference. Words like "Akwaba," "Canari," and "Grangreks," become cultural signs representing Caribbean culture, and allow Condé to recover a Caribbean identity against the linguistic and cultural domination of the centre. Through these strategies Condé's text both constitutes cultural difference and simultaneously attempts to bridge it. Kathleen Gyssels in "L'intraduisibilité de Tituba Indien" establishes that from a linguistic point of view the use of the phrase "sorcière noire" in the title is inexact since "Aux Antilles, une sorcière est appelée une 'quimboiseuse,' ou une 'séancière,' une 'obeah-woman' a la Jamaïque," (In the Antilles, a witch is called a 'quimboiseuse,' or a 'séancière,' an 'obeah-woman' in Jamaica).²⁴ Condé's use of the word 'sorcière' instead of quimboiseuse, or séancière provides an insight into the narrative's duplicate meaning, and expresses the way she plays on the semantic connotation of the word. Condé uses Western definitions because the notion of sorcery imposed on the historical Tituba was a Western Puritan definition. The use of Caribbean terminology shows the way Condé appropriates white colonial definitions in order to both interrogate and undermine the notion of sorcery associated with Tituba.

Davis's foreword to the English editions provides another illustration of how texts can be manipulated in the process of packaging and marketing. Davis's comments work to create an analogy between Davis's story and Condé's novel. Davis's serious tone in the foreword provides a sharp contrast with the novel's satirical narrative mode, as well as with the novelist's emphasis on fictionalization in the afterword. Davis views the novel as a historical construction and uses the expression "historical novel" more than once to describe Condé's project. This assessment is countered by Condé's afterword, where she makes clear that she does not intend to write a historical novel; rather, she

contends: "Tituba is just the opposite of a historical novel. I was not interested at all in what her real life could have been. I had few precise documents [...] I really invented Tituba" (201). Condé also states that the story is part "parody," and that Tituba is a "mock-epic" heroine (201). The reader of the English translation operates in an ambivalent space, between Davis's foreword which implies the historicity of the novel, and Condé's afterword which undercuts the novel's historicity and insists on the fictional nature of Tituba. Davis ends her commentary by referring to the ambiguity concerning Tituba's racial origins. She comments: "there are those who dispute her African descent, countering that she was Indian, perhaps hoping to stir up enmity between black and Native American women as we seek to recreate our respective histories" (xi). Whereas Condé complicates Tituba's lineage and racial history, Davis writes in terms of absolutes by giving Tituba a fixed racial identity. Davis's comment also shows disregard for historical inquiry by simplistically supposing that historians who argue for Tituba's Indianess attempt to cause hostility between African Americans and Native Americans. However, Davis's reading of Condé's novel sheds light on the narrative's ambivalence, showing that Condé creates space for diverse interpretations of the text, but it also shows that where Davis looks for absolutes, Condé fashions a novel that foregrounds the ambiguity of history and identity.

To grasp fully how marketing strategies can obfuscate Condé's authorial intentions, it is also important to look at the way the original version and the translation deal with glossing. The English language translation contains a detailed glossary toward the end of text numbering twenty-three words in total, while the original text contains a total of only six words translated in footnotes. The insertion of a glossary in the translation to English shows that an effort is being made to explain unfamiliar words to the American audience, while there is a very moderate account taken of the French reader, despite the fact that both audiences are likely to be unfamiliar with the same words. The terminology used to explain the words is also revealing. In the French version, the explanations are short and concise; for example, the word "Akawaba" (15) is translated as "Bienvenue," whereas the English

glossary provides a more detailed translation. The same word is translated as "Ashanti greeting meaning 'welcome'" (185). These definitions try to further politicise Condé's novel (i.e. by establishing a direct connection to Africa) and make it easily accessible to its targeted African American readership. Put another way, the English translation is making fewer demands on the American readership by attempting to conform to its linguistic and cultural expectations. Yet, in a paradoxical way, the glossary also functions to remind the reader that they are about to explore a foreign text which has a specific cultural context.

The intervention of translators, and marketing strategies as well as audiences demonstrates how an author's politics can be obscured or compromised to a large degree. The insertion of a glossary in the translation to English, for instance, becomes problematic, given that Condé consciously uses ambiguous words in her original text as a narrative strategy. Pseudo-scientific names for plants like "passionflorinde," "Populara indica," and "Prune taureau" in the French text are premeditated, to keep Condé's readers under the illusion that the text provides an accurate knowledge of the science of plants. Here, Condé challenges her French audiences into delving beyond a superficial reading of her text. This authorial strategy is undermined in the translation, since the glossary points out that these words are invented by Condé.

Françoise Massardier-Kenny in "La question de la traduction plurielle ou les traducteurs de Maryse Condé" looks at Condé's *Une saison à Rihata*, and *La vie scélérate* and their translations. She explores the way translations exercise their authority either through "la culture de départ," when "le mouvement se fera du lecteur vers l'auteur plutôt que de l'auteur vers le lecteur," (The movement is from the reader to the author rather than from the author to the reader), or the opposite where "le mouvement se fait de l'auteur au lecteur puisque la valeur du livre est indiquée par référence à la culture d'arrivée"; (The movement happens from the author to the reader since the book's value is indicated by reference to the target culture.)²⁵ The novel's translation and transformation into English fits this second category. The cover, the comments, the glossary, the foreword and afterword all show that the English version seeks to assimilate the novel into African American culture. In that sense it is the writer who is moving towards the reader, rather than the other way around, where the reader moves towards the author, and towards "la culture de départ" and its particularities.

The reader of the translation thus is not challenged, since the voice of Maryse Condé becomes assimilated into the culture of the audience. This is reinforced by the example of the glossary of notes that was created for the American reader. At the level of packaging, the absence of the translator's name from both the front and back cover of the Caraf Books edition betrays an attempt to create a direct interaction between the author and her readers without the mediation of the translator, and thus further insert her into African American culture. Yet, the question of whether one brings the text to the audience or the other way around is very much affected by the author's prestige and international reputation. Condé is less established in the U.S than in France, and thus less demand seems to be placed on the American reader.

The fact that Condé uses a European language to talk about a non-European culture complicates the narrative further and shows that there is an act of translation taking place, even before the novel reaches its French audience. Condé's attempt to turn from Caribbean terminology, as mentioned before, shows that the translation to English is a double translation, and that there is already a similar movement from "la culture de départ" to "la culture d'arrivée" taking place with the French version. Significantly, Condé and her heroine are positioned within two different linguistic codes. As a Guadeloupean, Condé is positioned within a French Caribbean cultural and linguistic code, while Tituba, who is figured as a native of Barbados, is situated in a system that is English Caribbean. Condé becomes a translator and a mediator between the English-speaking Tituba and the French reader. However, the insertion of French Creole words in the text complicates the narrative, since the reader here is dealing with a heroine from the English-speaking Caribbean, who is introduced to them through French Creole. Elizabeth Mudimbe-Boyi in "Giving a Voice to Tituba: the Death of the Author" argues that the epigraph sets Condé outside the text, and situates Tituba within it, contending that this strategy of subversion allows Tituba to take the authority from Condé and become the narrator:

Tituba unfolds a long monologic "conversation" in which the writer becomes the simple listener of a narrating subject telling her own life story. The book is thus a fictional "autobiography" from which the writer has completely disappeared, leaving Tituba to take pre-eminence and become both the narrator and the narrated.²⁶

It is hard to believe that Condé completely disappears from the narrative and becomes a listener to Tituba's story. On the contrary, Condé is repeatedly interrupting Tituba's autobiographical voice. The French Creole words form a constant reminder of the author's presence in the text. It is a reminder that these words are Condé's and not Tituba's. Condé is consciously deconstructing Tituba's voice through language. She is playing on the historicity of her own project by questioning the possibility of translating/re-imagining Tituba's life.

Richard Philcox, Condé's husband, and the translator of most of Condé's work, including *Moi, Tituba, sorcière... Noire de Salem* talks about the problematics of translating Condé in his article on *Traversée de la Mangrove*. Philcox compares Condé's writings with Virginia Woolf's, and views this comparison between Condé and writers from the European canon as necessary in the process of translating Condé's work. He argues that in order to familiarise the American reader with Caribbean writings, it is important to use texts from within a canon with which the Anglophone reader is familiar. He explains Condé's use of the French language in her writings:

C'est par un système linguistique européen, par une tradition littéraire européenne, qu'on arrive à la société antillaise. Il était évident que pour plaire à un public occidental la traduction anglaise devait suivre le même processus et trouver une tradition littéraire européenne pour communiquer la Caribéanté du texte. (It is by using a European linguistic system and a European literary tradition that one reaches the Antillean society. It is evident that to please a contemporary Western public, the English translation has to follow the same process and find a European literary tradition in order to communicate the text's Caribbeaness).²⁷

Philcox's attempt to view Condé from within the European canon compromises her position, and contradicts the fact that Condé is continuously interrupting Western tradition by using strategies which assert the Caribbeaness of her text and call into question the supremacy of the European canon. Yet, Philcox's words suggest that the process of translation is not straightforward. Translators, like readers or critics, are interpreters of cultural and linguistic codes, and their work is affected by their cultural, political, sexual and social identity. When Philcox talks about "pleasing the audience," he again raises the ques-

tion of the extent to which a text can be assimilated into the target culture without compromising the author's work. It is important to note that the publication of Condé's translated work in the United States puts her books in the realm of international literature. Maria Tymoczko in "Post-Colonial Writing and Literary Translation" argues, "being marketed in the United States is often seen as an essential index of international success."²⁸ Yet, this international success becomes to a large extent dependent on marketing strategies which situate texts in a specific cultural and literary contexts to suit the receiving audience, as is the case of *Moi, Tituba, sorcière...Noire de Salem*. Condé's novel in its original version as well as in translation, reaches its audience through a complex process of transformation. A comparison between the novel's French version, which is aimed at a French gendered audience, and the translation, whose main targeted audience is African Americans, shows how marketing strategies differ considerably depending on the audience. Further, it is important to note that both the French and the American versions are translations, and they reach their audiences through a complex process of transfer across both language and culture.

Condé's novel generates an ambivalent narrative where the politics of ethnicity are constantly questioned. Condé destabilizes her own project and parodies her characters, but without undermining the importance of her work and her attempt to rewrite the forgotten past of a Caribbean heroine. The cultural distance created by Condé's status as a Guadeloupean author writing in French makes it possible for her to create an elusive language which challenges the reader in its indeterminacy, and allows for a questioning and interrogation of racial, cultural and literary discourses despite the considerable constraints created by marketing and translating strategies.

Notes

1. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 113.

2. *Ibid.*, 113.

3. Elaine G. Breslaw contends, "Puritans were predisposed to believe that Indians willingly participated in Devil worship. That perception of Indians as supporters of the devil encouraged Tituba to fuel their fantasies of a diabolical plot. See Breslaw's *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), xx.

4. All references in French to the novel are from the 1988 Folio Series: Maryse Condé, *Moi, Tituba, sorcière...Noire de Salem* (Paris: Mercure de France/Folio Series, 1988). Subsequent references will be parenthetically included in the text. The English translation is from the Ballantine edition: Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Trans. by Richard Philcox (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992). Subsequent references will be included in the text.

5. Lillian Manzor-Coats makes a similar point in her "Of Witches and Other Things: Maryse Condé's Challenges to Feminist Discourse," *World Literature Today*, September 1, 1993, Vol. 67, Issue 4, 739.

6. Françoise Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 58.

7. See Manzor-Coats, 738.

8. All references in French to the novel are from the 1988 Folio Series: Maryse Condé, *Moi, Tituba, sorcière...Noire de Salem* (Paris: Mercure de France/Folio Series, 1988). Subsequent references will be parenthetically included in the text. The English translation is from the Ballantine edition: Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Trans. by Richard Philcox (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992). Subsequent references will be included in the text.

9. Scarboro, Foreword to *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, 205.

10. See Manzor-Coats, 738.

11. In his exploration of the historical background of Benoist's painting, James Smalls contends that "It has been suggested that the *Portrait d'une négresse* was not commissioned but was painted on the artist's own initiative, and was modelled after a black slave brought back to France by Benoist's brother-in-law, a civil servant and ship's purser who had returned from the French island of Guadeloupe in 1800." See "Slavery is a Woman: 'Race,' Gender, and Visuality in Marie Benoist's *Portrait d'une négresse* (1800)." in *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, Vol. 3, 1, 2004, (19thc-artworldwide.org/spring_04/articles/smal.html).

12. For more on slave narrative in Caribbean literature, see Caroline Rody, *The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

13. Rody, 84.

14. Manzor-Coats argues that this cover targets "angry black women," 738.

15. Pfaff, 106. See also p.101 where Condé mentions how French audiences label her work sometimes as "exotic."

16. In the 1960s modern feminist witches appeared, out of the WICCA movement. Modern witches believe in the Goddess who represents female spirituality. Naomi R. Goldenberg writes "witches use their Goddess concept to give women positive self-images in all stages of life" (97). Feminist witchcraft is mainly a spiritual movement whose main concern is not political. However, many feminist groups have taken over the metaphor of the witch and identified themselves with that image for political reasons, such as the feminist group WITCH: the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. See Naomi R. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 85- 114. Jeffrey B. Russell, *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 156.

17. See Manzor-Coats who elaborate on this point in "Of Witches and Other Things," pp 743-5.

18. It is possible that Condé is also reflecting on the views of African American feminists. In her interview with Barbara Lewis in *Callaloo* Condé points out that in

Guadeloupe women's attitude towards men is ambivalent. She reports, "We would like to see them more adult, more grown up, but we discuss with them how we would like them to change. So the crisis is not as dramatic as it is in black America, it seems to me" (550). In her commentary Condé conveys that African American women are more radical in their approach to masculinity, unlike Caribbean women whose attitude seems to be more moderate. Tituba in her light reaction to Hester's radical feminist views is voicing a Caribbean approach to feminism that is less earnest. See Barbara Lewis, "No Silence: An Interview with Maryse Condé," *Callalo*, 18, 3, (1995).

19. For more information see Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam, 1985), and bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto, 1982).

20. Tituba appears in contemporary narratives as a woman of African descent, while in the seventeenth-century court documents, the historical Tituba is referred to as Indian. Most recent historians agree on Tituba's Indian origins based on records of Salem witchcraft. Chadwick Hansen explores the shift in Tituba's racial identity and shows how Tituba's race has been gradually changed from Indian, to half-Indian, half-black, to black, and how this was paralleled by a change in her magic practices, which were originally identifiably English, but were transformed to Indian and then to African. Hansen traces Tituba's representation by historians, novelists and dramatists chronologically, ending his inquiry with Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1952), where Tituba becomes completely metamorphosed into a "Negro" woman who practises voodoo. See Chadwick Hansen "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro" in *The New England Quarterly*, 47 (1974), 3-12, Bernard Rosenthal, "Tituba's Story" in *The New England Quarterly*, 71 (1998), 190-203, Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: the Salem Witch Crisis of 1692* (New York: Knopf, 2002), Elaine Breslaw, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem*, Francis Hill, *A Delusion of Satan: the Full Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (London & New York: Doubleday, 2002). Peter Hoffer's *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 1996) is the only contemporary historian who argues that Tituba is African, and was brought to the new world in slavery. He identifies her name as Yoruban.

21. Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (London: Penguin, 1968), 108.

22. Breslaw demonstrates in her project that Tituba acquired the same conversational mode as Puritan society and used the same idiomatic English used by the Parris family. To show that Tituba's speech pattern was not that of the transcribers, Breslaw compared Tituba's speech to recorded speech of other accused ethnic persons which were written down during the hearing to conclude that Tituba's speech in the record documents is different to others who spoke an obvious non-standard English. See Breslaw, 161-3.

23. It is also possible that Miller's negative portrayal of Tituba is a self-conscious one. Through Tituba he may be creating a parody of blackness that reflects the Puritans' fear of otherness.

24. Kathleen Gyssels, L'intraduisibilité de Tituba Indien, sujet interculturel in *Mots Pluriels*, 23(2003), 14 pages, <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/>, 3.

25. Françoise Massardier-Kenny "La question de la traduction plurielle ou 'les traducteurs de Maryse Condé'" in *L'oeuvre de Maryse Condé* (Paris: Harmattan, 1996), 250.

26. Mudimbe-Boyi, "Giving a Voice to Tituba: the death of the author?" in *World Literature Today*. Vol. 67 (1993), 752.

27. Richard Philcox, "Traduire 'Traversee de la Mangrove'" in *L'oeuvre de Maryse Condé*, 230.

28. Maria Tymoczko, "Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation" in *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed by Susanna Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 15.

Multiculturalism as a Site of Suspicion: American Legal Responses to Public Acts of Violence from Stono to September 11th

Jack Shuler

On Thursday, September 13, 2001, I was waiting for all the students in my 8 A.M. English composition class to arrive. Everyone was in a different mood than they had been two days before—grave, pensive. Even from inside the classroom, we could smell the smoke from lower Manhattan. We were equal parts angry, confused, and stunned. I asked the students to put their desks into a circle, and we began to discuss what had happened. Then, throughout the semester, we wrote about what we had experienced on September 11th. Fears and suspicions came to the fore. A student named Alex Demochev claimed, “Now[...]the ocean is not a barrier to make us secure and to keep us away from danger. Who can guarantee peace? What will protect us?”¹ Others expressed vengeance like normally quiet Maria Jimenez who wrote, “I don’t carry a lot of hate, but I want America to strike back. I know there will be a lot of innocent people that will die, but these terrorists also killed innocent people[...]I want Bin Laden to suffer more than we’ve suffered.”² Many of these students who were in New York City on that day—who watched thousands covered in ash and blood return home in a somber procession up Flatbush Avenue, or who waited for their phone to ring, or who exited the subway at Chambers street in time to run from the second tower—were full of ambiguities. One student named Javier Rodriguez wrote:

I watched the news and saw pictures of the World Trade Center on the ground and the smoke spreading over lower

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Manhattan[...]I grew more aggravated and infuriated as I watched the horrible things we humans are capable of doing. At that moment, I was thinking of revenge, but we really have no one to blame for such actions.³

Regardless of their desires for revenge or for peace, most of these students, many of them first-generation immigrants, proclaimed their “American-ness.” In their view, the United States was united by this tragedy. Sarah Ofer wrote: “The terrorist’s goal was to scare us all; they wanted us to lose faith in our government and our country. What happened was the exact opposite. All over our country people united.”⁴ Perhaps, but one thing stands out for me as I reflect on that time and on that classroom, in many ways a microcosm of New York City, post 9/11 many New Yorkers became aware of the cultural markers of Arab-Americans and Muslims for the first time; everyone became aware of their differences.

Prior to 9/11, I enjoyed wearing a navy-blue baseball cap with my home state of South Carolina’s flag—comprised of a palmetto tree and a crescent moon—emblazoned across the front. These symbols are relics of a Revolutionary War victory in which a fort built of palmetto logs and defended by colonists with crescent moons on their hats, withstood the barrage of British warships. But after 9/11 the symbol of a crescent moon became suspect. As I walked down a street in my neighborhood a few weeks later, wearing my favorite hat, a man muttered as I passed by, “What is that, an Arab hat?” Anyone bearing the markers of the new outsider was automatically suspicious. In Queens, a group of teens attacked a Sikh man because he looked Muslim. In 2005, Muslims discovered praying at a New York Giants football game were, according to onlookers, “suspicious.”⁵

In moments of crisis and fear, emotions often foster a paranoid rather than progressive unity. After 9/11 American politicians feeding off the public’s fears and suspicions and supported by that ever-present enabler, the mass media, chose to pass laws, to regulate, to invade. Some critics have argued that these laws were a hodgepodge of laws some politicians had wanted to pass for years.⁶ Political and legal responses, in particular the dissent-squashing PATRIOT Act, were emotional attempts to establish a sense of security by screening out Arab and Muslim Americans and anyone acting in a manner or expressing views deemed “un-American.” After 9/11 cultural exchange with “suspect” groups

became, for many, less an act of education but a stage for establishing difference and for dehumanization. The PATRIOT Act resulted in the communications of religious and political institutions being monitored through screening emails and recording library selections. “Domestic Terrorism” became a popular legal term signifying any act deemed a threat to the sovereignty of the United States. In one case in Oregon, environmentalists and animal rights activists accused of arson and destruction of property were charged under this provision.⁷ Suspect individuals were, and still are, detained and deported. Security measures in airports for all outsiders, including tourists, have taken on a measure of the absurd. These procedures were depicted in a recent production entitled *Supervision* by the theatre company The Builder’s Association.⁸ A character named “Traveler” must engage with a number of airport security agents throughout the United States. Each time he is asked piercing and, at times, personal questions. His skin color, his passport, and the number of stamps on that passport, mark him as suspect. Traveler was born in Uganda to Indian parents. He travels throughout the Middle East for business. The climax of the play for Traveler is a complete nervous breakdown in the airport security line. He’s decidedly “multi-culti” when it’s not cool to be “multi-culti.” Prior to 9/11, Louis Menand wrote, “Assimilation does not come from suppressing difference[...]it comes from mainstreaming it. Being an ‘American’ now means wearing your particular ‘difference’ on your sleeve.”⁹ But what if wearing your difference means subjecting yourself to constant cultural and/or racial profiling?

Harsh cultural and legal responses to public acts of violence have been the norm throughout United States history. How do we begin to interrogate these responses with an eye toward the future and a glance to the past? I would venture to say that there is much work to be done here. The Alien and Sedition Acts, the Palmer Raids, and the re-location of Japanese-Americans during WWII were much discussed in the United States post-9/11, but the legal parameters that have confined African Americans for hundreds of years were on few people’s radars. After seeing a performance of *Supervision* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, I had the opportunity to attend a post-show discussion with the cast and a group of Brooklyn high school students. The actor who portrayed Traveler asked the students, “What did you think about all the security checks I had to go through?” A young African American woman replied,

“It reminds me of when I go to school every morning.”

In his analysis of African American literature, Jon-Christian Suggs argues that there is a fundamental relationship of law and narrative to the lived experience of African Americans.¹⁰ In this sense I would like to examine the ways that laws have been used to circumscribe suspect groups following public acts of violence and raise questions about the relationship of cultural and legal responses to the lives of “outsiders” in the United States. My case study takes us back to the eighteenth century, to the Stono Rebellion of 1739, which, in some ways, remains largely unexplored but had a significant effect on the ways in which the United States was created as a multicultural, though predominantly white, nation.

In 1739 the colony of South Carolina was in a precarious situation, to say the least. Relations between Spain and Britain were tense, there was an outbreak of yellow fever, and African slaves outnumbered free whites two to one. Added to this mix was the intense heat and humidity that drove more established planters to abandon their Lowcountry farmland most of the year while their slaves labored over the tedious process of rice cultivation, often with little oversight by whites. And so it was that on the morning of Sunday, September 9, 1739, twenty Kongolese slaves, led by a man named Jemmy or Cato, armed themselves by breaking into a storehouse near the Stono River some fifteen miles south of Charles Town. They went from house to house setting them on fire and killing all slave-owners and their families—twenty-three or more in total. The rebels recruited others as they marched toward Spanish Florida where they expected to find freedom. By mid-morning there were between sixty and one hundred rebels on the move. Before noon, the slaves encountered, of all people, South Carolina’s Lieutenant Governor William Bull who hastened away to call the local militia. In the meantime, the rebels assembled in an open field and began dancing, playing drums, and calling others to join them. When the militia arrived, an intense battle ensued during which eyewitnesses claimed the rebels fought like well-trained soldiers using flags and fighting in formation.

But they were outnumbered and the rebellion was vigorously put down. Some rebels escaped—one was not captured for several years. Those that did not escape were rounded up and immediately executed. On that day white colonists killed over forty people, placing their cut-off heads on “every mile post they came to.”¹¹ Some slaves were hanged, but

as merchant Robert Pringle wrote shortly after the rebellion, “most of the gang are already taken or cut to pieces.”¹² The author of “An Account of Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina” applauded the “honour of the Carolina planters, that notwithstanding the provocation they had received from so many murders, they did not torture one Negro, but only put them to an easy death.”¹³ Given white planters’ predilections for torture, this is quite surprising.¹⁴

The yellow fever had subsided in South Carolina and was joined by a new plague—fear. The colony’s newspaper, *The South Carolina Gazette*, exerted a media blackout, but word of the rebellion leaked. Letters and reports written by white South Carolinians depict heightened anxieties and desires for swift retribution. Note the dramatic official report of the event published by the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly:

On this occasion every breast was filled with concern[...]With regret we bewailed our peculiar case, that we could not enjoy the benefits of peace like the rest of mankind and that our own industry should be the means of taking from us all the sweets of life and of rendering us liable to the loss of our lives and fortune.¹⁵

Rather than finding fault within themselves or with the practice of enslaving human beings, South Carolinians chose to point fingers, to pin the blame on someone else. In a letter to John Richards of London, Robert Pringle wrote, “I hope our government will order effectual methods for the taking of St. Augustine from the Spaniards which is now a great detriment to this province by the encouragement & protection given by them to our Negroes that run away there.”¹⁶ The Spanish were to blame for the Stono Rebellion. The Commons House concluded, “With indignation we looked at St. Augustine (like another Sallee) that den of thieves and ruffians! Receptacle of debtors, servants, and slaves! Bane of industry and society!”¹⁷ The Spanish are hangers-on, Catholics, and worst of all, disrupters of the project of Atlantic capitalism who had the audacity to offer freedom to escaped slaves. Rumors circulated that Spanish priests had come on shore to tell slaves this good news. In his journal from this period, William Stephens of Georgia describes an encounter with a suspicious character captured in Savannah and believed to be a Spanish spy.¹⁸ This speculation is made more interesting by the fact that the slaves involved in the rebellion were likely exposed

to the Portuguese language and Catholicism in Africa.¹⁹ Thus, the Stono Rebellion heightened the suspicions of South Carolinians and emboldened them to join forces with Oglethorpe of Georgia in an attack on Spanish Florida. Their expedition failed.

On the home front, the colonial government strengthened slave patrols and began consolidating all slave-related regulations. Its definitive response was signed into law on May 10, 1740 and was called, “An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes and Other Slaves in this Province,” or the “Negro Act.” This comprehensive act was modeled on the thorough slave codes of Barbados, where many of the colonists were from, and was later mimicked in Georgia and the Gulf states.²⁰ It remained largely in effect until the Civil War and included provisions meant to better the lives of slaves—preventing certain cruel punishments and limiting workdays—but ultimately, it served to legally separate black people from white people as much as possible.

The South Carolina government sought ways to stem the tide of the growing black population and imposed a temporary ban on importing slaves and stiff duties for when the ban was lifted. There had been various attempts to support the immigration of more Europeans into the colony, though these schemes were mostly unsuccessful. The government, therefore, decided to work with what was at hand. Rewards were established for slaves that informed on others. Those slaves that helped their masters escape from the Stono rebels were publicly acknowledged in Charles Town so as to provide potential collaborators with examples. More importantly, the government wished to collaborate with Native Americans. As long as the Cherokee remained on the borders of the colony, slave owners sought to exploit their tracking skills in their own efforts to capture runaways. The Negro Act offered rewards to Native Americans who captured runaways. This helped prevent escapes as well as the development of colonies of maroons like those that existed in Jamaica. It also fostered animosity between blacks and Native Americans. Gary Nash writes,

Indian uprisings that punctuated the colonial period and a succession of slave uprisings and insurrectionary plots that were nipped in the bud kept South Carolinians sickeningly aware that only through the greatest vigilance and through policies designed to keep their enemies divided could they hope to remain in control of the situation.²¹

A unified force of excluded groups was a real possibility in colonial South Carolina. Though complicated by the dynamics of power and culture, there was some contact between Native Americans and African slaves including instances of run-away slaves living among the Tuscaroras, Yamasee, and Cherokee. But there were few major acts of public resistance involving Native Americans and African slaves. Regardless, in 1740, South Carolina officials wished to prevent these two potentially volatile groups from working together. They knew it was a possibility; they had heard stories of blacks and Native Americans joining forces in New York City in 1712 and did not wish to take chances. Nash writes, “The colonizer’s position of numerical inferiority led to gnawing fears that Indians and slaves would combine forces and overpower them. Keeping Africans and Indians apart, therefore, became a necessity.”²²

Then again, separating, creating differences, has always been an effective tool for squelching dissent among the subaltern. To that end, the South Carolina government believed the best way to stabilize the dynamics of the colony was to enhance the social position of poor whites and, as Howard Zinn notes, racism became a “realistic device for control.”²³ The Negro Act transformed the legal status of South Carolina’s slaves from freehold property to chattel—“absolute slaves, and the subjects of property in the hands of particular persons.”²⁴ M. Eugene Sirmans notes that after 1740 chattel “slavery no longer rested upon custom” but in the *corpus juris*.²⁵ In addition, all black people within the colony would be assumed slaves unless they could prove otherwise.²⁶ And any white person, planter or pauper, could stop any black person and demand proof of their status. This pass system codified difference circumscribing lives, movements, and freedoms. “Black” human beings, slave or free, were singled out from other kinds of human beings. Colonial leaders believed their safety depended on making others feel socially significant in comparison to African slaves. This was, of course, the age of enlightened cataloging. That whites were empowered by the Negro Act is revealed in reports of violent searches of slave quarters, which Robert M. Weir notes “was a recognized form of amusement for young men.”²⁷ Weir continues, “Perhaps here—in the perversion or the laws making every white man a guardian of law and order—lay one of the tangled roots of vigilantism and nineteenth century lynching.”²⁸ Thus, the perpetual fear of torture or murder became another regulatory tool—

one that resonates still. This legalized dehumanization of the slave was extended to its logical (or illogical) end as the relationship of slaves to white property transformed in the wake of Stono. Indeed, the neurotic nature of the authors of these laws is revealed in punishments established for white and blacks caught destroying property in South Carolina. A slave who destroyed white property—a barn, a farm tool, a bag of rice—would be put to death. But a white person who destroyed a slave, also white property, would be fined.

Social status, though, is not the only measure of human dignity. Human dignity also manifests in one’s capability to communicate one’s concerns and ideals. The ultimate goal of the Negro Act was to prohibit any narrative emanating from the African American community that posited alternatives to the slave regime, to racism, to violations of human rights. In many ways, it was a legal challenge to the human dignity of African Americans. Besides the pass system, strict regulations were placed on slaves’ ability to communicate with one another: literacy and drums were outlawed and blacks could no longer congregate publicly. South Carolina was one of the first colonies to target “communications technologies” in its efforts to reduce human beings to chattel. Article 36 “restrain[ed] the wanderings and meetings of Negroes and other slaves, at all times” and prohibited the use of “drums, horns, or other loud instruments, which may call together or give sign or notice to one another of [the] wicked designs and purposes[...]of strange Negroes.”²⁹ Article 45 claimed that, “the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences.”³⁰ Until Stono, these communications technologies were not always deemed serious threats to the institution of slavery in South Carolina, that is, until they helped foster rebellion. Some believed that the rebels may have read a notice published in *The South Carolina Gazette* on August 18, 1739 that a new law was to be enacted requiring all white men to carry their arms to church on Sundays. The rebellion broke out on a Sunday, weeks before this new law went into effect. Others believed that the rebels motivated themselves and communicated their intentions by playing drums and having raucous gatherings. In an essay that was later re-printed as the introduction to the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay acknowledge the importance of communications to the Stono Rebellion and the Negro Act,

a draconian body of public laws, making two forms of literacy punishable by law: the mastery of letters, and the mastery of the drum[...]In the Stono Rebellion, both forms of literacy—of English letters and of the black vernacular—had been pivotal to the slave's capacity to rebel.³¹

If these modes of communication were used to launch the most successful slave rebellion in the colonial South, they would have to be closely controlled. In the process, these controls denied African Americans access to certain mechanisms for expressing their humanity in the public sphere.

But what were the Stono rebels expressing? Their actions during the insurrection give rise to speculations as to their ambitions, and perhaps, their ideals. First of all, they stopped at each house they passed killing the inhabitants, destroying property, and setting the houses on fire. Whites who had been kind to slaves were spared. This process of selective destruction must have consumed time and raised alarm—deliberate destruction is not conducive to a quick and clandestine escape. Later the Stono rebels gathered in a field in plain view, beating drums and dancing, drawing evermore attention to themselves. John K. Thornton notes that these Kongolese rebels might have performed a dance called a *sangemento* which is considered a declaration of war.³² One does not declare war if one seeks a quick escape. Finally, there is some evidence that these rebels asserted their intentions and their rights in a rather unique way. An account of the rebellion which Peter Wood attributes to General James Oglethorpe describes the scene as the rebels marched toward Florida: "Several Negroes joined them, they calling out liberty, marched on with colours displayed, and two drums beating, pursuing all white people they met with."³³ Significantly, this account was published in March 1740 issues of *Gentleman's Magazine* and *London Magazine*, popular London miscellanies, as well as in *The Scots Magazine*, based in Edinburgh. That these African slaves were shouting "liberty" may simply have been in the author's imagination. Or perhaps they were repeating something overheard from a master, a preacher, or on board a ship. But if these rebels knew what they were saying, how does that speak to their motives? Liberty, indeed, was a loaded term in the eighteenth century and was part of a powerful discourse that swept through Europe and North America, a discourse rooted in the belief of natural or human rights. Later that century a former slave would announce: "I am

Toussaint L' Overture. My name is perhaps known to you. I have undertaken to avenge you. I want liberty and equality to reign throughout St. Domingue."

If the rebels' goal was to escape quickly to Florida and, in turn, to freedom, they failed. But perhaps escape was not their only goal. To be certain, the message these rebels wished to impart was not lost, nor did the Negro Act completely dehumanize South Carolina's slave population. Indeed, the history of slave resistance in small and sometimes immeasurable ways is extensive. To that history, we must add the oral narrative of George Cato, the supposed great-great-great grandson of Cato, the rebellion leader. This account, "The Stono Insurrection Described By a Descendant of the Leader," was recorded and transcribed by Stiles M. Scruggs as part of the Federal Writers' Project in the late 1930s. Cato's account demonstrates that the Stono narrative had such force and power that it persisted over time, passed on by several generations of African Americans. It is uncannily similar to white-produced written accounts of the rebellion and speaks directly to issues of communication and human rights, thus underlining the colonial government's legal decisions. George Cato claims that, "Long befo' dis uprisin,' de Cato slave wrote passes for slaves and do all he can to send them to freedom," highlighting the importance of having a literate rebellion organizer—a key factor in the Prosser and Vesey conspiracies and Nat Turner's rebellion in the 19th Century.³⁴ George Cato portrays his ancestor as selfless in his pursuit of human dignity. He acted, "not so much for his own benefit as it was to help others."³⁵ He was a bold leader standing firm when the militia arrived and struggling to maintain order despite being outnumbered. George Cato claims, "Commander Cato speak for de crowd. He say: 'We don't like slavery[...]we not whipped yet and we is not converted'[...]He die but he die doin' de right, as he see it."³⁶ He died "doin' de right," fighting for what he believed to be correct.

Stono decidedly follows Herbert Aptheker's "conclusion that discontent and rebelliousness were not only exceedingly common, but, indeed characteristic of American Negro slaves."³⁷ I believe that Stono reveals one reason for such rebellions—an intrinsic belief in the dignity of the human being. The rebels' declaration of liberty and George Cato's narrative of the Stono rebellion can be read as literary acts engaging in a discourse of human rights. When the rebels shout "liberty," they are not murderers. As Wood has noted, they are "freedom fighters"³⁸ and partic-

ipants in the Atlantic World, projects of modernity, and the development of human rights discourse. In this light, the immediate and total legal response of the South Carolina government to this insurrection becomes clear. One of the final provisions of the Negro Act, Article 56, absolves whites of any wrongdoing on that day and in the wake of the rebellion:

as the exigence and danger the inhabitants at that time were in and exposed to, would not admit of the formality of a legal trial of such rebellious negroes, but for their own security, the said inhabitants were obliged to put such negroes to immediate death; to prevent, therefore, any person or persons being questioned for any matter or thing done in the suppression or execution of the said rebellious negroes, as also any litigious suit, action or prosecution that may be brought, sued or prosecuted or commenced against such person or persons for or concerning the same[...]all and every act, matter and thing, had, done, committed and executed, in and about suppressing and putting all and every said negro and negroes to death is and are hereby declared lawful, to all intents and purposes whatsoever, as fully and amply as if such rebellious negroes had undergone a formal trial.³⁹

The Negro Act establishes a legal rupture in South Carolina encoded in government policy and revealed in cultural practice. This rupture did not happen overnight. There is evidence of slave rebellions and of blatant disregard for the Negro Act throughout colonial and antebellum South Carolina history. This does not, however, change the fact that in the letter of the law blacks were always subject to the force and power of white people. A black person was automatically suspect and social and political order rested on the presence of this ethos of divide and conquer.

The similarities between 9/11 and Stono are uncanny. I do not presume to place the Stono rebels in the same category with the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, but there is something familiar about the legal response to these two events. To repeat the comment of my student Sarah: “The terrorist’s goal was to scare us all; they wanted us to lose faith in our government and our country. What happened was the exact opposite. All over our country people united.” She was repeating, perhaps unwittingly, what was playing out post-9/11 on the news, on car bumpers, and on billboards: “United we stand!” What this slogan means, in effect, is that “we,” meaning those given the authority to report on the “suspect,” are united against all enemies—real or not.⁴⁰ We are on guard

to such a degree that when hundreds of Muslim and Arab Americans are assumed by the United States government to fall into the category of “terrorist” and are rounded up and detained at the Metropolitan Detention Center on 29th Street in Brooklyn, there is only modest public outrage.

The circumstances may be different but the fear guiding these American responses to public acts of violence is quite similar. The Negro Act is an early example of an established paradigm of cultural and legal response. In each case, a subaltern group is ostracized while some previously excluded group is made to feel as though it has been mainstreamed or, at the very least, that it will be tolerated. Such a response worked quite well for the planting class in South Carolina, and it worked well for those in power during the Bush administration. But this paradigm dehumanizes and brutalizes members of suspect groups in order to satiate and unite a fearful and angry public. The lives of these suspects are ultimately inhibited and inhabited by law. These laws, rather than providing protections, provide occasions for divisions.

Notes

1. “The Last Day of the Epoch: What Next?” in *English 1: What We Experienced*. (New York: The Print Center, 2001), 64.
2. “A Day of Hell” *Ibid.*, 41.
3. “Death Experiences in New York City” *Ibid.*, 59.
4. “Close to Home” *Ibid.*, 19.
5. John Chadwick, Amy Klein, and John Brennan, “Muslim’s Prayers at Game Led to FBI Queries,” *The Record: Bergen County, New Jersey*, 3 November 2005, A01.
6. “Surveillance Under the USA Patriot Act,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, 3 April 2003, <www.aclu.org/safefree/general/17326res20030403.html> (18 May 2006).
7. “US ‘Eco-Terrorists’ Indicted on Arson, Destruction Charges,” *Agence France Presse*, 20 January 2006.
8. www.superv.org or www.thebuildersassociation.org
9. Louis Menand, “Diversity,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 349.
10. Jon-Christian Suggs, *Whispered Consolations: Law and Narrative in African American Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000), 4.
11. “A Ranger’s Report of Travels with General Oglethorpe, 1739-42,” in *Travels in the American Colonies*, ed. Newton D. Mereness, (New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1916), 223.
12. Robert Pringle, “Letter from Robert Pringle to John Richards, 26 September 1739” in *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, ed. Walter B. Edgar (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 135
13. “An Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina,” in *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, Eds. Allen D. Candler, William L. Northern, and Lucian L. Knight (Atlanta: Byrd, 1913), Vol. 22:2, 235.
14. For descriptions of torture in Colonial South Carolina see, Francis Le Jau, *The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau, 1706-1717*, ed. Frank J. Klingberg (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1956).

15. "Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Causes of the Disappointment of Success in the Late Expedition against St. Augustine," in *Journal of the Commons House of Assembly*, eds. Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord (Columbia, South Carolina: Johnston, 1840), 7: 84.

16. Pringle, 135.

17. "Report of the Committee," 84.

18. William Stephens, "A Journal of the Proceedings in Georgia, Beginning October 24, 1737," in *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, ed. Allen D. Candler (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 4: 378-379.

19. See John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *The American Historical Review* 96:4 (Oct 1991), 1101-1113.

20. Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 206.

21. Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974), 292.

22. Nash, 291-292.

23. Zinn, 56.

24. "An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing Negroes and Other Slaves in this Province," in *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, eds. Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord (Columbia: Johnston, 1840), 7: 397.

25. M. Eugene Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina: A Political History, 1663-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 209.

26. *Ibid.*, 398.

27. Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), 195.

28. *Ibid.*

29. "An Act," 410.

30. *Ibid.*, 413.

31. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay, "From Phillis Wheatley to Toni Morrison: The Flowering of African-American Literature," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 14 (Winter 1996-1997), 96.

32. John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *The American Historical Review* 96:4 (Oct 1991), 1112.

33. James Oglethorpe, "An Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina," *Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, eds. Allen D. Candler and William J. Northern (New York: 1970), 22.2: 234.

34. George Cato, "The Stono Insurrection Described by a Descendant of the Leader," in *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Series I, Volume XI: North Carolina and South Carolina Narratives*, ed. George P. Rawick (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1977), 100.

35. *Ibid.*, 98.

36. *Ibid.*, 100.

37. Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1993), 374.

38. *Slavery and the Making of America Episode 1: The Downward Spiral*, prod. And dir. Dante J. James, Public Broadcasting System, February 9, 2005, DVD.

39. "An Act," 416.

40. One is reminded here of the proposed TIPS or Terrorism Information and Prevention program which was supposed to recruit letter carriers and transportation workers to report any suspicious activities.

More Than Broken Glass: American Youth Activism in the 1990s

Michael Dennis

Interviewing a handful of privileged university students for a book about the 1990s, journalist Haynes Johnson asked them to define their generation. Some suggested that the technological revolution with its hyper-speed connections, instant access, and auto-didactic possibilities set them apart from their predecessors. Yet the information revolution was as much a source of post-modern uncertainty as vehicle of personal liberation. "There's nothing that's uniting us, or defining a movement for us," confessed one woman. "I wish we had something to fight for, something that brings us together," added another. Expressing a longing for something more profound than the cascade of images from her computer screen, another student observed that "I do feel like I missed out on something in the Sixties. Not that I would have wanted to live in that time, but there was something that so united everyone."¹

Despite the romanticization of 1960s activism, the comments reflected the predicament of middle-class youth in the late 20th century. Confronted by shrinking career prospects (even while internet millionaires seemed to confirm the persistence of the Horatio Alger myth) buffeted by an economic transformation that left a trail of downsized corporations in its wake, frustrated by the inability to approximate the achievements of their elders, and deluged by a consumer ethos that answered each call for meaning with rewards for loyal shopping, young, middle-class Americans found themselves suspended in a web of "nihilism, cynicism, and cultural exhaustion."² At the same time that most young Americans confronted a world of diminished opportunities and suburban meaninglessness, some found channels of political expression that restored a sense of control over their lives. Joining environmental groups, anti-sweatshop campaigns, and corporate accountability initiatives, young Americans began to turn the tide against post-modern drift.

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This renewed enthusiasm for democratic participation culminated at the fabled Battle of Seattle in 1999. In a period of market fundamentalism, student activists did more than engage in the time-honored tradition of youthful rebellion. Using the tactics of civil disobedience borrowed from an earlier generation of American activists, they expressed an oppositional subculture that exalted community interests over the 1990s ethic of fulfilment through individual consumption. The streams of youth activism that converged in Seattle at the WTO protests were important not because of the discrete issues they addressed. Rather, they were significant because of what they had in common, a profound disenchantment with the atomistic individualism and privatized consumption that defined the spirit of the age. Through their activism, they captured the persistent sense of insecurity that afflicted millions of Americans in the 1990s. Beneath the surface hype about the New Economy and the internet, middle-class Americans were deeply anxious about their futures; young activists became the lightning rods of that malaise.

This new activism represented a break with a youth subculture defined more by its *style* of personal protest than by its commitment to political action.³ While body piercing, hairstyles, clothing, and music distinguished a youth subculture committed to personal autonomy in the 1980s, collective decision-making, organized protest, and critical thinking about a global economy that directly shaped their lives characterized the young people who faced the rain and the rubber bullets in Seattle. Confronted by forces that yielded nothing to the latest bohemian mood, activists channelled their dissent into collective action.

In the 1980s, the impulse to oppose the status quo intensified. It was an era of conservative ascendancy, when President Ronald Reagan forged a coalition of Christian evangelicals and anti-tax middle-class activists to dismantle an allegedly intrusive welfare state. The willingness to challenge the ideological power grid of militarism and trickle-down economics grew stronger when Reagan ratcheted up the Cold War, stockpiling nuclear warheads, testing cruise missiles, and laying plans for the ominous “Star Wars” anti-ballistic missile system (SDI.) Beyond the clubs and the record stores, the alternative culture took a decidedly single-issue political focus: nuclear weapons proliferation, welfare reform, gay rights, and American meddling in Central America. Activists abandoned the traditional marches for a style of protest defined by direct action.

Anti-nuclear activists experimented with “die-ins” at the headquarters of companies manufacturing weaponry, “Punk Percussion Protests” against apartheid outside the South African embassy in Washington, and the indiscriminate distribution of “fall out” dust at strategic sites to symbolize the after-effects of a nuclear exchange. Experimenting in direct action tactics that had enjoyed considerable currency during the 1960s, young activists challenged the ethic of “spectatorship,” as Kevin Mattson describes it, the media-induced posture in which life becomes a series of discrete and disconnected experiences.⁴

Despite the impact on public consciousness, the protests were too sporadic to affect public policy or develop into a widespread social movement. Astonishing prosperity and the continuing Cold War saga also muted public protest against corporate dominance in America. Moreover, members of the punk subculture opted for a version of dissent based more on style than ideas. Living in a period of conservative consensus after the decline of the New Left, young dissidents withdrew into a world defined by clothes, music, hairstyles, and sneering posture. Personal accessorizing—Mohawk haircuts, safety pins in leather jackets, all-black ensembles, steady musical diets of Bauhaus and the Dead Kennedys—became the signifiers of a self-consciously alternative subculture. Clashing political viewpoints ranging from left to right circulated through this underworld, but the punk style increasingly dominated the way in which the young and disaffected expressed themselves.⁵ The libertarian tendencies within this subculture reflected an inversion of the hyper-individualist tendencies celebrated in the mainstream. Accessorizing for dissent, standardizing the “look” of the disenchanting, the punk scene offered an edgy but marketable (think Billy Idol and “Rebel Yell”) alternative to the button-down, penny-loafing preppie look.

The abiding reality for most young people of the 1990s was the declining prospect for social mobility. More than computers, MTV, skateboarding, and hip-hop—a musical genre that crossed the persistent racial divide in America—economic insecurity dominated the lives of this post-industrial generation. Statistics offer a clinical look into this world, but a look nonetheless. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, child poverty increased from 15 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1990, at precisely the same time that the poverty index was declining for the elderly. Over one in five people under the age of 18 lives in poverty, a statistic that some experts expect will increase to one out of every four

by 2021. More than escalating poverty and declining social insurance, a reality driven home by the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 which imposed strict limits on social assistance for the poor, Generation X and their Y protégés faced a working world that offered few opportunities for gratifying, stable employment. Part time, temporary jobs in retail outlets, fast food restaurants, and countless other companies of the burgeoning service sector promised low wages, limited benefits, and uncertainty for the children of America's most prosperous generation, the Baby Boomers.⁶

And it wasn't just the service sector that challenged the middle-class myth of upward mobility through education and hard work. Managerial and administrative positions in the white collar sector evaporated as companies merged or shed employees through the ruthless process of "downsizing." Those who continued to work, young no less than old, increasingly found themselves wedged into 'flexible' jobs offering fewer hours, fewer benefits, and little security. Middle and working-class young people also suffered from higher rates of obesity, mental illness, suicide, drug use, and depression than their elders. At the political level, leaders embraced a conservative philosophy of minimal government and maximum freedom for corporations, which whittled away the protections built up since the 1930s for the poor, unemployed, disadvantaged, young, unskilled, and non-white. This same philosophy of ruthless economic competition offered young people little comfort in their struggle to make sense of living in a prosperous, consumer-driven society while being told to accept the reality of making seven or eight career changes throughout their working lives and earning considerably less than their parents. Add to this the escalating cost of college education and the realization that it would not guarantee them a steady job, and middle-class youths had every reason to feel what sociologist Ryan Moore describes as a "sense of betrayal, the suspicion of failure, the resentment of more fortunate generations," and the abject loss of control over their lives.⁷

For young middle-class whites, the sense of isolation and despair bred by these dislocating changes was reflected in their music, particularly grunge rock. Pumped out through independent record labels that embodied the anti-corporate, punk subculture of the 1980s, grunge encapsulated the sense of generational drift and dislocation deliciously portrayed in films such as *Slackers* and *Clerks*. Grunge was also self-consciously generational, the strident antithesis of the love and peace vibe that permeated the Sixties' counterculture. As Soundgarden's Kim

Thayil put exclaimed, "They're [yuppies] this ultimate white-bread suburban upper-middle-class group that were spoiled little fuckers as kids 'cause they were all children of Dr. Spock, and then they were stupid stinky hippies, and then they were spoiled yuppie materialists."⁸ Focussing their discontent on a homogenous Baby Boomer generation, Thayil, Kurt Cobain, and the other purveyors of "alternative" rock studiously ignored the impact of race and class on one's position in the American social order. The problem became the sell-out yuppies, not unfettered capitalism or racist institutions. The solution was an introverted search for healing, a psychic adventure into the torment of suburban, consumer-saturated meaninglessness. Grooving on heavy bass lines and tuned-down guitar licks, kids were urged to "Smell Like Teen Spirit" (Nirvana), a spirit redolent with unfocussed anguish, self-loathing, and abandonment to an incomprehensible cosmos. Nirvana, Soundgarden, Pearl Jam, and the Stone Temple Pilots offered what Hal Foster described as "an aesthetic of indifference that went beyond a pose of boredom to a desire to be done with it all."⁹ Individualistically oriented, grunge could offer therapy, not a larger structure of meaning, and only an oblique challenge to the existing order.

Alongside the romantic storm and stress of grunge, fledgling radicals crafted a subculture fuelled by punk music, alternative magazines, and a commitment to independent cultural production.¹⁰ Congregating in urban scenes throughout the nation, devotees of this alternative youth subculture read *Maximum RocknRoll*, recorded at studios such as SubPop Records (the Nirvana label), and extolled the virtues of music freed from the grip of corporate parasites.

In this urban, predominantly white, punk and hardcore listening crowd of the 1980s, style came before substance. The radicals of the 1990s also exhibited a strong affinity for style. They sported an inimitable fashion that included hemp-spun ponchos, retro-hippie Birkenstocks, dreadlocks, bandanas, army fatigues, and just about anything that might have appealed to a countercultural enthusiast in 1968. Undoubtedly, the progressive youth of the 1990s adopted a distinctive look. Clothing and body piercing can be part of a political statement. In fact, the rejection of mainstream clothing styles and the accoutrements of middle-class privilege defined the bohemianism of the early twentieth century. These young dissidents did not invent a coherent political ideology to replace the amorphous anti-capitalism of the 1980s. Even so, the 1990s did see

the emergence of a new youth subculture, one grounded in the ideals of democratic inclusion and social responsibility. More than a new protest fashion, this subculture responded directly to the social climate that consumer capitalism generated in the late 20th century.¹¹

That sense of weightlessness, of detachment from any solid ground of meaning that reverberated through Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* and Cobain's lamentations gradually receded for the young people who took up the challenge of social reform. In organizing, primarily through grass-roots initiatives and decentralized structures, young people challenged the ideology of acquisitive individualism that dominated American society in the late twentieth century. According to Shannon Service, an organizer of the Direct Action Network that played a key role in coordinating the anti-WTO campaign in Seattle, "Growing up with Generation X meant growing up in a world where everything was for sale[...]Everywhere I turned, I was encouraged to consume my identity and even my liberation in the form of this new computer or that new SUV." Her decision to challenge the materialist consensus proved liberating. Hanging an anti-WTO banner above a freeway during the Seattle campaign, she embraced "a life that was a little freer, more profound, and fun."¹² Author Naomi Klein echoed Service's yearning for authenticity. Her anti-corporate manifesto *No Logo* was an expression of the "deep craving for metaphorical space: release, escape, some kind of open-ended freedom."¹³ Abandoning isolated self-absorption for cooperative action, young Americans restored a sense of personal engagement dulled by the culture of consumption. At the same time, they revived the practice of democratic community that lay dormant since the 1970s.

The growing determination to live a life defined by more than purchasing the latest style of khakis from The Gap led young, white, middle-class Americans into a variety of social causes. Students from across the United States and Canada joined environmentalist outfits such as Greenpeace, Earth First!, the Rainforest Action Network, and community action groups such as Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) that had sprung up in the 1970s. What they shared was a veneration of the environment bordering on mysticism, a search for transcendent truth in the green spaces threatened by industrial pollution. Deprived of the kind of spiritual framework that organized religion once provided, young people sought it in nature. Examining a seashell on a trip to the beach, Shannon Service "realized very clearly, in a moment, that the delicate and

beautiful sea form in my hand was considered valueless in our market economy." This epiphany probably occurred to dozens of young Americans throughout the 1990s, at least those fortunate enough to spend time at a beach examining seashells.¹⁴

Environmentalists translated their quasi-spiritual convictions into action. From obstructing logging routes to sitting in trees destined for the wood chipper to raising consciousness about global warming, college students challenged the sense of entitlement that underlay private industry's exploitation of nature. Operating through internationally-linked organizations and telecommunications, they focused public attention on the link between predatory capitalism and environmental degradation. Dwindling water supplies, declining forest stocks, and evaporating ozone layers were not isolated issues, nor were they the inevitable byproducts of progress. They were the consequences of decisions made by first world entrepreneurs and leaders to privilege industrial growth over ecological stability. Activists found a cause that expressed their impulse for purity over crass materialism. They simultaneously joined communities of activists interested in something more than computer downloads and "intimate and interactive" MTV broadcasts. In the process, they articulated a critique of consumer capitalism that reached far beyond the efforts of their 1980s predecessors.

This impulse to organize, to join, to overcome the social isolation of modern life manifested itself powerfully in the campaign against third world sweatshop labor. Galvanized by journalistic exposes of Nike Corporation's exploitive practices in Indonesia, by the revelation that celebrity Kathy Lee Gifford's company paid Honduran girls working 31 cents an hour to work under sweatshop conditions, and by an AFL-CIO "Union Summer" campaign that recruited a cadre of "Students Against Sweatshops," young activists transformed more than 20 university campuses into sites of corporate resistance.¹⁵ Students traveled, sometimes at considerable risk, to investigate working conditions in El Salvador and other nations sponsoring corporate sweatshops. By 2000, 150 branches of United Students Against Sweatshops had emerged on college campuses across the United States.

The Coalition for Campus Organizing also got into the fray. It focused its attention on sweatshops, education, and what would become the central symbol of anti-corporate protest, the World Trade Organization (WTO). More than simply criticizing corporate behavior,

the student anti-sweatshop campaigners began drawing up labor codes and forming a watchdog organization of its own, the Worker Rights Consortium.¹⁶ These organizations provided communications networks for thinking about issues that affected not only workers in underdeveloped countries and turtles in the Pacific Ocean, but themselves. Equally important, they provided expressly democratic spheres for regenerating civil society. Exuding the kind of unapologetic idealism that has always sustained youthful activism, Ted Hargrave of YES! (Youth for Environmental Sanity) celebrated the community-building features of JAMS!, the group's youth leadership conferences: "We have found again and again, that there is power in coming together to do nothing but hang out and build relationships." More than love-ins, though, Hargrave identified the larger political implications of community formation: "It's covert activism. It's building deep foundations. It's pausing to let the roots of our activism sink into the deeper waters that will sustain us."¹⁷ The sentiment was classically American: idealistic, principled, slightly naïve, but sincere. Here was an activist searching, much like his 1960s predecessors, for individual fulfillment through collective action. The search for belonging, the amorphous desire for self-determination, the conviction that the sources of youthful alienation were somehow intricately connected, led thousands to the streets of Seattle.

Of course, the protest against the World Trade Organization meeting in November 1999 was not the first site of the struggle against neoliberal globalization. Earlier protests in Venezuela, South Korea, Brazil, and Berlin mobilized young people in defense of personal and national autonomy. Successful campaigns against giving the president almost unilateral authority to negotiate trade agreements ("Fast Track") and against granting corporations the right to sue state and local governments (Multilateral Agreement on Investments) convinced American reformers that it was possible to oppose international corporate influence. But those were largely adult fights. For young people, the Seattle demonstration signaled a turning point in their struggle for meaning in a society choking on consumer excess. As Barbara Epstein explained, many of the young people who participated in direct action belonged to "a youth subculture that opposes corporate power, and capitalism generally, because it has created a society in which virtually everything has become a commodity."¹⁸ Appalled by the extension of the marketplace into almost every corner of public life, individually powerless against what

now seemed a global system of insatiable accumulation, young activists converged on Seattle—in strength.

A legion of political pundits and academics weighed in to explain why the WTO had to be abolished, reformed, or defended. But the focus here is in what young people *themselves* thought about the protest in Seattle. First, though, a word or two is necessary about the WTO.

The WTO was formed in 1995 out of the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which American policymakers formed in 1947 to facilitate international exchange after the devastation of World War II. Unlike the GATT, though, the WTO's rulings are binding. That means that participating nations are expected to subordinate domestic laws to the dictates of the WTO. As the sober *Time Magazine* described it, The WTO is "both traffic cop and top court of the global economy."¹⁹ Since its inception, the organization has issued over 175 rulings, many of which have been condemned for favoring corporate interests over that of workers, the environment, small businesses and farmers, human rights, and national sovereignty.²⁰ Committed to expanding the boundaries of corporate trade, the WTO opposes the public management of education, health care, and municipal utilities, services that have traditionally benefited the most marginal. Behind closed doors, free from public scrutiny, the WTO operated as the representative of transnational corporations, justifying decisions in their interest by the doctrines of free market liberalism. The fewer the barriers to international trade, WTO defenders argue, the easier it is to exchange goods and services throughout the world, creating in the process a higher standard of living throughout the western industrialized and developing world. For proponents of the WTO, free trade equaled global prosperity.²¹

But this was hardly the vision of the global village that protesters brought to Seattle in November 1999. According to Sarah Jay Staude, a college student in Portland at the time, her willingness to protest was an expression of "a common sentiment among people my age," the sentiment of those privileged enough to study and challenge injustice. "The poor people who are being exploited don't have the time to think about the global situation because they're just trying to survive. We have enough money, or scholarships, or whatever, to be going to a small liberal arts school and discuss and debate and get outraged."²² Mixing liberal guilt with social obligation, Staude joined the direct action protesters who shut down the WTO meeting. Despite the "dizzying

array” of issues that motivated participants, a protestor simply identified as “Jason” believed that “most people seemed genuinely united by the idea [that] the WTO is quietly effecting a global corporate free-for-all where massive companies force countries to vie for the weakest environmental laws and labor standards, and where corporate lawyers have the right to overturn decisions of democratically-elected local governments that are deemed ‘restrictive to trade.’”²³ Far from celebrating the lawyer as the role model for upwardly mobile youth, Jason defended local democracy against corporate encroachments. In adopting this perspective, he articulated an oppositional worldview. By rejecting submission to corporate prerogatives, the idea that government should be run like a business (if not by business), and material over social values—both of which enjoyed enormous influence among his peers in the 1990s—Jason opened up the possibility that the alternative to a logo-encrusted life might be found in something other than stylish consumption. It might be found through cooperation and the principled commitment to social change.

Critical thinking about the issues that shaped their world distinguished people like Jason as well as Alaskan activist Chris Dixon. According to Dixon, young protesters challenged “the assumption that multinational corporations somehow have the natural right to move freely, dismantling any barriers that interfere with their profit margin.”²⁴ According to Brian Hoover, an engineering student at the University of Michigan who participated in a parallel protest in Ann Arbor, “The real problem is profit versus quality of life; corporate versus people and environment. The WTO favors large multi-national corporations.”²⁵ College students from across the country were enthusiastic about the possibility of influencing the debate, but they came equipped with more than passion. Most had studied the WTO’s decisions, examined the dynamics of the global economy, considered the concrete impact of corporate decisions in developing nations, and arrived willing to learn through teach-ins and seminars.

They were also prepared to take nonviolent action against what they considered undemocratic organizations wielding enormous power. As participant Janet Thomas observed, “There were thousands of students in the streets of Seattle on November 30th. Most of them knew the issues, did the training, and made conscious, committed decision to participate in direct action.”²⁶ This doesn’t mean that the protesters were

“right” and the WTO representatives were hopelessly misguided. What it does suggest is that at the root of the Seattle event lay conflicting *ideas* about how to govern global society, distribute its goods, and promote social improvement. What Seattle highlighted was an emerging debate about the meaning of democracy and the preservation of civil society. It meant that young people, many of whom were university students, were at the forefront of a serious reconsideration of the basic values that dominated American society in the late twentieth century. Most protesters understood the benefits that flowed from entrepreneurial capitalism, but they sought to balance them against values that could not be reduced to commercial exchange. A belief in the primacy of the public sphere over private interests separated the 50,000 protesters from the power brokers inside the Convention Center. Far from an anti-authoritarian jamboree, the WTO protest offered a chance for young people to respond to the seemingly uncontrollable forces that governed their lives.

And what exactly happened in Seattle? Why was it significant and what made this protest any different from the anti-nuclear engagements of the 1980s? Perhaps most importantly, what did it mean to those who participated? This is not the place to review the complex events that led up to the sit-ins at the Seattle Convention Center. More impressive than the individual events was the sheer diversity and magnitude of the action in Seattle. First, over 700 organizations, ranging from the Alliance for Democracy to the Students from Everywhere to the Raging Grannies to the Rainforest Action Network, took part in the protests. Second, the participants were overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, white and middle class. As Jason noted after the demonstration, “There were gore-texed radical environmentalists, aging anti-nuke activists, Tibetan monks, and locked-out steelworkers” shoulder-to-shoulder with “Salvadoran campesinos and a contingent of Falun Gong adherents meditating as the tear gas rolled over them.”²⁷ Gay rights activists, Latino and African American anti-poverty activists, African trade unionists, Native American groups, and dozens of women’s advocacy groups joined this fractious kaleidoscope of democratic protest.

The diversity of the protest tactics mirrored the diversity of the participants. Marches, sit-ins, teach-ins, stadium-sized assemblies, and “lock-downs,” in which protesters would chain themselves together using bicycle locks or pvc pipes to neutralize a strategic area, were all part of the Direct Action repertoire. Young activists affiliated with the

group Art and Revolution constructed elaborate puppets to dramatize their grievances. As founder Alli Starr described it, “collaborative creativity,” the opposite of aggression and violence, played a key role in derailing the first day of WTO meetings. “Dance, music, and giant images helped to hold blockades, de-escalate police violence, and create a joyful festival for global justice.”²⁸ Activists hoisted a huge condom promoting “safe trade” while the Radical Cheerleaders jumped and twirled for justice. Street dancers, musicians, banner bearers (“Today We Shut Down the Evil Empire,”) cardboard turtles (people protesting the needless slaughter of sea turtles by shrimp trawlers that refused to carry Turtle Exclusion Devices), and participants in the “Boston WTeaO Party,” which ceremoniously dumped the shrimp caught in the offending nets while demanding “no globalization without representation,” testified to the versatility of direct action tactics.

The guerilla street theater and the puppets were not new, nor were the direct action and non-violent civil disobedience tactics. Each harkened back to the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the New Left of the 1960s. What was new was the sheer determination to use these tactics to reclaim public space from private, corporate control. Street protest was not so much about condemning state corruption as about insisting that the streets, sidewalks, and public parks belonged to them. Young activists directly challenged one of the central ideological assumptions of their era: that the corporate program to “brand” young people into consumer passivity served the public interest. Against a late twentieth century advertising juggernaut that sought to transform every bus, subway station, computer screen, and airwave into another marketing vehicle, young protesters asserted the right to use public space as a forum for citizenship.²⁹ Choosing collective action over alienated introspection, the youth of Seattle challenged the 90s notion, fed to them by their yuppie elders, that the only legitimate sources of fulfillment could be found in the shopping malls, on the internet, and up the ladder of career ambition. If the style of protest echoed the anti-war actions of 1967, the substance of youth protest harkened back to the Progressive Movement and the hope that liberal governance might restrain predatory business interests.

Youth protesters also signaled their departure from protesters of the 1960s by aligning with labor and mainstream environmentalists. As one of many observers noted, “Teamster president James Hoffa sharing a

stage with student anti-sweatshop activists, of Earth Firsters marching with Sierra Clubbers, and a chain of bare-breasted BGH-free Lesbian Avengers weaving through a crowd of machinists” marked the WTO protests as a carnival of participatory democracy.³⁰ Trade unionists split off from the labor rally to join direct action protesters in downtown Seattle while students, unionists, environmentalists, and others joined together on November 29, the first day of anti-WTO protests. They may not have agreed on tactics—large-scale marches and a “seat at the table” of the WTO vs. lock downs and street puppets—but they converged on the source of discontent. They focused on unilateral corporate influence, not some abstract “state” or theoretical system of class exploitation. To students and organized labor alike, it seemed that corporate interests welcomed them at the banquet of 1990s consumerism but excluded them from the public square when they called for democratic accountability. What began to form, even briefly, in the streets of Seattle was a coalition of people on the economic periphery. And unlike earlier coalitions, this one was international, a development that reflected the increasingly borderless world in which they lived. Generation Xers and their younger counterparts began to see, through the smoke of the tear gas canisters lobbed at them in November 1999, that they were not alone. This patchwork, cross-generational alliance was not an invitation-only affair for the “special interests” that neoconservatives had so harshly denounced. Instead, it was a fragile, united front of people excluded from the institutions that governed their lives.

Student protesters were conspicuously, relentlessly democratic. Oklahoma University student Erin Lawler, who participated in the protests, insisted that “People are angered that our democratic ways are being repealed by the WTO behind closed doors.” Meredith Lobel, a Wesleyan student who also joined the student brigade in Seattle, expressed her frustration at being excluded from the decisions that govern the new international order: “I believe we need rules otherwise there are so many people who have the capacity to be exploited.”³¹ But student and youth activists did more than offer platitudes about democratic inclusion; they also acted on their beliefs. The majority of direct action protesters organized themselves into highly decentralized “affinity groups” of five to twenty people. The groups invited maximum participation, permitted dissent, arrived at a consensus, and protected members involved in vulnerable lock-down positions. “Flying groups”

circulated throughout the downtown area reinforcing protesters under fire. Affinity groups divided themselves into those who were “arrestable” and those who did not want to endure that ordeal.

In contrast to the hierarchical organizations they opposed, the students operated according to participatory democracy, that lofty ideal that the Students for a Democratic Society contributed to the cultural ferment of the 1960s. The affinity groups emerged out the anarchist movement of the late nineteenth century and enjoyed considerable currency among opponents of the fascists during the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s. The Seattle activists had little use for the rigid ideologies that communists and anarchists espoused (though anarchist activity flourished during the WTO protest), but they liked the democratic overtones of the affinity groups. The affinity group became the defining expression of this youth subculture. Through the sit-ins, the brutal police retaliation, and the mass arrests, young activists exercised an astonishing determination to hold the group together. As the police aggression escalated, they found a sense of community. As protester Jason described it,

“When the smoke cleared, the blockades reformed on either side of the path the police had blazed. But all the delegates in the Sheraton hotel were still blocked in by protesters, and the police decided to push the protesters back far enough to open one of the entrances[...]Someone in the front row was holding an American flag, and another person began singing the Star Spangled Banner. Soon, the whole crowd took it up, and many people saluted. The rain dripped down the face masks of the police as we sang of ‘the land of the free, and the home of the brave.’ ‘Whose streets?’ someone shouted. ‘Our streets!’ came the reply from 500 people. ‘Whose democracy?’ ‘Our democracy.’ Then the police started shooting tear gas again.

His comments suggest not only a flair for the romantic, but the contrast between a popular, communitarian democracy and a governing system based on elite privilege. Rejecting the individualistic hedonism that prevailed in the 1990s, youth activists struggled to express the sense of collective purpose cultivated by months of internet organizing.

If anything, it was this sense of political unity that resonated among the young militants in Seattle. Exhilarated by the experience of participating in a tectonic shift of consciousness, university student Jesus Sepulveda reported that “We were just one energy of common sense and

solidarity and dignity and integrity. This is the moment to stop their lies and tell everybody what really happened, to speak all those radical commentaries that we normally don’t talk about with people in daily life[...]” Wesleyan student Sarah Norr joined a group of 50 protesters who formed a human chain that shut down one of the intersections close to the Convention Center. When police announced that they would use “pain compliance techniques” to clear the intersection, the student protesters faced their moment of truth. “[Staying there] was a hard decision to make,” Norr later commented. “Some people, including me, thought there was no point in staying around[...]But then some people said, ‘We’re staying,’ and *then other people did not want to leave them behind*” (emphasis added.)³³ Another protestor captured the feeling that Seattle represented a moment of unprecedented social fusion: “Having been in Seattle[...]I can tell you that the unity and solidarity expressed by all was immense. Anarchists supported people locked down in civil disobedience[...]college students alerted protesters as to the new movements of the riots cops at different intersections, longshoremen reinforced young militants at conflict-ridden intersections, balancing the scales.”³⁴

The exhilarating feeling of unity, the sense of overarching purpose stemmed from the realization that people become citizens through public action. Through democratic participation, selfishness is transformed into respect for others and indifference into concern for the public good. The community that Aristotle envisioned—not to mention Thomas Jefferson and James Madison—was self-governing, not totalitarian, rooted in public relationships of mutual benefit, not personal gain, and above all committed to the free exchange of ideas. In the streets of Seattle, and through the organizations that activists had built since the early 1990s, students tasted this kind of community.

That doesn’t mean that every protestor magically mutated into some kind of virtuous super-citizen; more than a handful came for the street party atmosphere. Others indulged in 1990s style radical chic by kicking over trash containers and breaking store windows. While only a marginal element in the larger protest, the self-proclaimed anarchists proved what Martin Luther King and an earlier generation of activists clearly understood: violence undermines the credibility of social justice movements. But for those who endured the batons, the rubber bullets, the pepper spray, the tear gas, and the unfettered intimidation of police bear-

ing a striking resemblance to Darth Vader, the Seattle protest became something more than the political equivalent of such “intense” experiences as bungee jumping and snowboarding. Those communities solidified the intellectual conviction that had brought them to Seattle, but which their elders—not to mention their professors—had insisted belonged only to an earlier generation of quaint, now irrelevant, peace and love freaks. Observing police officers evidently shaken by their own aggressive behavior, one protestor tried to include them in this ad hoc community:

You probably think we're just fanatics with nothing better to do, or maybe vagrants who are too lazy to be working right now, or maybe spoiled college kids who don't have to work. You can think that we're idiots who came across a few statistics on environmental degradation [sic] or sweatshops, that we're out here today to be self-righteous and think that we're better than everybody else, but we're people just like you. And everybody standing here with me knows exactly why they're here today. We're trying to make the world better. And I don't think a single one of you even knows why you're here. How many of you support the WTO? How many of you even know what it does? We know why we're here.³⁵

Determined to be participants rather than spectators, students and young protesters exhibited the kind of moral clarity that their predecessors thought had been safely confined to the archival footage of the civil rights movement and the antiwar protests.

Yet, as much as student activists reveled in a newfound sense of community, they excluded a huge swath of their contemporaries from the experience. Protesters were overwhelmingly young and white. Why, at a time when young African Americans and Latinos suffered the highest rates of youth mortality, the highest likelihood of imprisonment, the highest probability of being unemployed, and the highest chance of police harassment, did they not join the protests? As Van Jones of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights put it, “structural adjustment” (the lessening of debt to developing countries) seems remote at best to people “who are getting our asses kicked daily.” Environmental protection and an end to sweatshops might be important to privileged whites, but ending police brutality, reducing unemployment, and exposing the racial discrimination that continues to influence the criminal justice system

seemed more urgent to African American activists. For young blacks all too familiar with the limits of police tolerance, courting arrest and jail seemed like a recipe for disaster. At the same time, fringe anarchists who denounced the state as an instrument of repression failed to realize that the state has often been the only source of social and economic justice for African Americans.³⁶ Moreover, those persons of color who did participate came away feeling that the global democracy movement fostered what Andrew Hsiao described as “an insider’s culture of privileged militancy” that failed to include those who didn’t look and sound the same.³⁷ The erosion of environmental standards abroad and the decline of social assistance at home were not unrelated issues, but the failure to make the connection undermined the credibility of the Seattle protests among America’s minority groups.

Its strengths and weaknesses, then, were typically American. Strong in their commitment to a brand of participatory democracy inherited from the New Left of the 1960s, young activists were largely indifferent to the persistence of racial inequality in their own society. Concentrating on the poverty of those in the developing world, they overlooked the chronic insecurity that millions of Americans—including themselves—endured from part-time, low-wage work in the service industry. They did not offer a thorough critique of anti-labor practices in the United States, although these were devastating the ranks of the workers who marched beside them. Idealistically committed to direct action protest, they ignored the tendency of that strategy to attract an angry youth crowd that undermined their credibility as peaceful protestors. Failing to separate themselves from the trash-can throwing “anarkids,” they were tarred with the same ignoble brush.

Despite their limitations, the protesters who took to the streets in Seattle demonstrated that young people had not given up social justice for Gameboy, N’Sync, and the best law degree money could buy. The Seattle protests didn’t invent it, but they certainly accelerated the democratic, activist youth subculture that became an undercurrent of the 1990s. While they reawakened the yearnings of the counterculture to overcome the alienation of a bureaucratic, suburban, and consumer society, they echoed the democratic strains of an even earlier generation. In the late nineteenth century, as industrial capitalism transformed American society, small farmers, skilled workers, and middle-class reformers bonded together in protest. Like the WTO protestors, they

believed that American government had fallen into the hands of corporate interests. They too believed that average Americans had lost control of the institutions governing their lives. They launched what was known as the Populist Movement, which burned intensely in the 1890s but collapsed when it failed to gain power.

Even so, the Populists imparted to a later generation of reformers the conviction that government had to restrain the excesses of industrial capitalism and protect working people, young and old alike. That drive for reform, known as the Progressive Movement, set the template for the New Deal of the 1930s, which finally addressed the imbalance between private enterprise and the public interest. The Great Society of the 1960s then sought to expand the benefits of the social contract to a wider range of Americans. In identifying the danger that unrestricted corporate behavior posed to American freedom, the youth who gather in Seattle in November 1999 harkened back to the democratic impulse of the Populist Movement.³⁸

Let's return to Haynes Johnson's California college students for a moment. In 1999, probably most young people would have agreed with the comments of this student interviewee: "I'm hard-pressed to get into any kind of political discussion. No one's interested. Members of my generation have no interest in politics. It has no effect on their lives. They see everything through private businesses and private industry."³⁹ The students who showed up in Seattle challenged that ethic of free-market primacy and ruthless individualism. They fostered a youth subculture rooted in democratic citizenship, one that inadvertently spoke to the deepest anxieties of average Americans in a period of disruptive economic change. At a time when American media celebrated the benefits of unfettered capitalism, student activists advocated for the restoration of a social contract. Perhaps more than the slackers, the grunge oracles, and the hip hop enthusiasts, this movement left its mark on American public life.

Notes

1. Haynes Johnson, *The Best of Times: America in the Clinton Years* (New York: Harcourt Press, 2001), 505-7.

2. Ryan Moore, "[...] And Tomorrow Is Just Another Crazy Scam": Postmodernity, Youth, and the Downward Mobility of the Middle Class," in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth Century America* eds. Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 259.

3. Kevin Mattson, "Did Punk Really Matter? Analyzing the Practices of a Youth Subculture During the 1980s," *Journal of American Studies* 42 (Spring, 2001): 69-97; T.C. Shevory, "Bleached Resistance: The Politics of Grunge," *Popular Music and Society* 19 (Spring, 1995): 23-48.

4. Mattson, 84; on the craving for experience bred by modern, rationalized society, see Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 36-44.

5. Mattson, 86-87.

6. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, "Contemporary Youth and the Postmodern Adventure," retrieved July 9, 2003, from <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/youth.htm#edn9>.

7. Moore, 260.

8. T.C. Shevory, "Bleached Resistance: The Politics of Grunge," *Popular Music and Society* 19 (1995): 34.

9. *Ibid.*, 34.

10. Mattson, 72-77.

11. Again, this discussion draws upon and responds to Mattson's analysis of the style of youth protest in the 1980s.

12. Shannon Service, "Our Sacred Duty: Exposing the Spectacle of Consumer Culture," in *Global Uprising: Confronting the Tyrannies of the 21st Century* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2001), 5.

13. Janet Thomas, *The Battle in Seattle: The Story Behind and Beyond the WTO Demonstrations* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2000), 75.

14. Service, *Global Uprising*, 2.

15. Randy Shaw, *Reclaiming America: Nike, Clean Air, and the New National Activism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 28, 33, 82.

16. Jackie Smith, "Globalizing Resistance: the Battle of Seattle and the Future of Social Movements," *Mobilization* 6 (2001): 7.

17. Ted Hargrave, "YES! Activism at the Speed of Life," *Global Uprising*, 260-61.

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20. Thomas, *Battle in Seattle*, 52-53.

21. Tony Clarke, "Taking on the WTO: Lessons from the Battle of Seattle," *Studies in Political Economy* 62 (Summer, 2000): 7-16;

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25. "Students Dress in Costumes for Day of Action," *The Michigan Daily Online*, December 1, 1999.

26. Thomas, *Battle of Seattle*, 86.

27. "First Person Account of WTO Protest."

28. Ali Starr, "Art and Revolution: Revitalizing Political Protest," in *Global Uprising*, 36.

29. As Naomi Klein argues, activists were "working against forces whose common thread is what might broadly be described as the privatization of every aspect of life, and the transformation of every activity and value into a commodity." See "Reclaiming the Commons," *New Left Review* 9 (May-June 2001): 81-89.

30. Audrey Vanderford, "'Whose Streets? Our Streets!' Narratives and Negotiation after the WTO," 6, available at http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~audreylv/WTO/wto_protest.htm.

31. "OSU students involved in Seattle Protests: Stillwater Trio Part of 40, 000 People in Opposition of WTO," December 3, 1999, available at http://www.ocolly.com/issues/1999_Fall/991203/stories/riot.html; "Wes Students Protest vs. WTO," *The Wesleyan Argus*, December 3, 1999, available at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/dec0399/n2.html>.

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33. "Wes Students Protest vs. WTO," *Wesleyan Argus*, December 3, 1999, available at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/dec0399/n2.html>.

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36. Andrew Hsiao, "Color Blind: Activists of Color Bring the Economic War Home, But Is the Movement Missing the Message?" in *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Corporate Globalization*, 344.

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38. Michael Kazin, "Battle of Seattle Echoes Similar Cries from 1890s," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, December 7, 1999; Epstein, 53.

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Rejecting Artifice, Advancing Art: The Dance Criticism of John Martin

Siobhan Burke

True modernism in the dance, as in the other arts, can never be reduced to a formula; it is basically an approach to art in its relation to living, a point of view.

—John Martin, *America Dancing*, 1936

When John Martin began writing for the *New York Times* in 1927, American modern dance was in the vulnerable, defensive stages of its early development. Martha Graham, a fearless pioneer and future legend, had given her first performance just one year before to what Martin describes as closed-minded, indifferent viewers. In the following two years, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm—who, along with Graham, would constitute the historical "Big Four" of the 1930s—debuted to similar disapproval. In the familiar, colloquial tone of his oral history—the same tone that, in subtler shades, enlivens much of his criticism—Martin recalls that "the press and everybody else didn't know what it was all about:"

They thought it was another crazy art fad, or 'what will they think up next.' [...] The people said, 'Oh, for heaven's sake, why struggle with Martha Graham? Go and see *Swan Lake*.' It was easier [...] You didn't have to struggle; [...] It wasn't an austere art; it wasn't a protest; it wasn't acceptance; it was *entertainment*.¹

Martin was not interested in entertainment. Spending his early career in experimental theatre—as a player in the Chicago Little Theatre, executive director of the American Laboratory Theatre, and critic for *The Dramatic*

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Mirror—he had eschewed the realm of “show business” that was threatening to devour the art of drama. Something similar was happening in dance, but with a significant difference: the art of dance was not being demolished, it was only being born, and it would require Martin’s patience, devotion, and intricacy of thought to sustain it.

As the first dance critic to develop practical theories of performance, composition, and spectatorship—and to voice them in print²—Martin helped to bring the “esoteric” modern dance into the skeptical public light. Constructing his support for the form in opposition to Europe’s “decadent” ballet tradition, he established its legitimacy as a purer, more “American” art, an embodiment of the national spirit. In his emphasis on “the organic,” however, Martin would encounter one of his greatest shortcomings as a critic, a racial essentialism that excluded the black dancing body from his “universal” theories of art.

John Martin, even at the height of his critical passion, stayed true to one basic, pragmatic truth: if modern dance was to survive past its adolescence, it would require the general interest and financial support of a popular audience. Ten years after Graham’s debut, when Martin published his 1936 book *America Dancing*, contemporary dance remained “the source of nothing but tittering and bewilderment to the average man.”³ Most spectators, hungry for glamorous spectacle and narrative suspense, found neither in modern dance; throughout the 1930’s, they continued to react with the “common accusation” that there was “no power of beauty” in the form. Martin, however, firmly denied this claim, drawing attention to the flawed “aesthetic sensibilities” of the viewer:

The misapprehension arises from a narrow application of certain essentials of art—form, rhythm, beauty. The man whose aesthetic sensibilities are slight, either through natural disinclination or underdevelopment, looks for one of two things when he approaches a work of art—either an *intellectual rationalism expressed in literary allusions* as a rule, or *sensual satisfaction*. Neither of these has anything to do with the functions of art.⁴

The perceived ugliness of modern dance, then, was merely a symptom of the limitations of “individual minds,” which preferred easily-digestible

narrative (“literary allusions”) or vibrant spectacle (“sensual satisfaction”) over less “literal,” less “beautiful” modern works.

Writing for the general public, and deeply moved by the art they so frivolously rejected, Martin took it upon himself to remedy this “misapprehension,” to mediate between the presumed inaccessibility of “new dance” and the unfortunate crudities of popular taste. As he recalls in his oral history, “Once I became intrigued by the modern dance I was all for it[...]I thought it was a great art manifestation, and I felt that it was my business [...] to build an audience for this art.”⁵ Dance historian Selma Jeanne Cohen reaffirms this when she writes, “Martin had a mission: to ‘open the eyes’ of the audience, to get them to see the significance of this new dance that was often not pretty and that often told them truths they did not especially want them to hear.”⁶

In pursuing this mission, Martin never lowered his critical standards, nor did he encourage artists to cater to public sentiment; rather, he aimed diplomatically to elevate the popular sensibility toward a deeper understanding of modern dance. Challenging the notion that the art was impenetrably difficult, he insisted on the innate interpretive capacities of each viewer, and provided (in print) the theoretical tools he thought necessary for a full appreciation of dance. *America Dancing* contains two “Layman’s Guides”—“How Not to Look at Dancing” and “How to Look at Dancing”—with the aim of building an enlightened spectatorship. Here, and elsewhere in greater intricacy, Martin developed a complex theory of receptivity that broke down the intellectual hierarchy between artist and spectator, placing them on level planes of human experience, and suggesting that they could, indeed, relate to one another. The modern dancer was not the spectator’s antagonist, but at the same time, the spectator could not remain a passive or gluttonous recipient. According to Martin, the act of viewing dance, just like performing it, required *work*. Perhaps most interesting was his belief that this work relied less on the everyday, rational processes of the brain and more on the emotional awareness of the sensual, material body.

According to Martin, art was not “a high achievement that the lowly people must be led to[...]The artist is also a member of the general public, and his experience is a common experience.”⁷ The role of the artist, he believed, was to convey a universal human experience through the lens of a personal “point of view,” which would reveal to viewers “some new, unintellectualized truth” about a collectively familiar

subject.⁸ As he wrote in his *Introductions to the Dance*, “It is [the artist’s] purpose [...] to arouse us to feel a certain emotion about a particular object or situation. He wants to change our feeling about something, to increase our experience, to lead us from some habitual reaction [...] to a new reaction which has an awareness of life in it and is liberating and beneficent.”⁹ This is what Martin meant when he wrote, more succinctly, that “good art speaks directly from its creator’s emotions to our own.”¹⁰ Essentially, art should communicate something meaningful and real between artist and spectator. But *how*, exactly, did this transference of emotion take place? This was one of Martin’s major critical concerns, which he addressed through the concept of *metakinesis*.

Martin believed that two people—that is, two material bodies, each with a unique emotional past—were required to retrieve “meaning” from dance; to interpret a choreographed work was not a process of mental, intellectual rigor but one of naturally-occurring kinetic transfer, the transmission of “movement sense” from body to body. As he wrote in *Introductions to the Dance*, “not only does the dancer employ movement to express his ideas, but, strange as it may seem, the spectator must also employ movement in order to respond to the dancer’s intention and understand what he is trying to convey.”¹¹ Martin theorized that the viewer of dance engaged in an “inner mimicry” of the movement onstage, essentially internalizing the dance into his own neuromuscular system. The initial act of perception took place through the external senses, a passive absorption of spectacle and sound through the eyes and ears; this evolved, however, into a feeling deep within the spectator’s own body, through what Martin called the “sixth sense” of “muscular sympathy.”¹²

Relying on the belief that movement was the basis of all human experience—that our emotional memories were, at their core, muscular memories—Martin hypothesized that the inner mimicry of the dancer’s movement would necessarily evoke an emotional memory, or “associational connotation,” in the spectator. This is what gave meaning to a dance, allowing the viewer to relate emotionally to the action on stage, to look back at the work of art through his *own* lens of personal experience. Summarizing this theory in *America Dancing*, Martin wrote:

What, then, is the means of contact between the dancer and the spectator? When we see a human body moving, we see movement which is potentially producible by a human body and therefore by our own; through kinesthetic sympathy we actual-

ly reproduce it vicariously in our present muscular experience and awaken such associational connotations as might have been ours if the original movement had been of our own making. The irreducible minimum of equipment demanded of a spectator, therefore, is a kinesthetic sense in working condition.¹³

The spectator, Martin suggested, could put an end to his mental struggle with the allegedly confounding, inaccessible art of modern dance. Art was to be experienced not through the mind, but through the “irrational” parts of the physical self, for while the brain was a “marvelous machine,” only the body, the instrument of giving and receiving emotion, was capable of translating movement into meaning.¹⁴

Much of Martin’s criticism focused on the artist’s capacity to communicate emotion through movement, to penetrate the viewer’s emotional history and “liberate” his understanding of life. The art that achieved this was *expressional*, while that which failed was *spectacular*.¹⁵ The epitome of spectacle, and the object of Martin’s harshest early criticism, was the academic ballet. Showcasing dancers’ technical virtuosity over their capacity for emotional expression—with the support of dazzling costumes, lighting, and set design—ballet appealed to the senses on a purely superficial level. Viewers reacted to “the personal beauty of the executants, the story [...] being told, the music, the costumes, the scenery.” Similarly, “the dancing itself with its difficulties of execution” was merely a blur of dazzling physicality. Gratifying the spectator’s search for “sensual satisfaction,” it did not demand that visceral, muscular engagement with the artistic medium—the material body—but existed merely as an object of the aesthetically-limited, pleasure-seeking gaze.¹⁶

For Martin, spectacular dance was problematic because the human body, as “the very element in which we live,” was *necessarily* “an instrument of expression,” with every gesture carrying the emotional connotations of human behavior.¹⁷ As he wrote in *Introductions to the Dance*, “No movement of the human body is possible without definite relation to life experience, even if it is random or inadvertent[...]. The body is totally incapable of becoming an abstraction itself.”¹⁸ Ballet, however, had attempted to artificially abstract the body into “an instrument of pure design,” presenting movement without meaning, form without function. The ballerina—bending into the “unnatural” shapes and lines of a prescribed technical vocabulary—had become “an engine” for the

moving-about of expressionless geometrical shapes.¹⁹ As Martin saw it, the technique imposed upon her body, with its strict codifications, was merely “an invented code of laws, quite unrelated to natural impulse and subjective experience and in no wise concerned with the illumination of man’s relation to man or to his universe.”²⁰

It was only the narrative structure of the ballet—superimposed on the abstract movement of the dancer—that offered relevant meaning to the average, aesthetically misguided viewer. As Martin wrote mockingly, critiquing “literary-minded” popular audiences, “If the dancer does not come out dressed as some specific character—a sailor, a country maiden, a mocking-bird, a cloud—and climb an imaginary yokel, or sip the honey from imaginary flowers, or float through the imaginary ether, he is incomprehensible.”²¹ As his tone suggests, Martin deplored the genre of the story-ballet, with its easily decoded, pantomimic sequences. Combined with the abstraction of form, the literalism of ballet’s content failed to breach the viewer’s emotions. At the same time, representational movement, being fully “translatable into words,” undermined the expressive potential of the dancing body; if the content of a dance could be explained in words, Martin reasoned, why explain it with movement?²²

In Martin’s view, modern dance was ballet’s antithesis. The highest *expressional* genre, it succeeded in communicating “directly from its creator’s emotions to our own.” One key to its success was its rejection of ballet’s pantomimic representationalism in favor of “distortion and abstraction.” “Abstraction” in this sense did not refer to the deformation of the ballet body as discussed above; rather, it was the strategy of taking a literal gesture, something we might see in everyday life, and distorting it, defamiliarizing it, into a less recognizable but more thought-provoking form. As Martin wrote:

Dancing in its best sense [...] distorts its movements away from representationalism to give them wider range, abstracts them into the essence of experience to extend their powers of awakening memory and to intensify their impact [...] [A good dancer] sets up, along with the familiar patterns, such departures from them as to give them a new cast, a new meaning, in accordance with his original intention.²⁴

Through distorting and abstracting everyday movements of the body, the most effective *expressional* artist would dig deeper than “realistic

gesture” and beyond “the illustration of a literary idea,” getting to the core of “the very primitive, elementary business of translating emotion into movement first.”²⁴ In doing so, the artist would live up to Martin’s ideal, revealing a “hitherto unrealized truth” about “the stuff of common experience.”²⁵

It was the expressive potential of distortion and abstraction that drew Martin to the works of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, the subjects of his highest praise whom he credited as “the creators of modern dance.”²⁶ In his chapter on Graham in *America Dancing*, Martin wrote that “Her movement is based at its significant best upon purely communicative impulses; it is the stuff of gesture abstracted into greater universality of application.” This extraction of “universal” meaning from non-representational movement had been her “greatest contribution” to modern dance. According to Martin, Graham’s only rare disgraces occurred when she neglected her gift for expression in favor of “gymnastic virtuosity,” treating her body like the athletic machine of a ballerina rather than her own demonstrative instrument.²⁷

Humphrey, even more than Graham, succeeded in distorting movement and awakening emotion; she distinguished herself in Martin’s eye with her “emotionally stirring” works that, paradoxically, grew out of her “cold, technical” approach to creating “functional design.” Unlike design in ballet, the product of artificial “invention,” Humphrey designed her works based on physical principles of fall and recovery, of the body’s sequential surrender to and resistance of gravity. Because such principles were related “immediately to life,” Humphrey’s work achieved the “metakinetic element” of good art, “evoking a natural, sympathetic response.” This was particularly true of her *Drama of Motion*, which, “though it was as nearly abstract as a dance composition could well be [...] sounded a deeper emotional note than anything that had preceded it.” Martin commended Humphrey for upending widespread notions of abstractionism which conceptualized the body as “pure design in space”; she demonstrated that pure choreographic form, with no basis in pantomime or impersonation, could still possess great “meaning and substance,” the essence of emotion without the artifice.²⁸

The bulk of this theory and commentary derives from Martin’s more scholarly texts *America Dancing* and *Introductions to the Dance*, which may have not appealed to the same public reading *The New York Times*. Still, the voice of Martin the critic was not far removed from that of Martin the newspaper reviewer; his theory clearly informed his practice,

for what good was a “Layman’s Guide” if the layman was not reading it? Although Martin saw the reviewer as inferior to the critic (newspaper reviewing was merely “spot criticism” and “inspired snap judgment,” whereas criticism required “perspective”), Martin did not cheapen his critical voice when he wrote for the general public.²⁹ In fact, his theories of composition and receptivity found their way lucidly into the *Times*, as he struggled to bridge the gap between “esoteric” dancer and popular audience.

With his tireless emphasis on emotion-through-abstraction, Martin was responding directly to popular critiques of the early modern dancers, particularly the “sensual, highly emotional” Graham. With slurs like “esoteric and abstract,” “ugly,” “angular,” and “obscure,” the public, confounded by her newness, could not relate to her work on an emotional or physical level.³⁰ Martin, on the other hand, was swept away by her genius. In his oral history, he reveals that he felt a deep commitment to Graham, an intimate connection with her artistry and the fiery sense of self behind it. Recognizing the emotional and intellectual challenge of absorbing her work, he maintained that it was a struggle worth enduring:

Inside of her was this stormy center, and it was her own personal center of feeling [...] Everything she did stemmed from a very strong feeling of human experience[...]She kept demanding more of you; you had to follow her through a narrower channel, but her strength grew always greater and greater. In her career she finally found a center which, in a sense, was permanent—she knew where she stood at last. From the center she unfolded, always in dramatic fashion.³¹

Martin was genuinely concerned that members of the public also experience Graham’s work in its full emotional depth, that they feel seized, pulled along, and swept under, like he did, by her “dramatic fashion.” It was simply a matter of educating the layman. “You have to have two things,” he declared in his oral history; “you have to have the artist and the spectator—the audience and the creator. They must go side by side.”³² Nowhere was this truer, it seems, than between the powerless spectator and the over-powering “Miss Graham.”

Martin made this clear on a Sunday in 1929, with an impassioned *Times* review headlined “One Artist: Martha Graham’s Unique Gift and

Steady Development.” Uniting critical theory with the reviewer’s practice, he incorporated sophisticated principles of metakinesis and formal abstraction—that distillation of “essences”—into a fervent defense of Graham before a deeply suspicious mass audience. In two paragraphs, he prepared “the layman” for what to expect from Graham’s performance, and most importantly, for the emotional work it would require. Martin’s heartfelt tone, which infused so much of his work, makes his argument worth quoting at length:

Audiences who come to be amused and entertained will go away disappointed, for Miss Graham’s programs are alive with passion and protest [...]She does the unforgivable thing for a dancer to do—she makes you think; yet it is a thinking of a peculiar character, for it is less of the brain than of some organ absent from anatomical charts that reacts to esthetic stimuli. She leaves you upheaved and disquieted and furnishes afterthoughts not calculated to soothe such a condition.

Miss Graham leads more and more to essences. She boils down her moods and her movements until they are devoid of all extraneous substances and are concentrated to the highest degree. She gives less and less of the full dimensions of her meanings; she indicates, she suggests, she leads you on with her. And because she is so sparing it is not difficult to follow along; there are no sidetracks and byways.³³

This was not diversion, Martin warned; it was real, disquieting art. Without the receptive body-brain of the open, willing spectator, it would disappear, as public sentiment ordained, into obscurity and miscomprehension. His hope was that with the firm but patient help of the critic, growing appreciation for “the dance” would dissolve such imminent threats.

Martin’s distaste for diversion, spectacle, and superfluity was not a purely aesthetic critique; it was also a critique of the aristocratic, European culture—the “Old Guard,” he called it—from which ballet sprang. He firmly believed that in the act of throwing off this tradition, the modern dancers were creating a refreshingly “American” form of expression and redeeming the art of dance in doing so. As he wrote of

Martha Graham in 1931, she had “restored the dance to the high estate from which it fell when it became merely a pastime for an idle aristocracy.”³⁴ It was not their ancestral heritage that defined these artists as American, or the fact that many, particularly in the 1930’s and 1940’s, were creating such works as *Frontier*, *American Document*, *The Shakers*, and *Appalachian Spring*; rather, it was their spirit of individualism, expressed through each one’s personal commitment to an unadulterated “point of view,” that was shaping the long-awaited development of a distinctly American art.

Why did Martin insist so strongly on the Americanness of modern dance? Perhaps he was following the lead of critics in other genres, such as Van Wyck Brooks in literature, who critiqued the American appetite for European authors and called for a “strictly organic” national culture.³⁵ Indeed, the humbly adolescent American dance, much like the young American literature, had fallen under attack for its “inorganicism,” its lack of an inherited tradition, and Martin sought vengefully to redeem it.

In 1931, a polemical article appeared in the *Times* under the headline “The Dance: An Attack.” André Levinson, a leading European dance critic, had published a biting critique of American modern dance, ridiculing its “eclecticism,” its “dilettantism,” and its failure as a “national formula:”

As it is practiced in America, the concert dance, in search of a national formula and in the absence of all tradition, pays homage to an amateurism that is sometimes judicious and often ingenuous [...] [The dancers] do not apply themselves to any school: they borrow from all schools whatever outward signs and fixed characteristics are easily acquired. Only a culture that has been evolved and crystallized can produce an organic and original art of theatrical dancing [...]³⁶

Quoting Levinson at length in the *Sunday Times*, Martin launched a direct rebuttal, shedding light on the “conflict of classic tradition and modern needs.” Levinson was a firm supporter of the ballet tradition with its rigid standardization of form. His remarks suggested that in the absence of a “crystallized” culture, American concert dancers should simply embrace the elite, codified tradition of ballet rather than rebelling against it with a multiplicity of anti-technical forms. Martin, however, maintained that America was “innately a-balletic:” “our spirit of freedom

rebels against being told that we can do only thus and so.” In fact, he suggested, Americans *could* lay claim to a heritage, an inherited penchant for resistance that would not endure “such restrictions as M. Levinson would put upon the dance.” The nation’s early settlers, Martin wrote in *America Dancing*, had launched “a battle against authoritarianism, a crusade for the building of conduct on the *essential nature* of man instead of on *superimposed codes*.”³⁸ Within the realm of concert dance, trailing several centuries behind, the same developments were now taking place, setting into motion what Martin called the “the outstanding American trait” of “anti-authoritarianism.”³⁹

According to Martin, the cultural tradition available to modern dance was, paradoxically, America’s *lack* of tradition, its self-conscious rejection of establishment. In his oral history, when asked what was the “something about it” that defined American dance, he responded, “that one principle of throwing off arbitrary, traditional heritages that were no longer of any value [...] throwing them away and starting with no premise except the body as the instrument and total requirement for the art.”⁴⁰ Rather than lamenting America’s empty heritage, as Brooks seemed to do, Martin celebrated the challenge that lay before modern dance, the imperative to “start from the ground up” without the hindrance of “superimposed codes.”⁴¹

It was this American, anti-authoritarian impulse, combined with the modern emphasis on personal expression, which gave rise to a plurality of techniques within the realm of modern dance, the so-called “dilettantism” and “borrow[ing] from all schools” that Levinson critiqued. The dancer’s foremost goal, as we have seen, was to convey a personal point of view through the distorted, abstracted form of the moving body; but such a perspective was never static, nor was it consistent between individuals. Formal technique, therefore, had to remain fluid in order to comply with the endlessly shifting content it was meant to convey; it necessarily resisted pre-established standards. As Martin wrote in *America Dancing*,

Technique must remain a highly personal and plastic matter, in order to keep it at all times adequate to meet the ever changing demands made upon it[...] [For the modern artist,] there is no such thing as right or wrong method, there is no academic standard; there is only success or failure in conveying what he means to convey.⁴²

Martin recognized that this fluidity of technical standards led to “many conflicts of theory and opinion,” which posed a particular challenge to the student of modern dance, confounding his naïve search for concrete explanations. Freed from forces of “indoctrination,” the budding dancer was compelled toward self-exploration, extracting his *own* means of expression from the theories around him:

The immediate effect [of conflicting theories] is generally one of confusion of the mind of the student, and from this he is able to extricate himself only by dint of his own effort. With the whole field thrown open to him, he is forced to find his own solution to problems which are inevitably also his own [...] He is given every aid, but he has no orthodoxy to lean on, no authoritarianism to tell him what to think.⁴³

Sorting through a tangled web of ideas, the student would emerge from “confusion” with a stronger sense of self, joining a collective search for individual expression and recapitulating the American, anti-authoritarian ideals of modern dance.

Championing the Americanness of modern dance, Martin distinguished the adolescent art from its “irrelevant” and “authoritarian” European predecessors, maintaining that it was, in fact, an indigenous form of creative expression. Even at its most problematic, the “eclecticism” that Levinson derided as “inorganic” was in fact the complete opposite, shaped by the most intrinsic of American values: the rejection of repressive authority and the embrace of the individual self.

In response to questions of Americanness and modernity, the tension between ballet and modern dance was just one aspect of Martin’s criticism. In the late 1930s and 40s, African American concert dance became another focal point of this discourse, as black performers moved out of minstrelsy and into the more distinguished performing arts. Martin expressed great enthusiasm for these emerging artists—particularly “the unmistakable masters” Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus—providing an energetic, almost heroic account of their success in his survey text *Book of the Dance*.⁴⁴ Coming into their own as “creative artists,” Negro dancers experienced “greater equality” than ever before, as they

“delved with curiosity and profit” into works of “energy and experimentation.”⁴⁵ At the same time, as with the “Big Four” in modern dance, Martin helped to advance African American careers through his widely-read *Times* reviews, bringing another burgeoning dance form into the public eye.

In spite of this praise, however, Martin inadvertently denied “American Negro dancers” the very equality he believed they had attained. In *Book of the Dance*, he does not place African Americans within the genre of “modern dance.” While modern dancers had beneficently “open[ed] the way for the Negro dancer,” the two fields had never merged, maintaining instead “a *parallel* course all the way.”⁴⁶ One could read these comments as a statement of historical truth: perhaps at this time, it was not socially acceptable for black and white performers to appear together onstage, necessarily sending them on different artistic paths. Martin, however, suggests that something else—something innate—placed black artists outside the realm of modern dance. His characterization of their work, while consistently admiring, reeks of racial essentialism, the belief that “the Negro dancer” was just that: *the* Negro dancer, a racially prescribed archetype with a collective, ancestrally determined “point of view.”

Historian Patrick B. Miller has examined Martin’s essentialism in his essay *The Anatomy of Scientific Racism*, noting the critic’s “persistent references to the ‘intrinsic’ and the ‘innate’” in relation to “American Negro” dancers.⁴⁷ Though apparently well-intentioned, Martin problematically suggests that African Americans, united by the “intrinsic” pulse of a “uniquely racial rhythm,” all possess the same “innate equipment” for expression. Like other artists, the Negro dancer had created “a means for dance expression” based on “the relationship between inner emotional awareness and outward muscular activity.” For the Negro artist, however, the expressive content was necessarily imbued with the “uninhibited qualities” of his race:

[...] the movement he produced thus, without the superimposition of any arbitrary limitations, would differ from that produced by Caucasians, Mongolians or Malayans, and would accordingly release in communicative essence the uninhibited qualities of the racial heritage, no matter what the immediate subject of any specific dance might be.⁴⁸

While a white choreographer like Humphrey or Graham could create a distinctive, personal aesthetic—Graham delving into her own female psyche, Humphrey experimenting endlessly with abstract form—the Negro, by Martin's essentialist theory, was denied this same level of agency, by virtue of racial traits that transcended individuality. Furthermore, beyond his innate "emotional awareness," the Negro's physical anatomy—a "racial constant" in the bodily instrument of expression—placed restrictions on his art, excluding him in particular from the European ballet: "The deliberately maintained erectness of the European dancer's spine is in marked contrast to the fluidity of the Negro dancer's, and the latter's natural concentration of movement in the pelvic region is similarly at odds with European usage."⁴⁹

According to Martin, then, the Negro's internal *and* external selves—the sources of both content and form—were defined first and foremost by his alleged racial inheritance. His "innate" characteristics may have been positive—exuberance, rhythm, stamina, speed—but they inscribed limitations on the African American body and what it could "appropriately" strive to achieve. Martin himself noted this when he argued against the prospect of a racially integrated company:

The Negro artist, like the artist of any other race, works necessarily and rightly in terms of his own background, experience and tradition. He makes no fetish of it, but on the other hand, like any other artist, he recognizes that there are some roles and categories that do not suit him. Race—exactly like sex, age, height, weight, vocal range, temperament—carries with it its own index of appropriateness.⁵⁰

One could argue that this theory limited the white choreographer as well; Martin referred generally to "Race," not to "blackness." But rarely in his writings, if ever, did he remark on the innate whiteness of a modern dancer, nor did he critique whites who dabbled in African American idioms, such as Helen Tamiris in her use of jazz and Negro spirituals. For the American Negro, *self-expression* was necessarily *racial* expression, and *race* the transcendent point of view.

To a certain extent, we can forgive Martin these shortcomings. The popularity of artists like Dunham and Primus surged in the years that followed, and they remain legends today; surely, Martin's critical enthusiasm played a positive role. Still, it is worth questioning the ideological

legacy that a critic leaves behind, perhaps unnoticed, but still functioning in covert ways. What precedent did Martin establish by insisting on the innateness of racial qualities? What implications did this have for black choreographers of the 1960's and 1970's, who, like Donald McKayle, moved away from boisterous emotionalism and toward more serious social commentary, or, like Bill T. Jones and Gus Solomons, Jr., toward stoic, formal postmodernism? Martin's criticism, perceptive and passionate, functioned almost flawlessly in his time, legitimizing the beloved art that had once seemed hopelessly vulnerable. And since he was one of the few qualified dance critics of his time, he has been taken for granted; his theories, his commentary, his account of an era infuse the dance history textbook of today. But in a spirit that Martin might admire, we must remember that even the sole critic is not the authority, and that his views should remain prominent, but not entrenched, in the history of modern, American dance.

Notes

1. John Martin, *Reflections of John Joseph Martin* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1967), 61.
2. Jack Anderson, "Introduction," *The Dance in Theory* (Pennington: Dance Horizons, 1963), x.
3. John Martin, *America Dancing: The Background and Personalities of the Modern Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1968), 84.
4. John Martin, *The Modern Dance* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1933), 36.
5. Martin, *Reflections*, 86.
6. Selma Jeanne Cohen, "Martin, John," in *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, vol. 4.
7. Martin, *Reflections*, 87.
8. Martin, *America Dancing*, 115.
9. John Martin, *The Dance in Theory* (Pennington: Dance Horizons, 1963), 23.
10. Martin, *The Dance in Theory*, xi.
11. *Ibid.*, 1.
12. *Ibid.*, 12-22.
13. Martin, *America Dancing*, 117.
14. Martin, *Reflections*, 192.
15. Martin, *The Dance in Theory*, xi.
16. Martin, *America Dancing*, 94.
17. Martin, *America Dancing*, 141; Martin, *The Dance in Theory*, 22.
18. Martin, *The Dance in Theory*, 33.
19. Martin, *America Dancing*, 33-34.
20. Martin, *The Dance in Theory*, 34.
21. Martin, *America Dancing*, 89.
22. John Martin. "The Dance: A Need of Trained Audiences," *New York Times* 11 November 1928: 145.
23. Martin, *America Dancing*, 114-115.

24. Martin, *Reflections*, 196.
25. Martin, *America Dancing*, 214.
26. Martin, *Reflections*, 102.
27. Martin, *America Dancing*, 204.
28. *Ibid.*, *America Dancing*, 213-216.
29. Martin, *Reflections*, 77-78.
30. *Ibid.*, 105-106; John Martin, *Book of the Dance*, 1947 (New York: Tudor Publishing Co, 1963), 153.
31. Martin, *Reflections*, 105.
32. *Ibid.*, 86.
33. John Martin, "The Dance: One Artist," *New York Times*, 10 March 1929: 132.
34. Nancy Reynolds, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 147-148.
35. Van Wyck Brooks, *Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years*, Ed. Claire Sprague, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 202.
36. John Martin, "The Dance: An Attack," *New York Times*, 7 June 1931: X3.
37. John Martin, "The Dance: Old and New Forms," *New York Times* 14 June 1931: X3.
38. Martin, *America Dancing*, 44.
39. *Ibid.*, 32.
40. Martin, *Reflections*, 128.
41. *Ibid.*, 181.
42. Martin, *America Dancing*, 44-45.
43. *Ibid.*, 177.
44. Martin, *Book of the Dance*, 180.
45. *Ibid.*, 178-179.
46. *Ibid.*, 178.
47. Patrick B. Miller, "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement," *Journal of Sport History* 25 no. 1 (Spring 1998): 119.
48. *Book of the Dance*, 177-178.
49. *Ibid.*, 178-179.
50. *Ibid.*, 189.

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Jazz in Italy: From Its Origins to the Second World War

Silvio Amori

Introduction

Jazz and fascism have almost identical dates of birth but little has been made of the effect of one on the other. The difficult and slow achievement of jazz in Italy—the concern of this essay—can surely be associated with the repression carried out by the fascist regime, but other factors have to be considered. There was a cultural attitude which differed from that of other countries. This attitude continued well after the fascist era and was associated with an aprioristic, provincial, anticultural approach. As Luca Cerchiari writes,

among others, the greatest Italian philosopher of the twentieth century, Benedetto Croce, did not like music and this had repercussions on the already weak interest of the Italian intellectual world, at the beginning of the twentieth century, for the music world. Whereas in France we can find a completely different attitude, e.g. the particular interest for jazz shown on more occasions by the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. (10)

Cerchiari adds that we should not forget the Catholic conservatism, sex-phobia and indifference to musical cultures, or the “leftist” anti-Americanism of the fifties or the ridiculous dictates of the Conservatories, immune to American culture and, in general, to all cultures external to Europe.

But there were many exceptions, and one of them was the futurist movement of Marinetti (the founder), Lucini, Buzzi, Palazzeschi, Govoni, Altomare, Cardile, Carrieri, Manzella Frontini (the poets), Boccioni, Balla, Carra', Antonio and Luigi Russolo, Severini, De Pero (the painters), Balilla-Pratella, both Russolo brothers, Mix, and Casavola (the musicians). They probably heard the first 78 RPM records arriving from the

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United States after the birth of the recorded jazz which happened in New York in 1917, with the first recording by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band led by Nick La Rocca.

It is curious to note that the first ever recorded jazz in the world in 1917 featured an orchestra led by an Italian. According to Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns,

La Rocca had never been one of New Orleans's best known cornetists[...]but he burned with ambition[...]Raised in the tough 'Irish Channel' section of New Orleans, he was the son of a shoemaker from Sicily, and therefore a member of one of his polyglot hometown's most disdained minorities. The city's celebrated spirit of tolerance had never extended to Italian-Americans [...]they were all tarred with the Mafia brush. (55)

One year after La Rocca was born, someone killed the police chief on Basin Street and nineteen Sicilians were indicted for the crime. “Nine were tried. When six were found not guilty and the jury could not agree on a verdict for the other three, a mob of indignant whites and blacks stormed into the Orleans Parish Prison and butchered all nine of the accused, plus two others who had not yet come to the trial” (55). The mayor commended the mob!

Louis Armstrong, in his first book of memories, *Swing That Music*, wrote: “The first great jazz orchestra was created by cornet player Nick La Rocca. It was composed by only five elements, but that quintet was the hottest I had ever heard before[...]they transformed old songs into something absolutely new” (qtd. in Mazzeletti 33-34). It is ironic to consider that La Rocca, who played the cornet in such a tumultuous and racist environment and was one of the targets of such racism, was also the one who indirectly introduced jazz in Italy. Jazz which was later discriminated against because of its black roots. But it is interesting, anyway, to note that jazz was introduced in Italy by a white orchestra with an Italian conductor.

The Futurists

I will analyze a number of “exceptions” who praised jazz upon its entry into Italy, but I will start with the futurists because they represented one of the most genuine artistic forces and, if not the only, surely the

most important artistic movement in Italy in the twentieth century. But before I analyze a possible relationship between futurism and jazz, let's see who and what the futurists were.

The playwright and poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published the initial futurist manifesto in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. It was printed in French, and in France, because Paris was considered the capital of all artistic movements, and writing in Italian was not chic enough. Nonetheless, futurism was a totally Italian art, like jazz was a totally American art. This manifesto was the start of an avant-garde movement representing the rebellion of the new generations of the beginning of the twentieth century against the traditions. Always aspiring to the "new," a favorite target of the futurists was "the 'passatista'"—an old fashioned, conservative or passé person.

By the end of 1911, Marinetti decided to create the "temple of futurism," and the choice was a huge apartment at 61, Corso Venezia in Milan. He baptized it "La Casa Rossa" (The Red House), which became the official headquarters of the futurist Movement. It symbolized the fight for the accomplishment of a new culture. In the preface to Marinetti's book *Le Futurisme*, Giovanni Lista writes: "Futurism became mainly the initiator of one of the most radical avant-garde movements, the one which embodied a spirit of global, sociological and socio-political revolt" (qtd. in Marinetti 16).

All art forms, from poetry to painting and architecture, from theater to dance and music, from cinema to photography and gastronomy, seem to have been "attacked with violence and an irrepressible vital and creative (when not destructive) energy by the futurists" (Bianchi 7). In other words, futurism was noticeable for its interdisciplinary approach to all possible fields of action, "in an explosive cocktail where often the single disciplines cross over their boundaries to merge in 'mixed' artistic manifestations" (7).

But let's consider the role of music in this context. It seems to be unquestionable that futurism is remembered today not just because of the personality and the manifestos of its inventor, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, but even more because of its fabulous painters. Masters such as Carrá, Boccioni, Ball, or Severini are displayed today in the major museums in the world, from New York to Paris to Milan. On the other hand, I cannot remember having ever heard a concert of futurist music anywhere. A few CDs and LPs of futurist music, however, have been

published in relatively recent years. I am luckily in possession of one LP with music by Francesco Balilla Pratella, Daniele Napolitano, Luigi Russolo, Alfredo Casella, Virgilio Mortari, and Luigi Grandi, plus Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and three CDs with music by a few others.

Quite clearly, a discrepancy exists between the theoretical formulations of futurist music and their practical realizations. As Stefano Bianchi explains, "The numerous manifestos and proclamations on one hand are full of a great desire of renewal, on the other, generally show an obvious amateurishness" (8).

The first *Manifesto dei Musicisti Futuristi* (Manifesto of Futurist Musicians) is dated Milan, October 11, 1910, and is signed by the musician Balilla Pratella. The author writes that the young people, thirsty for new, actual and live things, should follow him with confidence "on the roads of the future, where already my, our courageous brothers, futurist poets and painters, gloriously are preceding us[...]" (qtd. in Bianchi 19).

On March 9, 1913 Pratella conducted at Teatro Costanzi in Rome his *Musica Futurista per Orchestra*. Two days later, Luigi Russolo, who was present at the concert, wrote and dedicated to his friend Pratella the most important manifesto of futurist music: *L'Art des Bruits* (The Art of Noises), in French, again. In it, Russolo asserts that "it is only with the invention of engines in the nineteenth century that noise was born. Today, noises dominate the sensibility of men. During many centuries life unfolded in silence or on the sly. The most powerful noises were neither intense, nor prolonged nor varied. In effect, nature is normally silent, except for storms, hurricanes, avalanches, water falls and some exceptional telluric movement" (9). He also argues that we can reduce even the most complicated orchestras to just four or five categories of different instruments as far as the timber of the sound is concerned: strings, brass, woods, and percussion. Russolo claims the necessity to break by all means this narrow circle of pure sounds, in order to conquer the infinite variety of sounds-noises. "We are satiated by the harmonies of the great masters, Beethoven and Wagner[...]this is why we get much more pleasure in putting ideally together some noises of trams, cars, loud crowds rather than listening again, as an example, to the 'Heroic' or the 'Pastoral'" (15).

Russolo strongly denies that noise must necessarily be unpleasant to human ears. He therefore makes a list of delicate noises, which create pleasant sensations: "The thunder, the wind, the waterfalls, the

rivers, the streams, the leaves, the horse's trot, the jumps of a cart on the uneven street, the solemn breathing of a nocturnal town, all the noises produced by felids and the domestic animals and all those that the human mouth can make without speaking or singing" (18). He also includes the trams on the rails, the uproar of the railway stations, of the steel and the spinning mills, of the electrical plants and of the subways. And, even more, the absolutely new noises of the modern war.

While Pratella's music was for orchestra with traditional instruments, Russolo, on the other hand, "conceived a music that made use of sounds that could not be produced by traditional instruments[...]and there is a literalness about Russolo's desire to incorporate everyday sounds into music" (Kirby 34). He realized that traditional musical instruments can only approximate some sounds, such as those of the artillery or the twittering bird, so he decided to create new instruments, starting with the *intonarumori*.

According to Kirby,

Externally, all of the *intonarumori* were quite similar. All were rectangular wooden boxes with funnel-shaped acoustical amplifiers, or megaphones, projecting from the front. The boxes, averaging about two-to-three feet in height, and the megaphones varied in size, but the general appearance was the same. They were 'played' by means of a protruding handle that moved in a slot on the top or side of the instrument. Inside the *intonarumori* were various motors and mechanisms, each producing one of the types of sound that Russolo had charted in 'The Art of Noise.' As he described in 'The Futurist *Intonarumori*,' exploding, crackling, humming and rubbing, for example, were all achieved by activating a stretched drumlike diaphragm in various ways. Although the quality of the sound remained constant, its pitch was variable. (37)

The *intonarumori* (whose originals were all lost) were patented by Russolo in 1914 and "by 1921 they reached the number of 27 with different names according to the sound: *ululatori*, *rombatori*, *crepicatori*, *stropicciatori*, *gorgogliatori*, *ronzatori*, *sibilatori*, etc." (approximate English translation: *ululators*, *thunderers*, *cracklers*, *rubbers*, *bubblers*, *buzzers*, *hissers*). According to Sylvia Martin, Russolo with his *intonarumori* "invented the field of noise music, the outstanding contribution of futurism to the development of music in the twentieth century" (40).

Russolo and Pratella also theorized the "enharmonic music," a music that exploited small changes in pitch rather than being limited to the notes that could be indicated on the traditional staves. Enharmony would contemplate even the minimal subdivisions of the tone with fractions of tone inferior to the semi-tone. In 1925, Russolo invented a new instrument, which he called *rumorarmonio* (noisearmonium), which would concentrate in it all the possibilities of the *intonarumori*, but would have been much simpler to use:

The tone colors are different one from the other and different from all the timbres of the orchestral instruments[...]they can be coupled together with a great variety by the performer[...]With such tone colors you can create any fraction of tone inferior to the semitone. Therefore, with new timbres you can make completely happen the enharmonic system which will undoubtedly be the musical system of the future. (Bianchi 67)

We should also not forget the new musical notation used by Russolo to write and read enharmonic music (the type of notation invented by Russolo is still used today by the composers of electronic music). Although the historic relevance of futurism did not last more than 15 to 20 years, nonetheless "the significance of its provocation was such that no subsequent experimentalism can claim of not being in debt with it" (Rimondii 74).

Futurism and Jazz

Marinetti in 1917 in the manifesto *La Danza Futurista* (The Futurist Dance) wrote "To the dances of the passéists, we futurists prefer[...]the cake-walk of the Negroes, since we must imitate with our gestures the movements of the machines, assiduously woo the steering wheels, the wheels, the pistons" (qtd. in Rimondi 76). Composer Alfredo Casella in 1923 writes a *Fox-trot* for piano and Franco Casavola composes, in the same year, a *Flop-Frog* using African-American rhythms. The same Casavola (a futurist musician and a pupil of Ottorino Respighi) writes in the *Manifesto La Musica Futurista* (The Futurist Music) of December 1924: "The *Jazz Band* represents today the real accomplishment of our principles: individuality of the song of its instruments, the persistence of its rhythms which form the basis of futurist music. Every single voice has

a free, improvised individuality” (qtd. in Cerchiari 12). And in 1926 Casavola confirms: “The *Jazz Band* is the typical product of our heroic, violent, overbearing, brutal, optimistic, antiromantic, antisentimental generation[...]. Some of its main characteristics are the rhythmic persistency, the tendency to improvisation, the unconventional composition of the orchestra[....] The new music, the new musical cycle humbly begins with the *Jazz Band*” (qtd. in Cerchiari 12).

In these words we find the essence of jazz: rhythm, a new “organization” of the orchestra and improvisation. There was an unbelievable coincidence of musical aspects between futurism and jazz: freedom, improvisation, energy, the insertion of extra-musical sounds (such as the novelty sounds of American clarinet players in the 1910s and a lot of noises in the futuristic music). And it is interesting to note that in Italy during the twenties, jazz was confused with its instrumental complex, and was erroneously called *Jazz Band*.

A conquest of futurism was the “introduction of free rhythm in music with rhythmic freedom without symmetrical links” (Bianchi 25). Many futurist writers and musicians, and intellectuals involved in futurism, wrote about jazz and improvisation. In the magazine *La Nuova Venezia*, Silvio Mix wishes that some day “we will be able to accomplish something which is certainly not impossible, but from which we are still very far: *orchestral improvisation*.” He wrote this in 1924, without realizing that everything was in the meantime being invented in jazz!

Even more interesting is what musician Franco Casavola writes in *La Musica futurista (Manifesto futurista)* of December 11, 1924:

Futurist music creates a new relationship between rhythm, singing and harmony[...]. Futurist ideal: to identify the performer with the composer, to bring improvisation into the orchestral whole. But then orchestra must not be composed by families of instruments, but by individuals, each one different from the other, in the character, in the timbre, in the expression. (Bianchi 46)

Duke Ellington in his *Music is My Mistress* wrote: “The cats who come into this band are probably unique in the aural realm. When someone falls out of the band—temporarily or permanently—it naturally becomes a matter of ‘Whom shall we get?’ or ‘Whom can we get?’ It is not just a

matter of replacing the cat who left, because we are concerned with a highly personalized kind of music. It is written to suit the character of an instrumentalist” (338). What the futurist musicians were dreaming of was actually made real by the greatest of jazz musicians. We can say in any case that they had a dream in common.

Another similarity with jazz: futurists wanted a total involvement with the public, as it had been in the ancient opera performances. “The throwing of vegetables on the stage, the yelling, the insults of the public, including sometimes real physical confrontations, meant a guarantee that the objective had been reached” (Bianchi 131). Physical confrontation aside, this is also what happened with jazz as far as the involvement of the public was concerned. And Marinetti was often behind these confrontations. He was a genius at provoking the public and his credo was that the great event is the one about which all media speak; good or bad, it does not matter. He was also a progenitor of marketing, at least in Italy. Defending futurist music, he said that he was not surprised and he did not care at all about the fact that he and his followers were considered “crazy.” “Palestrina would probably have considered Bach a crazy man, just as Bach would have thought of Beethoven could he have had a chance to listen to him and so would have done Beethoven towards Wagner had he heard his music” (179).

For the Italian futurists, however, their jazz infatuation did not last very long. As Rimondi writes, “Starting in 1932 Marinetti stresses his chauvinistic orientation” and in *Contro l'esterofilia. Manifesto futurista alle signore e agli intellettuali* (Against xenomania. Futurist manifesto for the ladies and the intellectuals) “he denounces the anti-Italianity of the cocktail party mania, probably more apt to the American race but surely harmful for our race[...].” (77).

Marinetti does not stop here. Almost twenty years after his praise of the cake-walk, he changed his mind, as he writes in 1934 in the *Manifesto futurista della aeromusica, sintetica, geometrica e curativa* (futurist manifesto of the synthetic, geometric, curative aeromusic): “We disapprove the imitation of jazz and of the Negro music, now killed by the rhythmic uniformity, and by the lack of inspired composers” (qtd. in Rimondi 77). In 1936, the new attitude of Marinetti towards jazz is confirmed in the manifesto *Contro il teatro morto contro il romanzone analitico contro il negrismo musicale* (Against dead theater against analytical saga against musical negrism.) In this manifesto he condemns

the funereal asthma of what we can call the musical negrism, unceasing moaning melopoeia, broken by syncopated songs and dances, in which we placed our hopes 25 years ago, but now we don't believe any more that originality may bloom from there. We also condemn the neurasthenic jests of pederast hands which mechanize the false gaiety of the musicians. (qtd. in Rimondi 78)

It appears that Marinetti was 'influenced' by a political adjustment to the fascist regime having also written that "Italian musicians, be futurist[...]therefore exciting the optimistic pride of living in this great 'Mussolinean' Italy, which is now the leader of the century of the machine" (qtd. in Mazzoletti 171).

We must not forget that the majority of futurists were fascists. Marinetti's seemingly life-long friendship with Mussolini is as difficult to fathom as his acceptance in 1929 of membership in the Italian Academy. Did these acts mean, as is often said, that Marinetti travestied all that futurism had stood for, and worse still, that futurism was one of the many roads to fascism? In a sense the answer must, of course, be yes. But the condemnation of futurism as a misguided enterprise does not necessarily follow. "Rather it tragically suggests that Marinetti, the 'St. John the Baptist of futurism,' in his blind and boundless zeal, accepted the temporary death of futurism in fascism 'much as Christianity was quenched by the Spanish Inquisition or charity by bishops'" (qtd. in Malbin 27). This remark was made in 1938 by the English painter and ex-futurist C.R.W. Nevinson. As to the diploma of the Italian Academy and, in general the relationship between futurism and fascism, Giorgio Rimondi in his book writes: "In spite of his (Marinetti) being a gifted leader, he finally suffered political defeat and, engulfed by fascism, had to give up the proclaimed futurist revolution of the universe in exchange for a diploma of the Academy. Fascism, in conclusion, gave futurism a secondary cover-up role[...]after having accepted and poorly sponsored it through the concession of secondary rewards" (73).

Jazz in Italy

Although with a delay of twenty years (other countries of Europe had been visited in the eighteen hundreds by African-American musicians and singers such as minstrels, spiritual choirs and later ragtime

groups: Great Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, but not Italy), Italy enjoyed the "first singers and dancers of the Louisiana Troupe[...]in Milan in 1904[...]and in 1907 it was the turn of the Hampton and Bradford duo" (Mazzoletti 1). They were followed by the singer Arabella Fields who performed in 1908 in Genoa, Turin and Florence; the Four Black Diamonds could be heard in 1910; and "the last black group who appeared in Italy before the war were the Black Troubadours who performed in Milan in 1911" (2).

The two main cities where jazz first spread in Italy were Rome and Milan. In Rome the banjoist Vittorio Spina in 1917 started his jazz career with a military band led by a sergeant of the marines by the name of Griffith. He became one of the best musicians of his generation. Other Roman jazz musicians of that time were conductor Umberto Bozza, banjoist Alfredo Gangi, violinist Ugo Filippini (in spite of being a violinist he was the first to introduce in Italy *double drumming*, a technique which allowed the drummer to play on more than one instrument at once, bass drum, snare and cymbal) and drummer 'Lupo' Battisti. Filippini contributed a lot to the diffusion of jazz in Italy, not only by importing the first bass drum pedal, but also by promoting the birth of the first jazz bands.

Milan, due to its geographical position, "felt the nearness of war[...]and was in a crucial position for delivering the troops to the front. Probably this is one of the reasons why Milan had higher doses of American music" (Mazzoletti 20). In Milan the best known was the stable orchestra of the Trianon, conducted by Nicola Moletti, which played mostly *fox trots*. In 1919, beside the Trianon, something like thirty tabarin, theaters, cafés, and cinemas were open for the Milanese audience. American music had conquered Milan.

According to Mazzoletti, "The number one person responsible for this change was the orchestras' and jazz groups' impresario, Arturo Agazzi, better known as Mirador" (24). Before this time, Mirador managed the most important night-clubs in London, such as *Ciro's* and *Embassy*. In 1918 he came back to Milan with fox trot sheet music and opened a jazz-club with a quartet with, among others, pianist Milietto Nervetti. Soon, high society of Milan was dancing to the sound of his *Syncopated Orchestra*: Carlo Benzi at the viola and then trombone and mainly alto sax, and pianist Gaetano Nervetti, better known as 'Milietto'. In 1919, Mirador and his *Syncopated Orchestra* performed in Venice at the

Sporting Club of the Casino at the Lido of Venice. Mirador was also a drummer and a dancer, and he could rapidly teach the fox trot to the offspring of the “good” Venetian society.

Together with young Vittorio Spina, Milietto (Gaetano Nervetti) was the first real Italian jazz player. He always followed Mirador wherever he went to play, and so did the other significant jazz player, Carlo Benzi. These people really created jazz in Italy. The press reception, however, was mixed.

On August 1919 the magazine *La Lettura*, a supplement of the very popular *Corriere della Sera*, wrote, in a correspondence from New Orleans with the title “Musiche e danze americane,”

Now that jazz bands, once crossed the oceans, are invading old Europe, shocking the ‘passatista’ musicians and thrilling the futurist ones, everybody is asking himself what jazz is. Many American newspapers, making confusion between American dances and music, have written that jazz is a new dance. Nothing could be more wrong. Jazz is an orchestra like any other, and to the traditional instruments has added some modern ones and plays any kind of music[...]some of which the futurist would call *intonarumori*[...]The drummer is the most important musician in the jazz band. (qtd. in Mazzoletti 30-31)

The article, after these approximate definitions of jazz, continues praising a new dance “that seems to have been expressly invented to be danced at the sounds of the *intonarumori*: the shimmy.”

On March 1920, in contrast, there was a violent attack against modern dances in the *Corriere della Sera*. The article quotes an archiepiscopal note warning against the evil and the danger of certain dances which go beyond the limits of the most elementary honesty and modesty and against forms of immorality of certain modern dances. Obvious reference was being made to jazz and tango. But in spite of these “recommendations,” Mirador opened the Ambassador’s New Club in Milan on October 13, 1920, with the Ambassador Jazz-Band. “From that moment, and during the whole decade, also Italy lived its ‘Age of Jazz’” (Mazzoletti 41).

On a lower scale, in the twenties other cities became centers of jazz of some importance: Florence (Violinist Aldo Frazzi, pianist Rodolfo Del Largo and his Savoy Orchestra), Genoa (the Milanese Pierino Faraboni’s orchestra, the trombonist Potito Simone, Domenico Mancini, clarinet and sax, Armando Di Piramo, violinist, Pippo Barzizza and his Blue Star

orchestra), San Remo (conductor Carlo Minari, bassist Antonio Semiglia, Alfredo and Giulio Spezialetti, respectively violin/sax and piano) and Turin (conductor Angelo Cinico, later known as Cinico Angelini, violinist Agostino Valdambri, the first Italian violinist to totally embrace jazz).

But again, not everybody appreciated such music. Writing in the Roman daily newspaper *Il Messagero*, a journalist by the name of Labb, on January 11, 1922 wrote: “Jazz band is one of the seven wonders arrived here during the last few years from Germany, to whom it was kindly donated by the African natives[...]Those who listen to that music ask themselves if, by some funny occurrence, they happened to arrive in a virgin forest, a madhouse, a kindergarten or a cage of ferocious animals” (qtd. in Mazzoletti 59).

In spite of such negative articles, jazz continued its expansion. For example, on June 1927, first in Milan at the Sempioncino and then in Venice at the Excelsior, the Italian public could listen to the Carolina Stomp Chasers and, at the end of that same year Josephine Baker made her appearance in Trieste, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Milan and Rome in the show *Black People* with the orchestra directed by Sydney Bechet. She was already very popular in France (in Paris), where she had toured in 1925 and where she spent a good part of her life, finally becoming a French citizen.

Baker became very popular in Italy as well, to the point that the magazine *L’Italia letteraria*, while scorning the blind rage of Mascagni against jazz, wrote that Luigi Pirandello has the intention of writing a comedy for her. In Italy she was never attacked as she had been in Nazi Germany and Austria. In Nazi Germany, when the National Socialists came to power in 1933, “the conservative music critics’ distaste for jazz took on the force of law. The Nazis saw jazz as the collaborative product of two despised groups, blacks and Jews—thus acknowledging the contribution to jazz of Jewish songwriters like Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and Harold Arlen, whose melodies black jazz musicians often used as the basis for improvisation” (Goddard 290).

But in fascist Germany, as in fascist Italy, contradictions abounded: “There often used to be a lot of high society people around—particularly in Germany;[...]They really liked the music and they really liked Josephine” (Goddard 290). As Ean Wood writes, Baker even came to develop a relationship with the Mussolini family:

In February 1932, she performed in Italy for the first time. She had not managed to do so before because she had been forbidden to appear there by the country's Fascist Prime Minister, Benito Mussolini. For some reason he had relented and she made her Italian debut in Milan, where she was praised as '*una Yvette Guilbert danzante*' (a dancing Yvette Guilbert). She was even introduced to him and reacted to his strength of personality and air of authority almost like a gushing fan, saying afterwards that she felt that his destiny and hers must be linked. (224)

In Wood's biography of her we also read that Josephine, traveling back from Tunisia where she was shooting a movie, stopped off briefly in Rome. While she was there, she learned that Mussolini was to make a public address. Josephine, remembering their brief meeting a few years before and how impressed by him she had been, went to hear him and stood crushed uncomfortably among the throng as *Il Duce* addressed them from an open window. He was in fact justifying the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, which had begun on 7 June 1935.

Baker came to believe that Hailé Selassié, the Emperor of Ethiopia, was an enemy of the Negro race, for he maintained slavery, which Mussolini was determined to stamp out. Her project to recruit a Negro army to help Italy, expressed in an interview to French newspapers, "was taken up by the Associated press and republished in America, and the Americans—especially blacks—were appalled by her remarks. To many Americans, Hailé Selassié was a hero. Josephine was always naïve and impulsive and often wrong headed" (Wood 236-7). Josephine lauded Mussolini, telling reporters that the Ethiopian Emperor "was really an enemy of the American Negro" (Baker 190). Her commitment to Hitler's top ally in Europe, Italy's Benito Mussolini, was apparently less ideological than personal. Only in 1951 did Baker publicly change her mind about Mussolini. On December 10, "through Arthur Garfield Hays, she issued a statement to the press. She was not anti-Semitic ('I married a Jew'), and she had never been a fan of Mussolini ('so ridiculous it does not require comment')" (Baker 312).

The years between 1930 and 1935 were of the utmost importance for Italian jazz in other ways as well. As Mazzoletti writes, "The records of Ellington, Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, Benny Carter with the Chocolate Dandies, Red Allen, Cab Calloway, Chick Webb, and

McKinney's Cotton Pickers started reaching Italy and replacing those of the preceding years: Trumbauer, Venuti-Lang, Red Nichols and Bix" (237). New musicians revealed themselves in Rome. Among them alto sax Ettore Pierotti, tenor sax Alfredo Basso and trumpeter Italo Scotti. But more important of all was Sesto Carlini (alto and soprano sax) who, with his orchestra, performed in the best clubs and the best hotels in Rome and Venice. Many American jazz artists also toured Italy for periods of time between 1930 and 1938: Fred Rich's orchestra in Naples on June 25, 1930, Bobby Martin and his orchestra in 1932 in Rome, violinist Paul Jordan in 1934 between Sicily and Trieste, trombonist William Newmayer Spiller in 1935 in Palermo, Sicily, and many others, more or less famous.

The concert by Louis Armstrong in Turin at the Chiarella Theater in 1935, however, was the most important event for Italy, considering that the repeated European visits of groups or soloists like The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Fats Waller, and Benny Carter, never reached Italy. Armstrong and Bechet were the only pioneers of jazz to perform in Italy before the war. Armstrong had arrived in England in July 1933 and then traveled to Scandinavia, Holland and England again and then settled for a few months in Paris, where he recorded several songs and played at the Salle Pleyel, and from where he toured Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, small towns in France and, finally, Turin.

Armstrong had been engaged by Alfredo Antonino, an owner of over 500 records, which was an enormous number at that time. Antonino himself reported on the event:

That evening all musicians of Turin had found a substitute in the orchestra where they were playing and had therefore deserted their ball room. There was an incredible line of cars in front of the theater. Even the public, God knows by virtue of which mysterious attraction, formed a long line from the defunct theater to Vittorio Emanuele Avenue, about three blocks. Louis's success was something miraculous. The majority of the audience obviously did not understand him, but everybody in their subconscious had the sensation of finding themselves in front of a great man, of a titanic artist and was under the spell of his influence, his fascination and was unconsciously entranced by him. (qtd. in Mazzoletti 246)

Armstrong was supposed to give three concerts in Turin, but he had to cancel the final one because of serious problems with his lips. He left on board the transatlantic *Champlain* on the 24th of July to New York. Armstrong would only be back in Italy fourteen years later, on a tour that reached, between October 23 and November 1st, 1949, Milan, Turin, Trieste, Rome, Naples, and Genoa.

After Armstrong's concert, the first *Hot Club* was created in Milan, in 1936. The founders were the musical critic Gian Carlo Testoni (the future founder of the magazine *Musica Jazz*) and the musician Ezio Levi. They also wrote together the first serious essay on jazz music and promoted quite a few evenings with hot groups. "At the beginning of the thirties, the activity of first generation Italian musicians was always more frenetic. Cesare Galli, Milietto Nervetti, Giuseppe Cartafesta, Luigi Redaelli, Carlo Benzi were playing between Cortina, St. Moritz and Riccione, which had become a fashionable bathing establishment, often visited by Benito Mussolini and his family. Nervetti even had a picture with Vittorio and Bruno Mussolini (Benito's sons), very nice boys who loved very much American music" (Mazzoletti 296).

Other events worth mentioning are the concert at the *Casino* in San Remo by the *Harlem Four*, a black vocal quartet, in 1937 and a tour by Harry Flemming, in 1938 with Piero Rizza as arranger. But then, in 1938, came the racial laws (beside the Jews, the African-American race was deemed not worthy to appear near the "Italic Family") and that was the end of the appearance of American jazzmen in Italy.

For his part, Mussolini, in 1935 declared: "I do not have enough time to go to the theater where I prefer lyric and gay music, the warlike and personal lyrical music of Verdi and Wagner and the cheerfulness of Rossini. You should not be surprised if I tell you that *I have no antipathy for jazz as dance music and I find it amusing*" (Italics added) (qtd. in Cerchiari 57). But, according to Professor Jeremy Tambling, who has written several books on literature, literary theory and opera, "Mussolini disliked the United States, whose popular culture he felt was invading Italy and preventing fascism's total hold" (129). In spite of several resolutions by the Cabinet obliging the civil and military agencies to give preference to Italian products, including music, the regime did not seem to be willing to interfere too much with cuts and censorship. After all, jazz was considered as a detail in the broader context of the movie and radio propaganda.

What's also interesting is that this music was thoroughly welcome in Mussolini's family: Benito's son Romano would in fact become an accomplished jazz pianist and the other son Vittorio would write for the music magazine *Il disco*. In one article, Vittorio suggests a list of "Five Hot Records," speaking in a very positive way of the artistic qualities of Louis Armstrong. And the same goes with the top high officials Galeazzo Ciano and Achille Starace, the secretary of the Fascist National Party.

Of course, jazz was under attack but not directly by the Mussolini family. The composer Pietro Mascagni, for example, in an article in the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* wrote: "jazz can be equated with cocaine and must be persecuted as if it were a drug of the spirit." In another article, he spoke of how "jazz has now reached radio. Its terrible voice excites the listeners and kills the little love which may be left for real music. Maybe jazz will win, and opera will be killed, but I hope that the good taste of the public will recover from its illness" (qtd. in Mazzoletti 119).

But we can also hear important voices defending jazz. One is that of the well known composer and musical critic Alfredo Casella. In an article in 1929 with the title "Il Jazz" in the magazine *L'Italia Letteraria*, Casella compares the rhythmic technique of jazz with that of Stravinsky, who was fighting against the metronomic monotony of the old symmetrical rhythm, and also writes, in the same article: "Jazz synthesizes [...] that stunning mixture of bloods and races that are the United States [...] It has found its last expression thanks to white people such as the Christian Whiteman, or the Jewish Berlin and Gershwin. Jazz is today an art form —the only North American one—imperialistic, which has been capable of conquering the world in less than 15 years, with a success that has no precedents in the history of music" (qtd. in Cerchiari 116).

However, when the war came, it was obviously difficult, if not impossible, to listen to and play jazz. After the September 1941 speech of Franklin Delano Roosevelt condemning the Axis and announcing the American intervention in the war, jazz did not officially exist any more as a term, not even with Italian funny versions and it was impossible to listen to it on record or on the radio in the original American versions.

Nevertheless, as we can read in the jacket of the CD *Jazz in Italy Under the Fascism*, the musicians performing on that CD used to meet secretly, during the winter between 1941 and 1942, in a studio in Milan,

and recorded music. There was a curfew and electricity was coming and going frequently. There were no stoves, no wood, and no coal. They were playing with their coats on, with hats and gloves. On top of this, there was the risk of being discovered by the secret police, OVRA. If found listening to or playing jazz, the consequences were the destruction of the instruments and the seizure of the musical scores—plus, for the musicians, a few days in jail.

In the article “Jazz a Bergamo,” journalist Riccardo Schwamenthal tells us of two different situations which occurred in 1942: First, “because of the war it was forbidden to listen to foreign radios and German soldiers were going around the city with instruments with monitoring devices, so it was very risky to listen to foreign radio stations” (22-23). And second, during a concert in 1943 at the Teatro Duse in Bergamo with an orchestra conducted by Gorni Kramer, at the beginning of the second part, a small group of young fascists swarmed onto the stage and forced the singer, well known Natalino Otto, to sing the Fascist anthem “Giovinezza.” This was obviously very bad, but nothing compared to what happened to some musicians in occupied Poland: “One time three musicians working in a restaurant dared to play ‘Warszawianka’ in public. This is a patriotic song written in 1831 during a national uprising. All three were executed” (Zwerin 73).

There were quite a few paradoxes and discontinuities in the German attitude towards jazz in the occupied countries. In France, “In spite of catastrophic world events at the beginning and end of the decade and the turmoil they caused in the music industry, the thirties were some of the richest years for jazz” (Shack 76). Consider also what happened to the Jazzman Gipsy Django Reinhardt:

For Django and for jazz, World War II was the best of times and the worst of times. When Adolph Hitler and his National Socialist Party took power in Germany in 1933, the very foundations of their ideology were aimed at someone like Django Reinhardt. He was a Romany and a jazzman—the first a crime against nazi beliefs in racial purity, the second a degenerate affront to decency[...]Yet during the war years, Django flourished. It was a great paradox in a dawning era of paradoxes[...]The German Occupation forces loved to hear him play his guitar in the requisitioned cabarets of Paris while the people of France fell in love with his wartime song “Nuages” (Clouds).” (Dregni 154)

The inconsistency of the attitude of the German occupying forces is seen in the fact that Holland had different rules. There the music was more tightly regulated than in Germany or France. The Germans wrote a three-page pamphlet of guidelines for dance and entertainment music issued in 1942. “It was mostly a detailed roster of forbidden devices and practices: plunger mutes, growls, smears and other dirty timbres, blue notes, scattling, drum solos, stop-time breaks, off-beat accents, boogie and other ostinato basses, background riffs repeated more than three times, charts written by black musicians, washboards, the use of the word ‘jazz’ were all off-limits” (Whitehead xiii).

After Mussolini (at the beginning of the end) founded the R.S.I (Italian Social Republic) in September 1943 in Saló in Northern Italy, the whole of the Italian territory (until liberated) was controlled by the Germans. As such, there is not much more to say about jazz and music in general until after the war.

Conclusion

Jazz was popular in Italy even under the fascists and in spite of the strong opposition by the bureaucratic machine, which showed frequent gaps and a certain discontinuity, not to mention the contradictory, but surely not extremely severe, attitude of Mussolini himself. This weakness in the fascist reaction to jazz and American (or rather foreign) music in general, was part of the DNA of fascism and of Italian character in general. Even after the promulgation of the racial laws in 1938, directed mainly against the Jews and issued in order to please Hitler, the machine of repression did not work very well. Even with the anti-Jewish laws, Mussolini had sent contradictory messages, as we have seen happening with jazz. Many Jews had managerial positions in the fascist party. Mussolini himself had a Jewish lover, Margherita Sarfatti, who was in charge of his image in the international press. And above all, Italians saved many Jews from the hands of the nazis, not only in Italy but also in occupied Southern France, Greece, and Yugoslavia. This was the (very) positive side of the above mentioned DNA. And this is the reason why jazz could live and proliferate even under fascism. The reason why the diffusion was slow has to be found, more than in Mussolini and his hierarchs, in the fact that, “in the twenties, very few musicians, musicologists and almost no poet, writer or intellectual, came near to jazz with

some interest” (Mazzoletti 170). Luckily there were some remarkable exceptions as I have described.

Thanks to these exceptions—to the influence of American jazz musicians visiting Italy, to the limited consequences of breaking the law when playing jazz when it was forbidden, to the weak and contradictory attitude of the fascist regime—it was possible for a handful of pioneers to leave a legacy to the post-war generation. In this legacy lay the foundations for the actual Italian jazz, which is now recognized as being one of the most important in the world.

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From Lowbrow to Nobrow

Peter Swirski

(McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005)

Reviewed by

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Nine decades ago Van Wyck Brooks in "America's Coming-of-Age" saw American literature as "two irreconcilable planes, the plane of stark intellectuality and the plane of stark business." He maintained that there was "no genial middle ground" that could fill the cultural chasm between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" art. Today Peter Swirski's *From Lowbrow to Nobrow* offers a fascinatingly original look at the subsequent fusing of these two planes into the "nobrow" territory, where the distinction of the two no longer suffices. By examining the underpinnings of this dichotomy, he proposes nobrow as a new analytic, pragmatic, and cultural category which describes a new type of literary work named arertainment.

From Lowbrow to Nobrow is divided into two parts, with the first half presenting an overview of highbrow and lowbrow art, and the latter half providing an interpretation of three "nobrow" works: Karel apek's *War With the Newts* (1936), Raymond Chandler's *Playback* (1958), and Stanislaw Lem's *The Chain of Chance* (1976). Before looking in detail at these three arertainments, the author devotes the first chapter to the analysis of the historical facts behind the functioning of popular fiction. This is followed by two chapters discussing the emergent nobrow aesthetics and the idea of genres. Reviewing more than a century of aesthetic arguments, he calls for a reevaluation of the way we perceive genre and popular art.

In a series of enthralling and provocative arguments, Swirski begins with an insightful chronicle explaining the long held prejudice in the treatment and reception of popular literature. Examining the socio-historical development of the publishing industry that crosses the

Western border, the author expresses beliefs that undermine many institutional curricula. While the public is concerned about declining literacy and the demise of books in the U.S., his meticulous research with UNESCO, Escarpit, Curwen, and the American Book Industry Study Group shows otherwise. He holds that under various extenuating socio-economic forces such as market pressures and tight publishing schedules, many writers turn to satisfying the mainstream appetite in order to obtain a larger readership. Whereas popular literature is often accused of producing inferior writing, Swirski argues against such a claim by positioning it between popular and canonical art in relative terms.

Popular Equals Generic Equals BAD?

In the midst of this highbrow-lowbrow tug of war, Swirski pens a sharp rebuttal against the four main criticisms of Trivialliteratur. These are that Trivialliteratur mass produces for profit making, borrows from "serious" fiction and depletes the latter's pool of talent, poses emotional and cognitive harm to readers and readership, and lowers the cultural level of reading public who becomes an audience turning to propaganda. While the majority tends to identify popular art with the lowest denominator, Swirski first argues that commercialism happens in high art too due to the lack of government subsidies and wealthy patrons. On the other hand, because of keen competition, popular fictions are hardly homogenous. Drawing examples from the hardboiled genre, he asserts that Dashiell Hammett, John O'Hara, Ernest Hemingway, James E. Cain, Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes, Philip Kerr, and Walter Mosley exhibit numerous differences in their works from each other, much as one can delineate the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Great Gatsby* to the repetitive "star-crossed lovers" motif if looked at through "an appropriately selected structural lens" (68). The writer goes on with the contention that we need cognitive interpretation to process narratives and make emotive discrimination and moral judgments. Foreknowledge of the plot does not necessarily bar a rewarding re-read, nor can one claim precognition of the story unless one has taken a comparative overview of the entire genre. Furthermore, reading is a "matter of choice rather than cultural and ideological brain-washing" (57), to say nothing of the fact that most people read novels more for the sake of the

individual story than for the genre of which it is a part.

In an ambitious undertaking, Swirski invites his audience to adopt a pragmatic approach to the concept of genre, which he denies is formulaic and empirically definable. For ten years the author championed a groundbreaking approach to literary interpretation which relies profoundly on game theory. Here, he proposes an original and immediately applicable model of genre as a “cooperative two-person non-zero-sum game.” He holds that while reading is a free-form game which involves ambiguity, vagueness, and even radical misinterpretation, writers too communicate their (reflexive) intentions to the readers under the “convergence of reciprocal expectations”—“coordination, not classification, you might say, is the name of the game” (82).

War With the Newts, *Playback*, and *The Chain of Chance* are chosen as much for chronological continuity as for being exemplary of literary trends that cross national, political, and linguistic borders. They underscore a number of literary and cultural undercurrents that prevailed in the early decades of the 20th century to the millennium. Although these three nobrow *objets d'art* wear different cloaks of respectability and acceptance in their own times, what brings them together in the hands of the Czech, the American, and the Pole is the writers' refusal to succumb to either literary end. A nobrow fusion of high aesthetics and popular entertainment, *War With the Newts* is a socio-political makeup of cross-national socialism, expansionism, communism, and militarism. Swirski contemplates the rules apek maneuvers with in his social satire, and ingeniously pays heeds to Chandler's reversal of such rules in his detective arertainment, wherein readers become “literary detectives” playing a different game outside the traditional hardboiled formula. All the same, deliberately positioning himself beyond the highbrow/lowbrow rhetoric, Lem in *The Chain of Chance* goes as far as to subvert “not only the structural but the moral imperative of detective literature” (154) where one experiences the sheer absence of justice in this gumshoe oeuvre.

In the world of modern fiction where the extent of one's artistic territory is often obscured by interweaving influences, borrowings, imitations, and appropriations, Swirski concludes that popular literature “requires to be scrutinized most closely” (180). Calling for a curriculum which honors genre novels as works of art with “analyses of aesthetic nuance, art-historical context, and symbolic and socio-ethical content”

(177), *From Lowbrow to Nobrow* breaks from traditional academic discussion of popular art and the literary canon. Not only will it widely appeal to people from all walks of life, it will also likely become an indispensable read in every classroom where literature is taught. Ray B. Browne, for four decades hailed the dean of popular-culture studies, opined that “this superb book will make all previous studies in popular culture moot.” Garry Hoppenstand, longtime editor of *The Journal of Popular Culture and Popular Fiction: An Anthology*, enthused: “I would rank this book among the top five in popular culture studies.” *From Lowbrow to Nobrow* is all this, and above all, an inexhaustible source for those who are in search of endless discoveries, reinvention, anticipation, and aesthetic fulfillment.

The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York

Patricia Cline Cohen, Timothy J. Gilfoyle,
and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, eds.
(University of Chicago Press, 2008)

Reviewed by

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Well before Anthony Comstock's Society for the Suppression of Vice got busy jailing actors in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* when that rather tame play about a British madam came to America, the censors were a potent force in our national literature. References to the prostitute were often disguised in terms like "soiled doves," "ladies of the pavement," and "girls who went wrong."

Antidotes, while they did not abound in so genteel—and hypocritical—a culture, did exist. If the term "flash press" is unknown by modern readers, scandal sheets for literate readers were certainly not. Artisans and literature laborers were likely to buy the sensational "cheap fiction" of George Lippard, for instance. His tales of lily-pure seductions (read rapes) and the drugs they unknowingly ingested (read date rape) pulled in many a reader seeking what Janis Stout in her study *Sodoms in Eden* has termed "the bald thrillsmanship of the dime novel."

For a parallel if more well-heeled audience, there was the flash press. Both the Americanist interested in antebellum male sporting subculture and the general reader drawn by American Victorianism can find much to ponder in these excerpts from the *Flash*, the *Whip*, and the *Libertine*. Under the obviously specious guise of a moral reform paper with a low price and a paying public ranging from clerks to gentlemen (and, when they could get away with reading it, ladies), this form was notorious, arch, and illustrated. A new collection by three eminent scholars places this once-shocking form in historical context by, among other insights, pointing to sexual diction in a Puritan land.

The editor/essayists illuminate their daring subject matter, most notably homosexuality, bar- and brothel-hopping, and the hypocrisy of well-off citizens who wanted to conceal their fantasies about the fast life. Local scandals, then as now, inevitably involved some of the city's most prominent figures, and these papers were almost gleeful in their coverage. As much of metropolitan subculture is lost to modern scholars, an excellent set of endnotes and full bibliography places the notorious people and places in the wider perspective of United States political life.

These rediscovered "flash" papers of New York's 1840s are also anthologized in a cleverly selective taxonomy. Chapters on "gossip, vituperation, and blackmail" share space with "racism" and "libertinism."

Reader beware. With however jaundiced an eye, New York before the Civil War is, after all, still participating in myths of the New World, and what scholars of mid-century American literature called "The American Adam." That figure is an innocent, anti-urban man who had worlds to conquer and the West to subdue: from James Fenimore Cooper to Frederic Jackson Turner, a womanless landscape was best. Perhaps that is why the salaciousness of national erotic is long on pragmatism and short on erotic detail. Hence "Whoredom in New York":

We are told that we unlock the secret places of vice, and display to the fascinated and eager eye of passion the gorgeous embellishments and fatal temptations that are within[...]What cannot be cured, must be endured. Fornication has been a pleasure, ever since man and woman were created, and will be until time is no more.

Book illustrations are more in-your-face, so to speak: a breast glimpsed here, a classic nymph and faun representing patron and whore, a demi-mondaine on a chaise lounge. Yet to the overstimulated modern blogger and bloggee, *The Flash Press* is a welcome reminder that scandal sheets were a far cry from the online super porn of our tasteless time.

The Abu Ghraib Effect

Stephen F. Eisenman

(University of Chicago Press, 2007)

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Any examination of the Abu Ghraib Prison has importance to American Studies, particularly one so original as to connect the infamous guards and their photos to the classical trope of the “redeemed or beautiful death” (109). While obviously Charles Graner, Lynnie England, and their cohorts liked to torture and even kill, they also displayed a home-grown refutation of humanism. Eisenman, a professor of art history at Northwestern University, spends (or wastes?) little time on their actions and motives. The photos chronicling the abuse must, he argues, also find a home in our venerated European artistic tradition. To open up “Western humanism” to this critique, he quotes Gandhi. When asked what he thought of Western civilization, the famed leader replied, “I think it would be a good idea” (121).

The linkage of the photos with a tradition of great art is the culmination of a tantalizingly quick and brilliant analysis of a key trope in Western iconography: passionate suffering—in this case in sculpture, painting, and drawing. But how can one use the word “tantalizing” to interpret an analysis that balances Michelangelo’s chalk drawing *The Execution of Haman* with horrific photographs taken by the fledgling photographers and professional sadists at Abu Ghraib?

To answer, the book must not be studied but experienced. Every page advances its unorthodox logic, as do half-tones of an anonymous classical sculpture (*Dying Celtic*), Titian (*Phillip II Offering the Infante [...] to Victory*), Manet (*The Mocking of Christ*) and Picasso (*Guernica*). What unfolds is the author’s deconstruction of an “expressive, propagandistic tradition[...]aestheticizing, eroticizing, and rationalizing pain and suffering” (53). Despite the varied monarchies, crusades, inquisitions, royal

wars, and crucifixions of pagans and Christians, all these artworks serve an “oppressive purpose” (66). Well before the anti-“Oriental” fixation culminating, argues the author, in wartime Abu Ghraib, “Raphael’s Vatican fresco, Battle of Ostia, enshrine[d] the military and moral superiority of European Christians over Muslims from the East” (67).

Eisenman thus argues that American moral indifference—indeed, blindness—to the torture at the Prison is in a centuries-long line of public acceptance of images of torture victims’ self-abasement, “internalization of chastisement, self-alienation” (54). (The author does not use the phrase identification with the aggressor, which would, perhaps, have also contextualized the subject in a more psychological way.) Yet, he implies, democracy is a latecomer on the world stage, and its fortunate citizens are finally free to protest in a way that the *hoi polloi* never were.

He skillfully qualifies the argument in two important ways: Western art is not only about the pathetic death; and amateur photos are not art. Indeed, I wonder what to call them. Totalitarian American art? Media Studies in the American banality of evil? In any event, the author contends that to understand the effect of the photographs and the subsequent “enemy combatant” spin, “the materials and tools of art history are essential to countering [them]” (10).

If in this lean volume direct references to American studies are largely absent between the preface and the last twenty pages, it is not an impediment to scholars of the field. This unusual examination wishes to position the Prison photos carefully enough so that his charge of United States’ “imperial fascism” (110) does not seem a throwback to any other hegemony or historical era. Instead, documentary evidence of water boarding and humiliating prisoners is pridefully provided by the American “torture artists” themselves. In so doing, they both stage and record bodies in the throes of an age old submission to fate. Or, he argues, to the silence of the people of the United States.

Who Publishes in *CJAS*?

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Marsha E. Ackermann, *Cool Comfort: America's Romance with Air-Conditioning* (Smithsonian Institute, 2002).

Matthew Basso, *Metal of Honor: Montana's World War II Homefront, Movies, and The Social Politics of White Male Anxiety* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (Noonday Press, 1996).

Virginia Scott Jenkins, *Bananas: An American History* (Smithsonian Institute, 2002).

Will Kaufman, *The Comedian as Confidence Man: Studies in Irony Fatigue* (Wayne State University Press, 1997).

Andrew Lainsbury, *Once Upon an American Dream: The Story of Euro Disneyland* (University of Kansas Press, 2000).

