

**American Icons:  
An Encyclopedia of the  
People, Places, and Things  
that Have Shaped Our  
Culture, Volumes 1–3**

*Edited by  
Dennis R. Hall  
Susan Grove Hall*

**Greenwood Press**

# American Icons



# AMERICAN ICONS

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An Encyclopedia of the People,  
Places, and Things that Have  
Shaped Our Culture

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VOLUME ONE

Edited by Dennis R. Hall  
and Susan Grove Hall



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# Preface

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We can best introduce you to these entries by giving you the same description we sent to their writers, when asking them to contribute to the collection. We invited them to interpret a cultural “icon” in an essay for a wide readership, from casual readers in public libraries, to investigating students, to scholars researching patterns in American culture and popular culture. We asked for the essay to make cultural scholarship accessible to the general reader, and also to add to critical understanding of the subject and of its “iconic” character.

The term “icon”—as we pointed out to the writers—is now used everywhere. It has mushroomed in popular usage, coinciding with the growth of interest in popular culture and of popular culture studies. What does it mean when we say some person, place, or thing is an icon? We have speculated about features of people, places, and things commonly characterized as iconic. We have also tested lists of “icons” with various age groups, looking for patterns of recognition, understanding, agreement, and disagreement. We have surveyed scholarly research, studied the programs of recent conferences on popular culture and other fields, and attended many presentations, attempting to identify the popular phenomena which are now commanding attention, and to locate the best understandings of this attention. In the process of these discussions and research, we realized that “icons” generate strong reactions.

We gave writers our hypothesis about features that we came to associate with an icon. These qualities include the following:

—An icon generates strong responses; people identify with it, or against it; and the differences often reflect generational distinctions. Marilyn Monroe, for instance, carries meanings distinctly different for people who are in their teens and twenties than for people in their sixties and older.

—An icon stands for a group of related things and values. John Wayne, for example, images the cowboy and traditional masculinity, among many other associations, including conservative politics.

—An icon has roots in historical sources, as various as folk culture, science, and commerce; it may supersede a prior icon; it reflects events or forces of its time. The log cabin has endured as an influential American icon, with meanings and associations evolving from our colonial past through the present.

—An icon can be reshaped within its own image, or extended in updated images by its adaptations or imitators. The railroads and trains, for instance, have shifted from carrying associations of high technology and the modern, to conveying ideas of nostalgia and a retreat from high technology.

—An icon moves or communicates widely, often showing the breakdown of former distinctions between popular culture and art or historic American culture. Icons like “Whistler’s Mother” and the patchwork quilt are both revered as high art and widely accepted as popular art.

—An icon can be employed in a variety of ways, and used in visual art, music, film, and other media. For example, references in text or graphics to Ernest Hemingway or to Mount Rushmore or to the gun add meanings to every artistic text in which they appear.

—An icon is usually successful in commerce. Every advertising campaign, every corporation, hopes to become the next Mickey Mouse, the next Las Vegas, the next Golden Arches.

In our invitations to the writers, then, we suggested that the essays should reveal an icon’s origins and changes, its influences, and the meaning of its enduring appeal—and repulsive reactions. When the articles began to arrive, though, we found we had underestimated either the subjects or the authors, or both; the essays were fascinating for many reasons we had not anticipated. We have been surprised by the insights they offer, and pleased to learn much that we had not envisioned having importance, complexity, or charm. And as their numbers mounted to over a hundred, we continued to be surprised by what we learned, and increasingly curious, as the entries touched on related topics from differing viewpoints, and added to the attractive qualities of icons—and to their dubious qualities as well.

These items we call icons hold a depth of significance we had not foreseen; it’s fortunate we did not attempt or request any definition of an icon, or of its appeal, because neither would have held true. We sought, instead, the range of meanings an icon holds for people. As we see it still, this range of meanings, plus people’s disagreements about an icon’s meanings and value, reflect the cultural resonance it holds, and provide the best indication of its character. In other words, a contest of possible meanings and values makes up the drawing power of an icon, and makes it dynamic, rather than static, evolving, rather than securely definable.

There are more icons than any three volumes could address. In making a selection, we have aimed at a representation of various kinds of icons, so that the entries treat principles and modes of differing types. Our arrangement of the icons into alphabetical order illustrates our idea of the equal, or random, relationship among icons, and the curious fact that out-of-the-way places,

and small items we take for granted, influence popular thinking as importantly as the hero or celebrity who is touted by media. The entries themselves illustrate a variety of approaches for understanding icons. Indeed, our basic purpose is to furnish useful demonstrations of how to “read” cultural artifacts, to make readers alert to such significant things around us, and to enable readers to interpret them.

Thus these writings should generate thought, not necessarily agreement. They are entries with lively variations in style and method, and often the writer rhetorically “animates” the subject. They present distinct viewpoints, but in ways that are thought-provoking and inviting of response. Icons may well be controversial in their very basis; these entries, separately, and much more in their convergences, should stir question and even dispute.

The entries provide a fund of themes and perspectives for study and scholarship. Among them are intriguing suggestions of possible patterns and modes among icons of differing types, related to such important concepts as identity, generational differences, and myths. Linking many of the essays are intersections of meaning, and webs of associations. To those who are or will be engaged in the study of icons, this collection will bring a wealth of resources, and make them accessible as subjects in the index.



# Acknowledgments

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We first thank the many people who shared their thoughts and opinions about icons with us as we developed our plans for this collection. These discussions—including the arguments—increased our understanding, stirred our curiosity, and encouraged our efforts to gather together the best voices for a worthwhile forum on the large but mysterious presence in our midst of those people, places, and things we call iconic.

We thank our writers for the help, encouragements, and pleasures they have given us. Some of the contributors we have known through many years of hearing their presentations at popular culture and literary conferences, and sharing critical discussions with them. Others we found as we searched for current writing, scholarship, and teaching on iconic subjects, or in the disciplines which study them; through subsequent conversations with them, we've enjoyed getting to know some very lively and original thinkers. We're appreciative that popular culture scholars ranging from the long-established to new contributors joined efforts with us, so the collection represents the flourishing vitality of popular culture studies. Our energy for this project has not flagged, because we kept hearing, from old associates and new, that they themselves looked forward to the finished volumes with great interest.

We are grateful to Eric Levy for asking us to consider editing a collection of essays on icons, whose suggestion started our thinking and investigation. Eric was then at Greenwood Press, where he was editor of *The Greenwood Guide to American Popular Culture*, essays on research and bibliography co-edited by M. Thomas Inge and Dennis Hall. Eric has moved to the Wesleyan University Press. Since then we have enjoyed having the attentive help of Lisa Pierce with the many questions and issues involved in bringing this collection to publication.

To the University of Louisville English Department and its chair, Susan M. Griffin, we are very grateful for the moral and material support they have given our efforts.

The University of Louisville Ekstrom Library and its librarians have provided help at every stage of our research on icons and preparation of this collection.

The Louisville Free Public Library has furnished many resources necessary for surveying and selecting popular icons, for finding books and articles with perspectives on them, and for fact-checking all kinds of matters from quotations to bibliographies. Their interlibrary loan and information services librarians have given us especially timely, needed help. Ruth Ellen Flint, information specialist at the Highlands–Shelby Park Branch, deserves our special thanks, because we took to her our problems of the most esoteric matters of fact, and she has never yet failed to devise a stratagem for finding the obscure detail which so often has seemed the key to correctness.

# Alamo

---

*Richard R. Flores*

The Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, the site of the 1836 siege and battle between the army of Mexican general and president Santa Anna and the Texas forces led by William B. Travis, is the most visited site in Texas and one of the structures most established in American cultural memory. The stone façade of this early-eighteenth-century Spanish mission has struck an impression around the world, joining an idealized version of courage and valor to an even more idealized image of American heroism. The retellings of the Alamo story in song, art, theater, film, and television programs have contributed to making the names of Travis, Jim Bowie, and Davy Crockett, along with Crockett's coonskin cap, recognizable around the globe.

Film and television have played a major role in the popularization of the Alamo. From D. W. Griffith's production *Martyrs of the Alamo* in 1915 to John Wayne's 1960 version, as well as the recent film with Billy Bob Thornton as Davy Crockett, the story has been reproduced anew for every succeeding generation. Walt Disney's 1954–1955 television series *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, which reached fanatical heights of audience enthusiasm in only a few months, served to imprint Crockett and his death at the Alamo in the American imagination beyond even Disney's expectation. In creating a key site of American cultural memory, the shaping of the story of the Alamo has resulted in collapsing fact and fiction, and paring the complex events of 1836 into a myth of American liberty, heroism, and sacrifice.

The collapsing of historical narratives with those of myth is not in itself an issue: such blurring occurs in all kinds of myth-making. It is the effect of this blurring that, in the case of the Alamo, is of concern. One reason for concern is that this tale of freedom and valor emerged from a larger occurrence of racial bias that rendered Mexicans irreverent, contemptuous, and socially debased, in a widespread stereotype. That is, the myth of the Alamo took a political conflict of 1836 and turned it into a racial story to address the events of the early 1900s. This racialized story then served as the popular idiom through which the Alamo achieved its success in tourism and entertainment.



A leading instance of the transformation of history is the 1915 film *Martyrs of the Alamo*, produced under the supervision of the influential filmmaker D. W. Griffith, and shown to Alamo visitors as a historical introduction by its caretakers, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, until 2001.

To put this film into perspective, a brief summary of the conditions that led to the Alamo battle of 1836 is necessary. First, Texas, or the province of Coahuila-Tejas as it was known, was one of the provinces of the Mexican state, and all incoming citizens from the United States became Mexican citizens, taking an oath to the Mexican government. By 1827, 12,000 Anglo-Americans had entered Mexico and were living in the province of Coahuila-Tejas, outnumbering the Mexicans by 5,000 people. Foreigners continued moving into the province in large numbers, and, by 1835, Mexican citizens in Tejas numbered 7,800 to 30,000 Anglo-Americans. These numbers alarmed Mexican officials, who took measures to curb U.S. immigration into Mexico.

The citizens of Tejas—both Mexican and Anglo-American—were dissatisfied with government from far away, in the cumbersome distance between Tejas and Saltillo, where government offices and appellate courts for the province were located. Stephen F. Austin, in 1833, traveled to Mexico City to try to persuade President Santa Anna to allow Texas to become an independent Mexican state with control over its own affairs. Santa Anna refused, but he did agree to permit citizens of the province more voice in conducting their legal matters; the reforms included a revision of the tariff laws, repeal of the anti-immigration law, and trial by jury.

Although tension and fear existed between Anglo-Americans and the local Mexican population, they both also experienced cooperation and beneficial relationships. Mexicans in Tejas were pleased to find help in warding off the raids of Comanches, Apaches, and Kiowas who often attacked settlements to steal horses and other goods. Anglo-Americans, unaccustomed to the harsh conditions of the Texas prairies, learned their skills of cattle ranching from the Mexican vaqueros. In marriage alliances, it was not uncommon for Mexican women to find husbands among the incoming settlers, especially among those of the elite classes.

Animosity began between the Mexican citizenry in Tejas and the Mexican government, and rose toward a crisis when Santa Anna discarded the Constitution of 1824, causing great consternation among Mexicans and Anglo-Americans alike. Perhaps the biggest misunderstanding in the annals of Texas history concerns the immediate effects of Santa Anna's annulment. Historians agree that his actions led to the military engagements that resulted in the independence of Texas, but it is also quite clear that the movement to gain independence was not immediately joined by all, especially the older settlers. Many had come to Tejas seeking new ways of life and had no interest in independence or conflict. They were slow to respond to calls for military service; even fewer fought at the Alamo.

Numerous considerations motivated those who bore arms against the Mexican state. The most common, at least in the initial stages of the revolt,



*Battle of the Alamo* by Percy Moran, 1912. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

was the intent of local citizens to restore Mexico to its federalist constitution. In fact, as settlers in Tejas organized during the early months of conflict, their mutual efforts at forming a provisional independent government led to open feuding on the issue of independence. These initial efforts in November 1835 led to the formation of a provisional government, not a separate independent Texas republic. The rationale for this position was that local citizens of Tejas believed that many of their troubles with the Mexican government would be sufferable if decisions were left in their own hands under the federalist constitution of 1824. Among these two camps, ethnic or national origin did not serve as a primary factor in choosing sides. One would find Mexican citizens siding with the federalists, opposing the dictatorial regime of Santa Anna, and Anglo-Americans backing the centralist forces of the dictator.

The initial dispute in Texas stemmed from efforts by both Mexicans and Anglo-Americans seeking to restore a federalist government in Mexico. Mexicans in the province also tired of Santa Anna's exploits and of the tedious political circumstances affiliated with their distance from the provincial and national capitols in Coahuila and Mexico City. Second, despite his unilateral control of Mexican affairs and politics, and his egotistical and personal ambitions, Santa Anna's actions can be viewed as an effort to control an internal uprising in his own country.

Finally, an element in the Battle of the Alamo controversy that seems quite overlooked is the men who died. The popular version claims that this was a battle between Texans and Mexicans, a categorization that merits special scrutiny because it collapses ethnic and political categories into an ambiguous binary. Ethnically, those who fought on the “Texan” side were anything but a homogeneous lot. There were thirteen native-born Texans in the group, eleven of whom were of Mexican descent. Of those remaining, forty-one were born in Europe, two were Jews, two were black, and the remainder were Americans from other states in the United States. Inter-marriage between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans was common, with that of Jim Bowie and Ursula Verimendi, the daughter of the Mexican governor, serving as the closest case at the Alamo. On the Mexican side, Santa Anna’s forces, as well as the local population in San Antonio, were an amalgamation of former Spanish citizens, now Mexican, Spanish-Mexican criollos and mestizos; and Santa Anna had conscripted numerous indigenous young men from the interior of Mexico to assist in battle. Politically, one has only to recognize that this was Mexican territory and “foreigners” were not citizens of Texas but affiliates of the Mexican state. Finally, one cannot forget that prominent Mexican citizens fought on both sides, dividing their allegiance along political and ideological lines. Neither side were the ethnically or nationally circumscribed identities popularized by the collective memory of this battle.

The historical events of 1836 are critical for a more rounded understanding of the Alamo. But it is the myth of the Alamo, I suggest, that offers more insight into the role of the Alamo as icon. It is the myth that captured the American imagination and that served as fictional fodder to nourish a growing nationalist ideology in the early twentieth century, and it is the story of the 1915 silent film.

*Martyrs of the Alamo* begins by introducing itself as a drama about the events that led to the independence of Texas, and making claims to its historical accuracy. Let me be clear. I am not expecting this film to follow the contours of the events of 1836. What interests me is how this film detracts from the past and, more importantly, why.

The film opens, incorrectly, with Santa Anna already in San Antonio, giving General Cos instructions as Santa Anna prepares to journey South to Mexico. It then moves to a depiction of the local Mexican population, both soldiers and civilians, as ill-mannered, slovenly, drunken, and lusting after women who walk before them. We find a Mexican officer stopping an Anglo woman, verbally accosting her and making suggestive advances. Upon returning home, the woman reports this to her husband, who proceeds to locate the Mexican officer and, after an exchange of words, shoot him dead. As a result of this incident, Santa Anna confiscates all weapons from the Anglo population, except for a cache of arms hidden beneath the floor by David Crockett and Jim Bowie.

These two projections—the maltreatment of Anglo women by Mexican men and the confiscation of weapons by Santa Anna—are depicted as the cause for

Crockett, Bowie, and other Anglo settlers to plot the taking of the Alamo. The opportunity to enact such a plan arises when, in the wake of Santa Anna's departure, the local Mexican population, including the military, take to the streets celebrating, drinking, and chasing women in wild debauchery. Finding this to be an opportune moment, Crockett, Bowie, and their followers gather their concealed weapons, storm the streets, take the Mexican army by surprise, and seize control of the city. With the Texans in charge, the local Mexican citizenry comport themselves very differently. After the text flashes "Under the new regime . . ." the film displays a scene where Mexicans are taking off their hats in deference to women, greeting each other and Anglos in a sober and respectful manner, and generally acting in a "civilized" fashion.

It is notable that up to this point, and throughout the remainder, the movie depicts an ethnic and racial divide between Texans and Mexicans. Although historians have demonstrated that those who fought on the Texan side were immigrants from both the United States and Europe as well as Mexican citizens, according to *Martyrs of the Alamo*, the conflict occurred between "white" Texans and "brown" Mexicans. The film's one exception is Bowie's "slave," portrayed by a black-faced actor who dutifully sits beside the ailing defender.

In the movie, General Cos, banished from San Antonio, reconnects with Santa Anna, who then calls his generals together to plan an attack on the Alamo. However, unsuspected by the Mexicans, "Deaf" Smith, one of the Texan leaders, is hiding in the bush, from where he hears the entire plan. He carries this information back to Bowie, Crockett, and now also Travis, who has been sent by Sam Houston to take charge of the former mission; preparations are made for Santa Anna's arrival and the battle.

After Santa Anna arrives and the actual siege of the Alamo begins, the Mexicans are portrayed as the more powerful, impersonal, villainous, and yet at times even inept, force. Perhaps one of the more disturbing images appears when the Mexicans have made their way into the Alamo. During a scene of hand-to-hand fighting, the scene shifts to a small, unarmed boy cowering behind a cannon, taking cover from the fighting around him. From nowhere appears the arm of a Mexican soldier, grabbing the youth by his neck and pulling him out of view. The next frame shows the dead corpse of the boy flying across the room, landing against the far wall.

The last scene I want to briefly address depicts Santa Anna camping near San Jacinto just before Houston's forces arrive. The film shows the Mexicans in their tents sleeping, drinking, and totally unprepared for battle. The text makes note of Santa Anna as a "drug fiend" who also engages in "orgies." With this, the film cuts to Santa Anna in his tent, in a drug-induced stupor, surrounded by scantily-clad dancing women. After a lengthy view of this image, the film shows the forces of Sam Houston arriving and Santa Anna, too inebriated even to hold his sword, fleeing for his life.

With Houston's forces shouting "Remember the Alamo," Santa Anna, hiding in a row of shrubs, is captured. Sam Houston, deciding the Mexican general is more valuable alive than dead, stops several soldiers from placing a

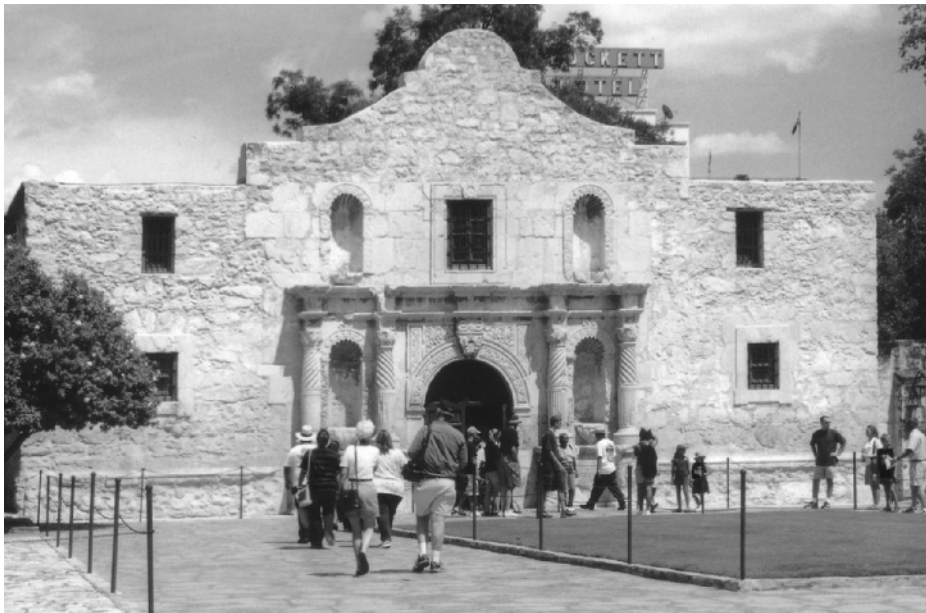
noose around his neck and proceeds to sign a treaty with him that sets Texas free from Mexican rule.

How are we to understand this early film on the Alamo? In *Martyrs*, the impetus for Texas to secede from the Mexican Union is portrayed not as a political act but a social one, based on the depiction of Mexicans as disrespectful, uncivil, promiscuous, and sexually dangerous to Anglo women. Like the projection of arrogant reconstruction era blacks in Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, these Mexicans, both citizens and soldiers, appear socially reprehensible and in need of control by Anglo rule. The film's biased representation results in the negation of history, as political difference is collapsed into social conduct, sexual morality, and representations of gender. Not only are Mexicans culturally to be feared in terms of future miscegenation, but their advances on Anglo women as objects of sexual desire require the saving presence of the Anglo male hero.

The fear of Mexicans that the movie implies extends to their behavior in regard to the norms of "civilized" warfare. The murder of the young boy cowering behind the cannon suggests unwarranted cruelty and accustomed savagery. Contrast this with the sparing of Santa Anna by Houston, as well as Cos's departure with sword in hand, and the noble character of the Anglo emerges quite clearly, in opposition. The portrayal of Mexicans as incapable of civil behavior posits their difference as the result of their social and cultural practice. It is Mexicans, according to this film, who are responsible for their particular plight in Texas.

The dominant narrative we find in this film, one that pits liberty-loving Texans against tyrannous Mexicans as the cause of the Battle of the Alamo, is incorrect, but it underlies today's accounts of the "hallowed ground" and "bastion of liberty" that range from histories to tourist promotions. Much earlier there were widely diverse stories of the choices made to remain in the Alamo, and of the men who made them. Moreover, the Alamo itself did not seem to stand as a hallowed bastion or even a site worth much interest until the 1890s. It was not tended or preserved, and became dilapidated; it was used for commercial purposes, for grain storage and even as a saloon. It became important for its significance to culture and history at last in the eyes of two women, who then campaigned to save it and give it public honor, and succeeded when the Texas Legislature purchased the property to entrust it to the care of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas in 1905.

For this change of attitude to happen, a new interpretation of the Alamo needed to emerge. A new historical vision of the place and its relationship to the surrounding culture developed, in response to changes that had occurred in Texas, and relevant to ideas and beliefs of modern Texas culture. The Alamo became a major icon early in the twentieth century because it responded to change by advancing a new mode of thinking, with a myth that appealed to people even far beyond Texas. How did this Alamo myth advance the changes in ideas and practices of this transition into twentieth-century modernism?



Tourists visiting the Alamo mission today. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

In brief, economic demands and needs changed radically in Texas with the introduction of the railroad in the 1880s, the closing of the range through barbed wire, and the beginning of industrial irrigation. The effects of these events saw Mexican workers and landowners lose status and jobs. The special skills of the Mexican ranch hand were becoming less important while the need for cheap labor to work newly irrigated land was increasing. Mexican workers and landowners, by 1900, became a landless class whose skilled labor was diminished if not obsolete.

These social and economic changes affected everyone. But the results of the alterations on the residents of the Mexican-origin community were disproportionate to their numbers. The Mexican and Mexican-American population of Texas experienced loss of status, economic stability, and rights during this period. For example, in 1850 over 60 percent of the Mexican-origin population in Texas were either landowners or skilled laborers. By 1900, this number hovered closer to 10 percent. With the arrival of the railroad, the skills of the Mexican vaquero—the foremost ranch workers in Texas—became nearly obsolete. Owners no longer needed to employ dozens of vaqueros to run their cattle north, and in their place hired only a handful of workers to get their cattle to the local depot. With irrigation, especially in deep South Texas, industrial farming required cheap and mobile workers. Mexicans were seen as the ideal population for this task.

The rebirth of the Alamo in 1905 coincides with the social changes going on in Texas. The mythic story of the Alamo that posits Mexicans as tyrannous and against liberty and freedom, those bedrocks of U.S. democratic

ideals, serves to rationalize the Mexican community's increased segregation and economic erosion. The image of treacherous Mexicans produced by the myth of the Alamo story justified the racist establishment of Jim Crow segregation throughout Texas.

The myth of the Alamo that is represented in *Martyrs*, a myth constructed on the binary of good Texans versus evil Mexicans, or, in its least pejorative sense, the inaccurate representation of this history as one between Texans and Mexicans, has served as the foundation of all future tellings. The Disney stories of Crockett, artistic representations of the battle, and John Wayne's version of this story are all told through this same binary idiom. This mythic structure, one that collapses narrative features into a simple binary of us versus them, is one of the key reasons the Alamo as icon has been so popular. While Griffith's film tells the Alamo story as a means of exploiting and reproducing a racialized view of Mexicans, Wayne's film allows him to connect the Mexican threat to liberty with communism and the ideologies of the Cold War. For Griffith, Wayne, and the multiple other versions of this story, the Alamo as icon fosters a tale of American liberty and freedom against all odds and all enemies, regardless of the facts of history.

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# Muhammad Ali

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*J. Peter Williams*

When the April 1998 issue of *GQ* named their athlete of the century they printed his picture on their cover, but they felt no need to give their readers his name. The photograph of the most recognizable face on the planet was enough. They could have added that no other athlete, and likely no other public figure, more symbolized his time than Muhammad Ali.

Ali virtually defines the iconic: as well as any other individual, he “stands for” his historical period, which may be said to stretch from the time of John Kennedy to the onset of the Reagan era, from the period of individualism we loosely call the sixties to the shift, in the eighties, to a more corporate mindset. Like other icons who are also real people, however, Ali lived as a man as well as a symbol. He was always a performer, the lead in his own iconic drama, although it must be said that a role has seldom fit its player better.

Ali’s career in the ring, like much great drama, has five acts. The first culminates in his initial defeat of Sonny Liston and his subsequent decision to change his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali; the climax of the second, after his suspension from boxing and his 3½-year absence from the sport, is his first loss, to Joe Frazier; the third act ends with Ali’s spectacular victory over George Foreman in Africa, and the fourth with his defeat of Leon Spinks in their second fight, when Ali became the first heavyweight to hold the championship three times. Only in the final act does the story of the human individual diverge from myth. An aging athlete who stayed in the ring too long, Ali the individual was debilitated by Parkinson’s Syndrome. As an icon, though, his final act could easily have been his best: his surprise appearance in Atlanta, when he held the torch that lit the Olympic flame.

Myth always trumps history. Although Ali himself is devoid of self-pity, some moralists might cluck at the sport that both made him and deprived him of coherent speech. Fortunately, however, we are here concerned not with the literal, but with the mythical, and, in this very real sense, the conclusion to Ali’s drama cannot be called tragic.

Before his first fight with Sonny Liston, Cassius Clay seemed little more than an adolescent reveling in his first real spotlight, at times blustering like a bully,



at others pretending to be terrified of the champion. As a result, when the match was finally scheduled for early 1964 in Miami, no one knew what to expect. At the weigh-in, Clay's eyes were fixed and glassy and he was so noisy and wild, once raising a fist and rushing Liston, that Morris Klein, the Commission's chairman, fined him \$2,500. One reporter asked the Commission's doctor if Clay had been smoking "reefers," but the doctor said he just didn't know.

In retrospect, it's hard to see how easily everyone was so badly fooled. Clay had just invented the modern weigh-in, modeling his behavior—and he admitted this—on that of the flamboyant pro wrestler, Gorgeous George. He had posed for comic promotional photos with the Beatles just before the fight, and when one reporter begged for just one interview with Cassius when he wasn't onstage, Clay declined, saying that if the reporter wrote about what he was really like it would spoil his act. Clay was surprisingly blunt about his tactics. "When I become heavyweight champion, I probably will quit being a blabmouth," he said, asking if P. T. Barnum "could have been a great showman by saying nothing." Then he got serious. "My fighting is not an act," he said; "when I'm in the ring against an opponent, it's for real" (Bromberg).

The fight was every bit as one-sided as the writers had expected, but the dominant party was not the man they had picked. Clay's speed and reflexes so much outshone Sonny's that it became apparent after the first two rounds that Cassius's declarations had been more truthful than vain. Liston's frustration was turning to helpless rage, and he was cut so badly that he would later need six stitches. After six rounds, Sonny gave up. Sitting on his stool after the warning buzzer for round seven, watching the fresh and unhurt Clay standing and dancing in the corner opposite, he spat out his mouthpiece. Clay saw him do it and threw up his hands in victory.

After Clay won the fight, he was unemotional, even-tempered and calm, answering questions so quietly that reporters in the back row had to ask him to speak up. A few days later Clay discussed his tactics:

It was an act, and I was quieter inside than all the suckers feeling sorry for me. And Liston, he was the biggest patsy of them all. When that doctor went along with it, saying I was deathly afraid of fighting, I was so happy I could have bust a gut laughing. (Bromberg)

All part of the plan; as with Prince Hal in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, it turns out there had always been a *real* hero in that clown suit. Still, because Cassius had been a practitioner of hype for some time, why were normally skeptical journalists duped as easily as the Miami doctor and the Big Bear? Primarily, because most of them wanted to be.

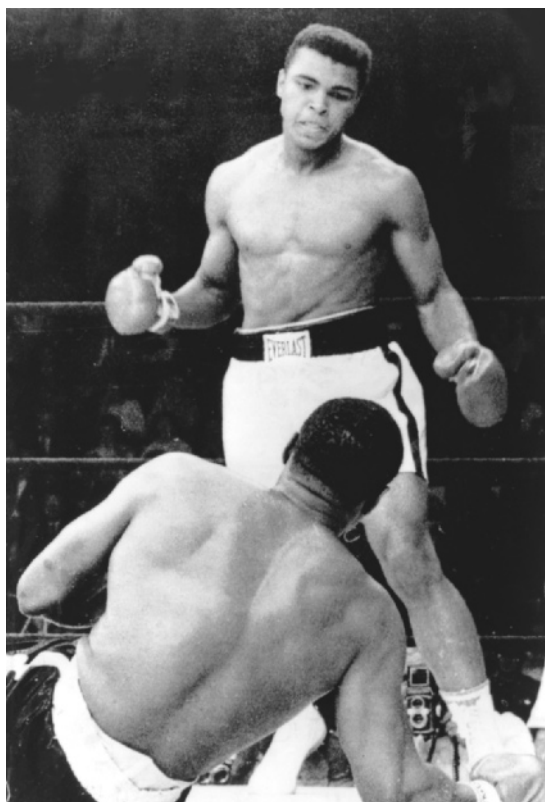
In early 1964, the division of the country that we remember as the sixties had only just begun. Most adults who thought themselves responsible held the same dim view of a counter-culture still in its infancy as the reporter who wondered about "reefers" had of Clay. Almost everybody not only picked

Liston, but wanted him to win. Clay was viewed as a freak, just a Beatle with a haircut. One of the few writers who saw through Clay's deception was Leonard Schecter, who made the following perceptive comments:

The weight of opinion against Clay has almost as much to do with his personality as with his ability. It's not a good thing to brag. Clay brags. Then there is the strong suspicion that Clay holds with the opinions of the Black Muslims. The revulsion in some quarters against the Beatles, noisy, irreverent, but basically decent young men, riding a tide of success, is similar to the reaction to Clay.

Schecter's remarks about the role Clay's image played in turning writers against him is very pertinent here; as the sixties began to grow increasingly volatile in the wake of the first Kennedy assassination, which had taken place very recently, different sides were being taken and new lines were being drawn. Liston had at first been considered an unpopular ex-convict; now he had become a popular champion for the first time, but only because he was opposed to Clay, who represented everything the threatened old order feared. Their fears were realized when, soon after becoming the new champ, Cassius made three announcements. Two of them can be summarized in the slogans of the sixties, even though this was not the precise language he used: "I want to do my own thing," and "Hell, no, I won't go." The third was that he had been a Black Muslim for about three months, or since roughly the time J.F.K. was killed. At first, in an interview in which he was photographed standing next to Malcolm X, he said his temporary name was Cassius X; a short while later, he said his permanent one would be Muhammad Ali.

This moment was arguably the most important event in the public life of the most prominent international athlete of the last part of the last century. What is *not* arguable is that it was the moment when the adult began to replace the teenager, when the icon began to supersede the individual. Put more accurately—and there is most truth in this—it was the



Muhammad Ali standing over a fallen Sonny Liston during their 1965 bout. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

moment when that individual “came out,” dropped his mask and, intuitively recognizing a certain destiny, put on the only attire that was ever designed to fit.

After he beat Liston, Clay had openly embraced Malcolm X; after he lost to Clay, Liston had said he hadn't felt so bad since he'd heard John Kennedy was killed, and you may remember that it was Malcolm X who called the J.F.K. assassination a case of “the chickens coming home to roost.” To publicly ally yourself with Malcolm X a scant three months after the death of the Camelot president was impolitic; and Ali, who had been deferred from the draft because of his truly miserable math skills, was soon made eligible regardless. When he refused induction, claiming the status of a conscientious objector because of his Muslim faith, it took only twenty-four hours for the boxing authorities to strip him of his title and void his license; it would take nearly four years for our Supreme Court to advise us that we had punished someone for being, like so many others of his time, a sincere dissenter, and to convince skeptics (even black radicals like Amiri Baraka, who still called himself Leroi Jones) that his Islamic faith was genuine. By that time—at the end of Ali's Act II—there were few if any remaining who thought that the figure in question was *not* the iconic and legendary Muhammad Ali, and many who wondered if Cassius Clay had ever existed at all.

During the time he was out of the ring, Ali's iconic stature grew. The so-called counter-culture, by now healthier than ever, viewed him as the hero who had beaten not just everyone he'd ever faced in the ring, but also “The Man,” the establishment that had tried to destroy his career. When he finally fought Joe Frazier for the title they had taken from him, “the fight” transcended sport; it was far more important on the symbolic level, a dramatic conflict between the old order and the new. Ali had not changed. He believed that blacks were not treated equally in our country, that the Vietnam War was a brutal mistake, and that Christianity in America tended more toward the hypocritical than the pious—and these were the same beliefs that had been espoused by Cassius Clay. The important difference was that, in the seven years since the Liston fight, Ali had been transformed from pariah to Galahad. The old guard that had run the country, made up of men like Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew, and Chicago's Mayor Daley, had become as unpopular as the war itself and, like that war, was on the way out. Ali had not changed; the country had. Frazier, a change-resistant flag-waver, represented everything Ali had always fought, but he didn't see that now the country was in the other man's corner, and that the only place he could possibly win was in the ring.

Frazier did win, as everybody knows—or so it seemed at first. The war for the heart of the public had clearly been won by Ali, who had in the process also won a major victory for the anti-war movement in the country's ultimate court.

Although Ali lost no iconic prestige whatsoever in the first Frazier fight, and although he may even have gained some symbolic stature, the individual athlete had lost, and he knew it. In fact, from here on in, the boxer Ali

would be far less dominant in the ring. His three fights with Ken Norton (the first of which he lost) all went the distance, as did the second Frazier fight, and in the third, the “Thrilla in Manila,” Frazier could not come out for the last round. Just before that third Frazier fight, however, Ali fought one more iconic match. Again, he represented the new individualistic culture; again his opponent, George Foreman, stood for a complacent and uncritical status quo.

But there was a difference. Until now, Ali had represented the democratic values he saw eroded in his country; the only thing left was to stand for *all* the people, and particularly perhaps for the disadvantaged and ignored, for what Westerners patronize as the Third World. When Ali went to Zaire it was as if the great statue in New York harbor had come itself to the tired and the poor, or like Mohammed going to the mountain. In his third great symbolic fight, Ali publicized, embraced, and became a part of the entire globe.

Even in Zaire, however, Ali was, as always, the same man he had always been. It was Ali who thought up the phrase “the rumble in the jungle,” and he also had the idea, which was never carried out, of entering the ring carrying three flags, those of Zaire, the Organization of African Unity, and the U.N., which would have been an obvious comment on the American flag Foreman waved at the 1968 Olympics. Before the fight, Ali said, with the eloquent simplicity of the man of the whole world he had become, “I feel at home.”

After Ali’s great upset victory, the writers realized more than ever that they were in the presence of a hero in the old, Greek sense. Larry Merchant, saying he’d watched “a steak jump up at the butcher,” called the fight sublime and gave Ali the ultimate quality of godhead, immortality; six years after losing the title, Merchant said, “Ali reseated himself forever more” on the heavy-weight throne. After the knockout, as Ali drove the forty miles to his quarters, dawn was breaking, and he remarked a number of times that it seemed right to be coming out of darkness into light.

The Ali–Foreman fight established the myth of Muhammad Ali utterly. After the fight, he became, certainly, the greatest sports legend in American history and, possibly, in modern history itself. After the knockout, Pete Bonvente of *Newsweek* went in search of the most recognizable face on the planet, the athlete of the century and man of the epoch, and, forty miles later, he found him in the most fervent and significant of all his incarnations, the man of the people:

It was five in the morning, and Ken Regan [a photographer] said, “Let’s drive out to N’Sele.” Two hours after we started, we got to N’Sele. There was no press. The entourage was gone. We went over to Ali’s cottage, and three hours after the greatest victory of his life, Muhammad Ali was sitting on a stoop, showing a magic trick to a group of black children. It was a rope trick, where the rope is cut in half and then it’s suddenly back together again. And it was hard to tell who was having a better time, Ali or the children. All I could think was, I don’t care what anyone says, there’ll never be anyone like him again. (Hauser 280)

In the eleven years before he kayoed Foreman, Ali had fought out of country ten times (Toronto, Frankfurt, Zurich, Tokyo, Vancouver, Dublin, Djakarta, and three fights in London); for the seven years after and including the Foreman fight, and as if to reinforce his growing image as an international icon, he fought away from home six more times (Kinshaha, Kuala Lumpur, Quezon City, Puerto Rico, Munich, and Nassau). There was evidence, however, that the enormous success of the mythical idol may have convinced the fighter who had been so successful for nearly two decades that he needn't take his opponents all that seriously. That evidence became compelling when in 1978, just after turning 36, he lost his title to Leon Spinks.

All the athlete's loss did, however—and by then we were all tempted to say “of course”—was set up another comeback for the icon. In New Orleans, six months later, Ali won an easy decision over Spinks. Although there was none of the powerful social symbolism associated with Clay–Liston, Frazier–Ali, or Ali–Foreman, it won't stretch a point to say that this fight also had extrapugilistic significance, if on a less important level. Spinks, whose success in dethroning “The Greatest” had certainly gone to his head, spent a plural number of nights away from his training camp, evidently trysting, and when he was in town he was driven around in a white stretch limo playing rap at top volume, protected by his bodyguard, the as yet little-known Mr. T. Conversely Ali, who never partied and who knew he had to get serious, trained hard, and the fight ended up an illustration of the failure of excess when confronted by a solid work ethic.

The story should end right there, in perfect symmetry, but we all know it doesn't, at least not as involves Ali the individual, the human, the actor in the drama who made the sad mistake of thinking he was closer to his indomitable image than he actually was. Ali fought twice more, once with Larry Holmes and once with Trevor Berbick, when he was so badly pummelled that—many think—it caused the Parkinson's Syndrome which afflicts him now. But neither does the saga of the mythical Ali end here. If we want to consider the fitting finale for Ali the icon—and this is undoubtedly unsafe, because he may have many acts left to perform—it must be the moment, fifteen years after those sad last fights, when, holding a torch in a visibly trembling right hand, he appeared at the top of the Atlanta stadium, like the god out of the machine, and lit that Olympic flame.

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# Amish

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*David L. Weaver-Zercher*

In 1989, President George H. W. Bush traveled to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to publicize his administration's "war on drugs." Accompanied by Attorney General Richard Thornburgh and drug czar William Bennett, the president first delivered an anti-drug speech to a suburban Lancaster high school, then ventured deeper into the countryside, where he and his entourage met with a dozen Old Order Amish and Mennonite church leaders. The meeting, according to Bush, was aimed at learning from these Old Order leaders "how your community manages to stave off the scourge of drugs." Transcripts from the meeting reveal that Bush administration officials did most of the talking and, correspondingly, probably learned little about Old Order Amish socialization practices. They did, however, succeed at making image points. The next morning, newspapers across the country carried an Associated Press photograph of a stately President Bush striding past a horse and buggy tied to a hitching post—a hitching post that, at the request of the president's staff, had been moved to a prominent, photogenic location, replete with rolling farmland in the background.

That a sitting American president would make a pilgrimage to Lancaster County to sit at the feet of Amish gurus—and, in a calculated way, capture the image on film—reveals the iconic nature of the Old Order Amish. So too does the media frenzy that exploded in the summer of 1998, when two Amish men were arrested for possessing cocaine with the intent to sell it to their Amish friends. In a matter of days, the story of their arrests had traveled around the world. As evidence of its cultural cachet, the story quickly became fodder for jokes on the nation's late-night talk shows (among his "Top Ten Signs Your Amish Teen is in Trouble," David Letterman included, "Sometimes he stays in bed 'til after 6 A.M."). As the story made its rounds, some observers complained that it was unfair to make such a fuss over the arrest of two 20-year-olds selling cocaine. The arrests would hardly have been noticed, they said, had the drug dealers been Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, or atheists. These critics were right: the newsworthiness of the story had little to do with the gravity of the crime, and everything to do with the fact that it was

committed by members of a religious community that, in many Americans' minds, successfully avoided the indiscretions of modern American life. In that sense, President Bush's politicized employment of the Amish was the flipside—and perhaps even a contributor—to the media coverage surrounding the 1998 Amish drug bust. Few things make for better news stories than the sordid activities of a venerated icon.

It is ironic that the Old Order Amish, a religious community that shuns publicity (and actively discourages its members from seeking it), has become a renowned American icon, one that can be used both to depict the integrity of close-knit, rural communities and to illustrate their pitfalls. Historically speaking, this iconic status is a relatively recent phenomenon; despite a history that reaches back 300 years, the Amish have been renowned cultural icons only since the mid-twentieth century. The process by which the Amish achieved their iconic status as hardworking, morally virtuous, frontier-like farmers—in sum, hearty Americans—tells us some things about the Amish. It tells us even more about the trajectory of American culture in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The term “Amish” refers to a variety of small, sectarian Christian groups that trace their origins to Jacob Amman, a late-seventeenth-century Swiss-Alsatian Anabaptist. By that time, the Anabaptist movement was over 150 years

old, first emerging in the 1520s during the Protestant Reformation. The Anabaptists, whose designation “ana-baptist” refers to their practice of “rebaptizing” one another as adult believers, sought to push other Protestant reformers to make more radical reforms to the sixteenth-century church. The prototypical example of this push came in Zurich, Switzerland, where youthful followers of reformer Ulrich Zwingli encouraged their mentor to abandon the church's tradition of baptizing infants. When Zwingli refused their demand, his disaffected followers moved ahead, rebaptizing one another to symbolize their break with the Protestant mainstream.

This act of adult baptism, performed in 1525, was met with stiff opposition, not only by church leaders like Zwingli, but also by government officials who sought to maintain a cohesive Christian society. The Anabaptists were quickly branded heretics and, in many regions of Europe, were forced to recant their views or face imprisonment, torture, and even death.



A poster of the Amish to promote Pennsylvania, ca. 1940. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Eventually thousands of Anabaptists were martyred, but many who survived continued to pursue their radical form of Christianity. Most Anabaptists came to see their powerlessness as a virtue, citing Jesus Christ as their model for responding to persecution nonviolently. Three centuries later, contemporary Anabaptists—who now carry the names “Mennonite” (for sixteenth-century leader Menno Simons), “Amish” (for seventeenth-century leader Jacob Amman), or “Brethren”—continue to espouse adult baptism and non-violence, beliefs they sustain by pointing to Jesus’ example.

The Amish, then, comprise one particular strand of Anabaptist Christianity. But what sets them apart from other Anabaptists? Here it is instructive to consider the concerns Jacob Amman first voiced in the 1690s. According to Amman, too many Swiss Anabaptists had become lax in their practice of the Christian faith. Church leaders in particular, he said, had lost the will to enact appropriate discipline within their flocks. Invoking earlier Anabaptist precedents for shunning wayward church members—that is, excommunicating unrepentant sinners and limiting social interactions with them—Amman and his followers demanded that these leaders reinvigorate “the ban.” When Swiss Anabaptist leaders rejected the Ammanists’ demand, in 1693, the Amish church was born.

Over the centuries, this thoroughgoing commitment to church discipline has continued to set the Amish apart from other Christian groups, including most other Anabaptist groups. Moreover, Amish communities have tended to produce longer, more determinate lists of lifestyle expectations than have other Christian churches. These lifestyle expectations, ranging from dress and grooming requirements (e.g., beards sans moustaches for married men) to technological constraint (e.g., refusal to hook into electric power lines) to various sorts of cultural resistance (e.g., retention of their Pennsylvania German dialect), when combined with an ardent commitment to church discipline, have given rise to distinctive religious communities that manifest a high degree of uniformity in belief and practice.

More than being *uniform*, however, many of these Amish practices became strikingly *visible* on the North American cultural landscape. Generally speaking, the visible eccentricity of Amish communities is a relatively late development, the roots of which can be traced to two contrasting but inter-related developments in late nineteenth-century America. On the one hand, ever larger segments of American society partook of the fruits of progress, many of which were technological. On the other hand, some Anabaptist communities, including many Amish communities, chose to reject those fruits. Over time, a significant lifestyle chasm developed between “Old Order” Anabaptist groups and their more progressive neighbors, including progressive Anabaptist groups. For even as other residents of rural America embraced motorized cars and tractors, the Old Orders continued to drive horse-drawn buggies and plows. Similarly, even as most rural Americans plugged into the electric power grid and public telephone service, the Old Orders opted for less technologically sophisticated ways of life. Not least, the



Old Order Amish remained overwhelmingly rural, forgoing the allurements of America's middle class, including suburban living. In response, popular fascination with the Old Order Amish grew, as did the list of newspaper and magazine articles describing the Amish and their "queer" ways.

Some onlookers interpreted Amish cultural resistance to progress as the last gasp of a dying religious culture. In 1937, for instance, the *New York Times* ran a piece entitled "Amishmen Battle to Keep Drab Life." This article, which appeared during an attempt by Lancaster County Amish leaders to resist school consolidation in favor of one-room schooling, was followed by an editorial predicting that the Amish children who attended these homey, one-room schools would soon be "big industrialists" themselves. In other words, the *Times's* cultural prognosticators recognized the Amish were fighting to sustain their traditional way of life, but they forecast a quick surrender to progress's cultural authority. The Old Order Amish not only proved these prognosticators wrong, but they shattered their predictions with a degree of cultural vitality and numerical growth that, even now, shows no signs of abating.

Still, as impressive as Old Order numerical growth has been, it pales in comparison to the growth of their renown. Indeed, it is arguable that the Amish are one of the most recognizable religious groups in contemporary America. The 1985 movie *Witness*, in which Harrison Ford plays a Philadelphia policeman forced to go undercover on an Amish farm, contributed heavily to this renown. Decades before *Witness* hit the big screen, however, the Amish's transformation from a little known religious sect to an American



A typical Amish buggy in Ohio. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

icon was well underway. In the 1950s, for instance, Amish-themed tourism became a prominent business in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, an enterprise that has continued to grow in Lancaster County and has since spread to other Amish-populated regions of the United States. In 1955, Amish characters made their debut in a Broadway musical, *Plain and Fancy*. More recently, Amish characters have appeared on network television shows, television commercials and print advertisements (many of which sell products Amish people are not allowed to own or use), romance novels, internet sites, and documentary films. In 2004, the Amish graduated to reality television: a series entitled “Amish in the City” featured six disaffected Amish youth living with six “city kids” in an ultra-hip house in the Hollywood Hills. The predictability of the show’s premise—would these Amish youth return to their Amish communities, or would they choose instead the ways of the world—did little to stem its popularity.

The title of the reality show, “Amish in the City,” provides some clues to the iconic nature of the Amish. In actuality, Amish people are not averse to spending time in cities, particularly those in proximity to their Amish settlements. At the same time, the Amish have been, and continue to be, rural people. Thus, the popular conception of the Amish, although sometimes overdrawn, is essentially correct: the Amish do not belong in the city. They are rural people, and they embody—in our imagination, if not always in reality—the best qualities of North American rural life. In fact, the employment of the Amish in popular discourse participates in a tradition that long predates North American rural life, a tradition that stretches back to the Roman poet Virgil, whose “pastoral” writings idealized rural settings as places of peace, tranquility, and moral virtue.

Cultural historians have effectively chronicled this longstanding affection for rural life, as well as the corresponding assumption that rural living successfully counters the ills of the city (e.g., Smith, Marx). Virgil is perhaps best known for fostering this pastoral ideal in which humans live in close harmony with nature, enjoy nature’s bounties, and experience the tranquility and existential satisfaction that is supposedly absent from economically stratified, morally corrupt cities. Renaissance writers reiterated Virgil’s concerns, as did eighteenth-century English advocates of “country ideology,” which “set the country in opposition to the metropolis as the natural seat of all that was right and good” (Walbert). In eighteenth-century America, Thomas Jefferson became the most articulate advocate of this sort of thinking. America will remain virtuous, Jefferson wrote, only as long as it remains “chiefly agricultural,” but when Americans “get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe” (qtd. in Walbert).

Even as cultural historians have noted this strong affection for rural living, they have also observed its selective view of rural life. It is, in essence, a nostalgic vision, emerging most strongly when rural life is being overrun by urbanizing forces (Lasch). As with other expressions of nostalgia, longings for rural life rarely undertake a realistic assessment of rural existence, forgetting (or at least

underemphasizing) the back-breaking toil required to produce crops, the stench of farm animals, and the general brutishness of nature. In addition, nostalgia for the country tends to forget that selfishness, economic oppression, and intense family squabbles are not restricted to the metropolis. Nevertheless, truths such as these are often obscured by the pastoral mythology, which tends to sell better in the marketplace of ideas. Indeed, the sale of nostalgic views of American rural life has long been a thriving enterprise in the United States, an enterprise that continues apace with Jeanette Oke prairie romances, “country” decorating themes, and ranching vacations for suburbanites.

America’s continuing regard for the Amish—a regard that blossomed only in the twentieth century, as the family farm succumbed to big business—similarly reveals the potency of the pastoral ideal in contemporary America. Tourists who travel to Amish Country express a desire to witness life “as it was meant to be,” which they find in the Amish as they work their small-scale farms. Some tourists endeavor to learn about the intricacies of Amish life, exploring the religious and sociological underpinnings of Amish culture. But in the final analysis, it is the pastoral ideal associated with the Amish that attracts most visitors to Amish regions of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. That many Amish people now make their livings away from the farm (in Northern Indiana, many Amish men now work in factories) has done little to stem this consumer interest in the Amish. As long as *some* Amish people continue to tend their small, family farms, giving tourists a picturesque glimpse of the pastoral ideal, the Amish will maintain their iconic status in the American imagination.



An Amish father with his two children at a craft fair in Ohio. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

At the same time, the high esteem in which the Amish are held will continue to provide a fertile context for demythologizers to do their work. In other words, as long as the Amish are employed to maintain the myth of the pastoral, those who wish to puncture that myth will be able to do so. The drug bust story of 1998, which revealed that the Amish had not successfully resisted “the scourge of drugs”; the 2002 documentary film *Devil’s Playground*, which reiterated that same point with stunning footage from Amish barn parties; and *True Stories of the X-Amish*, a book that recounts the experiences of people who found their Amish communities harsh and oppressive—what these media offerings share in common is their myth-shattering content. If the Amish did not function as an icon for the pastoral ideal, these myth busters would have no story to tell—or, at the very least, would have far fewer consumers interested in hearing their stories.

In sum, the Amish function in the American imagination as hearty, virtuous ruralists, representing what many Americans imagine to be the essence of the American past. They are in essence a saving remnant, possessing the qualities that, according to Thomas Jefferson, would make America great, qualities that (again, according to Jefferson) America forsakes at its peril (Weaver-Zercher). To be sure, even a little scratching beneath the surface reveals that the Amish are not very “American” at all. They look askance at the latest technologies, refuse to bow to Hollywood and Wall Street, and even refuse to participate in the military. Still, the rural existence they embody, often in striking ways, reminds many contemporary Americans, truthfully or not, of what most Americans used to be. That some who comprise this saving remnant would fall from grace not only makes for good newspaper stories, it also undergirds the widely held belief that the Amish *are* something other: a remnant of saints who occupy another realm, far above the sordidness of the modern metropolis.

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# Antiperspirant

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*Jimmy Dean Smith*

You really do not *need* an antiperspirant. If you are clean and healthy and vary your diet so you are not constantly atomizing one overwhelming aroma, you will more than likely pass muster. No need for you to worry that you are being judged in the court of public opinion and found guilty. You understand that sweat, a substance most human beings create, is only natural. You know this. And yet, distrusting your brain, you probably still believe profoundly that you must not start your day without spraying or spritzing or smearing your underarms. The very thought of going out the door without using antiperspirant gives you the fantods. The whole world is watching (or, rather, sniffing) and judging, and you can use all the tricks applied chemistry offers to sneak past society's prying eyes (or nose).

A "deodorant," as the name suggests, works on a body's smells, while an "antiperspirant" works on its sweat. (The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of *deodorant* is terrifying: "A substance or preparation that destroys the odour of fetid effluvia." About *antiperspirant* it remains silent.) The two substances are closely linked because sweat provides a fertile breeding area for smells, although sweat itself has no odor. That is, an otherwise clean person might perspire buckets and one would not know it except by looking: no smell would give away the person's sweatiness. All by themselves, the body's sweat-producing eccrine and apocrine glands should not be made to take the heat for the bad smells that some people exude.

Those people are troublesome not because they sweat but because the kinds of bacteria that grow on unwashed bodies smell very bad when millions and millions of them die. This is not a new discovery, and thus deodorants have been around for quite a while. Today's deodorants actually contain ingredients that attack and kill the bacteria before they have a chance to gain a foothold. In the beginning, deodorants worked (as best they could) by smelling stronger than the stench of decaying bacteria. The ancients of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, for instance, used perfume to outmuscle and defeat body reek.

Here is where sweat comes in. The body provides few climates more naturally conducive to bacterial fecundity than armpits. The heat of armpits

makes them attractive to bacteria, but what really turns armpits into overgrown steamy jungles is the humidity: bacteria can't get enough sweat. Again, to reiterate: the sweat itself doesn't smell, and neither do the bacteria. But then they die, and decay, and sweat gets all the blame. Thus, antiperspirants treat a problem by attacking one of its causes rather than another (uncleanliness) or still another (new norms for polite behavior—see the paragraphs on advertising below).

The exact active ingredients that go into antiperspirants depend on how the antiperspirant is configured. A roll-on, for instance, might contain aluminum chlorhydrate. Sticks might contain aluminum zirconium tetrachlorohydrate. In both cases, these aluminum salts help control the body's odor by reducing the amount of sweat it produces. Lacking a hospitable climate to grow in, bacteria have no chance to thrive and die and stink. The way that these salts work gives medical professionals fits: they make the pores contract so sweat doesn't leak out of them. You don't even have to be an M.D. to understand why clogging your pores is probably an ill-advised idea. Even if you don't obsess over an obvious question (where does the bottled-up sweat go?), you will probably agree that contracted pores are a terrible, dehumanizing price to pay for a little dryness and a somewhat pleasanter smell.

Unless, that is, you happen ever to have watched television or read a commercial magazine. In that case, you have probably been just about convinced that having your sweat glands removed altogether is a remedy worth considering. Dehumanization seems all right compared with what advertising tells us is awaiting all who sweat and smell. Advertising has done such a complete job of making us aware of sweat—of making us fear and despise a substance our own bodies produce—that its wildly successful marketing of antiperspirants is really the iconic story. Of course, the ancients, among others, disliked the smell of a dirty human body; but turning that smell into a marker of class and creating a huge industry to treat a problem that other hygienic practices, like washing, would treat more healthily, inventing a paranoia that seizes at the soul of countless millions—that is the victory of advertising.

Imagine this: a man, Bill Brown, looking to all appearances utterly fastidious, stands before a mirror, knotting his tie, smiling as he confidently foretastes success in his day's every endeavor. His hair is cut and combed just so, his skin is clear and shining. Bill looks terrific. You're inclined to give him anything he wants: a job, your insurance account, your daughter's hand in marriage. And he seems to know that he cuts a fine figure: self-confidence rests lightly but surely on his broad shoulders. But suddenly a dark cloud passes over Bill's countenance. His sparkling eyes turn dull and his smile fades away. His lips tremble with—what is it? Fear? Disgust? Slowly his eyes move side to side. Slowly his arms rise—he looks as if he's imitating a very deliberate chicken—and his lips curl in agonized recognition. With a look of despair, Bill turns his nose to the side and down and, replaying a personal drama that is in its way as much an icon of the twentieth century as the Kennedy assassination



Advertisers want us to believe that only by using antiperspirant will we be truly attractive and acceptable to others. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

or the Beatles' triumphant appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, sniffs his own offending armpit.

Or "underarm," as the advertisers would put it. Advertisers seem confused by the word *armpit* and so offer up a term that helps take one's mind off rotten, foul things suggested by "pits." Their marketing of antiperspirants and deodorants has always been an inspired mixture of delicacy and dread, as if Merchant-Ivory had hired George Romero to remake *Howards End* but with the suggestion that the late Mrs. Wilcox might return as a brain-eating zombie. *Armpit* would make us squirm in our easy chairs and wonder what's on the other channel; but, watching a television commercial that uses the word *underarm*, we feel secure, certain that somebody is watching out for our sensitivities and hopeful that we can repay their politeness in some small way.

Besides keeping us comfortably in the world of the commercial or print ad, such finicky language also makes advertisers' use of another word that much more devastatingly organic. No, in an antiperspirant commercial you will not suffer from *stink* or *reekeness* or a *general swamplike situation in the hot 'n' hairy places*. But you will suffer from "wetness." Bill Brown, who smelled his armpits, or underarms, before the mirror, will certainly worry that, as the day goes on, he will begin to show signs of "wetness." So complete is advertising's control of our vocabulary that we cannot imagine such a word used positively (cf. "One thing I love about Acapulco is its wetness"; "What makes the Colonel's chicken great is its wetness"). Instead, we can only think of it, both word and squeamishly euphemized substance, with dread. Thus, as another day progresses and despite the human body's annoying tendency to create a series of potentially impolite situations, everything seems to be going as well as can be expected until Bill Brown stands and stretches and—what is that? What is that dark stain creeping outward from his underarms, that ever expanding mark of his human frailty and thus of his shame? Is it—oh no, is it *wetness*?

In the collective nightmares called commercials, usually at this point Bill is asked to step into the boss's office, not for anything bad, but just because she needs to see him. Maybe she's giving Bill a raise. Maybe she's giving him her daughter in marriage. But he has *wetness*. He doesn't know how or why—this is a question for philosophers and theologians and space age scientists—but he has *wetness*. And it's coming out of his *underarms*. So he shuffles into her office and stands there while she tells him that he has indeed been given a raise and that she's thought it over and, welcome to the family, her daughter's

hand is his. And the entire time, he's standing with arms clamped so hard to his sides that his elbows are making his lungs hurt.

(This posture, after the classic pit-sniff, is the second iconic gesture the antiperspirant industry has given us. The third is the frantic arm-flap. To do it, one holds one's arms loosely out to the sides, bent forward at the elbows and relaxed at the wrists, and flaps frantically, every joint floppy, perhaps with a look of sheer panic on one's face. He or she, unfortunately, has applied a roll-on antiperspirant that has not yet dried and thus will stain their clothes. What that person should have done, of course, is purchase and use a faster-drying roll-on or stick.)

Antiperspirants became a genuine icon when advertising started telling people what would happen to them if they didn't buy and use the product. A signal moment, then, took place in 1919 when Odo-Ro-No used the discrete, but terrifying, abbreviation "B.O." in its print ads. Suddenly body odor was not just something one should avoid but also something that one should not even speak of in polite society. An abbreviation would just have to do. People would whisper "He has B.O." in the same tones they'd whisper "He has V.D." and you'd hope they weren't whispering about you. Trading on just this combination of bourgeois niceness and desperate paranoia is, of course, one of advertising's specialties, and in few areas has it been so successful as with antiperspirants. In short, what advertising did was make the body's natural processes seem dirty, all the while avoiding some common sense measures (first, lighten up about how you smell, and, second, if you smell really bad, take a bath) that would, if taken to heart, obviate the need for antiperspirants and deodorants.

It is perfectly fine to sweat like a dockworker if you are actually working on a dock. Athletes are constantly sweating, slurping down gallons of "sports drink," and sweating away that stuff too, and no etiquette expert puts them in their place. As laborers, they are in their proper place—on the field, in the arena, in the ring. As it happens, for most people throughout human history the proper place was just about anywhere. People worked hard on farms and in mines and, naturally, they sweated. People lived without air conditioning and—why, of course—they perspired. For millennia there was another name for the working class: "just about everybody." And so sweat and stink were the natural order of things.

But if there are places where sweating is socially acceptable—in arenas, on construction sites, in the pre-air-conditioned past—there are other places—*nice* places—where one may not sweat: at a party, on a job interview, in a presidential debate with John F. Kennedy. To sweat out of bounds is to demonstrate that one is not middle class or following middle-class convention. An early stinker, Socrates, took it upon himself, as well as anybody who stood downwind, to go militantly unbathed and thus combat polite Athenian standards. Among its other uses, etiquette determines how the body may function—at least how it may *politely* function—and it says that what is natural under certain conditions is taboo in others. Smelling bad and sporting



sweaty stains prove that one has not risen above the vulgarity of one's human origins; they are damning class signifiers. People have to stay "dry," to use the advertisers' term of art, and smell nice if they are going to make it in the rigidly polite society of middle-class America. If they sweat and stink, they reveal themselves to be just the vulgarians Americans are always rumored to be, although, of course, anti-sweat fetishism is more symptomatic of America than just about any place in the world, a sign that, no matter our promotion of freedom as one of our ideals, we are all rigidly Puritan at heart. (Residual cultural Puritanism explains why the other major kind of sweat besides that of workers also offends American sensibilities. Nervousness will also make a person sweat buckets; and nervousness, as good Puritans know, means that you have something to hide.)

Antiperspirants and their first cousins, deodorants, are American icons because they meet the needs of a class-anxious culture. Moreover, because they are not actually necessary (seriously: if you do sweat excessively or smell terrible, you need a physician, not an antiperspirant) but are marketed as if they are, antiperspirants are icons of advertising genius. That is, they meet the needs of the culture but only after advertising creates the needs.

The most class-conscious writer who ever lived, George Orwell, wrote that even politically progressive observers harbor an abiding suspicion about the working class: "They smell bad." Of all the horrors we can conjure up, smelling bad is, it would seem, or *should* seem, minor among them. Everyone sweats; everyone smells; and the solution to the problem, if it proves eye-wateringly great, is as simple as soap and water. But sweating and stinking are genuinely dreadful to many because they give away the game: that, no matter how much money we make or how nice our manners are, we are in many ways really no better than those foul-smelling lower classes. This is America, where we all started out with nothing (that's what the books say) and made something of ourselves. Along the way, we earned the right to forget about our lower-class origins—even, it seems, to deny our status as organisms. That's middle-class America, where all classes are equal and we'll clog our pores with aluminum salts before we'll be mistaken for our lessers.

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# Art Fair

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## *Mary Carothers and Sharon Scott*

Climbing from garden club fundraisers to the elite heights of New York society, the art fair appears in multiple incarnations across the girth of the nation. Only recently validated by the authoritative establishments of art, the importance of the art fair has been felt by more humble American communities for decades. Vendors promoting each year's artistic achievements pop their tents in parks, streets, hotels, and convention halls to produce this event-driven exchange. The art fair presents an occasion full of options and competition for both buyer and seller. Possessing a temporary landscape, the art fair provides a place to see and to be seen—a stage for players and witnesses to converge.

There are as many art fairs as there are definitions of art. Each manifestation appeals to its buyers in relation to their aesthetic interests or social influences. It is a highly segregated phenomenon. One may encounter chainsaw art at the North Georgia Mountain Art Fair, but don't expect to find it at the Angola Prison Rodeo and Art Fair; the latter event, which shares its location with the recent Hollywood movie *Dead Man Walking*, features art from convicts on Death Row. The Body Art Fair in Costa Mesa, California, showcases live piercing and tattoo art. The Outsider Art Fair in New York City benefits the American Folk Art Museum. The ~scope contemporary art fair strikes seasonally around the world and at last it is possible to attend a virtual art fair without leaving home via [www.internetartfair.com](http://www.internetartfair.com).

Of the features that identify the art fair, the consistent time and location seem to be the most imperative. Just as Persephone returns annually from Hades, the activity of the art fair bustles into town with the season. From teenage girls buying ceramic birdfeeders for Mother's Day to important curators purchasing for their collection, attending the art fair has become a ritual of American life.

Art fairs are efficient mechanisms of one-stop shopping. Virtually all of them employ committees to select exhibitors. The chosen applicants are charged rental fees for a square footage of the fair. Temporary displays in rows creating open corridors allow visitors to view many exhibits at once.

While the community art fair is free to the public, the high art fair charges shoppers admission. At the neighborhood art fair one finds an emphasis on home and fashion products. Items are crafty, affordable, and fun. (Stained glass versions of the magnetic “Support Our Troops” car ribbons are a current rage.) A shopper might purchase anything from welded nut and bolt creatures to refined Anagama pottery. Most shoppers are purchasing gifts. At the high art fair, on the other hand, money spent is considered an investment. The work in these fairs may be more intellectually challenging to traditional notions of beauty. The work ranges from multimillion-dollar Picasso paintings to Victorian wallpaper samples painted with the blood of an emerging artist who is struggling for recognition.

The American art fair is just turning fifty, yet it feels much older. Claiming lineage from the Victorian World’s Fair and the regional state fair, this icon nestles itself securely in between the bosoms of Community and Progress. There are obvious links between the art fair and art exhibitions at the regional fairs. For one reason, state fairs have traditionally sacrificed the controversy of contemporary art exhibitions in favor of popular student art competitions. The Gaspirilla Fair in Florida, for instance, was born because depictions of nudes at the State Fair offended the livestock audience. The Gaspirilla Art Fair publicity materials say, “Controversy often attended the art exhibitions and some fair board members would like to have seen it dismantled altogether.” For the most part, the art fair has always been an independent entity.

The idea of the community art fair was established by entrepreneurs seeking to revitalize downtown business districts affected by the suburban flight of the 1950s. The Metris Art Fair in Minnesota is one of these; in their publicity materials, Fair organizers describe the founders as entrepreneurial pioneers. The upscale contemporary art fairs were likewise established by innovative capitalists in the name of economic renewal. Currently one of the largest contemporary art fairs, the Armory Show: The International Fair of New Art, was organized by Manhattan dealers to jump-start the fledgling New York art market in the early 1990s. The contemporary art fair gains prominence as the New York gallery world declines.

Connecting itself to history is imperative to the art fair’s future. The Old Town Art Fair, the Old Country Art Fair, and the Old Capital Art Fair are



Art fair attendees in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

but a few of the numerous fairs presenting themselves as living history. The only relation today's Armory show has with the influential Armory Show of 1913 is, however, New York City. Most art aficionados are aware of this but cannot deny the name solicits an automatically validating link. The art fair without tradition fails, even in the contemporary art world.

For publicity purposes and old time appeal, many contemporary art fairs claim to be the nation's oldest. Among these, the 57th Street Art Fair in Chicago's Hyde Park was established in 1948 by artist-gallerist Mary Louise Wormer as a means for artist networking. The Fair was open to all artists until 1963, when a group of critics, collectors, curators, and artists began selecting exhibitors. Today, the vast majority of the art fairs are similarly juried events in which the participants are selected by panels of art officials.

Despite obscure claims to be of benefit to struggling artists, virtually all of today's art fairs are business ventures whose purpose is raising capital for their organizers. While the fashionable artist unloads this year's inventory, the artist who is not commercially successful is losing money, confidence, and a place in next year's show. Rain or shine, the fair makes money on exhibitor entrance fees, sales commissions, and equipment rentals. Even Uncle Walt recognizes the money-making potential of organizing an art fair. On the Disney Family Fun Web pages there are simple instructions to gain capital by asking artists "to sell their work and donate the proceeds" ([www.disney.com](http://www.disney.com)). A few nonprofit art fairs, including Womer's 57th Street Fair, are committed to serving the community with fair revenue. Most art fairs, however, cannot be considered philanthropic efforts.

In 2005, the Armory packed over 500 of the world's most exclusive contemporary art dealers inside two New York City convention halls. Selected galleries paid from \$20,000 to \$500,000 for a weekend's booth rental. The cost of the private preview party was \$1,000 a head. Visitor admission was \$20. The Armory Fair is annually sandwiched between commercial boat and ideal home shows. Come October, the Affordable Art Fair moves into the same hall. Its exhibitors rent booths for thousands less, the private preview party is a mere \$100, and general admission is reduced to \$12. The Affordable Art Fair is separate but available to shoppers of diverse economic backgrounds.

The Armory Fair has a closer relation in its origin to contemporary art fairs in hotels. The Armory Fair began when the contemporary art dealers Pat Hearn, Colin McLand, Paul Morris, and Matthew Marks invited select galleries to showcase work in the rooms of Gramercy Park Hotel. The success of this original incarnation of the Armory Fair co-mingles with the jewelry world's "trunk shows" to spawn the present generation of contemporary events such as -scope and DIVA: Digital and Video Art Fair. These cutting-edge art fairs transform swanky hotel rooms into makeshift galleries. Distant and perverse relations to the neighborhood art fair, these exclusive events strew emerging artists across crisp double beds where traveling collectors negotiate a price.

Back home in middle America, the Cherokee Triangle Art Fair in Louisville, Kentucky, is an outdoor event. Although it is only advertised in more affluent areas, it takes place on neighborhood streets and is ostensibly open to the public. The sun shines through the trees and it is a beautiful day at the fair. It is mostly a Caucasian crowd, yet there is a feeling that the entire community is participating. This relaxed and festive occasion is the celebration of a society shopping! Clowns and popcorn and kids: besides art, this fair offers music, games, regional foods, and the obligatory police on horses. There is an uncommon sense of well-being. Everyone is cheerful and swollen with community pride.

Whether they are elite New York events or popular street festivals, art fairs are obviously dealing in more than art. The art fair annually provides a hunt for something new within the security of the familiar. At each year's art fair, one never knows who or what will be discovered. Romance and mystery fill the air and everyone is on the prowl. It's interesting to note that writer Peter Hill has produced a novel called *The Art Fair Murders*. Twelve murders occur in twelve cities around the world. The novel, like the art fair itself, links international artists, gallery dealers, art critics, and collectors. In reality and fiction, the art fair is an island of treasure that provides the landscape between the searching predator and the hunted victim.

Since Paleolithic times, art has sistered the hunt. In a metaphorical relationship to the Altamira Caves in Spain, today's art fairs enact the ritual of hunters. It has been suggested that the paintings found within the caves served the ritual function of ensuring fertility and a good hunt. At the art fair, the hunt is on, but the danger has been eliminated. The panel of jurors may be intimidating to some artists and the event may be overwhelming, but the underlying intention of the event is to promote a fertile hunting ground that promises not to be threatening. Today's art fairs are carefully choreographed labyrinths of community shopping adventures taking place within the consumer comfort zone. The rummaging that takes place at every art fair confirms that the hunt for a new possession is accompanied by an excited frenzy not unlike the primal hunger for food.

The victors of the art fair are those who discover and claim the new. Here, everyone dreams of having the best taste, being the best shopper. The discovery of the "in" product is exciting. Smart shopping is rewarded heroically and remembered mythically. The buyer distinctly carries his purchase like a badge of some brave act. Participating in the ritual makes the individual proud. Conversely, refusing to participate in the art fair exchange is plagued by a sensation of guilt. Buying nothing at the art fair is not only rude towards the artist, selfish toward one's family, and disrespectful to the community, it is ultimately sacrilegious.

Recently in the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Jerry Lyndrup, the co-chair of the Cherokee Triangle Art Fair, referred to visitors enacting "their rite of spring" (Hall B3). Similarly, *New York Times* arts reporter Carol Vogel reported "serious American collectors, dealers, auction house experts and

museum curators attending an annual pilgrimage to Maastricht [art fair]” (B7). From local newspapers to quarterly art journals, the art fair is so idealized that it is spoken of in religious terms. Like football Sundays or fireworks on the Fourth of July, the days at the art fair provide the community with an occasion to hang memories upon.

This year’s fair makes last year’s purchases old and it is time to shop again. Americans understand that a new possession brings a certain satisfaction. They also expect this satisfaction will mutate into disappointment. Sooner or later the novel item works its way out of the art fair and namelessly rolls over onto the shelves of superstores and yard sales. Eventually the new becomes articulated so many times that it becomes old, and the demand for the art fair is regenerated. Americans look forward to the annual return of the art fair because it promises to bring them up-to-date.

It is this locomotive spirit of consumer lust that the contemporary art dealers have recently learned to appreciate. Although several high art fairs have existed in America for decades, their raging popularity began with the appearance of Art Miami in 2002. The most exclusive galleries in the world are now paying less attention to their physical homes and concentrating upon their presentation at the annual fairs. A gallerist may participate in as many as eleven shows annually. According to *New Criterion* editor James Panero, “Contemporary galleries now earn upwards of 50 percent of their sales from fairs where it once was 10” (42). Art fair-specific staff has been added to gallery payrolls, and artists are constantly pushed for trendy, portable work.

The immense popularity of the art fair within the contemporary art world raises obvious questions about the future of the gallery and eventually about the future of art. The cold, white gallery space may have dug its own grave via pretentious secretaries and stuffy parties, yet it consistently offered space for quiet aesthetic contemplation. The art fair is a boisterous, interactive event whose aim is to make art purchasing easy. Museums, on the other hand, are out to win respect of their viewing public by curating a masterful collection of art. In a museum, the same painting may cover the same piece of wall for months or even decades. The museum provides the work with the time and space to be seen. At an art fair, works must compete to be noticed. As a result, much of the work is flashy and shocking. One notable example was *Fuck Leg*, a lifelike gorilla leg severed with a meat cleaver that appeared on the floor of the 2005 Armory Show. In an art fair, an artwork is sold, removed, and replaced with a new piece. The most highly coveted artworks at the fair may not even reach the viewing walls, but be secretly traded many times back stage. Museum politics and art fair politics pit capitalism against aestheticism.

Most museum curators dislike art fairs, but visit them regardless. Many deals shake down and they too want to be part of the action. Dealers, on the other hand, are attending a sleep-away camp where like-minded camaraderie prevails. During the fair every gallery in town puts on its best show of the season and there may be 100 private viewings on the same night. There will be untold parties, private dinners, photo ops, and late night debauching.

Sexiness, glamour, and randomness turn themselves into mini-marathons as the art fair ritual unfolds.

At the Los Angeles Art Fair, one painting by Pop artist Andy Warhol sold five times to five different galleries. The price went up each time it sold. In a culture that puts a premium on market value, the art fair proves itself to be a highly efficient exchange. These events become increasingly central to the financial and social mechanisms of the international art world and the local economies that harbor them.

The art fair places exhibitors back to back in aesthetic competition. Buyers can easily compare products and prices. At the fair, art patrons act more like mall shoppers rummaging through products, buying impulsively, and keeping up with the Joneses. Art at the fair must be dramatic and flashy enough to capture the overwhelmed eye. It must be “buzzy and fun,” according to *New York Observer* reporter Choire Sicha (1). Limited by booth size, necessary portability, and continuous demand for supply, the art fair presently dictates the direction of contemporary American arts. The more popular the mobile art fair becomes, the more art representatives are pushing their artists to make compact, marketable art at an ever-increasing rate. The art fair is an experiential shopping event that may eventually take precedence over the artist’s creative intention.

As the art fair gains prominence, it continues to raise questions about the buying and selling of art. How much are the demands of the fair determining the shape of contemporary art? Will the commercial world produce artists or will the artist create an intangible context? At this year’s fairs, dealers have proven their business savvy by including such non-objective forms such as Performance Art, Installation Art, and Cyber Art within their inventories. If a work itself cannot be purchased, the artist’s time can. The submission of art to the demands of the art fair means contemporary aesthetics are determined by supply and demand. When dealer and collector benefit from the convenience of shopping, the intentions of the creator are easily sacrificed. Inspiration, devotion, and expression are replaced by marketability.

Artist members of the American Association of Painters and Sculptors created and managed all aspects at the 1913 Armory Show. At the most recent Armory Show, very few artists were present. Many were discouraged from attending, as gallery representatives orchestrated the entire event. In one rare instance the artist was present but encased within a hollow wall. As a performance piece she revealed only her arm through a hole for buyers to see. A light bulb was clenched in her hand. At first glance, the arm appeared to be a cast object, at second glance, one began to realize that the arm was real. An American flag, colors inverted, was suspended just over the arm. One could assume this art act was a play on the Statue of Liberty and was questioning the idea of patriotism. Regardless of intention, this piece attested to the invisibility of artists at such a fair.

In contrast to the inaccessibility of the artists at the high art fair, creators at community art fairs are visibly managing their own displays. They are



creating work at their booths and are openly interacting with the public. Excluded from this opportunity are creative artists who often feel dismissed by selection committees in favor of commercially driven craftsmen. As a response, recent years have seen the emergence of non-juried alternative events, such as The St. James Art UNFAIR in Louisville, Kentucky.

The art fair can adjust its tempo to the momentum of American culture and reinvent itself to suit all interests and economic groups; there are even art fairs for those who despise art fairs. Art fairs stand as community timekeepers: year after year Americans return to their ceremonial marketplace; they hunt fashion and like-mindedness as they participate in the consumer celebration. The wealth, time, and taste necessary to enjoy the fair attest to the prosperity of the nation. The art fair is an icon of social progress and individual achievement. Inside and outdoors, from high art to death row, in exclusive society or on the Internet, the art fair is a unifying ritual that perpetuates the survival of a capitalist culture.

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# Fred Astaire

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## *Michael Dunne*

Fred Astaire (1899–1987) was born Frederick Austerlitz in Omaha, Nebraska, but still went on to become an internationally acknowledged embodiment of romantic male sophistication. Tony Bennett, one of Fred’s epigones, opines that Astaire ended up as “our national treasure” despite his Nebraskan origins. Whether dressed in top hat, white tie, and tails or in fashionable casual wear with a scarf serving as his belt, Fred Astaire always looked fabulous. Even while playing light romantic comedy roles in which he was usually called something like Jerry Travers, Fred Astaire epitomized whatever was cool at that time. According to Benny Green, “[Astaire] had an elegance that aligned itself with what I guess you’d call high society” (146). In the words of Howard Thompson, Astaire “gave to entertainment annals a champagne radiance that appealed to everybody on all levels, rich or poor” (9–10). No wonder Patrick Dennis’s lead character—also called Patrick Dennis—admits in the novel *Auntie Mame* (1955):

Our only god was Fred Astaire. He was everything we wanted to be: smooth, suave, debonair, dapper, intelligent, adult, witty, and wise. We saw his pictures over and over, played his records until they were gray and blurred, dressed as much like him as we dared. When any crises came into our young lives, we asked ourselves what Fred Astaire would do and we did likewise. (154)

As the history of American popular culture has attested, young Patrick was not alone in his hero worship in the 1950s, the 1930s—or much later on.

Even today, Americans can be expected to recognize the name Fred Astaire—at least in the judgment of E. D. Hirsch, Jr., in his 1987 *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (157). Admittedly, today’s Americans are likely to know about Fred Astaire through occasional revivals of his films on television or through the self-promotional MGM films *That’s Entertainment* (1974), *That’s Entertainment, Part II* (1976), and *That’s Dancing* (1985). However, Benny Green asserts that “Astaire’s uniqueness had long been apparent when the MGM retrospectives underlined



Fred Astaire, 1936. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

the fact. People understood that there would never be anybody with whom to compare him, to duplicate the range of his achievement, least of all to replace him” (144). According to John Mueller, Astaire “is one of the greatest dancers and choreographers . . . one of the master artists of the century” (3). That is why Fred Astaire is truly an American icon. Unsurprisingly, he became an icon through the media of mass entertainment.

In the early days, Fred was successfully paired with his slightly older sister, Adele, first in vaudeville and then on the Broadway and London stages in musical comedies including *Funny Face*, *Lady, Be Good!*, and *The Band Wagon*. After Adele retired from show business in 1932 to marry the Duke of Devonshire, Fred starred on his own as a combination singer-dancer-light comedian in Cole Porter’s *The Gay Divorcée*. Rather than continuing this comfortable pattern on Broadway or in London, however, Fred next went to Hollywood under contract to RKO. There, before he could begin filming *Flying Down to Rio* in which he was paired with Ginger Rogers, Fred was loaned to MGM to play himself as Joan

Crawford’s dancing partner in *Dancing Lady* (1933). The combination of these stars was unremarkable; if *Dancing Lady* is remembered at all today, it is mentioned merely as Fred Astaire’s first Hollywood appearance. *Flying Down to Rio* was another story altogether. Released in the same year as *Dancing Lady* and starring Dolores del Rio and Gene Raymond, *Rio* was the first of ten films in which Astaire appeared opposite Rogers—nine for RKO, concluding with *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (1939), and the last, *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), for MGM. As he and Ginger starred in a fabulously successful string of musical films including *The Gay Divorcée* (1934), *Roberta* (1935), *Top Hat* (1935), *Swing Time* (1936), and *Shall We Dance* (1937), it began to seem as if Fred had merely traded one female partner for another and would continue to be only one-half of a stellar show business team.

Then, in the period following the series of eagerly anticipated, annual RKO Fred-and-Ginger musicals, Fred began to dance with other partners at other studios. The first of these, Eleanor Powell (*Broadway Melody of 1940*), was perhaps the most talented female tap dancer of all time and a musical film star in her own right. However, when she danced with Fred, two masters were in full-out competition rather than in romantic union. Something along the

same lines might be said of the much admired tap dancer Ann Miller (*Easter Parade* [1948]), although I have never cared much for her explosive dancing. Harriet Hoctor (*Shall We Dance* [1937]) was something of an acrobatic freak who could tap on point and also reach her foot up from behind to touch the back of her head. Arlene Croce is only one of many critics to find fault with Hoctor, writing that “Miss Hoctor can be taken for nothing human” (122). Lucille Bremer (*Yolanda and the Thief* [1945], *The Ziegfeld Follies* [1946]) was beautiful, graceful, and—by general consensus—entirely lacking in personality. Rita Hayworth (*You’ll Never Get Rich* [1941], *You Were Never Lovelier* [1942]) was perhaps the most beautiful screen actress of all time, and a wonderful dancer too. Furthermore, these dancers were all of a suitable age to pass as Fred’s romantic leads. With the magnificent Judy Garland, a new female generation emerged on the Astaire horizon in *Easter Parade*, and so Fred began to assume Pygmalion or fairy-godfather roles in films. Vera-Ellen (*Three Little Words* [1950], *The Belle of New York* [1952]) danced with Fred as well as she had done with Gene Kelley in *On the Town* (1949), but she seemed so much younger than Astaire that on-screen chemistry was lacking. This was perhaps even more the case with Leslie Caron (*Daddy Long Legs* [1955]), and Audrey Hepburn (*Funny Face* [1957]), although each costar was appealing in her own way. Age hardly mattered with the preternaturally beautiful and talented Cyd Charisse (*The Band Wagon* [1953], *Silk Stockings* [1957]). It is surely significant that, although his partners changed radically, Astaire continued to be Astaire. In the MGM clips film *That’s Entertainment* (1974), Gene Kelly says about the number from *Royal Wedding* in which Astaire dances with a hatrack, “As usual, he made his partner look good.” The same might be said about his on-screen pairings with these female co-stars of various ages and talents.

To some degree all of this success occurred because, as Howard Thompson writes, Astaire “had become known as one of the greatest perfectionists in the theatrical field, spending endless but regulated hours on sound stages working tirelessly on the dance tricks and routines that emerged with such seeming ease on the screen” (136). This is certainly the testimony of other dancers, including Bob Fosse, who proclaimed at the American Film Institute Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony for Astaire, “What always impressed me about Fred was his tremendous desire for perfection. I got a peek at him, rehearsing at M-G-M, even after he had mastered a movement, and he seemed to me to keep going over and over and over it again—until it became mechanical” (qtd. in Adler 177). On the same festive occasion, Mikhail Baryshnikov said about Astaire, “His perfection is an absurdity; it’s hard to face” (qtd. in Adler 177). In specific terms, we might consider what Arlene Croce says about the number “Never Gonna Dance” from *Swing Time*: “[I]ts climax, a spine-chilling series of pirouettes by Rogers, took forty takes to accomplish, and in the middle of shooting, Rogers’ feet began to bleed” (113). This is consistent with what Astaire told Howard Thompson: “My routines may look easy, but they are nothing you throw away while shaving. . . . It’s

always murder to get that easy effect” (136). And, it is not only Fred’s partners who had to suffer in the cause of on-screen perfection. Alan Jay Lerner recalls Astaire’s endless rehearsing and self-criticism in an anecdote that appears in Benny Green’s book. All alone, after everyone else had left the MGM sound stage, Fred straggled out to greet a late-working Lerner with the self-doubting question of why anyone could even consider him a dancer. To Lerner, “[t]he tormented illogic of his question made any answer insipid” (148). After all, this was Fred Astaire, and he was still working on his dance numbers after all the other performers had quit for the day! In his autobiography *Steps in Time*, Astaire throws some light on all of this by writing that “[w]hat counts more than luck is determination and perseverance” (4). Whatever the cause, and whoever Fred’s partner, all of his films contain truly memorable musical numbers, and these have consolidated his status as icon.

Eventually, of course, the American film musical seemed to have reached its natural point of exhaustion. As John Mueller explains in his *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films*: “By the mid 1950s the era of the classic Hollywood musical as Astaire had experienced it—indeed, defined it—was coming to an end. Revenues were declining, costs were rising, the studio system was falling apart, competition with television was growing, popular music was moving into the age of rock and roll. Astaire and other products of the classic Hollywood musical, such as Freed and Kelly, were out of business as Hollywood created fewer and fewer musical films” (12–13). And so, Fred Astaire turned from Hollywood musicals to television, specifically to his Emmy-Award-winning song and dance spectaculars *An Evening with Fred Astaire* (1958), *Another Evening with Fred Astaire* (1959), and *Astaire Time* (1960)—all co-starring Barrie Chase. During this period, he also appeared in non-musical films, including *On the Beach* (1959) and *The Pleasure of His Company* (1961), as well as in the recurring role of a retired cat burglar on the television program *To Catch a Thief* (1968–1970), starring Robert Wagner. Fred also acted, sang, and danced in *Finian’s Rainbow* (1968) opposite Petula Clark in an early—and not very successful—directorial effort by Francis Ford Coppola. Through it all, he exemplified what Patrick Dennis’s character calls the “smooth, suave, debonair, dapper, intelligent, adult, witty, and wise” male icon.

As Arlene Croce writes about this musical comedy superstar, “His ‘peerlessness’ is a legend; it means, not that there were no other tap-dancers, but that there were no other Astaires” (6). Even so, Astaire’s excellence as a dancer was undisputed. John Mueller, for instance, begins his book by noting that George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Baryshnikov have all publicly testified in favor of Astaire’s premiere terpsichorean genius (3). To quote Croce again: “When Fred dances alone, he’s perfect. For as long as we have known him he has been simply Astaire, *the* dancing man self-defined. He is his own form of theater, and we ask nothing more” (6). As a singer, too, Astaire’s exemplary status is noteworthy. The liner notes for *Nothing Thrilled Us Half as Much: Fred Astaire Sings and Dances His Greatest Hits* explain: “The Astaire voice has never been a serious threat to

concert singers, but his singing has, if one defines singing as an artful blend of taste and intelligence and emotion. And for that reason, America's finest songwriters and lyricists have supplied him with some of their greatest songs." Howard Thompson agrees that Fred was "assuredly not the best singer" available (9), but he also points out that Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Harold Arlen, and George and Ira Gershwin chose Fred Astaire to introduce some of their most memorable songs on stage and on the screen. In Benny Green's terms, in his own inimitable versions of these songs Fred "is saying, in effect, 'I may not be able to write songs as good as these, but at least let me draw your attention to the brilliance of those who can'" (22). Perhaps this recorded sophistication was owing to the fact, as Peter Gammond writes in *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music*, that Fred "contrived to be the perfect popular songster . . . , giving more meaning and strength to the songs than many with more impressive vocal chords could ever achieve" (24). So, even though we sometimes have to wonder whether Astaire is going to be able to hit a particular note in "The Way You Look Tonight" or "Cheek to Cheek," we are enchanted by his command of the song. In summary, we might consider Will Friedwald's comment in the liner notes for the *Fred Astaire at M-G-M* CD collection: "No composer, performer, producer, or writer so personified everything that was great about musical comedy—both on stage and screen—and Tin Pan Alley as did Astaire. He was the embodiment of all that was wonderful about the intertwined arts of song and dance." Friedwald's last sentence just about says it all!

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# Lucille Ball

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## *Rhonda Wilcox*

Isn't it funny. I cannot for the life of me remember how the furniture was laid out in the living room of the house I grew up in, but I can remember where every stick of furniture was in the Ricardo house.

ABC News Anchor Diane Sawyer, eulogizing Lucille Ball  
(Kanfer 301)

In the 1990 film *Pretty Woman*, which made Julia Roberts a star, the audience is given certain signals to show that the prostitute protagonist is worthy to be a Cinderella. She not only shows an untutored love of opera; she also demonstrates a gleeful, unfettered appreciation for *I Love Lucy*. Lucille Ball's is one of the most recognized faces on the planet. And when someone mentions the name "Lucy," very few anymore think of Wordsworth or even Bram Stoker. The recognition is instantaneous; but it is not as simple as it might at first seem. Lucy as an icon means different things to different people.

Lucy was enabled to become iconic because of a combination of talent, intelligence, hard work, and fortuitous historical timing. Lucille Ball had been a model, movie starlet, and radio performer; she and her husband, musical performer Desi Arnaz, Jr., wanted to be able to work together, so they took a gamble on television in its early days, knowing that if they failed, they might not be welcome back in the film world. Sponsors disliked the idea of the redhead and the Cuban as a married couple, but Lucy insisted; and Lucy and Desi invested their own money to help get the show off the ground. They did not want to move back to New York from California, so they filmed their shows before a live audience. To make this work, they initiated the use of the three-camera shooting style which became the standard for sitcoms, and which still structures our visual expectations. These two choices—the investment and the filming—meant that the couple ended up having behind-the-scenes power in the television business (they came to own the prolific Desilu Studios), and that while much early television work disappeared, Lucy, in her syndicated reruns, instead became immortal.

*I Love Lucy* ran from 1951 to 1961, stopping at approximately the same time as the couple's marriage. (*The Lucy Show*, without Desi, and later under the name *Here's Lucy*, ran for more than a decade after that.) Despite the sponsor's doubts, it quickly rose to number one in the ratings and stayed there for years. In a time period of few networks, Lucy drew as her audience approximately one-fifth of the population of America. When Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated as President of the United States in 1953, 29 million watched; the night before, however, 44 million had tuned in to see Lucy Ricardo give birth to Little Ricky. But the show and the character were not just popular in their own time; those syndicated episodes have never stopped rerunning, and now people are buying VHS and DVD copies of the black-and-white redhead, too.

Lucy is the one so many of us love, but she emerged in a context. Redheaded zany Lucille McGillicuddy is married to handsome Cuban band leader and singer Ricky Ricardo; they live in a middle-class New York apartment rented from an older couple, stingy Fred and Lucy's sidekick Ethel Mertz. Ricky is the sensible husband (though Lucy's antics can drive him to comic loss of verbal control, vehemently expressed in his native Spanish), and Lucy is the wacky wife. In almost every episode, Lucy's facial expression would convey what the writers called the "light bulb" look of having an idea, conceiving an improbable scheme—sometimes, to get money; even more often, to get on Ricky's show. After twenty-some minutes of farcical deception and genuinely hilarious physical comedy (Lucy is seen as the inheritor of Charlie Chaplin), the world would right itself—as it always should in comedy. And in the 1950s, this meant that wife Lucy would be laughingly and lovingly put in her place. This world-order is something many find appealing even today. The shows are in some ways about a very traditional battle of the sexes, with Lucy and Ethel against Fred and Ricky (though the characters sometimes form different combinations). As Kathleen Brady writes, "it balanced temperaments in a way that harkened back to the 'humors' of the Elizabethan stage: patient Ethel, volatile Ricky, stolid Fred, and flighty, airy Lucy—couple against couple, boys against the girls" (194). And as Lucille Ball says, they agreed that "the humor could never be mean or unkind" (207).

Within this comfortably controlled world, Lucy herself was on the loose, out of control—the unruly woman, as Kathleen Rowe terms it. In all sorts of ways she shows us the carnival wildness, the rule-breaking that Mikhail Bakhtin highlights in comedy. Her hair has to be red, vivid red—a color associated with high emotions—and wildly unusual, as is the character. The red hair helps us remember that she is also a bit ethnic: a McGillicuddy; and she definitely crossed an ethnic borderline by marrying her Cuban beloved—a step that meant more in the fifties, but that still means something today. Her scheming and deception make her something of a trickster figure; as Brer Rabbit, in some ways, represented blacks, Lucy represented many a woman who might feel that she had the right to some scheming because power was held by someone else. Though the Brer Rabbit stories were recorded by





Lucille Ball, 1960. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

a white man, Joel Chandler Harris, they were told by blacks; as for Lucy, at least one of the series' three major writers was female—Madelyn Pugh.

When I was beginning to write this essay, I went looking for copies of *Lucy* episodes. A young black man who worked at the video store spoke up enthusiastically about his own enjoyment of the series. Asked about what he liked in the series, he replied, “Just the dumb stuff Lucy do.” When Lucy has the chance to be in an Italian movie, she doesn't just look around to soak up the local color; she immerses herself in it quite literally. She sneaks into a group of women planning to work at a traditional winery, manages to be assigned to stomping duty, unintentionally gets in an all-out, falling-down brawl with another worker, and ends up grape-faced, stained purple, and unable to take the part when the movie's director shows up to offer it to her. The vineyard

scene is quintessential Lucy. In an episode that cites sexy Italian stars such as Gina Lollobrigida, Lucy shows up at the vineyard in an off-the-shoulder blouse; but when she takes off her shoes to fit in with the other workers, her seductive posturing is disrupted by her hopping up and down on the hot paving stones. Her wild physical comedy is often predicated on the presentation of the body out of control. But the lack of control can have a childlike joy to it. When she is in the large vat, stomping the grapes, the woman she is paired with moves with a steady, sensible, businesslike rhythm. Lucy, once she gets past mugging her initial shock at the feeling of the grapes between her toes and up her legs, proceeds to happily fling herself into the experience, literally dancing rings around the other worker, arms enthusiastically akimbo. (Lucy's trademark way of crying, the “Waaah,” wailing, is comparably childlike in its lack of control—as is her out-of-tune singing.) After an intervening scene with Ricky and Ethel, we return to see Lucy exhausted. When the other worker tries to pull her back to work, Lucy, in shaking her off, accidentally knocks her down into the grapes; and thus their tussle begins. It is important, in terms of the audience's emotional investment, that Lucy never intends harm—though once the fracas starts, she fights as enthusiastically as she has danced. She may be selfish, but she is never cruel.

Among the out-of-control elements, food and drink often play a part, and she is often immersed in the physical—in the grapes of the vat, for instance. Or consider the classic “Job Switching” episode, with the candy factory scene. Lucy and Ethel are switching roles with the men, who agree to temporarily take on the job as housekeepers. Ricky and Fred end up sliding

about the kitchen floor under overflowing mounds of rice. Meanwhile, Lucy and Ethel stand by a conveyor belt. Having been told they'll be fired if they let a piece of candy get by unwrapped, they end up hiding the excess candy. Lucy swallows it, and stuffs it down her blouse, as she struggles, chocolate-mouthed, trying to keep up. (Years later, she stuffs eggs down her blouse in "Lucy Does the Tango"; of course the eggs will be crushed against her, sticky and dripping, in yet another Lucy dance.) The bit Lucy herself thought funniest involved drink, not food, and yet another unintentional rule-breaking: the Vitameatavegamin routine. Once again Lucy is trying to get into Ricky's show, if only in a commercial break for a health tonic. Though we in the audience know, she and the commercial director do not realize that the product (which she must repeatedly swallow as she rehearses) is 23 percent alcohol. So the very properly dressed representative of 1950s womanhood gets to end up flat drunk—with no moral guilt attached. Lucy starts out shuddering as she tries to deliver the line, "It's so tasty, too!" but she ends up making love to the bottle. And it is her seemingly out-of-control physical reaction—including her comically loving drunken approach to her husband as he performs in the show-within-a-show—that creates the humor.

These are the moments we remember—the moments that keep us coming back to Lucy. It is true that the status quo is always restored at the end; and many a critic has argued that Lucy's power (or woman's power) is thus denied. But there is a whole other level of meaning that many a viewer has enjoyed simultaneously. W.E.B. Du Bois talked about the "double consciousness" required of blacks who have had to think both in terms of white society and in terms of their own lives. There is a different kind of double consciousness about Lucy. The comedy gives a sense of power, and play, and delight in her being out of control; yet also conveys that behind the scenes, she *has* control. The audience knew that not only were the Ricardos married, but so also were Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. While other TV sitcom husbands had offstage, invisible work, Ricky (Desi) sang right in front of us. Lucy's real husband is *shown* being attractive and worth her desire; she has made a good choice, it seems. Because she had a cesarean section, Lucille Ball gave birth to her son on the same night that Lucy Ricardo gave birth to hers—a curious sort of control of the relationship between fiction and reality. It brought wild enthusiasm at the time, and even today, the line between character and actor is pleurably blurred for many; a play with the edges of reality—despite what some know of the marriage's eventual break-up. And Lucy, who said "Yes, sir" and "No, sir," to her husband on camera, in the real world ended up buying him out of their company.

Another significant element of the play with lack of control is that former model and movie starlet Lucille Ball was a very beautiful woman. Like Carole Lombard and Ginger Rogers (whose mother was a mentor for Lucy), Lucy was not restrained by her beauty from taking comic roles. She did not have to mug and take pratfalls to compensate for homely features. Every pie in the

face was a choice, and her audience knew it. Even the red hair was unreal, chosen—and the audience knew that, too, from repeated jokes in the series. Perhaps most important of all was the double consciousness of Lucy as entertainer. Ricky: “You cannot be in the show.” Lucy: “Give me one good reason.” Ricky: “You have no talent.” Lucy: “Give me another good reason.” Time after time this sort of interaction is reiterated. Time after time Lucy, like any good *id* character, goes after what she wants in spite of rational objections—with hilarious results. As Lucy herself said, she and Vivian Vance (Ethel) “both believe wholeheartedly in what we call ‘an enchanted sense of play’” (Ball 208). But as with a virtuoso musician, the playfulness was earned. As Kathleen Brady points out, Lucy might rehearse for three hours with different sizes and weights of paper bags to get the best sound when she popped one (197). And as Susan Horowitz writes, “Ball’s beauty, drive, willingness to learn, and comedic talent eventually led to fame and fortune, [while] Lucy Ricardo’s hapless efforts lead only to laughs” (36). Many a viewer was conscious of the fact that Lucy Ricardo, who performed so badly, was entertaining precisely because Lucille Ball was a consummate performer.

When we laugh, we are out of control; for a moment, we share that freedom with Lucy. And while critics may point out that each episode ends with restrictive (or, depending on one’s view, comforting) order restored, the fact that Lucy’s humor comes on television means that there is another element to be considered. If she were bound down at the close of a movie, the weight of the ending would be heavier. But on episodic television, we know that she will play again another day. Not only in VHS and on DVD but still out on the airwaves, Lucy continues. Lucille Ball apparently wanted to be in the show just as much as Lucy did—and as so many of us do; and we love to know she got to. There is a sort of bravery of pleasure in Lucy’s pursuit of her desire, in Lucy’s being herself. That is something worth contemplating, something worth looking at again and again; that is why she is still an icon.

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# Banjo

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## *Jack Ashworth*

The banjo, solidly associated with several types of musical Americana (bluegrass, old time, Dixieland, early jazz, vaudeville), is actually an African instrument. Originally made by cutting off the side of a gourd, affixing a skin over the opening, and attaching a wooden neck with strings made of animal or plant fibers, the instrument was described (though not named) as early as 1621, and manufactured commercially at least as early as the 1850s (Epstein 350, 357). Dena Epstein supplies a list of names used for the instrument from Africa, the West Indies, and North America between 1678 and 1851; most are recognizable cousins of today's *banjo* (e.g., *banjar*), although some are both more descriptive and more fun (e.g., *strum strum* and *merrywhang*, both Jamaican). The most typical American banjo is a five-string instrument with four strings of equal length and one shorter drone string, although two four-string versions of the instrument were popular, especially among Dixieland and jazz musicians, between about 1900 and 1930.

What world does the banjo conjure? Who owns the banjo, black America or white? Is it more likely to evoke romantic plantation scenes of the antebellum South, or rural poverty and ignorance? Is it a Southern thing, or an American thing?

Any such discussion must begin with Karen Linn's *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture*. Linn addresses many issues, presenting along the way a vast array of references from literature, drama, movies, and even cartoons, as well as multiple illustrations from both magazine advertising and the covers of sheet music; in doing so, she documents popular perceptions of the banjo in America from its early use in minstrel shows through the late twentieth century. Linn also demonstrates how the banjo has been a cultural player on several levels and in many contexts during the course of its American life. Considered from a cultural perspective, there have been a variety of banjos in the past 300 years, each with its own set of associations. Two of these, the nineteenth-century banjo of plantation blacks and the twentieth-century instrument of indigent mountain whites, have been at once consistent to themselves and different from each other, and meaning

rings within their largely self-contained worlds. These two banjos lead to the contemporary icon.

To start with the black banjo, we begin with an instrument that came to the Western hemisphere with enslaved Africans, was taken up by whites, and by the 1840s had become a staple of the peculiar phenomenon known as the minstrel show, in which Northern white men blackened their faces with burnt cork and presented music and banter trading on the exoticism of the southern black man, while enjoying his lively music and a laugh at his expense. But while early minstrel musicians no doubt modeled their playing on what they heard from black banjo players to at least some extent, they were entertainers rather than reenactors and it is unlikely that an audience at a minstrel show would necessarily have heard the “authentic” sound of the plantation banjo, especially after the first few years of the fad (Linn 48).

About the same time there arose a body of sentimental popular culture woven around African Americans on the Old Plantation, starting at the time of Stephen Foster’s songs (also 1840s) and extending through plays and movies as far as the 1930s, intended to evoke a romantic legend where the plantation black, carefree and happily ignorant, is frequently depicted with a banjo in his hand, or on his knee. This picture was heavily reinforced by the staging of the immensely popular *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* shows which toured the country between 1852 and 1931, and in which blacks were portrayed as playing the banjo even though Harriet Beecher Stowe never once mentions the instrument in her book of the same name (Linn 58).

While whites were of course also playing the banjo as whites, and not just in blackface during the nineteenth century, it was not until approximately 1900 that the banjo begins to be found in popular culture as being connected with white players, and thus associated with whites as well as blacks by Americans far removed from the place where the banjo could actually be heard in its element. An early instance is the popular novel by John Fox, Jr., *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1903), whose white protagonist Chad is discovered to be a fine banjo player—much to the surprise of those who hear him. Thus emerged a new stream of banjo consciousness, where the African instrument of the nineteenth century became the hillbilly instrument of the twentieth, an instrument that enjoyed a lengthy recording career starting in the mid-1920s with old time mountain string band musicians, and turned into the centerpiece of the standard bluegrass ensemble after Earl Scruggs transformed both the technique and the role of the banjo player some twenty years later. This white banjo took on one additional layer of meaning in the 1950s, when the folk revival movement, chiefly musicians from the North and East, began to identify the Southern white mountaineer as a true living remnant of pure Anglo-Saxon stock, Rousseau’s Noble [English] Savage—albeit one whose nobility was slightly impaired in the popular imagination by a trifle too much moonshine and feudin’. The banjo was as much a part of his cultural kit as was his tumbledown shack.

How is the banjo more than just a vehicle for musical accompaniment to a plantation frolic or a lonesome mountain song? For one nineteenth-century Massachusetts woman, it was important enough as a generator of cultural meaning that upon seeing some reference to Southern blacks neither knowing nor caring about the banjo, she felt compelled to write a letter to the editor: “I should be shocked to learn that the negroes of the South know nothing of the banjo. Somehow it has been a great comfort to me to associate them with that instrument” (Linn 40; the incident took place in 1883). We may owe at least some of this

far-resounding resonance of the banjo’s twang to Stephen Foster’s popular songs romanticizing plantation life. The banjo shows up in many of these, most famously “Oh, Susannah!” The song is written in nonsense quatrains and so may only use the banjo incidentally as a handy two-syllable accessory to the Alabama-bound traveler. He’s black (we know that from the dialect); he needs a two-syllable word: ah! *banjo!* (In terms of both scansion and sense it could as easily have been a “pumpkin” or a “shotgun” on his knee.)

Foster’s “Ring, Ring de Banjo!” is a song extolling the joys and stability of plantation life; in it, the freed slave comes hurrying back to the plantation. And as “massa” dies in verse four, it is none other than this freedman for whom the old man calls to softly waft his soul to the other side of the Swanee. The scene is completed by the banjo, yet it is an incongruous choice in that it is described as “dulcem”—right for the sickbed, but hardly an appropriate adjective for a properly-played banjo (“Early in de morning / Ob a lubly summer day, / My massa send me warning / He’d like to hear me play. / On de banjo tapping, / I come wid dulcem strain; / Massa fall a napping / He’ll nebber wake again.”). In verse one we had already learned that the singer could, in fact, play the piano if he wanted to, but he makes the conscious choice not to, unless it becomes necessary (“Den come again Susanna / By de gaslight ob de moon; / We’ll tum de old Piano / When de banjo’s out ob tune”) (Foster 165–66). The fabricated world of the Old South is here both completed and authenticated by the banjo, a fact which Foster’s consumers anticipated and, if they were like the woman from Massachusetts, required.

Jumping to the mid-twentieth century, we still find the banjo consciously used to evoke a fantasy world, although the exact locale of that world has not been as carefully worked out. The popular television show *Hee Haw* was a



Folk singer Pete Seeger playing banjo, 1948. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

simplistic, cartoon-like succession of joke tableaux for which the show's writers and producers were clearly trying to evoke a country image. But just where is this "country"? With the idea that decisions made for the first episode might reflect the direction the show's creative team wanted it to take, we shall look at it in some detail.

In this episode (June 15, 1969), settings of jokes vary from a cowboy campfire to a barnyard to a cornfield to an outhouse to two different front porches, one serving as the residence of Mark Twain and the other populated by a whole passel of people and a dog. Except for the campfire (the Old West?) and Mark Twain's front porch (the banks of the Mississippi?), visual imagery does not suggest any one place, and certainly not the South—there are no plantation houses, for instance. But even so the viewer is still somehow sure that *Hee Haw*'s main (though not exclusive) cultural neighborhood is somewhere below the Mason-Dixon Line. This impression is partly due to the southern accents, but much of it also has to do with the banjo. And the way in which its use is specifically manipulated suggests that it is not just intended to provide a bit of local color.

The show opens over a driving bluegrass banjo number, but the context is strange: the other instruments heard are electric bass and, mostly, drums—sounds not associated with traditional bluegrass. Hosts Roy Clark and Buck Owens come on stage playing banjo and guitar, respectively. Owen's red, white, and blue-striped guitar grabs our visual attention, but all we hear is the banjo. The tune, written by Sheb Wooley (whose accomplishments include the fifties hit "The Purple People Eater"), includes a laughing segment to connect with the show's title, and the sense is that this is not so much a banjo number as it is a television theme song featuring a banjo. It is soon pulled down under the announcer's voice and the applause of the audience, but it has done its work: its presence authenticates the rest of the show for the viewer, whose upcoming vicarious experiences of being on that front porch and in that cornfield will now be subtly enhanced. It's a hook—an ear-con, if you will—reassurance that, yes, this is a country show all right, where "country" equals "Nashville" equals "South" as much as it equals "rural." Presumably, it could also mean that if you don't like the banjo, don't bother watching the show.

The banjo's next major appearance is in the cornfield scene, where various actors pop up and tell (what else?) corny jokes; their background music is (what else?) a banjo—which is heard, but not seen. A few jokes later we hear (but don't see) the banjo's friend the fiddle, whose music is background to the jokes told in front of the outhouse. Although cornfields and outhouses dot the whole American landscape, the sound of the banjo and fiddle anchor us in the South. They are a pair of aural overalls. And in one of this episode's musical interludes, Grandpa Jones, a well-known old-time banjo player and comedian, frails away happily on a bouncy tune which could almost (well, almost) be mistaken as something traditional except for its recurring chorus: "The banjo am the instrument for me." This is a faux grammatical blunder, and

was certainly conceived to fill out and amplify the intended bumpkinicity of the banjo player.

It also deserves mention that one of the musical guests in this episode is Charlie Pride, an African American musician. Playing an electric guitar as he sings, he is backed by the “Nashville Sound” heard throughout the show—here consisting of a second electric guitar, pedal steel guitar and drums, with unseen piano and chorus added during the bridge. For once the banjo is not present, either visually or aurally: it is a richly ironic juxtaposition.

A highly popular film of approximately the same time also helped imprint the banjo into the contemporary American consciousness, though with a different range of associations. Bluegrass music is used in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), especially when the characters are speeding off in getaway cars. As Neil Rosenberg notes, “The music is connected to the exhilaration of lawlessness, escape, and travel, which from the outset have sexual connotations” (265). Bluegrass is also used under the scene where Bonnie finally succeeds in seducing Clyde. The fact that the first appearance of this sound, which came when Earl Scruggs joined Bill Monroe’s band in 1945, postdates the year in which the movie is set (1933) by twelve years was not seen as an impediment to its use as background music by either the movie’s producers or its audiences. Indeed, Flatt and Scruggs, whose “Foggy Mountain Breakdown” is the tune most associated with the movie, happily cashed in on its popularity by soon recording an album also called *Bonnie and Clyde*; they are pictured on the cover in gangster costumes. The resonance of this set of associations transcended even the facts of history, history which would have been actually lived through by many of those who saw the film and bought the album. Clyde Barrow could never possibly have heard a bluegrass band, and yet it is still somehow a convincing component of his world, not to mention the perfect back-up for a thrilling car chase. The banjo’s exotic otherness no longer evokes just the southern plantation or mountain cabin, but also the American bad man folk hero and the entire romantic *monde noire* of early 1930s freewheeling lawlessness.

The Boston-based radio show *Car Talk*, from the very capital of Yankee-edom, uses a banjo-centered bluegrass band for its theme music. Is it riding the “road music” imagery of *Bonnie and Clyde*? St. Paul-based *A Prairie Home Companion* also featured a banjo-laced bluegrass theme for several years, and bluegrass is still sometimes featured on the show. Are these merely transplanted examples of Southern rural white banjo music?

No: the banjo now rings with all its accumulated resonance. Through various adaptations, the African instrument has become an American idiom, and its sound evokes a visceral response that transcends any specific set of cultural associations: the banjo now conjures energy and good cheer, as much as anything. The Jamaicans had it right with their name, the *merrywhang*. As the *Peanuts* character Linus once said, “The way I see it, as soon as a baby is born he should be issued a banjo!” (Seeger 9). This would be neither an African plantation banjo nor a rural white banjo, but an American banjo.



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# Barbie

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## *Dawn Heinecken*

A friend recently told me a story about “the game” she used to play with her Barbie during bath time. The goal of the game was to get Barbie to stand on the drain of the tub until the water covered her breasts. But, try as she might, Barbie would never stand still long enough to achieve this goal; Barbie kept popping out of the drain, drifting up and sideways, and spinning out of control. “The problem with getting her to stand up in the bath,” my friend lamented, “is that Barbie floats.”

Much has been published about Barbie and her status as an American icon—the ways in which she functions as a representation of U.S. society (Motz, “I Want to Be a Barbie Doll”; Motz, “Seen Through Rose Tinted Glasses”). Like Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Elvis, or Coca-Cola, her image is immediately recognizable around the world and instantly communicates many of the values of U.S. culture. Barbie is the embodiment of a certain kind of physical perfection and models a fabulous, fun lifestyle built around the endless consumption of products and a dedication to fashion and leisure activities.

However, it would be a mistake to say that Barbie is merely a static symbol of the American dream or ideal femininity. Over the years, the ways in which real people have actually responded to and used Barbie, have complicated her meaning. These interpretations and valuations have been layered over/against/in addition to other meanings, such as those intended by Barbie’s corporate creators; this layering process continually reshapes how we think about the doll. In fact, there are so many layers, so many interpretations, that it has become difficult to pin one down. Barbie’s meaning, at this time, is unfixed, unstable; literally, she floats.

That her shapely 39–18–32 frame is fertile with multiple meanings is exemplified by the fact that most people have a Barbie story. Appearing in U.S. households for the last forty years, she is as ubiquitous as death and taxes. But while everybody has a Barbie story, they are not all the same.

Many people love Barbie. To date, over 1 billion Barbies have been sold (“Life in Plastic”). In 1997, the Barbie brand generated 40 percent of total revenue of \$4.5 billion for Mattel (Morgenson, qtd. in Weissman 81). She is

sold in 144 countries worldwide (Weissman 88). According to *The Economist*, U.S. girls own an average of ten dolls apiece. There are Barbie computer and video games and even a work-out-video. Fans dedicate adoring websites to her and collectors attend conferences and conventions all over the country. Some fans even dress up as their favorite doll (*Barbie Nation*). Collectors can find out all sorts of Barbie-related trivia from the magazine *Barbie Bazaar*. Cindy Jackson made headlines in her attempts to restructure herself into Barbie's image through plastic surgery. The global sales figures and the activities of devoted fans point to the fact that Barbie is loved and revered throughout the world.

At the same time, Barbie has been banned by the Iranian government because of her corrupting influence on that country's traditional values (Coppin). She has been featured in numerous artistic parodies, many of which are based on the destruction and mutilation of the dolls. Barbie has been posed in a food blender, wrapped in tortillas and baked in an oven, and even been used as a dildo (Rand; Steiner). Artistic parodies of Barbie have included "Exorcist Barbie," "Sweatshop Barbie," "PMS Barbie," and "Teenage Pregnant Barbie," as well as "Suicide Bomber Barbie," a piece that was featured in a 2002 London art exhibit ("Life in Plastic"; Strohmeyer). Pop group Aqua's 1997 song "Barbie Girl" assures us that "Life in plastic / It's fantastic," while a popular bumper sticker reads "I want to be just like Barbie: That *Bitch* has Everything!"

These parodies make use of the fact that Barbie has been positioned by Mattel as an ubiquitous figure, fitting into any social role her wardrobe will allow. In fact, Barbie's creator, Ruth Handler, deliberately made Barbie's face as blank and bland as possible, in order to encourage children to "fill in" the blank with their own imagination and thus to open up as wide a range of potential imaginary identities for the doll as possible (Rand 40). Barbie's numerous careers over the years, ranging from a model to an astronaut, combine with this openness to make her a sort of "Everywoman."

Despite her seemingly "open" meaning, however, artistic parodies of the doll work because, Barbie, in fact, does have an identity to which we respond. The fact that Barbie, unlike most dolls, can be referred to by name and as "she" rather than an "it," points to her iconic status—"she" has a personality that has been carefully constructed by her Mattel parents. And most people "know" what this personality "means" or represents. Understanding Barbie as a corporate construction, Erica Rand argues, is essential to comprehending the ways in which Barbie comes to signify certain values and assumptions.

For example, the original brunette, brown-eyed Barbie was changed to a blonde-hair and blue-eyed model because her creators felt the original doll looked "too foreign." Although Mattel wanted to encourage children's fantasy, they apparently had little desire for children to fantasize about non-white identities (Rand 40). Thus, Erica Rand sees the language and imagery of "infinite possibility" used by Mattel "to camouflage what is actually being promoted: a very limited set of products, ideas, and actions" (28). Barbie models a normative vision of white, heterosexual affluence.

Yet it is perhaps her very normativity, and consumer awareness of it, that has forced the doll to change. As Rand notes, the difference between getting a consumer to buy a toy like an Etch-A-Sketch and a Barbie is that other toys, unlike Barbie, have never had to face criticism that the toy might compromise your little girl's self-esteem. Thus, Mattel has had to work to adopt (and adapt) various strategies over time to continue to win and re-win consumers at various points in the doll's history (29).

One such Mattel strategy has been systematically to attach Barbie to "culturally specific items and representations" which

work to assimilate the items into her own image (Weissman 85). Thus, although Barbie seemed relatively unaware of the feminist movement of the 1970s, in the 1980s there was a "Day-to-Night" Barbie who dressed in a career outfit (albeit in pink), held occupations like "Business Executive" and "TV News Reporter," and owned a Barbie Home and Office playset (Dickey 27–29). Feminist criticisms of Barbie's unrealistic body proportions were addressed by Mattel in the late 1990s with the creation of a more "realistically" proportioned Barbie. The slogan "We Girls Can Do Anything" co-opted the language of feminism and suggested that Barbie was an empowered and empowering toy even though she remained a slave to fashion and consumption.

Similarly, in 1990 Mattel announced a new multicultural marketing strategy by launching ad campaigns for black and Hispanic versions of the doll. Mattel is clearly attempting to be (or appearing to be) more culturally sensitive and to appeal to a global market by featuring dolls of differing ethnicity, as well as, with dolls like Sign Language Barbie or Share A Smile Becky, representing the disabled community. However, this sensitivity is perhaps motivated more by concerns with penetrating a global audience than with concerns of social inclusion. Many have observed that the only difference between the traditional "white" all-American Barbie and the "ethnic" Barbie is the skin tone (Ducille; Hegde; Weissman). Ann Ducille writes that these dolls give us the "face of cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference." Thus, she sees this move as a collapse into "easy pluralism that simply adds what it constructs as the Other without upsetting the fundamental precepts and paradigms of Western culture" (52–53). Radha Hegde likewise concludes that Barbie "survives as an icon of whiteness and femininity wherever she travels" (132).



Actress Millicent Roberts as "Barbie" poses with Mattel CEO Jill Barad and consumer advocate Francia Smith during a ceremony announcing the creation of a new stamp portraying the Barbie doll, 1999. AP/Wide World Photos.

These authors argue for the relative stability of Barbie's meaning: although she appropriates other discourses, she transforms their meanings into her own image and ultimately continues to signify hegemonic norms. However, it must be noted that even Barbie's "official" text—products marketed by Mattel—contain elements that can be understood in different ways. Rand notes the popularity of the Earring Magic Ken doll in the gay community and ties it to the "screaming gay subtext" of the promotional material for the doll. Skeptical that this imagery could be used unintentionally, she argues that it must be a sign of some intentional subversion on the part of workers within Mattel, if not by Mattel the corporation (88–89).

In the same way, although Barbie has been criticized by many feminists for representing unrealistic standards of passive femininity, she has simultaneously been seen as promoting a message of empowerment for girls. For example, Anita Brill has said that for girls of her generation, "Barbie was our liberator" (qtd. in Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 175). In contrast to the majority of toys aimed at girls that encourage girls to play games based upon the household tasks of adult women, Mattel never shows Barbie doing domestic labor. As Brill recalls, "Barbie's initial pre-feminist appearance signaled for us the universe of other possibilities. Gone from our agenda were the eternal rounds of playing mommy and daddy and baby doll, complete with baby carriages and strollers tailor-made for child-sized moms. With Barbie acting for us we could be exciting and interesting women in the world" (qtd. in Reid-Walsh and Mitchell 182). In the context in which she appeared, and for that audience of girls, Barbie signified freedom.

Furthermore, once a product has left its manufacturers, it leads its own life and can be appropriated by consumers for their own purposes (Jenkins). Consumers may choose to use and respond to Barbie variously. Often they do so in ways that are clearly not intended by her designers. These range from making clothes for the dolls to cross-dressing them to disfiguring them, actions that Rand calls a "queering" of Mattel's intentions. What does Barbie mean in the context of such actions?

Insofar as she represents an ideal, Barbie marks boundaries and sets limits. For example, she sets the standards of a slender, yet buxom, feminine beauty by which many women measure themselves. It is through our positioning against/in relation to these standards that we come to know ourselves as individuals—to acknowledge the ways we do or do not live up to the ideal. The various uses to which Barbie is put may thus be seen as "acts of allegiance to or rebellion against those to whom the doll refers or those who ascribe to its opposing values" (Rand 101). Barbie provides an embodied site where we can express our relationship to the dominant culture through the doll and engage with, or comment upon, or resist normative notions.

This opportunity perhaps supplies one reason why Barbie is frequently disfigured by the children who play with her. Tara Kuther and Erin McDonald note that Barbie play teaches girls about adult social roles and aids in the internalization of stereotypical feminine "scripts." They see the disfigurement

of the doll as representing “girls’ views about their developing feminine self. . . . The devaluation of Barbie dolls may symbolize girls’ loss of voice and self, or their ‘silencing’” (50). The disfigurement acts as a form of protest against norms of female behavior.

It’s also important to note that destructive acts against the doll are assertions of a personal identity, a living subjective presence, that has the power to *be* critical of norms. What we do to or with Barbie is a form of expressing the self: we can define ourselves through play. For example, Reid-Walsh and Mitchell note the ways in which adult women’s memories of, and attitudes toward Barbie, may be shaped by their own attitudes toward themselves. In their study, women tended to remember the ways they played with the doll as children as emblematic of the women they are today. In other words, women who saw themselves as conventional saw their present behavior reflected in the ways they had played with Barbie. At the same time, women who considered themselves unconventional saw their attitudes foreshadowed in the unconventional ways they had played with Barbie (186).

Insofar as Barbie is a representation of ourselves as Americans, it’s useful to think of the ways she also functions to reflect those aspects of American culture we tend to repress. Every sign signifies its absent other. Barbie signals white, affluent heterosexuality, but in doing so, she also constantly reminds us of what she is *not*—she is not poor, not fat, not ethnic, not queer. Indeed, it is perhaps the ways in which Barbie signifies, through absence, those who are repressed in our culture that contributes to her popularity. A new layer of the Barbie mythology has arisen from within folk culture that clearly works to complicate her image.

As noted earlier, Barbie parodies abound on the Web and in ads for the Body Shop, as well as in art exhibits, bumper stickers, song lyrics, and even book titles. In most cases Mattel has not produced these images, and the company has launched numerous lawsuits to silence non-sanctioned uses of the Barbie image. Although not part of the official Barbie line of products, these renderings of Barbie are a form of folk culture that have become part of the larger culture by virtue of their mass circulation, and are by now an inseparable part of the meaning of the doll.

These appropriations of the Barbie image articulate consumers’ ability to read and criticize the meanings of mass-produced culture. For example, “Sweatshop Barbie” by artist Sue Wandell most obviously highlights the uncomfortable reality of sweatshops that exploit the labor of thousands of women and children in nightmarish conditions, and Barbie’s status as a beautiful, affluent consumer. Barbie might wear sweatshop-produced clothes—but would never work in a sweatshop herself. Texts like “Sweatshop Barbie” implicate the role of the consumer in the process of exploitation. The art piece functions by relying on our common understanding of what Barbie “means” (i.e., affluence, consumption, fashion), but also by highlighting the different ways that meaning can be evaluated. It speaks to the presence of a different subjectivity viewing the values of U.S. culture, the critical eye of the

other turned against mainstream society's prevailing values and deeply held beliefs.

Barbie's iconic status—the very fixity of her image as an American ideal—gives us a shorthand way to communicate about certain values, attitudes, and assumptions in our culture. Ironically, however, such communications contribute to the ultimate destabilization of the Barbie image. Barbie floats because her meaning at this point is unstable: she is always both/and the other; it's virtually impossible for the modern consumer to think of Barbie without thinking of her detractors, or to think of the dream of American success she represents, and all the ways that dream has not been realized or has been found unworthy or flawed. Barbie the idealized American beauty is also always Barbie the oppressor. Yet despite our awareness of this, Barbie floats above the fray. She continues to flourish—floating about the globe, spreading the dream of a fabulous Malibu lifestyle where waists are small, breasts are high, and everyone's having a good time.

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# Bear

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## *Richard Sanzenbacher*

There have been few animals in our history that have sparked such imaginative fervor as the bear. Its indelible presence is everywhere: from the teddy bear and the cartoon characters of Yogi, Winnie the Pooh, Smokey the Bear, and others to the many animated films that feature the bear as the leading heroic figure, and the animal documentaries that overtly remind us of the dangers of this unpredictable creature, not to mention its use in advertisements and the cartoons of Gary Larson. And when considering holidays, what would Valentine's Day be without the bear, especially when we see the assorted array of stuffed animals, all of them attesting to a soft and romantic persona, a metaphorical construct that seems to assure us that everything will be all right? Plus, from a psychological perspective, the bear has been there to comfort and protect: we only need to visit a nursing home or a day care center to see how the stuffed bear works its magic, how it is clutched and caressed, given an important role in the lives of so many. Because of the many roles attributed to the bear, this majestic creature has become a powerful icon entrenched within the human consciousness.

Unequivocally, in Native American culture, the bear, its voice and presence, resonates in the tribal attitudes, customs, and rituals of the people. For them, the relationship between bear and human takes on a sacred and intimate quality, a kinship that embodies multiple dimensions. In David B. Rockwell's fine study *Giving Voice to Bear: North American Indian Myths, Rituals, and Images*, he observes that "Bears were often central to the most basic rites of many tribes: the initiation of youths into adulthood, the sacred practices of humanism, the healing of the sick and injured, the rites surrounding the hunt" (2). As he explores these rites in depth, he demonstrates the bear's presence in North American Indian myths and the proliferation of the bear's image in other areas of the Native American culture.

Beyond the totemic role of the bear in Native American tradition, on which much literature exists, the animal figures variously in popular culture. This entry focuses on ways the features of the bear, its physicality, and the contradictory messages associated with that physicality, images of cuddliness/

comfort versus ferocity/danger, play a definite function in the social and economic import of particular advertisements, and in the male gay community wherein a segment has built a tenuous identity around that physicality.

First, what is it about the bear in contradistinction to all other animals that would account for this fervor, this willingness to see some kind of connection to the other? Gary Brown, author of *The Great Bear Almanac*, provides a clue when he contends that of all the animals, the bear embodies several anatomical and behavioral features similar to the human. To begin with,

bears stand bipedal and even occasionally walk in this manner; . . . lean back against objects to rest, and may even fold a leg across their other leg; . . . leave human-like footprints; . . . nurse and discipline their young, even spank; display moods and obvious affection during courting (petting); and are inquisitive, curious, and inflexible. (174)

Sharing similar traits, humans can imagine assimilation into the space of the bear, thus enabling them to traverse the boundary that exists between the human and the nonhuman.

It is not surprising, then, that people have constructed multiple perspectives from which to view this mysterious animal so that it has become a powerful, diverse icon. That is to say, the bear roams across many metaphorical boundaries: from images of power, renewal, healing, wildness, and primal fear to those of mystery, wisdom, playfulness, freedom, and spirituality. Whether it takes the image of a ferocious monster in the wilderness or of the endearing coziness in the teddy bear, the bear remains a fluid icon, shaped in the context in which it is imagined. More pointedly, whatever cultural lens we look through or whatever human constructs we build around this animal, the bear becomes a reality of our own making, a reality, of course, that does not necessarily reflect what the bear actually is. Yet, it is this anthropocentric imposition that accounts for the icon generated; therefore, it is important to keep this in mind when reflecting on the diverse nature of the bear as depicted in various images, if only to remind us that the bear out there in the wilderness and our idea of that same bear are two different things. The icon thus becomes our way of making sense of something that is essentially unknowable.



A poster advertising Smokey the Bear, 1970. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Arguably, the teddy bear phenomenon, begun by news reporters covering President Theodore Roosevelt's sportsmanship, reigns as one of the most salient illustrations of humankind's attempt to demystify the unknowable. Possibly as a way to control or strip the bear of its wild nature or as a way to coexist with an animal that instills unmitigated fear within the psyche, the teddy bear rose to its pervasive favor, becoming an icon that not only creates a comfort zone but one that embodies the Native American perception of the bear as Creator. Behavioral studies of the bear point to the fact that while in hibernation, the mother bear gives birth from one to three cubs. From this close relationship, in its perception by Native Americans, "the bear became a metaphor for the universal mother, the giver of all life." Furthermore, in "the Bear Mother creation story, the kinship of bear and human is established" (Ramsey 58–59). From one perspective, the teddy bear phenomenon may be seen as a response to the Bear Mother creation story in that this narrative foregrounds the maternal and caring nature of the bear (in addition to the fragile and vulnerable cubs), and de-emphasizes its ferocious and wild side.

The teddy bear is usually perceived from only one perspective: that of the fuzzy, cuddly bear cub that radiates a sense of coziness and comfort, an icon that manifests a space of safety, reassurance, and tranquility away from the world's problems. However, in several stores, the teddy bear cub is many times accompanied by the mother figure, a coupling that revitalizes and re-enacts the bear as Creator narrative. Accordingly, this intimate bond between the mother bear and its young replicates the human linkage between the human mother and her offspring, therefore establishing a familial connection. Seeing the teddy bear from this perspective opens up the multiple layers of this icon. On one level, the benign cuddly cuteness of the teddy bear symbolizes the ever-innocent state of the child and all the images associated with that time of life, while on another plateau it points towards universal issues of birth and nurturance. The ironic twist here is that something so fragile and vulnerable should take on such enduring cosmic significance.

But while the dominant image of the bear for the last few decades has revolved around the teddy bear mystique, the world of advertisement has employed the image of the bear from diverse perspectives, going beyond and sometimes countering the cuddly persona. Some advertisements highlight the superior physical strength and prowess of the bear, while others emphasize the wild habitat in which they live and their humanlike postures. In some advertisements, the



A little girl playing doctor with a teddy bear. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

bear becomes a viable symbol for the natural world and purity. Possibly one of the most fascinating advertisements depicts a bear drinking a bottle of Valvert, pure mineral water, his paws surrounding the bottle, reminiscent of a human clutching a glass. The caption to the ad reads: “Somewhere in Belgium, there is a hidden and timeless spot pampered by Nature. On this virgin spot rises the Valvert water. The water taking its time. The water that after twenty years of percolating surfaces again tender and pure” (“Animals in Advertising/Bears”). The physical and material presence of the bear becomes absorbed within the metaphor that the bear becomes. The paws enwrapped around the glass become our hands while the space that the bear occupies (standing in front of a blurry green backdrop) transports us to a pristine setting devoid of humans, pure and untainted. The overt emphasis on the natural becomes paramount here. Just as a bear would drink from a clear mountain spring, we, too, can do the same thing. The life force that water represents becomes intertwined with the life force of the bear. Put another way, if Valvert can sustain the survival of a creature in the wild, then its effect on the human can be transforming. The bear has become an icon of the wilderness, the pristine and the pure; the viewer wants to participate in that raw energy and refreshment. And how can this happen? Through the water, of course, which can be bought.

The connection of the bear to the wilderness and purity takes a different turn with an advertisement for Tryba, art-deco windows. The ad tells us that the polar bear is “king in the immense blue and whiteness of the arctic. He symbolizes for Tryba uncompromised power and serenity. In this world of pure air and water where everything stands for beauty and perfection, he is life itself” (“Animals in Advertising/Bear”). Again, the bear represents the natural world and that life force, but this time the bear seems to take on a larger role than in the previous advertisement: it has been elevated to the stature of king, an image that delivers awesome power, yet a power tempered by a sense of serenity. The silence of the image seems to suggest an almost God-like presence, that ethereal voice lurking somewhere out there. This undetermined space is then further reiterated in the immense blue and whiteness of the arctic: immensity and whiteness implying spaces without boundaries. In some ways, the overly crafted image of the bear tends to wipe out the product of the advertisement, art-deco style windows. But from another perspective, we take on the kingship of the bear as we choose and control our gaze through these art glass windows, establishing our reign over the pristine land we want to imagine before us.

Although these advertisements respectfully glorify the immense power of the bear, other advertisements infuse this power with an element of danger, thus reaffirming the bear as an icon of the savage wilderness. Whereas in the water and window ads the natural world is depicted in almost mythical terms—an Eden-like setting in which the raw, violent energies of nature have been tempered or virtually erased—these advertisements circle back and zero in on the clear-cut ferociousness of this animal. One of the most telling ads depicts a close-up shot of a bear’s face; however, the eyes, nose, and forehead

of the bear are occluded by the open mouth and the killing teeth of this animal. This bear's face occupies at least three-fourths of the space of the ad, projecting unstoppable violence, precluding any sense of a maternal nature. In short, visions of an idyllic and tranquil wilderness implied in other ads are here unimaginable, indicating that within the icon of the bear as representative of the wilderness there are divisions, and turns of thought that tend to quarrel with each other. This ad's actual product, a network analyzer, appears in a small, side photo, with the caption, playing on the metaphor of a huge, horrible problem as "a bear": "Tame your datacomm problems easily—network analyzers." Beside the analyzer device in the photo sits a toy teddy bear, the artificial replacement for the huge, wild problem that threatens to engulf the would-be consumer.

Possibly the most intriguing use of the bear as an icon occurs within the gay male subculture. Although the beginnings of gay men's self-identifying themselves as bears is debatable, it is reported that by 1980 certain gay men in San Francisco, Toronto, Miami, New York, and elsewhere were placing a small teddy bear in their shirts or hip pockets. Supposedly, the teddy bear represented a man who was into cuddling and was a shared sign to other "bear" men. Eventually, a bear subculture emerged, its origin in San Francisco, along three lines: the underground press, private sex parties, and the newly formed medium of electronic communications. With this new venture into communication came *BEAR* magazine, a publication that became the home place and voice for this new movement. Almost overnight, the magazine became a huge sensation. More than a decade later, there were some 140 bear and bear-friendly clubs worldwide ("What Is a Bear"). These bear groups thus enabled some men to construct an authentic masculinity, a crucial outlet for those men who were contesting society's wrongheaded tendency to make being gay and being masculine mutually exclusive.

Les Wright, in *The Bear Book: Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*, offers further insight into this bear phenomenon as it relates to the gay male culture: "It may describe physical size, refer to male secondary sex characteristics, to alleged behaviors or personality traits of bears, or to metaphysical, supernatural, or other symbolic attributes of bears" (Wright, "A Concise History" 21). The most interesting aspect of this movement is why it occurred in the first place. For one thing, the bear community resisted and challenged the gay gender stereotype, that of an effeminate gay man, young in years, sporting a chiseled, slender body reminiscent of the typical *GQ* model. Identifying with the bear culture, the gay male was able to accept his own body type and be accepted by others in the same community. Essentially, according to a study of *BEAR* magazine by Joe Policarpo, the "general profile of a 'bear' includes at least some facial hair and some body hair . . . , a 'musky animality,' a blend of traditionally masculine aggressiveness and (feminine) desire to cuddle, muscles by Nautilus or physical labor, and a tendency to be older than the models found in most other gay male porn magazines" (qtd. in Wright, "A Concise History" 31). Yet, an overemphasis

on the physicality of the typical gay male bear would disallow a significant aspect of the bear movement: the original impulse of the bears “to create a new way to express and find intimacy, emotional and sexual. Hence the emphasis on nurturing qualities, hence the idea of embraceable ‘teddy bears,’ hence the effort to create safe spaces” (Wright, “Introduction” 9).

The Bear movement of the 1980s also initiated a vital link with the coming of AIDS. Those infected with the disease could find a community that would not marginalize them or isolate them; instead, the movement enabled them to reconnect with life and with the social and sexual domains of gay life again. In all aspects, “The rise of a bear community is inseparable from the AIDS epidemic.” It brought “the first broadly accepted sexualization of abundant body weight,” something that was frowned upon and deeply contested in the traditional gay community (Wright, “Introduction” 15). But more important, the bear movement ushered in a certain mindset that encouraged authenticity, the importance of being oneself as opposed to being what one wasn’t. Today, bear clubs are still active, but for “many bears, being a member of this group is not about much more than having fun and being social” (Zeffer). The nourishing aspect may still be there, but the surface, superficial qualities of good looks take precedence; appearance becomes paramount. As with any icon, the subject to which it refers is diminished in that the icon heightens only certain aspects of the bear to the exclusion of others; subsequently, the bear itself ends up being only an echo of itself, buried within the many layers of the icon.

In short, humankind’s transactions with and reflections on the bear tend to imply a yearning we have for the Other, a deep need to transcend boundaries and be reunited with the natural world, to recapture that kinship between human and nonhuman that is missing from our lives. Just the fact that we construct these symbol-laden scenarios around the bear reaffirms more our endeavor to understand the mystery of bear, to situate ourselves within its proximity. Certainly, anytime we transform the nonhuman into something else, we remove ourselves that much more from the actual subject. But by creating tidy summations of the bear as reflected in the diverse icons surrounding this animal, we also open up further inquiries into the ambiguities and mysteries surrounding this wilderness wonder, thus assuring that this entity known as bear remains tentative, unfinished, yet to be envisioned in new ways, even though these ways of knowing will always fall short of completing what bear is.

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# Beats

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*Jason R. Kirby*

Charlie Parker's musical expositions in cabarets made an indelible impact on white hipsters who came to be called the "Beats." They were intrigued by his ability to create melodies that reinforced their alienation from the prevailing cultural paradigm in America. Parker's music reigned in their psyches. As biographer Ross Russell notes, Bird's playing brought them in touch with a culture they could sympathize with, but could never quite wholly experience: "His playing, [and] his toughness and resilience, were expressive of the Afro-American ethos that has become the archetype of the loneliness and alienation of modern man" (367).

This entry focuses on the psychological effects Parker's musical improvisation created in the minds of white aficionados, concentrating on Jack Kerouac's impressions of Parker, because Kerouac is the most notable character of the white counterculture during the 1940s and 1950s. Parker's music created a sensation of euphoria that directly reinforced hipster contempt for rationality. Parker's improvisations allowed the "instinctive" passions to thrive in the mindsets of white hipsters. Parker was a "primitive" knight to hipsters not only for his musicianship and "blackness," but also because he represented the inexplicable "otherness" they extolled. There were discrepancies, however, between the characterizations hipsters attributed to Parker's music and life, and the realities of his musicianship and life. In short, white hipsters in their attempt to escape "whiteness" could never quite understand "blackness" in its entirety.

Charlie Parker's life and music were unconventional. Remarkably, many view him as the greatest saxophone player who ever lived, yet most of his extraordinary talent developed and evolved through self instruction (Gridley 143). After dropping out of high school, Parker commonly spent eleven to fifteen hours a day practicing his musical craft (Woideck 6). As his abilities flourished, he became instrumental in the birth of bebop, which challenged swing music, the dominant genre in jazz at the time. Contrary to swing, bebop (or bop) was distinctive for its individual instrumentation. Bebop bands typically consisted of three or four members, significantly fewer than those of



swing bands; and the music gained a reputation for its faster tempo. This style provided artists, such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, much room to maneuver musically, whereas swing bands typically performed in a more structured arrangement. Even though swing bands were more “rational” in this regard, bebop music required more complexity and skill to play (Gridley 165; Lott 600).

From 1947 to 1950, Parker became the most celebrated figure of the bebop era. Parker’s saxophone solos became legendary to those who witnessed his stage performances. Like fellow beboppers, he often performed into the early morning hours. While on stage, frequently juiced on heroin or some other intoxicant, Parker stood stationary as the notes poured out of his saxophone. Art Taylor, a former band member, describes Parker’s distinctive stage demeanor: “He just stood there almost still as a statue, and when he finished, there was a pool of water at his feet” (Crouch 253–54). Other jazz musicians commonly tried to mimic Parker’s virtuosity. Much to Parker’s chagrin, some even began using heroin because they believed it could enhance their musicianship, because they surmised this drug had heightened Parker’s creativity on stage (Davis 175).

Parker lived at the edge. Aside from his heroin addiction, Parker used marijuana and Benzedrine, was a womanizer, frequently went on eating binges,



Jazz greats Charlie Parker, left, and Russell “Big Chief” Moore perform on the opening day of the International Jazz Festival in Paris, 1949. AP/Wide World Photos.

drank heavily, and smoked cigarettes. Whenever he tried to kick his heroin addiction the withdrawal symptoms became so excruciating that he generally drank himself into a stupor to alleviate the pain, which thereby reinforced his addiction to alcohol (Russell 263). Not surprisingly, on each attempt he made to quit, he only overcame his heroin habit for a short period before reverting back to the drug. The consequences of his addictions were many. For one example, aside from the debilitating health effects, he habitually showed up tardy for gigs, and on some occasions, he even missed scheduled events altogether (Bennett 73).

The de facto racism Parker experienced exacerbated both his excesses as well as his feelings of insecurity as an artist. Lerone Bennett, Jr., captures the dual alienation Parker felt: “He never believed in himself, and according to his friends, he embraced ‘the needle’ and the bottle to blot out the harsh

reality of everyday life” (71). Following a 1950 tour in the South, even though his band fared well financially, Parker “vowed never again to set foot below the Mason-Dixon line” (Russell 291). Moreover, enacting an assault on the white establishment, Parker often slept with white women (Russell 257; Davis 171). Parker’s music also represented rebellion against systematic racial injustice. As Lorenzo Thomas states while discussing the work of the famous black poet and beatnik Bob Kaufman, “Jazz music spoke a truth about existence that words were hard put to express” (Thomas 294). The use of jazz slang also challenged white oppression; as Neil Leonard explains, “Words like . . . ‘sweet,’ ‘pretty,’ ‘square,’ and ‘straight’ were pejorative” (152).

In 1955, Parker’s indulgences finally caught up with him and contributed to his death at the young age of thirty-four.

The Beats enthusiastically embraced Parker for what they perceived as his “primitive” genius, despite the fact they misunderstood his life and the intricacies of his music (Nisenson 119). From their perspective, Parker’s music represented inexplicable art. When the Beats witnessed Parker sounding off his musical motifs on stage, they yearned for the instinctive passions he represented in their minds. Parker’s music symbolized for them the alienation they felt toward the world around them. Their psychological affinity with Parker, albeit often irrational, is crucial to understanding the various ideologies white hipsters favored.

To this white subculture, mainstream America offered little for the soul. While conventional white Americans embraced prosperity and conformity, white hipsters dreaded the trap of organizing their lives around the forces of the market. “Squares” (in the favored label for the white middle-class among hipsters) organized their lives efficiently, attended church regularly, refrained from indulging the senses, typically were politically conservative, engaged in materialistic acquisition, were either indifferent to or took part in racist activity, and generally considered themselves patriotic. Hipsters, contrarily, lived for the moment, scoffed at organized religion, embraced the senses, were politically liberal or apolitical, favored the instinctive over the rational, found racism repugnant, and took a fatalistic view of the world. Norman Mailer, a steadfast proponent of hipster culture, reveals this chasm in sharp terms in his landmark essay “The White Negro”:

One is Hip or one is Square . . . one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life, or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society, doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed. (339)

Hipsters found sanctuary in black culture. Jack Kerouac, for instance, through the lens of his narrator, Sal, in *On the Road*, clarifies the sentiments he felt toward his race: “[I wish] I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy,

kicks, darkness, music, not enough night” (180). To him, black culture exemplified an authenticity white culture lacked.

For hipsters, bebop concerts loosened inhibitions and offered a sanctuary from the Cold War reality nuclear weapons posed. To them, civilization seemed as though on a direct path to complete annihilation following the development of atomic weaponry, with Revelation and Christ’s Second Coming playing no part in what appeared to be an impending apocalypse. As Norman Mailer contended in the “The White Negro,” the profound devastation of World War II largely bolstered hipsters’ sense of fatalism: “The Second World War presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded anyone who looked into it” (338). In such thinking, the next war involving America could only magnify in its destructive power, because the mere push of a button would propel the world into a nuclear holocaust. Mailer breaks down the impulses of hipsters in bearing Cold-War threats like an albatross wrapped around their necks:

It is on this bleak scene that a phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist—the hipster, the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war . . . or with a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled . . . , why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death . . . [and] to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. (339)

Charlie Parker’s improvisations represented the medicine their souls required in a universe ostensibly doomed. Although they could not fully grasp the pain exuded through Parker’s saxophone, hipsters knew it represented something arcane, and that the music transported their minds some place other than reality.

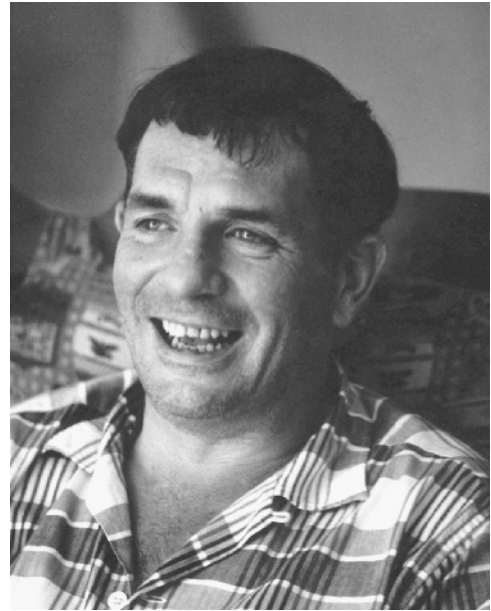
Jack Kerouac knew little about jazz or Parker’s life, but he personified the various psychological sensations and effects Parker’s music brought to the hipster generations of the late 1940s and 1950s. Kerouac became the rare white author who wanted to assimilate into the black community, for as John Ridener points out, “Until this point, most movements by and large had been to assimilate people of color into white society, creating the melting-pot ideology” (60). Parker’s apparent spontaneity on stage forever changed Kerouac’s writing style and approach to life. As late as 1968, Kerouac made his praise for Parker conspicuous, as he reportedly told one friend, “I got every record Charlie Parker ever made” (Amburn 48). Although Parker’s riffs on stage required hours of arduous practice, Kerouac emulated his seemingly freewheeling musicianship in his writing, as he pursued spontaneous prose and seldom made revisions after his first book, *The Town and the City*. He felt writing was more genuine if it lacked “bookishness and what he referred to as ‘tedious intellectualism’” (Foster 93).

Parker's music posed an alternative set forth in a standard critical work of the time, in the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. The Apollonian urge (named for the deity of civilization) emphasizes the rational faculties of human disposition, while the Dionysian (for the god of wine) celebrates the passions, the senses, the libido, and the irrational. Nietzsche claimed that in order to maintain emotional equilibrium, one had to have a balance between these two conflicting tendencies in the psyche; at either extreme, catastrophe befell. So Parker's indulgences and his eventual self-destruction modeled a Dionysian tragedy. The Beat Generation embraced their Dionysian desires. They frequently used drugs to expand their consciousness, indulged in sexual escapades, and often celebrated with alcohol. Norman Mailer romanticizes the reasons why the hipster performs such rituals in his essay "Hipster and Beatnik":

[H]e takes on the dissipation of drugs in order to dig more life for himself, he is wrestling with the destiny of his nervous system, he is Faustian. . . . He wants to get out of reality more than he wants to change it. . . . (374)

The Beat Generation sought Parker's music for religious enlightenment. He represented another element in their quest for hedonistic ecstasy, and as Lee Bartlett explains, "Ecstasy is . . . the central factor in the Dionysian vision" (120). Parker's music was godlike to Kerouac. In *Mexico City Blues*, Kerouac eulogized Parker after his untimely death, and tailored the text in his prototypical desultory fashion so it would epitomize a Parker solo on stage.

Other hipsters, like Kerouac, deified Parker and, according to Francis Davis, "swore that Parker once walked on water" (174). The Beats thought Parker's music represented the inexplicable "holy." His music embodied a religious experience, something greater than the here and now. His tunes symbolized everything hipsters lived for and worshiped. His riffs represented the indefinable "IT." "IT" in beatnik vernacular meant spiritual enlightenment and the supernatural unknown. "IT" described the nonmaterial and metaphysical aspects in mental associations that somehow transcended and surpassed the earthly void that frequented the minds of hipsters. Regina Weinreich explains "IT," stating what Kerouac means by his use of the



Jack Kerouac, 1967. AP/Wide World Photos.

expression in *On the Road*: “‘It’ is a form of instant gratification, a thrill, an epiphany, more significant to Sal [Kerouac] than the pursuit of more conventional values such as permanence and the ultimate security—the delusion of the hearth” (151).

As Mailer states in the “The White Negro,” “IT” represented the God of the senses and the antithesis of Apollo: “. . . ‘It’; God; not the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm” (351).

Kerouac and other hipsters visited jazz clubs habitually for the spiritual medicine these venues provided. Parker became the ultimate messiah for exuding “IT.” His riffs are orgasmic to Sal in *On the Road*, as he describes the emotional euphoria his protagonist Dean Moriarty experiences at a Parker-like gig, clearly expressing his belief in the superiority of “blackness”:

Out we jumped in the warm, mad night, hearing a wild tenorman [*sic*] bawling his horn across the way, going “EE-YAH! EE-YAH! EE-YAH!” and hands clapping to the beat and folks yelling, “Go go, go!” Dean was already racing across the street with his thumb in the air, yelling, “Blow, man, blow!” A bunch of colored men in Saturday-night suits were whooping it up in front. . . . [The] tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling riff that went from “EE-yah!” to a crazier “EE-de-lee-yah!” and blasted along to the rolling crash of butt-scarred drums hammered by a big brutal Negro with a bullneck who didn’t give a damn about anything but punishing his busted tubs, crash, rattle-ti-boom, crash. Uproars of music and the tenorman *had it* and everybody knew he had it. . . . Groups of colored guys stumbled in from the street, falling over one another to get there. “Stay with it, man!” roared a man with a foghorn voice. . . . Dean was in a trance. The tenorman’s eyes were fixed straight on him; he had a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more and much more than there was, and they began dueling for this; everything came out of the horn. . . . and everybody pushed around and yelled, “Yes! Yes! He blowed that one!” Dean wiped himself with his handkerchief. (196–98)

In their hedonistic quests for euphoria, the Beats transformed Parker’s improvisations into mental constructions that represented their values. They used Parker’s music to reinforce the alienation they felt toward a society that appeared cold and repressive. Even though this relationship speaks volumes about their subculture, it does not do justice to Parker as an artist. White hipsters seemingly viewed Parker’s death as an example that reinforced their predilection to fatalism. From their perspective, Parker represented a paragon of someone who lived to extremes in order not to “die” of conformity. In truth, Parker had a severe drug addiction to heroin which he had attempted to break on a number of occasions in order to continue his life. Because heroin is the most addictive drug, especially as a result of its excruciating withdrawal symptoms, he remained trapped in the cycle of addiction. Additionally, the club scene did not provide a milieu conducive to sobriety.

Parker's music did induce a levitating effect on the psyche, but his improvisations were framed on years of meticulous practice rather than spontaneous whims on stage. Eric Lott, setting bebop in its original context of African-American society, discounts the white hipster version:

White-Negro revisionists Kerouac and Mailer to the contrary, bebop was no screaming surge of existential abandon, its makers far from lost. And while bebop said there was a riot going on, it was hardly protest music. . . . Bebop was about making disciplined imagination alive and answerable to the social change of its time. (597)

The music of Parker and others grew out of African-American resistance to and protest of racial injustice in World War II, and migrations in which ethnic awareness as well as musical styles coalesced, in Harlem. The resultant ferment of creativity in bebop responded in "a politics of style beyond protest, focusing the struggles of its moment in a live and irreverent art" (Lott 599, 603). Moreover, as Amiri Baraka (formerly the black beatnik LeRoi Jones) explains, black musicians of the period, unlike their white counterparts, were already outside the mainstream: "The young Negro musician of the forties began to realize that merely by being a Negro in America, one *was* a nonconformist" (Jones 188). In addition, Parker's own life and music were very complex, and even biographers find it arduous, and in some cases impossible, to define Parker (Nisenson 118).

Charlie Parker's artistic ingenuity made him a hero to white hipsters. His music reinforced their estrangement from mainstream American values. He gave them Dionysus through his saxophone, and metaphorically attacked Apollonian values in the process. Parker's musical genius allowed for a vast range of emotional responses among white listeners; and for the white community, his solos became in figurative terms a litmus test for whether one was hip or whether one was square.

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# Betty Crocker

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*Pauline Adema*

Betty Crocker, one of the most widely recognized names in the food industry, was never a real person: she was the creative brain child of the Washburn-Crosby Company. It is difficult to overestimate the impact this domestic icon has had on corporate advertising strategies, American domestic cookery, and perhaps most importantly, on eating. Her near-century long influence is attributable to her dynamic and malleable persona—or, rather, the creative manipulation of her by her corporate guardians. Betty Crocker-branded books and products continue to address changing notions of what it means to be a homemaker as well as changing attitudes toward cooking and eating.

By the end of the nineteenth century, food companies faced increasing competition and a burgeoning national market. To distinguish their products many corporations created fictitious personas that consumers could associate with their foodstuffs. One of the oldest and most familiar commercial icons is Aunt Jemima, whose image appeared as early as 1893. Second to Aunt Jemima and nearly thirty years her junior is Betty Crocker. Since her creation in 1921 Betty Crocker has won the admiration of generations of American homemakers.

In response to a magazine advertising contest promotion, the Washburn-Crosby Company, which became General Mills in 1928, received not only contest entries but also letters from homemakers across the country asking for baking advice. For a short time the company's team of nearly fifty home economists answered the thousands of letters and a male executive signed each letter. Realizing that a woman would be a more appropriate authority to dispense baking advice, Washburn-Crosby created home economist and cooking expert Betty Crocker. The name "Betty" was chosen for its all-American friendly sound; the surname "Crocker" honored a retired director of the company. Betty Crocker quickly established a reputation for accessible, reliable recipes and sound domestic advice.

Among the team of home economists working at Washburn-Crosby was Marjorie Child Husted. By the time Husted became the head of the Home Service Department in 1926, Betty Crocker was already a household name.



Under Husted's guidance, Betty Crocker's role expanded from signing letters and offering recipe pamphlets to hosting radio and, subsequently, television shows on which she presented recipes and provided cooking advice to eager audiences of homemakers.

Betty Crocker endowed a male-dominated corporation with a feminine identity. In promoting its products, she instructed housewives across the country how to use a rapidly expanding array of packaged foods and modern kitchen appliances. Through her advice she affirmed the value of woman's role as caretaker and provider for her family's health and emotional well-being. Inspired by Betty Crocker's success, several other companies created fictitious spokeswomen. Among the most notable were Ann Pillsbury for Pillsbury Flour, Kay Kellogg for Kellogg's cereal, Martha Logan for Swift Meats, and Anne Marshal for Campbell Soup, all part of a burgeoning field of real and fictitious female experts who personalized otherwise impersonal corporate consumer culture.

### **“AMERICA'S FIRST LADY OF FOOD” ON THE RADIO**

“The Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air,” inaugurated in 1924, introduced a disembodied Betty Crocker to a rapidly-growing radio audience. Like other radio homemakers of the 1920s, the voices that portrayed Betty Crocker radiated confidence, enthusiasm, and concern. Radio programs provided isolated, especially rural, women with a friendly female voice that offered them companionship and advice. But it was not only radio listeners who benefited from Betty Crocker's wisdom. Newspaper and magazine advertisements increased her audience. The more people read or heard her, the more letters she received asking for advice and requesting recipe booklets. “The Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air,” which began on the Washburn-Crosby owned radio station WCCO, was so successful that it had expanded to thirteen regional stations by 1925. Thirteen different women across the country trained to be the voices of Betty Crocker. Playing the role of Betty Crocker, they broadcast food and cooking tips for the nation's first-ever radio cooking program. The program joined the roster of NBC, then a nascent national radio network, in 1927. In 1936, thanks to developments in radio technology, listeners heard a single voice as Betty Crocker.

Introduced as “America's First Lady of Food,” Betty Crocker's radio career grew throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s. She offered help and support to her listeners while promoting food products and domestic ideology. Housewives wrote letters to Betty Crocker asking cooking questions. She answered their questions on the air and always recommended General Mills products. Her written and spoken advice blurred the line between recipes and corporate endorsement. Through Betty Crocker, General Mills had a direct link to domestic consumers and developed a loyal customer base. Once again other food companies followed in Betty Crocker's successful footsteps.

General Foods, for example, created the “General Foods Cooking School of the Air” early in the 1930s, employing their version of Betty Crocker, Frances Lee Barton.

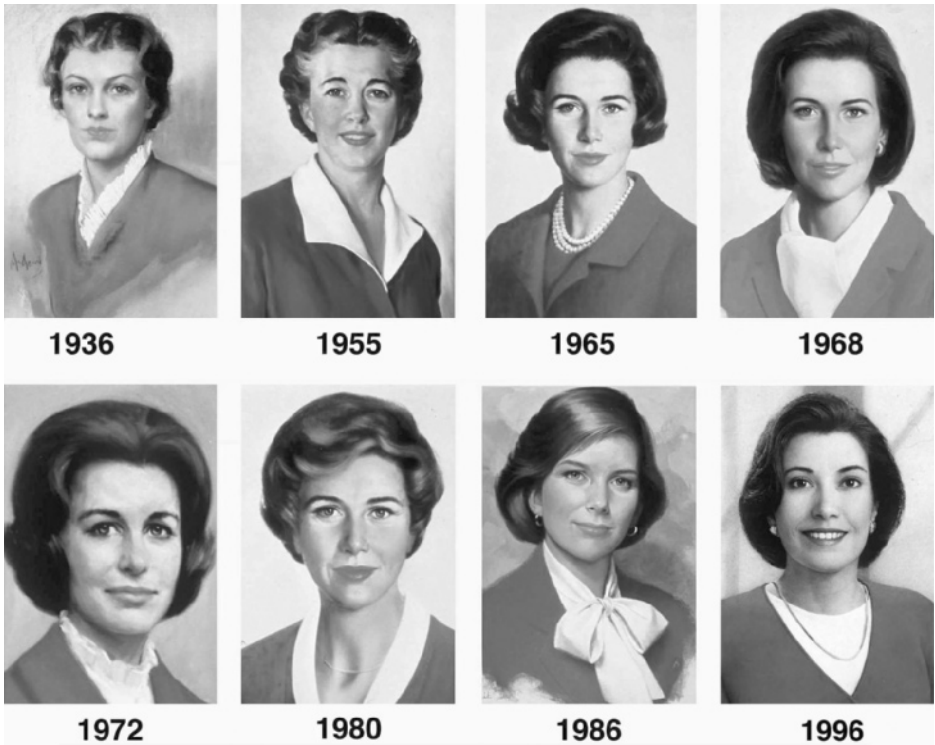
During World War II Betty Crocker did her patriotic duty by advising readers and listeners how to make the most of the foods available while dealing with food shortages. Her wartime radio program, “Our Nation’s Rations,” was produced by General Mills under commission from the War Food Administration. Her widely distributed wartime recipe pamphlet, “Your Share,” further reinforced her reputation as a cookery expert. Betty Crocker also was featured in wartime film strips and booklets about low-cost menus. By 1945, 91 percent of American housewives knew Betty Crocker’s name. More than 50 percent of respondents correctly associated her with General Mills. That same year, Betty Crocker was named the second-most-admired woman in America, second only to Eleanor Roosevelt.

After the war Betty Crocker, a well known “live trademark” as such corporate icons were called, maintained her role as radio homemaker. Husted continued to create and script her shows, as well as other promotions and contests. She developed two new radio programs after the war, “The Betty Crocker Magazine of the Air” and a five-minute show called “Time for Betty Crocker.” Thanks to Husted, the Betty Crocker persona was that of a strong woman who took very seriously her role as advisor, asserting the value of women’s work in the home and her role as caretaker of the family. Each woman put forth a professional image, affirming Betty Crocker’s role as the nation’s leading (though fictitious) home economist.

By the late 1940s, home audiences spent less time listening to the radio than watching television, bringing a new medium through which companies could promote their products. Following successful early cooking TV shows like James Beard’s *I Love to Eat*, *The Betty Crocker Show* premiered on CBS in 1950. Following the custom of the day to incorporate commercial products into company-produced programs, Betty Crocker’s show was a scripted advertisement for General Mills baking products. The show failed, however, because of its incongruous images of Betty Crocker as well as its “stodgy writing and leaden patriotism” (Shapiro). After one more unsuccessful attempt at a television program, General Mills relegated Betty Crocker to an advisor and recipe-giver primarily through radio, letters, and printed media, with a presence in short TV commercials.

## PICTURING THE IDEAL

The first visual image of Betty Crocker was created in 1936. Since then, her likeness has been updated seven times (1955, 1965, 1968, 1972, 1980, 1986, and 1996) to keep up with changing societal moods and evolving conceptions of the “ideal” woman. The changing faces of Betty Crocker are a barometer of shifting concepts of domesticity and women’s role as homemaker in the



The different versions of Betty Crocker throughout the twentieth century. AP/Wide World Photos.

twentieth-century United States. When she first appeared in picture form, Betty Crocker was a stern grey-haired matriarch. To balance the nurturing softness associated with a maternal image, she appeared in a crisp red jacket and unruffled blouse. She exuded confidence. She looked like an authoritative woman who would deliver opinions with a gentle but firm touch.

Betty Crocker's portraits always present her in red and white, the colors of the easily recognized Betty Crocker logo of a red teaspoon bearing her signature, and she always has dark hair and eyes. The most recent portrait, prepared in honor of her seventy-fifth birthday, is an amalgamation of seventy-five images submitted by consumers who were asked to create their "ideal Betty." She is shown in her trademark red jacket over a white shirt. She sports neatly styled but not fussy short, dark hair and subtle jewelry. A distinguishing feature of the contemporary Betty Crocker is her broad smile. The 1955 portrait is the only other one in which Betty Crocker's smile is expansive enough to expose her teeth, which are perfectly straight and white—much like Betty Crocker was conceived to be. The most recent portrait presents Betty Crocker with dark yet nonspecific features. Her modern incarnation suggests that she is not so purely Anglo-American as she used to be, reflecting the reality that neither her target consumer population, nor the American domestic ideal, is as predominantly white as in the past.

### “BIG RED” AND BETTY CROCKER’S COOKBOOK LEGACY

Between 1930 and 1950, General Mills published several Betty Crocker recipe pamphlets that were widely distributed to homemakers. A 1933 pamphlet “Betty Crocker’s 101 Delicious Bisquick Creations as Made and Served by Well-Known Gracious Hostesses” promoted the relatively new General Mills product Bisquick, introduced two years before as the first pre-mixed baking mix. Consumers had to learn to make biscuits and other baked goods from a mix, helped by directions. The popularity of Betty Crocker’s recipe pamphlets anticipated the resounding success of her cookbooks.

By the time Marjorie Husted retired from General Mills in 1950, Betty Crocker’s role was changing from that of a leading expert on domestic food to a corporate figurehead who gave less baking advice and more cooking demonstrations. This gradual transformation paralleled changes in the food industry which, in turn, facilitated and reflected changes in the American family as well as cooking patterns. Bisquick was part of a trend within the food industry to create shortcut food that required less cooking skill. It represented the future of the American food industry: convenience foods. Food and appliance technologies were transforming the ways Americans cooked, entertained, and ate. As the availability of packaged foods increased, so too did housewives’ desire to learn to use them.

In addition to guidance on making cakes from scratch, Betty Crocker offered advice on using her cake mixes. Referring to the predictability of her cake mixes, in 1953 Betty Crocker introduced what became her famous tagline: “I guarantee a perfect cake, every time you bake—cake after cake after cake.” That statement typifies the way the food industry promoted its products in much of popular culture; that is, food from a package is easy to prepare and will produce consistent results, time after time. The domestic ideal of the 1950s still placed a woman in the kitchen, but it had her taking full advantage of the conveniences afforded her by modern appliances and packaged foods. Recipes in the 1950s moved away from cookery that required skill toward providing directions for combining and heating packaged, canned, and frozen foods.

Embodying this shift in cooking patterns and an idealized white middle-class domesticity of mid-century America is *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book* (BCPCB), first published in 1950. It sold more copies than any other nonfiction book that year. By 1951, 1 million copies were in print. All nine editions up to 1998 were published in usable three-ring binder and spiral bound formats. It remains among the most popular cook books ever printed. BCPCB, affectionately called “Big Red” because of the first edition’s red cover, quickly joined the ranks of other kitchen bibles such as Fanny Farmer’s *Boston School Cook Book* (1896) and Irma Rombauer’s *Joy of Cooking* (1931). Unlike those books, however, Big Red was the product of a committee. The General Mills home economists who contributed to it not only wrote and tested the recipes, they also cooked at home and knew the realities

of being a busy homemaker. Their personal experiences woven into the book's extra-recipe text became part of its appeal for many other women. As with other popular mid-century cookbooks, *Big Red* offered readers ideological messages on how to administer housewives' roles as household managers, primary caregivers, and wives.

*Big Red* was geared toward young women who missed learning how to cook at home, for several possible reasons. Some young brides came from homes where domestic workers had done most of the cooking. As newlyweds on their own they were left to learn basic kitchen skills. Some young women missed learning how to cook because they, and possibly their mothers, worked during the war. Still others lacked cooking skills because they attended residential colleges that took them away from the kitchen classroom at home. For various reasons, many women in America's postwar emerging middle-class had to learn to cook.

*Big Red* was just the tool kitchen neophytes needed. Accompanying its straight-forward recipes and practical tips were 633 instructional black-and-white photographs. In addition to the ground-breaking photographic instructions were thirty-six color photographs. These glamour shots showed the housewife how the finished dishes should look when she presented them to her family and guests. They were a visual representation of the 1950s food ideal. Implicit in the ideal was the message that it was the responsibility of the woman of the house to attain it. Through its extra-recipe rhetoric and illustrations the book affirmed the importance of food as literal and symbolic sustenance for individual, familial, and social identity. It served as pedagogical tool on multiple levels, teaching not only how to cook but also how to plan meals that would please the family and impress guests. In this way the book had a socializing function, reinforcing women's place in the home.

The stereotype of a homemaker in a somnolent mid-century America belies the era's social and political tensions. Simmering alongside postwar national pride and prosperity was paranoia as Cold War fears dominated public discourse and shaped public policy. Jennifer Horner argues that *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book* was a gendered response to a post-World War II social crisis, part of a larger mass-media campaign of reintegration for returning veterans. Popular media such as magazines, television, and cookbooks presented women's domestic work as civilizing children and men, the latter especially important because 11 million United States service men reentered society after the war. Post-World War II emphasis on the domestic sphere and women's role in it was not without contention. Beneath the apparent placidity of the 1950s festered discontent that resulted in Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*.

While *Big Red* promoted conformity to homemaking, it also advocated some adventure and diversity. By the 1950s, housewives were being encouraged to transform creatively packaged foods into chic (for the era) meals. *Big*

Red embodied the seeming paradox of creating “authentic” international dishes using American-made convenience foods, and invited domestic cooks to be adventurous within the safety of their kitchens and with familiar American products. Under “National Soups,” for example, the cook found recipes for “Italian Minestrone,” “Scotch Broth,” “Potage de Fromage,” “Borsch,” and “Swedish Pea Soup.” The book’s inclusion of recipes from a variety of ethnic groups reflected a growing interest in international foods and presaged future Betty Crocker ethnicity-specific cook books. The incorporation of recipes representing different ethnic or cultural groups can also be interpreted as General Mills’ attempt to recognize the diversity of America’s population and the contributions such groups made to American foodways. Noticeable by its absence, however, is mention of African Americans, who comprised a substantial segment of the population. That omission typifies the cautious, indeed fearful, mid-century attitude about race in the United States.

Since the 1950s, Betty Crocker’s name and signature-bearing teaspoon logo have appeared on more than 200 cookbooks. As Americans’ interest in cooking ethnic foods blossomed and persisted, so too did her bibliography of specialty ethnic cookbooks. For example, the 1981 *Betty Crocker’s Chinese Cookbook* was revised and updated with new recipes in 1991, resulting in the *Betty Crocker’s New Chinese Cookbook*. In keeping with an increasingly health-conscious society, Betty Crocker added terms like “diet,” “low fat” and “cholesterol” to her vocabulary. For body-conscious cooks and eaters she produced titles such as *Betty Crocker’s Eat and Lose Weight* (1992, with several updated editions since then) and *Betty Crocker’s Healthy New Choices* (1998). Yet, attesting to the ongoing popularity of her now-classic first book, a facsimile edition of the original *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book* appeared in 1998. From it contemporary cooks can prepare recipes such as “Canary Corn Sticks” and “Chocolate Chip Chiffon Cake,” or read tips for “thrifty [meat] buying” just as preceding generations of home cooks have done.

Betty Crocker’s cookbook legacy is not limited to printed media. She entered the electronic age by producing “Betty Crocker’s Cookbook,” a handheld, electronic cookbook. Betty Crocker entered the computer age by offering “Cook’n With Betty Crocker” recipe software. Not one to shun promotional opportunities or new media, Betty Crocker has a presence on the World Wide Web. At the Web site [www.bettycrocker.com](http://www.bettycrocker.com), visitors can “Take a peek at America’s Most Trusted Kitchens where over 50,000 recipe tests are performed each year.” And of course visitors to the site can access thousands of test-kitchen tested recipes that are “fun and easy to make.”

## **FUN AND EASY TO MAKE: AN ENDURING LEGACY**

The number and types of products bearing Betty Crocker’s name and her familiar red spoon logo have grown exponentially since her letter-writing

days. From Gold Medal Flour to small kitchen appliances to toys, the Betty Crocker brand is affixed to a wide assortment of consumer goods. Among the most enduring non-food items bearing Betty Crocker's seal of approval is the Easy-Bake Oven. Introduced in 1963 by Kenner Products, purchased by General Mills in 1968, the Easy-Bake Oven was a child-size version of the domestic oven. More than 500,000 of these working toy ovens sold in its first year on the market. With the Easy-Bake Oven young cooks—mostly girls, especially in its early years—could actually bake miniature cakes and cookies in a mini-oven “just like mom’s!” As with other Betty Crocker items, the Easy-Bake Oven was fun and educational. It taught little girls baking basics while affirming traditional gender roles. The Easy-Bake Oven playfully taught little girls that their place was at the stove and that Betty Crocker products were integral to their baking experiences. The popularity of the Easy-Bake Oven inspired spin-off products including miniature versions of Betty Crocker cake mixes and miniature TV dinners. Renewed interest in Easy-Bake Ovens at the end of the twentieth century inspired cookbooks such as *The Official Easy-Bake Cookbook!* (1999) and *The EasyBake Oven Gourmet* (2003).

Betty Crocker remains relevant because she and her product lines adapt to shifting political, social, and economic currents. At the fore of the convenience food trend with her cake mixes, Betty Crocker anticipated the meal in a box trend when she launched Hamburger Helper in 1971. It was so successful that she followed it with Chicken Helper and Tuna Helper, also dry dinner kits to which consumers just add the meat or tuna. A more recent variation on one-dish casseroles is her new (2002) shelf-stable complete dinner kit, Complete Meals.

As a persona, Betty Crocker has endured through generations for whom, as Mary Drake McFeely comments, “like many good fictional characters she had assumed a convincingly real presence as an omniscient and reassuring domestic advisor.” It is easy to forget that she is not a real person. Her tenacity in the American imagination—and in our kitchens—attests to her timelessness as a merged corporate and domestic icon.

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# Bomb

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*Margot A. Henriksen*

The atomic bomb's attainment of iconic status is seemingly frozen at a very specific point and place in time. At 8:15 A.M., on August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, simultaneously contributing to the end of World War II and the beginning of the atomic age and the Cold War. The atomic explosion that devastated Hiroshima continues, however, to reverberate into the present. Its enduring centrality to the history of the twentieth century found confirmation at the end of the century, when select journalists and scholars in 1999 voted the atomic bombing of Hiroshima the most important story of the last 100 years. Likewise does the significance of the atomic bomb itself continue to resonate, albeit as incorporated into broader and more inclusive designations such as nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction.

The iconic weapon of choice after Hiroshima and during the Cold War, the atomic bomb and its more potent successors did not disappear when that ideological conflict between the superpowers came to a conclusion upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the post-Cold War "Second Nuclear Age," the atomic bomb retains its authority as an icon, as nuclear stockpiles and nuclear weapons development persist as major shaping forces in the exercise of American power. The potential and real proliferation of these weapons of mass destruction outside the American sphere has profoundly altered the practice of American foreign policy, most recently in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. Saddam Hussein's presumed cache of weapons of mass destruction provided one rationale for President George W. Bush's 2003 preemptive strike against Iraq in his continuing war on terrorism; North Korea's nuclear program has landed that country squarely within Bush's "axis of evil"; and so-called "dirty bombs," small, portable nuclear weapons, comprise yet another possible terrorist threat. The atomic bomb possesses relevance as an evolving and ambivalent American icon, signifying both awesome American strength and apocalyptic American fear.

The U.S. government and military shrouded the birth of the atomic bomb as an iconic American weapon in secrecy. The Manhattan Project established in 1942 to develop the weapon operated as a top-secret endeavor and conducted its official Trinity test of the atomic bomb in the remote deserts of New Mexico on July 16, 1945. Even with the public, wartime atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, officials released very little information about this ultimate weapon and kept its human effects largely invisible. Iconic imagery of the atomic bomb appeared shadowy, often expressed in metaphoric fashion in ancillary atomic representations such as the majestic yet terrible mushroom cloud that towered into the sky after an atomic explosion. Technologically complex and capable of a vastness of destruction hitherto unknown, the atomic bomb proved intellectually and psychologically difficult to comprehend or to represent. The difficulties seemed greatest when attempting to envisage the human and material devastation beneath the mushroom cloud. Emerging from mystery and taking on various incarnations as nuclear weapons technology and public knowledge deepened, the atomic bomb developed into an unstable icon whose different meanings received a mixed reception in American society and culture. Rather than serving as a unifying American icon, the atomic bomb became a site of dispute, open to often radically divergent political and cultural representations. At the extreme ends of interpretation, the atomic bomb conjured either triumph or tragedy; peace and hope or death and despair; utopian promise or apocalyptic peril. The atomic bomb's divisive and ambivalent iconography arose from the ashen landscapes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When President Harry S. Truman announced to the American public on August 6, 1945, that one bomb, an atomic bomb, had been dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, he explained the revolutionary destructive power of the weapon as stemming from its harnessing of the basic power of the universe, akin to the forces powering the sun. The iconic significance of this stunning if abstruse weapon became more concrete to Americans as Truman's threatened "rain of ruin from the air" materialized next over Nagasaki, Japan, thereafter bringing about Japanese surrender and the end of World War II. Americans celebrated the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for concluding a long and deadly global conflict, for assuring the unconditional surrender of Japanese forces, and, by doing so, for preventing a massive loss of American life in an anticipated invasion of Japan. The American soldiers scheduled to participate in that invasion hailed this new and awe-inspiring atomic bomb with especial fervor, often "thanking God" for its advent and application against the merciless Japanese enemy who had initiated hostilities at Pearl Harbor. The atomic bomb earned early iconic glory as a war-ending weapon that secured the triumph of the United States in World War II.

Enveloped in the narrative of World War II, "the good war," the atomic bomb came to represent from an American point-of-view a weapon of peace, a

weapon that saved lives. Americans began to accustom themselves to the sometimes arcane and amazing iconic elements associated with these first atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—designated “Little Boy” and “Fat Man”—explosions produced through fission and the energy-releasing splitting of atoms in a scientific endeavor of technical marvellousness, each capable of obliterating a city then left in smoldering ruins, its observers blinded by a flash of light brighter than the sun and then shadowed by the billowing mushroom cloud. At the same time, other more unsettling iconic imagery began to be associated with the atomic bomb. Uncomfortable atomic images arose in the American imagination from the time of these initial uses of the atomic bomb, becoming even more profoundly disturbing as further information and select photographic materials circulated in the public sphere. On the very day that President Truman revealed the existence of this secret weapon of victory that could vaporize an urban center, one radio commentator wondered whether the United States had created a Frankenstein. Monstrous images of death, charnel smells of burning flesh, and visions of apocalypse also attached to the new American icon. A nervousness that this American creation would turn on its creators pulsed in the United States.

The publication of John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* in 1946 sealed the iconic association of Hiroshima and the atomic bomb, and familiarized anxious Americans with monstrously deadly and tragically threatening signifiers of the atomic bomb. Hersey released his journalistic account of six survivors one year after the bombing; his account reflected the increased knowledge of the atomic bomb and its effects that had accrued. More importantly, it switched the point of view on the atomic bomb to the Japanese. Although designated by American political and military leaders as a “military target,” Hiroshima also served as home to thousands of civilians—a point stressed by Hersey in his choice to follow the stories of women, priests, and doctors. Along with the dead, these atomic survivors represented the first victims of the atomic bomb and provided a view from beneath the mushroom cloud. And it was a horrifying vision, replete with detail on the terror-inducing and stupefying physical consequences and aftereffects of an atomic bomb: thousands instantly incinerated by the scorching blast of the bomb, deformed by melting eyeballs and skin burned so badly it sloughed off in sheets, thousands more survivors, nearly impossible to distinguish from the dead given their wounded, singed flesh and their dazed, zombie-like confusion, all subject to strange atmospheric conditions—huge, radioactive raindrops, wild winds, and fires that took away any shelter in a city already largely reduced to rubble and ashes. Thousands who lived through the bombing nonetheless died in the following hours, days, and weeks, succumbing to the radiation sickness that was a by-product of the bomb’s fallout. Such images entered a newly atomic apocalyptic imagination in America, and Americans visualized themselves along with the Japanese as potential victims of this iconic bearer of irradiated mass death.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki set the terms of iconic struggle regarding the atomic bomb, whereby the bomb belonged either to the victors or the victims,



Hiroshima atomic dome. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

and promised peace and security or betokened violence and annihilation. Expressions of atomic bomb guilt and fear, such as those fanned by Hersey's *Hiroshima*, surfaced and yet were countered by more confident assessments of atomic security and safety. As World War II bled into the cold war, United States leaders sanctified the atomic bomb as a means of preserving peace and security in a world now threatened by Soviet communist expansion. Intent on protecting the American monopoly on the atomic bomb and institutionalizing the system that had produced the weapons for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the United States government enshrined the atomic bomb as a weapon of peace designed to allow the United States to prevail in the Cold War. The state also closely guarded the bomb's secrets—both in terms of its scientific and industrial production and in terms of its dangers.

One group of Americans, themselves atomic icons, did challenge the government's comfortable assumptions about atomic moral certitude and the feasibility of maintaining indefinitely a monopoly on the bomb. The physicists of the Manhattan Project, those "atomic scientists" credited with the invention of this scientific and military breakthrough, gave voice to remorse about the weapons they had created. They often advocated international control over atomic weapons, because they believed it was just a matter of time before Soviet scientists matched their feat. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb," famously stated that the physicists had "known sin" as a result of their work on the atomic bomb, addressing the guilt associated with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Founding the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* in 1947, in part as a forum to discuss their views, atomic scientists

included on the cover of each issue the “Doomsday Clock.” The hands of the clock took position in relation to a dark midnight, symbolic of nuclear war and destruction and expressive of physicists’ fears for the future of humans in the atomic age. In 1947, the hands of the clock read seven minutes to doomsday. The prospects for annihilation appeared even more likely once the Soviets tested their own atomic bomb in 1949 and once the United States launched plans to invent a “super bomb.” A number of scientists, including Oppenheimer, argued against working on what would be a hydrogen bomb, a fusion device of thermonuclear proportions; its exponential increase in devastating power would make it a genocidal weapon, an instrument for the mass slaughter of civilians. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), which oversaw atomic developments, nonetheless approved the project. In 1952 and 1953, the United States and Soviet Union each tested workable H-bombs. The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists’* Doomsday Clock moved within two minutes of midnight.

In the intense atmosphere of the Cold War and an atomic and hydrogen bomb arms race between the superpowers, the warnings of scientists had little effect on the government’s embrace of atomic and hydrogen bombs as icons of Cold War—security and safety. That search for safety and security included ferreting out “atomic spies” who had presumably allowed the Soviet Union to attain atomic secrets. It enfolded other Americans deemed to be “subversives” or “security risks” because of their political affiliations with communism or because of their criticism of the American system and its atomic icon. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sent to the electric chair in 1953 as atomic traitors, and even J. Robert Oppenheimer lost his security clearance with the AEC in 1954, partly as a result of his political past but mostly as a result of having tainted iconic nuclear weapons with guilt, remorse, and moral opposition. The way was clear for the atomic bomb to remain at the sacred core of an evolving nuclear weapons arsenal aimed at deterring a Soviet attack or World War III. Atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs, and intercontinental ballistic missiles made viable American foreign and military policies of deterrence based on “massive retaliation,” “brinkmanship,” and mutually assured destruction—all of which entailed an American willingness to prepare for and wage nuclear war.

American officials coupled this preparation for war to a preparation for peace, threatening the Soviets with destruction while promising Americans a utopian peace made idyllic by atomic energy and nuclear deterrence. President Truman had described the atomic bomb as a “weapon of peace,” and President Dwight D. Eisenhower promoted “Atoms for Peace” in 1953, even as news of successful hydrogen bomb tests arrived. The Air Force’s Strategic Air Command, tasked with flying the aircraft that would deploy the bombs, adopted “Peace Is Our Profession” as its motto. Although wrapped in peaceful imagery, safe behind a veil of secrecy and security, the atomic bomb and its more powerful heirs nonetheless remained subject to iconic debate and exposure to more dangerous imagery that recalled Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as scientists’ warnings about doomsday. American preparedness entailed

the widespread testing of atomic and hydrogen weapons, tests stunningly visible to the public in newsreels, on television, and even in person on the outskirts of Las Vegas at the Nevada Proving Ground (later the Nevada Test Site). Preparedness also involved protecting Americans against possible Soviet attack, in the form of civil defense drills and the construction of bomb shelters. Bomb tests and bomb shelters offered surrogate atomic forums, and produced real and allusive iconic representations that at once corresponded to and conflicted with peaceful atomic notions.

The atmospheric testing of atomic and hydrogen bombs took place in the Pacific and in Nevada between 1946 and 1963, showcasing for Americans the power and presence of the weapons being marshaled in their defense. In the environs of 1950s Las Vegas, a bomb-test-watching craze developed, and suggested a patriotic acceptance of and acclaim for these nuclear icons. Residents and tourists gathered to observe that most recognizable of atomic icons, the mushroom cloud, which could be seen from rooftop bars, mountain picnic spots, or way stations like the Atomic View Motel. Las Vegas hotel-casinos hosted the Miss Atomic Bomb Contest, concocted atomic cocktails, and coiffed atomic hairdos. Clark County, Nevada, refashioned its governmental seal to feature the mushroom cloud, grateful for the prosperity spawned by the atomic bomb tests. Atomic giddiness coexisted, though, with a frightened gravity over the radioactive fallout spewed by these tests. Especially shocking were the hydrogen bomb tests in 1954 on Bikini atoll; more powerful than expected, the blasts contaminated a distant Japanese fishing boat named the *Lucky Dragon* and led to the death of a crew member.

Such fearful knowledge brought imagination of vaster horrors; science fiction films of the time crafted a perilous atomic iconography of creatures born from testing and fallout, creating atomic monsters to populate the American imagination. The fictional marauders awakened or mutated as a result of American bomb tests included a prehistoric sea serpent (*The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, 1953), gargantuan ants (*Them!*, 1954), and *Godzilla* (1954/1956). The real terrors for living human beings were not outstripped, however. The 1955 arrival in the United States of the Hiroshima Maidens— young women disfigured by the bomb and seeking corrective plastic surgery— simply underscored the monstrous capacities of the atomic bomb. Organized anti-nuclear groups coalesced against the dangers posed by fallout, and also represented opposition to the claims of patriotic civil defense. For example, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), founded in 1957, contrasted sharply with the government and its evolving policy of deterrence through MAD.

Civil defense drills and fallout shelters promoted survival in the atomic age, but proponents of civilian preparedness had to stress the iconic deadliness and devastation of the bomb in order to arouse public awareness and interest. In educational civil defense films, “Bert the Turtle” urged American youths to “duck and cover,” to mimic his head tucking into his shell. Images of children cowering under school desks or adults digging underground shelters for their

homes called into question a triumphal American Cold War vision of life. The Berlin crisis in 1961 threatened a thermonuclear confrontation, and prompted President John F. Kennedy to urge on television that all Americans busy themselves building shelters. A panicked dedication to survivalism and shelter-building ensued, but so too did a more reasoned understanding of the essential immorality of shelters: they made nuclear war thinkable and human extinction more likely. Emerging from concerns about fallout and shelters in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the “Armageddon attitude” filtered into iconic associations with the atomic bomb: the atomic bomb meant death and human annihilation, and the Cold War nuclear system was therefore irrational and in need of control or abolition. Poetically expressed in Nevil Shute’s novel *On the Beach* (1957) and raucously satirized in the black humor film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), the bomb came to stand as an icon for military madness and the end of human life.

In *Dr. Strangelove*, Major King Kong exuberantly rides an H-bomb falling to earth like a bucking bronco; his irreverent atomic age persona symbolized a new courage in openly addressing the perils of the atomic bomb and the pitfalls of the Cold War system. The shelter craze died and bomb tests moved underground after 1963, a result of the Soviet-American Limited Test Ban Treaty, itself a signal of official recognition of human susceptibility to atmospheric fallout and atomic annihilation after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Still, the atomic bomb had become a visible and recognized icon for often-conflicting understandings of American life and cold war policy.

The iconic battle between triumph and tragedy, peace and peril, persisted through the Vietnam era to the end of the Cold War. To those in the antiwar movement, the bomb served as a symbol for deadly Cold War militarism along with the Vietnam War; to government and military officials, the bomb stood as a symbol of their restraint in the Cold War because they did not resort to using this ultimate weapon in Vietnam. When Cold War tensions intensified in the 1980s under President Ronald W. Reagan, his atomic enthusiasm faced dampening atomic opposition in anti-nuclear activism that proposed a “nuclear freeze” and presaged a “nuclear winter,” devastating climatic changes that would extinguish all life on earth after a massive nuclear exchange. At the end of the Cold War, many Americans again hailed the atomic bomb and its nuclear descendants for proving the sanity of MAD and for allowing the United States to win the war. Others pushed to abolish an arsenal that included thousands of nuclear warheads, now that a new era had presumably rendered the atomic icon irrelevant, a historic relic.

Suggestion of a sort of circularity in the atomic age, as well as the continued potency of the atomic bomb as a contested American icon in post-Cold War America, arrived in the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum proposed an exhibit based around the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Organizers intended to incorporate

critical historical perspectives on the atomic bombing, as well as visual and material evidence of the bomb's devastation in Hiroshima. World War II veterans, members of Congress, and others raised a storm of protest, particularly about the photographs and artifacts from under Hiroshima's mushroom cloud: pictorials of the seared human victims of the bomb, a Japanese school girl's burnt lunch box. Only a drastically scaled-back exhibit focusing on the *Enola Gay* itself survived the furor, leading Japanese observers to note how the bomb remained a "holy relic," a national hero for the United States.

The rehabilitation of the heroic status of the atomic bomb continued, from the halls of government to popular culture. Talks on the issues of nuclear non-proliferation and arms reduction stalled, securing a place for the bomb among post-Cold War weapons. Films like *Independence Day* (1996), *Armageddon* (1998), and *Deep Impact* (1998) employed nuclear weapons to save earth and prevent the extinction of human life by aliens, asteroids, and comets, contesting competing visions of nuclear-borne annihilation.

Ambivalent iconography of the atomic bomb has persisted from 1945 to the present, maintaining a precarious balance between hope and despair, subsumed, as the icon has long been, within images of triumph and tragedy, salvation and extinction. It should come as no surprise that the Doomsday Clock on the 2005 cover of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* is set at exactly seven minutes to midnight, just where it began.

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# Daniel Boone

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*Richard Taylor*

As Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington were enshrined as founders of the American Republic and exemplars of man in civil society, their contemporary Daniel Boone won fame at the beginning of the Westward Movement as man in a state of nature, a son of the wilderness guided by virtue and natural wisdom. An enduring American icon, Daniel Boone (1734–1820) is the wearer of many hats, including the coonskin cap depicted in Enid Yandel’s popular sculpture of the frontier hero at the entrance to Cherokee park in Louisville, Kentucky, one that in life he never wore. Like Walt Whitman’s persona in “Leaves of Grass,” Boone “contains multitudes,” some of them creating inconsistencies and contradictions—an indication of the multiple roles the iconic Boone plays in American culture.

At root, Boone the pioneer should be viewed as a variant of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s eighteenth-century natural man, a Noble Savage, an idealization of an uncivilized man, an emblem of the innate goodness of men freed from the corrupting influences of civilization. This Boone of the wilds is fictionalized in James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, a figure similarly unsullied by civilization and its corrupting tendencies. In the five Leather-Stocking novels written between 1823 and 1841, Bumppo, a Boone-like son of the wilderness, moves through incarnations of Deerslayer and Pathfinder to full-fledged Pioneer. These novels of search and rescue are the first of the popular genre of westerns. Though their locus moves west, as did Boone’s, they might more accurately be called eastern westerns, and to some degree they prescribe the conventions of the modern genre of westerns—the laconic and lone hero who is a Euro-American knight of the prairie, overcoming adversity in many forms, never really falling for the allure of material riches or domesticity. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lesser writers churned out pale imitations of wilderness archetypes—of Davy Crockett, Kit Carson, and Simon Kenton, and of Boone himself in books whose primary audience was young readers.

The popular image of Daniel Boone has been appropriated as a model for American youth, especially through the outdoors movement whose publicist was Dan Beard (1850–1941), a surveyor, writer, and illustrator who founded

the Sons of Daniel Boone (1905), the earliest precursor of the Boy Scouts of America. Beard, who grew up in Covington, Kentucky, on the banks of the Ohio, eventually moved to New York and wrote more than a dozen handicraft books for boys “to encourage conservation, love of the outdoors, and the pioneer spirit” (“Beard”). He went on to found the Boy Pioneers of America, an organization that influenced the formation of the boy scout movements in England and America. His books mirrored the times, compatible with Theodore Roosevelt’s popularization of fitness, the robust outdoor life as a means to develop character, and the dedication of national parks to preserve the last wilderness lands of America. In his *Winning of the West* books Roosevelt himself idolized Boone as an embodiment of the pioneer spirit. He recognized in Boone an exemplar of the rugged individual able to survive the frontier’s harsh environment and draw moral nourishment from it, an individual schooled in the ways of nature, possessing the values of self-reliance and stewardship that nature came to represent for those who challenged its despoilment during the high tide of American industrialization.

These forces and a revival of nationalism in American culture spawned dozens of Boone biographies and popular adventure books for boys, including *Scouting with Daniel Boone* (1914) by Everett Tomlinson, a fictional, character-building book that was part of the Every Boy’s Library Series authorized by the Boy Scouts of America. Other fictional renderings of Boone’s life followed, including Stewart Edward White’s *Daniel Boone: Wilderness Scout* (1922), with stunning color illustrations by James Daugherty, who would later produce his own Boone book. In his introductory chapter White outlines the connections between Boone and scouting:

If the Boy Scouts would know a man who in his attitude toward the life to which he was called most nearly embodied the precepts of their laws let them look on Daniel Boone. Gentle, kind, modest, peace-loving, absolutely fearless, a master of Indian warfare, a mighty hunter, strong as a bear and active as the panther, his life was lived in daily danger, almost perpetual hardship and exposure; yet he died in his bed at nearly ninety years of age. (3)

More concerned with shaping an image than probing the complexities of Boone’s character, White unquestioningly accepts the paradox of the peace-lover who excels in violence, the gentle man hardened by necessity, the refined man whose physical attributes are comparable to those of beasts. A slightly different take on Boone is found in Daniel Henderson’s *Boone of the Wilderness: A Tale of Pioneer Adventure and Achievement in “The Dark and Bloody Ground”* (1921). Adopting the view of Boone as a bold bearer of civilization rather than an escapee from it like Natty Bumppo, Henderson introduces his book with a poem that accents Boone’s heroic mission to tame the wilds:

“You dare not cross the Cumberlands!” the voices said to him;  
You may not tread the azure grass beyond the mountain’s rim!

No white man's foot may follow the deer and buffalo—  
The red men guard the ranges!" but Boone replied, "I go!" (viii)

James Daughtery's *Daniel Boone* (1939), whose bold and swirling lithographs of Boone brought the Kentucky frontier alive for me in the public library, addresses Boone in the invocation that begins his children's biography as "a living flame, ever young in the heart and bright dream of America marching on" (7). Depicting Boone as a foot soldier in the march of Progress, Nationalism, and Democracy, he called for transferring the spirit of the frontier to a new generation of youth, "That you may have the enduring courage to cut a clean straight path for a free people through the wilderness against oppression and aggression" (7). Written as clouds of impending war were darkening Europe, Daughtery's bravado today would spark the objections of revisionists who would describe Boone less as a pioneer taking a first step in the movement west than an accessory to those who participated in the aggressive thrust of Manifest Destiny and the decimation of America's native peoples. Edna McGuire in her fictionalized biography *Daniel Boone* (1945) in The American Adventure Series reaffirmed this view of Boone as a foot-soldier in the advance column of democracy, describing him as a "freedom-loving" and "home-seeking" pioneer who fought bravely in defense of his home and faced the hardships of the frontier with "high courage" (prefatory note). My own favorite early portrayal of Boone was Louisville-native John Mason Brown's *Daniel Boone: The Opening of the Wilderness* (1952) in the popular Landmark series of American history, a series that fueled among many of my generation a love of history.

Many books cast in this mold were written for adoption in the classroom, as, for example, Frances M. Perry and Katherine Beebe's *Four American Pioneers: A Book for Young Americans* (1900), which also contained selective biographies of George Rogers Clark, David Crockett, and Kit Carson, fellow travelers in the frontier caravan. Their presence in the public schools accounts for the pervasiveness in American culture of Boone as an all-purpose utility for American values.

Though the proliferation of such books began early in the twentieth century, their predecessors appeared before the Civil War in Timothy Flint's *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone, the First Settler of Kentucky* (1833), in which he was portrayed, in the words of Boone biographer John Mack Faragher, as a "providential pathfinder for civilization" (322); in W. H. Bogart's *Daniel Boone and the Hunters of Kentucky* (1854); in George Canning Hill's *Daniel Boone, the Pioneer of Kentucky* (1860); and John Peck's *Daniel Boone* (1847) in the Library of American Biography. Such nineteenth-century biographies created an appetite for the Boone adventure books in the early twentieth, a growth industry that a century later shows few signs of waning.

There are two central archetypes that these depictions of Boone seem to reinforce. One focuses on place, an Adamic figure's longed-for return to

Eden, an unspoiled reserve where nature predominates and man can recover his lost innocence. The world he is redeemed from is not only the established civilization of the Eastern colonies but the Old World itself. A new man supplants the guilt and moral jadedness of eighteenth century Europe, what R.W.B. Lewis describes as an “American Adam.” The other, almost its opposite, is an archetypal image of the Man Who Copes—Boone as a kind of North-American Robinson Crusoe, bold, self-reliant, resourceful, more than equal to the hardships posed by wilderness and the red man who inhabits it. Reflecting conventional sentiment of the time, this model finds fault with the Native American’s stubborn defense of his homeland, identifying him as a Manichean counterpart of the bringers of light and civilization, a devil.

To place Boone more accurately, he occupies a kind of no-man’s-land between the wilderness that is and the settlement that will be, neither a builder nor a farmer but a hunter, a Nimrod providentially equipped to explore the vast cipher of the continent and mark a trail for others. This image of Boone is embodied in George Caleb Bingham’s “Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the Cumberland Gap” (1851–1852), a painting that depicts Moses-like Boone with confident stride leading pioneer families through Cumberland Gap to the Promised Land. He is also the image of Jefferson’s sturdy yeoman whose legions will transform the wilderness into farms and market towns. Boone was, in fact, by profession a surveyor, a good one, who platted thousands of acres for those who would become the yeoman farmers that Jefferson envisioned populating the West. He was also a legislator and would-be government contractor. For a time he also kept a tavern and trading post at Limestone (Maysville, Kentucky), one of the primary points of debarkation on the Ohio. Behind this romanticized leader is the provider, a man with a family who increasingly felt the economic press of mouths to feed. An inventory of Boone’s résumé should refer to these livelihoods in addition to his popular pastimes as explorer and Indian fighter.

John Filson’s *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke* (1784), later published in French and German editions, is the first, perhaps least accurate, and most memorable of these glorifications of the frontiersman’s life. John Filson (1753–1788), biographer, historian, cartographer, explorer, was born in Pennsylvania, educated in Maryland, taught school in



An undated lithograph of Daniel Boone. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Pennsylvania during the Revolution, then in 1783 immigrated to Kentucky where he practiced surveying, interviewed settlers, and began making the first creditable map of Kentucky country. His *Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke*, the book he published in Delaware in 1784, had an appendix entitled “The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone.” He drafted the manuscript, at least in part, to promote his speculation in land, and though he surveyed a road from Lexington in central Kentucky to the mouth of the Licking River and helped found Losantiville (the “city opposite the mouth of the Licking River” that later became Cincinnati), his reach exceeded his luck, for he disappeared while exploring the site and was believed to have been killed by Indians. The Boone narrative, though written with ornate language and elaborate locution alien to Boone himself, represents the birth of Daniel Boone in the public consciousness, the first in a long list of books that have had a perennial market in America and beyond.

Boone’s own narrative history of his life, started in old age after he had emigrated to Missouri, was lost in a move when a canoe carrying his goods capsized. Had it survived, some of the mythic scale of his life might have been trimmed more modestly to size, the record set straight. Hyperbole was simply not congruent with his character. What may have been the other great corrective to the Boone myth, the book projected by Lyman S. Draper (1815–1891), who faithfully collected Boone material for most of a lifetime, was still unwritten at the time of the collector’s death. Because little that Boone said or wrote has come down to us intact, much of the well we draw from is tainted by hearsay, some of it well-intentioned apocrypha, some of it outright lies. Compared to others who have been elevated to mythic status, Boone, the most authoritative source of matters relating to his life, is virtually silent—maybe in part achieving his mythic status because of that silence. Others stepped in to fill the void. To this day, the name Boone guarantees robust sales, a testimony to Boone’s place in the American pantheon. The cottage industry of books in print about Boone at the time of this writing exceeds 100; who knows how many have been superseded and are out of print?

It is not so much the particulars of Daniel Boone’s life that raised him to the rank of America’s quintessential pioneer as it is the larger-than-life image that others have created in children’s histories, biographies, statues, painting, engraving, movies, television serials, and the wholesale hagiography accorded to those associated with the Westward Movement. After all, the lives of James Harrod, founder of Kentucky’s first permanent settlement, and Simon Kenton both equal Boone’s adventures and exploits and even surpass Boone’s in terms of lasting accomplishments. Both of the settlements they founded, Harrodsburg and Maysville, Kentucky, survive as modern-day communities, unlike Boonesborough which is now a state park with a replica of the original fort. General George Rogers Clark, founder of Louisville and conqueror of the Northwest Territory during the Revolution, easily has cut a much wider mark in American History. Other less well-known figures, including John

Floyd, Benjamin Logan, even Boone's own brother Squire Boone (1744–1815), in many ways match or surpass Boone in their actual contributions.

Though I heard stories about the frontier hero from a time beyond memory, my first printed encounter with Daniel Boone was in my fourth-grade reader, *Adventures in Pioneering* by Mary Browning. Written to introduce children to Kentucky history, Browning's narrative presents the frontier through "Grandma," one of the first generation of pioneers who describes the exploits of James Harrod and Daniel Boone to Jimmy Fisher and his sister Sally, her grandchildren. Under the old oak tree she tells the "story" of Boone's capture at Blue Licks where he went with a party from Boonesborough to boil the brackish water for salt. Captured alone during a snowstorm, he asks his captors to adopt him. He then persuades the outnumbered saltmakers to surrender in return for a promise of good treatment. After winning the Shawnees' confidence and learning of a plan to attack Boonesborough, he escapes and brings the news back to the settlement. The children conclude that he is the "bravest man in the world," brave and clever.

Grandma later resumes her story of Boone, recounting the siege of Boonesborough in August of 1778 when Boone and his comrades withstood an attack of 400 Indians. As might be expected, these accounts were sanitized, sensitive to depictions of violence, and silent on the issues of empire and Indian rights. Boone was portrayed as a peaceable man forced to defend himself and his neighbors to make Kentucky safe for settlement. If he is not the bringer of culture to the wilderness in the popular depictions, he is the safekeeper of settlement, both the point man and bodyguard, so to speak, of civilization.

In the popular imagination, the bundle of virtues he possessed included valor, foresight, resourcefulness, pureness of spirit, benevolence in peace, ferocity in war—qualities that do not differ substantially from America's most hopeful assessment of itself. To a great degree, Boone is presented as a kind of wilderness saint, a St. Francis with a flintlock, whose virtues are highlighted in a series of parables and homilies, all sweetness and light, as he carves a pathway to Paradise. This heroic view of Boone is reflected in William Ranney's painting "Boone's First View of Kentucky" (1849). It depicts Boone and five companions in 1769, standing atop an eminence thereafter known as Pilot Knob, gazing out at the "beautiful level of Kentucky." An adaptation of this critical moment, with its threshold of promise and unanticipated suffering, is the subject of Gilbert White's large lunette in the Kentucky statehouse. The four panels on the monument at his gravesite above the Kentucky River are an abbreviated and over-simplified synopsis of his life. In milky marble they depict Boone grappling with a tomahawk-wielding Indian, Boone resting beside a downed buck, Boone, his rifle at rest, instructing a behatted slave whose eyes are respectfully downcast, and a woman (presumably Rebecca) milking a cow. In this scene of home, Boone, as was so often the case, is absent.

The darker side of this bright vision of the opening of the West so embedded in the folk imagination is personified by Simon Girty (1741–1818).

What Boone is to the bright aspect of America's playing out of Manifest Destiny, Girty is to its dark side, the acknowledgement of the shadowy subtext of America's conquest, for Girty is portrayed as a betrayer of his race. This so-called "White Savage" is perceived as delighting in the torture and annihilation of his white brothers. Allying himself with the British and Indians during the Revolution, "The Great Renegade" operated over thirty years as a kind of scout and provocateur in the Ohio River Valley. Son of an Irish immigrant living on the Pennsylvania frontier, Girty was captured by Indians as a teenager, learned several native languages, and through a complex series of swervings in loyalty finally committed himself to resisting settlement in the Kentucky country. He was active during the siege of Bryan's Station as well as the Battle of Blue Licks (1782), St. Clair's Defeat (1791), and Fallen Timbers (1794). If his path and Boone's crossed, it was never closer than shooting distance—both were at Blue Licks, the greatest defeat of Kentuckians during the Indian Wars. Though history does not record a meeting between them, each was keenly aware of the other's existence. Like Boone, Girty was a man more complex than history has remembered him, on occasion acting mercifully to secure the release of white captives, including his old comrade Simon Kenton, whose life he saved twice (as Kenton later saved Boone's).

What earned Girty his badge of infamy was the burning at the stake of William Crawford after the colonel's capture near Sandusky Plains in Ohio, following the defeat of Crawford's forces during a punitive expedition against the Ohio tribes. Another captive, Dr. John Knight, reported, probably with some fabrication, that Girty took pleasure in the burning of his former acquaintance and refused all aid to him, even a request to shoot him as relief from his agony. Escaping, Knight lived to write an account of his captivity, including damning remarks about Girty later confuted by other witnesses. As a consequence of Knight's accusations, Girty was regarded as a *bête noire* during the nineteenth century, perhaps the most detested man in American history. He entered American folklore and literature as a dark demon of the wilderness, whose name mothers invoked to terrorize their disobedient children. He was the subject of popular romances such as *Simon Girty, the Outlaw* by Uriah Jones (1846), and mentioned in Stephen Vincent Benét's frequently anthologized short story, "The Devil and Daniel Webster," in which he is recruited as a member of the Devil's jury:

... and there was Simon Girty, the renegade, who saw white men burned at the stake and whooped with the Indians to see them burn. His eyes were green like a catamount's, and the stains on his hunting shirt did not come from the blood of deer. (594)

In broad profile, Boone and Girty represent two sides of the American psyche as described in an evolving mythos of light and dark, good and evil, courage and cowardice.

Any deeper probing of either Boone or Girty reveals that they were more ambiguous and complex than textbooks or the popular imagination portrays them. For example, Boone the Quaker pacifist was also touted as a great Indian-fighter. During his long life Boone was in fact certain of killing only two Indians. One was at Blue Licks shortly before his son Israel was killed. The other killing he acknowledged was less justifiable, less often mentioned, bordering on gratuitous homicide. According to his son Nathan in Draper's interviews, Boone, in the summer of 1770 near what would become Frankfort, shot a lone Indian who was fishing from a fallen tree by the Kentucky River. Though Boone did not confess outright that he murdered him and there may have been mitigating considerations of safety that justified his doing so, in his later years he simply told his son Nathan that "While I was looking at him he tumbled into the river and I saw no more of him" (Hammon 111). About the same time, on the other hand, he met an aged Indian who had been left to die by his comrades. Boone charitably killed a deer, took only a small portion of it for himself, and presented the remainder to the old Indian. In his *In the American Grain* (1925), William Carlos Williams regards Boone not as the Indian's nemesis but as his model: "To Boone the Indian was his greatest master. Not for himself surely to be an Indian, though they eagerly sought to adopt him into their tribes, but the reverse: to be *himself* in a new world, Indianlike" (137).

Most of us interpret Boone according to our own predilections. Some remember him as Boone the Rescuer, referring to his pursuit of the band of Shawnees that kidnapped his daughter Jemima and two other girls as they dangled their feet from a canoe on the Kentucky River near Boonesborough one Sunday afternoon in 1776. When the alarm was sounded, Boone was in such haste to begin the pursuit that he left without moccasins on his feet. By second-guessing the kidnappers' route north and exercising extreme caution, he succeeded in rescuing the girls. Others cite his deliverance of Boonesborough with his timely warning and heroic defense during the siege.

Still others are taken by his stoical acceptance of conditions over which he had no control, as in his capture at Blue Licks in February of 1778, giving in when resistance was senseless and then persuading the party of men that accompanied him to surrender without a fight when it was clear that the odds were against them. After gaining the confidence of Blackfish, the Shawnee chief who adopted him as son and renamed him Shel-Tow-Y ("Big Turtle," said to be a reference to his broadening girth during middle age), Boone lived quite contentedly with his captors until he learned they were preparing to attack Boonesborough, at which time he planned and cleverly executed his escape.

Skeptics cite inconsistencies in the stereotype of Boone as an unlettered son of the wilderness—for example, his drawing on Jonathan's Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* to name an obscure creek Lulbegrud, a misspelling of Lorbrulgrud, the capital of the Brobdingnags in a book that he had fetched to the wilderness and read aloud to his comrades during evenings by firelight. My own favorite is the story told by a party of Long Hunters in the years before



settlement. Trekking in the woods, they were mystified by an unidentifiable caterwauling. Stealthily, they crept to a meadow where they found Boone on his back singing as if there were not another person within all of Kentucky (Faragher 85). This image of Boone, heedless, happy, self-sufficient, and perfectly at one with nature, is endearing and indelible. As is his admission when asked by Chester Harding, the portraitist who painted the only full-figured image of Boone from life, if he had ever been lost in the vast spaces of Kentucky. “No,” he said, “but I was once bewildered for three days” (Bakeless 413).

As students of Boone have pointed out, Boone was far from being a happy harbinger of settlement. Tragically, he lost his eldest son James during his first attempt to bring his and other families to Kentucky. As the population of Kentucky surged in the 1780s and Boone was legally out-manuevered in defending his thousands of acres of land claims, he wanted nothing more than to move beyond the settlements. In his mind they came to represent the depletion and senseless slaughter of game, the pettifogging of land grabbers and opportunists, the whittling of the wilderness into consumable grids of freeholds and farmland. According to his son Nathan, when his father left Kentucky, “he did it with the intention of never stepping his feet upon Kentucky soil again” (Hammon 111). This doesn’t square with Bingham’s image of Boone proudly leading settlers into Kentucky to establish an agrarian Land of Plenty. Nor does it conform to later studies that indicate only a small number of those coming to Kentucky for land succeeded in owning any. Toward the end of his life, “when he [Boone] saw strangers approaching the house, he, anticipating their prying curiosity, would take his cane and walk off to avoid them” (Hammon 138). Historians and those who dilute history into folk traditions often paint in broad strokes, with greater emphasis on emblem and grander purpose than accuracy and nuance. Quite simply, we like our heroes pure, our culprits depraved.

Finally, Boone is the Great Survivor. He survived John Filson, his first biographer, the person who more than any other fathered his legend and granted him immortality. He outlasted most of his contemporary pathfinders as well as his wife and at least two sons. In moving west, he withstood the threats of the wilderness and its rapid eclipse in Kentucky at the dawn of settlement and the industrial era. In some ways, he was a throwback to the hunter stage of human development. A kind of crypto-pantheist, he survived his Quaker upbringing and the churching of the frontier, unlike his brother Squire who became a Baptist minister. In immigrating to Missouri, he nearly outdistanced his own celebrity, encountering the next frontier and being snagged only by the occasional Draper (not Audubon, who fabricated their meeting). He died among his family, hunting wild game almost until the end. Significantly, the last buffalo east of the Mississippi passed at the time of his death. Though he lacked a camouflaged poncho and a radical credo, he was a kind of eighteenth century survivalist, but a sanguine survivalist. Fixed as an

American icon, he has in a sense survived his disparate myths, which constantly are being reassessed and redefined in book after book.

As Boone biographer John Mack Faragher has pointed out, perhaps the most lasting cultural legacy of Boone is as “an embodiment of American possibility” (341). The actual Boone, resembling but not living up to the iconic Boone that holds so prominent a position in the American psyche, dwells somewhere on the fringes of the printed texts, far from the smoke of his neighbors’ chimneys in an undiscovered meadow of the imagination where there is sufficient elbow room. As Boone himself said in relation to the many extravagant stories that circulated about him, “Many heroic actions and chivalrous adventures are related of me which exist only in the regions of fancy. . . . With me the world has taken great liberties, and yet I have been but a common man” (Faragher 302).

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# Boy Scout Knife

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*R. H. Miller*

Boy Scout knife, like ladies' hairpin, have many uses.

*Charlie Chan's Secret* (1936)

In 1997, when the critic John Lahr interviewed the playwright David Mamet, at the outset of their meeting Mamet presented him with a Boy Scout knife. It must have been one of the very rare older models issued by the New York Knife Company, as it carried only the motto "Be prepared" on one side (Lahr 70; "BSA Scout Knives"). In his account of that interview in *The New Yorker* Lahr surmises presciently that the motto seems to have a double meaning, signifying both "prowess and paranoia" (70). In the course of the interview Lahr tried to puzzle out the meaning of the gift and finally concluded that in some way it was connected to Mamet's play *The Cryptogram*:

As I attempted to ask him unwelcome questions about his childhood, the presence of the Boy Scout knife on the table reminded me of the knife that the distraught ten-year-old boy John flashes in Mamet's autobiographical masterpiece *The Cryptogram*—a play about the betrayal of the boy by his parents. He is on the stairway looking down at the living room, where his mother, abandoned by his father and unable to meet his emotional needs, sits in the tortured last beat of the play. At whom, exactly, is the boy's murderous energy aimed, himself or others? His gesture foreshadows the life of the playwright, who learned to turn aggression into art: the knife became a pen. (72)

Mamet's (and Lahr's) sensitivity to the layered meanings bound up in this seemingly innocuous object is not unusual at all. Perhaps no other icon of white middle-class male culture carries the talismanic significance of the Boy Scout knife. It is a frequently recurring figure in our imaginative literature, in fictional accounts, stories taken from real life, in stories from film and TV. For the more than 100 million boys who have been in the scouting ranks since its founding, the Boy Scout knife has served both as a useful tool and a powerful symbol.

The appearance of the Boy Scout knife follows close on the founding of the organization itself. The Boy Scouts of America was established in 1910, only a year after Lord Baden-Powell formed its parent organization, the British Boy Scouts. The earliest Boy Scout knives came on the market in 1911, manufactured by the New York Knife Company, which continued to produce the knives until 1931. The knives were also issued by Imperial; Universal/Landers, Ferry & Clark; Remington/PAL; Schrade; and Ulster, among others, and beginning in 1946 by the Camillus Cutlery Company of Camillus, New York, which is now the major purveyor of the product. Since 1911 many variations of the knife have been manufactured—a Norman Rockwell knife, a whittler, a woodsman, a two-blade, a three-blade, a four-blade, a deluxe five-blade, and special knives for various special uses—but it is still the Camillus four-bladed knife with its stainless steel blades, brown delrin plastic body, Scout insignia, and key chain ring that remains the standard Boy Scout knife. For the more patriotically minded, the Norman Rockwell version is still available, with Rockwell’s various full-color portrayals of young Scouts permanently preserved beneath a plastic overlay on its handle.

In due time the Girl Scouts of America issued the Girl Scout knife, a green plastic-bodied version of the Boy Scout knife; but, with all due respect, it has not woven itself into the fabric of American life and culture as has the Boy Scout knife. The fact points out all the more directly that the knife is a carrier of deep, psychic male signification. Today the difference between the significance of the Boy Scout knife and the Girl Scout knife is instructive. On the Internet search engine Google there are almost three times as many Web sites noted for the Boy Scout knife as there are for the Girl Scout knife (about 1500 versus 500). The original Kutmaster Girl Scout knife was a worthy rival to the Boy Scout knife, but today it has been replaced by a cheap-looking three-blade utensil priced at \$18.95 (compared to the robust Camillus Boy Scout camp knife at \$27.95). Clearly, for the young woman—the Brownie becoming a Girl Scout, the knife has been of little significance, other than as a utilitarian object. Not surprisingly, about 30 percent of the “hits” for the term “Girl Scout knife” direct the searcher to pornographic Web sites. On the Web the Boy Scout has retained his image as the boy-man, while the Girl Scout

has been appropriated as another sex object alongside the *gamine*, cheerleader, and dental hygienist. The Girl Scout knife continues to be little more than a practical tool, while the Boy Scout knife remains a powerful icon of our culture.

On the other hand, the literature issued by the BSA about the knife is careful to deal exclusively with its utility. *Boy’s Life*, the scouting magazine, contains numerous stories and first-person accounts in which the knife figures as a handy, indeed essen-



Boy Scout knife. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

tial scouting tool (Butterworth). Yet nowhere is it even suggested that the knife might be used for some other purpose, let alone be a cultural signifier.

A boy's acquisition of a weapon is a male rite of passage, highly charged with cultural significance; and in the context of the urban-suburban world that constitutes the social base of the Boy Scouts, a boy's acquisition of such a knife became a potent sign of the taking on of manhood. In rural America such weapon bestowing usually occurs very early in a boy's life and typically involves not only the acquisition of a knife, but eventually a firearm, most often a .22 caliber rifle, or at an earlier stage, a BB gun, preferably the Red Ryder. Where urban parents cautiously bestow the BB gun on their boys ("You'll shoot your eye out!"), they treat the Boy Scout knife as a more acceptable weapon, because it is associated with an organization that takes upon itself the duty to teach knife safety and also to promote the moral and spiritual initiation of young boys from age 11 upward (and now even younger) into the Judeo-Christian masculine world. And, of course, the Boy Scout knife's potential as a weapon can be mitigated by its many utilitarian purposes, although I have often wondered how many Scouts actually find those other three blades useful.

Of some of the practical uses of the knife we have many accounts. Soldiers in World War I and II were issued pocket knives made by the Camillus Cutlery Company of New York, which were modeled on the traditional four-bladed Boy Scout knife, but many soldiers also secretly carried with them into battle their revered boyhood talisman, which served duty as a defensive weapon, as a tool for cutting yourself loose from your tangled parachute straps, for example, or for removing some souvenir of war that you decided to carry home with you. Stories abound of rescues and clever uses inspired by trusty Boy Scout knives. As evidence of its utility, in J. D. Salinger's novella *Franny and Zooey*, Mrs. Seymour Glass, the mother, wears a kimono around the house, which has a pocket full of useful tools, one of which is a Boy Scout knife that was a castoff of one of her sons. As testimonial to the object's potency as a symbol of patriotic fervor and manly achievement, what can be more telling than the astronaut John Glenn's carrying his son's Boy Scout knife with him on his first mission in space?

Like William Blake's sick rose, the knife has its potent, evil side as well. The Beat generation figures William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and their friend Lucien Carr were involved in a murderous episode that took place in New York City, in Riverside Park, in 1944. In the late summer, the trio were involved in a knifing, in which Carr stabbed to death one David Kammerer, a college teacher, in order to stave off his homosexual advances. The weapon in question was of course a Boy Scout knife. The crime seems to cry out for semiotic analysis. What could be more signifying in the murder of a gay man than to use a talisman of an organization that has since its inception been devoted to the cultivation of muscular Christianity, to the values of the heterosexual male, that has spent millions of dollars in legal costs to prevent gays from participating in scouting? Carr was not charged because of his claim of self-defense.

In a similar manner, the notorious boxer Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, at the age of twelve, was arrested and incarcerated in the Jamesburg (New Jersey) State Home for Boys for stabbing a man with a Boy Scout knife. Carter claimed the man was a pedophile and was attempting to molest one of his companions. Before his six-year sentence was up, he managed to escape from the home. He joined the Army in 1954 and was never caught until his release two years later, at which time he was returned to prison to serve the remaining ten months of his sentence. Carter figured as the subject of the film *The Hurricane* (1999), starring Denzel Washington. The movie does not stint in its portrayal of this episode, but the knife young Carter uses is a switchblade, not a Boy Scout knife. Was the director, or someone else, loath to sully the image of the Boy Scout knife, to violate its cultural sanctity? And further, although the event is not particularly notable, the appearance of a Boy Scout knife in the hands of a young black surely must signify an unusual crossover in cultural identity, for here we have a young black street urchin using a “white boy’s” weapon. Perhaps on both counts the director, or the powers that be, thought it dangerous to wade into those perilous cultural waters.

In another episode, we have the eerie account of a 14-year-old Scout by the name of Thomas Sullivan, Jr., who strayed from the path of scouting and delved into studying books on the occult and on Satanic practices. At least that is the story the Jefferson County, New Jersey, county prosecutor published to the world.

In 1988, on January 11, young Sullivan, in a murderous rage, stabbed his mother twenty-seven times with his Boy Scout knife, and then tried to kill the rest of his family by setting the family home on fire. When that stratagem failed, he took his knife and committed suicide by cutting his wrists and slashing his throat. Under ordinary circumstances the case would have drawn little notice, but because of the involvement of the Boy Scout knife, it has taken on mythic proportions, particularly because Sullivan was apparently the epitome of the Good Boy Scout, a bright student and outstanding athlete. The event represents an almost perfect inversion of the iconic import of the knife. The son takes upon himself an Orestes-burdened revenge against the mother, with a weapon that was most likely a gift from the father or both parents to him, and all that is good and pure in it is converted into the Satanic, the vengeful, the destructive.

Perhaps most revealing of the hidden sexual potency of this icon is a “Boy Scout” modern variation of the old medieval tale of the loathly hag, which figures prominently in Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Tale.” The story goes that a young man, in an attempt to secure the sexual favors of an attractive young woman, promises her anything she wants if she will have sex with him. In turn, she asks for a solid gold Boy Scout knife. The exchange is effected, and during their postcoital conversation, the lad happens to notice her slip the knife into a chest, which is filled almost to the brim with solid gold Boy Scout knives. When the man asks her why she is collecting the knives, she replies, in these words or similar, “Right now I’m young and desirable, but some day I’ll be an old ugly

crone. And I'll have these knives, and you know a Boy Scout will do anything for a solid gold Boy Scout knife!" This phallic exchange that the future crone delineates goes to the deeper signification of the knife as a penis form become phallus, a body part that comes to signify sexual prowess, in the most perfect male shape, an idealized penis, made of the most perfect element, gold, whose symbolic meanings are unlimited. It is a tool, and it is also "a tool."

One of the most intriguing uses of the iconic significance of the Boy Scout knife in a literary setting occurs in Philip Roth's 1971 political satire *Our Gang*. President Trick E. Dixon, or "Tricky," as he is styled, gives an address to the nation in which he characterizes the Scouts as the unwitting dupes of Curt Flood, the baseball player who challenged the reserve clause and paved the way for a free-agent system, in an attempt to arouse public feelings against the president. In a further stretch of the imagination, Tricky goes on to characterize the Boy Scout knife as a weapon even more dangerous than the Italian surplus military rifle used to assassinate the late President John Charisma (read "Kennedy"). What Tricky must have failed to realize is that the Boy Scout knife is often viewed in the law as a benign instrument, not necessarily a weapon. In fact, some lawyers advise that if you are planning to arm yourself, carry a Boy Scout knife, because many judges treat it as a utilitarian instrument, not as a concealed weapon.

Included in Tricky's diatribe are specific data on the knife, its dimensions, its materials, and the particular diabolical uses to which each of the four blades might be put. On the can-opener blade he thunders,

You will observe that it is hook-shaped at the end, and measures one inch and one-eighth. It is employed during the interrogation of prisoners primarily to gouge out one or both of the eyes. It is also used on the soles of the feet, which are sliced open, like so, with the point of the hook. Last, but not least, it is sometimes inserted into the mouth of a prisoner who will not talk, in order to slit the flesh at the upper part of the larynx, between the vocal cords. That opening up there is called the glottis, and "bottle opener" is derived from "glottal opener," the pet name originally attached to the blade by its most cold-blooded practitioners. (112)

Suffice it to say that the blade is known officially as the "can opener" and that Tricky's fanciful description is so absurd as to beggar the imagination. Roth continues on to show the sharpness of the knife blade by using it to shred a page of the Preamble to the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights (114).

In fact, the absurdity of Tricky's revelation is quite the point of Roth's satirical strategy, which is to take one of America's most precious icons and, by a stentorian exaggeration, attempt to turn it into its "bizarro" opposite. In Tricky's opinion, it is precisely because the Boy Scout knife is such a symbol of honorable American masculinity that it can be seen to be in fact the whited sepulcher of American iconology, and in a twist of its meaning, can be turned into a terrorist



weapon that exposes the machinations of this seemingly patriotic group of youngsters. Roth's ultimate satirical ploy is to expose Tricky for the duplicitous person he is through his ridiculous suspicions, just as the McCarthyites in their paranoid ranting tried to portray loyal Americans as Communist dupes.

I remember "the knife" as an item both to be feared and revered, because of its potency as a weapon and its power as an artifact of my culture. I think my first scouting possession was indeed a Boy Scout knife, and it was given to me at great expense because at the time my dad was out of work, and our family was struggling to survive after WWII in a small apartment in Toledo, Ohio. I was a member of a troop at Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, at the corner of Woodruff and Ashland Avenues. Because I had three younger brothers I was never allowed to open it at home (although I did, many times). As my fortunes turned out, my knife got stolen at Scout camp. Later, during a run of good times, when Dad was working, he replaced it. Then Dad hit another dry spell. I left the troop under a cloud, because my parents couldn't afford the Scout uniform, and I was tired of being badgered by my troop leader for not having one. But I had that knife, and I took it with me when we moved back to the farm and the life I describe in my memoir, *Deaf Hearing Boy*. Out in the wilderness of rural Ohio, however, I was forced to grow up fast, and soon a rifle, and a shotgun, and a sheath knife replaced the pocketknife. What happened to my Boy Scout knife, I do not know. I suspect my grandmother lifted it and added it to her hoard of my abandoned toys she kept as a kind of secret trove, which we discovered after she died (Miller 142). In that hodgepodge of rusty toy farm implements, whistles, and plastic cars, though, the knife was nowhere to be found.

Practical tool, defensive weapon, exemplar of a utilitarian yet aesthetic design, murder weapon—on a non-symbolic level the Boy Scout knife is an artifact of great importance. As an American icon of middle-class male acceptance, of patriotism and all that it signifies, of passage into male adulthood and as a marker of masculinity, of Judeo-Christian male do-goodism, patriotism, as a symbol of sexual coming of age and sexual power, of the potential to signify the essence of aggression and rage in any red-blooded American male, the Boy Scout knife is almost unrivaled in its ability to contain within itself layer upon layer of signification.

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# Capitol

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*Karelisa V. Hartigan*

The Capitol, as most commonly seen, is \$50. As the building imprinted on the fifty dollar bill, it appears to be worth more than the White House, which adorns the back of the twenty, the Treasury building on the ten, or the Lincoln Memorial on the five, but less valuable, somehow, than the ineffable Independence Hall in Philadelphia, which graces the hundred dollar note. But as American cultural capital, this immediately recognizable sign of the American government has accrued immense value, rich in associations and resonance that inspire responses ranging from the unthinkingly emotional to the acutely rational. References to “The Capitol” in Washington, D.C., are ubiquitous in American culture, and they contribute meaning to texts ranging from poems and novels, to plays, to movies, to advertising, to corporate logos, to tourist souvenirs, to political campaign literature, to bumper stickers, and to a host of other ephemera.

The towering dome of the United States Capitol has come to symbolize American values: freedom, whose statue stands atop it, democracy, and the American way of life. The Capitol, and its interior and exterior decoration, reflect Americans’ view of themselves. The U.S. Capitol was designed to promote a visual memory of the political actions that led to America’s creation. By consciously echoing the art and architecture of classical Rome, the Capitol’s shape and art elevated the story of the America’s birth to a level of new American myth.

“Capitol” comes from *Capitolium*, the ancient temple of Jupiter and its hill overlooking the Roman Forum, the first of many terms and ideas borrowed from classical Rome as the new American nation began to develop signs of its authority. As the name Capitol came from ancient Rome, so did the idea for its dome. Once Washington had been laid out as the site of the new nation’s capital, architects and plans were solicited for the buildings of its government. George Washington was interested in the design of the city; but Thomas Jefferson was concerned with the design for the new Capitol, a building to provide accommodation for the nation’s new bicameral legislature and to offer an accessible public space. He favored the plan of William Thornton,

one based on the Pantheon in Rome, and selected its architect, Benjamin H. Latrobe. The Jefferson-Thornton-Latrobe building was completed in 1811.

In August 1814 the British attacked Washington and burned the new Capitol. Rebuilding began the following year, but more than five decades would pass before the Capitol achieved the form seared into the visual memory of virtually all Americans and many throughout the rest of the world. When Latrobe resigned from the rebuilding in 1817, Charles Bulfinch took over his work and retained, more or less, the design of the original Capitol. Although hailed as an architectural wonder, the Capitol's space was soon discovered to be inadequate for its purposes. Redesign of the interior soon began, and with the reconstruction Thomas Walter created a more impressive dome. Completed in 1858, his cast iron creation towers above the Capitol building we know today. Walter transformed the shape of Capitol dome from that of the Pantheon to that of St. Peter's. Thus America's building that perhaps best represents the separation of church and state traces its origin to both pagan and Christian religion.

The dome of the United States Capitol has come to represent American democracy. Steeped in classical tradition, America's founding fathers looked to the ancient world for inspiration. They found in Greek and Roman statuary and architecture the ideas they wished to promote for their new nation. The Pantheon, commissioned by the Roman emperor Hadrian as part of his political statement about Rome's position in the Mediterranean world, re-



The Capitol building. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

mained intact and was widely admired. For political and aesthetic reasons, it was the logical choice upon which to model the new nation's most important government building. America could acquire from the Pantheon an immediate veneer of culture.

Domed structures have a long history as places of significance. The word dome comes from both Greek and Latin, *domus*, house, a covered important space. A dome covers a circular building, and the circle also has meaning: it is inclusive, promoting a sense of equality among those gathered within it. The covering dome is said to represent the sky above, the whole then being an earthly pattern of the cosmos itself. A domed religious building was considered a *Domus Dei*, a House of God; the word survives into modern languages in terms for a cathedral.

Circular structures were first used in the Greco-Roman world as tombs, the last resting place of revered ancestors. The earliest Greeks buried their dead in circular, or *tholos*, tombs; the Romans often emulated the shape for imperial tombs. When the Capitol rotunda was first designed, the popular intent was to bury Washington within it, and a crypt extends beneath its floor. Horatio Greenough's statue of Washington, modeled upon the statue of Zeus at Olympia, one of the Wonders of the Ancient World, was commissioned to stand above the tomb. But the statue sat within the Rotunda only two years before being moved outside, and Washington remains buried at Mt. Vernon.

In the Athenian agora, the central place of Athenian democracy, annually elected state officials met in a round building just below the area's single hill. But the agora tholos did not have a domed roof, so while the circular building can be connected with early democracy, the idea of the dome derives directly from the Romans. It was they who perfected the means to create the vault, and how to admit light into it: an opening, the *oculus* or eye, at the center of the Pantheon's dome, admits light into the interior. When Thomas Walter redesigned the Latrobe/Bulfinch dome, he did not keep the open oculus but did maintain its concept. The dome's cupola is really an enclosed eye, and Constantino Brumidi's encircling paintings emphasize the design.

The Capitol and its dome have come to represent democracy, and the sculpture on the building and the art within it contribute to this representation. The paintings made for the Capitol and the sculptures commissioned for it reflect the values of both politicians and citizens of the period 1815–1865. This art sought to unify emerging beliefs into a single state-supported ideology, to underscore the ideas that formed the states into a union, to create in the Capitol a physical reflection of the new nation's values and principles.

At first, the recently ended Revolutionary War provided the symbols for such concepts as liberty, justice, and unity. John Trumbull's paintings, commissioned to hang within the Capitol's Rotunda, are scenes from the Revolution. Trumbull portrayed British and American generals at their moments of victory or defeat. Military art at that time focused upon the general, not the common soldier; the idea that the true hero lay in the trenches did not become popular until after World War II. Thus the four paintings displayed

in the Capitol show the generals, and not those who died for them. Trumbull portrayed noble men embarking upon noble venture in signing the Declaration of Independence, facing defeat or accepting victory honorably in the battles at Saratoga and Yorktown, and stepping aside with dignity in Washington's resigning rather than becoming king. These vast canvases, representing the new nation's freedom and political originality, are also projections of how America wanted to be viewed. The subjects were native and did not try to achieve greatness through association with classical Rome. Trumbull's paintings—works on canvas, not in stone, it should be noted—were to hang in the classically inspired Rotunda, but they initiated themes that would continue to guide the creation of the Capitol and its decoration: art and architecture blended old themes with new.

The Rotunda frieze, designed by Constantino Brumidi and painted by three artists, consists of nineteen separate scenes, each representing a moment in American history. Brumidi lived to paint the first eight of a planned sixteen scenes, from "America and History" to "William Penn and the Indians." Filippo Costaggini took up the work and completed the designs for the remaining eight, a series ending with the "Discovery of Gold in California." These paintings did not fill the space, however, and a gap of over thirty feet remained for nearly fifty years. Finally in 1951 Allyn Cox was commissioned to paint three more panels, tracing American history from the Civil War to the invention of the airplane. In the scenes' final form, from the landing of Columbus to the flight at Kitty Hawk, in 300 feet of fresco painted to resemble sculpture, the main emphasis is on the Revolutionary War and the conquest of the Indians, events which dominated American ideas at the time of the original designs. Only in the last scene do we see a reference to the nation's advances in technology. We must turn to the sculpture of the Capitol for representation of America's contributions to a better life.

When the legislative wings were built, appropriate pediment sculpture was commissioned. Here again classical style blends with American themes and ideology. Paul Wayland Bartlett's *The Apotheosis of Democracy* on the House wing reflects directly the sculpture on the temple of Zeus at Olympia and that on the Madeleine in Paris. While pediment shape demands a central figure surrounded by others who must gradually bend to the raked corners, here subject matter clearly replicates ancient themes. The Zeus temple at Olympia celebrates Apollo, deity of civilization, triumphant over the barbarous centaurs. The Madeleine pediment shows Christ giving pardon at the Last Judgment. Bartlett's *Apotheosis* personifies American democracy as a goddess of peace. She is attired as the Roman Minerva, but has laid aside her implements of war. The olive tree of Athena stands behind her, now the olive of peace. Beneath her outstretched hand the child genius, free to develop, cradles the torch of immortality. Flanking this democracy/peace personification are figures representing sources of American wealth: iron and textile industries fill the left frame; agriculture and animal husbandry stand on the right.

The pediment sculpture of the Senate wing portrays *Progress of Civilization*. Thomas Crawford's work presents a program similar to Bartlett's. America, again as a woman, stands at the center, with an eagle beside her, the sun behind. The early days of American civilization are represented on the right by a Native American chief, woman, child, and a grave. The diversity of progress fills the left, including a soldier, merchant, and mechanic. No tomb appears with the industrious citizens gathered to represent American progress: white American civilization triumphs over that of the Native American.

A simple design adorns the pediment of the Capitol's east entrance. Luigi Persico's *Genius of America* comprises but three figures: America herself, in the center, points to Justice with her scales on her right. Flanking America on her left are an eagle and the figure of Hope. Three inscriptions augment the trilogy: "USA" on America's shield, "July 4, 1776" on her altar, and "Constitution, 17 September 1787" marked on Justice's scroll. Hope lacks a date: she looks to the future.

American political art created for the Capitol expresses a continual dichotomy between the classical tradition and a desire to be new. The tension between antiquity and modernity is often not truly resolved but merely juxtaposed, at times becoming an uneasy replica of the Etruscan chimera: a blending of many elements into something new and strange. Brumidi's frescoes for the Rotunda ceiling, those encircling the dome's eye, might be called chimerical.

*The Apotheosis of George Washington* unites the deities of ancient Rome with the founders of the United States. The title of the frieze suggests a deification of a mortal, an idea borrowed from imperial Rome, where each emperor was thought to become a god after his death—some believed in their divinity while on earth. Washington, flanked by Liberty and Victory, is portrayed as he was in Greenough's statue: he sits enthroned like the Zeus at Olympia, but here wears attire of his own period. Each scene has its guiding classical deity. Minerva protects "Arts and Sciences" as Franklin, Morse, and Fulton look up at her. In "Agriculture," Ceres with a cornucopia sits upon a McCormick Reaper. Vulcan takes the central position in "Mechanics," Mercury guides "Commerce," while Neptune overlooks the "Marine" scene. Brumidi's blatant association of the classical world with the new nation was hailed by all as a triumphant illustration of American values.

Atop the Capitol's dome stands the Statue of Freedom. Also the work of Thomas Crawford, this bronze statue blends classical with Native American images. Freedom, a woman, attired in Roman garb, holds or wears a variety of symbolic items. The laurel victory wreath in her left hand recalls Apollo. As Minerva held a shield, so Freedom grips one adorned with thirteen stripes. Her Roman helmet, also borrowed from Minerva, features a crest of eagle feathers, a reference to the Native American headdress.

The Capitol and its bicameral wings signify the ideals the American nation wished to claim as its own. The classical influences in design and sculpture offered instant culture to the new nation; the figures represented every man

and woman who brought European civilization to the land. In form and art the Capitol stands as a central icon for the United States.

The Capitol's dome has been replicated across the country: a majority of state capitols echo its form. While each reflects regional interests, almost all include a dome. Most state capitol buildings had a dome in their original design, but often had to wait until finances permitted construction; Oklahoma's capitol rotunda had to wait until 2001 for its grand dome.

The few capitols without the iconic dome emulate the rotunda in shape or concept. Santa Fe, New Mexico, boasts a magnificent round structure resembling a Roman amphitheater with walls of native adobe. Hawaii's capitol, reflective of the island's geography and its history, is a square open to the elements at the center, an echo of the Pantheon's oculus or a Roman atrium. The skyscraper inspired only three capitol buildings. Nebraska, North Dakota, and in recent years, Louisiana, built their government buildings high into the sky. Nebraska was the first to abandon the familiar dome, although its architect capped the skyscraper with a domed roof. Louisiana recently replaced its government castle with the nation's highest capitol tower, but, again, topped with a dome. Only North Dakota rejected the dome entirely. Its vertical mass towers above Bismark as a symbol of its efficient government. Virginia's Capitol also lacks a dome, but is a replica of the Maison Carrée, the Roman temple of Augustus and Livia in Nimes.

Americans love to take well-known, easily recognizable images and reproduce them on souvenirs or use them in advertisements. The Capitol's dome adorns everything from candles to tote bags. One can buy replicas of the building or just its dome at tourist shops in Washington or on the Web. Numerous products, from crackers to comedy groups, from biscuits to wall paper, have used the towering dome as their logo. Although there are other monuments on the Washington Mall, it is the Capitol that most frequently appears to identify the place in films or TV shows set in the city and newscasts from it. The Washington Monument, a replica of an ancient obelisk, stands taller, but the Capitol has become the logo of the city, and hence the nation.

The buildings of the Washington Mall collectively commemorate both America's tripartite government structure and many, but not all, of its wars. It is also the place where democracy is celebrated and practiced. The iconography of the Mall reflects American values; its monuments remind, and instruct, both visitors and workers about these values. The Capitol, anchoring the east end of the Mall, leads the way in proclaiming America's history and the nature of its people: from its dome and its sculpture the nation's self-image is asserted. From ground level one cannot read the inscription on Freedom's base atop the Capitol, *e pluribus unum*, but every American knows the Latin phrase symbolizes the nation's unity. The towering circle of the Capitol dome expresses that idea in its form; it is the nation's most perfect *domus*, its most splendid house.

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# Johnny Carson

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*David Lavery*

By defying the TV reductionism that renders all things knowable and ultimately trivial, Carson made himself into one of the medium's only characters worth watching, night after night...[W]e knew Johnny Carson like we knew ourselves. Which is to say we hardly knew him at all.

Steven D. Stark, *Glued to the Set*

In the early 1990s, in a series of *Saturday Night Live* skits, Dana Carvey and Phil Hartman parodied their fellow NBC late night program, the long-running *Tonight Show* (1954–). As Johnny Carson, the show's host from 1963 to 1993, Carvey reduced the talk show legend to a series of familiar ticks and the constantly repeated, applicable to everything, exclamation “That’s wild stuff”; mimicking sidekick-announcer Ed McMahon, Hartman was all boisterous laughs and endlessly repeated “Heigh-o’s.” For critic Ken Tucker, the parodies, “at once mean and respectfully accurate,” spelled cultural doom for the King of Late Night: “Carvey was pointing out the way Carson had become increasingly out of it, seemingly unaware of the pop culture around him” (“Still Crazy After All These Years”).

In a May 1991 installment of the recurring sketch, Carvey answered Ed’s “Here’s Johnny” summons and emerged from behind the curtain not in his usual dapper sport coat and slacks, not with short, graying hair, not to perform his usual golf-swing-punctuated monologue and announce “We’ll be right back,” but as “Carsenio,” a bleached-blond, flat-topped, Caucasian-version of African-American comedian Arsenio Hall, the late night syndicated host whose fist-pumping, hipper humor and more contemporary guests had begun to woo away the younger end of Carson’s demographic.

The sight of the Carvey version of the King of Late Night stooping to emulate his distant rival could only provoke sadness, not laughter, in the longtime *Tonight Show* watcher. The spectacle of Carson trying to be the “terminally charmless” Jay Leno, his successor as *Tonight Show* host (Shales), or Carson-as-Letterman, the loser in the “network battle for the night” that erupted after Johnny’s retirement (Carter), would be just as distressing. The

Johnny Carson who had become an American icon, “NBC’s answer to foreplay” (Tynan 315), “history’s most effective contraceptive” (“Johnny Carson”), and “the greeter and spokesman for the United States” (Letterman, quoted by Zehme), while remaining an essentially private, reclusive individual—“the Garbo of Comedy, the Salinger of Television” (Zehme)—that Carson never really changed. “The idea that one man, basically unscripted, could last on TV for 30 years,” a former NBC executive would maintain, “it’s a freak of television” (quoted in Zoglin).

When Shakespeare left the theater for good, he put the London stage behind him completely and remained content to be a retired impresario back home in Stratford; when Carson, the most watched performer in the history of entertainment, his show the biggest money-maker the medium had ever known, left television after his 4,530th show, he returned home to Malibu pretty much never to be seen again. “Like sun and moon and oxygen,” Bill Zehme, contemplating his disappearance, would write movingly in 2002, “he was always there, reliable and dependable, for thirty years. Then he wasn’t anymore. And he didn’t just simply leave: he vanished completely; he evaporated into cathode snow; he took the powder of all powders.” In January 2005 the news broke that Carson, who had spent almost his entire career on NBC, was occasionally providing jokes for David Letterman’s *Late Show* monologue on rival CBS. Soon after, on January 23, 2005, came the shocking news that Johnny Carson was dead from emphysema, having passed away while these pages were being written. Judging by some of the hagiographies that appeared in the media after his death, critic David Edelstein would justifiably complain, “You’d think that Carson was some sort of egoless saint of television.”

More than just a celebrity (defined by Boorstin as someone merely “known for his well-knownness” [57]), the “Greatest Generation” Carson (Shales) once represented something distinctly American. “More people look at Johnny,” an NBC press agent once bragged about its prize commodity, “than look at the moon” (“Johnny”). But what did they see? As television scholar Jimmie Reeves once observed, Carson was never a simple star in the firmament: “It’s [Carson’s] elusivity that keeps him fresh. . . . We can put ourselves into him. He’s familiar enough to be recognizable, yet unique enough to be interesting. There’s more to Johnny Carson than meets the eye” (quoted in Stark 184).

In private, Johnny Carson was, by all reports, a loner, uncomfortable in social situations, seemingly ill-suited to the life of celebrity. The screenwriter George Axelrod once observed that “Socially, [Carson] doesn’t exist. The reason is that there are no television cameras in living rooms. If human beings had little red lights in the middle of their foreheads, Carson would be the greatest conversationalist on earth” (quoted in Tynan 312). (The camera, Tynan quipped, “act[ed] on him like an addictive and galvanic drug” [311].)

Critics like Richard Poirier have documented the pronounced tendency of key figures in American literature, culture, and politics to create imaginary public personas often at odds with their private selves. Though Carson’s long-time producer Fred de Cordova once insisted that while “George Burns and



Johnny Carson, 1965. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Jack Benny assumed a façade,” his star was himself, “not a character named Johnny Carson” (quoted by Stark 185); was it not in fact his “negative capability” that enabled him to become not only Carnac the Magnificent and Aunt Blabby, Art Fern and Floyd R. Turbo, but also his greatest creation: Carson the congenial conversationalist?

A year after Carsenio made his *Saturday Night Live* appearance, Carson ended his run just short of three decades behind the desk. His final two shows, cultural spectacles comparable to the series finales of *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Seinfeld*, and *Friends*, drew huge audiences (50 million watched the last one, a guestless retrospective clip show, on May 21, 1992), but it was the penultimate one, in which Bette Midler crooned “One More for My Baby (and

One More for the Road)” to an obviously moved Carson, that everyone remembers, producing as it did what David Bianculli called “a perfect moment of television, a guaranteed tearjerker, and a fitting finale (even if it was a day early) to one of the most durable and impressive careers in show business” (342). Television scholar David Marc would see in Carson’s retirement the end of an era: “For 30 years, prime time was bracketed by two men: Walter Cronkite, who gave the news in his daily report, and Johnny Carson, who reviewed the news in his daily monologue. . . . Johnny, like Walter, is part of the lost world of three-channel culture” (quoted in Tucker, “Johnny’s Last Laugh”).

Though he came to be a Hollywood gatekeeper with the power to make or break careers—scores of comics, from Roseanne Barr to Jerry Seinfeld credited him with their first big break—Carson never shed his image as a Midwestern boy (born in Iowa, he grew up in Nebraska). Watch *Johnny Goes Home* on *The Ultimate Collection* DVDs, narrated by and starring Carson as he wanders about Norfolk, Nebraska, even sitting down for a refresher penmanship lesson by his then-elderly grade-school teacher, and it becomes apparent that Johnny had not succeeded, nor perhaps even attempted, to take the farm out of the boy. If fellow Nebraskan talk show host Dick Cavett would discern in his one-time boss and later rival “that wonderful naughty-fraternity-boy quality . . . he never outgrows” (quoted in Zoglin), Carson’s impish taste for the risqué, his adeptness at double-entendre, were equally apparent to any alert viewer.

Carson's distinct style emerges in Edelstein's discerning obituary of him:

When Carson succeeded Steve Allen and Jack Paar as host of . . . the *Tonight Show*, the shift in tone was radical. Although Allen was underappreciated as a satirist, he had a fundamentally earnest presence, and Paar was, if anything, overeager (to the point of bathos). But Carson was cutting: there was always a chill behind the twinkle. If he cultivated the look of a boyish Midwesterner . . . , he could turn into a bad boy (or a smutty-minded boy) in an instant.

Although no one seems able to confirm (and Carson himself denied it) that he once responded to a Persian-cat-toting Zsa Zsa Gabor's invitation "to pet my pussy?" with "Sure, if you move that damn cat out of the way!" (Cox 77), he very definitely did tell the voluptuous Dolly Parton that he would "give about a year's pay to take a peek under there" (Cox 84). Who can forget his wide-eyed response, captured in close-up, when the late Madeline Kahn responded to his inquiry about her phobias with "I do not like balls coming toward me." Carson's use of "the camera as a silent conspirator," Kenneth Tynan once observed, was his "most original contribution to TV technique." But it was not his only one.

Writing in *USA Today*, Wes Gehring would offer an astute analysis of Carson's comic style:

[B]ecause Carson was such a student of laughter, he often existed as a pluralist comedian, gifting audiences periodically with such signature expressions as Oliver Hardy's embarrassed tie-fiddling look, Stan Laurel's teary elongated face, Benny's direct address (staring at the camera) deadpan, and a Groucho Marx eyebrow twitch after a mildly suggestive double entendre. What made these and other assorted funny footnotes all Carson was the ease with which he segued through such shtick. It was a tour de silly each night of the week. (68)

He was a superb physical comedian, as good at pratfalls as a Chevy Chase, willing to get down on all fours, pretending to be a dog gobbling the Alpo a real dog had rejected, saving Ed McMahon's live ad. Wonderfully uneasy with the parade of animals the San Diego Zoo brought to the show, he could secure uproarious laughter from a face-off with an orangutan, a marmoset urinating on his head, a boa constrictor's tail surprisingly emerging between his legs.

Virtually every recognizable figure from entertainment and politics, both fellow icons and lesser lights, from Martin Luther King, Jr., to Dean Martin, Richard Nixon to Bob Hope, Shelley Winters to Carl Sagan, Bill Clinton to Tiny Tim, sat down beside him. "It is still the most exciting moment in show business to walk out from that curtain and sit in this chair," Tom Hanks has confessed (Zoglin). He was absolutely wonderful with children and the elderly; and with ordinary Americans (deemed "civilians" by the show's staff), he could be the perfect host, hardly ever condescending, though often playful

(that time, for example, when he pretended to eat one of the prized potato chips in which a woman had found a variety of animal and human faces).

With *Dragnet*'s Jack Webb, he could do tongue-twisting verbal humor about copper clappers and kleptomaniacs, or, portraying President Reagan, revisit Abbott and Costello's "Who's On First" routine with Hu, Watt, and Yasser Arafat replacing Who, What, and friends. The *Ultimate Collection* Carson DVDs are full of such moments of clever, imaginative, often literate comedy. In one particularly memorable skit, Carson, dressed in Renaissance garb, plays Hamlet, reciting, or so it seems, the famous "To be or not to be" and "Alas, Poor Yorick" soliloquies; but Shakespeare's powerful words turn out to be mere product placement for a shameless series of commercials: "sleep no more" inspires a plug for Sominex; "The heartache, and the thousand natural *shocks* / That flesh is heir to" (emphasis added) leads to an ad for Aamco; "ay, there's the rub," turns out to be, of course, a set-up for promotion of Mentholatum Deep Heat Rub. Yorick, in turn, is warned not to leave Denmark without his American Express Card.

But it was, of course, Carson's monologues that were his comic signature. Whether his one-liners produced laughs or bombed (he was a master at transforming even his failures into hilarity), his opening litany of jokes, almost certain to include gags about Ed's drinking, bandleader Doc Severinsen's wardrobe (or substitute Tommy Newsom's drabness), and his own former wives, was often the highlight of the show and sometimes the only part of the show for which sleepy Americans could stay conscious. Carson "dealt with topical events as reliably as Walter Cronkite," Bianculli has observed, "and the impact of his monologue made Carson the TV equivalent of Will Rogers: one joke could make all the difference in indicating whether someone (or something) was up or down, in or out" (341). It should not surprise us that Carson's monologue came to possess such influence, for, as Stark notes, "like an anchorman (or a president), Carson was one of the few performers whom TV etiquette allowed to address the camera directly—the culture's ultimate sign of respect and authority" (183).

In perhaps the most discerning piece ever written on Carson, Kenneth Tynan articulates the dilemma that faced Carson both the performer and the icon:

Singers, actors, and dancers all have multiple choices: they can exercise their talents in the theatre, on TV, or in the movies. But a talk-show host can only become a more successful talk-show host. There is no place in the other media for the gifts that distinguish him—most specifically, for the gift of re-inventing himself, night after night, without rehearsal or repetition. Carson, in other words, is a grand master of the one show-business art that leads nowhere. He has painted himself not into a corner but onto the top of a mountain. (353–54)

If television had a Mount Rushmore, Johnny would be on it.

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# Johnny Cash

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## *Don Cusic*

During his lifetime, Johnny Cash did just about everything he could to destroy his career. He became wasted on drugs, unreliable, surly, and diffident. And yet, when he died in September 2003, he was widely considered one of the most important—if not *the* most important—artist in the history of country music.

Johnny Cash came to symbolize country music, or at least country as those both inside and outside the world of country music see the genre. He grew up poor and rural—an essential element in creating a country music icon. He was deeply religious, fell into an addiction to drugs, then was redeemed by a “good woman,” and along the way recorded hit songs and concept albums. In some of his hit songs and concept albums he aligned himself with the cowboy and American West—which has long been part of the image of country music. Cash starred in his own network TV show, appeared in several movies, sang on some soundtracks, and in his later years became “cool” to young people by being produced by a rap and alternative record producer.

Johnny Cash was a man who conveyed deep thoughts in a deep voice; he wrote anthems for youth when country music and the youth culture were at odds. He was a patriot and veteran who dared question the Vietnam War, and he spoke up for the downtrodden—Native Americans and prisoners—during the 1960s. It’s a classic rags to riches tale, the story of somebody growing up a poor nobody and dying an important figure in country music and popular culture. Is it any wonder that Johnny Cash is not just a person but an icon in country music?

J. R. Cash (he did not become “John” until he entered the military, and became “Johnny” when Sam Phillips released his first record on Sun) was born during the Great Depression (February 26, 1932) and grew up in the northeast corner of Arkansas where his parents, Ray and Carrie Cash, were tenant farmers. Every evening young J. R. Cash sat at the kitchen and listened to the radio, but that radio wasn’t just music for idle time; it gave him inspiration and relief from the daily grind of farming, a dream and vision he would pursue.

After graduating from high school in 1950, Cash made the trek that so many southern boys made—to the car manufacturing plants in Michigan—and obtained a job at the Fisher Body factory in Pontiac. He worked there for two weeks, then went back home and enlisted in the Air Force. Cash was sent to Landsberg, Germany, where he was a radio operator. But, more importantly, there Johnny Cash bought a guitar, learned how to play it, and made his first steps towards being a performer. In the summer of 1954, Cash was discharged from the Air Force; he returned to Arkansas and married a young lady he had met during basic training in Texas.

During the first twenty-two years of Johnny Cash's life, he was shaped by several factors. First, his rural upbringing in Arkansas on a cotton farm had given him the kind of background that served as a common thread for country boys in the Depression. The radio brought him country music and allowed him to hear songs and singers he wouldn't have been able to hear before, and so shaped his musical tastes. His family was very religious and the early exposure to church gave him a deep, abiding faith that was always a part of him. And the personal tragedy of his brother's death left a huge emotional gap in his life.

Jack Cash, two years older than John, was fourteen when he was pulled into a table saw while cutting fence posts at a sawmill. Cash said that the memory of his brother was always with him during his entire life.

Living in Memphis, Cash met Luther Perkins and Marshall Grant, two mechanics who worked at a Chevrolet dealership. The three young men, all acoustic guitar players, began practicing together. One night Cash suggested Perkins and Grant each play different instruments; Perkins began to play lead guitar and Grant picked up the bass. Thus, Cash's original back-up group the Tennessee Two was born.

John Cash was aware of Sun Records in Memphis; by this time Elvis's first recordings had been released and there were articles in the paper about the label. Cash began to stop by Sun Records in hopes of meeting Sam Phillips. After a number of times when Phillips wasn't in or was in a meeting or otherwise occupied, Cash finally saw him, introduced himself, and asked for an audition. Phillips invited him in and Cash sang a number of songs for Phillips. Probably during this meeting, in late 1954, Phillips recorded two songs with just Cash and his guitar. Later, Cash came back with Luther Perkins and Marshall Grant and they auditioned. At this point the group viewed itself as a gospel group and Cash wanted to do gospel material, but Phillips was reluctant to record gospel because Sun couldn't sell it; the future for the record company was in what became known as rockabilly. Cash quickly realized this, and during this audition, probably in early 1955, Sam Phillips recorded them doing several songs, including "Folsom Prison Blues" and "Hey Porter." In February 1955, Cash, Grant and Perkins went into the studio and recorded "Wide Open Road," "Cry, Cry, Cry" (which he had written since the last session), and "Hey Porter"; the last two would be his first single release from Sun with "Cry, Cry, Cry" entering the *Billboard* country chart.



Cash spent that summer performing wherever he could in and around Memphis; he played in movie theaters during intermissions, in school auditoriums, and in the Overton Park shell in Memphis on a show with Elvis Presley. A small taste of “road fever” was all it took for Cash to want to perform live all over the country.

A second single, “Folsom Prison Blues” (backed with “So Doggone Lonesome”), was released in December 1955 and both songs entered the *Billboard* charts. The third single for Johnny Cash on Sun Records would be the one that would catapult him to stardom; “I Walk the Line” was recorded on April 2, 1956, and released in May; it entered the *Billboard* charts the following month, moved to number one and stayed on the charts for forty-three weeks, selling well over a million singles. This song hit during the same period when Elvis was achieving superstardom; Presley would sell over 10 million records in 1956, be seen on national television, appear in his first movie, and his music would become the source of sermons by preachers and admonitions by teachers and parents.

The success of Elvis was, in part, responsible for the success of Johnny Cash. Elvis was the first Sun artist to hit big and his success created interest in the small label; so when Sam Phillips sold Elvis’ contract to RCA in the fall of 1955 for \$40,000, part of that money went into promoting Johnny Cash, whose second single was released at the end of that year.

Musically, Cash was influenced by Elvis’ guitar playing, the full, strong rhythm, and used it himself. Elvis would move over into pop and then “rock and roll,” the category created after the success of artists like the Sun group. Cash would remain in country music, although some of his records crossed over into the pop charts. The reasons are fairly simple: Elvis’s talent lent itself to rock and roll; Cash’s did not. Cash had a strong, unique voice but it is rooted in country and he could never be a screamer or shouter. The sound of Cash and the Tennessee Two was unique and different, but limited. As Marshall Grant observed, “We didn’t work to get that boom-chicka-boom sound. That’s all we could play.”

After “I Walk the Line,” Cash had a series of hit records for Sun. But in July 1958 Cash made his last recording session for Sun, then began recording for the major label Columbia Records. The second single released by Columbia was the western story-song, “Don’t Take Your Guns to Town,” which reached number one on the charts. You cannot become a country music icon without hit songs on the radio. An artist has to reach the masses and be accepted as a “star” before a legend can take root and grow.

Cash’s drug addiction during the 1957–1967 period has been written about in detail. He began taking amphetamines in 1957 as a way of coping with the demands of the long nights traveling on the road; tranquilizers became necessary in order to get some rest. In 1967 Cash isolated himself in his home and, with the help of June Carter, went through the withdrawal process to overcome his addiction.

Cash married June Carter in March 1968; the following year they had a son, John Carter Cash. And the career of Johnny Cash shifted into overdrive with a string of million selling albums, beginning with his *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison* release, his network TV show on ABC, and then his movie *Gospel Road*, filmed in Israel. To some it seemed that overnight Johnny Cash had arrived, but they were misled.

During the ten-year period that was Cash's personal night of the soul, he also put together one of the best traveling groups in country music, which included Carl Perkins, the Carter Family, and the Statler Brothers. He also recorded a number of important albums and had successful singles during this period, so it was an incredibly productive time for him. And, despite his bouts with drugs, he also managed to write some important and memorable songs.

There were two musical revolutions in the 1950s; the rock revolution and the folk revolution. The two musical revolutions tugged at country music from two different directions; rock pulled artists and sales away from country, while folk music eventually brought some sales and credibility to country. Interestingly, as many of Cash's contemporaries moved toward rock, Cash moved towards the folk roots of country. He had an interest in folk music, performed and recorded a number of folk ballads, and audiences increasingly saw him as a folk performer. Because folk music was viewed as more "intellectual," Cash got respect and attention from the college audience, which was normally not receptive to country.

The folk movement was interested in issues; Cash became known for his focus on Indians and prisoners initially during this period, and this gave credibility to his music and set him apart from other country singers. In March 1959 Cash recorded a number of songs, including "I Got Stripes," "Five Feet High and Rising," and "Old Apache Squaw." These songs came out on an album, *Songs of Our Soil*, which was his first "concept" album.

Cash developed the idea of a "concept" album further when he recorded *Ride This Train*, early in 1960. The folk movement was a lyric-dominated music interested in issues and topics more deeply than a hit song. In the summer of 1962 Cash recorded another concept album, *Blood, Sweat, Toil*



Johnny Cash, 1970. Courtesy of Photofest.

*and Tears*. Cash did not write any of these songs except “Legend of John Henry’s Hammer,” where he took the basic folk song of “John Henry” and turned it into a dramatic eight-minute masterpiece.

In 1963 Johnny Cash began a string of top single hits for Columbia, beginning with “Ring of Fire,” written by June Carter and Merle Kilgore, and “The Matador,” written by Cash and June Carter, both that year; “Understand Your Man,” “The Ballad of Ira Hayes” and “Bad News” in 1964; “Orange Blossom Special,” “The Sons of Katie Elder” (the title track from the movie of the same name), and “Happy To Be With You” in 1965; and “The One On the Right Is On the Left” in 1966. His album *Ring of Fire* was a huge success, and it contained songs such as the TV theme song “The Rebel—Johnny Yuma” and the title track (neither of which he wrote) in addition to the self-penned “I’d Still Be There” (written with Johnny Horton), “What Do I Care,” “I Still Miss Someone,” “Forty Shades of Green,” “The Big Battle” and “Tennessee Flat-top Box.” This was his strongest album so far and Cash was a commercial as well as critical success; this album was Cash’s first to go “gold” (sales of half a million units).

The widespread interest in cowboys may have spurred Cash’s interest in Indians. He was part Cherokee, so there was a natural interest; but the 1950s and 1960s also saw Indians and the Old West reexamined through a number of movies. Johnny Cash had written “Old Apache Squaw” and it was released on the album *Songs of Our Soil*. But Cash’s interest in Indians was spurred further when he heard Indian songwriter Peter LaFarge performing in 1963 in Greenwich Village at the Gaslight Club. On this same evening, Cash first met Bob Dylan.

“The Ballad of Ira Hayes” tells the story of an Arizona Pima Indian who was one of those who raised the flag at Iwo Jima, immortalized in a photograph and a monument at Arlington National Cemetery. But when Hayes returned home he faced discrimination, humiliation, and poverty. An alcoholic, Hayes died a tragic death, drowned in a ditch. Cash recorded “The Ballad of Ira Hayes,” a protest song in the era of protests. After this single, Cash recorded the album that would become *Bitter Tears*.

Cash’s reasons for recording a concept album about Indians—indeed, it was an angry album as much about civil rights and protest as about Indians per se—were artistic as well as commercial.

Johnny Cash’s interest in the West and cowboys, which he originally expressed in songs like “Give My Love to Rose” and “Don’t Take Your Guns to Town” led to a double album of cowboy songs, *Johnny Cash Sings the Ballads of the True West* that was recorded in March 1965. This album includes a number of old cowboy classics, such as “The Streets of Laredo,” “I Ride an Old Paint,” “Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie,” and “Green Grow the Lilacs” as well as some original songs. Cash adds some narration on the album in addition to the songs, further showing the diversity of the West.

After Columbia released the double album of *True West* they edited the album down to a single album entitled *Mean As Hell* and released that as

well. And so 1965 ended with Johnny Cash's image firmly established as a folk singer of the mythical West.

Many people saw Johnny Cash as larger than life; he probably saw himself the same way. In his songs, albums, and life he always projected a sense of vision, a sense of "calling" and a higher purpose to his life and work. He had never been just another artist looking for the next hit or a singer just trying to get to the next gig. If Johnny Cash achieved the status of a great man it was because he aspired to become a great man. He set high standards for himself—in his life and his work—and worked hard to fulfill them. Although he may have fallen short of greatness at times in his life and work, his vision was always there and he was able to continue his journey having learned his lessons. Few people carry the ambition and resolve to become a great man in their lives; Johnny Cash was one of them.

On June 7, 1969, *The Johnny Cash Show* became a weekly TV show on ABC-TV. The hour-long show was originally a summer series, broadcast on Saturday nights. In the fall of 1969 the show was moved to Wednesday evenings, where it continued its run until May 1971. This popular television program brought Johnny Cash into American homes each week and multiplied his fame. Again, he used this platform to do more than entertain; he had a "Ride This Train" segment which combined history and geography, he featured gospel music, and he featured performers such as Bob Dylan and Kris Kristofferson. With this TV show, Johnny Cash went from being a superstar in country music to an American icon and a figure in country music of almost mythic proportions.

In addition to his TV show Cash made other notable appearances; in 1969 he toured Vietnam, singing for the troops, and in 1970 he performed at the White House for President Richard Nixon. It was a busy time for Cash, who spent these two years in heavy public demand. This high-profile time yielded great rewards in terms of personal bookings and also fueled his creative juices. Cash always thrived on activity and seemed to be at his most creative when he was busiest and shouldering major responsibilities.

In March 1970 Cash recorded "What Is Truth," which connected him to the youth of the nation and once again made him a spokesman for the outcast—in this case, the long-haired youth of the day who represented a cultural gap and great division between the generations. But although this was a hit single, it would not be released on an album.

The fame from the TV show seemed to increase Cash's self-confidence and awareness of himself. In February 1971 he recorded "Man in Black" which stated, in essence, that he was on the side of the downtrodden. In this song he states he wears black for the poor, hopeless, prisoners, and those who have never heard the message of Jesus, concluding that he'd love to wear bright colors but "I'll try to carry off a little darkness on my back," and so he'll be a man who wears black.

After his TV show ended in March 1971, Cash embarked on a project that had deep significance for him, the movie *Gospel Road*, which he financed

himself. *Gospel Road* consumed a great deal of Cash's time and energy and strengthened his marriage and working relationship with June Carter.

Johnny Cash wrote all of the songs on his album *Ragged Old Flag*, which came out in 1974. The album came at a time when America was getting out of Vietnam, only to become embroiled in the Watergate scandal of President Richard Nixon. So when Johnny Cash recorded "Ragged Old Flag," he confronted that sense of shame and countered with an unabashedly patriotic song.

Creatively, the 1980s were a long dry spell for Johnny Cash. Although he collected honors and awards and was seen as a "senior spokesman" for country music, he didn't seem to have a spot in the contemporary country music world. The excitement of new audiences and big sales left some of the old timers in the dust; for someone like Johnny Cash it was a frustrating, disappointing period.

Then, in 1994 he released an album *Cash: American Recordings* on the new American Recordings label produced by alternative producer Rick Rubin. The album was done with just Cash and his guitar and summed up Cash's career pretty well. There were folk songs ("Tennessee Stud" and "Delia's Gone"), a humorous song ("The Man Who Couldn't Cry"), a cowboy song ("Oh Bury Me Not"), a gospel song ("Why Me, Lord"), songs with a haunting personal vision ("The Beast In Me" and "Bird on a Wire"), and four songs he wrote. The self-penned songs tell stories and encompass Cash's spiritual vision. There was nothing new on this album except the audience; young people suddenly discovered Johnny Cash and found him both profound and "cool." It was a surprising rebirth for a man whose audiences and fans now included people younger than some of his grandchildren.

The *American Recordings* album validated Cash's status and stature as an American icon and gained him a new, young audience. After the first album, three others followed.

In May 2003, June Carter Cash went into the hospital for heart surgery and fell into a coma; she died on May 15. During the four months between her death and his, Cash recorded about fifty songs. In September he was set to fly to Los Angeles to record some more songs with Rick Rubin, but failing health forced him to enter the hospital, where he died on September 12.

It took a long hard life to write the songs that Johnny Cash wrote, and a good, sweet life to sing them. Johnny Cash lived both. The songs he wrote reflect both the hardness and the sweetness of his life, the sinner and the saint, the success and the failures, the strengths and weaknesses, all wrapped up in the greatness that called itself Johnny Cash.

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# Cell Phone

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*John P. Ferré*

At the start of the twentieth century, when Guglielmo Marconi was refining his wireless telegraph for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication, the English engineer William Ayrton prophesied an entirely different use of the new medium. He envisioned private conversations conveyed electronically across the world:

If a person wanted to call a friend he knew not where, he would call in a loud, electro-magnetic voice, heard by him who had the electro-magnetic ear, silent to him who had it not. “Where are you?” he would say. A small reply would come, “I am at the bottom of a coal mine, or crossing the Andes, or in the middle of the Pacific.” Let them think of what that meant, of the calling which went on every day from room to room of a house, and then think of that calling extending from pole to pole; not a noisy babble, but a call audible to him who wanted to hear and absolutely silent to him who did not. (quoted in Czitrom 67)

The mobile telephones Ayrton foresaw were reliable, secure, and useful, very much like the cell phones we have today.

Cell phones became commercially viable in 1983 when Motorola introduced the DynaTAC, but mobility had long before been a goal for wireless communications. Although radio had always been mobile at sea, the first mobile land use for radio began in 1921, when the Detroit Police Department instituted a one-way radio messaging service. Twenty years later, Motorola installed the first two-way radio in a police cruiser. The development of the cell phone finally liberated Americans from phones tethered to walls at work and home. The desire for cell phones was so great that twenty years after Motorola introduced them to American consumers, 60 percent of Americans had one.

But however quickly Americans incorporated cell phones into their lives, they did so with mixed emotions. The cell phone quickly came to represent disparate values. Advocates recognized in the cell phone safety and connectedness; detractors, by contrast, saw physical dangers and the erosion of considerateness. Whether the cell phone represented social advancement or

nuisance depended upon who was asked. An icon of mobility, the cell phone was also a Rorschach Test for attitudes toward social life at the turn of the twenty-first century.

**ADVOCATES**

Safety is the primary reason that people buy cell phones. People want instantaneous communication in an emergency both for themselves and their families. Indeed, having peace of mind and keeping track of their children motivates many parents to give cell phones to their children. More than half of children from 11 to 17 years old have a cell phone, and nearly half of children from 8 to 10 years old have one. To encourage even more parents to buy cell phones for their children, companies have devised family plans that include free calls between family members.

While emergencies account for a small percentage of the cell phone calls that are actually made, the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association reports that 200,000 calls for help are made on cell phones every day. These calls can be as mundane as a call for a tow truck or a ride, or they can be for police, firefighters, or EMS. Some cell phone calls have been so dramatic that they have made the news, as was the case of a hunter lost in a northern Minnesota forest in freezing temperatures who was rescued by sheriff's deputies after he called 911 on his cell phone, or the rescue of a mountain climber who managed to call 911 after being snowbound for three nights on Mount Shasta in northern California. Safety is such an important dimension of cell phones that the Federal Communications Commission mandated that by 2006 emergency dispatchers be able to use the global positioning chips in cell phones to pinpoint the location of almost any 911 call. Cell phones can also be set up in an emergency message network to receive instant messages about emergencies and response plans, an arrangement used mostly by government agencies, schools, and transport companies.

Of course, cell phones mean much more than safety. Surveys of cell phone buyers suggest that, after safety, socializing, convenience, and business are the most important reasons for having a cell phone. Cell phones, in other words, signify easy accessibility to friends, family, and business associates. Those who have not bought cell phones tend not only to be unable to afford the payments, but they also tend to be much older than cell phone users, leading one researcher to observe that non-use of cell phones amounts to "a process of social exclusion" (Wei 715). The irony here is that unlike traditional land telephone service, which includes a listing in a telephone directory, cell phones, which signify accessibility, are not listed; and cell phone users are often reluctant to share their numbers with very many people.

The ultimate confluence between personal connectedness and emergency use occurred on September 11, 2001, in a flurry of highly publicized cell phone calls during the terrorist attacks of that day. Some of the calls occurred between the terrorists, as they coordinated their attack from aboard the





Camera phone with picture of a camera phone.  
Courtesy of Shutterstock.

planes they would soon hijack. After the planes were hijacked, some passengers on each of the four hijacked planes managed to phone home to report what was going on and to say goodbye to their loved ones. The call that became iconic was made on United Airlines Flight 93 by Todd Beamer, who used an air phone to provide an operator with information about the hijacking. After saying the Lord's Prayer with her, he kept the connection open while he and other passengers prepared to attack the hijackers. "Are you ready guys?" Beamer asked. "Let's roll" (Dutton 237–45).

The phrase "Let's roll" immediately came to represent the bravery of Americans who would fight to the end to protect Americans from terrorists. The phrase quickly appeared on a variety of patriotic consumer items. There were "Let's Roll Flight 93" lapel pins, "Let's Roll" ball caps, and "Let's Roll" bumper stickers. Rock musician Neil Young wrote a song called "Let's Roll," and Beamer's wife Lisa later wrote a book entitled *Let's Roll! Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage*, which she also narrated as an audio CD.

Cell phones were again in the news after the 9/11 attacks when the *Washington Post* reported that Americans had nearly captured the Al Qaeda mastermind, Osama bin Laden. In late 2001, U.S. intelligence agencies were following bin Laden's satellite phone signal in the Tora Bora mountains of Afghanistan, but before U.S. forces could close in on him, bin Laden gave his phone to a bodyguard, who led the American pursuers away from him.

## DETRACTORS

In every generation since electricity was first harnessed, there have been people who feared exposure to it would cause physical harm. As telegraph wires were strung between poles throughout the country in the nineteenth century, some people would walk well out of their way to avoid getting too near to them. In *My Life and Hard Times*, James Thurber told of his grandmother who feared that electricity was leaking throughout the house from empty sockets in rooms where the wall switch had been left on. Mothers warned their children in the 1960s not to sit too close to the television.

Cell phones are the most recent in a line of electronic technologies that have been seen as potentially dangerous. Some people have worried that holding a device that emits radio-frequency radiation to one's ear could, over time, be as dangerous as prolonged exposure to the ionizing radiation produced by x-ray machines and radioactive materials. This was the claim of

David Reynard of Madeira Beach, Florida, who sued NEC Corporation in 1993 after his 33-year-old wife died from a brain tumor. After Reynard appeared on CNN's *Larry King Live*, where he recalled that "she held it against her head, and she talked on it all the time," fears that cell phones could cause brain cancer proliferated. Reynard repeated his story for various news media, including ABC's *20/20*, even after his lawsuit was dismissed for lack of evidence. Despite Reynard's lack of success in court, Christopher Newman, a 41-year-old neurologist from Baltimore, Maryland, sued seven cell phone companies, including Motorola, in 2000, claiming that six years of cell phone use had produced his malignant brain tumor. A federal judge dismissed Newman's \$800 million lawsuit due to lack of evidence. She also dismissed five class-action lawsuits that claimed cell phone manufacturers were negligent because they did not provide headsets to protect users from cell phone radiation (Parascandola 338).

Advertisements show people using cell phones at home, outside, and in stores, but never behind the wheel of a car. That's because of a persistent suspicion that talking on the phone while driving causes accidents. This suspicion is supported by some anecdotal and scientific evidence. A court in Hawaii ordered a teacher who struck a pedestrian as she finished a cell phone conversation to pay \$7.5 million in damages. An Arkansas lumber company settled a case for \$16.2 million after a company salesman who was making a sales call struck a woman, who was left disabled from the accident. A widely cited 1997 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that drivers are four times more likely to have a collision when using a cell phone (Glazer 203–11).

In light of such evidence, every state in the country has considered cell phone legislation, and some have gone so far as to outlaw the use of hand-held cell phones while driving. Tens of thousands of drivers have put bumper stickers on their cars that read "Drive Now, Talk Later," promoted on the popular radio program *Car Talk*. Others have shown their irritation by displaying bumper stickers that command drivers to "Hang Up And Drive," or that growl, "If that phone was up your ass, maybe you could drive better." Undeterred by evidence or sentiment, most drivers who have cell phones continue to use them on the road. Fortunately, automobile accidents have not kept pace with the growth in cell phone use.

One of the primary complaints about cell phones has been the rudeness of some cell phone users. Before cell phones became ubiquitous in airports, stores, walkways, and waiting rooms, people who wanted to make phone calls from public places had to use pay phones, which were located in booths beside heavily trafficked areas. The booths allowed maximum privacy, because passersby could not hear the caller, and the caller was not bothered by passersby.

Cell phones, by contrast, sometimes sacrifice privacy for convenience and mobility. Most cell phone conversations take place in private—at home, on park benches away from others, alone in cars—out of earshot of others. But when phone calls occur close to others, people get angry. Phones ring in movie theaters, churches, concert halls, and classrooms, breaking the concentration

of those who are otherwise uninvolved in the calls. To reduce the occurrence of such cell phone interruptions, local ordinances have been passed banning cell phone use in areas of public assembly. A ringing phone in a library or museum in New York can cost its owner \$50.

As irritating as these interruptions can be, they end as soon as the owner of the phone can turn it off by reaching into a pocket or a purse. Not so with conversations. The most vituperative complaints about rude cell phone use come from people who have become a captive audience to one side of an interminable phone conversation. Writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, essayist Mary Pat Kane described a train trip along the Hudson River from Albany to New York that was ruined by one man's multiple phone calls. "Like so many cell-phone people he was garrulous and loud," she recalled. "He commandeered our section of the train as his personal office, yet I wasn't on salary and he sure didn't offer to pay for my train ticket" (15). For a private, two-way communication device, the cell phone has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to influence the dynamics of public places.

## CONCLUSION

The cell phone of the early twenty-first century was the fulfillment of a dream from the early twentieth. Like all electronic media of communication, the cell phone attempted to render geography irrelevant by separating communication from transportation in a novel way. To a large degree, this purpose was fulfilled, which accounts for the high degree of cell phone adoption. Cell phone users are generally pleased with their ability to be connected with others anywhere. No longer do they have to wait by a phone or get to a phone for emergencies or for everyday conversations with family, friends, and business associates.

But however much the cell phone allowed people to transcend geographical barriers, it did not remove geography altogether. Cell phone conversations are not totally ethereal. They still take place in public thoroughfares, turning some drivers into menaces and some callers into boors. The cell phone extends our range of speech and hearing, but its earthbound features have led to problems that its developers could hardly have foreseen. As cell phone technology continues to merge with other technologies of sound and sight, it will overcome geographical hindrances in new ways, but its limitations will continue to vex us in ways we cannot predict.

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# Ray Charles

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## *Reginald Martin*

Much has been made lately of the influences Ray Charles had on multiple genres of music: jazz, blues, country, even classical (emblemized by his live performance of “Ave Maria” at the Boston Pops with Sarah Vaughan in 1984), and rightfully so. He stands, as Michael Lydon observes, with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, “and a handful of others among the presiding geniuses of twentieth-century popular music,” but with a difference in the breadth of his music: “Listening in the dark, he soaked up sounds and styles from every idiom, and from them wrought a personal idiom more vital than many of its sources” (Lydon 396–70). What is so often overlooked in both print and film biographies is the incredible emancipating influence Charles’ music had on American sexuality. From the very first, his polyrhythmic beats, his metaphor-filled lyrics, and his church-derived, throaty, sexual growl provoked one to feel Charles’ words beyond the surface narrative. An easy way to view his influence on opening sexual venues through his music is to focus on the sequential singles that Charles, himself, chose to release.

From 1950 to 1965 are pivotal years in sexual development for Charles’ fans, and also in the development of Charles’ own on-going sexual narrative; it should be noted that during this period radio was still segregated, so his music and lyrics for the most part were allowed only on black stations with primarily black programming. Thus, in many of the key erotic songs, in-group metaphors were used to enhance their sexual meanings. For example, in the case of Little Richard’s now-familiar rock number “Tutti Frutti,” Little Richard early on performed the chorus using the words “Tutti Frutti, loose booty,” and the song was considered “very raucous and sexual . . . too suggestive for white audiences; so the words were “cleaned up” when Little Richard recorded them as “Tutti Frutti, aw Rudi” (*Songfacts*). Later, mainstream America became exposed to the original songs in concerts, then on the air, via court-legislated integration; and, due mostly to the pioneering work of jazz writers examining early rhythm and blues and rock and roll records (Nat Hentoff is a good example in his 1965 *Jazz Country*), mainstream America

could understand and appreciate the in-group lyrics due to cross-referenced explications from the music writers focusing on “jazz” phrasings.

The period of 1950–1965 really brackets most of Charles’s most erotic deliveries. Interestingly, in his representations during this time, erotic love can be bad or good. The number one hit, “Hit the Road Jack” (1962) clearly points out that all flames are flickering; and “Busted” (1966) holds out no promise of sex for the broke man, as it ties together financial achievement and the delights that must be afforded. But Charles’s 1954 song of the benefits of eroticism, especially of female ardor, “I Got a Woman” was so vivid it tested the metaphor boundaries of black-owned stations. The title came to Charles while he was singing along with a gospel tune, on a long late-night drive with his band, and the song developed in a dialogue of playful boasting with trumpeter Renald Richard. Charles sang it in gospel style like a rejoicing preacher, changing “spiritual joy into sexual delight” (Lydon 112–13). In *Oral History Interview with Nat D. Williams: Topic: Beale Street and the Fabulous World of Entertainment* (1976), Ronald Anderson Walter notes that the lyrics were too hot even for the first black-owned radio station in the South, WDIA of Memphis. When Charles sang of his woman’s eagerness for loving him in the early morning, with active tender care, alarm bells rang for even those gatekeepers on the margins of society. Nat D. Williams, the biggest disc jockey of the time for the entire South, knew Ray Charles and begged him to temper the words a bit more. Thankfully, this request was never granted.

The easy substitution of the stipulative sign “love” for the intended sign “sex” was one that from the beginning black radio found easy to program, and, generally, no one complained when “love” was made in this dyadic exchange. Even for lyrics as outrageous as those of Little Richard (Richard Penniman), the radio could always handle the stipulation, while never quite the thing itself. When Penniman screamed, “Good golly Miss Molly” and told what Molly liked to do, “ball” could be euphemized into a metaphor to mean frenetic dancing. The audience was jubilant and the radio stations and Little Richard were happy with their popularity and profits. Thus, when Ray Charles sang in “Hallelujah I Love Her So” (1953) about the coming of darkness when he is alone with his lover and stirred to cry “Hallelujah,” “love” again candy-coated the raw passion that not even black radio could play.

In the same way that a simple action verb can be switched, so can nouns; in many of the songs of the 1950s, and especially in the lyrics of Charles, purposely misplaced nouns give themselves away by their incongruence with the preceding verbs. A prime example is the lyric praising nighttime as “The Right Time” (1956); Charles adapted this blues song into a duet to sing with the Raelet chorus member who was his new mistress (Lydon 149): for two lines the singer extols how his baby “rocks” him, and then invites her to begin again, by asking her to hold his “hand.” The incongruence is obvious to anyone, but contained in euphemistic metaphors of dancing for sex; and the



Ray Charles, 1960. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

song passed the censors' rules right up to the time that Charles could be played on Top 40 radio, around 1965—also the year of the federal Civil Rights Act. This song gained more fame from the 1986 *Cosby Show* episode #203, in which Cliff's parents' anniversary celebration turns into a lip-sync rendition by the whole Huxtable family of "The Right Time."

Ray's penultimate erotic song closes out the decade of the 1950s, once again turning to condensed metaphors in the lyrics and up-tempo phrasing in the music. Interestingly, when this song was performed in two extremely popular TV specials of the 1960s, one with Bing Crosby and the other with Andy Williams, the tempo was slowed down considerably by the hosts, the censors, or both. Charles can be seen clearly straining to tone down the subliminal message carried by the

beat. Also, interestingly, both Crosby and Williams chose to sit on the piano bench with Charles, again disallowing the movement of any body parts. Had there ever been a song before like 1959's "What'd I Say?" With its driving bass piano beat and the response of the polyrhythmic drums, no one could sit still to listen to it. When hot, barely metaphorical lyrics were added to the gospel beat, they made the song both irrepressible and aggressively erotic, joining the singer's demonstration of stamina and his suggestions of what a girl could do with him throughout the night.

In 1960, Charles recorded the classic "Basin Street Blues" written by Spencer Williams. For anyone who didn't know before that this song was about heated interracial sex, Charles's gravelly rendering, traveling from baritone to soprano range, leaves no doubt; slowing the tempo slightly from its classic beat, Charles makes you understand why Basin Street holds a special meeting for black and white folks, nicer than anyone can know until actually coming to New Orleans. Clearly sung to reach the underground audience of blacks who were sexually involved with whites, Charles's version pulls one into the idea that only in New Orleans, the place of dreams, where race is almost indefinable by its natives, can one really enjoy what is usually taboo. Further, in the second stanza, Charles suggests that the whole taboo of cross-racial sexual exchange is what will enhance the act: in the physical embraces, and spell of the music, the ordinary staples (white rice, black and red beans) become unsurpassably better. Because this song was primarily

played on “race” stations, it had to pass less censor scrutiny than if it had been played and delivered as Charles delivers it on a Top 40 station. After one listen, the insider listener would get its message about encountering sex outside the standard way.

The recording Charles made with Betty Carter in 1961 of “Baby, It’s Cold Outside” can be considered “the definitive version of Frank Loesser’s witty interlocked lyric” (Lydon 201). The rap dialogue and the enticement are made everything to the erotic mood, and the weather report is nothing but background. Taking the call and response technique directly from West African forms, Charles croons about the cold outside over and over, no matter the many protestations from the female respondent that she has to leave, ultimately making the female respondent croon along with him, having finally been brought to her erotic senses by the male narrator’s apparently sensible advances. When it is mentioned that a bit of spirits will help to keep her warm, the foreplay is complete and the female respondent realizes, hey, it does make more sense to stay in and be warmed in every way.

“Unchain My Heart,” a hit single for Charles in 1961, is an up-tempo, lamenting ballad played as a love song. However, for the intent listener to Charles’s version, it is clear that the “chains” bind more than the narrator’s heart: the social chains of sexual rules restrain the narrator’s pulsing sexuality, keeping him from the love and lover he desires most; indeed, they try to limit even the physical desires and prowess of the narrator. Think of the image of “chains” to a segregated audience in 1965 and all of the social/sexual limitations such a symbol would connote, and you begin to get the picture the lyric would address, in confessing to be caught under the lover’s spell and without any chance of loving her, unless he is freed. To be set free to do as he pleases sexually is something the male listener of the time could relate to freedoms of all sorts, and the record understandably went to number 2 on the R&B charts while at the same time becoming a staple of civil rights workers, who would slightly change the words to a more purely social meaning (See Tom Dent’s *Southern Journey: A Return to the Civil Rights Movement*, 2001).

Finally, it is not coincidence that Charles’ sexual period basically ends when he is allowed full radio airplay. Yet it is not cultural censorship that changes his themes from eroticism to love, standards, and the American way. It is Charles, himself, who has changed and grown, in different ways that are no better, but certainly not worse, than the themes of his earlier period. While new standards included on *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* (1962) came at a time when censorship on radio lists had become so porous as to be non-existent, and received cross-format airplay all over the world, one gets the feeling that this change in themes is organic, nothing forced by outside influences or infantile attempts to “cross over” to a mainstream audience. Charles, moreover, was not above inserting sexuality here and there in his later periods, with Willie Nelson in the early 1980s in “Seven Spanish Angels,” and into the new millennium with his rendition of “Crazy Love” from the 2004



*Genius Loves Company* CD. But after 1965, Eros has become a gateway to other things, not more important than them, and still a constant in the perception of Charles. As one biographer, David Ritz, notes in *Brother Ray: Ray Charles' Own Story* (2004), even at the end, the fans wanted the erotic from Charles, a man in his seventies, and demanded every old song at each concert.

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# Julia Child

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*Sara Lewis Dunne*

Joseph V. Amondio, writing in the *New York Times Magazine*, says that Americans have pretty much had it with celebrity chefs, but Julia Child—one of our first celebrity chefs—is more beloved than ever, raised, in fact, to the status of icon even before her death on August 13, 2004, just two days before her ninety-second birthday. Julia Child made French food seem accessible and doable to American home cooks, many of whom had taken Peg Bracken’s *The I Hate to Cook Book*, published in 1960, to heart. Before the decade ended, though, many of Bracken’s followers and fans, who had accepted her advice to spend as little time as possible in the kitchen, were being inspired and entertained by America’s French Chef, Julia Child. Child gained her fame through her television shows, but her first show was intended primarily to support her first book, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, which came out only a year after Bracken’s book. Bracken, in spite of her book’s popularity, has not become an icon of American culture.

Julia McWilliams Child certainly showed little promise in her early life of becoming much more than a well-educated (Smith, 1934), tall (6’2”), athletic (golf, basketball, tennis) socialite from one of Pasadena, California’s, founding families. In fact, according to a newspaper note from the time quoted by Julia’s biographer, Noel Riley Fitch, “She will return here after graduation and will pass the summer with her family at the McWilliams beach home at San Malo” (64). As she was expected to do, Julia Child joined the Junior League (which in 1935 was not yet famous for its fund-raising cookbooks) in Pasadena; but she returned to the East in September of 1935 and soon took a job in advertising in New York, having always been interested in writing. She showed little interest in food, according to Fitch, but subsisted on frozen foods, eating “only to defeat her hunger” (67). Her time in New York was brief, however, and she returned to Pasadena to be with her mother during Caroline McWilliams’ final illness and death, in 1937. Julia spent the next five years playing golf—often with her father—seeing her friends, partying, and writing for the Junior League. She resumed her work for the Los Angeles office of the company she had worked for in New York and seemed happy to

be unencumbered. She had little to do with the kitchen in her house, and most of her entertainments were cocktail parties. There were romances with young men, one in New York, another in Pasadena, a marriage proposal, but like so many young people in the early 1940s, Julia McWilliams saw World War II as her chance for an adventurous new life.

Julia McWilliams's active social life moved with her from Pasadena to Washington, D.C., where she began working as a Senior Typist in the State Department in the summer of 1942, transferring soon to the Office of Strategic Services, now the Central Intelligence Agency. She still wasn't much of a cook, but living in a tiny apartment in Washington, she did try to feed herself and her friends and continued to entertain with "'nice crowded parties'" (Fitch 85). Hungering more for adventure than food, McWilliams was transferred to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and then to China. Ceylon is where McWilliams met Paul Child, who would later become her husband. He was ten years older, had much experience with women, and was knowledgeable about French food and European culture. Neither was the other's ideal: she was too tall, too emotional, too funny, too outgoing, too unsophisticated, and had "no intellectual rigor"; he was too old, too bald, too bookish, too quiet, and seemed to "lack a male drive" (Fitch 122, 124). Even so, their intense friendship morphed into romance, fueled in part by their letters to one another after they had each left China. They married on September 1, 1946.

Their first home was in Washington, D.C., and Julia Child had to learn to produce meals on a regular basis. She relied on Irma Rombauer's 1943 edition of *The Joy of Cooking* in her early kitchen struggles, but she soon began to subscribe to the then-new *Gourmet* magazine. Her first cooking was amateurish, enthusiastic, and experimental, marked by occasional disasters, but always supported whole-heartedly by Paul. Her real, true, all-encompassing love of food did not begin until the Childs moved to France in 1948. One meal at LaCouronne in Rouen sparked this love: oysters *portugaises*, Pouilly-Fuisse, sole browned in French butter, salad, crème fraîche, followed by coffee. It was Julia's first French meal, eaten slowly, worshipfully, joyfully, opening a world of possibility (Fitch 155).

The next year Julia Child enrolled in the *Cordon Bleu* cooking school and was taught by Max Bugnard, who had trained with Escoffier. Child threw her heart into French cooking and began to collect recipes. Julia and Bugnard became friends and remained so. Child and two Parisian friends, Louise Bertholle and Simone Beck, opened their own cooking school, L'Ecole des Trois Gourmandes, early in 1952. This school led eventually to the production and publication of their cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, a project that took nine years of writing, editing, polishing, finagling, re-writing, string-pulling, and adapting recipes for American cooks who shopped mostly in supermarkets. In the meantime, the Childs moved from Paris back to America, then to Oslo, to Germany, and finally settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near their friend Avis DeVoto, widow of editor and writer Bernard DeVoto. When *Mastering* was rejected by Putnam as "too

unconventional,” Avis DeVoto took the manuscript to her husband’s publisher, Houghton Mifflin, who agreed to publish it, but later decided not to. Avis DeVoto, still the midwife of this book, sent the manuscript to Knopf, and senior editor William Koshland cooked his way through the manuscript. The book weighed three pounds when it was published (Fitch 198, 270). It was favorably reviewed in the *New York Times*, and Child’s television appearances to promote it eventually resulted in her first PBS shows in Boston. Child had caught the public’s eye when, in a promotional television appearance on the *Today* show, she cooked an omelet on a hotplate on the show’s set. Using her vast network of acquaintances and friends, Julia Child planned and executed her own book tour, giving cooking demonstrations all over America, making friends with other food luminaries who would remain close throughout her life—James Beard and Dione Lucas to name two, and M.F.K. Fisher, to name another.

Julia Child’s lucky upbringing and education, in addition to her energy, her considerable charm, and her intelligence, combined with her remarkable height and her warbly voice to make her an enduring, if unlikely, television star. She saw herself, though, primarily as a teacher, not a “personality” and certainly not a “star.” Her attitude that French food could be mastered—even though it was an “art”—by anyone willing to be taught how to do it came along at a time when Americans were willing to soften their sometimes-harsh attitude toward France, the French, and French culture. The Francophile Kennedys, after all, had hired the French chef Rene Verdon as the White House chef, and other books similar to Julia Child’s were appearing, such as veteran cookery scholar and writer Elizabeth David’s *French Provincial Cooking* in 1960. Julia Child, in her foreword to the latest edition of David’s *French Provincial Cooking* (1998), remembers the American food of the 1950s and 1960s, deserts in particular: “a jellied molded object somewhat in the shape of an upright banana (or other less innocent object). Imbedded in this structure were cubes of banana, peeled white grapes, and diced marshmallows, the whole garnished by canned whipped cream generously squirted in mounds about its base. . . . No. We were not yet ready for Elizabeth David” (10). Remarkably enough, though, we were soon ready for Julia Child and we were ready for the lessons she wanted to teach us about sauces, eggs, babas, batteries de cuisines, cold buffets, vegetables, aspics, quiches, and any other foods the French might cook or eat. The book has two volumes and they have sold more than a million copies since publication.

Her first show, *The French Chef*, aired February 11, 1963, on National Education Television on Boston’s WGBH. Other PBS stations across America picked up the show and soon all of us knew her. Americans loved Julia Child’s cooking shows first, her books second. Her shows were so popular, in part, because Child was such a thoroughly human teacher—one who burned the butter, dropped the potato pancakes, forgot key ingredients, spilled sauce, licked her fingers, and wiped them on her apron, but who always came out with something wonderful in the end. True icons are the subjects of folklore, and one



Julia Child on her cooking show, 1978. Courtesy of Photofest.

piece of folklore about Julia Child is that she dropped a chicken on the floor, picked it up, dusted it off, and carried on as usual. In a videotaped tribute to “Julia Child, America’s Favorite Chef,” she sets the record straight. Even though some viewers swear they saw the dropped chicken incident, it never happened. She did own up to dropping a potato pancake she was trying to flip and catch in the pan, and the footage of that occurrence backs her up, but no chicken ever hit the floor while she was on air. Nor was she the polished, perfectly coiffed, pearl-wearing TV hostess-cook. She usually wore a shirt with rolled-up sleeves, a skirt, and an apron. She didn’t look anything like the TV moms Donna Reed, June Cleaver, or Harriett Nelson, or 1950s kitchen-appliances spokeswomen Julia Meade or Bess Myerson. She looked kind of like us—only taller—and she was likely to burst into giggles or make the turkey “dance” across the counter as she held it by its wings. She had a collection of

large French kitchen utensils that she sometimes used for comic purposes—her giant potato ricer, for example. At another time, she unceremoniously tossed away a puny rolling pin and produced one closer in size to a baseball bat. Julia Child certainly demonstrated that cooking could be joyful, even more than her predecessor *Joy of Cooking* author Irma Rombauer had.

She appeared on the cover of *Time* on November 25, 1966, dubbed as “our lady of the ladle.” She was, by this time, Fitch says, “a reassuring and familiar icon, a national treasure, cherished for her pervasive presence on television” (310). She was also lauded as a feminist role model and named by *Harper’s Bazaar* as one of “100 Women of Accomplishment” in 1967. An online article by William Rice of the *Chicago Tribune* quotes Camille Paglia’s claim that Child was an even more important feminist than Gloria Steinem and a transformer of American culture.

Only a few people have ever publicly admitted disliking Julia Child. One was my mother-in-law, the late Mary Mallon Dunne, who thought Julia used too many pots. Another more hateful critic was the food scholar Karen Hess who, with her husband John, wrote food columns for the *New York Times*, often trashing what they saw as American pretensions and bad imitations of European foodways, recipes, and cooking techniques. Their collected writings

are contained in *The Taste of America*, and on page 174 they point out the obvious: that Julia Child was neither French nor a chef. Later, though, they take on her book *From Julia Child's Kitchen* (1975) and castigate it and her for not being authentically French and for mixing cooking traditions. The Hesses seem particularly horrified at the idea of serving lasagna with French bread or black beans with sauerkraut, although the book's title does not promise anything but Julia Child's home cooking. One appended chapter at the book's very end is spent attacking Noel Riley Fitch's biography of Julia Child (which I have found quite helpful). This review, called "Icon Flambé," only adds to the evidence that for good or ill, Julia Child is an icon of American culture, even to her detractors.

The other cook and writer who seems to have had it in for Julia Child is Madeleine Kamman, author of *The Making of a Cook* (1971) and *Dinner Against the Clock* (1973). Kamman was a French émigrée to America and had worked in the kitchen of an aunt's restaurant in France while growing up. She had studied with one of Julia's cookbook writing partners, Simone "Simca" Beck, and met the Childs, inviting them for a dinner which they described as "outstanding." Kamman, apparently, saw Julia Child as a rival rather than a colleague and, according to Fitch, demanded that the students in her cooking school in Newton, Massachusetts, neither read Julia's books nor watch her television show (351–52). Eventually, after public denunciations in such news outlets as the *Washington Post* and vituperative letters to Julia Child, Child refused to respond to Kamman, to discuss her publicly, or even to say her name, and sent all correspondence from her to her attorneys. Eventually, Kamman seemed to grow tired of her one-sided feud, while the strength of Julia Child's reputation kept the public on her side. We note now, too, that Madeleine Kamman is no icon, nor is Karen Hess.

There have been no loving television tributes to Madeleine Kamman or Karen Hess, and no genuinely mournful television wakes will mark their passing. Within a week of her death, TV's Food Network aired a tribute to Julia Child and featured many of her professional admirers: Emeril Lagasse, who had cooked with her on television; Sara Moulton, who had interned in Julia's kitchen; Paula Deen, the silver-haired chef from Savannah; the world-renowned Wolfgang Puck; and relative newcomer Bobby Flay. Emeril lauded her as one of America's most important cultural figures, and Sara Moulton claimed Julia Child as "an enormous role model," after which Emeril echoed, "She was a legend, an American icon." Paula Deen credits Julia Child with being a "pioneer of women on TV." Perhaps the comment Julia might have relished most was Puck's: "She came off just like a regular person," although her life seems to have shown that she was a most singular person. As a television cooking show pioneer, Julia Child was credited with inventing the TV cooking "process" whereby a dish is shown in its various stages of preparation, an operation that involves multiple preparations of a single dish, including the finished version. As the memorial show readily admits, Julia was not either French or a chef, but she was a revered teacher of French cooking.

Both this show and the televised biography of Child feature another important aspect of her status as an icon. When Julia Child retired and moved out of her beloved house in Cambridge that she had shared for many years with her husband Paul, the Smithsonian took her kitchen, measuring, photographing, documenting the placement of each pot, pan, spoon, spice jar, tea bag, table, chair, in short, everything in her kitchen. Television scholar Richard Thompson, of the University of Syracuse, calls the moving and meticulous reassembly of Julia's kitchen in the Smithsonian her establishment "in the canon of the most important iconic moments in American Popular Culture." The day after her death was announced, one devotee, Brian Sisolak, placed a bouquet of red roses against the plexiglass wall outside her Smithsonian kitchen, according to Manny Fernandez, a *Washington Post* writer who visited the kitchen and interviewed other visitors. One such visitor summed it up: "There's lots and lots of chefs. But there was one Julia."

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# Computer Chip

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*Michael Bertz*

Have you ever cracked open your cell phone or peeked under the hood of your personal computer (PC) at the myriad of plastic- or metal-encased devices within and wondered how these little bits of technology work? Even with their packaging removed, modern computer chips do not give up their secrets easily. The circuitry encoded on them has become much smaller (literally by orders of magnitude) than the finest human hair, and the newest versions of microprocessors can pack tens or hundreds of millions of transistors (the functional building blocks of integrated circuits) on a single piece of silicon the size of a postage stamp. Beyond your amazement at their size, however, should be the realization that these devices power some application in nearly all of our mechanized and technology-enabled products, to the extent that our society as we know it today could not exist without them. They are arguably the root of both the current triumph of our human ingenuity and the source of our now likely systemic addiction to technology. Humans have made more chips than anything else in history, and are currently building them at a rate of tens to hundreds of billions more per year (with the individual components on the chips, transistors, numbering into the *quadrillions*).

With respect to chips' current uses, the term "computer chip" is something of a misnomer. While the PC is a dominant application, in many respects the silicon-based chip (and all of the varieties it has spawned—microprocessors that power computers or game consoles, microcontrollers found in your car, high-speed digital signal processing chips in your cell phone or networking equipment, as well as ubiquitous memory chips) is the enabler for most technology everywhere. The term "computer chip" is derived from its ability to perform high speed mathematical computations—distilling the essence of the abacus, Babbage's mechanical computer, or room-sized vacuum-tube-based behemoths onto a tiny sliver of circuitry. The common denominator of much semiconductor-powered technology has become the fact that it is the semiconductors themselves that have made many of them possible, in turn generating a vast commercial infrastructure that has enabled us to produce, implement, and exploit them.



The semiconductor chip is the fundamental transforming force of the second half of the twentieth century: not only has it transformed its own parent industry (electronics), but by being small, cheap, and powerful enough it has become the transformer of virtually all technology that came previously, and invented other technology that had not existed before.

To truly understand its iconic status, we must take a look at the evolution of the chip, which rapidly evolved from lab science experiment to initial commercial applications (primarily things that could be accomplished no other way), to the penetration of more mainstream technologies, to near ubiquity. Along the way we'll see many changes in chips' physical form, imagery, and perception.

The chips we know today didn't reach their integrated silicon form at a commercial level until well into the 1960s, but we can trace their genesis all the way back to the late 1940s, when a team of researchers at Bell Labs was seeking to solve a vexing problem: a replacement that would be more reliable than the vacuum tubes and mechanical relays in use at that time. Vacuum tubes were bulky, slow, and inefficient, prone to overheating and breaking; however, they were the only practical electronic switching components available to amplify voice over long distance, and their limitations were one of the factors that made long-distance calling so expensive. The research team at Bell Labs, led by Brattain, Bardeen, and Shockley, sought to develop a semiconductor-based solution and finally succeeded in 1947 with a small slab of germanium. Dubbed the "transistor," it was able to perform the required switching functions of both turning a current stream on or off and amplifying it, common to all transistors today. The transistor was considered a revolution when it was invented, quickly replacing the vacuum tube (including a version Texas Instruments developed for use in the transistor radio in 1954); however, it still did not completely solve the problems of connectivity between devices when constructing more complex electrical circuits.

Replacing the vacuum tube, however, didn't change the critical requirement for connections between transistors, diodes, capacitors, and other components to remain intact, in order for the advanced circuit to function properly. By the mid-1950s, silicon had become the dominant semiconductor base material, but assembly workers had to literally build the circuits by hand, soldering individual components to a circuit board and connecting them with wires. Performing manual assembly introduced further limitations on the size and complexity of the circuits that could be created. The answer came from a new approach developed independently by Jack Kilby and Robert Noyce between 1958 and 1959. In the summer of 1958, Kilby was at Texas Instruments (TI) while most of the rest of the staff was on vacation (Kilby was newly employed and had yet to accrue vacation time), where in the process of TI circuit miniaturization effort, Kilby hit upon the idea of constructing the entire circuit from a monolithic slab of semiconductor material. This change allowed the components and connections to be fashioned in an integrated

process, with all of the parts coming out of the same block of material and a layer of metal placed on top to connect them.

While these first integrated circuits (ICs) were fairly crude, they offered a groundbreaking approach to circuit design. Robert Noyce at Fairchild Semiconductor (which he had helped found a year earlier) independently arrived at his own idea for the integrated circuit, and Fairchild introduced the first commercially available ICs in 1961. These original ICs were very simple devices, consisting of a single transistor, a few resistors, and a capacitor; but their miniaturization and reliability led to rapid development, adoption, and use, and they are the first true versions of the “chips” we think of today. Both men went on to other accomplishments; Kilby developed a number of other inventions, including the pocket calculator in 1967, while Noyce went on to co-found Intel with Gordon Moore and Andy Grove in 1968.

Intel invented dynamic random access memory (DRAM) in 1970, followed by the microprocessor, the type of chip at the heart of all PCs, in 1971. DRAM made possible the loading of multiple programs into a computer memory and, importantly, the storage of dynamic information into a solid-state repository that the computer could work with as it performed calculations. Memory chips remain one of the biggest categories today, with billions of chips produced at densities undreamed of in the 1970s (incidentally, memory chips were the crux of the United States’ anti-dumping efforts against Asian/Japanese companies in one of the industry’s first competitive tests).

Microprocessors, on the other hand, are sophisticated general-purpose engines that excel at performing high-level code execution, acting as the central brain of a computer and controlling other parts of the system. As the development of chips in general and microprocessor ICs in particular advanced during the 1970s, applications previously unthinkable became possible. The ability to produce these microprocessor units with an embedded operating system and other functionality (such as memory controllers) led to the development of PCs—small machines, not room-sized, but with significant computing power for the time. In 1975, the Altair, the first true PC hit the market, followed by Wozniak and Jobs’ Apple computer shortly thereafter in 1976 (with the Apple II in 1977) and the IBM PC, which brought the computer to the business world in 1981.

For much of the next two decades, the pace of computing development was driven by advancements in microprocessor ICs, measured in chip complexity (the number of transistors on the chip, zooming from roughly 50,000 in 1985 to over *50 million* by the early 2000s). While a very significant application well understood by many, PC chips don’t tell the entire story; a number of other devices enabled by computing chips have become pervasive over the last twenty years. For example, in 1983, Motorola introduced the cellular phone (today powered by specialized digital signal processors, or DSPs), and in 1984, microcontroller-driven anti-lock brakes were introduced. Throughout the 1980s



An engineer examining a computer chip. Courtesy of Getty Images/PhotoDisc.

and 1990s, chip development continued in communications applications, increasing the quality and reliability of voice and data telecom connections, enabling not only a sharp decline in long-distance calling costs but also the buildout of the Internet. Today a virtually limitless array of products, from children's stuffed animal toys to flat panel high-definition televisions, have semiconductors at their heart.

In terms of the imagery of this icon, chips did not begin as the slab of silicon we currently associate them with. They started instead as a lump of another semiconducting material, germanium, as a device with a single electronic function, the transistor. From the unimpressive-looking point-contact transistor devices sprang

small cans, more robust and better packaged, typically with three metal wire leads; however, these were all basically discrete devices. It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s when integrated circuits—multiple devices built onto a single monolithic piece of silicon—became commercialized that we would truly begin to recognize the basic form factor of the chips that are prevalent today. Even though these simplistic ICs of the 1960s were quite capable for their day, we do not really observe general knowledge of the modern image of these little slabs of silicon until well into the 1970s, when one could pry open a calculator or a child's Speak 'n Spell and observe these tiny processors.

The iconic image that we have today of chips did not really solidify until the adoption of PCs began to rise in the early 1980s, generating a new set of industry giants which, though they had existed for years, became household names—including Intel and Texas Instruments (though now for chips, and not radios or calculators or educational toys). Until then the companies had labored away in some obscurity, but they were in a position to exploit a dramatically growing market, primarily revolving around computing applications. As these companies and many others flourished, Silicon Valley became even more a magnet for innovation and engineering talent, their business success driving the American perception of the silicon chip as a powerful economic force, like oil or cars, with the image of this “wealth made from sand” solidifying around the single microprocessor (sometimes seen in stock news footage on wafers).

The chip therefore, as an icon, has become a symbol of both our ingenuity and our society's inextricable dependence on technology; few in modern

society could go back to a “non-wired” civilization on a permanent basis. These small slabs of silicon not only have enabled a myriad of technological devices, but they also have created new products and applications, indeed whole new industries.

Economically, chips have changed the fortunes of individual people, companies, entire regions or even countries; would Taiwan likely be the dynamic economy it is today without its semiconductor industry? The quintessential American example, of course, is the area around San Jose at the south end of San Francisco Bay. In small cities from Fremont to Sunnyvale, Palo Alto to Cupertino, buildings flow from one technology business park to the next. The streets are littered with well-known companies, both large and small, likely the highest concentration of semiconductor design and manufacturing companies in the world. It isn't named “Silicon Valley” without good reason.

With this economic power comes both opportunity and risk. The pervasiveness of chips in technology and product applications implies that those who control their design and production will derive a significant economic advantage. Chips have already seen significant economic influence in trade disputes between the United States and Japan (the aforementioned memory-dumping disputes of the late 1980s), as well as the rise of very aggressive industry giants in South Korea and Taiwan. Here at the outset of the twenty-first century, semiconductor chips could be the central nexus of a looming geopolitical/socio-economic struggle between superpowers, as China's growing prowess with chips and its inexpensive yet educated labor force position it to challenge America's traditional dominance and design leadership in the field.

The semiconductor chip's biggest impact, however, has been how it has changed us as a society. The imprint is felt by Americans in particular, but the effects are far reaching. (Visit an Italian café and estimate the percentage of people using their cell phones.) The trend towards embedding processing power in virtually all parts of everyday life has meant that, over time, chips have changed the way that we interact with technology. For example, the enormous advances in processor power and the capabilities that they have allowed have in turn caused computers to go from being difficult-to-program black boxes to being extremely flexible tools for document creation, game playing, information gathering, or business process management.

Beyond that, however, computer chips have changed the way we interact and relate to each other. Coupled with fiber optics, chips are what make inexpensive long distance calling possible. “Reaching out to touch someone,” as an old AT&T advertisement encouraged us to do, now costs on the order of one-tenth to one-hundredth of the amount it did even thirty years ago. Long-distance phone calls to grandma in Ohio are no longer quite the special occasion that they had been, but have on the other hand allowed geographically dispersed families to remain closer than ever before.

Coupled with PCs, chips enable the Internet and all that it has brought to our interactions. Surfing the Internet for information has in many ways both

broadened our understanding of other peoples and places, and yet has at the same time taken away a cause for human interaction (such as taking a trip to the library to search for information). The Internet has spawned the ability for communications between far-flung people and has become a forum for almost any philosophical opinion or position. The power of the PC coupled with the Internet is in the process of revolutionizing commerce, and has recently begun to change the way some people meet and court, with online dating. Chips are now also the driving force behind digital cameras and the instant capturing and electronic sharing of memories.

As an “icon” to most Americans, chips have become a magic miniaturized black box. For Americans, they also represent an industry we started but which has been given to the world. Chips have truly become the ultimate technological icon, as the key enabler of technology, with the amount of functionality driven by the value and coding in the chip. One cannot find an item more important to the technological revolution of the second half of the twentieth century. Like the earlier processes in which the steam engine and the mechanized production equipment it drove came to signify the Industrial Revolution, and the automobile and airplane came to embody fundamental changes in transportation in the twentieth century, the computer chip stands as the seminal technology behind the Information Age. Like all great inventions, chips have revolutionized society, dramatically changing human lifestyles and changing the way humans perceive themselves and their world.

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# Coney Island

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*Judith A. Adams-Volpe*

Coney Island made America *feel good*. These six words sum up Coney Island's past, present, and continuing influence on the collective American psyche and on the shape of our cultural environment. From the beach, hot dog, nickel entertainment, exotic architecture, appropriation of technology for fun, and sensual bombardment, to its reformatting in theme parks, Las Vegas, and an ever intensifying pursuit of pleasure, Coney Island showed us how to play. Our cultural constructs of "letting go," "feel good generation," "fast food," "sexual revolution," "people's playground," ethnic "melting pot," and "leisure" itself all had roots at Coney.

Social commentator David Brooks, in his 2004 book *On Paradise Drive* shows us that Americans continue to be driven by the spell of paradise, a myth of constant striving toward a dreamlike destiny that is "[j]ust out of reach, . . . the spot you can get to where all tensions melt, all time pressures are relieved and all contentment can be realized" (268–69). Coney Island actualized this place for the millions at the end of a five-cent subway ride. From the 1890s to the 1950s, the accessibility of Coney and its immediate connection to fun and amusement made it immensely powerful and enduring. Coney Island emerges as an icon far surpassing nostalgic postcard memories, what John F. Kasson describes in *Amusing the Million* as a "harbinger of modernity . . . a symbol not only of fun and frolic but also of major changes in American manners and morals" (8).

A small group of Dutch immigrants first settled the windblown scrub that stretched for five miles at the foot of Brooklyn, calling it "Konijn," the Dutch word for rabbit, because of the hordes of bunnies on the dunes. The events that would transform Coney into a crowded, exotic playground of pleasure began in 1829 with the building of the Shell Road and a first hotel. By the 1870s steamers carried visitors on a two-hour trip from the city for fifty cents. Increasing Coney's pleasure seekers from the thousands to the millions was the Prospect Park & Coney Island Railroad, completed in 1875. The train carried a million passengers its first year, and 2 million the second. By 1920, the subway brought tens of millions to frolic on the beach and boardwalk (Adams).

Cultural commentator Michael Immerso recognizes that it is to Coney Island that Americans, especially immigrants and middle- to lower-class urban dwellers, went to “invent their own forms of leisure” and to grasp play and leisure as a “national birthright” (11). The major trends that created a Babylon on the beach, a pyrotechnic “insanitarium,” a people’s playground, all endure today in altered yet easily recognizable forms: an escape destination; an architecture of feeling; technology harnessed for fun, spectacle, and sensual abandon; the nickel empire; the crowd as cultural mingler and communicator.

### ESCAPE DESTINATION

Most major or mid-sized American cities in the latter part of the nineteenth century were located near a waterfront that became transformed into a leisure/excursion pleasure site. Those few urban areas without beachfronts created nearby picnic groves. With its railroad arriving by the mid-1870s, Coney Island created the forms, activities, and environment of the “resort” to be imitated by thousands of trolley parks appearing by the 1890s throughout the nation.

Coney’s entrepreneurs and showmen, like their American amusement progeny to come, capitalized on demographic and economic trends, cleverly playing on the needs of an emerging social order. The population of New York City exploded between 1860 and 1940 as the result of unprecedented European immigration, rising from 700,000 to 2.5 million people. Around 1910, these New Yorkers were predominantly young, with those under 30 years old dominating the age distribution. Coney’s attractions were designed to appeal to this segment of the population, especially the 15–30-year-olds. In 1909, twenty million of them frolicked on the beach, boardwalk, and Bowery enjoying spectacular fireworks, brass bands, lager, roasted clams, and amusement park dreamlands. Industrialization and the rise of labor unions reduced the hours of the work week during the years between 1890 and 1925 by nearly ten hours, so there was more discretionary income and time for leisure activities.

How did this spit of seashore land at the foot of Brooklyn lure and amuse the millions? It was a separate place, requiring a short but distinctive break away journey from the everyday to a realm that turned the respectable values of its time upside down, replacing an outmoded Victorian gentility with sexual titillation and license, and paradoxically transforming the very engines of industrialization into fun machines. Coney is escape from duty to joy permitted for a moment. The words of contemporary observers are the best conveyers of the allure and intoxication of Coney Island. Wonder, awe, and joy are irrepressible in these reactions:

Why Coney is all the wonders of the world in one pyrotechnic masterpiece of coruscating concentration. . . . America has builded for herself a Palace of

Illusion, and filled it with every species of talented attractive monster, every misbegotten fancy of the frenzied nerves, every fantastic marvel of the moonstruck brain . . . strange Isle of Monsters, Preposterous Palace of Illusion, gigantic Parody of Pleasure. . . the name of Coney Island is Babylon. (LeGallienne 239–46)

Maxim Gorky, postulating his intellectual disgust with Coney Island, was enraptured despite himself. Coney succeeds in transporting even him outside his gloomy, introspective persona:

A fantastic city all of fire suddenly rises from the ocean into the sky. Thousands of ruddy sparks glimmer in the darkness, . . . shapely towers of miraculous castles, palaces and temples. Golden gossamer threads tremble in the air. They intertwine in transparent, flaming patterns, which flutter and melt away in love with their own beauty mirrored in the waters. Fabulous and beyond conceiving, ineffably beautiful, is this fiery scintillation. (qtd. in Adams 50)

For those who couldn't visit Coney Island, this marvelous, exotic, and unique place was captured and transmitted through postcards and the new invention of the motion picture. Coney largely stimulated the postcard industry, entrancing a nation with vibrant color and static scenes of wonder and fun. This vision was made more fluid through silent film. Edison Manufacturing Company, American Mutoscope, and Biograph made more short silent films of Coney Island than any other location. From 1896 through the 1920s, films with titles like "Coney Island at Night," "Fire and Flames at Luna Park," and featuring such stars as Harold Lloyd, Fatty Arbuckle, and Buster Keaton, depicted the hurly-burley chaos of Coney (Immerso 118). The postcards and films projected the iconography of Coney to an immense national audience, generating a shared popular culture of leisure, play, and cheap thrills in a place of escape.

The cultural construct of the vacation destination continues to grow in strength and vibrancy. Today, vacation and leisure can hardly be referenced except in the context of escape destinations. Theme parks, Walt Disney World, Las Vegas, all-inclusive resorts, and historical reconstruction enclaves require a journey away from everyday temporal reality to a bordered sanctuary of illusion, indulgence, pretense, and glitz.

**AN ARCHITECTURE OF FEELING**

Luna Park, Frederick Thompson and Skip Dundy's lavish 22-acre amusement center appearing in 1903, became the archetypal amusement park until the advent of Disneyland in 1955. Its architecture, designed to promote wonder, chaos, awe, physical and imaginative transport to an exotic realm, and its extravaganza of lighting and color have endured and are revised in the excesses of Las Vegas and Times Square.





Luna Park and Surf Avenue, Coney Island, New York, 1912. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The twentieth century's architectural dictum of “form follows function” never got a foothold at Coney. Coney's architecture uses form to promote *feeling*—enchantment, dreams, exoticism, sensual stimulation. Thompson, once an architecture student, recognized the powerful entertainment potential of architectural forms, and he abandoned all restraint and convention in the creation of the sublime Luna Park, a sumptuously ornamented electric Babylon. On opening night, May 16, 1903, visitors were universally stunned by swirling pinwheels and crescents, blazing spires and turrets, minarets, sculpted fantastic animal creatures, shows depicting strange lands and peoples, all ablaze with 250,000 electric lights—at the time the greatest concentration of electric illumination ever attempted.

Thompson and Dundy set out to appeal to American desires for unrestrained extravagance, the magnetic wonder of the fantastic, and the vitality of ceaseless motion. The result at Luna Park was a sensual, enticing architecture described by one historian as “Super-Saracenic or Oriental Orgasmic” (Kasson 63). Thompson used malleable, cheap plastic staff, a plaster and fiber wall-covering, to produce marvelous curving structures and monumental grandeur. He also appropriated the popular exotic locale attractions of turn-of-the-century World's Fair midways with an Eskimo Village, Canals of Venice, and a Japanese Garden. These recreations have, of course, been reborn

in the sector locales of contemporary theme parks, EPCOT Center, and progressively in theme-oriented hotels and resorts.

In Luna's second year, 1904, 4 million visitors paid for the Luna experience, and attendance continued to climb through the first decade of the new century. Thompson died in 1919, and although others took over Luna Park, it began a steady decline, succumbing to a spectacular fire in 1946. The land was secured for a large apartment complex developed by Fred Trump, Donald's father. The eventual row after row of drab square apartment buildings was the very antithesis of Luna's magic minarets.

Although Luna Park as place is gone forever, it survives in a very immediate sense in the architectural abandon, fiery scintillation, and sensual bombardment of Las Vegas. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour in their classic study, *Learning from Las Vegas*, view the Las Vegas strip architecture as "bold communication." Meaning is communicated through the "inherent, physiognomic characteristics of form." The messages are dependent on "watts, animation, and iconology" (4, 2, 15). The Las Vegas strip itself, while initially engendered by the automobile, has its formative roots in the Coney Island entertainment strip and Luna Park. While in the classic sense, Las Vegas, like Luna Park, is the embodiment of "bad" taste, people *like* it. The ceaseless sensual stimulation, the chaos of illumination and motion, and the fantasy-themed enclaves allow us to escape, play, and dream. Just like Luna Park, Las Vegas appropriates the architectural symbols of luxury and exoticism. Both places democratize the yearning for splendor in magical realms where conventional rules don't apply. Nothing could be more immediate and accessible than the primary alchemic message of Las Vegas—transforming the drab, base, and ordinary into the splendor of gold. At Luna and Las Vegas, the masses find a gilded place imbued with the irresistible promise that all of their dreams can come true.

## TECHNOLOGY FOR FUN AND SENSUAL PLAY

Coney Island's amusement entrepreneurs harnessed the gears, wheels, and motors of the industrial revolution into engines of fun and sexual titillation. George Cornelius Tilyou liberally appropriated the mechanics of the factory when he opened the first major enclosed amusement park, Steeplechase Park, at Coney Island in 1897. Every element and contrivance in Steeplechase Park was designed to sweep away restraint and propel the crowds into extroverted intense motion. His fun machines threw young bodies into intimate contact, lifted long skirts to reveal shapely legs never glimpsed on a city street.

Steeplechase's emblem, the "Funny Face," was a huge devilish jester with a massive grin promising irresponsible and diabolical fun. To enter Steeplechase, visitors had to pass through the "Barrel of Love," a revolving, highly polished wooden tunnel that rolled revelers off their feet and into suggestive contact with strangers. The signature "Steeplechase" ride consisted of eight mechanical double-saddled horses that raced along an undulating track to the



Coney Island, 1997. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

finish line. The double saddles allowed couples to ride together generally with a man's arms snugly wrapped around his companion's waist, creating a rather genteel intimacy. Rides like the "Human Roulette Wheel," the "Whirlpool," and the "Human Pool Table" were more intense, physical, and sexually explicit. These rapidly revolving contrivances threw willing bodies in all directions, whisked skirts way up to reveal thighs and more, and forced bodies into intimate contact. The sensuality of these amusements is portrayed by artist Reginald Marsh in paintings that capture the ample, undulating curves and powerful muscles of out-of-control riders (Goodrich).

Thompson and Dundy took mechanical amusement to a higher level. Debuting at the Pan American Exposition in 1901, their "A Trip to the Moon" was the first virtual reality experience. They made their incredibly successful ride the centerpiece for Luna Park. This elaborate fantasy ride launched visitors in a large space ship on a voyage to the moon that combined motion, projected visual imagery, sound, and lighting. Once landed on the moon, voyagers encountered a total environment of caverns, grottos, giants, midg-ets, and moon maidens dispensing green cheese. Luna also featured regularly scheduled "disaster" extravaganzas, endlessly repeating the burning of a four-story apartment building (very much like the buildings where most of the onlookers resided), the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and fall of Pompeii, the Johnstown and Galveston floods.

These illusions created at the beginning of the twentieth century are the harbingers of such technological extravaganzas as Universal Studio's "Earth-

quake: The Big One.” Thus, generations of Americans have experienced technology outside its utilitarian bounds as spectacle and pure entertainment. In today’s seemingly dangerous rides, such as mega roller coasters and free-fall contrivances, riders more intensely experience the awe, fear, and adrenalin rush of the technological sublime.

### THE NICKEL EMPIRE AND CROWDS

The nickel trolley ride began transporting the masses to Coney in 1895. In 1920, the cost of the trip was the same via the five-cent subway. The millions of revelers instantly turned into the tens of millions demanding entertainment and fun at subway prices. One hot day in 1947, 2.5 million people packed the beaches. For small change, visitors could leave the dingy commonality of city streets and tenements for a colorful, exotic, ever-changing holiday milieu. Arriving as individuals, they merged into the unprecedented melting pot of nationalities, ages, interests, and sensations. They became part of the crowd and the crowd was the show. The line between performer and spectator was always blurred at Coney. Being part of the crowd gave everyone a sense of belonging, and the cultural identity of insiders.

In 1938 *Fortune Magazine* ran an anonymous lengthy article entitled, “To Heaven by Subway.” This graphic and colorful piece captured the spirit of the Nickel Empire:

For five cents Coney Island will feed you, frighten you, cool you, toast you, flatter you, or destroy your inhibitions. And in this nickel empire boy meets girl. . . . Some 25 million people pile into this area in a season. . . leaving behind them a sum estimated at anything from \$7,500,000 to \$35 million. But whatever the amount—and whether derived from the family on relief or from the \$20 plunger and his girl friend—it is an accumulation of the smallest coins of the country.

Coney’s food is fast, fun, sensual, cheap, and created for crowds on the move. The hot dog, the archetype of fast food, was invented at Coney Island by Charles Feltman, who was selling boiled sausages wrapped in pastry rolls from his pie wagon by the mid-1870s. It was Nathan Handwerker who made the hot dog an icon when he left his job slicing hot dog rolls at Feltman’s Ocean Pavilion and opened a corner stand in 1916 selling hot dogs for five cents and throwing in a glass of root beer and a pickle. Nathan’s Famous, established by 1925, drew incredible crowds, selling 75,000 hot dogs on weekends, with advertising slogans like “Follow the Crowd to Nathan’s” and “From a Hot Dog to a National Habit.” Other foods devoured in vast quantities at Coney were roasted corn on the cob, saltwater taffy, the ice cream cone (first manufactured at Coney in 1905), pizza pie first appearing at Totonno’s Pizzeria in 1924, and frozen custard introduced in 1927 (Immerso 131–32, 152). All of these portable, cheap, and fast foods for revelers on the go are

still associated with leisure, vacation, and fun times. In July 1955, Nathan's sold its 100 millionth hot dog, and the establishment is still a monument today at Coney, open year round, a beacon of popular culture in a changed Coney.

Nathan's also holds sway today in the middle of Las Vegas as a feature of the "Coney Island Emporium" of the New York–New York hotel complex. Thus, the Coney that started it all is literally resurrected as an attraction in the heart of its spectacular desert progeny. There are a roller coaster, bumper cars, shooting gallery, and the updated technological fun of virtual reality games and laser tag. From Coney to Vegas, *feeling*, *escape*, and the lure of a *dreamlike destiny* are the intense messages.

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# Couch

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*Dennis Hall*

The couch, as the *American Heritage Dictionary* (2nd ed.) has it, is an “article of furniture, commonly upholstered and often having a back, on which one may sit or recline”—from the French nouns for bed and verbs to go to bed or lie down, presumably to rest. The sofa, “a long upholstered seat with a back and arms,” warrants a picture which may illustrate its origins in *sufah*, the Arabic word for dais, and suggest its more upright character. In common American use and understanding, however, little separates these two pieces of furniture, and most people, even the writers of popular interior design books, use the terms interchangeably. Books and articles trafficking in the history of furniture, to be sure, make careful distinctions among such terms as daybed, camel back sofa, *canapé*, *canapé à confidente*, couch, chaise lounge, settee, *lit de repos*, sofa, sofa bed, among many others, detailing the evolution of furniture forms and styles, their times and locales—all of use, best I can tell, principally to collectors. But this relentless chronicle has been reluctant to attach meanings to furniture much beyond noting its obvious function as a marker of disposable income and social status, high or low, and it offers even less about the couch or sofa, as such, despite its very large footprint in the living and family rooms of most American households, and in a good many other venues.

This immediately recognizable bit of material culture, however, is filled with meaning, as is apparent to anyone reflecting upon furnished living space; watching television, a movie or a play; patronizing a coffee shop; leering at paintings of odalisques or 1940s publicity stills of Hollywood starlets (not to mention pornography); or uttering such common expressions as “couch potato,” “casting couch,” and “psychiatrist’s couch,” or reading the comics or Wallace Stevens’ poem “So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch.” The very commonness of the couch, as with so many elements in American popular culture, makes it easy to overlook.

The couch, however, is filled with cultural value. The presence of a couch adds meanings to the texts and contexts in which it appears: in the lived-in space of homes or offices or other private or public spaces occupied by actual

people, in the possible spaces depicted in furniture showrooms or advertisements or interior designs, in the representational spaces of movies or television shows, of photographs or paintings or poems or plays or stories. The couch, I submit, occupies a distinct place in the system of furniture and in the culture which that system furnishes—furnishes as much with ideas and associations as with upholstered frames and cushions. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton found, things have their significance “not because of the material comfort they provide but for the information they convey about the owner and his or her ties to others” (239). The couch, for all its individual variation, is an immediately recognizable artifact that rises to the level of popular culture icon rich in metonymic resonance. The couch delivers meanings well beyond the simple utilitarian functions of sitting or reclining into every context in which it appears.

The couch has a long history, evolving over time from the severity of the settle, settee, and Knole sofa in the eighteenth and, in the nineteenth century, into the heavily upholstered comfort now common, all the result of such technical developments as “square stuffing,” “interlaced webbing,” “coil springs,” and “deep-buttoning” (Boyce 307). The Victorian period “witnessed the most pronounced manifestation of this trend in over-stuffed furniture . . . in forms that were both massive and opulent in appearance” (Boyce 307). Comfort was the sign, if not the lived experience, of the couch in this era, as it is in the present. Indeed, couch and comfort are strongly linked associations. “The effect,” as Tim Dant expresses this commonplace, “is an atmosphere of neither sitting upright nor lying down, it is rather ‘the invitation to informal posture’” (80). The couch is a place and is in a place where one is bidden to make one’s self comfortable. The couch suggests a comfortable home, a comfortable place to meet people, a comfortable place to be with friends, a comfortable place to watch TV, a comfortable venue for sex, a comfortable place to talk to a psychotherapist.

In cultural history, the concept of “comfort” mediates between the indulgence of excess and waste, on the one hand, and the austerity of necessity and utility, on the other; and the couch is among its most conspicuous material signs. Early in its history the couch marked aristocratic wealth and status and luxury. In the nineteenth century, upholstered furniture signed bourgeois wealth and status, but oscillated between being a token of luxury and mark of convenience; that is, a domestic indulgence morally justified by earnestness and hard work. In the twentieth century, particularly after World War II, the couch became commonplace to the point that the presence of the thing itself no longer signed wealth or status; this cultural work, then, had to be done by the design or the quality of materials or workmanship or the newness of a given couch. Indeed, not to have a couch or sofa in the house, whether it was used or not, became a mark either of extreme poverty or eccentricity. Even hippies had couches. Indeed, as Tim Dant notes, “the sofa has become a more ‘democratic’ seating unit, often replacing individual chairs—even when there

are easy chairs, the material distinction between ‘his’ and ‘hers’ is more likely to have disappeared” (80–81).

Couches and sofas have strong associations with home and home’s psychic as well as physical comforts—and, we must never forget, its dangers. When introduced into other environments, say, for example, the offices and waiting rooms of dentists, doctors, and lawyers, or coffee shops or cocktail lounges, or schools or bookstores, they mark a degree of extravagance well beyond a collection of chairs, while seeking to provide to clients and customers some of the comforts, and risking some of the discomforts, of home.

And no other cultural sign so efficiently communicates the concept of “family” as does the couch and sofa, as the sets of television soap operas and sitcoms demonstrate from *Father Knows Best* to *The Dick Van Dyke Show* to *The Brady Bunch* to *The Cosby Show*. Lest the ubiquity of this device escape our attention, every episode of *The Simpsons* opens with a variation on this motif, a parody that pays homage to the couch as cultural sign. That the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Cheers* did not cast the couch in a central role are conspicuous exceptions, suggesting an effort to define the sitcom “family” in radically different terms, contra the nuclear family. *Friends*, significantly, reappropriates the couch for a redefinition of family by its conspicuous placement in the apartment and in the coffee shop, where most of the show’s scenes are shot, by its incongruous placement in front of the Pulitzer fountain in front of the Plaza Hotel in the show’s opening credits, and by its presence in the ensemble’s picture on the program’s poster and many of the web pages devoted to the program; here the couch signs a friendship that extends if not surpasses family in this carefully and successfully constructed environment. This same resonance moved the editors of the *New York Times* Sunday Styles section (November 16, 2003) to employ the couch in its effort to describe the new political style of the Howard Dean campaign; the picture of three youthful campaign workers on a beat-up three-cushion sofa infused more meaning into the story than did most of the text.

Couches, of course, have become strongly associated with viewing television, for they are commonly placed in front of television sets in living and family rooms, so to promote attention to programs and so to shape whatever



More often than not a couch symbolizes comfort in today’s society. Courtesy of Corbis.



conversation between or among couch sitters during the many hours a day the set is turned on in the typical American household. Couches and TVs enjoy a symbiotic relationship as household goods, one often mirrored in the programming commonly watched. Yet—with the exception of *The Simpsons* and *Beavis and Butthead*, and a few other aggressively satiric programs—the couch sitters represented on television rarely are engaged in watching television; rather, they are engaged in conversation and life, however idiosyncratically that may be represented. The “couch potato,” a persona tarred with associations of routinely wasted time and attention, resulting in physical and mental atrophy, is not a character in *Seinfeld* or *Friends* or other television environments well furnished with couches.

To position a couch, in art or in life, not facing a television set is a deliberate, meaningful utterance. The couch is a necessary condition for *Friends*, for example, because the show is devoted to relationships, as are so many currently popular television narratives. And the couch, whatever else may be said of it, is a mediating device, a big piece of furniture that, for good or ill, brings people together both physically and emotionally in ways that tables and chairs and even beds do not. The democracy of seating that the couch represents in many instances serves to collapse the separate spheres of men and women common in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century (see Attfield 156), contributing in one degree or another to a feminization of men and a masculinization of women at the dawn of the twenty-first. The increasingly shared interests and concerns of men and women are signed in much more intimately shared space, an intimacy once reserved to family.

Moreover, couches, as they bring people together physically, often vibrate between public and private space, allowing private speech and gestures in a public space and permitting expression in public of private matters. The couch is the site of the effort *Friends* makes to adjudicate between friendship and love, to negotiate degrees of intimacy, a predilection rampant in contemporary American culture.

While often involved in public and other shared use, couches can be really private, intensely personal. In most essential respects, couches are pretty much alike, but they become individuated by wear, conforming to the forms of regular sitters, in lumps and characteristics that one feels rather than sees. Use—actual or imagined, anticipated or remembered—gives a couch more resonance than do conventions of style or taste or the expense of purchasing it. Dant, citing Baudrillard, suggests “that items of furniture have ‘a primordial function as vessels, a function that belongs to the register of the imaginary’; as womb-like containers they cradle and protect humans at rest” (79). Indeed, while one commonly sits “on” a chair, one often sits “in” a couch or sofa. In their study of *The Meaning of Things*, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton note that “chairs, sofas, and tables are most often mentioned as being special objects in the home” (58) and that “[T]hey tend to be considered special for a limited range of reasons: because they embody

memories and experiences; because they are signs of the self and one's family" (62).

In his novel *The Corrections* (2001) Jonathan Franzen binds general associations of the couch to personal experience and memory and demonstrates the signal value of a particular couch to define self and relationship:

That night . . . found Chip alone at Tilton Ledge pursuing sexual congress with his red chaise longue . . . and the digital readouts of his home electronics cast light on his carnal labors. He was kneeling at the feet of his chaise and sniffing its plush minutely, inch by inch, in hopes that some vaginal tang might still be lingering eight weeks after Melissa Paquette had lain here. Ordinarily distinct and identifiable smells—dust, sweat, urine, the dayroom reek of cigarette smoke, the fugitive afterscent of quim—became abstract and indistinguishable from oversmelling, and so he had to pause again and again to refresh his nostrils. He worked his lips down into the chaise's buttoned navels and kissed the lint and grit and crumbs and hairs that had collected in them. None of the three spots where he thought he smelled Melissa was unambiguously tangy, but after exhaustive comparison he was able to settle on the least questionable of the three spots, near a button just south of the backrest, and give it his full nasal attention. He fingered other buttons with both hands, the cool plush chafing his nether parts in a poor approximation of Melissa's skin, until finally he achieved sufficient belief in the smell's reality—sufficient faith that he still possessed some relic of Melissa—to consummate the act. Then he then rolled off his compliant antique and slumped on the floor with his pants undone and his head on the cushion. (76–77)

The sexual associations of the couch are as pervasive as the familial, to which they are related in fundamental ways. The couch has a long iconographic tradition in this regard, stretching from classical mythology to Chaucer to painting and sculpture from the Renaissance to the present, to pinup art and pornography and advertising. Hollywood starlets in the 1940s were photographed as well as cast on couches. Couches always carry with them an aura of sexual congress, if not intrigue, whether they occupy a living or family room or a hotel room or an executive office. One might argue, however, that these venereal associations are not invariably venal and that many—possibly most—families might not form, children might not be born, without the mediation of the couch.

Function as a mediating device, is, I think, central to understanding all icons, and is finally the source of their resonance. Couches, as do all icons—at least all iconic things—perform their mediating function because they foreground the material. Firmly lodged in space and time, they reaffirm the body, as Judy Attfield expresses the point, “as the threshold between the interior subjective self (the individual) and the exterior objective world (society). Put another way the body can be regarded as the traffic junction between (human) nature—that which has become absorbed into everyday life and

appears unamenable to change—and culture—that which is constructed, contingent, and ephemeral” (238).

The couch, then, is a venue for the exploration, the reaffirmation, and, yes, the destruction of relationships. Sitting in a couch is palpably different from sitting on a chair or lying in a bed. While differences in degree, of course, may be very great, couches are in kind paradigmatic in their function; that is, they put existing relationships (the realm of the syntagmatic) into play and present the sitter with a structure of possible relationships (the realm of the paradigmatic). Tables and chairs imply far more conventionally fixed, unitary, relationships. The couch allows, sometimes compels, one to explore possible stories, possible lives, possible identities, even multiple identities, as, for example, those of guest or friend or date or lover or family member, and all the variations on these affinities.

For those with whom one already has a relationship, the shared couch may occasion reaffirmation or redefinition of intimacy, say for example, the move from girl or boyfriend to lover or from lover to “let’s just be friends.” The deeper one gets into the couch, of course, the more dangerous the game, for the couch also signs the vulnerability that attends intimacy, a structure of possible unhappy stories, lives, and identities. The venue of the kiss is often, perhaps just as often, the venue of the fight. In one set of circumstances, the shared couch might mediate between the intercourse of the dinner table and the intercourse of the bedroom; in another situation the couch might arbitrate the retreat to a separate sphere, to a chair or to a bed of one’s own.

The couch is a signally loose piece of furniture, very—dare I say—post-modern. The table and chair, by comparison, are remarkably unified in their meanings and associations. So too, the bed, despite all of its associations as a venue of sexual activity. The couch, however, is always fragmented, contingent, pointing not to a unified self and fixed relationships, but to as many potential selves and relationships as actual ones. The couch, like so very many popular icons, materially signs the schizophrenia of the postmodern condition.

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# Courtroom Trial

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*David Ray Papke*

During early 1995 the biggest news in America concerned the trial of O. J. Simpson for allegedly murdering his ex-wife Nicole Simpson and twenty-five-year-old waiter Ron Goldman. As jurors in the Los Angeles Criminal Courts Building listened to testimony from racist detective Mark Fuhrman and others, Americans from all around the country contemplated the same testimony on their television screens. Conversations in the workplace and over dinner involved the rulings of Judge Lance Ito, and lawyers and laymen alike used cyberspace chat lines to compare notes on prosecutors Marcia Clark and Christopher Darden and “Dream Team” defense counsels Johnnie Cochran and F. Lee Bailey. A courtroom trial had captured America’s attention.

Many Americans failed to realize, meanwhile, that the O. J. Simpson trial was only the most recent trial to fascinate the nation. The twentieth century had served up numerous “trials of the century”—proceedings with defendants Harry K. Thaw, Leo Frank, Sacco and Vanzetti, Bruno Hauptmann, the Rosenbergs, Sam Sheppard, and Claus von Bulow, to name only a handful. Each of these trials provided an engaging specific narrative and, on another level, an opportunity to reflect on the principles by which society is or should be ordered. Americans were able to easily follow these trials and to use them to make sense of their world because the courtroom trial in both fact and fiction is an established icon of their culture.

During the nation’s earliest decades courtroom trials were especially important civic affairs. Most of the country was rural, and judges and an accompanying band of lawyers often traveled on horseback to assorted county seats for trials. Average citizens gathered at the courthouse to watch the proceedings. These trials were among the most dramatic examples of government in action and so they were important community-building events.

In the larger cities courts were more regularly in session, and smaller percentages of the population attended trials. However, that hardly meant citizens were uninformed about courtroom proceedings. Early journals such as the *North American Review*, *Analectic Magazine*, and *Port Folio* covered courtroom trials extensively, and popular trial reports were for sale in Philadelphia

and New York and throughout New England. Published as pamphlets, the reports traced the proceedings and often ended with only partially convincing admonitions that crime did not pay. From the start, pamphlets of this sort were as much titillating as they were cautionary.

Trial pamphlets gradually disappeared from the marketplace, but the trial coverage in the rapidly expanding daily press of the nineteenth century more than replaced them. Trial coverage was a staple in the so-called “penny press,” and other daily and weekly newspapers as well provided extended coverage of courtroom trials in the middle and later parts of the nineteenth century. An exemplary journalistic extravaganza involved the trial in 1836 of Richard P. Robinson for the murder of a New York City prostitute. The New York City dailies gave front-page coverage to the trial, and the *Herald* actually tripled its circulation during the two months it covered the trial.

Fact and fiction sometimes blended together in this journalism, but nobody seemed particularly concerned. Indeed, tales with courtroom trials were also mainstays in the nineteenth century’s fiction magazines, story papers, and cheap novels. In fiction with dramatic trials as well as in journalistic reports on actual proceedings, Americans found an opportunity not only to delight in well-told stories but also to reflect on social problems and values.

In the early twentieth century both the tabloids and the more respectable newspapers continued to report extensively on important trials, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, the nation’s most popular magazine, published no fewer than 86 short stories between 1919 and 1945 featuring the courtroom trial exploits of Ephraim Tutt, a fictional lawyer created by Arthur Train. The *Saturday Evening Post* also serialized several early Perry Mason novels by Erle Stanley Gardner. Overall, Gardner wrote 82 Perry Mason novels and supervised or at least contributed to the 3,221 episodes of the Perry Mason radio show, seven Perry Mason movies from Warner Brothers, and the *Perry Mason* television series, which originally ran on CBS from 1957–1968 and continues to appear as reruns on many local stations. Perry Mason’s composure and reasoning are legendary, but he was always at his best in the courtroom.

By the final years of the twentieth century, the courtroom trial was a staple of the American popular culture industry. Both print and broadcast journalism reported regularly on trials, a cable channel featured trials, and super-market weeklies delighted in the courtroom dilemmas of the rich and famous. Furthermore, the fictional courtroom trial is a fixture in popular literature and the movies, and television proffers both an abundance of daytime courtroom shows and prime-time drama with weekly courtroom proceedings. Reports on actual trials and portrayals of fictional trials are so common that Americans rarely reflect on their consumption of them. The courtroom trial has long been and continues to be a familiar part of the cultural fabric.

Each trial report and each fictional story with a trial in it differs from the next, but the courtroom trial in the contemporary mind’s eye is surprisingly standardized. Images reinforce one another and create conventional



Television camera filming the courtroom of the Harry Washburn murder trial, Waco, Texas, 1955. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

expectations. Hence, the courtroom trial takes on its iconic character and enables Americans to use the icon to contemplate larger practices and beliefs of the society.

What are the features of the iconic courtroom trial? The courtroom itself is customarily wood-paneled and well-upholstered—a far cry from the dirty courtrooms with linoleum flooring in many modern-day urban courthouses. At the back of the iconic courtroom giant doors swing open and shut when key participants enter or exit. The furniture is heavy and placed symmetrically. The judge’s bench stands at the exact center-front and rises well off the floor, suggesting something sacred.

Like the setting, the major players are standardized. Judges are relatively abstract, perhaps symbolizing justice or the state’s neutral attempt to referee conflict, and jurors as well rarely come to life as individuals. The attorneys, meanwhile, garner a great deal of attention in media reports on actual trials and are the most developed characters in fiction, television, and the cinema. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, white, male defense lawyers tended to dominate. The Perry Mason character inspired dozens of imitators on prime time, and the American Film Institute selected defense lawyer Atticus Finch, as portrayed by Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Hollywood’s all-time most heroic figure. In recent years, more and more female lawyers and lawyers of color have made their way into the iconic courtroom, and as the successful television series *Law and Order* suggests, the heroic lawyer in the present might well be a prosecutor rather than a defense lawyer.

As the prominence of defense counsel and prosecutors suggests, almost all courtroom trials reported in the press or portrayed in fiction are criminal trials. That is, they involve the state prosecuting an individual for supposed wrongdoing. Even when civil proceedings with two private parties are featured, as, for example, with the suit against a hospital in the movie *The Verdict* or with the sometimes-absurd lawsuits in *Ally McBeal*, the courtroom trial resembles a criminal prosecution. Injuries are neither accidental nor inadvertent, and one party is cast as evil like a criminal perpetrator. The case is tried before a jury, although in most real-life jurisdictions juries have virtually disappeared in civil trials.

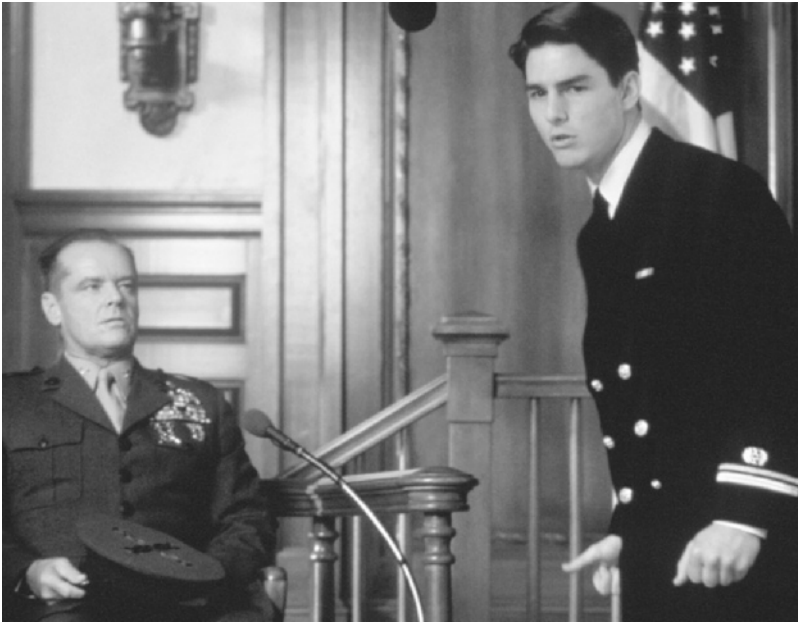
The iconic courtroom trial, be it a criminal trial or an ersatz civil one, is presented as a narrative, and even though uncertainty may exist about the ending, the stages of the proceeding are predictable for readers and viewers. Certain parts of the real-life process—voir dire (the selection of jurors), detailed jury instructions, sentencing hearings—are rarely portrayed. Journalists, novelists, and screenwriters instead emphasize examinations, cross-examinations, and closing arguments. The average layperson might think, in fact, that courtroom trials include only these components.

Examinations and cross-examinations in the iconic courtroom trial are especially dramatic. Lawyers stand at their tables or, more likely, stride confidently into the “well”—the area immediately in front of the bench. They aggressively question witnesses, experts, and defendants. In the iconic courtroom trial (but rarely in the actual one), people break down on the stand or are exposed as conniving liars. Sometimes, as in the film *A Few Good Men* when Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee, played by Tom Cruise, subjects Colonel Nathan Jessup, played by Jack Nicholson, to blistering cross-examination, the guilty party confesses on the spot.

When the examinations and cross-examinations are complete, the prosecution and defense lawyers make their closing arguments to the jury. These arguments are also highly dramatic, albeit in a different way. The two lawyers deliver intense pieces of oratory full of passion and detail. Jurors listen carefully, apparently with their decisions still unmade. In film and television the camera frequently looks into the lawyers’ faces from over the shoulders of the jurors. For at least a few moments the sight lines deposit viewers into the jury box.

After the closing arguments the jury members solemnly leave the courtroom to deliberate. Isolated works such as the film *Twelve Angry Men* take us into the jury room with the jurors, but in general journalism and fiction tell us little of what is said in jury deliberations. However, as readers or viewers we know the jury will return to the courtroom. Lawyers receive telephone calls with the news the jury is returning. Police hurriedly transport defendants from jails to the courtroom. And the jury foreman hands the judge a piece of paper with the verdict. What exactly is on that piece of paper? We never find out, but the judge, after looking intently at the paper, returns it approvingly to the foreman. He or she then reads the verdict aloud. Defendants, lawyers,





Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson in Rob Reiner's *A Few Good Men*, 1992.  
Courtesy of Photofest.

and people in the courtroom groan or cheer. People faint or cry. Often the judge must struggle mightily to calm the courtroom before announcing the court is adjourned for the final time.

As implied, the iconic courtroom trial differs in various ways from actual criminal proceedings and civil lawsuits. To begin with, the great majority of criminal proceedings and civil lawsuits do not even result in a full-blown trial. On the criminal side of the docket, roughly three-quarters of the defendants are indigent, and their public defenders and court-appointed lawyers are not eager for trials. Sometimes prosecutors simply agree to drop or reduce the charges; in other cases pleas and sentences are negotiated outside the courtroom. In civil cases, the parties and their lawyers appreciate how time-consuming and expensive trials are, and out-of-court settlements are routine.

In the small percentage of actual cases that go to trial, examinations and cross-examinations are rarely as revealing and dramatic as they are in the iconic courtroom. In criminal proceedings witnesses are often inarticulate and confused, and the most effective testimony tends to come from police officers. Often police officers' training includes lessons on how to testify, and police officers sometimes arrest with an eye to testifying later if necessary. The majority of defendants do not take the stand in actual trials. If they do, prior criminal records can be revealed and indirectly influence the judge and jury. Furthermore, many criminal defendants would hurt their defenses because of the negative impression they make while on the stand. When boxer Mike

Tyson took the stand in his trial for raping a beauty pageant contestant in Indianapolis, jurors saw a foul-mouthed man with a temper.

The attorneys in full criminal or civil trials are hardly as attractive, articulate, and resourceful as the ones practicing in the iconic courtroom. The attorneys rarely break down witnesses on the stand, and they do not fill the air with objections. In many jurisdictions closing statements have time limits, and attorneys are frequently only average speakers who are wedded to their notes. Overall, judges are much more in control of actual courtroom proceedings than they are of those in the iconic courtroom.

One would never anticipate it from the reports on selected trials in the media or certainly from renderings of fictional trials, but most actual criminal trials conclude with short jury deliberations and a conviction. In most jurisdictions, in fact, the conviction rate is between 80 and 90 percent. Not even a crack prosecutor such as Jack McCoy in television's *Law and Order* can achieve success in a comparable percentage of cases.

Should the cultural critic work to "expose" the inaccuracies in the iconic courtroom trial? It might be valuable for future trial lawyers to know that their work will not be as exciting as pop cultural litigation. Possible jurors could be reminded that defense counsel need only show a reasonable doubt regarding their clients' guilt and need not identify and produce the "true" perpetrators. But in general it might be more valuable to recall that those who portray the iconic courtroom trial, on the one hand, and those who conduct the great majority of criminal and civil proceedings, on the other, have different goals.

The iconic courtroom trial, be it in the daily news or on prime-time television, is a part of popular culture. Writers and producers of popular culture seek stories that can hold together and engage readers and viewers. The iconic courtroom trial informs and entertains consumers, and in the American cultural context consumers can find meaning in reports and renderings of stylized courtroom trials. Actual criminal and civil proceedings, by contrast, are messier affairs. Pieces are missing, narratives stop short, and many trials are never completed. Presiding judges would acknowledge these imperfections and argue the proceedings are not for information and entertainment but rather for dispute resolution and justice.

This does not mean that the iconic courtroom trial is without significant ramifications. While most Americans have never participated in or even observed an actual courtroom trial, they have read about hundreds of trials in their newspapers or seen just as many on television or in the movies. The stylized dramatic trial deflects attention from the tawdry realities of the justice system by providing an inspiring ritual for the highly legalistic culture. The trial report or trial story suggests that the legal process can lift above racial and class bias or, at least, should be deplored if it does not do so. The idealized courtroom trial implies that we can sort through facts and conflicting accounts to get to the truth. The courtroom trial portrays a rule of law

in action and suggests we have a reliable process to achieve justice. In all of these ways, the courtroom trial endorses central features of the nation's dominant ideology. The courtroom trial as icon is, in the end, one of the most important vehicles through which the citizenry can recognize itself as Americans.

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# Joan Crawford

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*Claude J. Smith*

When one mentions the name “Joan Crawford,” images arise of a crazed woman who hated wire hangers, or of the shrew who addressed the Board of Pepsi-Cola with this tirade: “Don’t [expletive deleted] with me, boys. This ain’t my first time at the rodeo.” Whether these events happened or not is open to question, but based on her lower-class background, her Texas origins, and her screen persona, one feels that they might well have. A key problem now exists with Crawford when we attempt to make sense of her career: most of her screen time is tinted by our knowledge of *Mommy Dearest*.

Joan Crawford occupies a special place in American popular culture, for she was a harbinger of the conflicted modern liberated woman. For American women of the 1930s and 1940s, she provided both a powerful icon of women breaking free from the constraints of a male-dominated world as well as a warning of the dangers of transgressing contemporary morality and sex roles. Her career embodied the changing conscience of women of her era and society’s perception of them.

In the 1930s and 1940s Joan Crawford was, intermittently, one of the most popular actresses in America. At the time, however, she made up only one part of a trio of extremely strong mature women, the other two being Bette Davis and Barbara Stanwyck, and, in 1944, was the highest paid woman in America (“A Tribute”). Bette Davis was cut from different cloth as she had had some middle/upper-middle class advantages that the other two did not have; she was also busty/fleshy whereas they were lean. Davis’s acting style, unlike theirs, was over the top in flamboyant theatricality, and she spoke an affected “stage” English.

Crawford and Barbara Stanwyck were seminal actresses in a time of dramatically changing sex roles. Their personas had both feminine and masculine traits and followed the historical feminist sweep from flapper to Depression survivor to World War II independent wage earner, only to be displaced in the 1950s by their age, by male hegemony, and by the new curvaceous ideal, the dumb blonde. Crawford and Stanwyck were naturalistic movie actresses who came from impoverished backgrounds, both having been reared initially

by single parents. For working-class women, Crawford and Stanwyck illustrated the possibility of arising from nothing to being a contender. Crawford's mother was a charwoman: her father left the mother before Lucille Le Sueur (Joan Crawford's birth name) was born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1908 (Wittman); the mother of Ruby Stevens (Stanwyck, born 1907 in Brooklyn) was killed by a streetcar and her father deserted the family a few years later. She lived in foster homes (Watters). Both entered movies via the chorus line (with God only knows how much sexual exploitation). Both changed their names. Both specialized in roles involving an almost fanatical social climbing, greed, husband abuse, and love triangles in which they were unquestionably stronger than the males whom they dealt with. In a battle of wills, few men could equal theirs. Both married multiple times. Their careers followed the same trajectories with sharp declines in the 1950s. Stanwyck, described as being the best actress never to win an Oscar (Watters), managed her career better than Crawford and moved into matriarch roles on television after age pushed her out of leading movie roles.

Of the two actresses, Crawford seemed the colder, the more calculating, the one with little or no sense of humor; Stanwyck, by contrast, could play comedy. Crawford had a perpetual pout, her bottom lip petulantly thrust forward as though she had a chronic chip on her shoulder against the system and at men in general. Crawford had debuted in *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) as a flapper, the embodiment of the liberated-from-Victorian-morality, hedonistic 1920s female (Wittman). In *Mannequin* (1938), she is enslaved again as a Depression-era worker, as a slightly horse-faced Jessie Cassidy who is what in the South is called a "linthead." The film's opening shots show dumpy women in frumpy dresses clocking out from a sewing sweatshop like the exhausted workers of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). (The 1930s woman probably knew about the awful conditions of the historic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory; furthermore, organized labor was struggling to make its greatest gains at this time.) A depleted Jessie climbs flights of stairs to her Hester Street slum home wherein her father is an unemployed dreamer and her brother is a sponger. Despite her protesting that she "needs" stockings, the family exploits her meager salary. Her mom is drained from a lifetime of making do. Jessie begs her boxing-promoter boyfriend Eddie to take her away.

They elope and celebrate at a speakeasy where John Hennessey (Spencer Tracy) becomes infatuated with her and buys her champagne on her wedding night! She dances with Eddie (ironically) to "Always and Always." She gets a chorus-line job, one of the few open to poor attractive women at this time, and Eddie begins to sponge off of her, having lost his best fighter in "a crap game." They move in with her parents. As Jessie's feckless father bellows he's tired of waiting for dinner, her mother tells Jessie, "there's a difference between a man's world and a woman's," but that Jessie can "do things . . . unlike most women."

Using the few tools she has, Jessie gets a job as a mannequin, modeling fine clothes and lingerie as Hennessey obsessively pursues her. Joan Crawford's

characteristic and symbolic broad shoulders are already present as Eddie pimps her by urging her to divorce him and marry Hennessey in hopes of extorting money. To foil Eddie's plan, she later leaves Hennessey, but returns in the film's finale when his first business goes bankrupt. She plans to help finance Hennessey's new business with money from her hocked jewels. She even has to slap his face to bring him around out of his own "depression." This is a strong, inspiring woman, a societal role model.

Via this movie, millions of trapped Depression women, victims of exploitation in the marketplace and at home, could vicariously escape their dead-end lives and, like Jessie, with will and physical charms, marry upwardly with men who idolize them. The film also served as warning against men such as her father or Eddie—leaches, tyrants, and ruthless exploiters. Demonstrating how popular culture can introduce new, radical ideas, this film helped rationalize divorce (i.e., ditch the loser and marry a winner) and make it more palatable.

By far, Crawford's most important role and the one for which she won an Academy Award is *Mildred Pierce* (1945), a film that parallels Crawford's own rags-to-riches journey and one in which she plays both mother and masculine breadwinner. Though the film is set during World War II, the only direct evidence in the film is that servicemen are present in a bar, and stockings are unattainable "for the duration."

The tensions created by World War II's female defense worker known as "Rosie the Riveter" and her newfound independence and wealth, however, simmer barely below the surface of this marvelous film.

Again in this film, the woman is strong, hardworking, and loyal; and the men are unregenerate crooks, weaklings, exploiters, lechers. Narrating in the flashback format, Mildred says in voiceover that she married when she was seventeen and that she feels as though she was "born in a kitchen and lived there all [her] life." Her first husband, Bert (Bruce Bennett), loses his job near the beginning of the flashback story and does not seem anxious about finding another one, and he justifiably wants her to stop nagging him. Mildred is apparently the dominant force in the house, spending money they can't afford on her children, in an effort, says Bert, "to buy love from those kids." She has



Joan Crawford, 1928. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

upward social aspirations illustrated by the piano and ballet lessons she forces on her daughters. She has never, however, boosted her husband: “Those kids,” says Mildred, “come first.” Her non-stop lavishing of gifts on daughter Veda turns the girl into a spoiled monster.

After Bert moves out, Wally (Jack Carter), Bert’s former partner, hits on Mildred (dressed in a robe with convict’s stripes), thinking she will need a strong masculine presence in her life. He bulls his way into her house and drinks Bert’s whiskey, determined that he will now rule the roost, as she is part of a huge empire of “grass widows,” single women with children, who will need a male friend to help them out in exchange for sexual favors. He will screw her in more ways than one. Overweight, nasal, and warty, he is one of two loathsome male leads in the film. Thousands of grass widows in the audience would knowingly observe Mildred’s plight.

Struggling, Mildred waits tables during the day, one of the few jobs available to women at the time, and bakes desserts at night. Earlier she had appeared in an employment office looking for any kind of work, and was photographed behind bars, continuing the economic prisoner motif. Her rotten daughter Veda is ashamed of her mother’s blue-collar job and taunts Mildred about her social inferiority, saying she understands why “You’ve never spoken about your people.” Women’s employment at this time had rigid social class divisions. Jobs typically were limited, in declining order of respectability from teacher to nurse, telephone operator, secretary, beautician, waitress, and shopgirl.

Social-class consciousness is a constant in the film as it was in *Mannequin*, an anomaly in most American popular films but omnipresent in the lives of the 1930s–1940s working-class female audience. Shamed by Veda, Mildred stops waiting tables to become a restaurant owner, an entrepreneur. Buying property from a decadent aristocrat Monte Beragon, Mildred sets in motion a tragic locomotive that will destroy her business and send her daughter to jail for murder. Zachary Scott, who plays Monte, seemed to specialize in weak male roles; in this film, he wears a wispy pimp mustache and brags that his primary career is “to loaf.” Mildred, unused to the superficial ease of the idle ex-rich, finds him charming and sleeps with him although on screen there is zero chemistry between them. (Not surprisingly, Crawford had an usually cold screen persona, especially compared to Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* [1944].) Single mothers and 1940s wives viewing this film would not have reacted negatively to the grass widow having a lover, as many of them had also had them during the war.

Though Mildred’s business is successful, its déclassé menu specialty of “fried chicken” suggests Mildred cannot escape her working-class origins. Monte is soon sponging money, and Veda’s non-stop demands for luxuries are a drain. In an attempt to finally “arrive,” Mildred commands Monte: “Ask me to marry you.” Monte demands a portion of the business (he is pimp-like), and she grants it. She buys his family mansion, and has it redone, only to have Monte soon declare he doesn’t like the smell of chicken on a

woman. He will soon force a crisis in her business that drives her out of the corporation. In this maneuver, her old “friend” Wally profits off her loss. One can, however, almost understand him: Mildred had put a demasculating frilly apron around his middle on the restaurant’s opening night.

As Joan Crawford was in *Dearest*, the lower-class Mildred is a disaster as a mother. Veda cold-bloodedly extorts money from one young suitor by pretending to be pregnant. The suitor’s rich mother pays off rather than have a former waitress as an in-law. In trying to give her daughter every benefit of an upper-class background, Mildred has turned Veda into an insatiable monster. Veda’s quest for money and status is, however, only a mirror image of her mother’s and probably Crawford’s. At the police station, Veda accurately says to Mildred: “It’s your fault I’m the way I am.” The subtext of this film is that although Mildred has proved her merit in the business world, mothers still belong in the home.

Social class and women’s place in the world are subtly hinted at in the film’s final shot: as a reconciled Mildred and Bert leave the police station, two charwomen scrub the floor. The film suggests that a woman/mother should attend to the affairs of the home, including scrubbing the floor. She should support her husband, not nag him. She must learn her place in the world, including avoiding the mistake of filling her daughter’s head with high-toned aspirations. If she does not, the results can be catastrophic. Thus, the conflicted consciousness created by Rosie the Riveter, the new independent woman, is embedded in this film.

Although Joan Crawford was not a “method” actress, she seemed to live the role of Mildred Pierce. The sense of inferior social class and ruthless ambition that drove Mildred apparently drove Joan Crawford to such an extent that her first husband, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., soon couldn’t stand her and wanted a divorce. Like Monte’s dislike of the smell of chicken, Fairbanks supposedly could not stand Crawford’s vulgarity (Wittman). In the film, that vulgarity and aggressive ambition are brilliantly illustrated in an early scene when Mildred is near Wally’s waterfront bar wearing a gauche fur toque and a mink jacket with linebacker’s shoulder pads. Although Crawford came into movies from the chorus (and, like Stanwyck, had a nice pair of legs), physical grace seemed beyond her. Crawford seemed to represent the antithesis of the Pygmalion effect.

Crawford represented the dark, fearful side of femininity, the terrible mother (literally), the siren with just enough erotic appeal to lure men to their destruction. She had an unusually cold screen persona, a result in part of a fairly impassive face. Slathered increasingly as the years passed with makeup applied, it seemed, with a trowel, her face never revealed much, although her eyes (unlike Stanwyck’s that were almost slits) were large and very expressive. They helped detract the hypercritical viewer from lipstick applied like a minstrel show singer’s and from eyebrows that were on the verge of being bushy. Though she supposedly photographed well from all angles, her nose in complete profile in *Mannequin* is almost a “honker.” For the typical woman



of her era, Joan represented the idea that attractiveness can be improved by a liberal application of cosmetics. If we remember that “painted hussies” was a popular fundamentalist perception about cosmetic usage, Joan Crawford along with other screen stars did much to tear apart that idea in the public consciousness and loose another bond of male oppression against femininity.

*Humoresque* (1947) was one of the final major films of Crawford’s career. It signals an end to the dominating roles she had earlier played. She finally meets a male as driven as she is. Crawford plays Helen Wright, an ennui-drenched rich man’s wife, who decides to make a gifted violinist, Paul Boray (John Garfield) her protégé. Eventually, she demands he pay attention to her in return for buying his clothes and arranging his career, but Paul is obsessed with his music. Paul asks her whether her husband “interferes” with her in marriage—he doesn’t. The neurotic dipsomaniac Helen drowns her frustrations while Paul plays *Tristan and Isolde* at Carnegie Hall. Helen needs glasses, symbolizing her lack of outlook. Here Crawford’s eyes look a little old and mean as she struggles to see him clearly. The film suggests by a slow dolly in to an extreme close-up (a surprising shot considering Crawford’s vanity and age—almost 40) that what Helen probably wants to kill herself about is her lost youth. Crawford was one of the first women to age on the big screen (Garbo had retired); thus, she was a resonant icon of every aging female viewer’s decline, being still attractive, but fading.

The powerful class-conscious woman that Crawford had portrayed through much of her career was reprised once again in one of her lesser known but quite amazing films, *Flamingo Road* (1949). Teamed again with director Michael Curtiz, Crawford plays a carnival cooch dancer, the clumsiest of three we see early in the film, who grows weary of that life and decides to settle down. She feels “tired and dirty” and is sick of having “people look at me like I’m cheap.” Her driving goal in this film is to get respectability, which is clearly a chimera despite her later improbable marriage to a political boss who meets her while she is a tavern (brothel) singer. He moves her to ultra-respectable Flamingo Road. A clear indication of stratified social classes is shown when a “Mother’s Committee” organizes a violent protest against her being there. The town is ruled by a tyrannical sheriff (Sidney Greenstreet), and the state is run by men in a smoke-filled room. In this film, men wield power almost absolutely; women’s career possibilities are virtually nil. Social-class rigidity is enforced by an oppressive male power structure as well as by conservative females. Thus, in a few years after World War II, we see a dramatic shift away from empowerment that women experienced during the war.

In Joan Crawford, we see encapsulated a history of women’s place in American society from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. Her career reflected the desires of millions of suppressed American women. Crawford’s power as an icon is, perhaps, most important in that stars of popular culture help to normalize outré behavior. No traditional retiring female, this pushy broad from Texas had the *cojones* to wear heavy makeup, drink, smoke, use her body to attract men, divorce, sleep around, marry for money, and perhaps

most importantly, to challenge male authority—a whole spectrum of non-standard behavior for women of her generation. Having clawed her way to the top of Hollywood stardom from virtually hopeless beginnings, she was, indeed, entitled to say to the Pepsi Board, “This ain’t my first time at the rodeo.”

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# Crayola Crayon

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## *Elizabeth Armstrong Hall*

In the summer of 1990 Crayola crayon giant Binney & Smith retired eight original crayons from its flagship sixty-four-crayon box. Having learned that kids preferred bold, bright colors, the company replaced maize, raw umber, lemon yellow, blue gray, violet blue, green blue, orange red, and orange yellow with cerulean, vivid tangerine, jungle green, fuchsia, dandelion, teal blue, royal purple, and wild strawberry.

Binney & Smith had renamed crayons in the past. When teachers reminded the company that kids no longer studied Prussian history, Prussian blue became midnight blue in 1958. Prodded by the Civil Rights Movement, the company changed its flesh crayon to peach in 1962. In 1999 Indian red became chestnut to erase any perceived connection with American Indians. But the “Crayola Eight,” as the retirees would be dubbed, were the first to be physically removed from the popular sixty-four-crayon pack.

Aware that crayon fans had fond memories of the old colors, Binney & Smith invited the public to a “retirement party” in the tour lobby of its world headquarters in Forks Township near Easton, Pennsylvania. The “Crayola Eight” would be inducted into a “Crayola Hall of Fame,” created for the occasion. On August 7 families, political dignitaries, Binney & Smith employees, and local and national media packed the lobby for the induction ceremony. The event featured eight, five-foot crayon replicas, one for each retired color. A Binney & Smith staffer dressed as a giant crayon—the costume would be brought out for future celebrations—served “retirement cake” to the gathered throng. Then the eight replacement shades were introduced with much fanfare. Pennsylvania Congressman Don Ritter presented Binney & Smith with a document paying tribute to the company for “providing future leaders of America with brighter and bolder colors.”

While the celebrants were eating cake inside, angry crayon fans, most of them adults, were staging protests outside. One group went by the name RUMPS (The Raw UMBER and Maize Preservation Society). Another called itself the National Committee to Save Lemon Yellow. As quoted in a *Time* magazine article, RUMPS president Ken Lang told one reporter covering the

demonstration, “Raw Umber and Maize are part of the American fabric. If you remove them, then what?”

The adults’ protests and the media blitz that followed took the company by surprise. In one week alone, Binney & Smith received more than 200 letters and faxes from crayon fans. “The kids are happy,” said Binney & Smith’s director of art and package design, as reported in the Allentown, Pennsylvania, daily *The Morning Call*. “But some adults are taking it personally. They say, ‘That’s my childhood. Don’t mess with it.’” In *Time* magazine’s August 27, 1990 issue, the writer of “Goodbye to Lemon Yellow” explained, “Any child who has ever wielded a Crayola knows the ideal color for tree trunks: raw umber. But henceforth, basic brown will have to do the job.”

The following year, a vocal chorus still clamored for the old shades. They bombarded the company with letters and phone calls. Adults who had not even touched a crayon since they were kids waxed nostalgic over the old colors. “You can’t draw a picture of Nebraska or Iowa without using raw umber and maize,” reminded RUMP president Ken Lang. *On Good Morning America* co-host Charles Gibson asked his TV audience how anyone could draw Confederate soldiers without blue-gray (“Goodbye to Lemon Yellow”).

In an unorthodox marketing decision, on October 1, 1991, Binney & Smith announced it would bring the old shades out of retirement, temporarily. “The outcry for the retired colors is an adult phenomenon,” said Binney & Smith’s Brad Dexler in a company press release. “To satisfy them (the adults), we are going to give them one more chance to buy the crayon colors of their childhood.”

Fourteen months after the retirement party, the company rolled out fresh batches of the retired crayons and packed them inside limited edition commemorative tins. Each tin contained a box of sixty-four crayons with the eight replacement colors and a separate box with the retired crayons. The “Retired Eight” would be available only until January 1992. The president of yet another protest group, CRAYON (Committee to Reestablish All Your Old Norms), called the return of the old colors a “great moral victory.”

The 1990–1991 “Crayola Eight” saga set the stage for the crayon’s transformation in the 1990s from a child’s coloring medium into an American icon, fueled by baby boomer nostalgia and the crayon’s own 100-year-old history.

Crayola crayons started out in 1903 as America’s first safe, affordable colored crayons sturdy enough for kids. When cousins Edwin Binney and Harold Smith introduced their crayons, the only other colored crayons available in the United States were pricey imported artists’ crayons made with toxic organic pigments or cheap domestic brands that easily crumbled. Binney’s wife Alice, a former teacher, came up with the name for the new product by combining the French “craie” (chalk or stick of color) with “ola” (oleaginous, or oily).

They were not only sturdy; they were also affordable. The first box of eight—in red, orange, yellow, blue, green, violet, brown, and black—sold for a nickel.



A box of Crayola crayons. Courtesy of Getty Images/PhotoDisc.

A box of sixteen—with the addition of light green, cobalt blue, burnt sienna, rose pink, white, gold ochre, English vermilion, and olive green—sold for a dime.

By the 1910s, the crayons were sold in boxes of 8, 12, 16, and 24. Teachers loved them. So did kids. The United States government, one of the company's first clients, distributed the crayons to its reservation schools. By the 1920s Binney & Smith was also producing a popular line of artists' crayons, including Rubens Crayola Drawing Crayons and Perma Pressed fine art crayons.

Until the late 1940s, schools and art instructors made up the bulk of the crayon market. This balance began to tilt toward consumers after World War II, as American family size ballooned and middle-class stay-at-home moms discovered that their kids could stay occupied for hours with just a box of crayons and a drawing pad or coloring book.

These baby boomer kids were the first to own their own crayons. Most pre-boomers had used crayons only in school. By the late 1940s, Binney & Smith refocused its attention to its burgeoning family market. And, while teachers were still the crayon's most loyal and dependable customers, much of the advertising budget was redirected toward mothers looking for creative outlets for their little ones. When the boomer kids wanted more colors, the company followed suit. In 1949 the new forty-eight-crayon box added more than twenty new colors, including boomer favorites maize, lemon yellow, bitter-sweet, periwinkle, violet blue, thistle, and salmon.

By the time the sixty-four-crayon box debuted in 1958 on the popular children's television show *Captain Kangaroo*, Crayola crayons were on their way to becoming one of the hottest family consumer products in America. The sixty-four-crayon box, the first with the revolutionary built-in crayon sharpener, introduced sixteen new colors to the palette, among them raw sienna, aquamarine, cadet blue, blue gray, and other memorable shades.

"The box of 64 was a watershed," says David Shayt, curator of the Crayola Collection at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, a collection that includes more than 300 boxes of vintage crayons that span most of the crayon's first 100 years. The collection got its start in 1998 when Binney & Smith donated one original sixty-four-crayon box to the Smithsonian to commemorate the product's fortieth anniversary. Binney & Smith executive Dave Hewitt, on hand for the occasion, told the *New York Times*, "At Crayola, we divide our history into the presharpener era and the post-sharpener era" (Collins).

The box of sixty-four solidified a personal connection between the postwar generation and Crayola crayons, laying the groundwork for the boomers'

opposition to the company's decision to make the first changes in the box a half-century later. "If you go into a restaurant with crayons on the table, it's the middle-aged adults who grab the crayons," says independent toy consultant Chris Byrne (also known as the "Toy Guy").

The American nostalgia craze, with the oldest boomers leading the charge, was taking off just as the "Crayola Eight" were heading for retirement. By the end of the 1990s, companies like Binney & Smith, Coca Cola, Hershey, Mattel, and Volkswagen of America had found a ready market in the boomers for retro and heritage products. "Middle-aged boomers obsessed with their youth and movin' down the highway to retirement clamor for retro roadsters," a *Business Week* cover story reported: "Indeed, social experts say much of the appeal of nostalgia stems from a longing to return to simpler times. . . . Naturally, baby boomers, ever powerful in their numbers, are driving this return to roots. The Roper survey identifies the most longed-for age as the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s" (Naughton and Vlasic 58, 60).

"You have to credit Binney & Smith for hyping nostalgia," says Shayt. "This is a company that actually flaunts the retirement of its products." Shayt and others point out how Crayola crayons tug at layers of adult memories, including sight, touch, smell, and even taste. Long after adults put away their crayons, they can still recall the colors and names of their favorite crayons, the feel of a freshly sharpened tip, and that waxy smell that filled their nostrils whenever they opened up a new box. That aroma, according to one Yale study, is the eighteenth most-recognized scent among American adults.

With the boomers' oozing nostalgia and media attention in full throttle, after 1990, Binney & Smith pulled out all stops to keep its crayon in the national spotlight. The Hall of Fame ceremony for the retired shades foreshadowed the elaborate public celebrations, ceremonies, and crayon-naming contests that culminated in the crayon's hundredth birthday celebration in 2003. These events not only brought celebrity status to the old-fashioned crayon, but also kept its boomer fans loyal and their kids excited about crayons.

When the first boomers had entered their teens and twenties, the company paid special attention to the boomers' younger siblings. In the first breakaway from the traditional palette, in 1972 the company came out with a box of eight fluorescent crayons with names to match: atomic orange, blizzard blue, hot magenta, laser lemon, outrageous orange, screamin' green, shocking pink, and wild watermelon.

After the "Crayola Eight" saga, Binney & Smith made a point of inviting consumers to help name new crayons as the pack expanded. In 1993, Binney & Smith sponsored the first of its popular crayon-color naming contests. The sixteen new shades debuted in the biggest crayon pack ever, the ninety-six-crayon box for the crayon's ninetieth birthday. The winning names submitted by both adults and kids added even more offbeat crayons to the pack: Razzmatazz, Timber Wolf, Shamrock, Cerise, Pacific Blue, Asparagus, Tickle Me Pink, Wisteria, Denim, Granny Smith Apple, Mauvelous, Tumbleweed, Robin's Egg Blue, Macaroni & Cheese, and Tropical Rain Forest.

Five years later, when the company decided it needed to find a new name for “Indian Red,” it invited the public to send in suggestions. After reading more than 250,000 entrees, a panel of company color experts chose “chestnut,” a name submitted by 155 people. Each winner received an official “Certificate of Crayola Crayon Authorship” and a gift certificate for Crayola products.

With each new contest, the company revved up both its publicity campaign and public celebration to market the new crayons and infuse glamour and excitement into an old-fashioned product. As a build-up to the June 2002 opening of CrayolaWorks, a now shuttered all-Crayola retail store and family art studio outside Baltimore, the company invited the public to submit Baltimore- and Washington, D.C.-themed crayon names for two new eight-crayon packs. The contest winners (most of them adults) for the “Colors of Washington, D.C.” and “Colors of Baltimore” packs won all-expenses-paid trips to the grand opening, public kudos, and giant replicas of their winning crayons.

Like the crayon-naming contests, public celebrations brought together generations of crayon fans for a shared love-fest for the crayon. On July 17, 1996, more than 45,000 people of all ages packed the streets of downtown Easton for the grand opening of the Crayola Factory, a family discovery center and museum with a giant Crayola store around the corner. The festivities featured a “ColorJam” parade of 2,000 fans with color-themed names and outfits to match. Sporting a bright gold tie, Easton Mayor Thomas Goldsmith acted as master of ceremonies.

In 1998 the Crayola crayon was officially commemorated as an American icon by the federal government, Smithsonian Institution, and American toy industry. In January the U.S. Postal Service unveiled a Crayola crayon postage stamp of the original 1903 box of eight crayons as part of its “Celebrate the Century” series. Also in January the Toy Industry Association included Crayola crayons on its much-hyped “Century of Toys” list for the twentieth century. When Binney & Smith donated its rare sixty-four-crayon box to the Smithsonian in February, the *New York Times* referred to the classic box as “an American institution, now a fixture in the collective memory of millions of adults” (Collins).

By the time the Crayola crayon reached its centennial year, fans were geared up for the much-publicized and anticipated year-long birthday party. Two years in the planning, the celebrations featured a cross-country Crayola bus, a “Name the Shade” contest for four new crayons, a chance to save one of five crayons from retirement, and a day-long street party in Easton over the Columbus Day weekend. The 100-year-old crayon was honored with a fifteen-division, color-themed parade and the unveiling of a 1,500-pound blue crayon made from stubs collected across the country. Boomers whooped it up when they learned that their beloved Burnt Sienna would be saved from retirement.

In January 2003, Binney & Smith introduced a special edition 100-crayon birthday box to kick off and promote the crayon’s centennial. The box sported a new logo and bright gold wrapping; yet, that familiar waxy fragrance still wafted out of the package. And, while flashy crayons like neon carrot, hot

magenta, and atomic tangerine shared the pack with the staid blue violet, cadet blue, burnt orange, and raw sienna, they were still the same Crayola crayons, sealed in the same paper wrapping one has to peel back before sharpening a crayon in the built-in sharpener.

In 2003, crayon fans could also purchase a limited edition centennial tin that contained a sixty-four-crayon box with graphics from either the 1920s, 1940s, or 1960s and a separate pack of twelve retired crayons, the infamous “Crayola Eight” plus the four shades retired in 2003. After opening the box of retired crayons, this boomer grabbed raw umber, lemon yellow, maize, and blue-gray and sketched a field of sunflowers on a cloudless day.

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# George Armstrong Custer

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*Michael C. C. Adams*

With the possible exceptions of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, no historical figure has more name recognition with the American people than George Armstrong Custer. Long after most of the nineteenth-century Indian-fighting army passed into obscurity, his figure continued to resonate in popular culture. The Battle of the Little Bighorn, where Custer died on June 25, 1876, has been the subject of over 900 paintings, besides numerous books and movies. The general has featured as a cardboard cutout hero on cereal boxes alongside such legendary figures as Robin Hood, King Arthur, and Cinderella. In the 1970s, he joined the Jane West line of plastic dolls in the persona of “General Custard.” Interest in Custer’s last stand has remained so intense that the *New York Times*, on October 27, 1991, commented that, “fascination with the battle has inspired a legion of hobbyists.”

How did this particular army officer become a cultural icon, and what symbolic functions has he performed in our collective imaginations? It cannot be taken for granted that Custer has been remembered just because his life ended in a climactic last-stand encounter. Other officers who died in this manner, such as Captain William Fetterman, whose command was wiped out by Plains Indian warriors in 1866, are forgotten. Nor can it be assumed that Custer’s memory remained sharp because of outstanding generalship. As Stephen E. Ambrose, one biographer, remarked: “He was a good, if often reckless, small-unit commander, no more no less” (195). The context of Custer’s last battle is significant in his becoming an icon for the nation, but before we go into this issue we must observe that another important factor in preparing him for lasting fame is that he was well known to the public long before his death and was, by the 1870s, a celebrated figure who could command \$200 for a public lecture, on a par with such leading literary luminaries as Mark Twain. Custer was a largely self-created media personality who worked hard to stay in the popular mind.

Graduating from West Point in 1861, the first year of the Civil War, Custer became a cavalry officer after service on General George B. McClellan’s staff. He quickly established a reputation for aggressiveness in combat, a quality

lacking among many opponents of the legendary Army of Northern Virginia, so that he was soon a general and a regular feature in the illustrated weekly magazines. Capitalizing on his earned notoriety, Custer affected a distinctive appearance, wearing his golden hair beyond regulation length and dressing in fancy sailor suits. When he got his own brigade, he gave his men distinctive red bandanas and made the catchy marching song “Garry Owen” his own. After the war, whenever its strains were heard on a western army post, it was known that the 7th Cavalry was present.

The death of Custer created the emotional shock waves that accompany the demise of any popular culture icon, such as Frank Sinatra or Princess Diana in our time. But several factors stopped the Custer story from expiring when the media cycle moved on to other sensational stories. First, the general’s death occurred in 1876, America’s centennial year, a time of gross corruption in high places that made many despair for the future of the nation. It seemed that prosperity, settling into greed, had destroyed the earlier republican virtues of honesty and selfless devotion to the public good. The deaths in action of Custer and his troopers, poorly paid servants of the state but doing their duty to the end, suggested that some civic virtue survived. Custer had just testified about corruption in the Indian Bureau, risking his career to do right seemingly; and this added to the image of nobility in a crass time.

Even then, the legend might have been short-lived if the Little Bighorn had not caught the imaginations of artists outstanding with pen or paints. The first of these, essential in setting the key elements of the Custer myth in place, was Walt Whitman, the poet of democracy. Whitman had been searching for a subject from which to mould a great American epic that would rival the ancient folk sagas of Europe. He had hoped to find his theme in the Civil War, but it had proved too sprawling, confused, and bloody. In the death of Custer, the poet thought he had his focus. He assumed that the encounter was a hard-fought last stand, brought about not by the general’s bad judgment but by the treachery and cunning of opponents, the same ingredients found in such European legends as the eleventh-century epic poem, *The Song of Roland*.

In his poem, “A Death Sonnet for Custer,” published in the *New York Tribune* on July 10, 1876, Whitman depicted Custer as a symbol of chivalry in a dark time, yielding up his life in a sacrificial act that suggested the culture’s ultimate worth, and linking the American racial saga back to other Nordic and Anglo-Saxon heroes. Custer had died to further progress; the dusky warriors—the Native Americans—must give way and be extinguished in face of a superior civilization. As befitted so great a hero, Whitman depicted Custer as dying last amongst his determined band of followers.

This epic picture was echoed in such visual renditions of the battle as John Mulvany’s painting, “Custer’s Last Rally,” a popular canvas first exhibited in 1881, and much admired by Whitman. The artist showed a grimly determined Custer, sword in hand, going down hard at the center of his dwindling but staunch command. This legendary image was fixed solidly in the public mind when, in 1896, Otto Becker was commissioned by Anheuser-Busch to paint



*Custer's Last Charge*, published in Currier & Ives, 1876. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

a similar battle piece. Reproduced in over one million copies, the Becker print hung in bars, restaurants, and railroad stations well into the twentieth-century. At the same time, the general's devoted widow Elizabeth was immortalizing her husband in memoirs of their lives together in the west; and Buffalo Bill Cody, who bore a superficial resemblance to Custer and had taken a small part in the 1876 campaign, made the last stand the central feature of his Wild West Show, begun in 1883.

The making of an icon was complete. Custer stood for the noblest qualities of the Caucasian race and he gave his life in advancing the cause of progress, the inevitable triumph of Western civilization over inferior peoples. As the *Boston Globe*, on June 20, 1926, told Elizabeth, she could see fields of plenty thanks to her husband who had fertilized the American West with the blood of progress. This view of Custer as exemplifying the best qualities of white

America was largely unchallenged in popular culture through World War II. For example, in Warner Brothers' 1942 movie, *They Died With Their Boots On*, Errol Flynn as the gallant general deliberately sacrifices his command to save a weaker army column. True to the myth, Custer cannot be allowed to die due to his own misjudgment or the superior generalship of his opponents. The movie even credits Custer with crusading to save the Native Americans and, in a totally fictitious scene, Congress moves in memory of Custer to give justice to the tribes. General Philip Sheridan says to Libbie: "Your soldier won his last fight after all."

This romantic view could not survive unchallenged into the postwar era, with the collapse of Western imperialism and with it the assumption that Western military triumph over native peoples had been inevitably good for humanity. Wars of liberation, fought viciously on both sides, marred the British, French, Dutch, and other nations' retreat from empire. The vacuum left in French Indo-China led to America's involvement in Vietnam, with its accompanying huge cost in lives and environmental destruction. In this changed climate, Custer began to look more like an anti-hero, a reverse icon, symbolizing now what was wrong with the westward movement, our bullying of weaker peoples in a greedy ravishing of the planet. In Oliver Stone's controversial 1986 movie, *Platoon*, Sergeant Elias comments that the United States has been "kicking ass" for so long, it is time we got our own back. A similar sentiment is present in the post-Vietnam bumper sticker, "Custer had it coming" and in the succinct phrase, "Custer died for your sins," which no longer meant that he had died Christ-like to atone for the nation's material sins, but that he had deserved to die as a just punishment for his part in our role as aggressors.

Much in the Custer story justified a negative image. Some officers hated him for his arrogance and perceived indifference to the needs of his men. He did respect some Native American traits and he was by no means the most brutal of soldiers, but he could be ruthless as when, in 1868, he attacked a Cheyenne winter encampment on the Washita River, killing some non-combatants and slaughtering hundreds of ponies. This episode became a key scene in the 1970 movie, *Little Big Man*, based on Thomas Berger's novel, and a classic of the anti-Custer school. Director Arthur Penn grounded the 1868 Washita scene directly on the 1968 My Lai massacre in Vietnam exactly a hundred years later, suggesting how tarnished Custer had become as an icon. The general, played brilliantly by Richard Mulligan, is arrogant, insanely ambitious, and driven by a belief in his own infallibility that is immensely destructive to all about him.

The truth about Custer probably lies somewhere between the two extremes of veneration and excoriation. He did make errors of judgment on his last day, refusing to accept he was outnumbered and fatally dividing his command in the face of superior forces. But he was not a cruel and foolish figure either. Sometimes icons disappear when their cultural relevance diminishes, but this has not happened to Custer. Debate continues to swirl around his legacy. Recently, a new aspect has been added to the Custer symbolism. The

twentieth century opened with the 1912 sinking of the Titanic, a disaster we have recurred to because it told us we shouldn't place all our faith in the infallibility of technology (the last Titanic film was made in 1998). As the century ended, we suffered Y2K jitters and social critics like Neil Postman warned us that we didn't know where the revolution in media communications was taking us.

Interestingly, discoveries on the Custer battlefield at this very time also suggested that we should be careful to understand the implications of technological advance. In 1983, a range fire destroyed the wiry grass on the Little Bighorn site, allowing for archaeological digs that resulted in a startling new theory about the battle, propounded in Richard A. Fox's book, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle* (1993). Using forensic evidence provided by battlefield artifacts, investigators determined that Custer's command had quickly lost tactical stability and gone down fast, instead of there being a grim last stand as had been previously supposed. A lack of evenly distributed shell cases where the cavalry defensive perimeter should have been and a paucity of army bullets in their opponents' positions suggested that the 7th had failed to keep control of the battlefield, losing tactical cohesion, and had even succumbed to panic, bunching together at the end in terror of death. This fit with Native American accounts saying the soldiers had not fought as hard as they expected and had even acted as though drunk, weeping and throwing down their weapons. Why? Recent innovations in military technology meant that the age-old custom of fighting shoulder to shoulder, which had lasted through the Civil War, was no longer practicable. Breach-loading, long-range weapons that could sweep the field, demanded that soldiers spread out to avoid being killed in droves. But, as French soldier-scholar Ardant Du Picq warned in his 1870 volume, *Battle Studies*, the morale of soldiers deprived of close comradely support would crumble if things started to go wrong in the isolated situation of the modern battlefield. This happened to Custer's command when the warriors pressed them hard. Du Picq prescribed careful platooning of men who would know and trust each other in a crisis. Later American commanders would compensate for the loneliness of the battlefield by encouraging this buddy system, but the vital need for human cement on the skirmish line was not realized at the Little Bighorn, where the new tactics of fighting on a thinly spaced firing line were only two years old. Thus, Custer's last battle retains an iconic significance. The dead soldiers warn us that when our technological innovations outpace our understanding of their potential consequences, we run grave dangers.

The Little Bighorn was not a great battle in terms of numbers or outcome. The Native Americans won for a change, but that did not stop their total defeat. For the army, this setback was barely a glitch in their triumphal advance. Yet the fight is remembered because talented artists memorialized it and imbued Custer's death with a symbolic quality that has continued to resonate with Americans of different generations and philosophical persuasions. So far, there is little diminution in interest; even now, Fox's hypothesis

is being challenged. And controversy continues as to whose view the National Park Service should emphasize in telling the story of the Little Bighorn battle. How we interpret Custer's end still matters to many Americans.

### WORKS RECOMMENDED

If you would like to know more about Custer, a good recent biography is Jeffrey D. Wert, *Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Controversial but stimulating is Evan S. Connell, *Son of the Morning Star* (San Francisco: North Point P, 1984). Stephen E. Ambrose provides a fascinating portrait of two warring cultures in *Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors* (New York: New American Library, 1986). Elizabeth B. Custer memorialized her husband in such works as *Following the Guidon* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1966). Her role in the Custer legend is detailed in Shirley A. Leckie, *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1993).

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Native American views of the Little Bighorn include R. G. Hardoff, *Lakota Recollections of the Custer Fight: New Sources of Indian Military History* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1991); and David Humphreys Miller, *Custer's Fall: The Indian Side of the Story* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1957). Recent interpretation of the battle appears in Richard A. Fox, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1993).

# James Dean

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## Geoffrey Weiss

The 1950s' icon of rebellion without a cause was born James Byron Dean on February 8, 1931 in Marion, Indiana. When Dean was 5, his father's job took the family to California where his mother, Mildred, died in 1940. The nine-year-old Dean accompanied her body by rail to Fairmount, Indiana, and remained there with his Aunt Ortense and Uncle Marcus. At Fairmount High School, he studied speech and drama with Adeline Nall; he won the Indiana State Forensics League competition in 1949. After graduation, Dean tried to start an acting career, first in Los Angeles and then in New York. After training at the Actor's Studio and playing on Broadway and television, he made three movies in Hollywood: *East of Eden* (1955), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Giant* (1956). Dean died on September 30, 1955, when his Porsche Spyder 550 struck a Ford sedan driven by Donald Turnipseed, who turned across the center line directly in front of Dean at the intersection of highways 41 and 466 near Cholame, California.

Dean's legend commenced forming only days later with press comparisons of his funeral to Rudolph Valentino's; both set off hysteria among fans, many of whom traveled great distances to attend. The later 1950s saw a Dean cult develop with pilgrimages to his Indiana gravesite, annual memorial services at the Quaker meeting house in Fairmount, fan clubs, and many sensational stories in the tabloid press. In May of 1956 alone, three separate articles—in *Inside*, *Rave*, and *Anything Goes* respectively—asked “Did James Dean Commit Suicide?” *Whisper* told of “The Girl James Dean Left Behind” (August 1956) while *Exposed* profiled “James Dean: God of a Morbid Cult” (September 1956). Articles through 1958 “explained” his death in supernatural terms and even purported to carry “messages from beyond the grave” and ghost sightings.

Robert Altman's *The James Dean Story* (1957), a documentary biography of the actor, explains fans' devotion thus: they “had made James Dean, and they wouldn't let him go. To keep him close they made a legend in his name.” More accurately, fans created a mythology that, like any mythology, had both a more-or-less coherent narrative and a particular social function among its acolytes.

The narrative blends filmography and biography. Broadly rendered, it goes like this: a brilliant-but-misunderstood small town Everyboy attains the American dream—a combination of fame and financial success—but finds his accomplishment, somehow, unsatisfactory. Chasing a greater destiny he never fulfills, he dies tragically in his quest. Dean biographer Joe Hyams names the Dean persona “Little Boy Lost” and explains its social function: “he had the intuitive talent for expressing the hopes and fears that are a part of all young people. . . . [H]e managed to dramatize brilliantly the questions every young person in every generation must resolve” (Lizama et al.). Thus, Dean’s legend partially reflects Dean’s qualities, but much more mirrors his teen fans’ struggle to understand their lives, especially their relationships with parents. Their reluctance to let Dean go derives from reluctance to part with the myth’s explanatory power.

From its inception in the 1950s, the first modern era of prolonged adolescence, Dean’s performances—and, indeed, press coverage of what we now call his “lifestyle”—articulated an identity for which no clear enunciation existed; his image signified teen insecurity expressed in rebellion. “Because he died young and belonged to no one,” Altman’s film asserts, “every girl could feel that he belonged to her alone. Because he died violently, every boy could use him as a warning to his parents, ‘If you don’t start understanding me, I could go the same way.’” Dean the Rebel articulates for boomer teens an opposition to Eisenhower-era social order, which blossoms into the social conflicts of the sixties.

Norman Mailer’s 1957 essay, “The White Negro,” defines the primary conflict as hip versus square. According to Mailer, “One is Hip or one is Square, one is a rebel or one conforms” (278). In this scheme, Eisenhower and Johnson are square; Kennedy is hip. Beer is square; marijuana is hip. Hipness and rebellion appeal because they invite the rebel to revel, “to live without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self” (277). Translated and simplified, this appeal becomes an invitation to self indulgence. And, according to Mailer, “The late James Dean was a hipster hero” (276).

Dean’s films also addressed the burgeoning generation gap between the baby boomers of his generation and the “greatest generation” of their parents. The Dean persona responded to shortcomings in the *Ozzie and Harriet* vision of the nuclear family: remote fathers, consumerism, suburban malaise. *East of Eden*, Dean’s first film, dramatized a son’s agony over his father’s withheld love, but the central image of Dean’s iconography came from *Rebel*, the film released one month after Dean’s death: Dean as speed-driven juvenile delinquent, insouciantly leaning against a brick wall, wearing a red windbreaker and clutching a cigarette held at waist level in a pointing hand.

After the appearance of *Rebel Without a Cause*, Dean’s portrayal of Jim Stark’s bitter complaint to his distracted parents, “You’re tearing me apart!” quickly became the adolescent apotheosis. Jim Stark pointed to existential questions without providing any answers. Instead, fans could dress like Dean



and behave like Dean, conferring a bit of his rebellious charisma upon themselves and arousing a pleasurable frisson in imagining themselves headed to his Byronic fate. The Stark/Dean persona provided a convenient pose and costume, a prefabricated attitude that acted as a tactical position from which to engage the world; this position we know as The Rebel. The Dean pose conferred two kinds of power upon the imitative poseur: among his peers, the pose acted as a threat to keep the hoods at bay; among adults, it read as the posturings of insecurity, the result of parental neglect. Boys could adopt the pose directly, but Dean's many female fans needed to imagine themselves in relation to it. Thus, Dean's image post-*Rebel* took a variety of forms, all with a core of the disenfranchised outsider.



James Dean plays Jim Stark in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause*, 1955. Courtesy of Photofest.

His films, studio publicity, and profiles like the one published in *Life* provided images, and fan publications shaped Dean's biographical narrative to mirror a variety of lives and fill a range of needs ("Moody New Star"). For the romantic teenaged girl, a 1956 comic book biography sketched him as a doomed Byronic hero, pining for the lost love of starlet Pier Angeli. For the sexually inexperienced teen boy, contemporary publicity painted him as the jilted and forlorn lover as well as the bohemian playboy dating a succession of exotic women: Angeli, Ursula Andress, even TV horror hostess Vampira.

As Dean recedes in history, new combinations of images generate new personae. Using his pout and a photo of a man said to be Dean in the nude, a modern biography suggests he was a confused homosexual, opportunistically using his sexuality to break into acting (Alexander 284, 75–76, 82–84). He is the rejected son, forever performing to gain his remote

father's love. He is the dutiful son, broken by his mother's untimely death. Above all, Dean is the rebellious son. Still today, fans identify with all of these narratives to various degrees; the identification assures them they are not unique, not alone, even in their pose of isolation.

As a form of display, a pose requires external signs, and Dean fans signified their identities and their rebellion by consuming rebel products, both those associated with Dean and those bearing his image. Fan magazines like *Rave* and *Celebrity* printed anything Dean-related and sold a "special Jimmy Dean king size portrait [*sic*]" for thirty-five cents right alongside the shrunken

heads. Dean's actual tastes mattered less than his image in a product's marketability; the actor drove foreign cars, but fans fetishized the Mercury he drove in *Rebel*. Dean's red nylon jacket in that film sparked a clothing trend.

Only two years after his death, the Altman film could assert, "From Maine to Manila, from Tokyo to Rome, he seemed to express some of the things they couldn't find the words for: rage, rebellion, hope, the lonely awareness that growing up is pain. They wore what he wore. They walked as he walked. They played the parts they saw him play, and they searched for the answers they thought he was searching for. Some found a kinship they had never known before." Often manufactured memorabilia mediated the kinship. Fans "wore what he wore" and bought his image on a variety of products that recalled James Dean as medieval pieces of the true cross recalled the person of Jesus. Through mass ownership of these products Dean fans could claim a group identity.

The urge to fetishize Dean in products creates a paradox: namely, that Dean becomes an icon of rebellion commercialized, in what Thomas Frank has called "the conquest of cool," by the very social and corporate structures that incite his rebellion (31). Because, at least in mass-produced collectables, the corporate third-party always mediates the fans' connection with the star, the urge persists to connect more directly. Movie magazine titles play on this desire, implying they will supply information more direct and "true" than official reports: *Whisper*, *On the QT*, *Inside*, *Exposed*, *Uncensored*, *Low-down*, *Suppressed*, *Top Secret*. Behind the mediated connection, fans imagine, must be the authentic James Dean.

And they search for him unceasingly. Altman asserts that "[t]o separate hero from legend, we must go back to Fairmount, Indiana," Dean's home town. But Fairmount provides one of the best examples of the tension between the commodified and "authentic" James Deans.

David Loehr's "all new James Dean Gallery . . . located conveniently at the Gas City, Indiana Exit #59 off Interstate 69" is a monument to Dean's commodification (Gallery pamphlet). Even its former location in downtown Fairmount is now home to Rebel, Rebel, a fifties memorabilia shop. Though the gallery's pamphlet promises "the world's largest collection of James Dean memorabilia . . . clothing he wore in his films, original artwork done by James Dean, [and] personal items," commercial memorabilia comprise by far the largest portion of the exhibit. A partial list of the museum's collection of Dean products: cigarettes, lighters, ash trays, watches, hats, sunglasses, medallions, combs, belt buckles, buttons, pins, patches, cell phone face plates, playing cards, toilet tissue ("For the rebel without a roll"), coasters, snow globes, paper weights, nesting dolls, Christmas ornaments, pocket knives, underwear, shot glasses and drinking glasses of all kinds, and more. All these trinkets were licensed by either Warner Bros. or the Indianapolis-based CMG Worldwide for Dean's heirs and then mass-produced for sale. Loehr charges \$5.00 admission and funnels visitors out through the gift shop, which sells most of the recently produced items on display in the museum. Everything

about the Gallery—from its location directly off the highway exit (and behind a Cracker Barrel restaurant) to its gift shop lobby and its streamline moderne architecture—smacks of 1950s nostalgia and the manipulated image of Dean. Dean fans wanting to make a connection with the Little Boy Lost himself must press on.

They go to the “Authentic James Dean Exhibit” at the Fairmount Historical Museum, which tries to be the Gallery’s antithesis—even in its use of the terms “authentic” and “historical” in its name. Located in a Victorian-era house in downtown Fairmount and run by the Fairmount Historical Society, the exhibit features “hundreds of rare photographs, his motorcycles, bongo drum, movie costumes, and countless keepsakes donated to the museum by his own family and close friends” (museum pamphlet). The museum’s driving force is Ann Warr, a founding member of the museum’s board of directors and, along with her late husband Harry, Fairmount “town historian by proclamation, July 22, 1985” (museum pamphlet). When the museum is not crowded, she greets visitors at the door and provides a personal guided tour. As you exit, she asks you to sign the guest book, which is located just under the Plexiglas cube where you may deposit the “suggested donation” of one dollar.

Eschewing memorabilia for artifacts from Dean’s life, the Historical Society preserves Dean as a treasured son of Fairmount; it displays items from Dean’s life in Indiana, most of which were donated by Dean’s local friends and relatives. A partial list of the museum’s collection: Dean’s first motorcycle (purchased at a local speed shop), his metronome, alarm clock, basketball, and Santa Monica College sweaters, a pair of bull horns and a matador’s cape as well as the bongos from his New York apartment, his cap pistol and drinking cup from childhood, and an orchid painted by Dean as a gift for his high school drama teacher. Here James Dean becomes a conduit to a set of small town values from an idealized past when, its creators imagine, hard work and talent ensured success. Even the merchandise in the small gift shop promotes the town of Fairmount or the annual “Museum Days” festival as much as the man himself.

Of course, the Fairmount Historical Museum’s Dean is no more “authentic” than the Gallery, only authentic in a different way. In fact, they approach the same story from opposite ends. The Museum looks forward to the boy who left Fairmount for stardom; the Gallery looks backward toward the star that left too soon. As much Dean-iana as Fairmount displays to enhance the icon, the lasting impression is that the essence of the man is gone.

Yet Fairmount still draws many visitors looking to connect with James Dean. The museum’s guest book lists addresses from many states and several foreign countries—England, France, Japan, and more. Red lipstick kisses, left by fans, often adorn Dean’s gravestone. The Quaker meeting house still sees annual memorial services, and a mysterious character named Nicky Bazooka appears on his motorcycle to lead the procession to the graveside and place a

wreath. Any pilgrim to Indiana's Dean country likely visits both the Museum and the Gallery, for anyone coming to Fairmount as a Dean tourist likely has her own idea about the star. In the end, any vision of James Dean really only represents the Rebel its inventor desires to be.

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# Dinosaur

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*Mark A. Wilson*

Few icons provoke as many diverse responses, or have changed meanings more rapidly, than that of the dinosaur. The plush, toothless Barney of children's shows is designed to convey love and tolerance to preschoolers, whereas the relentless raptors of the movie *Jurassic Park* represent single-minded, alien violence. Older generations remember when the epithet "dinosaur" meant giant, slow-witted, and doomed to extinction; but any third grader today can name a dozen real dinosaurs, half of whom were relatively small, quick, and destined for extinction by circumstance, not evolution. The dinosaur is a complicated icon in America, and its history as a symbol reflects deep cultural changes as well as new scientific interpretations. The image of the dinosaur provides a rich vein for anthropologists and historians of science.

## **THE SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND**

Dinosaurs are such fertile subjects for research and speculation that it is now even difficult to fully define them. They are reptiles more closely related to crocodiles and birds than they are to lizards and turtles. Features of their pelvis and skulls distinguish them from other reptile groups. Recently developed evidence shows that birds evolved from one branch of the dinosaurs, and there are now many dinosaur fossils found with impressions of feathers which protruded from their skins. The relationship between dinosaurs and birds is now considered so evolutionarily tight that many paleontologists place birds *within* the dinosaurs, leading to the odd conclusion that dinosaurs did not go completely extinct 65 million years ago—some are still chirping on our windowsills. The dinosaurs we are concerned with here will be the "non-avian" variety, but we will see that this connection to birds continues to change the iconic meaning of the dinosaur.

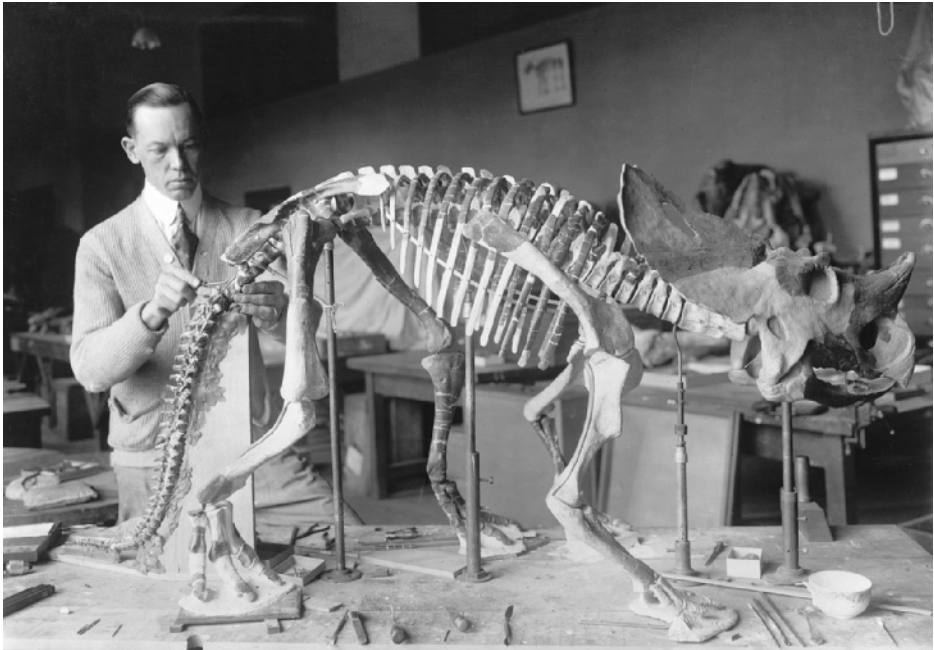
The oldest dinosaur fossils are found in Triassic rocks roughly 230 million years old. Even then they were divided into two different groups which became part of the public concept of dinosaurs. The Order Saurischia ("lizard-hips") contains the bipedal, carnivorous theropods (such as *Allosaurus*) and

the quadrupedal, herbivorous sauropods (such as *Apatosaurus*). The Order Ornithischia (“bird hips”) was entirely herbivorous, both the bipedal forms (e.g., *Iguanodon*) and the quadrupedal (e.g., *Stegosaurus*). Dinosaurs are thus characterized both taxonomically and ecologically by four overlapping states: bipedal and quadrupedal, herbivorous and carnivorous. Each condition carries with it different models of dinosaur behavior.

All dinosaurs were extinct by the end of the Cretaceous Period, approximately 65 million years ago. (OK, all *non-avian* dinosaurs!) The reasons for their extinction are also part of the dinosaur image. Prior to 1980 there were dozens of published hypotheses explaining dinosaur extinction. Many of the earliest were intrinsic to dinosaurs: they evolved to sizes they could not maintain, their brains grew too small to function, their eggshells were too heavy to crack, and so forth. Some of the more sophisticated ideas brought in extrinsic factors, although still affecting only dinosaurs: mammals ate their eggs, new plants poisoned them, diseases swept through their populations. The best ideas for the times took into account that the dinosaurs did not go extinct alone. The end-Cretaceous extinction simultaneously affected plants and animals on the land as well as in the seas. The dinosaurs must have gone extinct in response to global events not focused on them alone. Ideas here included climate changes and massive volcanic eruptions.

In 1980, a team led by Walter and Luis Alvarez hypothesized that a comet or asteroid the size of a mountain struck the earth 65 million years ago, producing a pall of smoke, dust, and debris which shut down ecological systems so severely that mass extinctions resulted, including those of the last dinosaurs. Their evidence was a thin layer of clay found between Cretaceous and later Tertiary rocks. This clay is enriched in iridium, an element much more common in extraterrestrial bodies than in the crust of the earth. This layer must be the settled dust from the end-Cretaceous impact event. Hundreds of later studies have confirmed and augmented this extinction scenario. A “big rock from space,” in the words of schoolchildren, on its journey through the solar system, happened to cross the earth’s orbit and produce the cataclysm that claimed the dinosaurs (and many other organisms). The existential randomness of this event changed scientific and public images of the dinosaur almost overnight. Dinosaurs left this world because of bad luck, not bad genes.

At about the same time that dinosaur extinction ideas were dramatically changing, there was also a revolution in our concepts of dinosaur metabolism and behavior. During the 1970s, a debate among paleontologists about whether dinosaurs were ectothermic (“cold-blooded”) like other reptiles or endothermic (“warm-blooded”) like mammals and birds reached the public. At stake was not just how these animals maintained their body temperatures, but what behaviors could be expected to follow. Endothermic animals have higher metabolisms and are thus more active. Endothermic dinosaurs would thus not have been slow, ponderous, overgrown lizards (a common perception of them since Victorian times), but quick and agile creatures. This debate



Norman Ross of the Division of Paleontology, National Museum, preparing the skeleton of a baby dinosaur some 7 or 8 million years old for exhibition, 1911. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

continues, but the behavioral image of dinosaurs decisively changed for the public when this endothermic model was presented in the immensely popular *Jurassic Park* movie. Dinosaurs could no longer be imagined as dumb and slow beasts after watching raptors methodically hunt children in the *Jurassic Park* kitchens.

### DINOSAURS AS ICONS IN THE PAST

Our earliest image of dinosaurs in popular culture comes from the Victorians. Charles Dickens may have been the first author to include a dinosaur in fiction. The first lines of *Bleak House* (1853) beautifully demonstrate the Victorian vision of a dinosaur:

London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a *Megalosaurus*, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill.

Already by the middle of the nineteenth century Dickens could use a dinosaur to evoke an ancient, primitive time, and his dinosaur is a lumbering, awkward, gigantic beast—a lizard writ large. The seminal event for the public

perception of dinosaurs was just a year later with the opening of the Crystal Palace Park in London. The sculptor Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, in consultation with Sir Richard Owens, the scientist who defined the Dinosauria, populated the park with life-size statues of dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals. We would not recognize most of these dinosaurs today because of the way they were reconstructed. *Megalosaurus* and *Iguanodon*, for example, were shown as quadrupedal and low-slung, whereas today they are illustrated as beautifully balanced bipeds. The models for the Victorian dinosaur were, naturally enough, living reptiles today such as lizards and crocodiles, and this imagery included not only their appearance but their behavior as well. The *Megalosaurus* of Dickens could indeed do little more than waddle in the mud.

Half a century later dinosaurs were far better known by paleontologists, but they had not yet been liberated from their slow and brutish ways. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published *The Lost World* in 1912, and this science fiction novel reintroduced dinosaurs into the culture. The story is an account of an expedition to a South American plateau “frozen in time” and harboring living dinosaurs and other prehistoric beasts. Here is Doyle’s description of a group of *Iguanodon*:

There were, as I say, five of them, two being adults and three young ones. In size they were enormous. Even the babies were as big as elephants, while the two large ones were far beyond all creatures I have ever seen. They had slate-colored skin, which was scaled like a lizard’s and shimmered where the sun shone upon it. All five were sitting up, balancing themselves upon their broad, powerful tails and their huge three-toed hind-feet, while with their small five-fingered front-feet they pulled down the branches upon which they browsed. I do not know that I can bring their appearance home to you better than by saying that they looked like monstrous kangaroos, twenty feet in length, and with skins like black crocodiles. (162)

*Iguanodon* is finally bipedal in this vision, although really tripedal if it is supported by its tail; and it is more placid in appearance than the menacing Crystal Palace Park version. Later Doyle makes it clear that his dinosaurs are all very stupid because of their legendary small brains.

It was when dinosaurs made it to film that their most intractable public images were formed. Winsor McCay created an affable sauropod called *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) in one of the earliest animated cartoons. McCay used the cartoon in a popular vaudeville show, interacting with Gertie as she did very dinosaurian things like drinking a lake dry and biting off most of a tree. The most important early dinosaur movie was *The Lost World* (1925), based on Doyle’s novel. Sauropods, ceratopsians (like *Triceratops*), and theropods are featured, all monstrous, dim-witted, and excruciatingly slow-footed. The pattern was set; dinosaurs appeared in dozens of movies after this in basically the same way with only the animation improving over time. The





Gertie the dinosaur standing on a cliff edge looking at a mastodon, 1914. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

most prominent of these movies include *One Million B.C.* (1940, but who can forget its 1966 remake with Raquel Welch?), *Journey to the Beginning of Time* (1955), and *The Valley of the Gwangi* (1969). Hollywood dinosaurs as tail-dragging, overgrown lizards persist into the 1980s.

Then came the next iconic dinosaur film: *Jurassic Park* (1993). The scientific revolution in which dinosaurs were hypothesized to have been active, upright, bird-like animals whose extinction was due more to chance than to evolution had finally penetrated Hollywood.

Michael Crichton's novel of the same name, combined with Steven Spielberg's direction, changed the image of dinosaurs forever for the public. The *Jurassic Park* dinosaurs were not lizards; they were creatures unique in their own ways. Furthermore, Crichton and Spielberg showed a diversity of dinosaurs, from the small to the stupendous, from extraordinary chasing predators to swift ostrich-like herbivores. There is probably no other film which has had such a dramatic impact on science education. The modern era of the dinosaur image had begun.

## DINOSAURS AS ICONS TODAY

Buy a bag of plastic dinosaurs and you'll find them roughly distributed between carnivores and herbivores, even though the latter were far more common in life. About half will be bipedal and the other half quadrupedal, again more to reflect diversity than paleontological reality. (The bag may also contain plesiosaurs, pterosaurs, and ichthyosaurs, none of which are dinosaurs!) Spread these dinosaur toys out on the floor before a group of American children and watch the kids sort them out and tell stories. The carnivores quickly become the "bad" dinosaurs, preying on the placid and friendly herbivores. *Tyrannosaurus rex* skulks around the outside of the group, pouncing on the unwary *Triceratops*, while a *Velociraptor* pack tears into a beleaguered *Iguanodon*. (You will find that most American children even know the relative ages of dinosaur taxa, so they rarely have anachronistic match-ups.) The herbivores are not without responses to the predators, though, as the children deploy them in defensive circles with "babies" protected inside, and the whip-like tails of the sauropods and the spikes of the ceratopsians do great damage on the attackers. These children have created a mythic drama with these toys. Each plastic dinosaur represents a form, a

personality, a set of needs, and a reputation as fixed as those of the Greek gods. For the children it is a universal language continually modified by images from the Discovery Channel and the thousands of dinosaur books written just for them. And beneath the passion stories, growls, and mimicked mayhem are scientific concepts. Dinosaurs have become the most effective means of introducing children to science because they fit so well into cultural models of conflict and resolution, good and bad, power and weakness. This utility of dinosaur symbols as an introduction to scientific thinking is a late twentieth-century phenomenon directly traceable to the contemporaneous scientific renaissance in dinosaur studies.

We can thus understand why the poster of *Tyrannosaurus rex* in a 10-year-old's bedroom now represents power (parents, for example, would be no match for this creature!), and how it evokes the mysterious lost world of the past. But why does little brother down the hall sleep every night comforted by a soft, stuffed, purple *T. rex* called Barney? Clearly the icon of the dinosaur is not entirely controlled by scientific realism. Barney was created in 1987 by a former teacher, Sheryl Leach, who wanted to make educational videos for preschool children. She saw her toddler son's fascination with museum dinosaurs and realized the potential for a dinosaur to attract children and maintain their interest. Barney was born. In 1992, *Barney & Friends* debuted on PBS television and quickly became the number one children's show. Barney was joined by his ceratopsian friends Baby Bop and BJ in the videos, and there is of course no suggestion of a predator-prey relationship! Baby Bop and BJ are even bipedal to make them more anthropomorphic and similar to Barney. The image of the dinosaur was thus transformed in Barney to that of a benign (and sometimes inane) older brother who is all about love, manners, and the primary colors. Preschool children listen to the very parental messages coming from characters very much unlike their actual mothers and fathers. It works because of that initial contact children have with much more impressive dinosaurs in museums, books, and movies. Curiously, Barney is wildly popular with young children, but among teenagers Barney is one of the most unpopular icons ever. Type "Barney the dinosaur" into a web search engine and you will see hundreds of extraordinary I-Hate-Barney Web sites.

The most enduring dinosaur in American commerce is Dino, the symbol for the Sinclair Oil Company. The company on its official



Roadside attraction of a tyrannosaurus rex. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

Web site ([www.sinclairoil.com](http://www.sinclairoil.com)) says that as a trademark Dino is a symbol of “power, endurance and stamina, the prime qualities of Sinclair products.” In 1930 the company wanted to find a way to convey to the public the quality of one of its crude oils which was especially old. They decided to use a dozen different kinds of dinosaurs in dramatic print advertisements to illustrate the geological past. These advertisements were very popular, and by 1932 one dinosaur stood out: the sauropod *Apatosaurus*. Curiously, the Sinclair sauropod looks very much like Winsor McCay’s acclaimed *Gertie the Dinosaur*, which appeared less than twenty years before and was also seen to be powerful yet friendly and under control. The Sinclair Oil Company registered the Dino image as a trademark and for many years even supported paleontological research on dinosaurs and distributed a variety of geological education materials to schools. Dino remains in silhouette on Sinclair Oil signs much the same way he has looked for decades. All the company needs to do now is lift its tail off the ground to make it more in keeping with current interpretations of *Apatosaurus*.

The dinosaur has thus been a complicated icon for American culture because it is directly tied to a dynamic science which has changed its own image of dinosaurs dramatically. Dinosaurs were unique, diverse, instantly recognizable creatures which roamed the landscape for over 150 million years. They always represented to us great age and a mysterious past. As a cultural symbol the dinosaur has evolved, though, from an almost mythically slow and thick beast to the much more realistic animals we imagine today.

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# Dollar Bill

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*Heinz Tschachler*

Every student of popular culture has his or her own personal motives for choosing a subject matter for analysis. I am old enough to admit that my relation to money is somewhat sentimental. A great deal of this is owed to my grandmother, who once gave me a stash of old German banknotes. They were emergency issues (*Notgeld*) from the inflation-plagued 1920s. Billions of those Deutschmarks together were worth less than ten bucks. By contrast, my uncle Erich's coin collection, always the object of my youthful fascination, must be worth quite a few grand. Another index to the sentimentality in my relationship to money is the fact that I always carry a one dollar bill in my wallet, for good luck. In these days of the euro I also notice that it speaks to me in a voice that is more familiar and more reassuring than that of the new currency. Why should that be so? Am I just another hapless victim of the relentless pressure to modernize? An essay on the euro's "sad symbols" and on its future as a currency "without soul or culture" (Théret) offers a more complex explanation. The gist of it is that the acceptance and legitimacy of modern currencies depend on their ability to symbolize a community based on a political territory and, at the same time, to transcend social contradictions. So much for postnationalism.

On the remaining pages, then, I want to pursue understanding the cultural work of the U.S. dollar; that is, I want to consider the meanings and associations—especially those that go beyond its function as "legal tender for all debts, public and private"—that it adds to the texts and contexts in which it appears. In order to achieve a sense of structure and coherence, I have arranged my pursuit around two issues: questions of money and value, on the one hand, and the role of the state in guaranteeing value by promising to redeem (what Marx called) "worthless tokens" at their face value, on the other.

If I focus rather narrowly on paper money, there are good reasons for doing so. Paper money is generally much more iconographically loaded than coinage. The large, rectangular shape of paper money affords ample space for expressing all kinds of ideas on a familiar canvas and thus for serving func-

tions beyond the mere economic. Furthermore, paper money began its widespread, long-lived use in America. The absence of any precious metal in what is now the United States—gold was not discovered in any usable quantity until 1848, and silver even later—left Americans little choice. They had to rely on paper money. “Paper money alone,” Richard Doty concludes, “would give the United States the peculiar capital elasticity it required” for its development as a nation (91).

Bringing together euro and dollar served to highlight a key feature of any iconic subject: as the editors of this collection found, icons generate strong reactions. People identify with them, or against them. There are undoubtedly many people carrying a \$1 bill in their wallets for good luck, but who would consider doing the same with a \$2 bill? If the unpopularity of that bill stems from its being the basic bet in horse-racing, the history of the national monetary icon abounds with examples of strong reactions. For the republic’s founders, for instance, money had been a means to formulate and perform a national identity or, in the words of a delegate to the Continental Congress, “a new bond of union to the associated colonies” (qtd. in Goodwin 61). Indeed the notes of the Continental Currency, issued in order to finance the Revolutionary War, were “the earliest symbols of the United States. . . . All the power of political advertising was vested in the Continental dollar bill” (Goodwin 62–63). The actual money value of Continentals, which were redeemable in Spanish milled dollars, was beside the point. Only two years after their adoption, ten dollars in Continental Currency bills was worth only

one Spanish silver dollar; by 1781, the ratio was 1,000 to 1. Ultimately the currency depreciated to a point where it cost more to print bills than they would buy so that, as Jonathan Carver observed in *Travels in America*, the “Congress paper dollars are now used for papering rooms, lighting pipes, and other conveniences” (qtd. in Newman 15). The depreciation of the notes is also perpetuated in the American colloquialism “not worth a Continental.”

This episode suggests the conflicted meanings surrounding the issuance of American paper currency during the Revolutionary period. But the problem of the paper money form, which unlike coins struck in gold or silver is not valuable in and of itself but only representative of value, had prompted considerable debate and given rise to much anxiety already in the colonial period. This is



Dollar bills. Courtesy of Corbis.

evident from the following practice: in order to encourage acceptance of such bills, a 5 percent premium was granted in Massachusetts (as well as in other colonies) to those who would use them for tax payments. Various colonial military needs throughout the eighteenth century were financed in the same manner, but bills of credit were also issued to repair or build jails, court-houses, harbors, lighthouses, forts, and other public works (Newman 9–10). All these measures were buttressed by the belief—held by Benjamin Franklin, among others—that an increase in the paper money would foster general prosperity. Not everyone agreed. James Madison, for instance, called the current “rage for paper money” an “improper or wicked project,” which only a strong federal government would be likely to remedy (1018). Madison’s vision did not become reality any time soon. On the contrary, the U.S. Constitution left to the states the power to incorporate banks that could issue notes. But with few laws to regulate banking, the situation was soon characterized by such features as wildcat banks, broken bank notes, counterfeit bills, and almost 10,000 different legal notes in circulation (Standish 124). Small wonder, then, that any business extending beyond the local was extremely risky. Edgar Allan Poe knew this well, as can be gleaned from one of his better-known tales.

This tale, written in 1843 and titled “The Gold-Bug,” begins with an account of a Mr. William Legrand’s bankruptcy, his forswearing of all business practices and his subsequent voluntary exile on a remote island off the coast of South Carolina. There Mr. Legrand engages in a quest of “entomological specimens,” that is, of beetles. A golden-colored *Scarabaeus* beetle sets him off on a wild treasure hunt. Incredibly, the hunt is successful, and Legrand is finally rewarded with the real thing, gold, when he unearths an “oblong chest of wood” that contains, in coin, “rather more than four hundred and fifty thousand dollars . . . gold.” Additionally, the hunt yields hundreds of artifacts, also in gold and exceeding “three hundred and fifty pounds avoirdupois.” But not only are both the amount itself and its total value (“the entire contents of the chest [are estimated] at a million and a half of dollars” [Poe 578–80]) verging on the miraculous. The story in particular foregrounds (and implicates the reader in) the incredible ingenuity and resourcefulness that human greed—lust for gold or, again following Marx, worship of the “Lord of commodities”—is capable of spawning. Yet Poe is too shrewd and troubled a writer to tell us whether the treasure will allow Mr. Legrand to live happily ever after. What he does tell us is that the treasure may have been flawed from the beginning, may have been corrupted in several ways at once. First there is, for instance in Legrand’s bug for gold, which drives him almost to madness, an echo of the traditional dislike of money in Christendom for the avarice with which it is associated. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “for the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Not surprisingly there is, secondly, a connection with death and violence, symbolized by the two skeletons in the pit, presumably of two associates killed by the legendary Captain Kidd when the treasure was buried. And thirdly and

finally there is, via the *Scarabaeus* beetle, the “gold-bug” of the title, the association with dung, which is not necessarily of any intrinsic value—like paper money that is not backed by precious metal, or like the “ideal” cryptographic drawing that the treasure-hunting protagonist cashes in for “real” gold.

The paper money form may have prompted considerable debate and given rise to much anxiety, but mostly among those who were or believed themselves to be in danger of losing money. What was talked about much less frequently was that paper money also brought about the breakdown of former distinctions between high and low culture, between social elites and the common. Previously, the latter had used mainly other forms of money, like wampum, buckskin, nails, or (mostly foreign) coinage. The paper dollar changed all that. Its presence also widened the boundaries within which it circulated, from the local to the regional, and ultimately to the national. As a result, relations among people changed; they became increasingly anonymous, and the community lost its face-to-face character to become, in Benedict Anderson’s famous term, an “imagined” one (Anderson 6–7).

The psychological consequences of the issuance of a national paper currency can be gleaned from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s associating it with “the corruption of man,” with “duplicity and falsehood,” and “rotten diction” (1480). Emerson, like many of his contemporaries, located the alternative in nature. Another preferred locus emerges from Washington Irving’s 1833 sketch “The Creole Village,” which describes one of the villages of French and Spanish origin in Louisiana which seemed to have been bypassed by modernization. Typically in those villages the ancient trees were still standing, “flourish[ing] undisturbed; though, by cutting them down, [the villagers] might open new streets, and put money in their pockets. In a word, *the almighty dollar*, that great object of universal devotion throughout our land, seems to have no genuine devotees in these peculiar villages” (23, emphasis added). When Irving republished the sketch in *Wolfert’s Roost* in 1855, he made one major addition in the form of a footnote, which reads as follows:

This phrase [the almighty dollar] used for the first time, in this sketch, has since passed into current circulation, and by some has been questioned as savoring of irreverence. The author, therefore, owes it to his orthodoxy to declare that no irreverence was intended even to the dollar itself; which he is aware is daily becoming more and more an object of worship. (27n.)

In other words, Irving means no disrespect for religion, but expresses his contempt for those who treat money as if it were God and thus an object of devotion.

The practice of treating money as if it were God and thus an object of devotion has found a more modern interpretation in Walter Benjamin’s 1921 fragment titled “Capitalism as Religion.” This short text, which remained

unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime, suggests that a comparison be made between religious paintings ("the images of the saints of the various religions") and the ornaments on banknotes ("the banknotes of different states. The spirit that speaks from the ornamental design of banknotes"). Such a comparison, Benjamin wrote, would reveal the ability of currency iconography to perform some kind of alchemy that transforms commodities or values into their equivalents and invests in pieces of paper values that they do not possess of their own accord (288). Furthermore, Benjamin's reference to "banknotes of different states" recalls the project, undertaken by state authorities especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of instilling in citizens a sense of collective identity. This goal was typically achieved by creating a wide range of memories, icons, and rituals that were capable of representing the nation's symbolic meanings. Perhaps the most obvious way in which national identity was mediated was through images that would help inculcate a sense of belonging to the national community. Such images could be found on items such as flags, stamps, murals and paintings, and statues—and on the national currency, which Eric Hobsbawm has called the "most universal form of public imagery" (281).

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the national currency was adorned with classical images and allegories, such as Columbia or Victory or Concordia, or more modern ones, such as Industry, Steam, or Electricity, with vignettes pertaining to history or tradition, or with reproductions of the famous paintings of Americana hanging in the Capitol at Washington or in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. As one visitor to the United States found, these (incredibly skilled and tasteful) depictions made banknote-engraving "the only true American contribution to the arts" (qtd. in Goodwin 150). Allegories were essentially feel-good images, serving the bourgeoisie well in that they concealed the worst excesses of industrialization and commodity relations. In the long run, however, images prevailed that were capable of representing the nation's symbolic meanings. This move was bound up in the shift of responsibility for note issuing from small local banks to large-scale central institutions such as the Treasury Department and, as of 1913, the Federal Reserve Bank. A crucial year was 1929, when a special committee appointed by the Secretary of the Treasury determined that "portraits of the Presidents of the United States have a more permanent familiarity in the minds of the public than any others" (Bureau of Engraving and Printing). Some exceptions were allowed, though, and thus we have portraits of Franklin (on the \$100 note, colloquially called "Benjamin"), Hamilton (the first Secretary of the Treasury, on the \$10 note), and Salmon P. Chase (Treasury Secretary under Lincoln, on the \$10,000 note).

Also in 1929 the size of all dollar bills was reduced by 25 percent, a measure adopted in order to save paper and thus to cut down on the cost of production. The measure was also coincidental with the stock market crash and thus truly emblematic of the fall. Three years later Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected on the expectation that he would give inspiration to a



Depression-demoralized nation. His proclamation, in the first inaugural address, that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” (qtd. in Lott 278) is thus particularly poignant. There was indeed much to be feared, like the fact that, following the abandonment of the gold standard in 1933, the circulation of symbolic currency was no longer related to its successful redemption. This shift meant that dollar bills had to be popular with a people who, as Roosevelt had declared, had been shamefully betrayed by the “money changers” (qtd. in Lott 279). When in 1935 the new bills began to roll off the presses, they were solidly dull-looking. Yet as Goodwin contends, the new dollar “no longer had to hoot and trumpet: America *was* the future.” Uniform across America, the new dollar was also “the perfect ingredient in the corporation paycheck . . . an indispensable partner to Big Business” (287). Small wonder, then, that the new design was here to last. The only significant change since has been the adoption of the national motto, “In God We Trust,” in 1957, a gesture by President Eisenhower to please the people who took their dollar bills seriously, like their flag and their pledge of allegiance.

Overall, dollar bills belong to those collective representations which, in the sociological tradition, provide the shared understandings which bond individuals together in society. A French commentator even remarked that “an emblematic power emanates from [the current \$1 bill] and transforms it into a potent political symbol” (Goux 115–16). In a similar vein, Brian Burrell characterized the current \$1 bill as at one and the same time the most familiar denomination of paper currency and “the most enigmatic of all American denominations” (181). Other commentators have gone even further, reading it as evidence of a Masonic conspiracy (Griffin). Still others connect it to big government, which undoubtedly began with the Roosevelt administration; or else to its dominance of international finance and export trading and, as well, to the preeminence of U.S. might in the global arena.

The dollar may be a sign of power both abroad and at home, but it also connects to the world of recognizable and reliable items, and, by extension, to the world of familiar things and popular culture. There are a whole set of practices associated with it which define what is culturally distinctive about it—like using it as game money, on greeting cards, or on personalized bills. Or else, referring to it in terms which have or have almost made it into standard English—terms like “greenback,” “folding green,” “buck” (which enshrines the fact that once deerskin went for around a dollar), “dough” (which means money because everyone “kneads” it), “grand” (meaning a thousand), and a host of other terms (Goodwin 119–20). Hip-hop has likewise valorized money throughout its existence, from Jimmy Spicer’s “Money (Dollar Bill Y’all)” in 1981 to Puff Daddy’s “It’s All About the Benjamins” in 1997, or by using “c.r.e.a.m.” (“Cash Rules Everything Around Me”) as a term for money.

Also to the world of familiar things and popular culture belong the little posters one used to see in food stores, diners, gas stations, and many other establishments throughout the U.S., near the cash register, which read, “In

God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash.” These posters, which seem to have disappeared with the widespread use of credit and debit cards, are a good example of the inversion of established hierarchies, when low becomes high, and high becomes low. The inversion is only temporary, though, and it does not therefore do away with Americans’ “contractual relationship” with the state. That relationship, as is suggested by the phrase “In God We Trust,” is legitimized by an authority beyond the state. To change these modest pieces of cotton fabric may thus be un-American. As a friend of mine remembered from watching a PBS documentary on currency about fifteen to twenty-five years ago, the United States was “pissing off European nations by refusing to change its currency.” The problem was that the bills had been around so long that they were easy targets for counterfeiters. As this friend recalled, the American response was to the effect that, “‘This is the dollar,’ as if one had been asked to change the teachings of Jesus because of religious counterfeits” (McNamara). Essentially, the teachings of the dollar—encoded in the verbal and visual images on the currency—serve to manufacture consent and a sense of inclusion among the American people. But as Eric Helleiner contends, the importance of the symbolic role of currencies as badges of national identity may be diminishing. There are many reasons for this, including the increasing number of everyday monetary transactions that do not involve a form of money with nationalist imagery on it. Another reason is that long-standing economic and fiscal national borders face probable dissolution, as is suggested, for example, by the introduction of the euro. But Americans are still “kindly separated” (as Jefferson would say) from the euro by an ocean, and thus the greenback remains an especially resonant American icon. To my knowledge, it is also the only currency to ever have become the subject of paintings, from John Haberle’s *trompe l’oeuil* paintings of the 1890s to Andy Warhol’s *Dollar-Signs* (1981), which these days sell for \$50,000 apiece (Shell).

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# Bob Dylan

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## *Edward P. Comentale*

When Bob Dylan sang “It Ain’t Me, Babe,” in 1964—apparently to a blinkered lover—his fans too felt the pain of rejection. The album in which the song appears—*Another Side of Bob Dylan*—marks an important turning point in Dylan’s career, the first explicit rejection of his status as prophet-poet and the first of many efforts to outwit the press, the music industry, and his own supporters. Here, Dylan the folk hero dissolves into Dylan the folk trickster, shaking off his role as spokesperson for a disenfranchised America, forcing his listeners to turn inwards, to examine their aggressive neediness for a heroic icon, and to find their own damn map to a brave new world.

Yet Dylan lets himself off too easily here, disappearing behind his own invective, and refusing to address his role in an entirely new cultural phenomenon that extends far beyond this particular song, its individual singer, or its eager listeners. Put simply, his surly chorus at once signals and dismisses the emergence of an icon who so completely disavows his iconic status and who makes that continual disavowal the basis for an even more spectacular stardom. The silence that ends the album, which is also a temporary and no doubt frustrating absence of his once assuring voice, reframes the stress of its chorus, placing a perplexing emphasis not on “me” the singer or even “you” the listener, but “it,” this strange configuration of need and desire, whereby a nation at large grants nearly divine status to a rebel drifter and possible con artist. Who are you, Mister Dylan? Or, better yet, *what* are you, Mister Dylan? And why does the negation of your identity—your “me”—make us want to know you even more? And then what does this singularly frustrating push-and-pull of fanatic desire and disavowal tell us about American culture today?

No doubt, Bob Dylan “made himself up” (Shelton 83). In early interviews, he describes his hometown—Hibbing, Minnesota—as a pit, a hole, the empty center of an America from which any rock star might emerge fully-formed. The old iron mines—now barren and overgrown—serve his biography both as mythic marker of a country that fails its young and as emblem of a distinctly American facility for self-creation. Early anecdotes, too, have him posing in front of mirrors or on his Harley—James Dean-style—hips out, hair slicked

back. Later on, he modeled a diverse range of musical icons: he took his voice from Guthrie, his stance was all Presley, and his kinky, wildman hair was pure Little Richard. With rising fame, he quickly learned to use the press for his own shape-shifting needs. He told reporters he was an orphan, a drifter, a hobo—he hailed anywhere from Superior, Wisconsin, to Acapulco, Mexico, to Gallup, New Mexico—he claimed that as a young boy he wanted to be a movie usher, a chorus girl, and a president (but not Harry Truman). He had a long list of pseudonyms: Elmer Johnson, Tedham Porterhouse, Bob Landy, Robert Milkwood Thomas, Big Joe’s Buddy, Blind Boy Grunt, Keef Laundry, Judge Magney, Lucky Wilbury, not to mention Kunezevitch or maybe Kessenovitch; he introduced himself at a Halloween concert by saying, “I got my Dylan mask on today.” As one friend claimed, “Every few weeks, Bob would become a different person with a different style.” Another said, “Bob is not an ordinary human being. There are two people, the cat I know and knew here and the one who’s ‘on’ in public” (Shelton 73, 80). Apart from any obvious musical talent, political courage, or business sense, Dylan seemed to guarantee himself at least a modicum of fame with this very public form of self-creation. The mystery, the elusiveness, the incredible self-containment of his performances captivated first an intensely exclusive New York folk scene and then conquered, with each new guise, a worldwide audience. But this was not mere careerism, for Dylan always took a keen pleasure—if not a certain political stance—with this tricksterism. In fact, throughout his career, he seems comfortable only as a put-on artist, a “surly mystic tease,” poking holes in his own authenticity and the sanctimony of his fans (Kael 225). As he joked in one of the first of many anti-biographies, “I’s driftin’ an’ learnin’ new lessons / I was making my own depression / . . . Hitchhiked on 61 – 51 – 75 – 169 – 37 – 66 – 22 / Got jailed for suspicion of armed robbery / Got held for four hours on a murder rap / Got busted for looking like I do. / An’ I never done none a them things” (“My Life”).

Although Dylan may have been having a hoot, each new guise served a genuine purpose; as intimates knew, with Dylan, “It really became much more than identification. He *was* the people he identified with” (Shelton 75). His endless vaudeville act—with its ad hoc staginess, its egalitarian scope, and its sexual sweep—can be aligned with a truly captivating vision of democratic America. In every dusty, impoverished incarnation, Dylan the icon nods to the rambling, gambling migrants of the country’s past, present, and future, and so—more than anything else—he becomes a multitude, a voracious humanist, as big as Guthrie, Whitman, and Lincoln himself: “away away be gone all you demons,” he writes in a 1964 letter to *Broadside Magazine*, “an just let me be me / human me / wild me / gently me / all kinds of me” (“A Letter”).

Here, though, we are confronted with perhaps the central contradiction of Dylan’s career, and perhaps the basis of his iconic status and its apparent longevity. As icon, he is at once associated with both the American folk tradition, with its emphasis on oral transmission, rural living, real labor, and rootsy authenticity, and, on the other hand, a kind of postmodern playfulness characterized by pastiche, performativity, and self-reflective irony. For him,

“folklore” is also “fakelore”; the “poet-prophet” is a “profit-poet”—a “song and dance man”—a “song-thief”—or, as one fan famously shouted, a “Judas.” No doubt, Dylan found this a hard line to walk, as each turn in his career—going folk, going electric, going underground, going folk again, going Christian, going Jewish, etc.—inevitably pissed off die-hard traditionalists as well as unrepentant deconstructionists. Yet, considering the arc of that career and the honky-tonk majesty of masterpieces like “Desolation Row” and “Visions of Johanna,” he knew how to make the paradox work, linking both modes through their shared emphases on anti-authoritarianism and personal liberation, as well as the promise of a more fully organic community. More specifically, then, Dylan’s folk is never simply or prettily folkish, for he pushes always at the tradition’s tangled, degenerate ends, as it sounds on the road, played by drifters, hobos, and other hoods, as it appears in vaudeville routines or dancehall skits, as it echoes on early



Bob Dylan, 1965. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

radio and other commercial formats. In all, this folk is aware of itself as folk—as self-conscious struggle, as impossible hope, as a crooked performance of what may never have been and what may not ever come to pass. When pressed about his music, Dylan will typically confess that “the times cry for truth,” but he quickly adds that there’s a whole lot more in his music: “mystery magic, truth, and the Bible” as well (Shelton 191). As he insists, his music is never simply expressive or even reflective of some greater truth; rather, it is full of lies, evasions, gaps, and obscurities, in which the listener may or may not find himself: “Folk songs are evasive,” he writes; they speak

the truth about life, and life is more or less a lie, but then again that’s exactly the way we want it to be. We wouldn’t be comfortable with it any other way. A folk song has over a thousand faces and you must meet them all if you want to play this stuff. A folk song might vary in meaning and it might not appear the same from one moment to the next. It depends on who’s playing and who’s listening. (*Chronicles* 71)

Undeniably, from the start, Dylan’s folksy turn was always tinged with irony and despair. “Ballad of Hollis Brown” upends rustic idealism by de-

picting rural life as the scene of unemployment, starvation, and squalor; the final stanza recounts a mass murder that leaves seven people dead and concludes with the equally damning notion that somewhere else there're seven new people being born. But his folk songwriting really comes into its own when it begins to tap into the ironies inherent to the genre itself. The song "Gates of Eden" proclaims nothing more than a continual deferral of paradise; with each choric reiteration, the promise of peace draws off into the distance as the singer retreats inward. Later, on *John Wesley Harding*, his understated chords and deceptively simple lyrics recall the sustaining form even as they wreck the entire folk tradition; the album's sepia-toned allegories of outlaws and drifters carry all the weight of the western experience and yet defy any easy answers his weary listeners may seek. The haunting "Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest," for example, attracts us with the apparent simplicity of its narrative style, but, in the end, it offers not one or two, but three ridiculously reductive and mutually contradicting moral conclusions.

In his recent work, Greil Marcus offers a compelling account of Dylan's folk music and its singular appeal. He emphasizes Dylan's uncanny ability to tap into an "old, weird America," to mine "certain bedrock strains of American cultural language." Dylan's songs serve as maps to an "undiscovered country" at once familiar and strange, an America that is both undeniably present yet unbearably imaginary; they point towards another version of America that is at once irretrievably lost and yet about to be born, an America that is perhaps as inauthentic as the ordinary America, yet one that follows through on its populist premises (Marcus xix–xxii). Marcus's claim—with his emphasis on the good ol' used-to-be and a god-willin' about-to-be—perhaps provides the key to Dylan's strange iconicity; as one friend from Dylan's early Minneapolis days reported, Dylan's scene is always elsewhere. "Both of us were on the edges of the scene, here, accepted but outside because of some need or difference of our own. I guess that's the real basis of our friendship then, a feeling that there was more, something else, somewhere else" (Shelton 80). As an icon, Dylan always speaks with two tongues, playing authenticity off of kitsch, presence against pose. In this, his show is all about deferral—he works in alibis, never where he pretends to be—"it," the real deal, is always truly elsewhere, just beyond the horizon. Thus, a certain emptiness, a certain mystery—perhaps like the black hole of Hibbing—lies at the center of each masked and anonymous performance, each interview, and unfinished autobiography. This emptiness is what draws the listener, demanding to be filled or fleshed out by the fan—each image is at once overdetermined and underdetermined, grounded by tangible details and yet open enough to encompass a multitude of individual desires. Frank Kermode and Stephen Spender offer a precise account of this trait:

A preference for mystery, opacity, a sort of emptiness in his texts, a passivity about meaning, is no doubt a deep temperamental trait. . . . The listener provides the response, brings his own meanings; he is offered no message, only mystery.

Dylan says the audience reaction “doesn’t matter”, but also that he welcomes “with open arms” people who analyse his songs. (157–58)

Pete Hammill concurs, stressing that this mystery works towards the establishment of a public:

[B]y leaving things out, he allows us the grand privilege of creating along with him. His song becomes our song because we live in those spaces. If we listen, if we work at it, we fill up that mystery, we expand and inhabit the work of art. It is the most democratic form of creation. (Shelton 373)

But this mystery—its pliability, as the site of multiple identifications—lies at the heart of every icon. Again, Dylan’s uniqueness—as a rebel icon, as a late-twentieth-century American icon—rests on an active self-negation, on his dynamic claim that the truth exists, but only elsewhere, in the beyond, with the next incarnation. It is this uncanny ability to disavow and re-create the self at will, to discard and recycle the most sacred traditions, to break the contract and yet sign another one in good faith, that seems typically Dylan and typically postmodern American. He gives his late-twentieth-century listener the distinctly cynical pleasure of holding out hope as all turns to shit in his hands—each sham or degradation also implies the possibility of authenticity, if not the possibility of a better tomorrow. In the end, “Desolation Row” is at once the most desolate street in America and the hippest place on earth. Its singular abjection—a circus-full of frauds, derelicts, and deviants—ultimately signals the possibility of a true and lush originality, not to mention human vitality and genuine community.

And yet, if this is an “old, weird America,” it is also a commodified America. In fact, an object that allures by way of its inherent emptiness—serving as receptacle for a multiplicity of unrealized hopes and dreams—is nothing more than a commodity. Dylan, in his continual role-playing and self-revision—ceaselessly updating his image, his songs, his biography, his precursors, his heirs—is always also a monstrous commodity, generating capital for decades, leading on old fans, capturing new ones, synergistically selling music, books, movies, guitars, Stetson hats, sunglasses, boots, political causes, presidents, ladies’ underwear, etc. His continual disavowal of his own labeling—personal, political, commercial, or otherwise—is at once a real gesture of protest against market appropriation as well as the central mechanism by which the marketplace extends itself. Indeed, Dylan’s jittery dance with the commodified versions of himself is a spectacle in its own right. After 1965, when superstardom became undeniable, his work grew preoccupied with his own increasingly thing-like status, and the songs register a dizzying range of emotions from humor, irony, and anger to downright confusion and fear. “I don’t want to give the impression of being a star,” he stated that year, “because I don’t think of myself as one. . . . I’ve seen all these crazes come and go, and I don’t think I’m more than a craze. In a couple years time, I shall be



right back where I started—an unknown. . . . All I'm interested in is singing to people who want to listen to me" (Shelton 290). At times, though, he found it hard to control his response, as he barked at a reporter in that same year, "Listen, I couldn't care less what your paper writes about me. Your paper can write anything, don't you realize. . . . You're using me. I'm an object to you" (Henshaw 55). In a few years' time, he would retreat altogether, but eerily he would encounter versions of himself everywhere; in 1972, hiding out in Phoenix, he heard Neil Young's "Heart of Gold" on the radio: "I needed to lay back for a while," he reports, "forget about things, myself included, and I'd get so far away and turn on the radio and there I am, but it's not me. It seemed to me somebody else had taken my thing and had run away with it, you know, and I never got over it" (Cohen 226).

And yet, again, the apparent emptiness and superficiality of the commodified form does not exclude the possibility of authentic experience. As we have seen, Dylan's status as an icon rests precisely on his ability to combine sham with sincerity, and we could perhaps read his bedraggled career and its failed hopes as the very basis of an alluring genuineness. In this regard, John Dyer's work on the twentieth-century phenomenon of stardom contains a few essential observations. Dyer combines sociology and semiotics to show how a single historical context produces both the fan and the star. His argument concerns the ways in which a troubled public seeks ideological resolution in its star images; in this, he reads stars as complex, polyvocal signs that serve to express and contain specific cultural tensions (6, 19–20). In Dylan's case, the seemingly mystical way in which a public elects its icon is expressed in a rhetoric of dreams and voices. Throughout much of the criticism and fan responses, the singer's voice is described as the voice of a generation, and his dreams seem to be the dreams of all his listeners. Dylan himself has often described his work as responsive to "inner voices," and he has made repeated claims that his songs are "kind of working out other people's fantasies" (Cohen 224). Fans, in turn, respond without restraint. Steve Soles once exclaimed, "Dylan is a psychic, he paraphrases things I've dreamed." And Simon Frith, "When people dream about Dylan—and most people do—they dream of him not as a lover but as a friend. If one of his skills has been to make his private concerns public, without being mawkish or self-concerned, another has been to let us make his public world, all the songs, private, relevant to our individual concerns" (Shelton 454, 468).

But insofar as Dylan the icon gives voice to a distinctly American wish-fulfillment, we must limit that expression to the late twentieth-century. Dyer insists that the historically-specific phenomenon of stardom expresses a historically-specific experience of the struggle between individual talent and economic conformity. According to Dyer, the success of a star image depends on its ability to express an absolutely modern tension between a romantic sense of selfhood and its commercial submission: "In terms of motivation, then, stars are very often on the raw edge of the individual-versus-society, self-versus-role-nexus" (99).

In other words, Dylan's struggle with his iconic status is a somewhat romanticized version of the struggle all his postwar and quasi-liberal fans go through, particularly as they navigate the increasingly corporate landscape of contemporary America. Aptly, the introduction to an *Esquire* exposé from 1972 described Dylan as a "human metaphor at the end of the corporate tunnel." The accompanying analysis by Frank Kermode emphasized the "humanness" of the metaphor and acknowledged—sincerely—how it served to galvanize a genuine community with genuine longings and fears (160). Ultimately, in the face of political disillusion, corporate appropriation, and personal disaster, Dylan was able to work his commodified status to his—and our own—advantage. Eschewing romantic rebellion as well as cynical defeat, he offers up confounding versions of himself that—in their own sly way—contain all the possibility of a more human and humane American experience.

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# Albert Einstein

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*Anthony O’Keeffe*

## **ALBERT EINSTEIN—ICONIC PROBLEM**

The difficulty that comes with investigating Einstein’s iconic status is so simple that it can be understood by invoking two short and unremarkable words: *an* and *the*. The first of those words can be shared by any number of people: James Dean is an icon of male American sexuality—as is Clark Gable, and the young Marlon Brando, and Tom Cruise, and . . . Eleanor Roosevelt is an icon of female American social activism—as is Susan B. Anthony, and Rosa Parks, and Gloria Steinem, and . . . *An* carries with it the implication of the list. Einstein is, of course and differently, *the* icon of twentieth-century science—global and American. And in that short but decisive *the* the depth of the problem is made clear. Depth is itself the problem.

## **ALBERT EINSTEIN—SPECTRUM PROBLEM, MOBIUS SOLUTION**

Reading Einstein’s *Autobiographical Notes*, one cannot but be charmed by a passage such as this: “There were altogether only two examinations; aside from these, one could just about do as one pleased. This was especially the case if one had a friend, as I did, who attended the lectures regularly and who worked over their content conscientiously” (31). Reading further, one cannot but be charmed—differently—by a passage such as this: “Since we know from the special theory of relativity that the (inertial) mass equals the energy, we shall have to put on the right-hand side the tensor of energy density—more precisely, of the entire energy density that does not belong to the pure gravitational field. In this way one arrives at the field equation:  $R_{ik} - 1/2g_{ik}R = -kT_{ik}$ ” (71).

Let these passages stand, for the moment, as ends of a wide spectrum, reminding us of two fundamentals of Einstein’s iconic status: so human a person; so inconceivable a genius. The width of that spectrum might make any such figure seem too dauntingly, too mysteriously different to be approached

or understood. But imagine that spectrum as printed on a discrete length of paper. Give it a twist—Einstein’s wanderer’s life can always provide one.

If relativity is proved right the Germans will call me a German, the Swiss will call me a Swiss citizen, and the French will call me a citizen of the world. If relativity is proved wrong, the French will call me a Swiss, the Swiss will call me a German, and the Germans will call me a Jew.

Join the ends together (space does, after all, turn out to be curved). Now our spectrum is a Möbius strip; it has achieved the unity of a single surface. This playful way—scientific, mathematical—of imaging Einstein brings us back to the wholeness, the “integrity,” of our icon’s human self. That continuity constitutes a large part of his power as icon.

### EVERY SCHOOLBOY KNOWS

Analytical commentary on the nature of Einstein’s iconic status is always more a matter of reminding than of discovery. His enduring public image is tidily expressed by this link on the Web site of the Historical Society of Princeton: “Albert Einstein: Scientist, Humanitarian, Cultural Icon.” As these categories imply, he was a genius whose intellectual powers, so enormous and original, did not make him coldly dismissive, analytically inhuman—qualities the popular stereotype typically applies to the scientist.

That image can be explored in more detail through the Web exhibit *Albert Einstein: Image and Impact* created by the American Institute of Physics; there such sections as “The Great Works—1905,” “World Fame,” and “Public Concerns” (just three of the eight available) can be accessed by clicking on a particular photographic image of Einstein. These AIP links remind us of another fundamental source of Einstein’s iconic power—his appealing visual distinctiveness. The *Image and Impact* exhibit is laced with photographs that—tellingly—are available for purchase. And there would be no counting the cultural appropriations (popular and serious, consumerist and political, religious and iconoclastic) of his almost universally familiar image: the hair that seems alive with the charge of his brilliant ideas; the dark, alert, and steadfast eyes; his expression, most typically rendering him as grave sage (the striking Philippe Halsman photo on the cover of *Autobiographical Notes*) or playful mocker of his own image and reputation (his tongue stuck out in mockery of a group of press photographers). It has been used to sell everything from beer to baseball caps, from books to nesting dolls, from computers to hair gel.

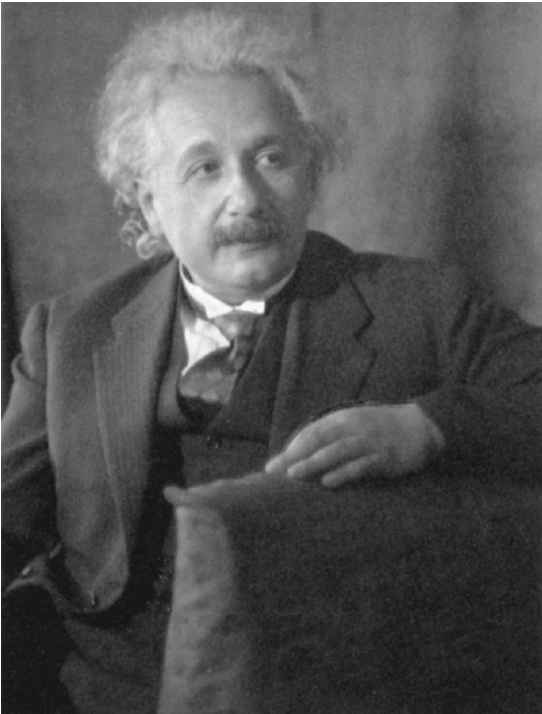
And Einstein is as textually famous as he is visually, his image often being accompanied by one of his vivid aphorisms: “Imagination is more important than knowledge”; “I am convinced that God does not play dice”; “Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind”; “The important thing is not to stop questioning”; “One cannot simultaneously prepare for and prevent war.”

Still, for all of his humanitarian concerns, and his lively anti-authoritarianism in matters both social and scientific, Einstein's iconic status naturally began with—and continues to be guaranteed by—his work in science. In *Einstein and the Rise of Big Science*, cosmologist Peter Coles deftly sketches the story of the two Royal Astronomical Society expeditions—one to Principe, off the coast of West Africa, one to Sobral, in northern Brazil—that would observe the total solar eclipse of May 29, 1919. Einstein's theory of general relativity predicted that the sun's enormous gravitational force would “bend” light rays passing close to it, deflecting by a measurable amount the known position of stars close to the sun's circumference. A day after the expedition teams presented their data, to a joint meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society and the Royal Society of London, confirmation of Einstein's correctness—and thereby of his genius—struck the world full force with this *London Times* headline of November 7, 1919: “REVOLUTION IN SCIENCE. NEW THEORY OF THE UNIVERSE” (Coles 57). Even though few people could follow the mathematics of Einstein's ideas (or even hold them in mind in familiar conceptual ways), all could manage a sense of the genius it must have taken to create them.

Yet the depth of Einstein's genius does not alone account for the permanence of his fame, and the growth and persistence of his stature. His genius was also, as luck

would have it, timely; wedded to it was the exponential growth of science in the twentieth century. In *The Search for Solutions*, historian Horace Freeland Judson argues that science “is the most interesting, difficult, pitiless, exciting, and beautiful pursuit that we have yet found. Science is our century's art” (12). And he dates the beginning of its rise to such status precisely: June 30, 1905—the day Einstein submitted his “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies” to the *Annalen der Physik*. In the realm of high theory, Einstein marks the defining step forward in twentieth-century science. After that, the historical march of theory and technology will carry him forward with it.

It is crucial, of course, that Einstein worked within physics, the hardest of the so-called “hard sciences.” Physics typically combined deep theoretical thinking with experimental procedure under controlled conditions, to yield the most precise, wide-ranging, and



Albert Einstein, 1931. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

predictive truths. Within that science, Einstein worked in an unusually pure way: deriving his brilliantly revolutionary insights through “thought experiments,” only pursuing mathematical proofs after. And then, of course, as the century unfolded, physics added to its image as the very emblem of pure thought (relativity, quantum theory) its new status as the source of raw inconceivable power (nuclear weapons).

The historical arc defined by the years from Hitler’s rise to power (January 1933) to the development of the first atom bomb (August 1945) marks the period in which Einstein became a specifically *American* icon. On October 17, 1933, Einstein arrived in Princeton, taking up his appointment as the first faculty member of Abraham Flexner’s new Institute for Advanced Study. It was to Einstein’s Princeton home that fellow physicists Leo Szilard and Eugene Wigner made their way in July 1939, bringing him the news that German scientists had established the possibility of splitting the uranium-235 atom—making the creation of a fission bomb feasible. On August 2, Einstein sent to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt the now-famous letter, drafted by Szilard, alerting him to the possibility that the creation of “a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium” will likely lead to the creation of “extremely powerful bombs of a new type.” Einstein’s paradigm-smashing theoretical work in physics was already behind him; nor would he, as the Manhattan Project unfolded, become directly involved in its work—given his avowedly leftist politics, the U.S. government would not grant him security clearance to do so. But this letter alone linked him inextricably to the history of nuclear weapons development—and thereby to the growth of his adopted home country as the century’s dominant superpower.

Einstein’s American life played directly into several of the important narratives by which the country has traditionally hoped to define its best self. His arrival proved America to be—as its Statue of Liberty advertised—a haven for the persecuted and dispossessed. Einstein’s image as a revolutionary genius who had worked out his astonishingly deep ideas on his own fit nicely with the American icon of the lonely, courageous hero—popularly reproduced and celebrated in any number of movie westerns. Living now in a country marked so enduringly by frontier awareness, he had proved his credentials at the “frontiers” of science. And having spoken forcefully and repeatedly as a pacifist, his embrace of necessary violent resistance to the march of Nazi power revealed in him the kind of pragmatism so central to America’s self-image.

Einstein’s towering intellectual achievements connected him publicly and indissolubly with the history of thought and the unfolding of technological power that define the twentieth century. In physics, he proceeded in the purest of deductive ways toward discoveries of universal importance. As befits ideas so fundamental and wide-reaching, his most famous formula,  $E = mc^2$ , provided both the universal relation of energy and matter *and* a step toward dangerous enormities of human power. And as befits his humanitarian nature, he worked relentlessly against the technological and political misuses

of what his pure theories had handed an unthinking and violence-prone humankind. Iconic as scientific genius, iconic—because iconoclastic—as social thinker, iconic as visual image that can represent both playfulness and almost tragic wisdom, Einstein remains a lively—perhaps even dominating—presence fifty years after his death.

### CLOSER ENCOUNTERS

Near the end of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, those human beings who had been taken aboard the enormous alien spaceship over several decades are returned to earth; they emerge un-aged by their years of faster-than-light-speed travel, prompting one of the awestruck scientists to comment, to a colleague, "Einstein was right!" The answer he receives—"Einstein was probably one of *them*"—provides a particularly well-placed pop-culture confirmation of Einstein's iconic status, grounded as it is in his seemingly otherworldly intelligence.

Since his first appearance in the *New York Times* yearly index, Einstein was never absent from it a single year in his life (Coles 57). I write this essay during the official World Year of Physics, an initiative of the United Nations—whose posters and Web site feature as their presiding eminence Einstein, of course (2005 being the hundredth anniversary of the year in which his four papers that reinvented physics appeared in the *Annalen der Physik*). Though dead fifty years, Einstein remains, in the words of the *New York Times* article "Brace Yourself! Here Comes Einstein's Year," "still the scientist most likely to have his picture on the front page of the newspaper." And he remains an enduring icon of anti-violence social wisdom, and *the* enduring icon of scientific genius, possessing a mind so capacious and freshly far-seeing as to appear almost alien to us. In an anticipatory "echo" of the comment in *Close Encounters*, the *Washington Post*, upon his death, printed an editorial cartoon by Herb Block that shows Earth, floating amid the universe's vastness, sporting an enormous plaque that reads "ALBERT EINSTEIN LIVED HERE." It seemed only fair to advertise to any alien intelligences inclined to notice us, and even to the universe at large, a thinker whose ideas were so vast that only the universe itself could confirm them (as in the 1919 expeditions designed to observe the bending of light).

Inevitably—and perhaps soon—the Einstein that lingers so forcefully as legend and image will be returned to more human, and thereby richer, status. As the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Princeton University Press work through the enormous task of publishing *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein* (projected to run more than twenty-five volumes), we will be forced to encounter the more complex figure briefly presented in Alan Lightman's essay "The Contradictory Genius." The Einstein that Lightman allows us to glimpse is more deeply shadowed by the personal than any public image can be: a young man who can strenuously defy his parents and marry Mileva Maric, only to prove "a remote and insensitive husband and father"; a genius

whose “stubborn self-confidence and willingness to strike out completely on his own” lead him to profoundly revolutionary insights into space, time, and matter, but then isolate him when he turns his back upon quantum physics to pursue—unsuccessfully—his own stubborn search for a non-quantum unified theory; an enormous public presence who remains, at heart, “above all else a loner” (97, 108, 87).

All of which is not to say that Einstein will lose his iconic status—only that it will be transformed. His extraordinary achievements may come to seem even more brilliant as we gain—especially through personal letters—a more sharply detailed sense of the realities of the very human life within which they were so laboriously pursued. In contradiction of the clever line in *Close Encounters*, our sense of Einstein’s greatness—and perhaps the certain foundation of our continued awed response to him—is that he was very much one of us.

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# Emergency Room

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*Robert Wolosin*

One of the most successful television shows of its genre, NBC's *ER* was nominated for twenty Emmy awards in its inaugural season. Ever since, its weekly episodes have entertained millions of viewers with a good cast and slick production values.

*ER* portrays a fast-paced emergency room life. Scenes cut between multiple story lines, creating a sense of breathlessness. The show prides itself on its "realism." Writer/director Jack Orman assures us that emergency physicians review the show "to make sure that everything is accurate" (Barrett). Realism is suggested by sounds such as beeps, loud shouts, screams, sirens, and simultaneous speech. A chaotic, impersonal ambience is conveyed visually by choppy camera work, quick scene changes, and frequent, brief shots of unidentified personnel between the camera and main actors. We see emergency medical technicians wheel patients in on gurneys; we glimpse cops, orderlies, nurses, doctors. The physical trappings of real emergency rooms, including florescent lights, pneumatic double doors, charts, electronic equipment, oxygen masks, and defibrillators, abound.

Nonetheless, this is fiction, not reality. From my own visits to real hospital emergency rooms, I know that they differ markedly from their TV counterparts; real ERs are relatively quiet, long waits are common, and patients without life-threatening problems constitute much of the caseload. In a real ER, patients are more likely to get stitches than CPR. These "reality checks" have been reinforced through a course I teach as a social psychologist. Preparing for medical careers, my undergraduate students observe local emergency rooms and write about their experiences. They say, for instance, that when a "real emergency" arises, the scene reflects an efficient, focused team effort.

As part of an ongoing dialogue between contemporary medicine and American culture, television shows, movies, comic books, jokes, and stories portray emergency rooms in particular ways. Such portrayals are digested and compressed, ultimately to coalesce into a mental representation, or icon. This imagined place represents ideas, values, and feelings about ourselves vis-à-vis modern medical care.

The positive image of the ER in popular media today is a recent development, and scarcely resembles its history. The idea of organized emergency medical care in the United States goes back to at least 1807, when Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Hospital was urged to hire a salaried "house surgeon" to treat emergency cases. In the mid-1800s, Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital had "admitting physicians" who attended emergencies; and New York City's Mount Sinai Hospital treated, emergently, wounded Union Army soldiers as well as victims of riots, fires, and accidents. The earliest reference to an actual emergency room appears to have been in Mount Sinai's Annual Report for 1888, "when the House Staff treated 301 emergency cases. This tiny ER was often referred to as 'the accident closet,' and was located in the entrance hall" (Aufses and Niss 200).

In the mid-twentieth century, several factors increased the use of hospital emergency rooms dramatically. The burgeoning population dispersed to suburbs; and general practitioners, whose numbers were already dwindling, ceased making house calls; instead, they sent patients in dire need directly to an ER. Insurance policies indemnified hospital-based services to a far greater extent than services obtained in offices. Thus, in addition to its continuous availability, patients had a financial incentive to seek ER care. It did not seem to matter that the physicians who staffed the ERs of the day inhabited the lowest rungs of the medical ladder. In teaching hospitals, ER duty was often relegated to interns and residents, and in non-teaching hospitals, the situation was even worse: "Foreign medical graduates, impaired physicians, and those disenchanting with their own practice" worked ERs (Society of Academic Emergency Medicine).

To deal with the personnel problem, a new medical specialty with its own training programs was created, and in 1979 emergency medicine became a full-fledged medical specialty. ERs now employ Board-certified emergency physicians.

From this recent establishment, emergency medicine has risen through media portrayals to dominate the public image of medical care, with its center in a drama-packed ER. I turn now to the prominent features of the iconic ER.

## **SPEED**

Portrayals of ERs constantly emphasize the race against time. In the desperate attempt to save a life, seconds count. We know the drill: rushing through city streets with lights flashing and siren blaring, an ambulance careens toward the scene of a critically injured person. Cars pull over; curious bystanders gawk, wondering where it is going, what the matter is, who is in need. At the accident scene, the crew quickly assesses the patient, immediately applies first aid, gets the patient into the ambulance, and whisks him off to the nearest ER. The ambulance arrives at the hospital's ER bay and the breathless crew bursts through the doors and hustles the patient—now strapped to a gurney and connected to IVs—to a trauma room. Rushing in, the crew barks out the patient's status to the trauma team. Intravenous lines sway, the patient



Doctors and nurses fight to save a life in an Illinois emergency room. Courtesy of Corbis.

is disrobed; the trauma team quickly assesses what must be done and goes to work. Packages of medical supplies are ripped open; an oxygen mask is applied, monitors are hooked up: Will the patient's life be saved?

### **CPR: THE HEART OF THE MATTER**

At some point during treatment, the patient may require cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). CPR is a staple of TV emergency room shows. According to one source, over 60 percent of episodes of the TV shows *Chicago Hope*, *ER*, and *Rescue 911* aired in 1994–1995 featured CPR (Diem, Lantos, and Tulskey). Unlike CPR in the real world, most of these attempts succeeded without serious complications. Full CPR includes chest compressions and inflating the patient's lungs. But cardiac defibrillation through electrical shock is CPR's most vivid manifestation. The dramatic application of paddles to the patient's bare chest, the cry of "Clear," and the sudden, convulsive jump of the patient's body at the moment of shock give CPR a visual and emotional impact other medical inventions can't approach.

CPR is powerful because it proclaims our willingness, nay, eagerness to defy death, to bring someone back from the Beyond; to play God. Through CPR depictions, we congratulate ourselves for marvelous technology and its skillful application. This is serious business. Like drawing up a will that directs the disposition of our property, we draft "Living Wills" and "Advance Directives" that routinely include instructions about the use of CPR, hoping to specify how this most extreme of medical interventions is applied to our own bodies.

CPR inhabits an ambiguous moral ground and evokes ambivalence. Even when obviously futile, CPR is considered a symbolic ritual, a sometimes literal “goodbye kiss” valued because “everything possible” was done to save the patient. But CPR has a dark side: a work by the UK cartoonist “KES” highlights the ultimately horrifying connotations of CPR’s ability to cheat death. It shows CPR being applied to a Frankenstein-type monster in a subterranean laboratory. The ancient and the modern are mixed: a torch lights the winding staircase, while machines with dials and gauges line the walls. Three medical personnel are present: a doctor at the controls of the shock apparatus, a paramedic holding the paddles, and an anxious bystander wearing a surgeon’s smock. The monster lies face up on a table, an oafish companion at his side. The caption reads, “Clear!” (Smith).

## MIRACLES AND SALVATION

CPR is part of the conception of ERs as places where miracles occur. Severed limbs are reattached; well-being is restored to critically ill patients. Most miraculous is the saving of seriously-endangered lives. On *Rescue 911*, the word “miracle” itself was often used to describe a successful outcome of emergency treatment.

Formerly, religion was the proper venue of miracles; concern with miracles is but one modern parallel between religion and medicine. Both institutions respond to birth, decline, suffering, and death; medicine is our secular bulwark against existential facts. Like religion, medicine gives meaning to the chaotic and incomprehensible, invokes “higher powers,” and takes place in specialized institutions where highly trained personnel use powerful procedures and enact elaborate rituals. We call upon physicians, like priests, for salvation. As priests mysteriously summon supernatural forces, so contemporary emergency room doctors call upon esoteric skills and recondite technology to save lives.

If doctors are the priests, nurses are the nuns. Intermediaries between patient and doctor, nurses comfort the former and obey the latter. Popular culture portrays nurses contradictorily “to evoke issues of work, death, dependence, sexuality, and womanhood.” They simultaneously enact and defy traditional women’s roles (Melosh 58). If TV has emphasized nurses’ sexuality, it is because that aspect is most likely to resonate with male viewers’ fantasies about the physical intimacy that nursing practice often involves.

ERs resemble secular temples whose specialized personnel use potent but obscure processes, hidden from public view by geographic isolation and carried out through cryptic jargon, for example, “Bag him!” or “I need some epi, stat!” Salvation imagery (“Rescue Squads,” “saving a life”) surrounds emergency treatment and imbues it with religious fervor. The “Jaws of Life” is an apparatus used by emergency crews to extract crash victims from mangled wreckage. If only we can keep the crash victim alive at the scene, the

logic goes, we can apply further interventions aboard the ambulance and in the ER. We can, perhaps, salvage another life.

And what are we being saved from? Ourselves! A look at ERs through the lens of stories suggests that it is mankind's follies that most result in ER care. The following, billed as a "true" emergency room story, was taken from the Internet:

A 28-year old male was brought into the ER after an attempted suicide. The man had swallowed several nitroglycerin pills and a fifth of vodka. When asked about the bruises about his head and chest, he said that they were from him ramming himself into the wall in an attempt to make the nitroglycerin explode. ("Emergency Room True Stories")

Stupidity and dumb luck excepted, such stories show us as hapless victims of our own indiscretions, many of them formerly considered sins, particularly the sins of gluttony and lust. Tales with sexual content—the more bizarre, the better—are commonplace. Ultimately, the purpose of the ER as a secular religion is to save us from paying the price of sin.

## TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE

And what saves us? High-tech science! "The popular image of healthcare organizations is high-tech. Stopped hearts are restarted, airways are reopened, arteries are sewn, babies are rescued, and rampant infection is overcome" (Griffith and White 47).

Today, it is difficult to imagine medicine as anything other than scientifically based, but it was only in the twentieth century that medical practice became firmly established as such. The doctor's white coat—symbol of the laboratory scientist—and the trappings of the doctor's office, which included stethoscopes and other scientific gear, ultimately established medical practice as scientific in the public's mind (Blumhagen).

Doctors regard themselves as scientists. Medical students spend countless hours memorizing biological facts. One observer declared that the point of the first year of medical school is to replace the lay idea of persons and the human body with a conception grounded in science (Good 70). Perhaps catering to public hope, or fear, of this superior knowledge, television and movies emphasize medicine's scientific technology in displays of machines with meters, tubes, and CRT's. Such apparatus, recognizably "medical," but whose functions and operations are unknown to the audience, adds to the mystique of the ER as a place where Nature is trumped by Science.

## HEROISM

The medical scientists who apply ER technology represent the hero; their magic words, "He's going to be fine," fix a world gone awry. As a descendant

of battlefield medicine, the ER evokes images of struggle culminating in triumph. Strong, dramatic images of physicians as heroic fighters are perfect for TV action shows where doctors are the commanders of the defense amid the battleground of the ER. They fight time and grievous injury and display the combat values of bravery, perseverance, and valor in the face of overwhelming odds while the patient's life teeters on the brink.

The doctor-hero is a familiar theme of popular media; in the 1940s, movies such as *Dr. Kildare* depicted fictionalized physicians fighting to save lives, while comic books portrayed the lives of historical physicians alongside those of other heroes such as Dwight Eisenhower (Hansen). A basic premise of TV doctor shows is that the doctor-hero can command whatever resources (hospital bed, rare drug, costly procedure) are necessary to accomplish the task of restoring the patient to health or alleviating the patient's suffering (Turow).

### HUDDLED MASSES: MEDICINE FOR EVERYMAN

In reality, ERs are uniquely open to their surroundings. Emergency room care is constantly available; street level entry gives necessary access to ambulances, and also offers a public portal to the hospital. For those who can't obtain hospitalization through regular admission, the ER offers an alternative "back door." Consequently, it becomes the medical care of last resort for persons who can't or won't find it elsewhere. This brings a motley array of patients, including the uninsured, homeless, or mentally ill. Some patients indeed come to the ER with a hidden agenda—they seek drugs, shelter, or companionship, rather than medical care.

These facts have been reflected in media portrayals, but rarely. The inner-city ER in the movie *Bringing Out the Dead* is old, understaffed, and overcrowded with street people. Its staff is cynical and burnt-out. It is guarded by a tough cop whose major duty is to turn away additional patients. The destitute lie on gurneys that line the corridors; fights break out. In one scene, a restrained, drug-addicted patient screams for water and flees half-naked into the night at his first opportunity. If this is not Hell, it is at least Purgatory.

The ER as a cultural icon, on the other hand, displays an idealized relationship with medical care: we want a place where someone will take care of us, no matter what or when. We want miraculous cures for everyone in need, and we want them now. In the popular conception, the ER is simultaneously a place of chaos and a restorer of order, a place of suffering and of redemption: our secular Purgatory.

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# Flea Market

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*Michael Prokopow*

The suggestion has been made that on any given summer Sunday in the United States more people can be found at flea markets than attending church. Now while very possibly an apocryphal account, the idea of millions of women and men searching for old and new treasures is compelling. And whether located in a borrowed farmer's field, the parking lot of mammoth sports arenas, the broad and artificially bright aisles of some suburban shopping malls, or a high school gymnasium seemingly unchanged since the Cold War, the contemporary American flea market constitutes a remarkable cultural and social phenomenon (Carbone; LaFarge; Rinker). The idea of so many Americans examining the plethora of goods that mark modern consumer culture or browsing the detritus of their fellow citizens—both alive and dead—constitutes a compelling and complicated variant of the idea that the United States is the land of opportunity. Serving most obviously as places of economic exchange, flea markets also operate as sites of pilgrimage and memory, not to mention entertainment, emotional sustenance, and the occasional good investment.

But how best to assess the cultural meanings of the flea market in contemporary American society, or the kindred phenomena of the yard, rummage, and garage sale? What roles do these loosely regulated gatherings of buyers and sellers play in North American society in terms of late capitalism and social culture? As sites of the distribution of goods (or sites of the redistribution of used or second hand goods), flea markets offer both sellers and buyers opportunities to participate in the theater of capitalism, but to do so with considerably more freedom than the familiar, and predictable, shopping conditions of late capitalism (Gregson and Crewe). Operating at both the actual and symbolic edges of the nation's gargantuan economy, flea markets not only generate billions of dollars in annual sales—with some estimates suggesting that as many as 100 million people frequent such markets annually—but they also serve a vital role in both the recirculation of used goods and the distribution of low-cost and bargain goods. And while other venues such as dollar stores, clearance centers, thrift stores, and charity shops and the like may perform similar functions and may offer similar products, the



flea market constitutes a unique commercial form. Not only does it celebrate unfettered commerce, but it also affirms personal freedom and individuality. For whether it is the freedom of vendors to sell what they want or the freedom of buyers to seek out whatever pleases, the jumble and bustle of the hundreds of thousands of flea markets across the United States operate as constant reminders and confirmations of the idea and fact of America as a land of opportunity (Harmon; Rinker).

### PROVENANCE

By definition, flea markets are gatherings of vendors and potential customers where the goods for sale range from the readily available to the rare to the unique. Flea markets are places where prices (at least in theory) are low, and flea markets are places where there exists a real and palpable sense of material promise; that is, there is never any way of knowing what will be found on the tables or stands that make up the market. Rather, holding true to their ancestry as gatherings of merchants selling whatever happens to be available for sale, the flea markets of contemporary America represent exercises in free enterprise at its most liberated, while also affording shoppers the chance to treasure-hunt, bargain-shop, and participate in nostalgic musing. In these ways, flea markets are different from most other arenas of commerce. They tend not to be defined by a particular type of commercial character, they do not have to cater to a specific consumer demographic, and they do not need to remake a corporate brand—to use contemporary business parlance—in order to stay current and commercially viable. If anything, the popularity and success of flea markets turn on their anomalous, quirky, and safely unpredictable character as emporia of possibilities.

And yet, despite the immense popularity and cultural importance of flea markets in American society, no formal history has been written that traces the development in the United States (or North America) of this ubiquitous commercial model. For although there have been numerous studies of early commercial activity in the early settlement period—or studies in which country and town markets were assessed as critically important in the distribution of goods—and studies about the economic transformation of the countryside in the nineteenth century where market gatherings served vital roles in community development, there has been no investigation of the American flea market as a vernacular commercial form.

Contemporary flea markets in the United States trace their evolution from the town markets of the early colonial period, where goods of all kinds, including livestock, foodstuffs, slaves, and chattels of all sorts—old and new—were offered for sale, and through the expansion of the nation to the west. And whether weekly or monthly gatherings—from the early established markets of Boston and New York to the horse auctions of the frontier west—public markets facilitated the necessary exchanges of goods, capital, and information. But more than arenas that served the economic needs of local

communities, flea markets also embodied long-standing and distinctly Anglo-American ideas about the rights of property. Operating on the premise of a citizen's right to engage freely in commercial activity, the flea market is arguably a place of unencumbered exchange, marked by negotiation and largely free of state intervention. Thus, as arenas for the open exchange of goods, from new wares to the discarded possessions of the living and the dead, the flea market in the United States has been central in the growth of capitalism, community, and the idea of the nation as a land of plenitude, liberty, and material opportunity.

Taking its English name from the French phrase *marche aux puces*—quite literally a ‘market of fleas’ because of the old, bug-infested upholstered furniture that was offered for sale—flea markets in the United States are probably best characterized as vernacular and idiosyncratic adaptations of old commercial forms. As Albert LaFarge has suggested, “today’s American flea market is the modern incarnation of a feature common to civilized societies throughout history—wherever there is a high concentration of people, there will be market days when they assemble for the exchange of goods and services” (LaFarge ix–x). Acknowledging that the contemporary flea market in the United States can trace its lineage back to the *agora* of ancient Greece, the forum of ancient Rome, and the market days of feudal Europe and Asia, LaFarge makes the important point that the phenomenon of merchants gathering in central locations in order to do business is a part of economic history found the world over. Marked by the sale of new and used goods, flea markets operate as sites of unfettered *laissez-faire* capitalism. For while transactions may well include the writing of a receipt, and while detailed records of inventory and business flow may or may not be kept, most flea market business turns on the counting out of crumpled dollar bills dug from a pocket or purse or the discrete transfer of crisp, newly-minted twenty-dollar bills recently dispensed from some ATM (Harmon).

In this way, the modern American flea market, with its eclectic mix of goods, owes a debt both to the work of waste pickers or itinerant traders and the small capitalists of the early modern world. In the case of the rag and bone traders of medieval and early modern Europe, this denigrated laboring class provided a vital service to their society’s economic well-being by removing waste of all kinds from urban areas (Burrows). Marked by stamina and business sense, the highly organized and stratified world of scavenging constituted a profession dedicated to the recycling of waste products. In fact, the instantly familiar and catch-all term “junk dealer”—a notion closely allied to the rag and bone trade—comes from the word *juncus*, the name of a species of bulrush used in the making of cordage and rope and for which there existed a brisk second-hand trade throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries (Dolan; Kline; Richardson).

If, however, contemporary flea markets are places defined by the more or less random assortment of used and new goods that are for sale, flea markets are also defined by the personal contact that accompanies the smallest and

most insignificant of transactions. In the age of corporate capitalism and e-commerce, the haggling and often good-humored negotiations that result in a sale are an increasingly rare throwback to an earlier, perhaps even simpler, time. The conversations that take place about price are modern versions of the negotiations that were standard in the past, whether between a vendor and customer at a market or a peddler and backwoods farmer at the door of a log cabin. And while not wanting to put too romantic a spin on the idea of the face-to-face negotiations over price, what is now identified as “direct selling” or contact between the vendor and the customer does recall the type of vital personal relationships that marked the economic development of the nation. Thus, the twenty-first-century flea market represents both an anachronistic commercial model—a holdout of sorts against the rationalized, usually impersonal, business practices that define contemporary and global commerce—and one that clearly resonates with the buying public because of its humanity.

### **GO QUEST, YOUNG MAN**

Human history has always been marked by famous quests, spiritual and otherwise. From Augustine’s search for the City of God to Pizarro’s hunt for the City of Gold, human beings have projected their longing—their desire—for enlightenment, discovery, and reward onto the unknown but experiential world. In seeking both the seen and unseen, the disembodied and the tangible, the quest has existed as a type of projection of the physically and metaphysically possible, of a mystery solved and the world as it might be. Such narratives of questing appear across cultures, social classes, and experiences. One thinks, for example, of the search for the Holy Grail, perhaps the most famous of all material quests. Vastly important in religious terms, the idea of the grail has come to embody very broadly the quest for an elusive, cherished, even coveted thing. For the popularization—the secularization—of the idea of the grail speaks to the capacity of the known but absent object to create a powerful longing that arguably requires the things to remain unfound. Arguably, it is the search that matters, and not necessarily the discovery. It is as if the process of the hunt is sufficient reward (Belk; Muensterberger). And while the discovery of a desired thing may well bring joy, the hunt is for many people reward in itself.

In this light, it is obvious that flea markets in the United States do more than provide fertile ground for the frugal, the curious, and the acquisitive. As depositories of tangible goods, most of which are used, flea markets cater to social, personal, aesthetic, and psychological needs. There is, to be sure, a sense of community and camaraderie when wandering around a flea market, as one sees countless other fellow travelers. Likewise, in a consumer culture so preoccupied with the latest styles and trends and instantly familiar products, the chance encounter with the never-before-seen or long-forgotten thing is a powerful experience. As Harry L. Rinker has suggested, the flea market is a place where one can mine older used objects (Rinker ix). Accordingly,

America's fascination with flea markets turns on the shared premise that a trip to the flea market will yield some type of find, physical and emotional.

Arguably, the ongoing search for meaning in life by way of the past drives many Americans to the flea market. Now this is not to deny that many North Americans seem to derive great pleasure from the abundance of the consumer economy and their access to a remarkable and ever-changing world of new consumer products. On the contrary, shopping is obviously one of the central national pastimes. However, it is striking that in the face of a consumer culture that constantly promotes the new and improved, millions of people annually turn to flea markets for an alternative consumer experience, namely shopping for history. For many people flea markets provide an anti-consumerism consumer experience. Beyond the aesthetic and status values of antiques and collectibles that experts suggest are the staples of most flea markets (Rinker iv–viii), lurks the value of the past. In a nation that prides itself on consumer choice and innovation, people paradoxically pursue old objects, things that are no longer current in style or function, the two pillars of contemporary product design and marketing. Indeed, old objects, whether labeled antiques or memorabilia or whatever, defy notions of progress and change.

In this light, the broad appeal of the American flea market lies in its function as a cross between the museum and the midway. Here, the experience of going to the flea market is never solely about acquisition but, rather, about the process of looking, discovering, reflecting, mourning, remembering, and perhaps possessing. It is, in short, about a knowable and needed encounter with the past and a past that may well be unknown, inchoate, or plain forgotten. As such, the encounter with history or what remains of history provides both amusement and diversion in light of the often-mindless consumerism of North American society and a world of cheap products. But more, the flea market encounters with the past also offer succor and the opportunity to acknowledge forbears, familial and national. Indeed, the flea market is in large part about a willing and wanted encounter with history; and consistently flea market devotees acknowledge that it is the lure of the unimaginable discovery—an object of reckoning—that is moving. The significance of the discovery lies not necessarily in its monetary value (although there may well be rarified market demand for the thing), but rather in the message the thing delivers, the memory it evokes or the associations it conjures. For such people—and clearly their numbers are immense in the United States—the flea market is the one place where the present can mingle with the tangible which may well teach lessons about life. Absent glass cases, absent security guards, and usually absent prohibitions on the handling of the merchandise, flea markets take the principles of shopping and combine them with all the emotional and sensory opportunities of museums. At the flea market—any flea market—the visitor-traveler-purchaser is at once pilgrim and patron, and all the while possessing the opportunity not only to look and to find, but also to behold, cherish, and possibly claim the object of affection.

Thus, in operating simultaneously as temporary morgues of the discards of contemporary society and as sites of economic exchange, flea markets occupy the unusual position of manager to consumer society because they facilitate the redistribution of used goods. Things unwanted by one individual may well strike the fancy of another. One person's obsolete object may be the most splendid thing for someone else. For while it has been said many times that "one's man trash is another man's treasure," and while there is significant truth in this notion, it is both the complex psychology of the relationships human beings establish with things and the mandatory disposable nature of consumer capitalism that combine to make flea markets more than simply places where old things end up (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton). Rather, in thought-provoking ways, flea markets serve American society as sites of reckoning and reclamation, both material and spiritual. While antique stores and consignment shops function in similar ways as depots for the recirculation of older things, arguably the levels of aesthetic discernment are considerably higher in such establishments; that is, not every object that is disowned or about to be disowned would be eligible for sale. In contrast, flea markets—in ways similar to thrift stores and charity shops—operate as the only places of commodity redistribution where things of all kinds, of all pedigrees and origins, can coexist without material incident.

And perhaps it is the very capacity of the flea market to jumble time, collapse distance, and obliterate the historical context of things that gives it power. As places where objects of diverse kinds and distinct histories are brought together (and brought together because of the frequently harsh truths about how used objects enter the post-consumer or second-hand market). They are at once optimistic and baleful places: places of optimism because of what they might hold and do hold, and baleful places because of what they do hold and because of the circumstances that lead to things being loosed from their one-time moorings of meaning.

### **DISCARDS AND DISMANTLINGS**

In July 1999 an article in the *New York Times* made the powerful point that over the course of the next two decades the North American middle class would witness the largest transfer of wealth and property in history (Karlen). Acknowledging the unavoidable mortality of the parents of the baby-boomer generation, the *Times* rightly noted that no generation had ever previously accumulated so much material wealth, and that their children, faced with parental loss, nonetheless stood to inherit vast riches. But what the *Times* did not discuss was that for most of the beneficiaries the acquisition of the household goods of their parents—treasured family items from across several generations, wedding presents that established the making of new families and the myriad domestic goods purchased proudly in the those post-war decades of rising affluence—posed the difficult but unavoidable question of

what to do with it all? For though the retention of family “heirlooms” might never be in question—Grandma’s china cabinet or Great Aunt Millicent’s painted wedding trunk from the old country regarded as the treasures of lineage and history never to leave the family—the other contents of a house or apartment or cottage or storage facility pose different challenges. Indeed, given that inheritance is one of the rather predictable details of the cycle of life, then the question of how to negotiate the surplus of unwanted things becomes an exercise in determining the emotional capital of each object and proceeding to keep or dispose of one’s family history.

Now, these same types of calculations apply to almost any instance where a possession is no longer needed, regarded with fondness, or desired. For whatever reasons—taste, commodity fetishism, faddism, and so on—people are constantly letting go of things. They give things to charity, they leave possessions on sidewalks for takers walking by, they take perfectly good things to the dump, and they sell functioning, usable things to dealers in second-hand goods all in order to be rid of them. As such, the process of distancing that needs to take place closely resembles that of the patterns that can mark social relationships: attraction, possession, familiarity, waning interest, and departure. In the context of flea markets—the repositories of things that existed some place else before ending up on the vendor’s table—it comes down to the basic fact that certain things long cluttering a house are finally gathered up and dispersed. Whether it is the dismantling of the house or the emptying of a cupboard or closet, the excision of possessions represents a powerful act. It is the sundering of a relationship, the casting off of something that at some point mattered. Indeed, the sentimental or utilitarian relationships that human beings have established with things can always be terminated, with the end of one relationship potentially providing the basis for the establishment of another. Thus flea markets operate as archives of sorts. They represent countless stories of dispersal or “narratives of dismantling,” to borrow Cynthia Wall’s poetic phrase, and they provide meaningful places for once meaningful things (Wall).

## DONE DEAL

Writing on matters of collectibles, that category of acquired objects that are not in traditionally active use, Chandra Mukerji has suggested that these things “seem to be commodities on the brink of extinction, saved by people who saw in them some lasting importance” (Mukerji 353). And in truth, every old thing in a flea market holds the potential of being discovered and possessed and cherished by some one. The discarded or loosed thing lies in wait for the person who will rescue it. As such, flea markets, yard sales, and the like are sites where objects are in transition or suspended, as it were, between one set of contextualized meanings and another set of emerging meanings. For every old and used thing in a flea market faces one of two possible futures: first, the thing may be purchased and incorporated into a

new setting, where new meanings and associations will accrue to it; or, second, the thing will end up never being sold and at some point will be discarded, once and for all, as trash to be buried in a landfill.

Thus contemporary flea markets in the United States serve an invaluable role in the economic and cultural life of the country (LaFarge; Rinker). Flea markets operate as places for the distribution of new merchandise and they serve as the sites that permit and encourage the redistribution of many types of used goods. However, more than these strictly economic functions, flea markets simultaneously operate as the temporary and changing storerooms of society and history. That Americans flock to flea markets at all times of the year in all parts of the country speaks to the way that a journey into the unknown is part of the national psyche—a legacy from history—and that the past, while so easily forgotten in the press of the moment and the promise of the future can always be found, even if it takes the shape of the most seemingly simple, innocuous, and familiar thing.

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# Ford Mustang

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*Susan Grove Hall*

The car you drove on those big dates in high school, or to your first real job, or on your travel adventures, will always be special in your memory. But it may be more fun to recollect with a present-day audience and some photos, especially if it was a customized 1955 Chevy, a Corvette, a Mustang, or a Dodge Charger. On the other hand, would your actual auto make the true statement about you? What model would you summon to complement your youthful image, or, better yet, improve it? When you think of the indie film that should be made about your coming-of-age, you probably realize that your vehicle is more than just a setting for most of your crucial scenes; it looms more powerful than any prop; and, without any help from costume, lighting, or camera to project its personality, it vies with any character, including yourself, for the lead.

Cars, along with their ubiquitous practical uses and influences in modern life, have been designed to convey images of vital identity and lifestyle, in an array of possibilities. People in different times and ways have designated vehicles for types of drivers and purposes, by associating, for instance, large touring cars during Depression privations with gangsters, molls, and bank robbers, a typecasting Hollywood accelerated. Much faster than human generations, automobiles evolved through the twentieth century's rapid changes, and reflected them; so they exhibit all the novelties of their peculiar period settings. It's no wonder we wax nostalgic about our ever-more-antiquated personal sidekicks. Nor is it odd that we sometimes speak of cars in personal terms, especially considering the quantity of our automotive discourse—from chitchat to family confabs to police reports and traffic court, in the bulk of newspaper ads, and on televisions's automotive channels.

Our language about cars animates them and makes them fellow creatures, according to a linguistic study of contemporary automotive journalism and advertising, primarily American. We invest the machines with animal or human traits in metaphors and personifications. For starters, the names given to cars have most often been human, such as Ambassador, President, or Vagabond (46.4 percent); or animal, as with Impala, Jaguar, or Mustang (19.4 percent);

then man-made object, Corvette, Prizm (15.6 percent); then a natural phenomenon, Comet, Galaxie (14.8 percent); or supernatural being, Fury, Thunderbird (3.8 percent). Their human characteristics are not understated, whatever their names. Advertising for the Jaguar, for instance, touts its uncorrupted *soul* and unbroken *spirit*. Both advertising and journalism by the test drivers who review new models treat automobiles as having human relationships: being a friend or relative, having a family tree descendancy, being subject to personality traits and frailties (Piller 483–88, 489–90). Cars, according to the metaphorical descriptions, can have muscle, heart, soul, and lungs and, in resemblance to people, the more the better; also, sex appeal; and “good breeding,” with which an American car can rival a European one in class without seeming snobbish (Piller 491–92). Such projected creatureness, indeed, can affect logic concerning the vehicle in public issues. Addressing the increasing concern over the safety of the SUV, for instance, a writer characterized the SUV as an innocent victim of bias against its tall, high-bellied body, being unjustly framed by bogus rollover tests, mishandled by poor drivers, and falsely accused by hysterical weakling critics (Piller 493–95). To represent an automobile’s actual role in any situation, on the other hand, requires consideration of its real influence on the human driver—or consumer, or society; interactions between the human and the technological cannot be understood solely in terms of one or the other, because the active force, as a sociologist finds, has become a hybrid combination of car and driver (Michael 76–77). The “evident humanity of the car” has shaped not only our environment, but also the culture in which we know ourselves as individuals and as society (Miller 2).

Although many automobiles are iconic from one perspective or another, the Ford Mustang stands out within the context of automotive discourse for its animation and “humanity” and the “hybridity of its car and driver”; moreover, it fulfills these projected roles in the active society and economy of car culture. Let’s start with the animated, creaturely utterances of other cars, then the Mustang’s. The Lexus produces “velvety power delivery” with “a muted snarl” as it springs to 60 miles per hour, too refined for a “road roar”; the quiet would be “too much sensory deprivation” for some drivers: the Lexus, explained in hybrid terms, is “almost too subtle for the talking primates who buy cars” (Winfield 75). The Porsche Boxster “makes lusty music” (Robinson 12). Both the Pontiac GTO and Ford Mustang exhausts sound notes that are “guttural and angry” (Quiroga 21). Equine-like, the GTO can pound out “a dust cloud raising 350 horses and 365 lb-ft of torque, grunting and growling and sounding every bit the frightening Detroit iron its fabled name recalls”; but the Mustang, the paradigm little pony car “with the big heart” will “gallop home the winner,” impressive “from the ample grunt under the hood to the exhaust rumble” (Neff and Ditz). Its animal sounds bring calls from the wild invoking the human desire for speed—“the traditional Mustang growl keeps calling for the next gear to be engaged”—and asserting the driver’s identity—“This car announces your presence to the world, and does so loudly, both with its sweet throwback looks and resonating muscle car exhaust” (“Drivers Log”). Finally, the Mustang even has an aria. The Ford company used

the oft-cited protean utterances in an advertisement that “cements its Mustang’s status as an American icon . . . , in which the car sings the national anthem, using various pitches of engine noises” (“Ford Mustang Anthem”).

The humanity ascribed to the Mustang is distinctly American in character, and by design. The immensely successful fortieth anniversary Mustang of 2005 repeats elements of the original, especially the short, raised back and long, lowered hood, which the anniversary model’s designer saw in Saigon in 1971 when it paraded with GIs on a morale-boosting tour. To him as a 5-year-old the car brought positive images of America in its size, power, and association with freedom (Sauer). Now, the Mustang’s allure of freedom has a range: for Europeans, that of cowboy boots and the “open roads of America”; for the CEO, the style statement “to inject a bit of rebel chic into the parking lot”; for the middle-aged, indomitable youth and the cool glamor of Steve McQueen in *Bullitt*, as an appropriate attitude at age 50 (Sauer). Significantly also, the middle-aged Mustang itself, in its retro get-up, appeals to actual youth, the teens and twenties who never saw the 1968 *Bullitt* but take the car’s “aggressive posture” for a token of its acceleration time zero to sixty. Notably, the 0–60 motif pervades Mustang reviews as consistently as it does articles on drag racing, street rods, and muscle car history; yet the Mustang retains its original, larger status, its class among the classic cars it originally rebelled from “as the ugly American of sports cars.” Its power to transcend generational differences in style suggests that its appeal amounts to much more than a sum of parts, and that it informs perceptions of it and has become a taste-maker. Its “American” identity is acclaimed insistently yet without consistent basis; its media presence may attract and drive its success more than any other aspect of this hybrid, as *Time* magazine’s review implies: “The Mustang is an American icon, with more movie cameos, hot-rod clubs and fanzines than any other vehicle” (Fonda).

In its 1964 cover story hailing the Mustang, “Ford’s Young One,” *Time* participated in the media campaign managed by Lee Iacocca that built wide-scale public curiosity about Ford’s new model, and spurred anticipatory competitive designs in Detroit; but *Time* also pointed out the car’s appeal to Americans, and its response to their changing circumstances. The Mustang spoke to the

country’s basic motoring urge, and to the new style of this desire: it was “destined to be a sort of Model A of sports cars,” available to the masses. The car had useful practicality in its four-passenger seats, many options, and moderate price; but it incorporated European features; with, for example, “its Ferrari flare and open-mouthed air scoop, the Mustang resembles the European racing cars that American sports-car buffs find so appealing.” Its designs had reminders of



A classic Ford Mustang. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

its European heritage—and competition—in the Austin-Healey, Triumph, and MG, and some resemblances to their U.S. imitators the Thunderbird and Corvette; but the Mustang was much cheaper and could accommodate a small family (92). Iacocca intended it to rival directly the Chevrolet Corvair Monza, and be more of a “sports car” with its standard bucket seats, floor shift, and leather-like vinyl upholstery (101). *Sports Illustrated* greeted the Mustang as the same, “A Sports Car for Everyone,” and supplied its qualifications: it was “raceable,” especially fast in its optional V-8 acceleration; in other versions it was a “plush road car” that could be “dolled up” for attractiveness (Grossman 38).

The racehorse component of the Mustang, thus heralded from its debut, and into today’s fandom, was carefully prepared, with attitudes of the public being the primary object of attention. Major automotive companies had, for several years, agreed not to promote racing, but Lee Iacocca demurred from such “hypocrisy” and, to change the public image of Fords, promoted the cars onto stock car tracks. More people, Iacocca reasoned, watched auto racing than baseball and football combined (“Ford’s Young One”). Ford began “its massive racing program in 1962,” and positioned itself at the head of a highly popular American sport (Grossman 38). Other automakers felt the pressure of Ford’s racing stake and intention to market a sporty model; and their advertisements, as in the early 1964 *Sports Illustrated*, reflected the competition for favor in an area little known to the magazine’s adult middle-class audience. A Chrysler ad posed the quandary—“This car set 26 dragstrip records. What’s a drag?”—and explained the quarter-mile drag race, “a million-fan sport, sanctioned by national organizations,” along with the photograph of a Plymouth and its winning driver. An ad for Buick promised, “You too can be a rally driver . . . in the first Buick Sports Car Rally. Really” (27 January 1964). When the Mustang appeared, it offered “the aspiring young sport . . . a reasonable facsimile of a European rally car” for a cheap price; and for \$400 more “a real rally car” that “will peel off 555 feet in ten seconds from a standing start.” Its customers would be young—the “post-war babies coming of age” (“The Mustang—A New Breed Out of Detroit” 97). Iacocca had targeted teenaged baby boomers as the forward movement he saw in the new market of suburban, multi-car families. His opponent the Corvair Monza overshot the target age; its ads pictured courting couples, such as a naval officer and his date, and new families, such as the husband at the bus stop and young wife shopping in the family car, while the Mustang in ads sat waiting for the imaginations to people it—as baby boomers’ would.

The keys to their imaginations, and pockets, were the fifty options, including the racing package, although perhaps the front-end design Iacocca favored also caught their liking with its “pointed, mouthy appearance” (“The Mustang—A New Breed Out of Detroit” 99–100). With the many options, a buyer could nearly individualize the car to a self-expression and self-assertion. Also, with the options the buyer could assemble a race car, and become a stock-car driver or dragster, at least potentially. The Mustang enabled

fulfillment of the civic rebellions dramatized in youth culture in the 1950s: remaking a standard car into a hot rod which could compete in striking looks and action with others; showing off such loud cars by “cruising” the streets, boulevard, or parking lots; and preparing at any stoplight for a drag race, at least by revving the engine. This scenario occupied teenagers in cities, suburbs, and villages across the country, and extended into the movies they gathered to watch in couples or carloads at the drive-in theaters, such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), which featured a deadly car game of “Chicken,” *Hot Rod Girl* (1956), and *Hot Rod* (1957).

This teen car culture seems, in hindsight, neither so delinquent as adults feared it, nor very serious as a rebellion; but it did enact and promote the hybrid force of car and driver, personally and socially. Customizing the car spurred a teenager’s creative cleverness and confidence, and produced an “animated” vehicle that demanded experimental driving despite risks. The customized car also starred in displays of teen fashion, music, and dancing such as the 1963 Teen Fair which Tom Wolfe reported in “The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby.” The cars crafted by these California “kids” demonstrated their automotive sophistication, their values—“freedom, style, sex, power, motion, color”—and their impressive access to money. The sponsor of this musically rocking exposition? The Ford Motor Company’s “Custom Car Caravan”: as Wolfe speculated, “Even the kids who aren’t full-time car nuts themselves will be influenced by which car is considered ‘boss’” (64–65). Here was Ford’s dual entry in the youth market, and perfect lure for the coming Mustang’s customizing options. The true basis of the Mustang’s visual appeal was probably not the Italian features alluded to in “sports car” guise, but the lowered roofline and drop of the body over the wheels reminiscent of the chopped and channeled 1950s hot rod. Tom Wolfe, like Lee Iacocca, foresaw that “teen-age styles” had created a new economy and a new, anti-elite aesthetic that would influence “the life of the whole country” (Wolfe, Introduction xiv–xv). Enthusiasm for the 2005 Mustang emphasizes values Wolfe identified with the teens’ aesthetic: the “raw power,” the “verve, guts and bravado to inflate the old ego,” freedom in the almost inevitable customizing done by owners of even a brand-new Mustang, and myriad loud or sultry colors (Sramik 88–90). Sex? Add a body kit for “the updated boy racer we’ve come to lust for” (Gritzinger).

Cruising endures, from the lonely village street to the 2-million crowd at Detroit’s Woodward Dream Cruise. The Mustang and its fellow travelers now host “cruises” in a city or region on almost every fair-weather evening. Sponsored by a car club, in a store or restaurant parking lot, the restored cars and their drivers gather, the cars sparkling for display, the drivers lounging on lawn chairs in the shade, unless keen to tout a vehicle on sale. Children, dates, and business are entertained. Restoring and maintaining these vehicles is a leisure craft for enjoyment and admiration, but it has ties to commerce, both in its expenses—there’s an industry from corporate to informal internet dealers supplying replacement and custom parts of all kinds—and its

rewards—even if the astronomical prices of collectors' cars do not motivate car restorers, as they claim, an increase in market value justifies their labors of love, or a disparagement of money wasted on a worthless model looms. The hobby almost necessarily entails commerce, like the 1966 Mustang a young man was showing and selling this summer at a Corvette Open Cruise at a Home Depot. His photo album showed the rusty ruin as it was found behind a Tennessee barn, and through its many phases to its gleaming customized features. Why had he worked on it? The young owner's father "grew up" with Mustangs, and his grandfather also owned and worked on them. So this Mustang was one of three the family now had, and its sale, for \$11,000, would bring another into their garage. They also had a rarer 1965 fastback, worth \$35,000. He liked working on Mustangs, the young man observed, because so many parts and options are readily available; in fact, solely from parts you can get through catalogs, you could completely build one.

Here's a side of the Mustang—hot rod icon with little resemblance to Hollywood's alienated *Bullitt*, and opposite *Rebel Without a Cause*. Hot-car culture unites this son and his father in leisure, learning, and a bit of successful business, and connects them with a sponsoring and cooperating social and commercial network, of car fans everywhere. The radio in their family work space probably plays oldies rock and roll and latter-day imitators, same as the loudspeakers at the open cruise. There's no generational rift. The car stars; and it sheds its values (style, power, etc.) on its attendant, who could as well be a woman driver, as in *Charlie's Angels*. When the car takes precedence in the hybrid, language is more technical than personal, and illustration doesn't show muscled men or leggy women. In the hard-core magazines of car culture, only hands, usually grease-ringed, appear, for the proper manipulation of shining chrome parts. This aspect of Mustang iconolatry harkens back to *Popular Mechanics* of the past mid-century and beyond, to the charm of mechanics, invention, and tinkering for Americans. I was persuaded of the Mustang's transformative aura when searching for Mustang articles on a public library computer. With a glance at some print-outs beside me, the young man at the next computer asked me, seriously, if I was going to build one. I've been a person who could build a Mustang ever since.

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# Gettysburg

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## *Randal Allred*

Ask any American to name a famous American battle; the likelihood is that Gettysburg may be the most frequently named. Not only has it become the climactic battle and symbolic microcosm of the American Civil War, but the place itself has become the archetype of American military shrines, and the locus of memorialized heroism in American culture. The study of this battle and the way we have memorialized the site necessarily becomes also a study of how we choose to remember the past.

No American battle is more debated than Gettysburg, nor any battle more tantalizing with the potential of “what if,” near chances, and potential turning points, within the battle itself. This battle has always been represented in the popular imagination as the crucial juncture of the war’s plot itself—the tragic climax—especially as it came at almost the exact halfway point in the war as it did. Geographically, it represents the apex of the Confederate enterprise. The place also has a mystic drawing power in its quiet pastoral setting’s stark contrast to the fury and slaughter of July 1, 2, and 3 in 1863. The hushed, parklike grounds attract over 2 million visitors a year, and the town’s name has become synonymous with pilgrimage—a “byword for Americana” as Jim Weeks puts it (4). The battlefield’s location makes it a natural stop on a tour of America’s early historic sites, and its site has been revered and preserved from early on, unlike many other battle areas.

Gettysburg immediately impresses the visitor with a panoramic view of things—an almost amphitheatrical view to the coherence of the entire conflict. The fact of the battle’s taking place in three days, and each stage of the battle occurring on fresh ground, argues to even the casual observer a coherent narrative thread in a battle that seemingly was conducted according to cause-effect logic, if not by a God-ordained script. And unlike visitors at Shiloh, Chickamauga, or Manassas, one can stand in many places on the Gettysburg battlefield with its low hills and gently rolling farmlands and easily see the landscape and topography that figured so crucially in the way the events played out. The names of features on the field also are embedded in the national memory, with the grimly appropriate Cemetery Hill and



Cemetery Ridge, Devil's Den, and the ironic Seminary Ridge. The appeal of simple names is also there: Oak Ridge, the Angle, the Copse of Trees, Little Round Top, the Wheat Field, and the Peach Orchard.

Gettysburg is generally seen as the turning point in the war that we see as the defining point in our history. Although Antietam was a significant conflict—the bloodiest day of the war—and became even more politically important because it provided a pretext for Lincoln's issuing the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 (even though it was, for McClellan and the Union, a tactical defeat), the plot of Antietam as narrative is rather muddled, full of missed chances and miscues for the Union forces; besides, the vainglorious McClellan, the victorious Union general, was sacked by Lincoln some few weeks later for failing to destroy Lee's already-weakened Army of Northern Virginia when it was at its most vulnerable. The 1862 invasion of Kentucky by Bragg and Kirby-Smith, and its repulse, was too disjointed and full of miscommunication and almost comic misapprehension, before and after the battle of Perryville, Kentucky, to figure largely in the memorable story of the war.

But Gettysburg was the most significant Confederate invasion of the North. In the summer of 1863, as Lee headed north again, the Army of Northern Virginia, at 75,000 strong, was the largest it would be during the war since the outset of the Seven Days Battles, when Lee took command of nearly 90,000 men. Lee was following up what some call his most brilliant victory at Chancellorsville. Gettysburg was the largest battle in the war in some respects: it had the most men engaged, by some counts, and had the most casualties. Its three days of combat stand as a motif-like trinity of horror, but full of Christian significance. Of battles as single, sustained conflicts, rather than a series of actions like Cold Harbor, only the Battle of Spotsylvania lasted longer among the major battles.

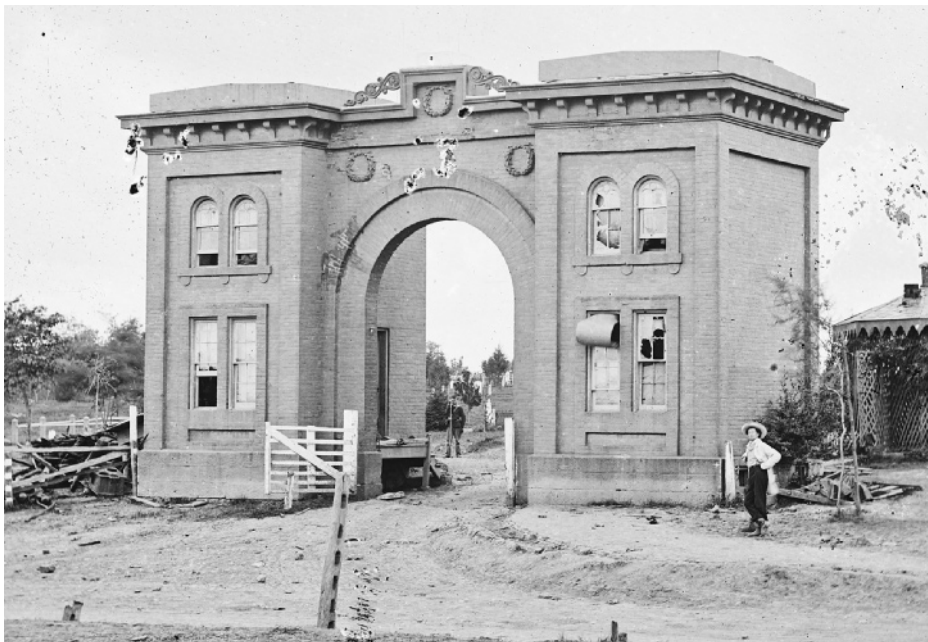
Gettysburg was the biggest battle of the few fought in the North, and consequently the one that Northerners have paid attention to. It was also the most significant battle for the Army of the Potomac, that proud, hard-luck unit whose war experience had been an odd mixture of continual defeat and a grand esprit de corps. After successive defeats at the hands of Lee, this army finally defeated him at his biggest and best. In later campaigns, even though the Union army drove the Army of Northern Virginia into the Petersburg entrenchments, most of the stand-up battles after Gettysburg were also won tactically by Lee: the Wilderness (which some argue to be a draw), Spotsylvania, the crossings of the North Anna, and Cold Harbor. So Gettysburg remains as the grand victory, the magnum opus, the best performance of the Federal army in the East, and perhaps the most poetic for the Union cause: you have the moral high ground if your enemy is the invader.

This battle on the other hand provided the South's biggest hurrah, if not its last. It was the conflict with the most at stake for the South; European recognition, although less likely than it had been in 1862, was a distinct hope driving this campaign for the Confederates. If Lee's army could defeat the Army of the Potomac convincingly, and capture a major city such as Philadelphia,

Baltimore, or (most hopeful yet) Washington, it would be hard for Europe to avoid the conclusion that the Confederate States were a viable enterprise. Militarily, it portended the South's finest hour: the effort to drive the Yankees from their positions with sweeping attacks suggests that a Southern victory would likely have been a significant one. It has seemed, in the American imagination, the most desperate and hopeful moment for the Rebels' fortunes: this is, we feel, where they almost won it all. Southerners often take a perverse pride in their performance in this battle, for these reasons: it was Lee's only significant loss (and that on unfamiliar ground); it was the best performance of the Army of the Potomac at its peak and yet the South, still outnumbered and on the attack, nearly won.

Yet the defeat has added a poetic and poignant aura to the "Lost Cause"—that it was only barely lost, and lost in such a dramatic and gallant manner, along with natural sympathy for the underdog, has enhanced the Lost Cause in popular culture. Many observers and scholars have noted that although the North won the military war, the South won the war of national sympathies in the sense of dictating the terms, forms, paradigms, and images by which the story of the conflict has been told in the years since: the *Gone with the Wind* syndrome. A postbellum (1888) comment by Confederate General Daniel Harvey Hill, who had served under Lee, is revealing:

I love to hear the praises of the wonderful deeds of McClellan, Grant, Meade, and Hancock, for if they were such great warriors for crushing with their



The cemetery gatehouse at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

massive columns the thin lines of ragged Rebels, what must be said of Lee, the two Johnstons, Beauregard, and Jackson, who held millions at bay for four years with their fragments of shadowy armies? . . .

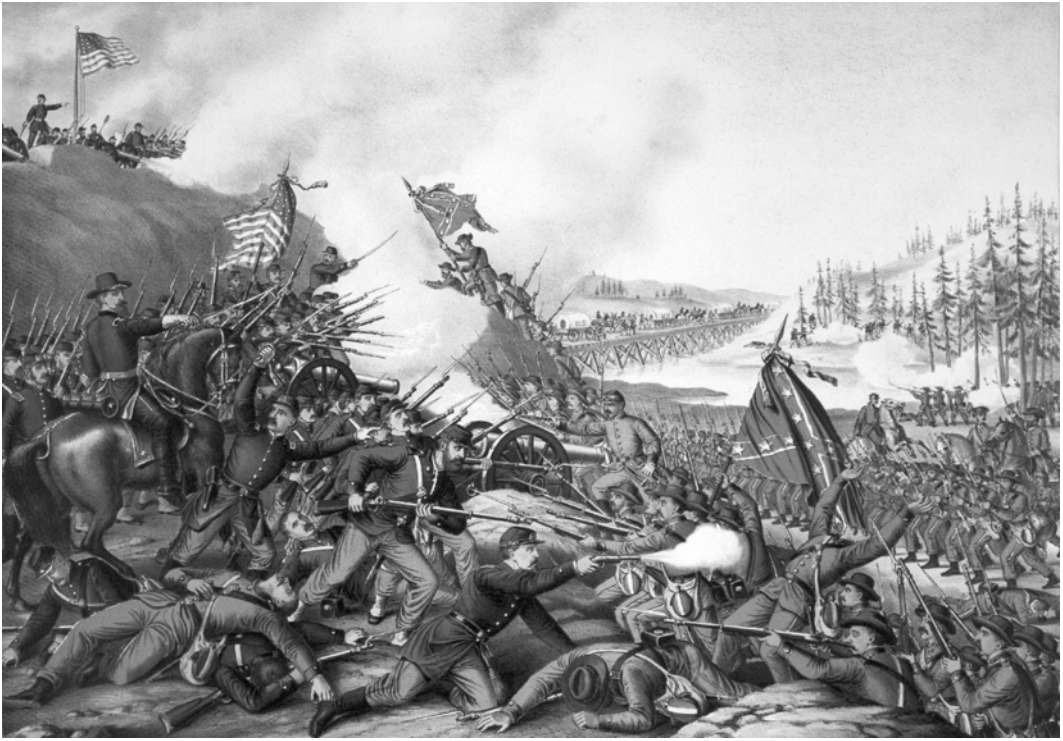
Suppose the tables had been turned, and that either of the five Southerners named above had been superior to his antagonists in all the appliances and inventions of war, and had been given, moreover, an excess of two millions of men over them, how many statues, think ye, my countrymen, would there be of bronze warriors and prancing chargers?

The logic here, of course, dictates that if the Army of the Potomac required all that might and material, and so many tries over those first two years of war to finally defeat Lee, how much more do Lee and his ragged troops deserve praise? Hence we have the myth of the Southern soldier being a nobler and better fighter than the Yankee, with Gettysburg their High Water mark in valor.

Was it the turning point of the Civil War? This is one of the issues debated still. Thomas Goss posits that even had Lee “succeeded in smashing the Army of the Potomac at Gettysburg, the war would not have ended with Southern independence,” and that it would not have been a fatal blow to the Northern will to fight (14). Yet Goss also admits that the physical impact of battlefield defeat “[is] not what makes a battle decisive; it is the psychological effect on confidence in eventual victory that determines the significance of a battlefield defeat” (15). With this in mind, it is difficult to calculate the effect of a Rebel victory at Gettysburg. Northern war weariness would manifest itself within days in the New York draft riots. Had Lee won, and Stuart been in place to push the pursuit of the retreating Yankees, keeping the roads and routes of retreat compromised, Lee very well could have marched into Washington. True, the city’s fall would have not have destroyed the Northern capacity to wage war, but it may easily have been discouraging enough to the North for a cease fire or treaty, leading to probable foreign recognition for the Confederacy and eventual nationhood.

As it was, the actual battle’s overall effects on the war were extensive: the defeat sapped Southern war spirit, according to Jefferson Davis and others. It prompted increased enlistments in the North, far outstripping the number of draftees. The Confederate government experienced increased internal dissension and fraction. And, combined with the fall of Vicksburg on July 4, Gettysburg convinced many Northerners that the war could indeed be won.

The recent blooming of alternative history in popular culture and speculative fiction springs from this kind of seed. Gettysburg seems to bristle with more near chances than other battles, inviting the imagination to engage in “What If” speculation. Many recent books, including a collection of short fictional pieces called *Alternative Gettysburgs*, offer many scenarios of what might have been. Many events in the battle invite this thinking: General Buford’s decision to defend the high ground; the nick-of-time arrival of the First Corps; the fateful decision of Ewell not to attack Cemetery Hill and Culp’s Hill; Stuart’s failure to screen Lee’s army and keep it informed; the



*Battle of Franklin*, a lithograph published in 1891. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

crucial time wasted by Longstreet's countermarch on Day Two; the sheer chance of General Warren's being on Little Round Top in time; the arrival of Vincent's brigade barely in time to save that hill for the Union; the undying controversy of Sickles' unauthorized advance to the Peach Orchard; the near chance of the Hoke-Avery assault on Cemetery Hill; the empty trenches on Culp's Hill that General Edward Johnson's Rebels nearly captured; and finally, most of all, the desperate and audacious attack led by Pickett, over open ground, on Day Three—all of these have provided endless grist for armchair generals and students to debate. The theatrical potential of Pickett's Charge, best articulated by William Faulkner's narrator in his novel *Intruders in the Dust*, demonstrates how this moment seems still viable and malleable:

For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, . . . and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin . . . and that moment doesn't even need a fourteen-year-old boy to think *This time. Maybe this time* with all this much to lose and all this much to gain: Pennsylvania, Maryland, the world, the golden dome of Washington itself to crown with desperate and unbelievable victory the desperate gamble, the cast made two years ago. (194–95)

This scenario has played in the mind of anyone who has contemplated deeply those circumstances while visiting the battlefield park and walking the same ground—especially that long stretch across to Cemetery Ridge, the path of Pickett’s assault, which the National Park Service keeps mown for walking. The tantalizing possibilities must surely exert more power than mere history.

The most significant single factor in making Gettysburg forever a shrine to American patriotism was the delivery of Lincoln’s address there at the dedication of the Cemetery on November 19, just four months after the battle. The 272-word speech which, as argued by Garry Wills and others, has done more to shape the concept of nationhood and American political rhetoric than any other text, was fundamentally designed to shape the meaning of the recent battle. Lincoln’s rhetorical triumph lay in imbuing the slaughter of American boys with the sanctity of the most sacred of public causes—the “new birth of freedom” for mankind, by preserving the Union. His argument, we remember, is that the sacrifice of the soldiers killed there would be dishonored by our failure to carry on the war to a victorious conclusion. In so few words, the entire American experiment—past, present, and future—was tied up in that three-day battle. If the field was not hallowed ground before, Lincoln’s speech has certainly made it so. The full ramifications of this speech are still being explored in our time, for Lincoln defined the meaning of military sacrifice in all wars where America’s interests are at stake.



*Pickett's Charge*, July 1903. Courtesy of Getty Images/PhotoDisc.

Another significance of Gettysburg rose in the veterans' reunions and re-enactments that began there with the 1887 event, on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the battle, when members of the Philadelphia Brigade invited members of Pickett's division to a commemorative celebration. Larger than anyone anticipated, this event hosted 9,000 visitors—veterans and their families. The largest of these events was the fiftieth anniversary of the battle in 1913, when Virginia-born President Woodrow Wilson spoke to nearly 50,000 veterans who camped on the field, greeted former adversaries, and staged mock battles. One participant expressed the meaning of the event:

Not only were there veterans of Gettysburg, but men who had fought under McClellan at Antietam, Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley, Sherman in Georgia, . . . This was the largest gathering of former soldiers who had changed the face of a nation, torn it apart, and now delighted in its reunification. ("The Great Reunion of 1913")

In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the presence of only a few hundred surviving Civil War veterans but many thousands of spectators, on the 75th Anniversary of the battle dedicated the Eternal Light Peace Memorial in the spirit of ending all wars. Gettysburg's landscape itself had thus been revisioned into a space for the worship of peace.

In the last decade or so, we cannot underestimate the impact of Michael Shaara's 1974 novel *The Killer Angels* on our collective construction of the Gettysburg myth. The novel has gained in popularity as the years go by, and is more widely read today as an expression of the meaning of the Civil War than when it won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1975. Its focus, among the multiple narrators, is the Battle of Gettysburg as a microcosm of the entire struggle—the clash of all of the social, racial, spiritual, intellectual, political, and military issues that inform the Civil War as a whole. The subsequent movie based on the novel, Ron Maxwell's four-hour-plus epic *Gettysburg*, produced by Ted Turner, has had an even wider reach. It has done much to change the way the public reads the battle, giving rise for example to renewed critical debate over Longstreet's conduct and the feud between his adherents and Lee's, as well as fostering a whole new cult of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain admirers. More people visit Little Round Top than ever before, and interest in the film (which was filmed in the park and surrounding areas) has stimulated more reenactment and living history programs in the area.

Criticism of the film, on the other hand, summarizes opposition to Gettysburg in all its aspects. Philip Beidler admits up front that, being a native of Gettysburg, he is "no fan of the Civil War industry," and that he resists "any attempt to render war attractive—the Civil War, the Vietnamese war, any war . . . particularly as regards the perverse spectacle called reenactment." In targeting the film *Gettysburg*, he attacks the "packaging and marketing of the Civil War as part of a larger commodification of cultural desire" which Turner's film exemplifies, and reenactors' aid in its making (489). The problem

with *Gettysburg*, Beidler argues, is that it is “handsomely done,” with almost none of the bloodshed and maiming that actually occurs in war, understating the destructive potential of the .58 caliber Minie ball and canister in cannon, showing the picture-perfect reenactors’ authenticity rather than realistic carnage (496–97). His voice joins those of other cultural critics who join an increasingly heated debate about how we should memorialize the past.

Recent arguments on Gettysburg’s planned new Visitor Center, which would discuss slavery and put the battle into an historical context, indicate that the revising of the battlefield text is a continual dialogical process, driven by the needs and imperatives of our times. The town of Gettysburg today boasts more sensitivity to the history than it did earlier, although there are also many museums, restaurants, ghost tours, and other industries that capitalize on the tourist trade, including General Pickett’s Buffet, Farnsworth House, the Lincoln Battle Theater, O’Rourke’s, and a major supplier of reenactor gear, the Regimental Quartermaster. The popular and famous Cyclorama painting (360 feet long and with a 360-degree view of Pickett’s Charge) by Paul Dominique Phillippoteaux also remains an important feature of the Gettysburg heritage industry, and has been included in plans for the new Museum and Visitor Center, after a \$9 million restoration.

Overall, though, recent trends have answered visitors’ increased demand for authenticity. Preservation efforts have acquired more of the original battlefield. National Park battlefield rehabilitation plans include removing trees not there during the battle, burying power lines, and as much restoring of the landscape to its 1863 state as possible. In 2000, the famous privately-owned observation tower near Culp’s Hill was purchased and demolished. The “shifting flow” of cultural authority is at work, according to Weeks, once again revising the text of what the battlefield means, now in the trend of increased preservation, while maintaining some of the commercialism that has always been part of the mix of the sacred with the secular. A few decades ago, for example, reenactors would have been considered “too vulgar” to be included in any Gettysburg activity; now they are a staple. They, like “guided tours, museums stuffed with relics, the cyclorama,” and other things, “emerged from the marketplace and in time were embraced by the battlefield’s custodians” (Weeks 220).

It is perhaps the deeper significance of Gettysburg that may account for its impact on American lives and culture. Robert Penn Warren reminds us that our national impressions of the war are a representation of life rather than being life itself: a “condensation of many meanings.” “There is no single meaning appropriate to our occasion,” adds Warren, “and that portentous richness is one of the things that make us stare at the towering event” (80–81). Perhaps the most profound appeal of the Civil War—and of Gettysburg, of course, because we have “read” it to encompass the whole conflict—is the picture of human will enduring in the face of incomprehensible suffering. The stories of soldiers and townspeople caught up in this battle, and the narrative of its myriad

conflicts also satisfy our yearning for epic heroism and patriotic spectacle. Experiencing the memorialized battlefield invites us to join the action.

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# GI

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## *Michael Smith*

The prevailing factor in the psychological make-up of the legendary American GI figure is his fatalism. This is a slightly different thing from his pessimism, or his cynicism, or even his sense of irony. He may certainly possess any of those qualities in abundance. We need only consider the grizzled GI who, after a wide-eyed, trembling recruit (a “greenhorn,” in the GI’s parlance) has taken a bullet through the head in the first five minutes of his very first combat patrol, looks down at the red mash of obliterated brain, shakes his head, and says, “Well, I guess his cherry got popped.” (The GI may even take off his helmet first, and deliver this line solemnly, in the manner of a prayer.) Another GI, after discovering that a bullet has passed neatly through his hip and exited cleanly through his buttock instead of blowing off the entire cheek (a much-hoped for circumstance, one that would have provided him with the Holy Grail every soldier is looking for, the elusive “Million-Dollar wound” and ticket home) is likely to gripe, “Ah, shoot. Lookit that. Just my rotten luck.”

Still another GI may ask just what it is about this particular hill that makes it more important than, say, the one right next to it. Is it simply because one is fortified and the other is not? Or is it the view? Because if it’s a question of the view, well, all things being equal, the GI much prefers the unfortified hill, because it seems like you’d certainly be able to see more of the river from up there, and oh, yeah, didn’t they cross a neat little bridge on their way here and wouldn’t you be able to look back and *see* that neat little bridge better from the nice, clean, *unfortified* vantage point than the one that’s all cluttered up with mines and barricades and trenches and barbed wire and pillboxes and, well, *Germans*, who seem always to be getting in the way with their “*Achtungs!*” and Schmeisser submachine guns whenever a fella is just looking to take in a little scenery?

But while the GI’s fatalism might be expressed in this kind of resigned, doomed humor, his particular fatalism is not, exactly, an acceptance of his fate. It is, rather, the existential sense that he is there to do a job, and that other than fulfilling that job, his life (and death) could scarcely be said to matter at all. And that job? The American GI should be a patriot, yes, he should, if at all

possible, be brave and strong and handsome and self-sacrificing and reverent—he should be, in effect, an exceedingly well-armed Boy Scout. But above all of that—far, far above that—the American GI's job is to be a *weapon*. He is, first and foremost, something that can be pointed and fired at the enemy, like an M-1 or an M-16 rifle. So, like those standard-issue weapons, he finds himself bought and paid for, manufactured (maybe at a considerable discount, owing to the large quantities in the purchase order) by means of mass production, and rolling off the line, one after the other. While there might be slight differences or infinitesimal variations and even occasional flaws in the line when you are producing weapons at such speed and in such large numbers, one finished weapon is still expected to fire pretty much the same as another, given that they are all of the same type.

Now, if the GI is a weapon, those who aim that weapon know it must be respected if it is to function properly and reliably. It must be taken care of, attended to. Mud has to be kept off the sights. It must often be cleaned and occasionally polished. It must have its grooves checked, and its firing mechanism must be evaluated regularly. You must look down, along, and inside the barrel.

Left in the water too long, the weapon will rust. Left too long in the sand, it will seize. And fired too long, in a sustained burst, it will melt.

Still, as in the case of the M1 or M16, the owners of this particular weapon know it doesn't pay to get too attached to your weapon. Oh, you may have a favorite or lucky piece for a while. One weapon may have served you particularly well. You may even have carved some notches in the stock to mark or commemorate this service, but still, the eventual loss or necessary replacement or upgrading of this weapon is hardly a thing to bring tears the eyes.

Abroad, this functioning is the American GI's only job, really, and he can be forgiven if he is not particularly well mannered or clean-shaven so long as he does that job effectively. He can be forgiven if he loses his faith in the cause or the flag or in his commanding officers so long as he can be pointed and, when his trigger gets pulled, he fires.

The GI knows this, senses it, has had the idea engrained in him by his training and his experiences on the field of battle, and still he carries out his orders. He is a weapon, and in a way, that makes it easier. Weapons



A pair of GIs camouflaged for forest conflict. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

don't have to think. They don't have to debate the morality of their actions. War is nothing personal, he will tell himself, and only a fool (a fool who is likely to die, and soon) insists on making it personal, in believing himself important.

The GI's acceptance of these ideas, and his reliance on them, transforms him, for all his wisecracks and his recalcitrance, into an engine of destruction. He becomes someone who approaches war in the manner of Ulysses S. Grant. Grant stunk of the twenty-plus cigars he inhaled a day, he was invariably covered in dust, he wore his ratty coat unbuttoned and without insignia, but he was primarily—as Shelby Foote describes him in *The Civil War, A Narrative*—a “killer-arithmetician” (2: 962). He may not have been a particularly honorable man, or even an articulate one (he had the laconic tendencies of the abstaining alcoholic, and he was notoriously uncomfortable amid ceremony and pomp). He was not considered particularly brilliant—although he could be tactically clever, even daring, as in his Mississippi campaign. But he did have one strength: Grant did not love war, but he absolutely did not fear it, either (2: 218–20). When Grant looked at war, when he viewed the battle to come or its aftermath, when he considered the cost, he did not see a human (or even a political) cost. What he saw was an equation: numbers, not people. And so he could shrug off 35,000 casualties in his two first weeks in charge of the Army of the Potomac, write it off as a natural consequence of the new, aggressive stance he was inculcating in that legendarily lethargic army. He could endlessly hurl his men at the earthworks at Cold Harbor in 1864 (he lost approximately 4,500 men in about 90 minutes) and then refuse a truce, leaving wounded soldiers to anguish for days in the hot sun on the field of battle because he did not relish even the smallest perception that he might have somehow given an inch by treating with Lee (3: 281–99).

It was Grant's calculation that originated, and in a sense installed, the American GI's fatalism. But there is no single figure that best illustrates the sheer annihilative power of this fatalism, once it has been embraced, better than World War II's Audie Murphy, the most decorated American soldier in history. Murphy appears, at first consideration, to be anything but a stony killer. To look at his photograph is to see the very essence of the picture-perfect Johnny Soldier Boy Scout, brought to life. In one postwar army publicity headshot, he is skinny, his head seemingly too big for his neck. His brow and cheeks are smooth, his eyes perfectly clear, and his lips are full, almost sensuous. His hair looks, more than anything, *clean* and nourished. You might guess his age as barely 18, except there are so many medals piled over his left breast that the sheer accumulation would stop a bullet from reaching his heart.

To read a short blurb of Murphy's online biography is to scan the quintessential American story. He appears as the very son of the American Dream: from Kingston, Texas, born of sharecroppers, his family abandoned by his father, his mother dying when he is young, he makes for an unlikely (and so, because of that very improbability, near perfect) war hero. At first rejected from

the marines and the paratroopers because he was too small, he enlists in the army infantry, 3rd Division, and fights in Sicily, Italy, France, Germany. He is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor and anywhere from 21 to 33 other medals and decorations; there seems to be some disagreement as to the exact number, and so it appears his acts of heroism are numerous and large enough that it is hard to pinpoint exactly how many different honors he received. After the war, Murphy becomes something of a matinee idol, starring in a series of war films and westerns starting in 1948 and continuing through the 1960s. John Huston directs him in an adaptation of Steven Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1953) and in *The Unforgiven* (1960). At various times, he finds himself working alongside movie stars like Cagney, Stewart, and Hepburn (Rodgers). He makes a great deal of money, and eventually, he achieves what is the ultimate dream of everyone in Hollywood (and perhaps in America): in 1955's *To Hell and Back*, which chronicles Murphy's experiences in World War II, he gets to star in a movie about himself, as himself.

It is in the autobiography on which this movie is based, however, that Murphy's other side, the fatalism that, in a sense, opened the door to these later successes, can be seen. Murphy's body count in World War II was almost demonic: 240 German casualties were attributed to him. Reading *To Hell and Back*, we come to suspect that the actual number is probably much, much higher. Murphy is given to scrambling onto tanks and assault vehicles, opening hatches, and dropping in grenades and gasoline cocktails. He blasts machine gun nests with mortars and exploding shells, and sneaks up on dug-in enemies and then shreds them at close range with a large-caliber, heavy machine gun. He calls in artillery fire on positions he triangulates from angles of fire, but cannot see. It is hard to imagine exact figures being possible under such conditions.

The oddly detached, clinical tone of the book (for it is anything but proud, or even filled with the kind of false modesty that invites us to think we are being treated to an exaggeration) doesn't leave us feeling that Murphy is the sort inclined to keep count. He takes no pleasure, no real satisfaction, in the facility with which he deals death. At the same time, he expresses an absolute lack of feeling for the men he kills. Indeed, they are usually not men at all, but "krauts." (In the book, there are two kinds of krauts: "krauts"—not even "live krauts," but simply "krauts"—and "dead krauts.")

The moment when he rounds a bend in a gully, and runs headlong into two startled Germans, is fairly representative of just how mechanically he views and presents his own actions in combat: "For an instant they recoil in surprise; and that is their mistake. My combat experience has taught me the value of split seconds. Before the Germans can regain their balance, I kill them both with a carbine" (174). Again and again, we are given stripped, detached descriptions like these: "I lob the grenade and grab the carbine trigger with one movement. Before the grenade has time to burst, two krauts fall with carbine slugs in their bellies" and "I squeeze the trigger. The helmet jumps. The man falls as if struck in the head with a club" (209–10) and "As he frantically reaches for the safety on his rifle, I fire twice. He crashes backwards.

I throw two hand grenades to take care of any companions lurking in the area” (215). The closest Murphy comes to analyzing his approach (and brilliance) in combat is when he tells us that in battle, his brain is “coldly alert and logical. I do not think of the danger to myself. My whole being is concentrated on killing” (177). On days when the lines are quiet or the platoon is idle, he says that he is “bored with the lack of activity, which breeds the kind of thinking that I try to avoid” (209). That kind of thinking, presumably, is anything—anger, fear, thoughts of home, or of exacting vengeance for a downed friend—that takes him out of his role as weapon.

If he even recognizes that his ability to deal death is startling, or that he seems to have a particular affinity for the work, or even just that he happens to leave an impressive number of obliterated bodies wherever he goes, Murphy does not once indicate it. Only *once* does he report any of his fellow soldiers remarking on his actions as if they are unusual (“What are you trying to do? Win a wooden cross?”; 175). For the most part, his fellows do not, it seems, see Murphy as anything out of the ordinary, or that he is doing much of anything they couldn’t—or, rather, *wouldn’t*, if they shared his technique. They are all engines, after all. Murphy might be a more efficient engine, but they share the same function.

Still, it seems the GI cannot bring himself to embrace completely his particular brand of fatalism. For alongside it, he also carries a deeply held and occasionally voiced suspicion, one he cannot ignore: he eventually suspects that he is become a toy gun, a plaything in the hands of idiot-child generals—that he is a pawn for lunatics who get their jollies moving those pieces willy-nilly across the chessboard battlefield. It’s fairly typical for the GI to grumble, for example, about just what in the hell the “Invisibles” (those never-seen commanding officers whose presence is nevertheless always felt) are thinking about. As he finds himself packing his gear for yet another mindless patrol, the GI may idly wonder just what it is the “Old Man” is doing in that tent of his, located oh-so-many miles behind the front lines. Is he simply drunk? Insane? Senile? (“I’ll lay you even odds on all three,” the platoon’s sergeant is likely to mutter. “Now shut up, all you dogfaces, and keep packing.”)

The sense of this suspicion is strong throughout *To Hell and Back*, but particularly when Murphy’s platoon fights for endless weeks to take Hill 193, only to be suddenly given an unexplained reprieve. As they limp off, one of Murphy’s comrades—the man’s name is Snuffy—looks back on the valley and snorts. “What was all the shootin’ about?” he wonders, unable to imagine a more disadvantageous piece of ground. “I wouldn’t give one turnip patch in Tennessee fer the whole damned [thing].” Mulling the *reason* for their mysterious reprieve, which seems to have come just when they were approaching a breakthrough, the platoon ultimately decides they are either to be checked for venereal diseases or that “the gravediggers ran out of mattress covers.” Once behind the lines, they are assigned “a period of rigorous training. Twice daily we have hot chow, and we sleep on cots in pyramidal tents.” Later, when Murphy and a friend are walking down a road, they shoot a chicken and must hide it in

the grass for later retrieval, lest they be caught and formally charged. Murphy ponders the incongruity: “In combat, we can destroy whole towns and be patted on the back for our efforts. But here in the rear, the theft of a chicken is a serious offense indeed. Army regulations say ‘No looting’” (51–56).

The GI’s recognition of the absurdity of his own predicament—the relentlessly indiscriminate orders of imbecilic or paranoid superiors, the haphazard application of rules and niceties to war—has become a staple of almost every piece of literature or popular entertainment involving him. We need only consider Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22* and the television show it inspired, *M\*A\*S\*H*, to begin to get the sense of this absurdity.

But it is not just his superiors—the generals, and their bosses, the politicians—that the GI comes to believe have lost sight of his essential humanity and have instead transposed something in its place. It is also those the soldier has left behind, the public, Mom and Dad and Betty Sue, home. On the home front, the role of “weapon” is replaced with “hero.” It is a role made all the more discomfiting because the GI knows there’s nothing particularly ennobling about having once been a weapon. The reflective GI wonders what will happen after Johnny comes marching home, and after they throw the parade? What will they think when he lies in bed for two weeks, the lights out and the shades drawn, but not sleeping? And what will Johnny do with his life when he ventures outside again?

In *To Hell and Back*, one of Murphy’s fellow soldiers properly sums up the dilemma caused by the GI’s fatalism: it is the knowledge that you can’t go home again. Pinned down in a cave, the platoon has spent the night listening to the labored breathing of a group of gut-shot Germans who survived when a member of the platoon took the cave (it’s worth noting that Murphy, with his efficiency, is not the one who assaulted this position, or else the Germans would doubtless have been dispatched immediately). When the last German dies, the platoon leader, Kerrigan, speaks:

“Home is the place where they send you when you lose an arm or a leg. I’ve read all about it in the papers. You ride in a hospital train, with beautiful nurses and Red Cross Dames drooling all over you. With newspapers writing how you gave your all for your country. With the train stopping at little towns, where the people are waiting at the depots to cheer. . . .

“Sure. Just like a picture. Your mama cries and calls in the neighbors to see her hero. You sit around the old store with your chest full of ribbons and tell the people about the war. You say, ‘It wasn’t so bad; and we’re beating hell out of the krauts.’ . . .

“You forget about nights like this. All you do is eat hot dogs and drink coca-colas, the absence of which has mostly occupied your mind in the field. . . .

“For a while, you miss the old gang. And you feel like a fish out of the water in civvies. You won’t have to go back clerking in a grocery store, because the good old army has trained you for a better job. . . .

“Sure. You’ve learned a lot of useful things. You can pick off a man at three hundred yards with an M-1. You can toss a grenade further than anybody else

in town. You can sleep among corpses, bathe in ditch water without any complaint a-tall. As civilians, we'll be in great demand." (50–51)

There's no greater proof of the essential truth of this feeling—and of the GI's appreciation of it—than one of the platoon's muttered reply to this monologue: "Horse Manure."

Recognizing the truth of one's condition, though, and reconciling with it are two very different things, especially for the GI on the home front. For Audie Murphy, it is clear that playing the role of hero was never quite comfortable. He was reportedly haunted by shrieking nightmares, and he struggled with alcoholism and an addiction to painkillers. There is general clinical agreement that Murphy simply could not have avoided suffering from what is now characterized as "post-traumatic stress disorder." Already uncomfortable in the role of hero, his movie roles—in which he, as the genuine article, tried to bring a Hollywood version of heroism to life—could only have contributed to the sense of his own dislocation and disorientation. He suffered financial setbacks in the 1960s, and his acting career declined. He died in a private plane crash—on Memorial Day—in 1971. Just the year before, he'd returned to the public eye, when a friend of Murphy's reportedly asked him to intervene after a dog trainer had done what she believed was a less than satisfactory job with her dog. In the bizarre case, Murphy was charged with threatening and even shooting at the man. He was acquitted, but his response to a reporter asking about the incident helps illuminate just how deeply engrained the GI's fatalism remained in him. In a recent preface to *To Hell and Back*, Tom Brokaw reports that Murphy, when asked "Did you shoot at that guy?" simply stared blankly at the questioner, as if he could not fathom the reason for the question. Then he shrugged. "If I had,"

he said. "Do you think I would have missed?" (viii).

For the contemporary GI, Murphy's brand of fatalism remains a necessary fact of his existence, both in real life and in our fictions. The undefined Korean war (or "police action"), the apparent futility of Vietnam, the stalemate of the Cold War, and the seeming ease but inscrutable end of the first Gulf War have done nothing but reinforce the GI's conviction that he exists only to fulfill two roles: he must be weapon abroad, and hero at home. At home, the figure must smile for the camera and wave during the parade. Abroad, the figure *must* maintain his absolute competence when it



U.S. marine from the 3/5 Lima company carries his "GI Joe Action Man" as he walks past the destruction in Fallujah, 2004. Patrick Baz/AFP/Getty Images.

comes to dealing death. Today, the fighting GI can be as philosophical about these roles, as profane or angry or circumspect or even as blind to their implications, as he prefers. His feelings are, as ever, entirely beside the point.

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# Golden Gate Bridge

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*Kenneth M. Sanderson  
and Laura Kennedy*

As you drive south on U.S. 101 approaching San Francisco, the ridge of Mount Tamalpais rises on your right and ahead, and San Francisco Bay lies on your left. You cannot see the Golden Gate Bridge at all, even though you know it has to be near. The road rises and curves upward to the mouth of the Waldo Tunnel.

Your car enters the tunnel, the road begins to slope downward, and the bright arc of the tunnel's far end appears ahead. As you run through the tunnel, the opening ahead becomes larger and larger, lighter and lighter, and then suddenly the opening frames red towers: your first glimpse of the Golden Gate Bridge. You are already almost at the bridge; it appears so suddenly and is so large as to be surreal, almost shocking. You have plunged down the rabbit hole, and while you are still underground the huge, beautiful structure looms before you.

You emerge from the tunnel and swoop down toward the bridge, which grows ever taller in your vision as your car rounds the last bend of the highway and the entire north tower of the bridge soars above you, framing the south tower ahead, more than a mile away on the other side of the Golden Gate.

What is so fascinating about the Golden Gate Bridge? Why does it evoke such wonder and delight? The size of the bridge is both breathtaking and absolutely appropriate to the surrounding headlands and cliffs. This elegant man-made thing complements the stunning landscape, neither subdued by it nor challenging it. Without the bridge, the Gate—the strait connecting bay and ocean—would be immense, impressive. The bridge is an artwork on the scale of nature's creation, but it isn't nature—it's art and engineering and labor. The Gate just is; the bridge is imagination cast against a vast natural canvas.

Why do so many people come to this bridge, to walk across what has been called the largest Art Deco sculpture in the world? Walk with them—families, couples (lots of couples), solitary strollers, joggers, bicyclists—and feel the wind on your cheek. It is cool despite the bright sunshine, and passing clouds

bring a chill. Gulls wheel below you and flocks of brown pelicans patrol above the strait. Fleets of paddling and diving black cormorants scatter when a seal surfaces in their midst. Huge container ships, barges towed by seagoing tugs, oil tankers, and a mammoth car carrier pass under the bridge with their escorts of harbor tugs. With the rising breeze of late afternoon, windsurfers and sailboarders course back and forth just inside the bridge, which defines the entrance to San Francisco Bay.

Always above your head are the huge, ornamental towers and the thick catenary cables that curve up to the top of one tower, then down, up again to the other tower, and down to the far anchorage. The heavy suspension cables hang from the catenaries in rigid pairs just outside the railing at your elbow. The color of the bridge is called International Orange, a deliberate choice of the designers, who were mindful of the striking setting and wanted their bridge to stand out, to define and be defined by the precipitous headlands to the north and the city and the forest of the San Francisco Presidio to the south.

These men were not only skillful and meticulous engineers, they were also visionaries. They thought as deeply about the meaning of the bridge as about the details of its materials and construction. Joseph Strauss, the chief engineer and for almost twenty years the driving force behind the planning and building of the bridge, was also a poet. When the bridge was completed in 1937, Strauss wrote a poem that began, “At last the mighty work is done; / Resplendent in the setting sun” (qtd. in Petroski 284). Only an engineer who was a poet could have built the Golden Gate Bridge.

The bridge represents perfection in an imperfect world. It tells us that no matter how flawed, tawdry, unreliable, petty, or frustrating life may sometimes be, there is one thing—one huge, useful, beautiful, gracefully aging thing—that can be relied on, that we can see, visit, touch, and use. The bridge is beautiful in a world that is often superficial and ugly. It raises our spirits; it is a work of art that speaks to us.

The Golden Gate Bridge probably does not mean the same thing to everyone, and there may be some for whom it is merely a way to get from here to there. But it is there, for you to make of it what you can, what you wish. It asks nothing (except a \$5 toll when you drive across it southbound into the city; northbound it’s free). The crowds walking on the bridge on a sunny day are proof that many people want what the bridge offers them, whatever that may be. A sizable number of those walkers are speaking languages other than English. The Golden Gate Bridge is an icon to people from all over the world.

An icon is more than just an object of admiration. It represents something beyond itself, and beyond the person admiring it. It is part of some bigger, communal reality: a culture or a religion. By focusing on the icon, the individual identifies with the larger truth, and locates himself within the community that recognizes the icon. For some, the bridge is an icon for what it makes them think. For others, it is an icon because of how it makes them feel.



The Golden Gate Bridge. Courtesy of Corbis.

Close up or far off, the bridge invites the eye and stirs the imagination. It is visible from many points and in many aspects. From the ridge of Mount Tamalpais closest to the north tower, you see the top of the tower almost on eye level as you look down on the bridge deck and across the Gate to the south tower and the city in the distance. This aspect, like the view of the bridge from across the bay, emphasizes the structure's gracefulness and elegance. From below, on the seawall at Fort Winfield Scott under the south end of the bridge (used to great effect in Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Vertigo*), you look up at the great towers and the underside of the span. It looms above you, heavy, almost threatening, and impossibly large. You can take a harbor tour on a boat that goes right under the bridge and be struck anew by how far above the water even the deck is, let alone the towers, lost far above in the clouds.

When the weather is clear, the Golden Gate Bridge is a presence in your field of vision, even from the opposite shore of the bay, ten miles away: a dividing line between heaven and earth during daylight hours and a string of golden lights at night. Often, however, the Bay's fog hides the bridge. Sometimes the towers vanish up into the overcast, and sometimes they are all of the bridge that can be seen, as a low fog swallows the bases of the towers and the deck.

The fog, like the strait, the city, and the bridge, plays its own part in the history of the region. For more than 200 years, that fog concealed the Golden Gate and San Francisco Bay from explorers and others sailing along the coast,

including Francis Drake. Finally in 1769 members of the Portola expedition, coming overland from the Spanish settlements in the south, were the first Europeans to see the strait and the bay when they reached Point Lobos, the westernmost point in what is now San Francisco. A day or two later, other members of the party saw the southern end of the bay from Montara Mountain. The history of the region had begun.

In 1846 the scout and explorer John Charles Frémont named the strait the Golden Gate, inspired by a fancied comparison with the Golden Horn, the harbor of Byzantium. In naming the strait in homage to a geographical icon of the old world, he was the first to acknowledge the iconic aspect of this waterway in the new world. The ancient Greeks had called their harbor the Golden Horn because of its shape and its advantageous location for trade with Asia. The Golden Gate, Frémont wrote, was a fitting name for the strait because of its shape and its suitability for trade, especially with Asia. His rationale was either prescient or breathtaking in its presumption, in view of the fact that at the time Yerba Buena (not yet called San Francisco) was a mere village at the edge of a continent largely unexplored and sparsely inhabited.

The promise of riches, fame, and dreams come true is a key element of the iconic meaning of the Golden Gate Bridge. It exists at the farthest end of the continent that so many immigrants would come to believe had streets paved with gold. Frémont was lucky in his timing. Two years after he gave this bit of landscape its legend-infused and poetic name, gold was discovered in California. The following year the gold rush transformed the hamlet of Yerba Buena into a bustling city, and the Golden Gate truly became the gateway to riches.

The name “Golden Gate” caught on quickly. In mid-August of 1849, Bayard Taylor, a reporter and man of letters, arrived in California after a journey, typical for the time, down the east coast of the United States, across the Isthmus of Panama, and up the Pacific coast in the steamer *Panama*. He wrote, “At last we are through the Golden Gate—fit name for such a magnificent portal to the commerce of the Pacific!” (43). Not only did he use the name provided by Frémont just three years earlier, but he shared Frémont’s sense of what the place meant: a commercial opportunity.

Because it is striking and beautiful, the Golden Gate Bridge is endlessly depicted in all sorts of places, for all sorts of reasons. It appears on the dust jackets of books and in advertisements for airlines, car rental firms, tour companies, even supermarkets. It provides the very name for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and of course its image is a regular feature in GGNRA literature. Especially in the San Francisco Bay Area, the image of the bridge is omnipresent. Elsewhere, it appears far less often, but it is still relatively common and always instantly recognizable. It means excitement, travel, adventure, freedom.

It may contribute to the bridge’s iconic status that many people from elsewhere first encounter it when they are in their late teens or early twenties, the age when their lives are becoming independent and are opening up, an age that is often full of possibilities (and sometimes full of angst). California has

long been a destination for the young. Before the bridge was even imagined, many of those who came for the gold rush were of that age. Nowadays, the young often first really encounter it as college-age “runaways” from somewhere else. For them, the bridge means sunshine, freedom, open sky, and possibilities. For them, the bridge still has the aura of the “Summer of Love.”

Others, who may also have come to the bridge in their youth, may now be old enough to remember when ships went to sea under the bridge in the early nineteen-forties, bound for the war on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, or later steamed into the bay victorious. In those days, the bridge had a special and potent place in the hearts of families, wives, and sweethearts who clustered at the railing of the bridge, hoping for a last glimpse of loved ones as the ships departed, or a first glimpse as they returned home.

If the bridge represents the promise of a dream fulfilled, what happens when the dream fails? Every year, some eighteen or nineteen people leap from the bridge to their deaths. Even this shocking number may be too low, though, for some suicides may not be observed, and the bodies of some who leap are never recovered. In addition, an unknown number of people presumably contemplate committing suicide by jumping from the bridge; some of these probably never actually go to the bridge, and some perhaps walk out on the span and then change their minds. It is clear that suicide is a dark aspect of the bridge’s status as an icon. Perhaps even as a heartbroken soul contemplates leaving this world, the choice of this monumental structure as a place to die is an unconscious response to something transcendent, larger than the individual, that is represented by the bridge. If so, the contemplated suicide could be interpreted as a last attempt to grasp meaning or a sense of belonging.

People need dreams, and symbols, and icons. The Golden Gate Bridge is one of the more potent icons of the modern world. The bridge is very much a part of our time, the age of machinery, steel, and the automobile. It has fed the longings of modern people for most of the last century. As we move out of the industrial age that created the bridge and into a new world, with new kinds of commerce, new kinds of longing, what dreams will this twentieth-century icon inspire in the young people of the twenty-first century?

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# Billy Graham

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*David Fillingim*

The crowd in the packed stadium bursts into applause at the final note of the song, then a hushed anticipation settles over them as the time for the main event arrives. But this is not an athletic contest. On a stage in the middle of the field at the twenty-five yard line, a man in a dark gray suit slowly makes his way to a simple lectern and begins to speak in a familiar, deliberate, baritone voice. Billy Graham is delivering his simple gospel message of salvation, and the capacity crowd hangs on every word.

If asked to name one person who stands as an icon of American Christianity, Billy Graham is the first name that would come to most people's minds. But Billy Graham represents different (and even opposite) things to different people. To some, Graham represents reactionary conservatism; to others, liberal compromise. He has been called both a prophet and a bulwark of the status quo against which prophets rail. Perhaps the varying perceptions of Graham and his legacy demonstrate that he has successfully embodied the Apostle Paul's ideal of becoming "all things to all people." Or perhaps they constitute yet another indication that iconic is in the eye of the beholder.

Graham is an icon both within and beyond the revivalist and evangelical strands of American Christianity, and one's perception of exactly what Graham represents depends in large measure upon one's position in relation to the various subgroups that comprise American evangelicalism. To "insiders" Graham will represent various theological and political substrata within evangelical Christianity. To "outsiders" he will tend to represent Christianity, evangelicalism, or American civil religion as a whole.

Born in 1918, Billy Graham was raised on a dairy farm near Charlotte, North Carolina. At age 16, Graham had his experience of being "born again" at a crusade led by traveling evangelist Mordecai Ham, and was ordained to the ministry five years later. He attended Florida Bible Institute and earned a bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in Illinois, where he met and married Ruth. After serving as a pastor in Illinois, he joined the ministry of the parachurch organization Youth for Christ, from which he launched his own evangelistic ministry through a successful 1949 Los Angeles crusade.

Most broadly, Billy Graham is an icon of American Christianity in the electronic era. To insert Billy Graham's name into a song lyric or his image into a work of art is to evoke immediately whatever the listener/viewer associates with being Christian in America—respectability, influence, power, stability, hope, peace, quaintness, prejudice, backwardness, and so on. More specifically Graham represents several strands of American religious history in which his ministry has played a pivotal role, and he symbolizes several major conflicts in American religion as evidenced by conflicting views of various facets of his own ministry.

First and most obviously, Billy Graham exemplifies the revivalist tradition that is endemic to American Christianity. As numerous observers have noted, the individualistic frontier mentality that has shaped American culture is uniquely suited to a religious mindset emphasizing rational decision and individual conversion (see my essay on “Self-Help and Popular Religion” in *The Greenwood Guide to American Popular Culture*). The revivalist tradition in America, beginning with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, and extending through Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and Billy Sunday, shows a progressive emphasis on the rational decision to follow Christ as the most prudent choice an individual can make. With his plain presentation of the gospel—always concluding with a simple appeal for a decision to follow Christ—Billy Graham stands at the zenith of this tradition.

One dynamic within revivalism that Graham especially exemplifies is the effort to control the emotional excesses sometimes associated with religious fervor. In other words, Billy Graham is an icon of religious respectability. During the first Great Awakening, which burst forth in late-seventeenth-century Puritan New England, many were critical of the revivals for their excessive emotional displays. Puritanism had tended to emphasize a more rational and orderly approach to religion and all of life. Revival leaders were concerned to demonstrate that the conversions brought about in the revivals were deeper than mere emotional excitement. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) wrote *On Religious Affections*, an exploration of the behaviors associated with conversion and a precursor to social science methodologies, in an effort to differentiate authentic religious emotion from excessive emotionalism.

As the Revivalist tradition developed, a sort of science of soul-winning developed with it. In the urban revivals of the mid-nineteenth century, Charles G. Finney (1792–1825) pioneered many of the elements that would become associated with mass evangelism, most notably the citywide crusade with publicity, trained volunteers, and local clergy support. Finney also pioneered the notion of the “evangelist” as a specialized minister, and was known for a colloquial preaching style that appealed to the common person. Finney's successors as leading evangelists, Dwight Moody (1837–1899) and Billy Sunday (1862–1935), also appealed to the common folk and increased the showmanship associated with revivals. Finney, Moody, and Sunday were all self-taught, lacking formal theological training. Moody's partnership with songleader Ira Sankey gave birth to the “gospel song” tradition of sacred

music, in which songs about heaven and personal friendship with Jesus are prominent. Sunday's songleader, Homer Rodeheaver, introduced new dynamics to gospel song performance and congregational singing styles.

Finney, Moody, and Sankey all presented a populist, anti-elitist, and anti-intellectual version of Christianity. With the advent of the Pentecostal movement at the dawn of the twentieth century, evangelists such as Aimee Semple McPherson (1944) took the revival movement farther from the cultural mainstream with healing ceremonies and other new and strange ritual practices. Revivalist Christianity was again criticized for its excessive emotionalism. McPherson's ostentatious ministry was also criticized for its commercialism, and scandals in her personal life brought accusations of outright hypocrisy. As the biting satire in Sinclair Lewis's novel *Elmer Gantry* demonstrates, by the mid twentieth century the figure of the evangelist was an icon of everything that was wrong with American Christianity. So how has Billy Graham come to be an icon of honor, integrity, and serenity?

From early in his ministry, Graham attracted support from the cultural mainstream. During Graham's 1949 Los Angeles tent crusade, news publisher William Randolph Hearst made the decision to give Graham positive press, perhaps because Graham's gospel seemed more palatable than the city's Pentecostal revivals that had preceded it. Graham's 1957 New York crusade filled Madison Square Garden for sixteen weeks. The years between included a successful crusade in London. Graham attended several meetings of the World Council of Churches from its founding in 1948 and sought to make evangelism a higher priority within the ecumenical movement by sponsoring the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966. One reason for Graham's broad appeal is simply that, unlike some earlier evangelists, he did nothing that would separate himself from the mainstream. He lacked the isolationist, anti-intellectual, and anti-elitist impulses sometimes associated with conservative Christianity. Graham's meticulously staged crusades avoid excess of any kind, thus providing a suitable frame for the simple gospel message and appealing to an audience given to moderation and rational decision-making.

William Martin's definitive biography of Graham is entitled *A Prophet With Honor*. To admirers Graham is an icon of both honor and the prophetic.



Billy Graham, 1966. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Graham represents the honorable in religion in part because of the previously mentioned avoidance of emotional excess and other extravagances, and also because of his reputation for financial integrity. Graham's organization is governed by a board of directors which approves Graham's moderate (by celebrity/televangelist standards) salary. During the 1980s, sex scandals involving televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart rocked the world of religious broadcasting; Bakker's opulent and self-indulgent lifestyle had already been a matter of some controversy. Graham managed to stay above the fray, keeping intact his reputation as a man of personal integrity and financial responsibility, never prone to the dishonorable and embarrassing antics of some of his peers.

The idea of Billy Graham as prophet is more problematic. To some, Graham represents the prophetic dimension of Christianity in that he proclaims a simple, uncompromising message of salvation that posits Jesus as the true solution to all personal and social problems. But to those who identify prophetic Christianity in the twentieth century as the religion of people like Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Berrigan brothers, Billy Graham is an icon of all that is wrong with the church. His simple individualism is seen as working against an adequate response to the great social issues of the day. For example, during the Cold War, Graham would often mention or allude to the anxiety brought on by nuclear proliferation, then conclude with the appeal that true peace in one's heart can be found only through Jesus Christ. The more radical prophetic wing of Christianity sought a more comprehensive solution to the nuclear arms race than individual conversion.

A similar dynamic revolves around Graham's stance on race relations. Admirers portray Graham as an advocate of racial reconciliation because of his insistence in the 1970s and 1980s that his crusades be open to all, which was indeed an improvement over the practices in many Southern churches (I personally witnessed white attendees walk out in protest when Graham stated his belief in racial equality from the podium of a 1986 crusade). But critics—most notably Reinhold Niebuhr, perhaps the most influential theologian of the twentieth century—have criticized Graham's failure to speak out on racial segregation in the Bible Belt during the earlier years of the Civil Rights movement. In reality, Graham had tried to desegregate his crusades in the early 1950s, but opposition from local crusade organizers in southern cities forced a difficult decision. Faced with the choice between evangelizing an audience with separate seating for black and white listeners and not evangelizing at all, Graham chose to make a difficult compromise.

Graham's relationships with United States presidents are iconic of the place of religion in American public life. Graham participated in the inauguration services of presidents Johnson, Nixon (twice), Reagan (twice) George H. W. Bush, and Clinton (twice). He also attended the inauguration of President Eisenhower and stayed overnight at the White House and participated in a prayer breakfast during the early days of the Carter presidency. To some,

Graham's role as the presidents' de facto chaplain reinforces the myth of America as a nation uniquely blessed and perhaps even chosen by God. To others (including Niebuhr), Graham's friendships with presidents compromise the integrity of the gospel through association with corrupt power and political agenda.

Though sometimes associated by critics with narrow, partisan agenda of the Religious Right, Graham's friendships with politicians differ markedly from the political friendships enjoyed by other television preachers like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Graham was accused of political partisanship in mid-career because of his close relationship with President Richard Nixon and his open disdain for communism. But Graham's subsequent friendships with Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton demonstrated that he was not captive to a particular political ideology. By contrast, the new Religious Right led by Falwell and Robertson rose to prominence during Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign and has unashamedly pursued specific policy goals. Falwell and Robertson have associated only with Republican leaders, despite the fact that the one Democratic president during their years of political involvement is the only president to share their Baptist denominational background. Graham, on the other hand, was one of the ministers Bill Clinton met with privately seeking counsel regarding his marital infidelity.

To most observers perhaps, Graham represents conservatism. But to some Christian fundamentalists, Graham is the prime example of the dangers of compromise with liberalism. While Graham was bringing respectability to revivalism by moderating its anti-intellectualism, the fundamentalist reactionary stance against evolution and higher criticism of the Bible intensified the anti-intellectualism of the far right wing of American Christendom. In the middle of the twentieth century, at the zenith of the fundamentalist reaction against modernism, Graham was among a group of Christian leaders who launched the current movement in American Christianity known as "Evangelicalism" in an effort to forge a middle way between rabid fundamentalist backwardness and the drift toward liberalism and secularism. Throughout his career, Graham has been criticized in arch-fundamentalist publications for adulterating the gospel by associating with the doctrinally impure.

Graham also represents serenity. His book laying out the gospel he preaches is entitled *Peace with God*. In a preaching career that spanned the Cold War and the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, Graham has always presented Jesus as the only source of true peace. When Graham would appear at public ceremonies, particularly in times of national crisis or disaster, his presence and demeanor exerted a calming influence. Graham's son, Franklin, apparently did not inherit this gift, as indicated by his inflammatory remarks about Islam in the wake of the atrocities of September 11, 2001. One of the functions of religion, including civil religion, is to nurture a sense of inner peace among its adherents. Billy Graham's steadiness and consistency, along with the simplicity of his message, have allowed him to be a visible symbol of the serenity that people seek from religion.

Several factors help to explain Graham's popularity. Graham and his contemporaries rose to fame on the tide of the growth of radio, and later television. The Roman Catholic Church had pioneered religious broadcasting. Father Coughlin, the radio priest, pioneered the use of radio to broadcast religious teaching in the 1930s, while Bishop Fulton Sheen was the first widely successful religious figure on television. Charles Fuller pioneered radio evangelism in the mid-twentieth century, paving the way for Graham and serving as a mentor of sorts for the younger evangelist. Though Father Coughlin's message had included harsh invective, television tended to favor more moderate voices—at least until the advent of cable TV with enough channels for every voice to find a niche. Graham's message of inner peace and rational decision-making was well-suited for the new medium.

Graham's career also bracketed with the Cold War and its anxiety-producing doctrine of nuclear deterrence. The acronym MAD (mutually assured destruction) for the era's major weapons policies bespeaks a culture crying out for a message of peace and tranquility. Graham's assurance that "peace with God" could cure the anxieties of an age of rapid cultural change found receptive ears.

Certainly Graham's own talents and character play a significant role in his popularity. His straightforward preaching style is accessible and engaging. His personal integrity has seldom been questioned. And his single-mindedness of purpose in placing the simple message of salvation above all other concerns allowed his ministry to carve a straight path through the tumultuous social environment of the second half of the twentieth century.

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# Grateful Dead

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*Nicholas Meriwether*

When Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia died in 1995, the *New York Times* eulogized him as an “Icon of 60’s Spirit” (Pareles). Nor were they alone: the term icon cropped up repeatedly, applied to both Garcia and the Dead, as well as to their tie-dyed fans, the Deadheads. Though used then in the broadest sense, the idea of an icon is actually quite apt in getting at what has made the Grateful Dead such a colorful, complex, and enduring phenomenon in American culture.

Of all the American bands to emerge from the heady ferment of the 1960s, the Grateful Dead cast the longest cultural shadow. Considered avatars of—and spokespersons for—the Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco’s famous bohemian neighborhood, the band coalesced in Palo Alto in 1965 with lead guitarist Jerry Garcia, drummer Bill Kreutzmann, bassist Phil Lesh, organist and lead vocalist Ron “Pigpen” McKernan, and rhythm guitarist Bob Weir. Their backgrounds—and aggregation—reveal much of the cultural currents that made San Francisco the “Liverpool of the West,” as columnists called it then. Garcia was a veteran of a number of folk and bluegrass groups, already considered the best banjo player in the competitive Bay Area folk scene. Weir and Pigpen were also part of that scene, though Pigpen’s forte was the blues. A former jazz trumpeter with perfect pitch, Lesh had studied with famed composer Luciano Berio and spent the past four years writing avant-garde classical music when Garcia tapped him to play bass for the fledgling group. After a brief apprenticeship playing peninsula bars, they performed at a party thrown by Ken Kesey and his circle of bohemians, nicknamed the Merry Pranksters. It was not just another party, though: this one featured the still-legal psychedelic drug LSD, and everyone—musicians included—participated. When Kesey decided to take the parties public, the Dead were tapped as the house band for what was called the Acid Tests, immortalized in Tom Wolfe’s memoir, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

Later the band would attribute much of their approach to music to the lessons they learned during this brief period. As they saw it, by breaking down barriers, psychedelics reinforced their ability to listen to each other,

laying the groundwork for the freeform improvisation that would become a defining aspect of their performances. It also broke down patterns of thinking and helped them view their music as almost infinitely expansive, able to absorb whatever influence or inspiration they might have. This eclecticism was bulwarked by the competitive nature of the jazz and folk scenes that birthed San Francisco rock: musicians were judged not only by their chops, but also by how deep—and esoteric—their musicology was. In a scene that produced the Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company (Janis Joplin's first band), Quicksilver Messenger Service, Country Joe and the Fish, Santana, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and dozens of others, the Dead were considered the best, by common consent.

Part of their appeal was the bond they managed to establish with their audiences. Some of this was purely kinetic: they were a tight dance band. But the spiritual quality of their performances was commented on from the outset: this was not three-chord rock, moaning about teen-aged love. Some of that spirit they brought with them from the Acid Tests; some of it, though, was imbued in the lyrics and in the warm, communal glow of group improvisation. It was an approach that made the audience a participant; indeed, the band would say that on a good night, the audience was another member of the band. Their first album, released in early 1967, featured their own arrangements of blues and jugband classics like “Good Morning, Little Schoolgirl” and “Don't Ease Me In.” Though the band quickly ceased playing the originals on the album, songs like “The Golden Road (To Unlimited Devotion)” captured the burgeoning ethos of the Haight, with its catchy refrain, urging everyone to join the party. Sadly, that happened, and the Haight scene collapsed under the influx of young people. After living in what one band family member called “the Haight's unofficial community center,” the Dead grew tired of Grayline tour buses driving by to gawk, and moved out shortly after 1967's *Summer of Love* (Scully and Dalton 74).

The band would always be associated with the Haight, however, and for the rest of their career, their songs would continue to explore those rich origins as well as steadily expand to encompass musical traditions from the rest of the world. They added another impetus for that diversity with second drummer Mickey Hart, who joined in the fall of 1967. A student of the drum in all its cultural guises, Hart was already practiced in Eastern rhythms and added both power and color to their percussion. Their sophomore album, released in 1968, blended live and studio recordings to capture a series of originals, designed to showcase their formidable reputation as a live band. From the Beat-inflected surrealism of “New Potato Caboose,” set to a madrigal-flavored melody, to the gut-bucket blues of “Alligator,” this was another document of the high seriousness and dazzling array of influences that informed the San Francisco scene. For fans, the standout was the thundering riot of “The Other One,” which captured another important chunk of the band's mythos: their relationship with the Pranksters, epitomized by Neal



The Grateful Dead, 1968. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Cassady, the legendary Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and their notorious patron and sound engineer, Augustus Owsley Stanley III, better known as Bear. A famed underground LSD chemist, Bear was responsible for helping establish the band's sound system, and began the practice of taping each show, so that the band could critique themselves afterwards. Later on these tapes would produce a gold mine of releases, and reinforce the precedent for fan taping as well.

It was with the pair of albums that followed, though, that the band's place in the mythology of the Haight-Ashbury was cemented. With the addition of lyricist Robert Hunter, the words took on the kind of learned, literate sophistication that already defined the music. From the allegorical "St. Stephen" to the slashing psychedelia of "Cosmic Charlie," Hunter was the final ingredient. His words for "Dark Star" clinched what would grow into the band's signature anthem, the centerpiece of their last album of the Sixties, *Live/Dead*. Over the next twenty-three years, Hunter would continue to pen words that Garcia thought captured his way of thinking, even his history, with an uncanny precision. Their last composition together, "Days Between," hearkened back to their days in the Palo Alto folk scene and the early days of the Haight, in a gem of a ballad that finally settled the issue of whether rock music could age gracefully. Much of his work with Garcia can be found on the band's dozen studio recordings, though along with the band's second lyricist John Perry Barlow (who mostly worked with Bob Weir), many of their gems only appear on the band's more than fifty live releases.

Many critics have commented on the intelligence, beauty, and power—the “larger-than-lifeness” in Steve Silberman’s words—of the music and lyrics of the Dead; some have begun to describe how these combined to outline a coherent vision (Silberman xx). One academic has called this a “lifeworld,” and one aspect of this is its ability to sustain and generate an iconography whose symbols are among the best known in popular culture (Ganter 176). The most famous of these were created by the small group of original Haight-Ashbury artists whose posters advertised early Fillmore and Avalon Ballroom shows. Like the Dead’s concert repertoire, some of these early images drew on older traditions: Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley found an illustration by Edward Sullivan for *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and it became one of the most recognized images for the band, the skeleton surrounded by roses—the perfect pictorial representation of the words “grateful dead.” Other images were as startling and original as the band’s own songs, and often drew on their imagery: Rick Griffin listened to Hunter’s lyrics, where roses feature prominently, and created a seminal poster of a gorgeous blue rose, one of horticulture’s holy grails. Most famously, Bob Thomas created the stylized image that graces the band’s 1975 album, *Steal Your Face*: nicknamed steallies or Lightning Jacks, the skull with a thirteen-point lightning bolt through it became the band’s best known symbol, and a trademarked logo. In time, these artists and others would add dancing bears, terrapins, skeletons, and dozens more to the iconography of the Dead, a process Deadheads joyfully participated in as well. Emblazoned on handcrafted teeshirts, stickers, and posters, Deadheads’ iconography drew on and embellished these and added their own, eventually earning their own gallery exhibition (Cole and Stallings).

There was a practical aspect to these icons: the Lightning Jack—colorful, simple, easily recognized—made it instantly possible to separate the band’s equipment from others, an important consideration in crowded backstages and festival situations. Likewise, fans could recognize each other when they spotted a bumper sticker emblazoned with a chain of dancing skeletons or the cryptic phrase, “nothing left to do but smile, smile smile,” one of the hundreds of lyric couplets that became touchstones of Deadhead philosophy. That identification carried risks as well, when law enforcement agencies began to use Deadhead insignias as probable cause to stop cars and perform contraband searches (Fraser and Black 24). For Garcia, whose bearded beaming visage and signature handprint, with its missing middle finger—chopped off in a childhood accident—became visual icons, fame became a trial and a burden.

With appearances at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 and Woodstock in 1969, the Dead’s centrality in the broader folklore of the Sixties was enshrined. Their historicity would also provide an enduring source of appeal for later fans, as well as for academics. Indeed, the ways in which the band both shaped and were shaped by their times would become one of the challenges facing academics trying to explain the Grateful Dead experience and phe-

nomenon, terms that embrace both the band's work and the fans' sense of involvement. While the band members' erudition and virtuosity made them appealing subjects, it was the bond they shared with their audience that would ultimately arouse even more commentary.

That audience showed no signs of diminishing after the sixties. Moreover, they remained loyal despite the band's refusal to conform to music industry norms and expectations. Touring without the benefit of a radio hit or massive record company promotion, the Dead soon became legendary for playing hours on end, and never repeating a show. With a repertoire that encompassed hundreds of songs, by 1990 a diehard fan could hear six consecutive shows featuring more than 100 songs, with none repeated.

That the band was still innovating, still improvising, after so many years was part of their continual appeal. In every era, critics noted that the band's audience renewed itself with young recruits, even as the older ones continued to come. By the 1980s fans could see three generations at every show, proof that the scene was healthy and that the Deadhead identity was not a negation but an affirmation. Like the original hippies of the Haight, Deadheads viewed themselves as artists of their lives, charged with the responsibility to find a meaningful, spiritually aware way of contributing to their community—even if that community was defined as being as far removed as possible from the mainstream society that condemned and misunderstood them.

All of this exuded a sense of authenticity that coils through much of the literature on the band. Just as the band recognized that what they were doing was tied into older, deeper knowledge, so too did the fans: being a Deadhead not only carried with it the challenge of understanding an exceptionally dense, wide-ranging musical corpus, it also entailed learning the band's musical antecedents and historical genesis. When Deadheads read Garcia's reaction to finding Harry Smith's folkways anthology, they too were turned on to what Greil Marcus called "the old, weird America." Hidden, suppressed or forgotten knowledge ran throughout the Dead scene, from Hart's forays into tribal drumming to the ritual use of psychedelics. Nor were they anti-academic: Dead shows were famous for attracting favorable attention—and participation—from luminaries such as Joseph Campbell and Owen Chamberlain, Nobel laureate in physics, who said he liked sitting between the two drummers on stage "because it gives me interesting ideas" (McNally 387). And the band was explicit about their sense of indebtedness to their artistic, musical, and cultural antecedents; in a late interview, Garcia reflected, "I feel like I'm part of a continuous line of a certain thing in American culture, of a root. . . . My life would be miserable if I didn't have those little chunks of Dylan Thomas and T. S. Eliot. I can't imagine life without that stuff. Those are the payoffs: the finest moments in music, the finest moments in movies. Great moments are part of what supports you as an artist and a human" (Henke 40). Deadheads who listened and read those interviews learned much about folk music, blues, jazz, classical, the Beats, modernism, and the cornerstones of Western civilization (plus a few from the East).



Deadheads may have felt alienated from mainstream America, but they felt rooted in much deeper human cultural traditions.

This helps explain why the band and fans have already generated so much academic work. There is the monumentalism of so many well-played shows, each one unique, most of them recorded and traded among fans; and there is the spectacular range of sources, musical and literary, informing their work. But what emerges as the most slippery and compelling aspect of the whole Grateful Dead phenomenon is the way that all of this translated into what one critic called “a union with their audience that was unrivaled and unshakeable” (Gilmore 96). It has also proven to be complex enough to merit a sizable amount of academic work, including a bibliography, several collections of essays, dozens of articles, five Ph.D. dissertations, more than two dozen master’s theses, and over 130 conference papers (Meriwether). Most remarkable is the percentage of papers and theses that have been published, a statistic that includes a surprising amount of undergraduate work as well. For knowledgeable academics, this is less surprising: but as Deadheads, these authors measured their effort against a very real and intensely personal experience; that passion, as Rebecca Adams has pointed out, is a critical component of Deadhead scholarship (Adams, “What Goes Around, Comes Around” 37).

Academics have approached the Dead phenomenon from a variety of disciplines: musicology, literary criticism, history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, religious studies, communication theory, business theory, and others have all made contributions. There is a certain propriety in this attention: the academy has always had a certain tolerance for eccentric, learned excellence, which could easily describe the Dead. But the real appeal of Dead studies for academics is that it offers unusual opportunities to address long-standing issues, from fundamentals such as a workable definition of rock music, to more theoretical concerns such as connecting a work of art to its audience, from creation to consumption (both thorny and still confounding issues, despite decades of work). The fact that all of these disciplines can provide compelling insights also suggests that Dead studies may well offer a unique basis for interdisciplinary work, grounded in a single phenomenon. Perhaps even more, the band and its subculture offer compelling models for such work: the band exemplifies the ideal of participating in the traditions you study. This has implications for the academy: as one anthropologist maintained, “the study of phenomena such as the Grateful Dead in American culture is not only justifiable, but requisite for the development of the discipline” (Bradshaw ix). And Deadheads believe in emulating the band’s standards—and ideals—of excellence, cooperation, and open-mindedness in their own work, which Rebecca Adams has hailed as uniquely laudatory in the academy (Adams, Foreword). The collaboration that lies at the heart of the book she coedited with Robert Sardiello, *Deadhead Social Science*, is at the forefront of educational theory, and it has also produced fine work.

From the outset, the band and their reluctant figurehead were called icons of hippiedom in general, and of the Haight-Ashbury and San Francisco rock in particular. It was no surprise then to see the term pressed into service again after Garcia's death, and not just by commentators, but by fellow musicians. Jazz saxophonist Branford Marsalis, who played with the band on several occasions, said: "Most rock shows are just like versions of MTV, but not the Dead—they're into jazz, they know Coltrane, they're American musical icons. . . . They're *fantastic*" (Pooley). Ornette Coleman, who had invited Garcia to play on one of his later albums, put it more succinctly: "Jerry Garcia was one of the original American icons. He played very naturally and beautifully" ("And We Bid You Good Night" 67). Both remarks chart the unlikely course the band pursued—or more properly, the improbable destination that emerged during their quest. In the more than 2,000 unique concerts they played over thirty years, playing more shows to more listeners than any other band in history, the Dead became much more than just symbols of the Sixties or the Haight-Ashbury. Indeed, as one academic commented in the early 1990s, "The Grateful Dead have become an American cultural icon, even for those who don't listen, or no longer listen, to rock music" (Tillinghast 188). Their place was cemented when the remaining members decided to retire the name, though they would continue touring in various aggregations and even partially resuscitate the name, as simply The Dead, a few years later. Cynics dismissed the continuation, but staying power was always a central part of the band's ethos. After all, they had outlived three keyboard players, though the rest of the band's lineup had remained stable.

While academics and the rest of America argue today over the meaning of the Sixties, one of its greatest cultural artifacts and legacies quietly transcended those tangled, turbulent origins to become an icon of America itself, in all its oft-misunderstood complexity. Novelist Robert Stone, an alumnus of that early Palo Alto bohemian scene, put it best: "The art and the thought and the spirit of liberation of the sixties flourished in their way. But of that holistic magic vision of the garden set free, the music of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead is the purest single remnant. It was supposed to be an accompaniment to the New Beginning. In fact, it was the thing itself, all that remains with us" (Stone 67). It is a true icon, embodying a complicated, challenging, uniquely American artistic and social phenomenon.

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# Guardian Angel

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*Scott Vander Ploeg*

The most resilient manifestation of the guardian angel in American popular culture appears in the 1947 Frank Capra classic Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey, perhaps his most endearing role. As George is contemplating suicide by jumping from the town bridge he is confronted by his guardian angel, Clarence Oddbody, who explains that he has been assigned by the higher authority of the archangels, and consequently by God, to save George. George assumes that Clarence is a deluded old man. But if Clarence can convince George to turn back from self destruction, he will earn his wings, graduating to first-class angel status. Clarence convinces George that his life is indeed worth living by showing him what an awful place Bedford Falls would have been if George had never been born.

Replayed on television incessantly during the holiday season, this movie capitalizes upon Biblical precedents and secular usages and so contributes to keeping the guardian angel strongly entrenched in the contemporary world view. The details of the guardian angel story in *It's a Wonderful Life* are only slightly different, for cinematic purposes, from the traditional associations of guardian angel. Clarence has a personal interest in George—getting his wings, as well as protecting him, suggesting a promotion among the hierarchy that is not consistent with tradition. The movie introduces and popularizes the notion that when a bell rings, it signifies that an angel has earned its wings. Now, it is common parlance to refer to getting or earning one's wings, and the imagined occasion is often heralded by the ringing of a bell. The movie is so broadly known that an episode of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990–1996) included a cameo appearance by Tom Jones as a guardian angel offering to rescue Will Smith's TV cousin, Carlton Banks, in a plot similar to that of Capra's movie.

The wider cultural manifestations of the guardian angel are legion, and range from high culture operatic works to pop culture movies and television shows. The concept of an angel is pervasive to Western civilization, so much so that Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins include it as the first entry in



Henry Travers and James Stewart in Frank Capra's holiday classic *It's a Wonderful Life*, 1946. RKO/The Kobol Collection.

*The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World.* Milton's depiction of angel multitudes and their individual involvement in the story of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* is part of an ongoing project in our culture that seeks to establish personal connection between deity and individual. Guardian angels figure prominently in the "holy cards" distributed to Catholic grade school children as rewards for work well done. Far apart in time and purpose, in the early 1990s a fad of guardian angel materials bloomed from book publications seeking to provide explanation and instruction in how the individual can better contact and utilize his or her angels. Such materials as tarot-styled angel cards (*The Angel Oracle*) and, packaged with a booklet, a stuffed angel-efigy doll, accompanied by golden purse and "blessing cards" (Crain), emphasize the connection between

spiritual agency and the common consumer. Until the 1990s, William D. Webber points out, only eight books on angels were available in print, and five of those were "denominational books" specific to particular doctrines and practices. By the end of the decade, however, some 300 books about angels had been published. The literary critic Harold Bloom identified angelology, along with interest in dreams and the "near-death experience," as a main cultural concern emerging with the approach of the millennium; for Bloom the aim of this quest was an image of the spiritually essential "primordial person," who would be the "guardian angel, or heavenly twin" (2, 10).

Hollywood long ago found that audiences embraced angels, as the use of "angel" in the title of so many movies suggests, perhaps most notably *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), but the guardian angel often took the guise of a friendly ghost as in the *Topper* movies (1937, 1938, 1941, 1979). The guardian angel proper figures more conspicuously in *Angel on My Shoulder* (1946, 1980), *The Bishop's Wife* (1947), *Angels in the Outfield* (1951, 1994), *The Angel Who Pawned Her Harp* (1954), and *The Angel Levine* (1970), among many others. And there has been something of a revival of motion pictures relying heavily on the saving grace of a guardian angel, including

the remake of *Angels in the Outfield* (1994), *Michael* (1996), *City of Angels* (1998), *The Preacher's Wife* (1996), and, with an ironic presentation, *Dogma* (1999). Furthermore, the essential concept of aid from the spiritual realm can be found in many movies of that period that do not rely on traditional guardian angel entities, such as *Ghost* (1990) and *Field of Dreams* (1989).

Television and the mass media are also now well populated with guardian angels. Michael Landon created a guardian angel role in *Highway to Heaven* (1984–1989), and Della Reese starred in the television series *Touched by an Angel* (1994–2003). Amid these happy-ending TV series, Sophy Burnham published her bestselling *A Book of Angels: Reflections on Angels Past and Present and True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives* in 1990, followed by its readers' responses in *Angel Letters* (1991), and Eileen Elias Freeman brought out *Touched by Angels: True Cases of Close Encounters of the Celestial Kind* in 1993. Though negligibly different in detail, the stories these publications tell are of angelic interventions and the turning of individuals from godless lives heading for destruction to positive and generous behavior full of gladness, gratitude, and godliness. Stories of good deeds are often interpreted as particular manifestations of angelic forces. These books launched a raft of angel goods into the popular culture, such that miniature guardian angel pins became common adornments, guardian angel paintings and posters and tattoos were suddenly desired commodities. At crane-style arcade games in Wal-Marts across America, for fifty cents you could win a guardian angel pin for your favorite occupation, including one for truck drivers. Other motorists sported bumper stickers claiming that their "guardian angels were riding with them." The guardian angel became ubiquitous.

Moreover, the guardian angel story became a common device for explaining happy coincidences, surprising or unexpected recoveries, ghostly presences that "save" individuals, and any gesture of compassion or sacrifice for the good of others. The story had a precedent in American literature. The "Good Samaritan" as guardian angel had been fully developed a century earlier, in Oliver Wendell Holmes's sentimental novel *The Guardian Angel* (1875). In its story, Master Byles Gridley, a fusty old philosopher, intervenes to protect a young girl, appropriately named Myrtle Hazard, from the perils of the male-dominated society in which she grows up. Although his good deeds have no hint of supernatural or divine agency behind them, Gridley is named as her guardian angel in the book's last sentence. Many of the late twentieth-century angel-themed books, such as Freeman's *Angelic Healing* and the authorless *When God Sends an Angel*, consist of compilations of stories of lucky outcomes and miraculous occurrences that are attributed to angelic intervention. Often the miracles are instances of good deeds performed by strangers. Both Sophy Burnham's and Eileen Freeman's experiences include numerous incidents in which they were warned by a voice or image and then averted injury to self or another; Burnham reflects on explanations such as telepathy or intuition but finds them insufficient in contrast to religious perspectives on prayer, angels, and, most of all, individual conviction (*A Book of Angels* 51–

61). Clearly the mass of believers who avidly watch the television shows and movies and seek these books agree with their concept of supernatural agency involved in daily survival, because it is basic to the plots, and, in the books, the introductory part of the memoir which must establish credibility (Burnham, *A Book of Angels* 6–17; Freeman, *Touched by Angels* 1–19).

The imagery of guardian angels often involves depiction of a ghostly presence, typically floating or flying and sporting large wings attached from the back and shoulders, the whole shown as translucent or diaphanous. In many paintings, lithographs, and poster depictions from the Victorian era, the angel is following a child or young children as they contend with metaphors of a dangerous world. In several such paintings, the children are alone, except for the angels behind and above them, the children's youth seeming at odds with their solitary status. The children are crossing bridges over streams, or playing near a cliff edge, suggesting the danger of falling, or they are toddling through a forest and in danger of remaining lost. Protection is the prime function of such angelic presences, though in most cases the angel's action is muted or passive.

The strong appeal of guardian angels often reveals an equally strong sense of a pervasive threat lurking in the world, as true for adults as for children. A divine protector is needed because it is believed that the individual cannot withstand the dangers that beset us. This threat perhaps explains why some of the guardian angel stories take the form of crime or detective movies and fiction. John Wall's *Guardian Angel in the Underworld*, for example, is a tale of good guys stopping gangsters, largely through the work of a woman who seeks to right the wrongs done to her own family. While guardian angels are not often represented as engaged in physical acts of protection, the avenging



A 1910 vintage greeting card showing a guardian angel watching over a sleeping child. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

or killer angels of ancient tradition lurk in the background; the possibility of a guardian angel's physical, even violent, intervention is commonly assumed and is a source of comfort. It is worth noting that the vigilante group in New York city who organized to fight street crime called themselves "The Guardian Angels." They saw their activity of enforcing law in the absence of official control as a kind of protection. Batman likewise functions as a type of guardian angel, relying on his utility belt and muscle instead of supernatural agency.

In Burnham's *Book of Angels*, she recognizes a psychological connection between the habit of young children to develop imaginary friends and the belief in angels who guard us. She explains that young children who reveal the presence of such imaginary friends are actually more in tune with their awareness than adults, and thus are reporting the real existence of guardian angels (41–45). Her explanation does not admit, or even seem capable of accepting the possibility, that the guardian angels of her adult world resemble the child's imaginary friends; but it bespeaks a sense of guardian angel belief deriving out of individual need for companionship. For many, the fact of being alone is a bane, a dismal situation that the guardian angel defeats by mere presence. Wordsworth's poetry answers the dread of loneliness by affirming the child's beliefs in spiritual beings; religion addresses it in creating heavens including angels; in common, art and religion value imagination. For Burnham, poets including Dante, Wordsworth, Blake, and Rilke; artists such as Dürer, Doré, Blake, and Gustave Moreau; and religions from Judaism, Medieval Christianity, Islam, to Swedenborgianism all convey images of angels and therefore, in her perspective, confirm her belief in angels (161–92). She mentions only agreements among these, not differences.

The good and bad angels that are popularly thought to sit on our shoulders and advise us alternately between good and evil are vestiges of medieval drama that can be found in literary treatments ranging from Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* to Walt Disney's Donald Duck. Latent in the public consciousness related to recent angel phenomena may be ancient concepts that each individual is allocated a guardian angel to watch over and protect the individual. Evidence of belief in angel guardians dates back to Sumerian civilization circa 3,000 B.C.E. and Egyptian Ishtar cults of the 1,800 B.C.E. range. The concept of personal guardian angels, presented by Aquinas and Augustine and debated in other Catholic patristic sources, has found comfortable placement among modern Protestant evangelicals, beginning with Billy Graham. When Graham first became interested in preaching about angels, however, he found very little about them in his library, and nothing written in the twentieth century. He noted the numerous shelves of books devoted to the devil, along with the occult and demons, and, reflecting that the Bible gives more importance to angels as divine ministers and human guardians than to the diabolical fallen angels, he began the study leading to his 1975 publication, *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (ix–x). Graham's book is a diverse treatment of angel stories expanded from Biblical references.



Although the idea of specific guardian angels assigned to each individual may be consistent with Protestantism's emphasis on personal relations with the deity, it is not Biblical, and not part of Graham's view. Graham relates Biblical passages to twentieth-century accounts of activities of angels, such as the rescue of a missionary and his wife from a murderous tribe, and, during World War II, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker's account of the gift of a gull which saved him and six fellow airmen from starvation after they were shot down in the Pacific Ocean (3–4).

Graham extended the personal ministry of angels, in his book and preaching, by integrating his witness of world events in his experience as an advisor to presidential administrations with the Bible's testimony about supernatural conflict; the warfare in the world, in this perspective, stems from attacks of demonic forces on God and the holy angels (75–76). Graham also implied the danger of being unaware of the spiritual hosts of good and evil in contending that "We live in a perpetual battlefield—The great War of the Ages continues to rage," so that a denial of angels and devils amounts to ignorance of the real conflict (65–67). More to the point of individual understanding and decision-making, and to the elevation angels have received in the 1990s, however, Graham emphasized the ultimate personal relationship with angels: "Today we have the choice of whether or not to receive the ministry of angels" crucial in our own futures, involving our death, judgment, and eternity (139). Again, present-day stories, of dying people, illustrate Biblical references to angels' actions in greeting, escorting, and singing to people (152–55).

More recent accounts of angelic intervention follow Graham's ideas of angelic ministry, but diminish or omit the framework of their subordination to the Biblical God's will and purpose. In these stories of encounters, the angels become manifest in the consciousness when coincidence or improbability confronts the individual, as when a near-death experience causes the individual to seek explanation for otherwise inexplicably having been "saved" from catastrophe. When this surprising escape occurs, the near-victim often attributes the outcome to the work of a divine guardian angel sent to warn and protect the individual from certain harm. In some constructions of this scenario, the attuned beneficiary may receive direct communications from the angel, often through prayer or special intervention; it may happen before the crisis, or after it, when the recipient seeks to keep the spiritual relationship, and, often, to extend it to others. Many of the recent "new age" constructions offer instruction in how to learn one's guardian angel's name, how to contact and communicate with the angel, and what to do to maintain good relations. These how-to guides assume that direct communications with the angels are possible, if the individual follows the programs the books indicate. Some purport to show the reader how to become a guardian angel for others. Those who believe in such agency often develop close relationships with their guardian angels, thinking of them as partners or collaborators, although presuming that the angels are entirely selfless and only interested in the welfare of their charges. Guardian angels seemingly have no agendas of their own,

except to ensure the ideal outcomes for the souls they oversee. They are invisible, inscrutable. They are beyond mortal comprehension and generally cannot be called upon at the individual's whim.

Guardian angels represent a continuing concern over the boundaries between material creation and the spiritual, among a public losing the theological distinctions of passing religious traditions. Belief in guardian angels presumes a continuity of existence beyond the material, in an afterlife, as well as a universe organized by the mind of a deity. Much of the resonance of the title and the stage imagery of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (stage 1993, HBO film 2003) derives from these enduring associations within American culture. In such a cosmic view, order and reason dominate over chaos, and events occur as part of a plan that is only imperfectly understood by the mortal mind. Many of the more recent guardian angel presentations involve the radical transcendence of humans who have died and become angels in order to save others. This adaptation implies a cultural need for reassurance that some use or value will attend the individual after death, and that in such "work" a degree of continued identity will be assured. The guardian angel's popularity, if it continues in this vein, may further extend the legendary American "work ethic" into its perhaps ultimate function, as a means of salvation in a self-help religion.

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# Gun

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*Michael C. C. Adams*

The gun is among the most potent of American icons. Firearms ownership is ubiquitous and its ramifications permeate the fabric of American society. For many, the gun embodies core American values. Arguably, the United States has a gun culture that is unique among Western nations. Great Britain, for example, has strong firearms traditions, but it does not aspire to a gun culture. The United Kingdom is renowned for its small arms industry that has produced such classic weapons as the Enfield bolt-action rifle. The country has a proud record of competitiveness in international gun sports. But the gun also has negative mental associations in Britain; it is popularly viewed as a threat to personal safety and public order. This attitude has intensified since the Dunblane school killings of March 1996 that led to the banning of all handguns in the United Kingdom, amid a wave of public anti-gun sentiment that associated private firearms ownership with promiscuous American gun violence.

The reverse of the U.K. attitude holds true in the United States. Here, the gun is associated in many minds with personal liberty and public safety. The origins of American involvement with the mystique of the gun are complex and controversial. The frontier experience is usually seen as pivotal in the development of firearms lore. The musket was a tool for economic self-sufficiency in a wilderness where game was plentiful and hunting was essential for survival. Flintlocks also provided defense against a hostile native population, on a battlefield where regular soldiers were scarce before 1755. Historically, then, the gun was associated first with survival and then progress in the harsh American environment. Richard Slotkin, perhaps the foremost contemporary student of the American frontier as a formative force, suggests that the power of the gun to tame the wilderness and provide a haven for European immigrants from the troubles of the Old World gave Americans a strong sense of the regenerative force of violence, a theme that continues to run through American literature and drama.

The difficulty with the frontier explanation of why the gun became an American icon is that other cultures underwent the frontier experience without producing a similar firearms ethic. For instance, Canada has a

hunting tradition as rich as that of the United States but experiences far fewer gun crimes, and there is no real association between the gun and national identity.

Recently, Michael A. Bellesiles has assailed the whole concept of a Colonial gun culture as pure legend. He argues that the affinity of settlers for firearms has been exaggerated, especially with regard to well-established areas where there was no longer a Native American threat. Colonials often ignored the militia provision that required all male freemen to acquire a smoothbore musket and ball ammunition; and British regular officers railed against the lack of marksmanship among provincial units. At the same time, Bellesiles's research has been attacked in turn as slipshod and understating evidence opposed to his conclusions.

Whatever the case for the colonial period, it is certainly true that by the eve of revolution, fear of a British tyranny led to the revitalization of the militia, so that on April 19, 1775, Massachusetts could put about 4,000 armed men in the field. The Revolutionary experience seems to have been crucial in constructing an American association between guns and defense of liberty against central tyranny, a strain that continued in the thinking of the National Rifle Association, the Minutemen of the Cold War era, and the private white-male militias of the 1990s. Americans did not forget that when Major John Pitcairn of the Royal Marines ordered the militia on Lexington Green to disperse, he also told them to lay down their arms. Their refusal to do so cemented an association between the bearing of arms and the preservation of liberty that is distinctly American.

Although the major fighting of the Revolutionary War fell upon the regulars of the Continental line, the folklore version held that the cause was won by untutored farmers and artisans who made up in natural virtue and superior marksmanship for what they lacked in professional training. Hence, when the new republic considered the need for a defense establishment, it put its main reliance on a well-regulated citizen militia, as embodied in the Second Amendment to the Constitution. However, the collective nature of this provision was quickly lost sight of. Perhaps this shift of vision was inevitable, given that the minuteman image was essentially individual and personal, so that the right to bear arms was soon held to be private and was embodied as such in a number of state constitutions.

The idea that American freedom depended on the individual hawk-eyed marksman was elaborated in the folklore version of the Battle of New Orleans, January 1815, which erroneously attributed American victory over the British not to General Andrew Jackson's regulars, but to the backwoods militia of Kentucky and Tennessee armed with their personal hunting rifles. The same coonskin-capped wielders of long rifles, led by Davy Crockett with Old Betsy, were purported to have laid low epic numbers of Mexicans at the Alamo in March 1836, preparing the way for another triumph of liberty. By now the American hero was, as D. H. Lawrence said of James Fenimore Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo, stoic, alone, and a killer.

America's second war with Britain enlarged the significance of the gun in a further context. Eli Whitney and other mechanics, striving to provide the fledgling U.S. army with sufficient arms for the conflict, pioneered the concept of interchangeable parts, making the mass production of weapons feasible and profitable. This groundbreaking work made possible mass production in many other areas, from farm and factory machinery to typewriters and sewing machines. Thus, Americans could proudly point to arms manufacture as a classic case of "Yankee ingenuity."

Subsequent advances in arms technology, most notably the perfection of the revolving-chamber pistol by Samuel Colt and others, along with the percussion rifled musket, coincided with the Mexican War and the further expansion of U.S. territory that, at least in American eyes, extended the area of democratic freedom. Once again, the association of firearms with liberty was reinforced.



An old Colt revolver. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

The single most significant development encouraging the growth of firearms ownership and reverence for the gun as an instrument of freedom was the Civil War. The superior ability to manufacture efficient modern weapons was material to Union success. As a result of service in the war, millions of male Americans became familiar with the use of firearms at the same time that like numbers of remaindered guns flooded the market. The result was a marked increase in gun ownership and violence. This

epoch in the growth of a gun culture is memorialized by Civil War reenactors, who are amongst the most passionate believers in the gun as icon.

The ready availability of guns was coincidental with the rapid advance of the trans-Mississippi frontier. As law enforcement was often weak in the expanding West, the gun became the tool of personal justice, equalizing the odds for the common man. In this era it was axiomatic that "God created men; Colonel Colt made them equal." However, despite the popularity of the idea of the gun as an icon of equality, the concept must be accepted with caution. In legend, the cowboy was the lineal descendant of the knight errant and, like the white knight of Medieval legend, the good guy in Western myth always won the duel with the villain in black. But this justice was not necessarily true in reality, for weapons are inanimate and neutral. Outlaws usually died because society hunted them down in superior numbers, and not because they were necessarily slower with a sidearm.

Further, this was also the era of Reconstruction in the South, during which ex-Confederates systematically disarmed blacks so that they could not defend themselves against loss of civil rights and reduction to virtual serfdom. Until

recently, black Americans have not had equal access to the right to bear arms, Colonel Colt notwithstanding.

Gun usage and its attendant symbolism took a jump in another postwar period, after World War I. In the roaring twenties, the snub-nosed modern revolver in the shoulder holster and the Tommy gun became symbols of cops and robbers. Roger Lane argues that gun crimes increased radically in this era partly because of the enhanced legal availability of weapons, promoted by concealed weapons laws. Also, the personal resort to violence was encouraged by contempt for a judicial system in which only 44 percent of gun crimes led to any sort of punishment. It is a continuing tenet of the gun culture that each citizen must be his own defense; the police and legal system cannot be relied upon.

As the country entered the Great Depression, Bonnie and Clyde figures came to appear as Robin Hoods, standing up to the discredited representatives of the capitalist system, the bankers and sheriff's deputies. The hoods' submachine guns became the modern equivalent of the long bow. Yet, by the same token, J. Edgar Hoover's G-Men carried the same weapons and used them to restore order. Thus the gun had a paradoxical iconic value: it was both the instigator of personal liberation and the guarantor of the status quo. The mystique of the gun continued in the film noir of the 1940s and 1950s when gritty anti-heroes like Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney further identified the snub-nosed pistol with the masculine mystique.

A relatively recent addition to the gun culture is the assault weapon that features in contemporary adventure movies. Partly, the super weapon is there simply to entertain youthful audiences that enjoy heavy action more than plot nuance. But the automatic weapon is also embraced by right-wing paramilitary groups as a powerful tool in their lineup against government, and by ordinary people who feel that its destructive power restores potency to the anonymous members of the "lonely crowd." The nineteenth-century concept of the gun as leveling the playing field is now being acted out in America's schools, where children who feel slighted or bullied strike back against colleagues and teachers with deadly efficiency, desensitized to



Bonnie Parker mockingly points a shotgun at Clyde Barrow, 1933. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



A man shoots an AK-47 at a shooting range in Montana. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

the act of killing by thousands of violent video images, as army psychologist Dave Grossman has pointed out.

The gun as an icon has appealed to different Americans in various ways, from adherents of the Revolutionary-era black-powder musket, to the six-gun of the frontier fight, on to the automatic weapons of the twentieth century. Yet certain themes unite the various gun subcultures. The firearm is associated with personal and public identity, particu-

larly for males (although more women are buying guns, their primary reason appears to be a pragmatic concern for personal safety rather than image or identity). For conservative white males in particular, the firearm represents personal liberty and the preservation of the republic; it is envisaged as a defense against tyranny.

There is much myth in all of this, and not all Americans subscribe to the gun culture. Polls suggest that a majority would like tougher gun control laws. It is doubtful that gun ownership makes America safer. Guns are more plentiful in the United States than, say, in Britain, France, New Zealand, Holland, or Japan, yet the gun crime rate is also much higher in America, indicating that weapons do not provide greater security. For example, in 1995 there were 409,000 privately owned firearms in the United Kingdom, which also saw seventy-seven gun killings, or a rate of 0.116 deaths per 100,000 of the population. In the same year, the United States had 222,000,000 weapons in circulation and 13,673 killings, a much higher rate of 5.25 per 100,000 citizens.

Moreover, it is doubtful that widespread dissemination of guns successfully operates as an antidote to strong central authority. Gun ownership has increased, but so has the power of the federal government. Tellingly, there has been no successful armed rebellion against central authority since the inception of the United States, including the Civil War. Nor does private arms bearing increase national security. Fantasies such as *Red Dawn* (1984), in which a group of teenagers seek to save their town from foreign invasion using their parents' private arsenals, are just that—fantasies. If the United States wished seriously to pursue the concept of a universally armed citizenry as a first line of national defense, it might follow the example of Switzerland, where every adult male is required to undergo basic training with an assault weapon that is then kept in his possession under strict rules of engagement. As it is, the U.S. National Guard is the legally designated successor of the militia, not the individual citizen who happens indiscriminately to own a weapon.

Obviously, the homage paid to the gun does not entirely depend on its actual relation to public and private security. People don't necessarily act on what is objectively true, but rather act on what they perceive as true. Whatever the reality, the gun as an icon is indelibly associated with America's commitment to personal liberty and the advance of democratic freedom. As such, it will probably retain an elevated status as icon into the foreseeable future.

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# Halloween Costume

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*Sylvia Grider*

The American Halloween can be traced to ancient Celtic rituals honoring the spirits of the dead, which were believed to wander about on this night. Bonfires were commonly lit to keep these spirits and revenants away, and also to light the way for them as they journeyed toward the land of the dead. Halloween also has a tenuous and syncretic Christian connection because the holiday is celebrated on the evening before All Saints Day, which falls on November 1, hence the name “All Hallow’s Eve” or Hallowe’en. The “Day of the Dead” celebrations of Mexico and other Latin countries draw on this same belief in the communion between the living and the dead on the night before the celebration of All Saints’. The Day of the Dead is celebrated with elaborate altars honoring the dead, pastries and sweets shaped like skeletons and skulls, and feasts in the cemetery at the graves of the deceased. Costumes are not generally part of this vernacular sacred observance. Although the trend is undergoing some dramatic changes, many of the costumes worn by both children and adults to celebrate American Halloween depict the *dramatis personae* of death: skeletons, ghosts, vampires, and mummies. Other fictional and supernatural creatures have been absorbed into the traditional Halloween pantheon, such as Dracula, Frankenstein’s monster, witches, and devils.

Children costumed as fantasy creatures and other supernatural characters toting trick-or-treat shopping bags or plastic jack-o-lanterns have been an integral feature of American Halloween for decades. Costumes are essential to trick-or-treating because the protagonists must be disguised in order to beg house-to-house. At first Halloween costumes and masks were made at home by the children themselves from whatever outsized or cast-off clothing was available, resulting in a great variety of tramps, gypsies, ghosts wearing sheets with eyeholes cut out, and so forth. By the 1960s or so, however, a high percentage of children’s costumes were commercially produced and seasonally marketed. Overall, these commercial costumes have proved to be more popular than the “homemade” look. In retrospect, we can see that these

commercial costumes were the harbinger of the shift of the holiday away from the local and the vernacular.

Even more important than the shift from homemade costumes to commercially-produced ones has been the shift in emphasis from costumed children trick-or-treating to elaborately costumed adults cavorting in various venues, ranging from offices and businesses to shopping malls and street parades. Holiday mumming for other holidays, such as the Christmas mumming in Newfoundland, typically involves costumed and disguised adults who perform various folk dramas in exchange for drinks and food. Trick-or-treating, however, has been relegated to young children; trick-or-treating is simply not part of the emerging adult holiday activities. Regardless of the ages of the wearers or the activities, Halloween costumes have become so universally recognized, sanctioned, and enjoyed that they are accorded iconic status in contemporary American society, if only for one day out of the year.

Because of its vernacular status—that is, its lack of sanction or control by any official agency—Halloween is perhaps the most dynamic of all American calendar customs. For example, after the so-called “Candyman murders,” the poisoning of a child with trick-or-treat candy in 1973, the American custom of trick-or-treating underwent major changes. After this widely publicized murder, trick-or-treating took on ominous overtones of threat and danger. In general, children are no longer allowed to roam through neighborhoods unescorted at dusk on Halloween. Instead, controlled promenades and costume contests in local shopping malls have become the norm in many parts of the country. Some churches and schools sponsor Halloween parties with such traditional but old-fashioned games as dunking for apples, as well as best-costume contests. Throughout the holiday, parents now keep a watchful eye on their costumed children, and rowdy teenagers in masks are viewed more as a threat than as a legitimate part of the holiday. Widespread concern regarding the safety of candy and treats collected by children has led to the institution of a new, technological tradition: taking the bags of treats to local hospitals and clinics to be x-rayed in order to detect any needles,



Children in costume trick or treating. Courtesy of Corbis.

razor blades, and so forth that might have been inserted into the candy. Of course the children wear their costumes during these visits, and many of the hospital and clinic personnel dress up for the occasion as well, and some even give additional treats to the visiting children.

At about the same time that costumed trick-or-treating for children was being considered so dangerous that many communities banned it entirely, national business concerns recognized a new market for costumes, minus the trick-or-treating: young adults. Accordingly, Halloween has become the second-highest grossing American holiday, following Christmas. Of course, the adult costume and party market is largely responsible for this marketing increase, in part because adults have more disposable income than children, but also because Halloween costumes for many adults are high-end purchases. Other commercially produced paraphernalia for Halloween-themed adult parties has also contributed to the increased profits during this season. Everything from special holiday greeting cards (frequently depicting ghosts and haunted houses), to house decorations, books, foods, and liquor all attempt to cash in on the lucrative adult Halloween market.

The most elaborate adult costumes are those worn to parties and street parades. In cities with a large theatrical and artistic population, Halloween costumes and masks provide a popular outlet for creativity. Some artists plan and work months ahead in order to create spectacular costumes. Sometimes whole groups of holiday revelers will dress alike and march together in choreographed units during the parades. For example, one group of gay men all dressed as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, complete with little Totos in their matching baskets. Entertainment and incongruity are the main intent of such costumed antics. However, special occasions are not the only venues for

wearing costumes during the brief Halloween season. Store clerks, receptionists, and waitstaff also commonly come to work in costume on October 31, especially if Halloween falls on a working weekday. Some offices, restaurants, and stores even make a point of encouraging all employees' coming to work in costume on Halloween in the hopes of increasing business and sales. Masks, however, are generally discouraged in these settings. Costumes in general are such an integral part of Halloween that frequently little notice is taken of costumed adults in the workplace.

Contemporary Halloween continues to drift away from traditional



Adults in costume. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

supernatural images and toward postmodern secularization. In some contemporary Halloween party venues for children, especially those associated with more conservative Christian churches, supernatural costumes depicting supernatural creatures associated with death and the devil have been banned. No vampires, ghosts, witches, skeletons, or mummies are to be seen in these contexts. In fact, the historical connection of Halloween with the spirits of the dead has been suppressed in so many American communities that children may not be aware of why Halloween is traditionally associated with ghosts and witches. Instead, children's costumes in these contexts tend heavily toward creatures of fantasy and the mass media.

The elaborate adult costumes associated with such popular events as Mardi Gras, especially in New Orleans, and the gay pride parades of San Francisco and other major cities have been copied and absorbed into Halloween parades and street celebrations throughout the country. Although the supernatural pantheon is still represented in some adult costumes, especially hyper-sexual vampires, political characters (frequently represented only by masks) have become more common themes. For example, during the President Clinton–Monica Lewinsky scandal, Halloween revelers of both sexes dressed in Lewinsky look-alike costumes of blue dress and dark beret, while smoking a big cigar. This topical costume was especially outrageous when worn by bearded men with unshaven legs. Other polarizing political figures such as George Bush, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden became common adult Halloween masks and costumes following the Gulf War and 9/11.

In addition to current events, the media are another source of inspiration for both children's and adults' Halloween costumes. Media tie-ins with current animated movies or television programs are evident in many commercially produced children's costumes. In 2004, such characters as Spongebob Squarepants, Shrek, Spider-Man, and Harry Potter and his friends were among the most popular costumes. Even with heavy media influence, children's costumes have consistently depicted a whole range of benign "kiddy" characters, such as princesses, gypsies, ballerinas, bumblebees, pirates, and various cuddly animals. Although cartoon-like witches and ghosts remain popular among children, other supernatural beings are less and less common. For example, today one rarely sees children dressed as devils, a popular costume in the past.

Media-influenced adult costumes cover a much wider range than children's Halloween costumes do. Popular movies and their spin-offs which lend themselves to costumes for adults include *The Matrix*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *Friday the 13th*, as well as *Star Wars*, especially Darth Vader. Consistent with the glorification of violence in contemporary movies and computer games, more and more adult costumes depict the perverse and grotesque—the gorier the better. "Living dead" masks and other eviscerated body parts are especially popular, especially among older adolescent boys and young men. Many talented adults craft their own elaborate costumes, but

others can always buy or rent the more expensive costumes which are professionally manufactured.

In mock “haunted houses” which are created as community fundraisers, the costumed actors depict the dead, dying, and grotesque in order to frighten and even disgust the patrons who are guided through the various gory tableaux which are featured in these labyrinthine seasonal parodies of fun houses. The tendency in recent years has been for the haunted house tableaux to be as realistic as possible, the best example of which are the Christian “hell houses” which depict the terrors of botched abortions, victims killed by drunken drivers, and vicious murders committed by perpetrators high on drugs. Paradoxically, the more realistic the costumes of characters in these venues are, the less they are recognizable as costumes. The main function of a costume is to disguise the identity of the wearer, not emphasize or heighten that identity.

The now iconic status of costumes at Halloween has resulted in the almost universal acceptance of costumes at Halloween in nearly every possible venue, from children’s trick-or-treat and adult parties, to offices, shops, and delivery trucks. The widespread popularity and acceptance of costumes—for both children and adults—at Halloween may have weakened other aspects of the holiday, such as pranks and trick-or-treat. Although costumes depicting the dead and the evil supernaturals, such as vampires and witches, are becoming less and less common, these figures are still prominent in party decorations and media advertisements. Seasonal puns, such as holding “spook-tacular” sales are depicted in newspaper, magazine, and television advertising. Perhaps relegating the pantheon of the dead to one-dimensional napkins and party favors is a symbolic way of weakening the power that tradition alleges these “creatures of the night” exert over humans. The traditional Halloween colors of black and orange, originally alluding to the flames and smoke of bonfires, are retained in party decorations and advertising. These traditional Halloween colors represent a seasonal code of instant recognition, much as green and red do at Christmastime.

In spite of all the societal pressures which are contributing to the secularization of Halloween, costumes remain the essence, the emotional core, the last vestige of traditional Halloween in America. Our society may ban trick-or-treating, but Halloween without costumes is inconceivable.

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# Hard-Boiled Detective

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*Brendan Riley*

Sam Spade sits behind his desk, looking “rather pleasantly like a blond satan.” His girl Friday ushers Miss Wonderly into Sam’s office; hesitantly, she asks Sam to find her missing sister. Six pages later, Sam’s partner is dead: shot “right through the pump” in “San Francisco’s night-fog, thin, clammy, and penetrant” (14–16). Thus begins *The Maltese Falcon*, a novel whose twisting narrative and tense, realistic style unite the elements of an emerging icon, the hard-boiled detective.

The genre stands out most for its tone. Author Dashiell Hammett, acknowledged as a master of sharp, direct prose, writes in a spare style, focusing on detail and realism. But he does not write simply. Instead, he crafts careful setting and character descriptions to build emotion and environment. His “objective” style leaves the detective’s motives in the dark—the hero’s actions become the stuff of mystery (Marling 129–30). Hard-boiled stories also introduce several other motifs. The detective runs his own firm or works independently; he’s a strong individualist with his own sense of right and wrong. He also operates in a dense, urban space (like *Falcon*’s San Francisco). Inevitably, the city abounds with criminals and officials corrupted by graft. Finally, the detective crosses paths with one or both of two kinds of women—*femmes fatales* or damsels in distress. While he tries to rescue each damsel, he must always be on his toes lest she turns out to be evil (Hoppenstand 118–20). These motifs distinguish hard-boiled detectives from their classical progenitors such as Poe’s Auguste Dupin or Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. Unlike early detective stories that reinforced traditional notions of law, order, and culture, these new tales changed the genre into a distinctly American one.

While the hard-boiled detective surfaced in the early 1920s pulps (such as *Black Mask*) and novels, his most significant moment as an American figure occurs on the screen in the 1940s. John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) captures the spirit of the novel, often translating narrative and dialog verbatim from the text. Huston shoots scenes with sharp contrast between light and shadow, making visual both the grimy reality and the emotional tenor of Hammett’s novel. This deep-shadow aesthetic would come to be known by

the French phrase *film noir*. More importantly, because of his everyman looks and distinctive style, Humphrey Bogart's portrayal of Sam Spade came to define the hard-boiled detective.

For example, the French "New Wave" filmmakers, whose attention to American "B" movies revitalized our own interest in them, saw Bogart as a metonym for the hard-boiled detective. Jean Luc Godard used Bogart as both the role model for the petty criminal Michel in *Breathless* (1960), and again as an inspiration for the detective Lemmy Caution in the science-fiction story *Alphaville* (1965). More recently, spoofs like Carl Reiner's *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (1982) and *Murder By Death* (1976) drew on images of Bogart for their detectives. Perhaps the most clear depiction of Bogart's wedding with the hard-boiled detective appears in *The Bogie Man*, a graphic novel by John Wagner and Alan Grant about an asylum resident and Bogart doppelganger who escapes and searches for the Maltese Falcon among a truckload of stolen frozen turkeys. But the hard-boiled detective has not become an American icon solely because of Bogart. Rather, he fits a niche in our collective mythos, connecting modern concerns with established ideas about the "American way."



Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade in John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*, 1941. Courtesy of Photofest.

## ROLES AND ARCHETYPES

Foremost, the hard-boiled detective brings the outlaw to the city. In "The Hard-Boiled Detective Story," Richard Slotkin explains that developments in nineteenth-century industry and urbanization shifted the focus of American adventure writers from frontier race wars to urban class wars. Two key figures in this shift were the outlaw hero of Western stories who battled against corrupt and exploitative entities of power, and the proto-detective who fought crime and unrest on behalf of corporations. Over twenty years or so, these two protagonists merged: the new character, both outlaw and detective, "acts like he could be a criminal . . . yet somehow . . . comes out on the side of the law" (99).

The hard-boiled detective's outlaw status also places him in direct opposition to classical detectives. John Cawelti explains that traditional detectives work with police to solve crimes whose clues don't make sense. The detectives have all the evidence at hand but must puzzle out how to "read" it.



Suspense in these stories comes from the movement of the detective's focus from suspect to suspect. Hard-boiled mysteries, on the other hand, work in a very different way. Instead of starting with a clear crime and evidence, they often begin with a mystery that has no crime (as with *The Maltese Falcon's* missing sister). The detective uncovers crimes, but instead of *thinking* through them, he usually has to *track down* his solutions. In doing so, the hard-boiled detective works against police, who might suspect that he's involved in the crime. He also "finds that he must go beyond the solution to some kind of personal choice or action." This choice involves the detective's own morality, which often contradicts official justice (Cawelti 142–43). Solving the crime reveals "that behind the facades of prosperity and order the world is really run by criminal conspiracies, driven by greed, establishing themselves by violence" (Slotkin 92). These revelations invert the traditional mystery, where a single crime's solution reinforces the status quo; hard-boiled mysteries uncover a deeper social malady, one beyond a single man's means to solve. The detective settles for a small-scale solution in the shadow of a large-scale cover-up.

The hard-boiled detective's emergence as an independent investigator also bolstered an imperiled story, the Horatio Alger myth. The Alger myth—in which a disadvantaged American youth uses hard work, "pluck, and a little luck" to succeed—was threatened by the "turbulent American city of the 1920s" and the "crisis of American individualism as the political philosophy of industrial capitalism" (Dennis Porter qtd. in Walton and Jones 189). At the moment the stock market crash destabilized the myth of individual success, the hard-boiled detective emerged as a hard-working entrepreneur, someone who "reaffirms his mastery over a city out of control" (Walton and Jones 189).

Finally, it is significant that this American subgenre of the detective story reached the height of its popularity on the silver screen. Indeed, the relationship between detectives and visual media makes cinematic hard-boiled detectives nearly inevitable. Consider the possibility that the detective story has more to do with "reading the world" than with cultural mythos. Life in large cities in the nineteenth century, Robert Ray explains, left people feeling anonymous and disoriented. Publishers, aware of the unease city crowds inflicted, began releasing books called *physiologies*, which explained in a few short pages how to recognize types of people—butchers, thieves, clerks, or anyone else one might encounter. Alas, the development of photography undercut these books: every photograph captured so many errant details that the *physiologies'* broad descriptions were invalidated. The classical detective story answers this unease: where photography's errant details make the city hard to "read," the classical detective uses such details to restore order by using those details to solve crimes (21–23).

Maybe, then, the hard-boiled detective's emergence answers cinema's emotional effect in the same way the classical detective story answered photography. Cinema fascinates us because "the camera render[s] some otherwise ordinary objects, landscapes, and even people luminous and

spellbinding” (Walton and Jones 4). This effect, dubbed *photogenicie*, has always perplexed cinema scholars: how does the camera imbue the everyday with magic? Hard-boiled detective stories, rooted in visual description, emotional conflict, and “cinematic” external action, were destined to find their iconic moment on the screen. Indeed, we cannot ignore their presence at the inception of film noir where the emotional effect of cinema’s photogenic quality disrupts the classical detective’s clinical ratiocination. For instance, *The Big Sleep* remains famous for its lack of resolution—while Bogart’s Philip Marlowe does not solve the film’s mystery, the ending satisfies because cinema’s “spellbinding” magic foregrounds Marlowe’s journey through the treacherous night-shrouded city; the mystery becomes secondary. The hard-boiled detective thus addresses cinema’s emotional effect by reshaping mysteries in terms of emotion rather than logic.

### THE DETECTIVE CHANGES

As suggested above, the hard-boiled detective’s distinction as an icon derives from his role as both individualist and outsider. The stories also shift the focus of mysteries from single crimes to larger issues of culture, often creating “narratives in which lying and deceit undermine . . . all of the fictions sustained by respectable society” (Horsley 32). Because of its opposition to and its exploration of mainstream culture, the genre was perfect for writers seeking new spaces in which to explore contemporary issues. They accessed these spaces by changing the genre: they made the detective a woman.

In the late 1970s, while traditional hard-boiled detectives continued appearing in films like *Dirty Harry* or in books like Robert Parker’s Spencer series, several authors began writing novels featuring female hard-boiled detectives (or “tough gals”). Like their male predecessors, these characters were gritty, hard, competent detectives who had to battle the “system” to get by; however, they battled not the gritty underworld of Hammett’s San Francisco, but the problematic society of post-1960s America. As Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones argue, the hard-boiled mystery genre provided the ideal starting point. Its individualist, self-sufficient protagonist offered “not just an eye that sees but a voice that speaks from the margins, a voice originating in a character who both talks and behaves in an insubordinate manner” (194). Female writers produced female private eyes whose investigations explored the challenges of an America dealing with shifting gender roles. These tough gal detectives, like Sara Peretsky’s V. I. Warshowski and Marcia Muller’s Sharon McCone, provided a public venue through which these writers could consider a range of issues facing women in culture (Walton and Jones 1–43).

“Tough gal” writers also redeemed women in hard-boiled fiction. In early hard-boiled novels, women who are unable (or unwilling) to play “damsel” to the detective’s “knight errant”—as Chandler called him—were inevitably “malicious and resourceful.” These women thus become “associated . . . with the degenerative forces at work in the social system” (Walton and Jones 192).

The novels resent the “increased personal freedom” women of the 1920s enjoyed, making women into “dangerous contenders, able to use their sexuality to trap and weaken men” (Hamilton 33). Not surprisingly, this lack of realistic (or even reasonable) female characters led several novelists to create their own, putting “an independent working woman detective at the center of the narrative of investigation” (Walton and Jones 30).

The pioneering work of these authors has significantly changed the landscape of the detective novel. The ripple-effect of these novels shows in what might be called the “second generation” of female hard-boiled detectives, such as Janet Evanovich’s Stephanie Plum or Patricia Cornwell’s Kay Scarpetta. Three other developments also indicate how significantly the hard-boiled detective has changed: first, as with Sam Spade’s move to cinema, descendants of the female detective have begun appearing in visual media. With her defiance of tradition and her close grappling with day-to-day issues, Buffy the Vampire Slayer clearly fits the tough gal niche; so does *Alias*’s Sydney Bristow. These heroines enact new possibilities for women because they “rely on social networks and because individual action on the part of the female . . . has *representational* value” (Walton and Jones 207). Second, female hard-boiled detectives have become so prominent that writers of both genders now regularly use them. In Brian Michael Bendis’ noirish graphic novel *Jinx*, the title character runs her own bounty-hunting business; in Jasper Fforde’s Thursday Next series, Next wrestles with love and life while solving crimes that oscillate between the “real” and the “fictional” worlds. Following the lead of female writers from the 1970s and 1980s, creators of these new hard-boiled heroines combine the inner and outer lives of their characters. Finally, the groundbreaking work done with detective fiction by Muller, Peretsky, Sue Grafton, and others suggests how the genre opens spaces for discussions of social issues. To this end, a number of “second wave” novels feature “lesbian private investigators” and “characters who are racial or ethnic minorities” (Walton and Jones 41). This genre-stretching continues to extend the boundaries of the hard-boiled detective novel wide, taking the formula to new places with characters who bring questions of race and sexuality to the fore.

## THE DETECTIVE OF THE FUTURE

Walter Ong, a famous scholar of oral and literate cultures, suggests that the detective story is *the* story of the literate age. He explains that print literacy “reaches a plenary form in the detective story—relentlessly rising tension, exquisitely tidy discovery and reversal, perfectly resolved denouement” (144). But hard-boiled detectives bring something else to the table. In particular, they bring the concerns and ideals of America. Sam Spade combines Horatio Alger’s individualist ideal with the cowboy outlaw’s independent morality and frontier mythos, to become a key figure representing American urban life. Bogart’s regular-Joe looks and distinctive acting amplified this effect, making the hard-boiled detective iconic around the world. Finally, the hard-boiled

detective represents America's ability to reconsider itself: the detective's evolution from womanizer to woman embodies America's dynamism, in particular our ongoing negotiation of gender roles.

So perhaps the hard-boiled detective *is* the perfect protagonist for modern America. Slotkin suggests that hard-boiled detectives appeal to us because "we know that on the one hand we need authority and hard lines of value, and on the other hand that authority is often corrupt and misdirected and that those lines of value are often blurry" (99–100). In some sense he is right: the genre's deep attachment to individualism and justice does provide a skeptical yet optimistic look at culture. But recent changes in the genre also suggest that culture is not about corruption so much as complexity. After all, complexity emerges when hard-boiled stories stray from the tidiness of classical detective mysteries. This complexity then mixes with skeptical optimism to create an icon who stands between them, helping America better understand itself.

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# Harley-Davidson Motorcycle

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*Wendy Moon*

When I was asked to write this entry, I requested clarification: was it the motorcycle or specifically Harley-Davidson that was the icon? The latter, editor Dennis Hall said. After all, it was “no accident that Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, and Malcolm Forbes and Jay Leno ride Harleys . . . and *Easy Rider* is always in the background.” Harleys, he went on, meant “quality . . . transgression, freedom, and fightin’.” He was partially wrong in specifics—but mostly right in meaning.

Marlon Brando rode a Triumph in *The Wild One*. Forbes rode and Leno rides Harleys, but also a great many bikes of all different makes and models. In fact, one of Leno’s favorite bikes is his Y2K bike with a jet airplane engine. And although the choppers in *Easy Rider* were Harleys, they were so customized the only thing utterly Davidson about them were the V-twin engines, and few Harley riders look for a fight. As to quality—there’s a joke about that—there’re plenty of Harley’s still out there on the road . . . because they all broke down.

But most people make similar assumptions. A friend rides a BMW R1100, and, even though she rode it to work for years, her co-workers kept calling it a Harley, and when people ask me what I ride, they smile and nod when I say “Harley.” This proves that Hall was right—Harley-Davidson is the Heinz ketchup of motorcycles. In a way, Harley is synonymous with “motorcycle” because it’s the only one manufactured here—thus called “American Iron,” and therefore American. But it has a far deeper meaning.

Harley became the icon of freedom and transgression in the aftermath of World War II when the new social normal became an economic model; happiness meant bigger and better buying, and stability meant cookie-cutter lifestyles with father in a 9 to 5 job and mother at home. Chain restaurants, motels, and housing developments that, in the words of the old song, “looked just the same,” sprang up across the country like acne on a teen’s face.

This contrast between war and peace was too discombobulating for some returning GIs, and they chose to opt out. Because many of them had been aviators in the war and motorcycling is like flying on the road, they bought Army

surplus Harleys and “chopped” them—removing non-essential parts and modifying others. The result reflected the ex-GIs’ mood—as design tends to do.

What society values, longs for, and fears is behind every product design—or redesign—whether subtle like Aunt Jemima’s getting a politically-correct look, or overt like cars’ becoming the moving fortresses we call SUVs. Motorcycles are no different. Heavy, low to the ground, and made to handle hours of moderate speeds on long, straight roads, Harleys are perfectly designed for the North American landscape.

But, even more than that, all motorcycles’ basic design is the polar opposite of the automobile: it’s open to the elements; the rider is exposed to view; it’s fundamentally solitary; and two wheels are essentially unstable. All that makes the rider vulnerable to—well, to everything. Therefore, it was perceived as antisocial, anti-family, and anti-safety. Because the choice of vehicle is seen to be an expression of who the operator is, the motorcycle’s design alone dictated the rider would be assumed to be the same, so whether they were or not, they were seen as misfits outside society’s laws—therefore out-laws, though not necessarily criminal.

The Detroit-made automobile, conversely, was the epitome of everything America valued. Capacious, it could hold a growing family. Essentially stable on four wheels and protected from weather, its four walls kept unsavory others out—just as the nation sought to do. And the auto could carry more consumer goods. As a result, the car was all-American.

Those ex-GIs, however, made a profound statement—the war had “re-designed” them from their previous civilian identities, and they, too, were military surplus in a terrible way. So it was fitting they eradicated every hint of the Army origin from their Harleys; and, in a sense, creating those modifications was a way of personal redemption. They also hung around together partying and riding and partying some more—and became motorcycle clubs, but they weren’t “gangs” until the media found them useful.

During the same period, the media taught society to dread the rigid conformity and repressiveness of the communists. Both too much freedom (anarchy) and too little (communism) seemed bad for America. The Soviet Union, of course, was the one villain and was symbolized by the nuclear warhead and the tank destroying everything in their paths; but the media needed its polar opposite. The motorcycle and its unruly rider were perfect and newspapers and magazines across the country demonized them—very often unjustly and inaccurately—as modern-day centaurs raping and pillaging the countryside. Papers even ran stories on biker gangs and communism side-by-side. The underlying message was that the country’s safety and stability were to be found in the middle. In this way, Harleys were an essential boundary at one end of American society—this isn’t freedom, it’s transgression.

The Harley, however, refused to be limited to its evil incarnation. GIs weren’t the only ones who felt society’s “one size fits all” didn’t fit them—the Beats as well as many women, racial minorities, and teenagers felt the same way. Although few women and few minorities rode them, male teens heard



Harley-Davidson motorcycles for sale at Sturgis. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

a different message in the loud pipes' roar—one of rebellion and freedom and individuality. By the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, the entertainment industry, responding to their interest, glorified them in songs like “Leader of the Pack,” and movies like *The Wild Angels* and *She-Devils on Wheels*. There's a very good reason for this dichotomy: as Matt Drutt, the editor of *Motorcycle Mania: The Biker Book*, writes, “Time and again in film, television, music, and literature, the motorcycle has appeared as both demon and savior, a Janus-faced symbol of power and coming of age” (13). America, in parallel, has a chronic identity crisis: we can't decide if we're pioneers or settlers, individualists or conformists, liberals or conservatives; we want to be in control of our lives but want the government to provide a safety net.

But any group with a strong or unilateral identity tends to be regarded with hostility and suspicion when they interact with broader society. Americanization, after all, tends to be a process of learning to prefer ketchup to salsa or chili sauce in order to be of one nation. In a period of backyard bomb shelters, social control was paramount. Freedom became associated not with literal movement or lifestyle, but with a system of government. Therefore Harley's unequivocal ungoverned identity made it icon-worthy, as a crux of resistance to ideological conformity.

The savior-demon image reveals another quintessentially American duality: we're ambivalent about liberty—we love and fear it in nearly equal measures;

we long for more of it then regulate it to make it as safe as possible; and we're willing to lose our freedoms to protect them, then quick to complain we've lost them. The motorcycle, though, cannot balance that ambivalence because freedom without risk is like a motorcycle with walls, a roof, and windows—in other words, a car. So, back then, Harleys weren't ketchup but mustard, and un-American to some. But, to others, because they thought a hot dog without mustard was no hot dog at all, the motorcycle was über-American. That brings us right back to the nation's identity conflict—there are as many diverse conceptions of what America and freedom are as there are Americans. As a result, the motorcycle embodied both core national values and anti-values, and such complexity called for response from both elders and youth, powerful and powerless; and each group was attracted or repelled for different reasons, and each group used the motorcycle as a symbol in different ways. It was and remains a potent icon because it could be used both positively and negatively to describe the same thing.

In “The Motorcycle on Screen,” John G. Hanhardt explains the positive side of the resulting icon:

[T]he biker/hero manifests a desire to control his destiny and expresses his independence from the state, invoking heroic themes that have always been a part of the mythology of the American way of life . . . the lone rider . . . was both a fearless and a vulnerable explorer, an independent hero who was confronted with problems he has to solve by himself. (99)

The biker, then, was just the latest incarnation of the early explorers, patriots, and cowboys—but, in fitting with the times, as an anti-hero. That image, however, was in the movies.

In real life, the image of the biker was, in large part, engrained in the public mind by the media's demonic portrayal, which was set by their coverage of the Hells Angels, who began as one of those ex-GI motorcycle clubs. For their part, they willingly wore the black hats in this real-life Western and related horror stories of sex and violence to gullible journalists. There was, however, no corresponding real-life Wyatt Earp in the news to balance it—even though, in reality, the wild bikers were a very small part of the motorcycling community. The Hells Angels, by the way, only rode American Iron, adding yet another layer to the motorcycle-Harley interplay and giving a specific focus to Harley as transgression.

In a very real way, then, it was the biker movies that explicitly made the connection between freedom and individuality and transgression with motorcycles. Even though relatively few saw the films, it was enough to hear about them to “get the message,” and it was the terminal message that spoke positively or negatively to society. In the first biker movie, *The Wild Angels*, released in 1966, Peter Fonda says, “We want to be free to do what we want to do—to ride our machine without being hassled by the man.” This



manifesto became the golden standard that subsequent biker flicks ineptly and exploitingly aspired to, and they multiplied like Elvis impersonators. It was also the red flag to conservative society.

In those movies, Hanhardt explains, the motorcycle itself is “repeatedly identified as the protagonist for change” (99). The biker flicks issued the metallic voice in the wilderness calling America to return to its roots, as well as a commentary on the same themes anti-war demonstrators, civil rights activists, and feminists proclaimed on the six o’clock news—they didn’t want to be hassled by the man either. The films, then, supported these great, but far more threatening, social movements.

Consequently, the scruffy, zippered black leather biker on the Harley struck terror in the general public because the image represented local mayhem and national upheaval. But it also represented the mingled hope and dread of personal freedom. Society then wanted it that way, and so do we, because they still were and we still are frontier-oriented at heart; we can pretend we’re farmers, but the explorer within remains. Bikers had to play outlaws so some could feel better about circling the wagons, and others needed cowboys to rescue them. And we still need cowboys and outlaws, today, even if they’re of the quasi-kind, and the motorcycle and rider still function that way.

This may be why dentists and middle managers who would be afraid to cheat on their taxes don’t shave on the weekends and then, on Sunday, don their beanie helmets and leather jackets to ride their Harleys. And there is a present-day corollary although the vehicle has changed; part of the appeal of SUVs is the idea they can triumph over the most rugged terrain, thus eliciting that frontier sense of movement. Even though that ability is rarely used for more than driving over a curb to park on the lawn, it’s the thought that counts: in this case, a potential freedom.

Returning to the motorcycle itself in the 1960s, motorcycle design changed to express the times; it was the heyday of the chopper—the hippie of motorcycles. The Harley’s front forks were extended, the backrest rose sky-high, and the rider’s position was laid back as if the biker was withdrawing even further from society. Nothing blended the hippie and the outlaw biker as well as the movie *Easy Rider*, released in 1969. It was advertised with a line that perfectly expressed the national identity crisis: “A man went looking for America and couldn’t find it anywhere.” In a key scene toward the end, the reason becomes clear—America had lost its distinctiveness as the land of the free and bikers had found it.

In that scene, Jack Nicholson says, “This used to be a hellava good country” and goes on to explain why society feared bikers, “They’re scared of what you represent . . . freedom.” Dennis Hopper responds, “What the hell is wrong with freedom? That’s what it’s all about.” “Oh, yeah, that’s what it’s all about, all right,” Nicholson says.

But talking about it and being it, it’s two different things. I mean, it’s real hard to be free when you are bought and sold in the marketplace. . . . Oh, they’ll talk

to you and talk to you and talk to you about individual freedom, but they see a free individual, it's gonna scare 'em . . . and that makes 'em dangerous.

The 1960s biker flicks, then, positioned motorcycles and their riders as more fundamentally American than the automobile. The correlation between Harleys, freedom, and transgression was thus cemented in the public imagination and the icon complete.

By the mid-eighties the major civil rights legislation had passed and social furor had settled down, and Harleys were no longer needed as poster children. When bikers made a rare appearance in film or television, they were almost always the villain and their incarnate freedom was trivialized by ten-second clips on the news of half-naked biker chicks at motorcycle rallies.

The message of *Easy Rider*, however, has once again become relevant in the new age of terrorism and reminds us that there is no true liberty without risk. Once again, it frequently appears in films, television, and commercials. In this incarnation, the Harley has been left behind while the freedom, rebellion, and individuality have been retained. The new icon centers on the sleek and brightly-colored sport bike with its racetrack pedigree rather than wild child legacy. Instead of the upright cruiser or laid-back chopper, the new rider perches like a jockey, the emphasis is on speed and maneuverability, and it's the hero who rides it. As after World War II, it's the young who find meaning in the motorcycle, but no longer in the Harley; and, significantly, women often ride in front. Too, in an age of globalization, perhaps it's appropriate that almost all sport bikes are foreign imports. It remains to be seen if the motorcycle, though, has become more like the empty symbolic gesture of the SUV's off-road capabilities or is once again a protagonist of change, ushering in an era of greater personal freedom.

Even as history begins to repeat itself, the same genericization process that typed the Harley is already at work, and the media refers to sport bikes as "Ninja-style" bikes. But Ninja is a particular Kawasaki model, and not all sportbikes are Ninjas, just as all motorcycles aren't Harleys. Given the motorcycle's increasing popularity, perhaps this means that twenty years from now, Americans will assume that all motorcycles are Ninjas—after all, that's what Tom Cruise rode, wasn't it?

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# Ernest Hemingway

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*R. H. Miller*

No single writer embodies those characteristics that constitute the iconic ideal of the American creative personage so completely as does Ernest Hemingway. His status does not even depend on judging him a great writer as Michael Reynolds argues in his “Hemingway as American Icon.” In the eyes of the American public, and not just the reading public, Hemingway is without question the quintessentially American writer. No other author is automatically recognized among the public at large, nor has he or she had outdoor clothing, pens, drinks (I recommend a Papa Doble; a recipe is in *The Hemingway Cookbook*), or a line of furniture named after them.

More essential, however, to the rank of icon is Hemingway’s unquestioned stature as one of the giants of American literature. His short stories and novels have earned a place in the educational canon of the American university and have received the highest awards, including a Pulitzer Prize for *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. For his time Hemingway was the American author whom we saw as a true “public figure,” who hobnobbed with the rich and famous and who commanded the wealth that allowed him to be taken seriously as a famous personality. With the publication of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) he attained superstar status. No book had been published in such a large initial press run, and no book up to that point, with the exception of *Gone with the Wind* (1936), had set such sales records. For good or ill, that novel bound him over forever to the American public, and there could be no turning back.

Hemingway’s “American” credentials are impeccable. He was a Midwesterner, from the heartland, just outside Chicago. Both of his parents’ families had accumulated modest wealth, in real estate and in a cutlery business. His father, Clarence, known familiarly as “Ed,” was a doctor, a practicing family physician and gynecologist with a large family residing in the prestigious suburban community of Oak Park, Illinois. Ernest was the second-born child and first-born of two sons. His mother, Grace Hall, was a strong, willful woman who had given up what she thought was an opportunity for a promising singing career to dedicate herself to caring for her family of six

children. His name, Ernest Miller, came from the names of his grandfather and a great uncle on Grace Hemingway's side of the family.

Ernest grew up a typical American bourgeois—handsome, sports-minded, outdoorsy, surrounded by the comforts that a relatively affluent doctor's career could provide, including a summer place in northern Michigan on Walloon Lake; but he nursed a rebellious streak. He braced against the domineering ways of his mother, and he found his father to be a moral prig and a pitiful male role model, much as he loved him. His adolescence closed when, instead of going off to college, he decided to launch himself into a journalism career, much to the dismay of his parents. To that point, his life almost defines him as the artistic American *typus*, with his upper-middle-class roots, his disillusionment with his father's spineless efforts to fulfill the role of *paterfamilias*, and his rebellion at his mother's powerful grip on the family and especially on him. Reflective of his rejection of that suburban existence is his use of his mother's and father's friends' names for the characters in his sexually frank and, for the time, startling story, "Up in Michigan," which appeared in his first book, *Three Stories and Ten Poems*, published in 1923.

Deeper yet, and a distinctive mark on his artistic career, was Hemingway's growing disaffection for American life and culture, and his embrace of the American expatriate movement of the 1920s and 1930s. He tried to enlist in the army for World War I but purportedly was turned away because of vision problems in one eye. After a brief period of service in the Italian Army Ambulance Corps, during which he was seriously wounded and later decorated, he returned to the United States; but his experiences only affirmed what was a deepening disenchantment from America and from his family.

From about 1921 until mid-1961 Hemingway lived a nomadic life of self-imposed exile, with semipermanent residences in Cuba and the United States, in Key West, Florida, and Idaho. Only one of his novels, *To Have and Have Not* (1937), is set in the United States. He left America just as the poet Byron before him had abandoned England in 1816, never to return, and so become the American model of the rebellious artist. Hemingway's separation from family, nation, and culture fitted him ideally for this iconic role. While he was to return to America later, his investment in his native country remained tenuous at best.

Hemingway's creative life, which began with his journalistic career at the *Kansas City Star* and continued later with various magazines and world press organizations, effectively modeled for Americans the kind of intellectual and inspirational experience they associate with the term "famous writer." He was largely self-educated, never attended college, and even though he was deeply self-conscious and resentful about this lack, it qualified him as a genuine American natural genius. Like Mark Twain before him, who was also a self-made writer and a major public figure, he managed to capture the essence of the authentic American as no other writer had, with the exception perhaps of Twain himself. Although he was always touted as the man of action, rather than a man of thought, the facts of his intellectual life show him to have been

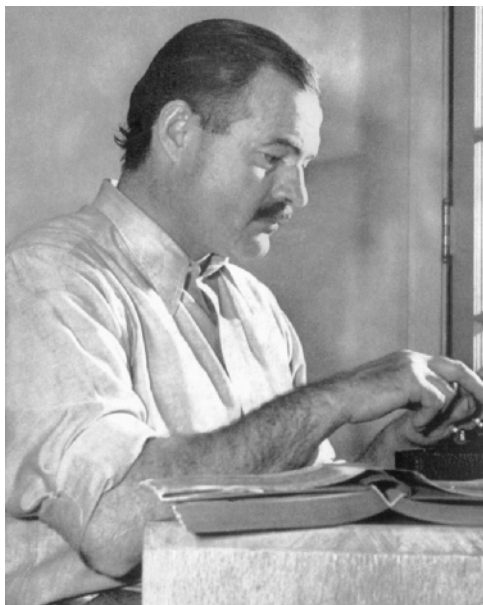
a voracious reader and widely knowledgeable on many subjects. To many, his habit of mining literary anthologies and other sources for book titles bespoke a kind of amateurish intellectual exhibitionism (*The Sun Also Rises* from Ecclesiastes, *A Farewell to Arms* from a poem by George Peele, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* from John Donne's *Devotions*), yet his interest in intellectual matters was deep and profound.

As did Byron, he affirmed in his physical appearance a popular expectation of the self-made male artist. As a young man he was spectacularly good-looking, as the many photos of him from the 1920s show with emphasis, and he maintained his tall, robust frame throughout his life, in spite of numerous accidents, the ravages of alcoholism, and other illnesses. His voracious appetite for male activities and male-bonding experiences identified him all the more with a hairy-chested image—bullfighting, deep-sea fishing, boxing, and big-game hunting, to name a few. On the other hand, Hemingway's association with the bloodier blood sports tends often to overshadow his engagement with the finer ones like fly fishing and upland bird hunting, of which he was extremely fond. Domestically, his troubled marriages, to Hadley Richardson, Pauline Pfeiffer, Martha Gellhorn, and Mary Welsh, were in keeping with the red-blooded American tradition of the famous personality.

What marks Hemingway perhaps more than any other characteristic as an American icon is his ability to find in his own life the characters and material of his fiction, and to weld that experience to enduring "American" themes of masculine identity, courage, personal heroism, and a sense of ethics that rises

high above that of most individuals. Americans have a long history of distrust of the imagined life, as Richard Hofstadter explains in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. To them, fiction is akin to lying, as their Puritan forebears had warned them. As a general rule, they feel more comfortable with a kind of art that is thinly veiled reportage. Hence their appetite for books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and authors like Mark Twain, or their firm belief in the historical authenticity of a book like *Gone with the Wind*. So Hemingway, who found his material in his own experience, appeals all the more to that sense of authenticity.

The corollary to this idea is the popular critical judgment that in his writing career Hemingway showed himself to be less and less successful artistically because, as his career drew itself out, he simply ran out of things to write about. Whether he did or not has been a subject of considerable critical



Undated photo of Ernest Hemingway. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

debate. Nick Adams is the early Hemingway, Frederic Henry is the Hemingway of World War I, Robert Jordan embodies the values of Hemingway the NANA reporter of the Spanish Civil War, and Santiago is Hemingway in the struggle of old age, in this debate's scenario. In any case, Hemingway's appeal comes from the fact that, for example, he not only wrote about war, but he had also seen war himself. To an American, the contrary example would be Shakespeare, whose art flowed from a powerful imagination that was able to make his art truer than life, but who practiced a liar's craft, or worse yet, didn't really write all those plays, because you can't really write well about things you haven't experienced. Strikingly, the "Shakespeare claimant" controversies are almost all of American origin.

Perhaps most surprising to the discerning reader is the extent to which Hemingway's fiction works against the grain of American experience, from the disaffected Krebs in the story "Soldier's Home" to the disillusioned Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*. In the major pieces of fiction, of which I rank four as paramount in the Hemingway corpus (the short stories, *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*), Hemingway represents his protagonists as men disaffected with American verities, American popular philosophies, and American attitudes generally. What Sinclair Lewis's protagonist George Follansbee Babbitt is, Hemingway's heroes are definitely not. This seeming contradiction in Hemingway's writings may hold the key to his sustaining popularity: even for one who seems to manifest in his public persona the ambitious qualities that we Americans value, at the core of his writings is a strong sense that hypocrisy and corruptness lie within the avid heart of America. Hemingway's heroes, so frequently misrepresented as macho figures, are deeply sensitive and fully aware of the purer values of mutual respect, pacifism, and true democratic principles.

Such is particularly the case with Francis Macomber, in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," who sacrifices himself on the altar of American macho values; or Jake Barnes, who has fled the hypocrisies of America; or Frederic Henry, who is fed up with the violence and destruction of war; or Robert Jordan, who has given up all hope for the democratic ideal in the midst of the brutalities of the Spanish Civil War. These heroes appeal to an expatriate impulse and alienation from confident Americanism. Yet at the same time they, like the prototypical American heroes, are loners, men against the world, who possess stamina and physical prowess equal to their unmatched sense of the ethical life. They live on the edge of evil, but are not tarnished by that temptation; and even in death they make a profound statement about the value of a career dedicated to a higher sense of right and wrong.

While his fiction has received its rightful place in the canon of American literature, Hemingway's contribution to nonfiction is no less distinctive. Here we bring to mind a large body of reportage done for various newspapers and magazines that cover various aspects of geopolitics and memorable world events, and especially stories that celebrate fishing and other outdoor sports, particularly "Big Two-Hearted River," which has been called the best fishing

story ever written; *Death in the Afternoon*, a heartfelt anatomy of the beauties and horrors of bullfighting; *Green Hills of Africa*, an elegiac remembrance of an Africa that is now a memory; and his literary memoir, *A Moveable Feast*. This kind of writing virtuosity also contributes to our appreciation of him as a paragon of the art, but, more to the present point, it distinguishes him as someone who has lived life in the midst of peril and who has been a witness to history in his time.

The Hemingway style likewise expresses qualities that are quintessentially American. It is “minimalist,” spare, and to the point. It echoes the qualities of speech that are characteristic of the Midwest and West, and reflects a certain Midwestern distrust in language, and a stronger trust in the murky world of gut instinct, in the language of ellipsis, of what is left unsaid. The style has its origins in many sources, but its main source is the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, a literary source that could not be closer to the roots of American culture.

In turn, that minimalist style is thoroughly compatible with another hallmark of Hemingway’s fiction: violence. The cult of violence was something that had not really been a part of American literature until the turn of the twentieth century, when it found a place in the new Realism and Naturalism, and in the “new” mystery writing called “hard-boiled.” The writer Flannery O’Connor is correct when she states in various places in her essays and letters that the use of violence is essential to the artistic truth of any piece of American fiction. The incorporation of violence in fiction reflects a truth about the world of American cities and countryside: that no matter where you go, you are never very far away from violence.

Finally and sadly, Hemingway’s exit from his life by suicide in 1961 befits the expectations of a public in search of an iconic identity who might have wished another outcome but who, deep in their hearts, found a sense of completion in that last self-destructive act. Like his father before him, a sister and his brother, and his granddaughter and an ex-wife after him, Hemingway took his own life, utterly demented in those last days. He chose to end it in a grand sporting manner, with one of his cherished Purdey shotguns. In that act he joined the ranks of famous personalities who have taken their lives.

Whether one of today’s blockbuster authors may someday reach not only star status but also attain the level of icon is anyone’s guess, but they have a long way to go to match Hemingway’s grip on the American public’s imagination. In that regard, no writer living or dead can touch him. He had that peculiar mix of talent, social and geographic characteristics, a life of alienation and yet one quintessentially American, a life also of high drama and tragedy, and an art that spoke clearly on issues that go to the heart of our experience, that made for his becoming an icon of our culture.

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# Jimi Hendrix

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## *Joy Haenlein*

He was a tall, thin, awkward black man with unruly hair, an acne-scarred face, and a penchant for wearing feather boas, pirate shirts, and military coats. He came to us dirt-poor, motherless, and poorly educated. But James Marshall (Jimi) Hendrix did more in four years, from 1966 to 1970, to influence music and popular culture than most do in a lifetime.

It wasn't just that he had a natural gift for playing the guitar. His raw talent is evident in his records and performances at some of the legendary outdoor music festivals of the time: Monterey Pop, Woodstock, and the Isle of Wight. His long fingers made complicated guitar maneuvers look easy. His sound was unique, a conglomeration of musical styles—rock and roll, rhythm and blues, folk, soul—and guitar-driven sound effects. He could play with speed and precision. And like most good musicians, he played from his heart in a way that struck a chord in others. Hendrix's electrifying version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock in August 1969 has become for many the defining moment of an era, embodying in a single iconic performance the restlessness and bravado of a generation.

His devotion to his instrument also set him apart from other musicians. He got his first guitar as a teenager, and though he lost many guitars over the years and had many others stolen from him, Hendrix rarely was without his signature instrument for long. Biographers note that he slept with his guitar, even while serving in the Army, and practiced virtually around the clock, even during set breaks and for hours after the most grueling performances. Practice allowed Hendrix to perfect some of the flashy maneuvers for which he later would become famous, such as playing the guitar with his teeth or behind his back.

Guitar players have tried to emulate Hendrix in the years since his death in 1970 at age 27, and some will argue that one or two have come close to duplicating the experience of his music. But there has been no true successor, even though virtually every rock guitarist admits his profound influence. Interpretations of his work are not common—an irony because Hendrix was known for his cover versions of previously recorded songs, especially those by Bob Dylan, whom he admired. Many consider Hendrix to be the greatest

influence on the playing of the electric guitar since Les Paul built the first solid-body electric guitar in 1941. Any guitarist who has used feedback and distortion to alter and deepen sound is acknowledging Hendrix. The long guitar solos of 1970s rock and roll have their roots in his music, as do heavy metal, punk, speed metal, grunge, and practically every form of rock music developed since. Yet as much as music has changed, Hendrix's work still sounds fresh and urgent thirty-five years after his death.

He was born in November 1942 in Seattle, the first child of Al and Lucille Hendrix. The couple named their son Johnny Allen originally, but changed his name to James Marshall four years later. Marital problems, alcoholism, and deep poverty broke the Hendrix family apart and kept its members on the move. His parents signed away their parental rights to four of his five siblings in 1955. When Jimi was 15, his mother died.

Never a good or an interested student, Hendrix attended school in a racially integrated system in Seattle, where about 30 percent of the student population was black. Local black culture at that time was heavily influenced by African American and Southern white gospel music. The combination of ethnic influences in his social background might help to explain why, years later, Hendrix seemed comfortable as a black man with an essentially white audience.

His first "guitar" was a broom he pretended to play when he was 11 years old, but by age 14 a boarder his father had taken in bought a beat-up acoustic guitar for Jimi for \$5. It had one string but Jimi got many sounds out of it, buzzing, twanging, and screeching. Before he got a full set of acoustic strings for his guitar, he was already dreaming of stardom. At 16, he got his first electric guitar and played with anyone in his neighborhood or school who would oblige. Like others of his generation, Hendrix listened to B. B. King, the Coasters, Chuck Berry, and Fats Domino. He saw Elvis Presley play and developed an appreciation for Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and blues musicians who appealed to his father's generation. Though his music would eventually integrate all of these influences, Hendrix's playing set him apart from an early age. He coaxed a wide variety of sounds from the guitar, just as he did from his first one-stringed instrument.

His efforts weren't always appreciated. His first band audition was at a Jewish temple; his girlfriend at the time said Hendrix was quickly cut from consideration because his playing was considered wild. This experience was Hendrix's pattern for nearly twelve years. As a guitarist, he was accomplished enough to play with anyone in the business. He didn't read music, but learned quickly, and practiced his parts until they were perfect. He had little respect for rules and convention, but he was too shy and awkward to be much of a troublemaker. Even as an adult pursuing a professional music career, he would get fired for straying from his part and playing "wild" guitar solos, or for refusing to wear the same suit or costume as the rest of the band, or for missing the tour bus.

Hendrix flunked out of school at 17, and despite his father's prodding, he never considered learning a trade. With Jimi, it was music or nothing. He was

poor and hungry, owning nothing more than a guitar and an amplifier and playing any available gigs. Perhaps looking for a way out, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and made it into the 101st Airborne division in 1961, guitar in tow. While he learned to jump out of airplanes at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, the army provided him with three meals a day and a regular paycheck, which was considerably more than he had in Seattle. But his main interest was still his guitar and his music. In the service, he met bass player Billy Cox, who would become a close friend and would later play with Hendrix at Woodstock and the Isle of Wight. When their five-piece Nashville band began to get bookings in other towns, Hendrix grew eager to leave the army and perform full time. Biographers differ about his exit from the service. For years, it was said that Hendrix was given an honorable discharge after jumping from an airplane and injuring an ankle. Most recently, biographer Charles R. Cross claimed that Jimi was released after he told the army psychiatrist that he had homosexual feelings toward his bunkmates.

Through the band, the King Kasuals, Hendrix ended up touring the South from 1963 to 1965. Jimi, sometimes alone or with the rest of his band, appeared on the bill with some of the top acts of the day, including Little Richard and the Isley Brothers. A promoter told Jimi there was work in New York City, and he went to Harlem. However, audiences there were interested almost exclusively in rhythm and blues and jazz. Although he gained experience doing session work (including the background for a single called “As the Clouds Drift By” by Jayne Mansfield), he found tastes in Harlem more restrictive than in Nashville. In the South, country and rock and roll were part of his popular repertoire, but in Harlem, Hendrix felt isolated and alone.

In Greenwich Village, however, he found audiences who were more open to what had become his unique style of music—a bluesy brand of rock infused with every trick and technique he’d learned along the road from the top performers. In 1966, his group, Jimmy James and the Blue Flames, performed covers primarily, from the Troggs’ “Wild Thing” and Howlin’ Wolf’s “Killing Floor” to “House of the Risin’ Sun” and “Knock on Wood.” Hendrix was a big Dylan fan and covered “Like a Rolling Stone.” By this time, he was using a crude fuzz box to distort the sound of his guitar. The fuzz box, given to him by a member of another band, the Fugs, became one more element of his sound.

It all came together for Hendrix in Greenwich Village in the summer



Undated photo of Jimi Hendrix. Courtesy of Photofest.

of 1966. Audiences were primarily white and caught up in the folk music movement of that era, but Jimi played the songs they recognized *his* way. He wowed audiences with his physical tricks—playing his guitar behind his back, under his leg, or with his teeth—and the unique sounds of his guitar solos. Also, Hendrix’s persona was accessible to multiracial audiences, just as the Civil Rights and counter-culture movements were coming to prominence in the late 1960s. After growing up in Seattle and playing to southern audiences with his army buddies, Hendrix was comfortable with whites, and many of his band mates in the Village were white. As important, Hendrix left behind the stiff suits and cookie-cutter looks of other bands and dressed as he wanted, in ruffled shirts and pirate jackets, feather boas, and wild colors. He might have appeared ridiculous to conventional audiences, but he appealed to white listeners in avant-garde Greenwich Village.

His reputation spread, and the top guitarists of the day came to see him play. Eventually, Bryan “Chas” Chandler, a rock and roll musician and manager from London, made it to the Village for a performance. Chandler reportedly was so overwhelmed the first time he heard Hendrix play that he dropped a milkshake down his shirt. Stunned that Hendrix was a virtual unknown in the United States, Chandler was confident that he would be a smash in Britain. He convinced Hendrix to go to London, promising him an introduction to Eric Clapton of Cream, another guitar virtuoso, and a chance for a music career. With \$40 of borrowed cash in his pocket and a small bag at his side, Hendrix got on an airplane in 1966.

Although he had struggled in the United States, Hendrix was a hit in London from his very first club performance. American blues music was as popular in Britain as British music was in America at that time, and the first songs he performed in British clubs, such as the bluesy “Hey Joe,” fit right in. All the great rock musicians saw Hendrix in London: besides Clapton, the Rolling Stones, Eric Burdon of the Animals, the Beatles, Jeff Beck, and Pete Townshend all came to hear Jimi play. Many guitarists and front men regarded him as a competitor, if not an outright threat, to their success, and tales of one-upsmanship between Hendrix and Townshend or Mick Jagger, for example, are numerous. Rock music, like most fields, has its petty rivalries, but there was good reason for other artists to be intimidated by Hendrix’s talent. He combined so many different influences in his music—rhythm and blues, rock, soul, folk—in such a seamless way that he invented a new genre. No one seemed able to duplicate it. Not only was the music new, but Jimi designed a new vocabulary for the guitar, pushing amps to their limits to create an intense sound, and using new fuzz boxes, wah-wah pedals, and tremolo arms to distort it in various ways. In addition to playing the guitar with parts of his body, he also used his body to push and shake the amps, further manipulating the sound. These technological forays are practically required of musicians today; but they were unusual in the 1960s until Hendrix popularized the approach. The high school dropout was one of rock’s first techno-geeks, laying the groundwork for all the bands that would later

incorporate feedback, distortion, and tonal work into their sound: from Emerson, Lake and Palmer and the keyboard-driven bands of the 1970s, to the heavy metal and grunge guitar movements of the 1980s and 1990s.

The next two years went by in a blur for Hendrix and the two white men who were recruited in London to join the Jimi Hendrix Experience, bass player Noel Redding and drummer John “Mitch” Mitchell. “Hey Joe,” the band’s first single, was released to acclaim, and the group’s first album, *Are You Experienced?* debuted in spring 1967, topping out just behind the Beatles at number 2 on the charts. The band gained a devoted following on their tour through Europe. But it was at the Monterey Pop festival in California in June 1967 that Hendrix captured a U.S. audience. Hendrix heard the Beatles’ highly anticipated *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* album just before the Experience was scheduled to play. He couldn’t resist the urge to cover one of their songs. Along with the rest of the band, he learned the chords and put a new version together in about an hour. The Experience opened the show with “Sgt. Pepper’s” and left the audience, including members of the Beatles who were in attendance, dumbstruck.

Following Pete Townshend’s Who onto the stage, the Jimi Hendrix Experience delivered a blistering set that included such songs as Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” and several from *Are You Experienced?* His appearance probably is best remembered for his performance of “Wild Thing,” during which he doused his guitar with lighter fluid and set it ablaze. Janis Joplin and other artists watched from the audience as he played guitar behind his back, under his leg, and with his teeth. From that point on, burning and smashing guitars became a regular part of Hendrix’s stage show. Smashing guitars had already become a signature stage move for the Who, and members of both bands were constantly monitoring the progress and antics of the other during the late 1960s.

Working with Redding and Mitchell, Hendrix had his most musically productive years in 1967 and 1968. Three albums of new material were released: *Axis: Bold As Love* (1967), most of which was recorded at the same time as *Are You Experienced?* (1967), and *Electric Ladyland* (1968). His concerts sold out and the Experience was a top draw at the outdoor festivals, which drew tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of fans—almost all of them white. He was not the first black man to attract a largely white audience: rockers Little Richard and Chuck Berry did it before. But Hendrix ascended during the height of the Civil Rights movement, when black-white relations were being explored and, to some extent, reinvented. Though his guitar work and his sound were his gifts to the world and made him an American icon, his appeal to white audiences had a greater cultural influence for occurring at a key point in the development of race relations in this country.

He also was a figurehead in the sexual revolution and the drug culture of the late 1960s. His sexual prowess was legendary. Once he became a star, he entertained groupies and reportedly had casual sex with hundreds of women,

although he also had more enduring relationships during that time. His drug use reached legendary status as well. He is said to have used everything from marijuana and cocaine to Seconal, Quaaludes, LSD, and heroin, and as time went on, drugs had an increasing influence on his performances. More than once, he either cut a concert short or failed to appear because he was unable to function.

Toward the end of his life, he seemed to be chasing a new direction, disbanding the Experience and forming loosely assembled bands with his army friend Billy Cox and other musicians. These were the groups Hendrix took with him to Woodstock and the Isle of Wight in England shortly before his death. Some recordings were made at this time, including the live *Band of Gypsies* (1970). These bands have been considered Hendrix's strongest musically, though their appeal was less commercial. Some biographers have hypothesized that prior to his death Hendrix was preparing to shelve his rock-god career and turn either toward folk music or jazz, where he could better connect with black audiences.

But it was not to be. Biographers differ about the final details. They agree that he asphyxiated on vomit as the result of a drug overdose. According to Charles Cross, Hendrix took a large dose of a German sedative called Vesparax, on top of other drugs and alcohol he had taken the night before. Some biographers have him dying in the ambulance or emergency room. Others have his body being found in the morning by a woman who slept as he choked and suffocated. He was buried in his hometown of Seattle.

Hendrix's death was the first of three to shake the rock music world over the next year. Janis Joplin died of a heroin overdose three days after Hendrix was buried. Nine months after that, Jim Morrison died of a heart attack. All were age 27 when they died, and all three became legends, at least in part because they died while they were young, while their careers still were going strong, and while 1960s counterculture was still emerging.

Although Hendrix gained stature as a musician and cultural icon because he died so young, his influence has been unique and pervasive. With Chuck Berry and Little Richard, he was one of the few black musicians of the twentieth century to be embraced immediately by white audiences, partly because he played the rock and roll that ruled the music world in the 1960s and he was accessible to white audiences. He loved to play the songs white audiences loved, covering work by Bob Dylan and the Beatles, among others. But his developments of rhythm-and-blues and soul precedents, his mastery of stage presence, and, above all, his guitar work imprint his real contributions to music. He also stands apart as a cultural touchstone for his generation. His strident individuality—reflected in his clothes, in his music, and in his lack of conventional grounding, especially as it relates to family—came together as young people in the United States and Europe were turning to those same avenues to find their own ways of exercising freedom and forging identity. His music and the lifestyle he embodied brought changes to the wider culture that continue today.

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# Audrey Hepburn

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## *Lucy Rollin*

Like icons in museums, admired for their beauty of design and color, Audrey Hepburn's image appeals to our aesthetic sense. Not only was she an unusually beautiful film star, but throughout her career she represented the height of fashion elegance, as she continues to do well into the twenty-first century. Her name alone conjures the simple and the ladylike in clothes. Since the virtual end of her film career in the late 1970s, however, her image has acquired spiritual meanings unusual in a film and fashion icon. She has come to represent a generosity approaching self-sacrifice—something close, perhaps, to martyrdom.

Hepburn's body combined the height and the narrow waist of the elegant model with the shapely legs and rear of the dancer—perfect for both high fashion gowns and simple sportswear. But she looked like no fashion model had ever looked, beginning with her remarkable face—its tilted, expressive eyes, long nose unusually wide at the tip, wide mouth and slightly crooked teeth. Photographer Cecil Beaton said of her, “She is like a portrait by Modigliani where the various distortions are not only interesting in themselves but make a completely satisfying composite” (Ferrer 86). She knew instinctively how to enhance her natural qualities to create an interesting look. In 1950s publicity photographs, her eyes were heavily made up while her hair looked as if it had been trimmed with nail scissors. Unsmiling, she looked sophisticated and sultry, but her wide smile was as fresh and joyful as a child's. Her tall, thin body fell into interesting poses thanks to her ballet training; her grace turned her flat chest into an asset. Photo spreads in *Life* magazine of Audrey wearing plain black capri pants with ballet flats, brief shorts and sandals, or a billowing strapless gown for the 1954 filming of *Sabrina*, made the angular *Vogue* and *Bazaar* models in their Christian Dior suits and high heels, look cold—and old.

As she became a star, Hepburn had plenty of help refining her fashion image, but she always exercised control over it. She chose French couturier Hubert de Givenchy, then only 26 years old, for her costumes in *Sabrina*—the beginning of a lifelong association; his simple lines, pure color, and elegant



fabrics suited Hepburn perfectly on and off screen. By the time she made *Funny Face* in 1957, she was as much fashion model as she was actress. The film satirized those chilly Dior models and the whole business of couture, offering instead Audrey's playfulness with clothes. In it she wore everything from a simple rain jacket with jeans and loafers, to a couturier wedding gown. Her most famous film, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), launched the reign of the little black dress as a modern fashion staple. Hepburn wears at least three black dresses in the film, two short and one long. The single most iconic image of Hepburn is from this film: the head-shot of her as she looks into Tiffany's window, wearing her black gown, pearls, and big sunglasses, holding a paper coffee container.

Most of her other 1960s films capitalized on her fashion model persona, no matter what character she played. *Charade* (1963) established the pattern: distressed young woman, always wearing beautiful clothes. *Paris When It Sizzles* (1964), *How to Steal a Million* (1966), and *Two for the Road* (1967) followed this formula. Even *My Fair Lady* (1964) became a large-screen canvas for Cecil Beaton's designs, especially those in which he clothed Audrey. Hepburn in her Ascot gown and hat has become the representation of that film.

No other figure associated with high fashion has had such lasting popular appeal, for despite her haute couture image in films and *Vogue* magazine, her style is surprisingly adaptable and undated because of its essential simplicity. A slim, knee-length dress or suit, low-heeled pumps, a sleek hairstyle and minimal jewelry—this combination is the basic Hepburn look, ladylike and understated. Almost any woman young or old can achieve some flattering version of it and add her own individual touches. The editors of *In Style* magazine say Hepburn's style "continues to enchant us" for its "clean lines and restraint" (Arbetter 24). Pamela Clarke Keogh in her book *Audrey Style* (1999) asserts, "Her style is as timely as it is timeless; she is ingrained in our consciousness. . . . [H]er influence on contemporary style is incomparable" (14).

However, icons originated not in museums but in Orthodox churches, where their purpose is to encourage meditation and inspire faith. An icon of, for example, the Virgin and Child invites the observer not only to admire its surface beauty but also to ponder Mary's relationship with the infant Jesus, the angel's message to her before his birth, the journey to Bethlehem, her grief at his crucifixion—images and thoughts that strengthen the viewer's faith. Audrey Hepburn's appearance and her experiences have caused her image to reverberate in this way. She has become, especially since her death, a representation of purity, suffering, and self-sacrifice.

Hepburn made a total of twenty-nine films, counting two for television. Early in her career she also appeared on stage in two major productions which won good reviews for her performances: *Gigi* (New York and national tour 1951–1952) and *Ondine* (New York 1954). But Hepburn never thought of herself as an accomplished actress; her youthful appearance and manner were what she offered, and as a result, she essentially played the same role in

all her work. *Roman Holiday*, her first major film and for which she won an Oscar for Best Actress of 1953, established her screen persona as a girl *almost* becoming a woman. Directors often paired her with much older leading men such as Humphrey Bogart, Gregory Peck, Gary Cooper, Fred Astaire, and Cary Grant—pairings that enhance her virginal quality. She is Cinderella forever at the ball, an image that mutes the sexual subtext of films like *Love in the Afternoon* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Even in her 1960s films, those in the *Charade* mold, sexual heat is subsumed by innocent flirtatiousness; she is still more girl than woman.

In the 1950s, when Hollywood offered Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell as representations of womanhood, Hepburn's image had a powerful appeal for girls on the threshold of puberty, and older. To girls who did not see themselves—or wish to see themselves yet—as sexual, Hepburn was a comforting alternative. In her film roles she was beautiful, fashionable, appealing, and innocent, and men fell for her completely without putting overt sexual pressure on her. Rachel Moseley, in *Growing Up with Audrey Hepburn* (2002), interviewed a number of British women of various ages about their response to Hepburn, and concludes that as a star “she offered the possibility of reconciling certain key contradictions which were significant for women . . . for instance in her ability to be both boyish and feminine” (128). This appeal has lasted well into the twenty-first century.

But Hepburn brought something more to her film performances—something that was part of her deepest self and emerged through her eyes before the camera. Moseley's interviewees identified it as a kind of frailty, “like she needs looking after,” while Moseley summarized it as another contradiction in her image: she represented physical fragility and psychological strength (190–91). This complex quality shows most effectively in her performance as Holly Golightly, a role for which she was remarkably well suited. Truman Capote, author of the short novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, wanted Marilyn Monroe to play it, casting that might have worked because Holly is apparently a call girl, but Hepburn's physical resemblance to Holly is obvious in Capote's opening pages. One of the characters is examining a photograph of a carved image of Holly: “an elongated carving of a head, a girl's, her hair



Classic Audrey Hepburn, ca. 1950s.  
Courtesy of Photofest.

sleek and short as a young man's, her smooth wood eyes too large and tilted in the tapering face, her mouth wide" (7). The bartender says she was a "skinny girl that walks fast and straight." When the narrator first sees her in person, he sees a girl in a "slim cool black dress. . . . For all her chic thinness, she had an almost breakfast-cereal air of health. . . . It was a face beyond childhood, yet this side of belonging to a woman" (13). Although she is a tough-talking girl who apparently sells her sexual favors, Holly appears innocent to those who know her. The bartender says he was in love with her, but never wanted to touch her: "I swear, it never crossed my mind about Holly. You can love somebody without it being like that" (9–10). Despite her tough exterior and sometimes crude vocabulary, Holly is sad, confused, frightened, unsure of her identity, asking for help but always just out of reach—a vulnerability that draws people to her. Along with her physical resemblance to Capote's character, Hepburn embodied Holly's vulnerability and essential purity, because they were part of herself.

In every Hepburn film, her characters at some point reveal themselves as fragile and frightened; her great eyes beg for sympathy as the camera moves in for the close-up. The clothes and makeup to which she gave such intense care were her armor, but the fear shone from her eyes. When her only armor was a nun's habit, in *The Nun's Story* (1959), her eyes became even more affecting; many believe this to be her finest performance. When she played a blind woman in *Wait Until Dark* (1967), her eyes became the focus of the film. Her thin body controlled in a dancer's posture, and the careful diction with which she delivered every line of dialogue, augmented the expression in her eyes, conveying a deep need for sympathy and understanding held under great restraint; audiences responded by loving her the way Capote's bartender loved Holly: "You can love somebody without it being like that. You keep them a stranger, a stranger who's a friend" (10).

Hepburn's son writes that sadness was an essential part of her character, beginning in her earliest life with a father who seemed incapable of close relationships, and who abandoned the family when she was 6 years old. Her mother was strong but also undemonstrative and often critical of her. Moreover, as a young adolescent she lived in Arnhem, in the Netherlands, experiencing near-starvation when the Germans occupied the town from 1939 to 1945. When the town was liberated, Hepburn was 15 and dangerously malnourished. As she regained her health, she found herself too tall and too old to realize her dream of becoming a classical dancer, but was "discovered" for films, because of the need to work rather than the desire to be a movie actress. Her thinness, and the emotional neediness she brought to her performances, remind her fans of the deprivations of her childhood and adolescence.

There were deprivations in her adult life as well. In 1954, after her success in *Roman Holiday*, she married actor-director Mel Ferrer; they established residence in Switzerland, because both preferred to remain apart from the Hollywood milieu. But as he took over the management of her career, she

began to resent his decisions on her behalf; he apparently insisted that she work more often than she wanted to, especially after they had a son. She divorced him in 1969 and soon married Italian psychiatrist Andrea Dotti, effectively retiring from films, living permanently in Europe, caring for her two sons Sean Ferrer and Luca Dotti, gardening and homemaking, making only occasional public appearances. Dotti, however, was known as a playboy and continued his liaisons throughout the marriage. Hepburn finally divorced him in 1982, returned to Switzerland, and lived there with actor Robert Wolders until her death. She struggled unsuccessfully to keep her two marriages intact, sacrificing herself for husbands who did not care enough for her as a person. She never married Wolders, but he offered her the devotion she had not experienced in marriage. Hepburn appeared, in the publicity surrounding her personal life, just as she did in her films: self-sacrificing and fragile.

If she had remained in her Swiss farmhouse into her old age, enjoying the privacy she so valued, her image would probably have continued to be most associated with elegance in clothes. But at age 59 she became an ambassador for UNICEF, using her image to attract attention to starving children in places like Ethiopia, Central America, Vietnam, Turkey, and Sudan. Between 1988 and 1992 she made eight journeys to such places and appeared in other public arenas to speak about her experiences and about the great need she saw. She had an emotional investment in these experiences that few others could share, for while she offered her publicity power to help these children, she revisited her own childhood hunger. Although most photographs of her during these journeys show a smiling Hepburn, family, friends, and acquaintances said she was suffering greatly, because of her memories of Arnhem and because she felt there was so little she, or indeed any one person, could do. In September 1992 she made her last journey and the most emotionally grueling one—to Somalia, where most of the population was starving. She told her son Sean after that trip that she had “been to hell” (Paris 354). By the time she returned, she was in great physical pain. Diagnosed with terminal colon cancer, she returned to her Swiss farmhouse, where she died at age 63 the following January. There is no proof that her disease was related to her UNICEF work, but there were those who believed she had sacrificed herself for the cause (Paris 357–60).

Since her death there has been an increasing flow of books and articles about her, many with appeals for the Audrey Hepburn Memorial Fund, established by her family and administered through the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. With each book, photograph, quotation, or anecdote, her image seems to become more saintly. Her friends recall only her simplicity, generosity, dignity, warmth, and courage. UNICEF photographer John Isaac said, “Audrey had no color, no race” (Paris 346). Director Peter Bogdanovich was amazed by her fragility off screen and her strength before the cameras; he said she had “strength through vulnerability—strength like an iron butterfly” (Paris 282). Others who encountered her became even more spiritual in their descriptions

of the experience. Makeup artist Kevyn Aucoin said that working with her “was like being in the presence of someone who was not merely human. She sort of had an angelic quality about her, and a sort of ethereal, rather haunting presence . . . an energy, a sort of light coming from within her that was just sort of overwhelming” (Keogh 230). Robert Wagner called her “a gift from God” and director Billy Wilder said, “She was just blessed. God kissed her on the cheek, and there she was” (Paris 382–83).

If the original purpose of an icon is to inspire faith, Hepburn certainly does that. Apparently millions of filmgoers from the 1950s until today believe unquestioningly that Hepburn was in life just as she appeared on screen. The young women interviewed in Moseley’s study express this phenomenon repeatedly: “She’s like always, like, herself”; “I mean, she seems to be *her* in all her films . . . she plays herself in every film . . . I mean it in a *good* way” (182–83). Barry Paris comments that “most people felt sincerity was her biggest asset” as an actress (Paris 376). Pamela Clarke Keogh says, “Most of all, she is honest—we believe who she is on the screen, we trust her”(18). In the midst of the cynicism that, early or late, surrounds most screen personalities, her image has remained as pure as it was in *Roman Holiday*. Now her fans’ faith is rewarded. Throughout his memoir of his mother, Sean Ferrer assures his readers that

She really was like those characters you saw in the movies: emotional, courageous, delicate, romantic. . . . What you saw and felt when you watched her on the big screen was not only the clever presentation of characters brilliantly written, directed, shot, and edited into a performance, but a clear view of a truly magical human being who deserves the warm feelings that still transport audiences worldwide today. (xxiv)

Pamela Clarke Keogh sums up the impact of Hepburn’s image today: “As an actress she embodies our hopes, our dreams, and our heartache, and reflects them back to us more brilliantly than we could ever imagine. Audrey Hepburn’s beauty, her vulnerability, and her courage are instinctive, visceral, electrifying” (18). Melissa Hellstern offers an even more spiritual response in her inspirational handbook *How to be Lovely: The Audrey Hepburn Way of Life* (2004), taking various quotations from Hepburn and organizing them around ways to achieve happiness, friendship, health, and success. Says Hellstern, “It is her character that is certain to withstand the test of time . . . she represented all that a woman could be. . . . May the light she shared with the world shine on in the lives of those she continues to inspire” (iv).

Hepburn herself once said: “I never think of myself as an icon. What is in other people’s minds is not in my mind” (Hellstern 143). Whether her image will continue to convey such spiritual meanings to “other people’s minds,” no one can say. In contrast to various excesses of food, fashion, and politics, her dignified clothes, manner, and lifestyle along with her humanitarianism have inspired admiration for decades. Of course, others have led similar lives and

made similar choices. But they did not look like Audrey Hepburn. All that she was, finally, is summed up in that remarkable face, an aesthetic fascination and joy. Even Hellstern's little book, which aspires to focus on what Hepburn said, is filled with pictures of her; they attract the eye more than the minimal text ever could. They are the essential Hepburn. Like Garbo's, her face continues to offer its unique beauty as an object for meditation, communicating to each individual observer more than words can convey.

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# Hershey Bar

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*Dennis Hall*

Sister Mary Martin used them to teach us fractions, occasionally reducing a large brown wall chart into small milk chocolate squares, distributed at the end of the lesson, invariably at the end of the day. Nothing engages the attention, even the understanding, of a grammar school child like a Hershey bar. I knew the goals of learning.

One Christmas, Santa left under the tree, just for me, a whole box of Hershey bars, nestled between cartons of Lucky Strikes and Old Golds for my elder brothers. Nothing then defined indulgence like a whole box of Hershey bars (or a carton of cigarettes); it was like owning a candy store. I knew Santa loved me more than I deserved.

The vending machines at my high school and college invariably offered bars of Hershey's dark chocolate, milk chocolate, and milk chocolate with almonds, with the remaining slots filled as space allowed with Snickers, Milky Way, or Three Musketeers bars, and occasionally (this candy machine would have been an unusually big one) with such oddities as Butterfinger, Mounds, or Nutter-Butter bars. I will ever remember my dismay when a school friend, off to buy candy bars, returned, all the Hershey bars having been sold out, with a Zag-Nut bar for me. This wasn't a candy bar! Moreover, he had misapprehended my taste, my sophistication, as well as squandered my dime (still a coin of some interest in my school days) on a confection which provided no nourishment, psychic or physical. I knew then that we are, in every sense, what we consume.

When I began graduate studies, I thought, after the directives of Saint Paul, that I had put away the things of the child. But in the first meeting of English 601, the required first course in scholarly research and methods, the venerable Dr. Richard D. Altick declared that anyone who found an error in any of his work, would be awarded a Hershey bar! Not a Milky Way or the candy bar of one's choice, but a Hershey bar (as it turned out, milk chocolate without almonds). Very few Hershey bars were dispensed, but those who got them would frame them rather than eat them. To have one of Dick Altick's Hershey bars (some few actually had two of them) could make a career in English

studies. I knew then, as do most Americans even now, that the Hershey bar has always borne the mark of distinction in American culture.

Chocolate has a long, well documented, and much repeated history, dating from its consumption as the beverage of the gods by Mayan and Aztec leaders, as Hernado Cortez reported early in the sixteenth century; to its widely being drunk in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European chocolate houses, especially in England and France; through a variety of technical refinements in the nineteenth century into increasingly popular confections known as chocolates and bonbons; into the mass productions of various kinds in the twentieth century; to a revival of interest in the new millennium in craft chocolate of seemingly infinite refinement and luxury. Many devotees tend to luxuriate in this narrative nearly as fully as in chocolate itself. Readily accessible in bookstore and library, repeated continuously in the periodical press, and flowing over the Internet like dark sauce on a scoop of vanilla ice cream (see Kidd, for example), the knowledge of chocolate's progress, of the various kinds and enrichments it lends itself to, of the many, often esoteric, cultural and social and commercial uses one may make of it, serve to redeem consumption that would otherwise be thought a narrow self-indulgence. Of chocolate, there is no trivia, only information.

The Hershey bar, introduced in 1900, is the commercial offspring of Milton Hershey (1857–1945) who began his career as an apprentice candy maker in the 1870s and who, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, revolutionized chocolate making and icon-brand marketing in America. Moreover, he proved to be the model of the good employer, and engaged in philanthropy far earlier and far more fully than did his fellow captains of American industry. While a certain amount of hagiography is to be expected at Hershey.com, the company Web site, few are the negative utterances about Milton Hershey to be found anywhere (Brenner seems to have collected all there are; see especially chapters 9 and 10). Some entrepreneurs have complained that as a businessman he was too interested in machinery and experimenting with new and often unsuccessful products, that he neglected operations, leaving them to subordinates he thought better qualified to direct operations, and that he was insufficiently aggressive and had too little interest in profits. He is reported often to have said that “I have more money than I know what to do with.” The extravagance of the Gilded Age was simply not part of his consciousness (Brenner 84). Whether by coincidence or design, he enjoyed throughout his life the reputation of a good guy in an era peopled with bad guys, particularly when compared to his principal competitor, Forrest Mars, who has been likened to “a shark in chocolatey seas” (“Candy Man Mars”).

Hershey, Pennsylvania, emerged as a model company town. While Hershey's hands, to be sure, worked long and hard, the company built Hershey Park and provided a wide range of other public amenities, including affordable and good housing for workers, which were of a kind and on a scale singular for the era. He did much the same for the workers in the town of



Hershey in Cuban sugar cane fields prior to the Castro revolution. In 1909, the childless Milton and Kitty Hershey founded an industrial school for orphaned boys; in 1918, three years after Kitty's death, Hershey donated his entire estate, then some \$60 million, to the school. It took five years for the public to become aware of this generosity. The endowment, now worth \$5 billion, supports one of America's best boarding schools, but one serving disadvantaged students of all races and religions (Brenner 134–35). "If Hershey's philanthropy" as Carol Ann Rinzler puts it, "often made him seem the very model of a paternalistic nineteenth-century industrial type, so be it. He built houses for his workers (individually designed ones—Hershey did not believe employees should have to live in cookie-cutter cottages), created social programs, and saw to it that during the Depression of the 1930s not a single Hershey worker lost his or her job. In fact, the company created jobs throughout Hershey and the surrounding area by embarking on a program of construction—housing, halls, factories. . . . [H]is company continued the tradition by creating the Milton Hershey Medical Center at Pennsylvania State University" (80–81). Unless Rinzler and the many others overstate the reality by half, Milton Hershey may be the only saint in the Gilded Age.

The aura of goodness associated with Hershey *père* was from the outset transferred to Hershey *fils*—the chocolate bar. His processing of milk chocolate was a technical innovation which made use of the abundant supplies of milk in the Pennsylvania countryside and had important consequences: it made what is known as "eating chocolate" capable of mass production and distribution and relatively cheap. It made eating chocolate easy to preserve and package and so to sell in a wide variety of outlets—newsstands, lunch counters, groceries, and later, vending machines, as well as candy stores. It made Hershey bars ubiquitous. "Hershey endeared himself to the American public at large," as Wendy Woloson expresses the point, "by creating domestic chocolates that were within the reach of everyone. In fact the Hershey

nickel bar, which fluctuated in size, remained the same price from 1903 until 1970" (146). For generations of Americans "Hershey bar" and "candy bar" were nearly synonymous, much as Coke stood for soft drink, or, later, Kleenex would come to stand for tissue or Xerox for photocopy.

The infusion of milk also made chocolate, at least in Milton Hershey's eyes, fit for the consumption of women and children. He insisted that his chocolate be characterized as food, be recognized as nutritious. Employees reputedly were



Photograph showing a Hershey's chocolate bar, ca. 1925. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

instructed never to refer to Hershey bars as “candy.” An early brown package, with silver raised lettering, carries the slogan

A NOURISHING FOOD  
**HERSHEY’S**  
 5¢ Milk Chocolate 5¢

For most of the Hershey bar’s life, its dark brown wrapper and silver lettering was the Hershey company’s only advertising. It spoke for itself with a resonance endearing to American consumers. And the basic package of the Hershey bar has stayed more or less the same, the mark of the real thing for over a hundred years, a sign of reliability and wholesomeness. When the company finally felt the need to advertise in the late 1960s, it led with nostalgia, with a jingle sung over a folk guitar accompaniment: “There is nothing like the face of a kid eatin’ a Hershey bar . . . Hershey’s, the great American chocolate bar.” To this day, many parents who are appalled at the prospect of a Snicker’s or some other candy bar will allow a Hershey bar.

Hershey’s milk chocolate bar, indeed, rescued chocolate from its sexual and sinful associations developed throughout the nineteenth century (see Woloson, ch. 4, “Sinfully Sweet: Chocolates and Bonbons,” 109–54). Chocolate was seen by friend and foe alike as making men potent and women receptive. One James Wadsworth wrote of “chocolate’s rejuvenating and sexually stimulating properties”:

Twill make Old Women Young and Fresh;  
 Create New Motions of the Flesh.  
 And cause them long for you know what,  
 If they but taste of chocolate. (Woloson 136)

J. H. Kellogg, of cornflakes fame, and Sylvester Graham, developer of the cracker that combined with a Hershey bar and marshmallow makes the ever popular s’mores, joined many other American voices for moral rearmament to warn against what they took to be the clear connection between “dreamy indolence and gluttony” and to describe chocolate’s association with licentiousness and dissipation, especially among women and girls. “Bonbons and other fine confections” Woloson concludes, “came to be the focus of many entreaties because they were luxurious, ephemeral, and fancy items that like gratuitous sex, masturbation, and novel reading had no purpose other than to take up time and to gratify indulgences” (143). Early on Hershey sold penny portions of milk chocolate in shapes and wrappers that would appeal to children, including a whole line of chocolate cigars and cigarettes (which were a special treat, although no longer made by Hershey, when I was in grade school). “When Hershey reevaluated his products at the turn of the century, he expanded his milk chocolate line to better serve children’s tastes.

His candies incorporated the logic that milk added to chocolate made it 'good' for children, in contrast to dark bittersweet chocolates, which still counted as 'real chocolate', meant for adults" (Woloson 145).

The success of the Hershey bar was such that it defined the taste and texture of American chocolate. By the 1940s Hershey was making 75 percent of America's chocolate, much of it used in the candy bars sold by other companies. "The only distinctively American taste," as Carol Rinzler points out, "was created by Hershey with its sweet, gritty dark chocolate (far too sandy for European tastes), and its milk chocolate, whose flavor derives from the special taste of naturally dried milk crumb" (59). "A serious chocolate person," she continues, "will tell you that fine dark chocolate should be smooth, without the grit or sandiness caused by sugar particles" and that fine milk chocolate ought not to have the "chewiness" created by "a relatively high proportion of milk solids and low proportion of cocoa butter" (60–61). Most Americans, however, grew up on Hershey bars and prefer their grit or chewy texture. While the proliferation of "new luxury" goods in the new millennium has led New York chocolate shops to ape Parisian *chocolatiers*, Americans still have to learn to like European chocolate. So too, there has been something of a revival of chocolate erotica, after the suggestiveness of food writers like Nigella Lawson or the explicitness of books like *Booty Food: A Date-by-Date, Course-by-Course, Nibble-by-Nibble Guide to Cultivating Love and Passion through Food*, whose eighth chapter, "Dessert's on Me," projects licentiousness and dissipation beyond the wildest fears of J. H. Kellogg and Sylvester Graham. Hershey's Kisses appeared in 1907, but, reputedly, the product was named not for the exchange of affection, but because the machine that makes them looks as if it is kissing the conveyor belt. The predominant American taste continues to favor the innocence of a Hershey's Kiss to the experience of a Perugina's *Bacio*, with its love note secreted under its foil wrapper.

The Hershey bar's aura of wholesomeness and quality and the American way is for many a matter of patriotism. The Hershey board of directors, having solicited bids, had a change of heart and recently voted (10 to 7) not to sell the company to Wrigley's or worse to Cadbury-Schweppes or worse yet to Nestle, a move that a group called the American Reformation Project hailed as a victory for "American culture, tradition, and values" (Simmermaker). This association, of course, has its roots in the Hershey bar going to war. Hershey's had provided milk chocolate bars for doughboys during World War I, after which it continued to supply the Department of the Army. As World War II loomed, Hershey's developed and was producing, by the end of 1945 at a rate of 24 million a week, "Field Ration D" for the troops, a "bar that weighed about 4 ounces, would not melt at high temperatures, was high in food energy value, and did not taste so good that soldiers would be tempted to eat it, except in an emergency" ("The Ration D Bar," [www.hersheys.com](http://www.hersheys.com)). These and conventional bars were the Hershey bars that G.I.s famously gave to refugees and residents of occupied territory, making friends for the United States and for Hershey's. The shiny tinfoil in the brown paper sleeve, printed with

HERSHEY'S in sliver block letters, quickly became a sign of American culture and an international icon easily equal to that of Coca-Cola. The company jealously guards the Hershey bar's military role, as Joël Brenner demonstrates in her fascinating account of the "Bar Wars" waged between Hershey's and Mars to secure Defense Department contracts to supply heat resistant chocolate bars for operations in the Middle East (3–18). Whatever the state of corporate warfare, however, the Hershey bar remains a mark of friendship and security.

As the Hershey bar is the standard of the American taste in chocolate, it has long served at various times and in different ways, positive and negative, and with varying degrees of clarity, as a rhetorical trope. While for many people happiness is a Hershey bar, precisely these positive associations make it ripe for irony. In military parlance, for example, a Hershey bar refers to the uniform stripes indicating overseas combat service. To describe a person as a Hershey bar once indicated a person especially innocent or naive. Women in occupied territories were often said to be easily seduced by the promise of a Hershey bar and a green card. A girl in the neighborhood might be known as a Hershey bar because that's what it cost to get into her pants; so too, a very cheap prostitute. The Hershey highway is homosexual slang for anal intercourse. The green Hershey bar is a term for hashish. A Hershey bar is an acne blemish, a zit. Stan Goetz wrote a tune (on his album *Swinging at Storyville*) called "Hershey Bar."

Sometimes the rhetorical uses are more elaborate, as for example in the title, "New Highway, Same Hershey Bar," a political article on the failed promise of computer technology (Schalit). My personal favorite appears in an introduction to a symposium on aesthetic formalism: "We might say that formalism, then, is like the Hershey Bar of criticism. It's a classic. It's an archetype. It's everywhere. Everything else seems to contain a variation on its theme. As the Hershey Bar of criticism, formalism is also a creative tool, a staple ingredient of many analytical recipes. Melt it and stir it in thoroughly, chop it up and mix it into the dough in chunks, grate it into a fine powder and sprinkle just a bit of it on top. People take their formalism in many forms. But everyone likes to have at least a little bit of Hershey formalism now and then, even if they claim they can't stomach excessive quantities of it at one sitting—or can't afford to or will really pay for it later" (Gee par. 5).

While in the minds of many Americans the Hershey bar is synonymous with chocolate, it hardly seems fair to tie to its tail the host of movies, books, plays, and even operas that either nominally or substantially exploit the capacity of chocolate to attract audiences, although the Hershey bar probably does lurk in the unconscious of the readers and viewers of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* or *Better Than Chocolate* or *Chocolat*, or *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*.

The Hershey bar is entrenched in American life and lore. The story, for example, that, when F. Scott Fitzgerald died of a heart attack in Sheila Graham's house, she had just left to buy him some Hershey bars, is entirely

believable (“21 December 1940”). The Hershey bar, a defining part of the texture of American life, confers credibility on all it touches. Its many associations run deep within America’s collective consciousness. Even for those of us not particularly fond of chocolate (as I confess to the astonishment of just about everyone I know), the Hershey bar serves as a medium of communication and a marker of affection and love. It is a trigger of nostalgia. And in typically American fashion, the Hershey bar is an indulgence taken apparently independent of abundance, savored all the more as a pleasure taken without apparent guilt. For most Americans, the Hershey bar can do more than Milton can to justify God’s ways to man.

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# Hollywood

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*Thomas B. Byers*

These days, Hollywood is the mother of all icons. Of course the metaphor is a hyperbole, but how else to launch a homily to the happy home of hype? Besides, the metaphor points toward a somewhat dicey double relation of Hollywood to iconography: on the one hand, the name “Hollywood” itself carries a practically uncountable wealth of iconographic meaning. On the other hand, Hollywood is the generator, the progenitor, the mother of countless other icons that are or could be subjects of essays in this book. If you want to send a message, call Western Union—but if you want to create an icon, make movies. Hollywood has been called “the Dream Factory,” but it’s both the factory *and* the dream. What follows will concentrate on Hollywood itself as icon, but the icons it produces are so much a part of its meaning that they will keep creeping in.

The first problem is one of definition. What is Hollywood? Of course, everyone knows it’s a town in California—except that it isn’t: it is a district of the city of Los Angeles. In any case, these days what we associate with the name is only rarely located in the geographical place. Hollywood is the name of an industry—a complex of industries, really (not only movies, but television, popular music, and music video, and so on)—whose products, taken together, are one of the United States’s leading exports. Hollywood is also, more particularly, the name for the industry, the medium, the art form, and the style of mainstream American movies. But more than that, it’s a cultural site—a fantasyland. It’s where the stars live the lives that are so much richer, so much more romantic, so much *more* than our own. The fact that almost none of them live there, and that most of their work is not done there, only adds to the fantastic, phantasmatic, magical quality of the word.

In order to try to give some manageable shape to the meanings that sprawl out from the Hollywood sign, I’ll discuss them under four major rubrics: sex, politics, ambition and class, and America. In each case, we will find that Hollywood embodies multiple, often contradictory meanings and tensions, and indeed that the contradictions and tensions themselves are iconic for some of the deepest splits and most relentless struggles in U.S. culture.

## SEX

Sex is the subject of perhaps the most obvious category, and probably the most fun to talk about. Some simple lists of names may get us started; here's a sampling of those who are commonly identified as stars and as sex symbols (which don't always amount to the same thing, but they do more often than not): Rudolph Valentino, Mae West, Clark Gable, Jean Harlowe, Lena Horne, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts and, of course, Rock Hudson. Some of them come in brilliant pairs, some meteoric, others enduring: Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, Tracy and Hepburn, Bogart and Bacall, Fred and Ginger, Liz and Richard, Ron and Nancy, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman. Other names carry whiffs of shame and scandal, sometimes forgiven, sometimes not: Ingrid Bergman, Errol Flynn, Lana Turner, Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle, Roman Polanski, Michael Jackson. Then there are the great gender benders—among them Marlene, Madonna, and (in their fashion) Jack Lemmon and the Tonys: Curtis and Perkins.

But the names are only foreplay. The money shot is that Hollywood says sex, and means it. It is where Americans, and many others around the world, learn what sex is and how to do it, what sexuality is and how to have it, what sexy is and how to be it. Think how much more, and more varied, experience we all have of romance on screen than we have of it in our lives. Hollywood is the home address of eros and the hotbed of, well, hot beds. Where sex is concerned, it is a Fantasyland far beyond Walt Disney's imagination—though for many of us, his films contain our first such fantasies, or at least our first conscious, shared, social ones. Whether our fantasies are of everlasting love and happily-ever-afters, forbidden passions and secret trysts, or wanton orgies and Richter-scale orgasms, Hollywood is the place where sex is the more that we all want it to be.

Of course, sometimes it is too much. Hollywood is also a place where innocence goes to be destroyed, where the bright-eyed young girl finds that the road to stardom crosses the casting couch, where predatory men commit statutory rape, where the tabloids find their fodder of both heartbreak and scandal. These in turn feed the darker fantasies of the minions of morality, from Will Hays, Joseph Breen, and the Legion of Decency (or their sisters in the Ladies of the Law and Order League in John Ford's *Stagecoach*), to Dan Quayle, Bob Dole, and more extreme right-wing critics. For those of this persuasion, Hollywood is and has long been at best sexually irresponsible and immoral, and at worst a latter-day Sodom. For example, consider the words of William Donohue, President of the Catholic League, speaking on MSNBC: "Hollywood likes anal sex. . . . I believe in traditional values and restraint. They believe in libertinism" ("Scarborough Country for Dec. 8," 6 September 2005 <<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/6685898>>).

In sum, whether its connotations are ameliorative or pejorative, whether it is imagined as a place of erotic freedom and possibility, or one of temptation and damnation, Hollywood stands for sex.

**POLITICS**

Charges of immorality and corruption link sex to politics, libertine to liberal, corrupter of youth to communist conspirator (after all, they are all body snatchers). In politics as in morals, right-wingers from the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, through Dole and Quayle in the 1990s, to today's cultural conservatives, have seen Hollywood as standing for the radical extreme to Middle America's traditional, conservative mean.

That there have been various strains of left-wing or left-leaning sentiment, commitment, and activity in Hollywood, from Communist Party membership to New Deal left populism and contemporary liberalism, is unquestionable. However, Hollywood's iconic status as leftist other seems a bit odd, given that all of the most prominent Hollywood figures who have actually made the transition from show business to politics, from Shirley Temple to Arnold Schwarzenegger, are Republicans, and among the most famous are such intensely conservative leaders as Ronald Reagan and Charlton Heston. Moreover, perhaps the most popular of all male Hollywood stars, John Wayne, not only was personally conservative but remains a conservative icon of heroic proportions. And as for the movies themselves, though they express a range of political positions (from Rambo's to Oliver Stone's), they generally tend toward the middle and marketable rather than the radical or even politically thought-provoking.

Nonetheless, in the popular imagination, and certainly in the ideology of the right, Hollywood is coded leftist, as the place not of Dutch Reagan and Duke Wayne but of Marlon Brando, who sent Sacheen Littlefeather to decline an Oscar for him because of Hollywood's treatment of Native Americans, and Jane Fonda, who notoriously went to North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. More recently it is identified with Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins and their opposition to the second Iraq war, and with Barbra Streisand and Steven Spielberg and their support for liberal causes and candidates.

The prominence of the latter two in current attacks on liberal Hollywood—and particularly in charges that it is “anti-Christian”—points to an issue that is always either lurking beneath the surface or rearing its ugly head: partly because Jewish moguls from Louis B. Mayer, Sam Goldwyn, and Harry Cohn to Michael Eisner, Michael Ovitz, Rob Reiner, Spielberg, and Streisand have become rich, powerful, and exceptionally visible in Hollywood, it has long been, and remains, a lightning-rod for anti-Semitism. Even a very brief session of Web browsing will uncover the current virulence of this phenomenon. For example, William Donohue, quoted earlier as saying that “Hollywood likes anal sex,” said in the same MSNBC broadcast that “Hollywood is controlled by secular Jews who hate Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular. It's not a secret, okay? And I'm not afraid to say it.” And hence by association the pro-anal sex, anti-family “libertines” (that is, in code, “the queers”) either are, or are under the control of, Christian-hating Jews. Of course Donohue represents an extreme, paranoid reading, but he only echoes the earlier views



of Joseph Breen, who ran the Production Code Administration, the official Hollywood censor of the 1930s and 1940s. There was only the extreme of an interpretive disposition whose more mainstream versions are nonetheless quite suspicious of Hollywood. As a political icon, particularly in our moment, Hollywood connotes a bastion of communism and liberalism, Jews and gays.

### AMBITION AND CLASS

Hollywood's connotations are, in general, a good deal sunnier in this area than they are in politics. Indeed, it is an iconic setting for the playing out of the American dream—a place where, by dint of determination, pluck, and luck, an “average” Joe or Jane may make, or fall into, a fortune. It's a place where one may go to succeed—as indeed many of the early moguls themselves did, along with many other children of immigrants, like Frank Capra. More even than New York, it's a magnet for aspiring actors, and a place full of beautiful, eager, young people on the rise (and on the make). It's also a place where your life may turn in an instant, where you may strike gold out of the blue—where simply drinking a Coke at the right time in the right place (say, after school in a little shop across from Hollywood High) may turn you into Lana Turner. And it's the last hope for fame and fortune of many people out there at their computers (formerly, typewriters), thinking that surely they can write a screenplay or television script for a show better than all the crappy ones they've sat through.

Yet even this fantasy has its darker side, just as the American success story, from Ben Franklin's *Autobiography* onward, is always shadowed by the failures who embody the threat that gives it meaning. For every Lana Turner there is a Judy Garland or Frances Farmer, as well as countless nameless would-be starlets used up and thrown away by the disposable, superficial culture of Tinseltown. If, for some, Hollywood Boulevard leads to Rodeo Drive, for others it turns into the Boulevard of Broken Dreams. In one par-



The famous Hollywood sign. Courtesy of Corbis.

ticular version of this (always cautionary) tale, Hollywood is specifically the ruination of the serious artist: easy money, vulgar taste, crass commercialism, and hedonist dissipation destroy the self-discipline that genius requires to bloom. This is the Hollywood of the F. Scott Fitzgerald legend, one of the reasons why, as Fitzgerald himself once famously said, “there are no second acts in American lives.”

What makes the dream so attractive in spite of these caveats is that the potential gains are so great. Hollywood’s version of the American dream, like just about everything else about the place, is extreme, heightened, superlative. It’s not just the money (though one has the sense that the place is rolling in it), not just the pleasures of sensuality or celebrity in themselves. It’s something even beyond the glamour, though that’s certainly part of it. It’s the notion that success in Hollywood bestows on its achievers something as close to the aura of royalty as our middle-class democracy has to offer. And it’s also the notion of self-transformation—of ceasing to be Betty Joan Perske and becoming Lauren Bacall, casting off Archibald Leach and putting on Cary Grant, leaving Norma Jean Baker behind and waking up as Marilyn Monroe. It’s not only making it to Hollywood, but making it there from Marion, Indiana (James Dean), or Helena, Montana (Gary Cooper), or a tobacco farm in Brogden, North Carolina (Ava Gardner), or even from Thal, Austria (Arnold Schwarzenegger). It’s ceasing to be nobody, and becoming somebody bigger than life. It’s actually ending up as one of those people you grew up seeing, and wanting to be, and thinking you could never touch in a million years.

## AMERICA

Hollywood is more than just a site of, or an icon of, the American dream. Finally, it is an icon, or a dream (or in fact many dreams) of America itself. In its simplest versions, this notion might refer to the misunderstandings of twentieth-century foreign visitors to the United States who thought they were coming to the Old West of the Western, complete with cowboys, stage-coaches, Indian attacks, and so on. Their misconceptions were naïve, but nonetheless symptomatic. For most of the world’s people (and peoples), their conceptions of the United States are formed as much from the Hollywood products they consume as from any other source.

Moreover, in this regard, Americans themselves are not all that different. The movies, Pauline Kael once said, are “our national theatre.” Not only do we get many of our pictures of different regions from their cinematic and televisual representations, but we get many of our overall conceptions of the “essence” of Americanness from Hollywood as well. The Old West not only is over, but in fact it never quite existed in the first place—but it is an inextricable, and politically influential, part of our conception of America. Similarly, the America of Bedford Falls in *It’s a Wonderful Life* is largely gone; far more Americans live in cities than in small towns, and even more of us live in suburbs; and small-town life wasn’t exactly Bedford Falls anyway. Yet Bed-

ford Falls is still part of what we think of as distinctly American. If, for nearly a century, Hollywood has been the mother of American iconography, it has particularly been the mother of our iconography of America and Americans.

Finally, though, Hollywood doesn't only make our icons of America; it is itself such an icon. It means *us*. There is a certain mathematical proportion to this phenomenon; in terms of culture, as America stands relative to the world (and particularly to old Europe), so Hollywood stands in relation to America: it is richer and brighter, more vulgar and meretricious, more glittering and glamorous and meteoric and hedonistic. It is at once more materialistic and technological, while more idealistic and dreamy, more staked on risk even as it is utopian. It is a place we look down on, and yet it is where we all want to end up. And in a peculiar way, we have. In our postmodern times Hollywood is, more and more, where we live.

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# Horse

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*Barrett Shaw*

Seabiscuit, Secretariat, Smarty Jones—periodically a rare race horse transcends the subculture of the track and engages the imagination of the American people en masse. For a few weeks in the spring, the country thrills to the notions of speed, heart, and victory. Particularly if the animal comes from a relatively humble background, it seems to epitomize many aspects of the American dream. Then, by mid-June, especially if, as in recent decades, the third jewel is not set in the Triple Crown, the horse fades back into our collective memory.

*Equus* couldn't be more American. Its earliest ancestor, little dog-sized, multi-toed eohippus, inhabited the jungles of what is now the United States 50 million years ago; its remains have been found in Utah and Wyoming. Later, mesohippus crossed a land bridge to Europe. When jungles turned to grassy plains, the horse adapted, growing in size, developing hooves from the central toe, moving in herds. It spread into South America and across the northern land bridge to Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The native horse disappeared from the Americas around 8,000 years ago, along with other large prehistoric animals. No one knows exactly why, but one speculation is overhunting. A few thousand years earlier, Paleo-Indians, spreading through the hemisphere after crossing from Asia, had begun using spears.

The horse made a triumphant return to its homeland on the vessels of the Spanish conquerors. There was apparently no collective memory of it then, certainly not as domesticated. Some of the Central American natives at first thought the riders were centaur-like gods. With sixteen horsemen, Cortez was able to subdue a civilization.

In Europe and Asia, the horse had been refined as an instrument of war. The Mongols had swept across Asia on their tough little mounts, and in medieval Europe the heavy horses of the north had borne the weight of armored knights. In the Crusades the northerners confronted the light, swift steeds of the Middle East and North Africa, and the merger of the two types brought about the development of most modern breeds. Spain, in particular,

produced the epitome of the war horse. Today's dressage and *haute école* developed from maneuvers learned for battle.

Key to conquest, horses were brought over in larger numbers and multiplied rapidly. Some were abandoned on less successful excursions into what is now the American Southwest; they quickly readapted to their old territory and wild herds began to spread. These mustangs—from the Mexican Spanish *mesteño*, or stray—were the source of many American breeds such as the Quarter Horse, Appaloosa, and Paint. The native peoples at first thought they were large super-dogs and revered them, developing with the animals a relationship of partnership rather than subjugation.

Meanwhile, settlers from more northern European countries, especially England, brought horses with them to the East Coast. Though many died in dark ships' holds, bodies cast overboard in the "horse latitudes," enough remained to become indispensable in establishing agriculture and enabling exploration of the new territories. The image of the horse is an inextricable part of the history of the westward development of our nation: pioneers crossing the Cumberland Gap on horseback into the wilds of Kentucky; teams pulling covered wagons over the plains; the circuit rider; the cavalry versus the Indians; the Pony Express carrying the news.

The horse in America also served its traditional function in war. As always, the commanders and officers had the best mounts; the cavalry were the elite soldiers; sturdy, less glamorous horses dragged the artillery and supplies; and the common infantryman slogged on foot. That hierarchy goes back through the middle ages to ancient civilizations and illustrates how the position and use of the horse have always mirrored social stratification.

But for a while the horse became fairly universally used in America, particularly in the West, where the spaces that had to be covered were so vast. It found its deepest niche in the American psyche herding cattle on long drives and carrying the law in pursuit of rustlers. Horses like these were the colleagues of the heroes America grew up with in the mid-twentieth century, in movies and later television: Roy Rogers and Trigger, Hopalong Cassidy and Topper, Gene Autry and Champion, the Lone Ranger and Silver. The rodeo preserves the activities of those days with its team roping and penning competitions. And the bucking bronco epitomizes one treasured aspect of what the horse symbolizes for us—freedom, wildness, defiant refusal to be tamed.

It wasn't long, though, before technology began displacing the horse, first telegraphy and the railroads, then the telephone, radio, and the automobile—the power of which, of course, is still measured in comparison to horses. By the second decade of the twentieth century, carriages, horsecars, and freight wagons were swiftly disappearing from the urban landscape, and working horses held on only a few decades longer in rural areas. Horses changed from middle-class necessities to upper-class luxuries.

The pampered performance or pet horse of today is the inverse of the wild mustang. It has become totally dependent on human care, kept in artificial



Drawing of stagecoach, covered wagons, cowboys, and horses on the Oregon trail, ca. 1930. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

circumstances that cut it off from its natural way of living, and bred for certain traits sometimes to the detriment of its overall well-being.

It is not cheap to keep a horse. Race or show horses require special feed and supplements, shoeing and medications, tack and equipment, training and exercise. Competitors in each different discipline must wear certain traditional kinds of clothing, boots, and headgear. Sports such as fox hunting, polo, steeplechase, and high-level horse shows are inevitably connected in the public mind with wealth. In the show ring or on the racetrack, the owners who can afford the best-bred animals and the most successful trainers get the most wins.

Horse racing is often called the sport of kings. The American version is directly derived from the English, as is the American Thoroughbred from its British forebears. For generations the racing scene was dominated by names like Mellon, Phipps, Whitney, and Vanderbilt; in recent years they've been joined by Arab sheiks. The epicenter has been the bluegrass region of Kentucky, the limestone fields of its fabled farms producing the bluebloods of the breed.

But anyone who visits the backside of a racetrack sees that racing encompasses poverty as well as wealth. The microcosmic world of this particular equine industry clearly mirrors the socioeconomic structure of the larger society. The owners pay the bills and have the bragging rights. The trainers have to serve and please them. Below them, the grooms muck stalls and try to keep the horses happy. And at the bottom are the hotwalkers, who lead the

horses to cool them down after they exercise or race. Those at the lower levels may bunk on the backside in concrete-block barracks or even on a cot in a tack room, while those at the top have star-studded Derby bashes at their mansions.

The horses, too, are divided hierarchically, but by their levels of ability. Like other athletes, not all are elite. (The apparent key to Secretariat's dominance was a heart more than twice normal size.) The best run in stakes races, the kind the public is most familiar with. Then there are allowance races for solid but not exceptional horses. And the rest, the great majority especially at smaller tracks, are claiming races. Any horse entered can be bought, or claimed, out of the race by any owner or trainer for a preset price that keeps the horses racing against comparably skilled animals; they have to run against peers to make it a horse race. At this level it literally doesn't pay to get attached to an animal; it's a commodity.

Because racing has immemorably been a gambling enterprise, it above all equine pursuits is subject to corruption. Even with plenty of scrutiny and oversight, with so many workers living in or near poverty, and with so much money at stake, it doesn't take a lot to bribe someone to influence the outcome of a race. Sad to say, horses are sometimes overdressed or raced with injuries. Those with little speed might be turned into riding horses or jumpers, but many others get passed from hand to hand and may end up neglected and starving or sent for slaughter.



Down the final stretch they come . . . Courtesy of Shutterstock.

Still, the Thoroughbred is born to run—I've seen one less than a day old, at a full-tilt, gangly, all-legs gallop along a fence, bang head first against the crossrail at the end of the field, fall over, get up, turn around, and start back as fast as he could go, mama cantering at his side. He might not win the prize for smarts (he collided with the fence a second time but had figured out about brakes by the third try), but he certainly should get points for heart and instinct.

Horses, as a rule, like to work and like to have a job. That's why we can get away with how we use them. When we make them perform to the absolute limits of their physical capacities, as in racing, we can say, "But they love to run. They love to win." When we make them leap six-foot jumps, or scramble miles across country over horrendous hurdles, or whiz around barrels, or trot with their legs so lifted and their neck so arched that their knees practically hit their nose, or stand on their hind legs and leap into the air from there, we can say, "But they enjoy it." And, thank goodness, they usually do. But we have to remember that they're just doing it because we're making them. They'd much rather be hanging around grazing all day with an occasional dash around the pasture with their buddies just for fun.

By making the horse dependent on us, we have assumed responsibility for it. Most horses were just chattel, overworked and routinely subject to abuse, before post-industrial sensibilities were awakened in the late nineteenth century by Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, the horse's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. To this day, little girls weep over Beauty's tribulations on his downward slide through British society. (When I was seven and had surgery for a crossed eye, my mother came into my hospital room and found me with bandage pulled up, reading *Black Beauty*. Her exasperated response: "Well, at least it could have been something you hadn't read before!") Now there are associations supporting animal welfare and laws to punish abusers.

The loving hearts of little girls are another world where horses dwell, quite apart from the more macho realms of racetrack and rodeo. As much as cowboys and soldiers and lawmen have been associated with horses, their largest and truest contingent is no doubt young females. They may start with a rocking horse and carnival carousel or pony rides (remnants our society has kept so all children can at least be exposed to the cultural memory of being on horseback). Then they pore over Walter Farley's *Black Stallion* and *Island Stallion* books, Marguerite Henry's classic *King of the Wind* and *Misty of Chincoteague*, and their reams of successors. From *My Little Pony* to *Pony Club*, they dream of a perfect four-legged, maned companion, and the lucky ones whose parents can afford it or are willing to make the sacrifice get to realize their dream. They transfer their nurturing instincts from dressing and coiffing Barbie to grooming and tacking up their mount. Whatever type of riding they do, their pony, and his larger successors as they grow, teaches them poise, confidence, discipline, responsibility, trust. He carries them into adolescence, where some abandon him for boys and others manage to balance the two attractions. Many who leave the stable find themselves compelled to return later in life.



A popular image of this bond is the medieval fable of the unicorn and the maiden. Hunters could not catch this elusive horselike beast by force. But irresistibly attracted by the presence and scent of a virgin, it would approach and lay its single-horned head in her lap and fall asleep. Then the men could close in and capture it. The phallic symbolism is obvious; but there is more to be learned from the tale about why women do so well with horses and why there has lately been a plethora of books about the nature of this relationship, such as *She Flies Without Wings: How Horses Touch a Woman's Soul* by Mary D. Midkiff and *The Tao of Equus: A Woman's Journey of Healing and Transformation through the Way of the Horse* by Linda Kohanov.

Women tend to relate to horses with intuition rather than force. They try to understand them as individuals, be supportive when they are afraid (which, with their herbivore heritage, they are quite frequently). Men are not immune to this approach; in fact, "horse whisperer" trainers like John Lyons and Monty Roberts are cashing in big time with their videos, books, and clinics, teaching methods based largely on observing and interacting with horses' natural herd behavior and body language. And more power to them. Their popularity means that far fewer horses will be subject to harsh, dispiriting training regimens.

But most people who say they are animal communicators or psychics are women. Many would dismiss their claims as New Age hot air, but there is anecdotal evidence that horses actually communicate with some degree of telepathy. Riders are taught to look where they want to go and the horse will go there, and it works. No doubt the rider, consciously or unconsciously, aligns her body and gives subtle signals to support that aiming, but the looking does seem to help focus the horse. In this context, the animal can be seen as a direct contact with nature, instinct, intuition; this aspect is the yin to its concurrent yang of force, speed, work, sport, and war.

It is ironic, then, that one of the newest uses we have come up with for horses is "farming" the urine of pregnant mares for estrogen for hormone replacement therapy. Every year thousands of mares are impregnated, then stand shoulder-to-shoulder in stanchions in barns, urinating into strapped-on bags connected by tubes to underground collection tanks, unable to walk, run, graze, play, turn around, or lie down flat for months, so human females can avoid hot flashes and other natural effects of aging. Thus, too, thousands of mostly unwanted foals are produced each year, many of which will be sold abroad for meat.

But those are uses we don't like to talk or think about. On the whole, the fashionable yin view of the horse has given it a growing popularity as a leisure-time distraction from the stresses of contemporary life. More and more people want to be able to possess the paradox of wildness tamed, to link back to the Native American's connection with this swift, powerful, beautiful, mysterious Native American.

You can even adopt a real mustang through the Bureau of Land Management for a few hundred dollars. But then you are responsible for it. And it may or may not choose to bond with you.

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# Indian Scout

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## *Tom Holm*

Charles Alexander Eastman was perhaps the most well-known Native American of his day. A Wahpeton and Mdewakanton Dakota, Eastman, whose Dakota name was Ohiyesa (the Winner), was born in 1857 and grew up steeped in the traditions of his people. At fifteen he was sent to Alfred Riggs' Santee Indian School. He proved to be an able student and later attended Knox College, and Dartmouth, and eventually graduated from the Boston College School of Medicine. Eastman started his career as the physician on the Pine Ridge Oglala Lakota reservation in South Dakota. He treated the survivors of the massacre that took place at Wounded Knee in 1890. He left the Indian Service in 1893, entered private practice for a time, lobbied for the restoration of Santee treaty rights, translated Dakota surnames into English for the Indian Office, served as the physician at the Crow Creek Sioux agency, worked for the YMCA, and established a girls' camp at which he taught "Indian lore" (Wilson).

Eastman gained greater fame, however, as a writer; between 1902 and 1917 he published ten books and numerous articles in most of the popular magazines of the early twentieth century. In addition to his autobiographical and philosophical monographs, he wrote several children's books aimed primarily at extolling the virtues of living life close to nature. As a physician, he was wrapped up in the sanitation and health movements of the period and firmly believed in the notion that hiking and camping were both physically and spiritually beneficial. He was one of the many philosophers of the era who tied human well-being to the conservation movement and the preservation of wilderness areas. Eastman's work with the YMCA, and as a teacher of Native life to the youths who vacationed at his girls' camp, led him to endorse the Boy Scout and Camp Fire Girl organizations. Most of his books targeted young people and paid special attention to converting that which whites viewed in Native life as pure savagery into something positive. He was at his best in doing so with the publication of *Indian Scout Talks* in 1914.

Eastman's main thrust in *Indian Scout Talks* was to take the contemporary image of the Native American warrior as the antithesis of white American

manhood and recast it as the actual prototype of the white ideal. Eastman's ideas were seemingly Cooperesque in that he always supported the romantic and nostalgic side of the conservation movement. But instead of thinking of conservation as a method of saving America's natural resources for future use, Eastman viewed conservation as something much more meaningful in a spiritual sense. The underlying theme of most of his many monographs hinged on the notion that the same things that were jeopardizing the American pioneering spirit—urbanization and industrialization—were the same things that were putting Native Americans' physical and spiritual health at risk (Eastman, *Soul of the Indian*; "The Indian's Health Problem").

*Indian Scout Talks* essentially outlines the ethos of warriorhood, an ethos that was very likely an underlying foundation of youthful male behavior in nearly every cooperative, traditional society that owed its particular identity to a specific place or territory. Eastman's scout was in many ways an Edward Curtis photograph depicting a handsome young man in profile looking out over a vast landscape with his right hand planted on his brow, shading his eyes from the sun. But more importantly and accurately, Eastman's scout was not only far-seeing in every sense of the word, but also self-sufficient, knowledgeable, resourceful, proud, athletic, indispensable to society, caring, and absolutely trustworthy. The Indian scout's duty was patiently to seek out both the game animals and the enemies of the people. The scout had to report honestly where the food resources were and on the movements of the enemy; the safety and the prosperity of the people rested directly on the shoulders of the scout. He also had to be a hunter as well as a warrior.

Eastman expanded on the positive side of the image of the Indian scout in his work. He was not, however, its inventor. The stereotype of the Indian scout not only is long-standing but also has become a true American icon. The image of a Native warrior gazing fixedly into the distance (with one hand shading his eyes), or walking with head bent and eyes to the ground searching for signs of game or the enemy, or lying prone staring at an approaching enemy on the crest of a hill, is easily recognizable and needs no further explanation as to the warrior's occupation. The terminology "Indian scout" is equally recognizable and conjures up in the American mind these same vivid images. In short, the image and term are fixed and inseparably connected.

The icon is nearly as old as the European invasion of the Americas, but by and large it held a negative connotation for most of the 500-odd years of Native-white contact. European and Native American warfare could not have been more dissimilar. European warfare was aggressive, confrontational, and intended to slaughter an enemy's military forces in a decisive battle. Native American warfare, on the other hand, was ritualized, restrained, and did not usually result in a high mortality rate on the battlefield. What made the Native American way of war so repugnant to Europeans was that Natives typically avoided decisive battle and limited warfare to smallish raids and even smaller ambushes. Much of Native warfare emphasized the taking of



A European man standing among four Indians scouts, 1907. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

captives to replace deceased members of the tribe or to frighten the whites away from sacred places or out of their national domains.

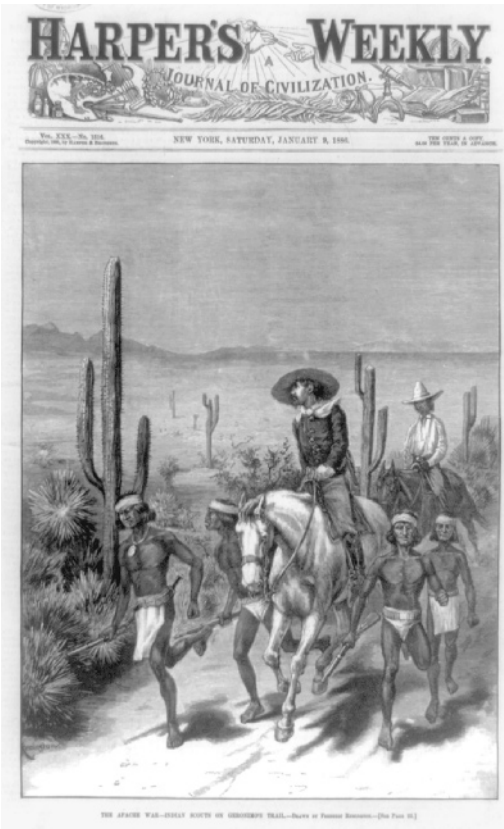
In order to conduct surprise raids or to set up an effective ambush, a military force had to effect surprise and concentration of force at the correct time and place. This unit (whether raiding party or ambushing force) would need to have a good idea of an enemy's movements and a correct assessment of the enemy's strength. The scout had to be able to deliver a detailed picture of the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whites called Native scouts "spies" and dubbed Native methods of combat the "skulking" way of war, terms far more negative in the European mind than "warrior" or "restrained warfare." The skulking way of war was supposedly an anathema in contrast to European methods of combat. Europeans stood their ground and fought face-to-face battles; Indians hid behind trees and attacked from ambush. When defeated in a pitched battle, European officers surrendered their swords honorably; Indians simply ran away, living to fight another day. Europeans treated prisoners of war according to certain well-established rules; Indians scalped or tortured their captives. Europeans met on a field of battle; Indians raided unsuspecting settlers. Europeans were soldiers, implying that they followed orders and were well-grounded in a strictly defined code of honor; Indians were warriors and, thus, savages without honor (Malone; Starkey).

The problem was that whites were caught in a dilemma. Although they disliked Native tactics and stealth, they also realized that to fight in the New World required them to adapt to the terrain and to Native combat in general.

To do so the whites employed Native auxiliaries in the New World, recruiting them by exploiting traditional enmities between two or more Native nations. Moreover, the British developed a colonial militia system that utilized the woodcraft of the white hunters in warfare, and Native American tactics served the Americans well during the Revolutionary War. By the nineteenth century the term “scout” was primarily used to describe the function of white frontiersmen who operated with the American armed forces, militia or regular, against Native enemies, the British, and others. And when the wars erupted between Natives and whites in the far west, the Indian scout became increasingly essential to the opening of the gold fields, the range cattle industry, and the railroads. In 1866 for the first time ever, Congress passed an act that allowed the U.S. Army to recruit, arm, and enlist Native Americans in the newly created Scouting Service. No longer would the United States rely on Indian allies to fulfill the military roles of scouts; Indians would be part of the American military service in a special branch (Dunlay).

After the Scouting Service was established, four Native units in particular became especially famous. The first was the Pawnee battalion that served under the leadership of Colonel Frank North. The Pawnees essentially fought their traditional Lakota and Cheyenne enemies, and by doing so protected the laying of the first transcontinental railroad. The Seminole-Negro scouts were enlisted against the Apaches, Comanches, and Kiowas in Texas. On the northern plains the Crow and Arikara scouts led the Army against the uprising of the Lakota and Cheyenne in 1876. Crow scouts warned Custer against attacking the Lakota at the Little Big Horn River but he, headstrong as ever, refused to heed their caution. Several Arikara scouts died in the sanguinary battle that was ultimately Custer’s last folly. The Apache scouts were perhaps the most famous of all the Indian scouting units. They were, of course, the main force that tracked down and cornered Geronimo, and for many years they were called to and from active duty. Some of the Apache scouts, without whom it might be said Arizona could not have become a state, were actually incarcerated due to the fact that they were Apaches and potentially hostile to the United States. However, when General John Pershing led an American expeditionary force into Mexico in 1916 to hunt down Pancho Villa, he enlisted a group of Apache scouts. When the United States entered World War I the next year, Pershing, as the commander of the American forces, took the Apache scouts with him to France (Holm, “Stereotypes, . . .”).

The Army Indian Scouting Service was not disbanded until 1943, and the last Apache scout, Sergeant William Major, retired from the Army in 1948. But its exploits were legendary in the military service, and when the Army Special Forces was formed during World War II it adopted the crossed-arrow insignia of the Scouting Service as its own. In many ways the “Green Berets” view their highly trained unit as the direct descendent of the Indian Scouts. During its seventy-seven years of life, the Indian Scouting Service received more decorations for valor per capita than any other Army unit. Sixteen Native



An engraving from *Harper's Weekly* of Indian scouts on Geronimo's trail during the Apache War. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

American members of the Scouts won the Medal of Honor (Holm, "Scouts"; Downey and Jacobson).

Perhaps more important was a lasting image of the Indian Scout in the non-Indian military mind: the Indian scout was the ultimate primitive warrior, so in tune with the natural environment that he could determine whether or not an enemy was present in the area by a bent blade of grass or an overturned rock. Supposedly the Indian scout could track an opposing force and tell from the circumstantial evidence of its spoor how many individuals were in it, what weaponry it carried, how long ago it had passed, and where it was heading.

In my study of Native American Vietnam veterans conducted by both questionnaire and interview over several years, I found a single combat experience common to a majority of the men who had experienced combat. This particular practice was known as "walking point." In this tactical maneuver, a single person, or perhaps two people, are sent out to walk in advance of a main unit on the move, or of a small patrol. The point man was essentially a scout who was expected to detect and report immedi-

ately the presence of the enemy. Not only was the position dangerous but also it required a good deal of stealth, knowledge, and a certain awareness of one's surroundings. Whole units of long-range reconnaissance personnel existed in Vietnam, and apparently a number of Native Americans were assigned to them (Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*).

Several of the veterans surveyed and interviewed stated flatly that they were assigned to perform reconnaissance duties or walk point because they were Indians. What I have called the "Indian Scout Syndrome" has infected non-Indians for a considerable period of time. During World War I, *The Indian's Friend*, a newsletter dedicated to the assimilation of Native peoples into mainstream American society, proudly but more than a bit ironically reported: "Indians in the regiments are being used for scouting and patrol duty because of the *natural instinct* [emphasis added] which fits them for this kind of work." After the United States entered World War II, the media exploited the Indian Scout Syndrome for propaganda purposes. Harold Ickes, the

Secretary of the Interior under Franklin Roosevelt, in the popular magazine *Collier's* touted "the fact that [the Indian] is one of our best fighters":

The inherited talents of the Indian make him uniquely valuable. He has endurance, rhythm, a feeling for timing, co-ordination, sense perception, an uncanny ability to get over any sort of terrain at night, and better than all else, an enthusiasm for fighting. He takes a rough job and makes a game of it. Rigors of combat hold no terrors for him; severe discipline and hard duties do not deter him. (58)

Little wonder that when many Natives reported to their units in Vietnam they quickly encountered the syndrome. One Native veteran was told to walk point because his platoon commander reasoned that Indians had "grown up in the woods" and would therefore be familiar with the forest (jungle) terrain of Vietnam. Although he had tried to explain to his platoon commander that he had in fact been brought up in an urban area, he was nevertheless assigned the point position. A Navajo veteran was caught up in the same dangerous predicament because, as he described, he was "stereotyped by the cowboys and Indian movies. Nicknamed 'Chief' right away. Non-Indians claimed Indians could see through trees and hear the unhearable. Bullshit, they even believed Indians could walk on water" (qtd. in Holms, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls* 152).

In short, the supposed virtues of the "Indian scout" have been indelibly imprinted on the American mind. On the other hand, bravery in battle, stealth, and a tenacious fighting spirit are equally the dubious qualities of the savage Indian warrior. A scout/warrior dialectic might be the more appropriate terminology to apply in discussing this iconology. Be that as it may, the icon certainly has led to some negative outcomes. For example, the scout stereotype undoubtedly placed very real Native Americans in extremely perilous positions. Whether infiltrating German lines during World War I or walking point on patrols in Vietnam, Native Americans faced the dangers of being killed, captured, or wounded perhaps to a greater extent than their non-Indian comrades in arms. Native Americans have, on a per capita basis, suffered more casualties in war than any other American ethnic group. Whether or not this casualty rate correlates with taking on highly dangerous duties as a result of commanders' applying a stereotype to war-making remains to be investigated. It would certainly be an interesting study.

The continued "Indian mascot" controversy has elements of the scout/warrior dichotomy. When defending the retention of these harmful and degrading stereotypes to promote various sports teams at the high school, college, and professional levels, most people normally and without hesitation stipulate that they are honoring American Indians for their battlefield virtues. In essence, they are utilizing the Indian scout icon as model of valor, honesty, and tenacity, and very likely believe that they are truly idolizing Native American people (King and Springwood). In fact, they are twisting the icon into a celebration of warfare and the conquest of the Americas.



The scout icon establishes the idea of “savage virtue” in combat. The word “Indian” is, of course, an invented term; and because Europeans were its inventors, they have defined it in any way they pleased (Berkhofer). The “Indian” represented the wilderness that was to be overcome. The Indian scout/warrior was seen as a savage foe who abducted “helpless” women, murdered white babies, treacherously ambushed stout-hearted soldiers, and toasted hapless frontiersmen over bonfires. In that sense the Indian scout/warrior was an especially dangerous enemy because he knew his environment. That he was stealthy and tenacious as well simply confirmed in the American mind that the conquest of America was a vast blood sacrifice. Conquering both the Indian as the icon of the wilderness and the Indian scout as the embodiment of “savage virtue” in battle is part of the American identity. When Americans honor the mascots, which are of course simple stereotypes of the Indian scout, they are glorifying their own military prowess and celebrating the American frontiersman’s sacrifice to civilization. They are engaging in a dialectic that makes no sense except in the colonial discourse on the right of conquest.

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# Martin Luther King, Jr.

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*Ricky L. Jones*

Many contend the true legacy of slain American civil rights icon Martin Luther King, Jr., must be continuously revisited and reevaluated as we settle into the twenty-first century so that the true mission of his life is preserved. Of course, the same is also true of titans such as Frederick Douglass. It is so, according to some, because on that fateful day in Memphis when King was killed a man died and a misleading image was born. At the instant King the man died from the impact of an assassin's bullet in 1968, a facsimile, an imitation, a deformed "it" was constructed and has been sold to the American public until this day. To be sure, it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the two. Instead, we should remember the liberating man, and destroy the oppressive myth.

Let me be clear at the outset. When I speak of destroying a myth, I am not advocating sully or denouncing King in any way. To the contrary, I love King. As a student at Morehouse College, I walked by King's statue which towers in front of King Chapel on our campus daily. There he stood, that bold, proud Morehouse Man from the Class of 1948 with outstretched hand—pointing the people towards freedom. Here is the man whom Morehouse Men still consider the best the school has ever produced (and Morehouse has graduated many great men). He is our model, our standard, our torch bearer, our candle in the dark. Therefore, I affirm without hesitation that this man was no oppressor of the people, but the dominant image of him most often encountered today most certainly is. I cannot make this point better than Michael Eric Dyson does in *I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.*:

Since his death, we have made three mistakes in treating King's legacy.

First, we have sanitized his *ideas*, ignoring his mistrust of white America, his commitment to black solidarity and advancement, and the radical message of his later life. Today right-wing conservatives can quote King's speeches in order to criticize affirmative action, while schoolchildren grow up learning only about the great pacifist, not the hard-nosed critic of economic injustice.

Second, we have twisted his *identity* and lost the chance to connect the man's humanity, including his flaws, to the young people of today, especially our despised black youth.

Finally we have ceded control of his *image* to a range of factions that include the right, the federal government and its holiday, and even the King family themselves, who have attempted to collect a fee for nearly every word the great man gave the world. (ix-x)

The appropriation of King by the religious and political right, inside as well as outside the race, has resulted in a repackaged effigy that is used to anaesthetize the people whenever trouble comes and resistance tactics beyond increasingly ineffectual protest marches, sit-ins, and emotive but nonsubstantive prayers are proffered. Disturbingly, the passive image of King has been adopted by many who do not have the best interests of oppressed people at heart. These people, not all of whom are white, are quick to trot out this portrait of King when the dispossessed rightfully protest their treatment in increasingly conservative America. At these times, "image pimps" across lines of race disapprovingly admonish the weary masses, "Remember the Dreamer—he would not have approved of this."

Sadly, some of the worst exploiters of King are today's black ministers. The very ones who should reinforce King's ideals are now exploiting them

without any real commitment to the construction of a truly egalitarian society. It is not unusual to go into black churches whose conservative ministers routinely invoke King's name, but have very little dedication to progressive sociopolitical agendas of the sort which King sacrificed his life defending. In their churches one may find newsletters and magazines entitled "The Dreamer" or "The Drum Major" which remind us of King, but do not continue his mission. These men demand consistent tithing and offerings from their members and guests to sustain lavish personal lifestyles, while never acknowledging that King unselfishly only took a salary of one dollar a year from the SCLC, which he helped found following the historic Montgomery bus boycott. Unfortunately, many



Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering a speech at Girard College, Philadelphia, 1965. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ministers do not stop there. A good percentage of them are now all too ready to jump on the right-wing, self-help bandwagon which blames blacks for their own suffering.

Ironically, many of these men, who often lead comfortable lives as a result of the financial contributions of their usually struggling black flocks, now admonish blacks to “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.” They forget, do not know, or will not acknowledge, that King commented on such an ideology in one of his lesser known sermons, “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution”:

Now there is another myth that still gets around: it is a kind of overreliance on the bootstrap philosophy. There are those who still feel that if the Negro is to rise out of poverty, if the Negro is to rise out of slum conditions, if he is to rise out of discrimination and segregation, he must do it all by himself. And so they say the Negro must lift himself by his own bootstraps.

They never stop to realize that no other ethnic group has been a slave on American soil. The people who say this never stop to realize that the nation made a black man's color a stigma; but beyond this they never stop to realize the debt that they owe a people who were kept in slavery 244 years. . . . It's all right to tell a man to lift himself by his own bootstraps, but it is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps. (271)

Since King's death, black religious leadership has become, in many respects, disproportionately strong in the black community. While some religious leaders do commendable work in certain areas, many have also developed an infectious, arrogant aversion to question and challenge, which black communities, more often than not, support. Critiques of black ministers are difficult to levy, because followers fear—and ministers often threaten their critics with—damnation. If the case involves misbehavior on the ministers' part, pleas for forgiveness—accompanied by reminders that some of God's favorites (including Moses, David, and, yes, King) were also flawed—are submitted. Without ever seriously addressing the concerns of the community, use of such emotive tools to diffuse accusations of ministerial malfeasance is powerful. The sad cases of the adulterous behavior of former National Baptist Convention President Henry Lyons and Rainbow/Push leader Jesse Jackson, and black people's general reluctance to hold them accountable are examples of this indulgence.

Of course, a large part of black ministers' power is a result of the historical reality of black suffering itself. It makes perfect sense that a race which has endured such a drudgerous existence would develop the idea that a better life awaits after death as a coping mechanism. In this progression, the black minister has come to be regarded as the unquestioned intermediary to God, and to challenge him is simply not acceptable. It is undeniable that far too many ministers have given Marx's observation that religion is the “opium of the masses” some modicum of validity.

King's impact on black people has also paved the way for a number of other realities which are rarely connected to him. While black ministers have always been powerful in the black community, King's feats moved their places to even more solid ground. For many in black America, having the title Reverend precede one's name is a prerequisite for leadership. It is also an almost absolute assurance of the unquestioned submission of the masses. A number of rather crafty fellows have parlayed this free reign in the community into small empires of which they are lord and master.

The best example of this phenomenon is the black religious-business hybrid—the mega-church. We see the rise of such entities in cities where there is a black population large enough to sustain them. Unfortunately, along with size, power, and influence, mega-churches (like any other business) also carry with them voracious appetites for economic resources which must be fed. Over time, the mega-church extends itself to the point that tithes and love-offerings can no longer sustain it, and outside support must be sought. While business (fundraising, institutional expansion, etc.) has always been an aspect of the black church, in many ways black mega-churches *are* businesses and their leaders, therefore necessarily, become businessmen. Once such a transition is made, these ministers often lose the authenticity and sincerity of their external place as moral critics because they enter the fray for money and power which sustains the capitalist state. Smaller church ministers are often critical of their colleagues' behavior, but many of them would jump at the opportunity to join their ranks if it were possible.

A good percentage of the African-descended population in America acknowledges that, unlike King, many ministers have become little more than demagogues who prey on black suffering without substantive defiance from the masses. A few black ministers have even been able to follow the leads of Billy Graham and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker by transforming themselves into traveling entertainers or nationally viewed television personalities. They use their television shows, more often than not, as mediums to peddle video and audio tapes and to advertise the location of their next "road show" stop. The meteoric rise of Bishop T. D. Jakes and his marketing empire is the best example of this. Jakes is certainly not alone. While no minister may be quite so popular, Fred Price, Creflo Dollar, Eddie Long, and others enjoy varying degrees of regional and national success.

Unfortunately, most of these men provide a hyper-frenzied brand of entertainment rather than education. More importantly, they do not promote any type of liberatory theology which powerfully addresses hegemonic sociopolitical structures, in the tradition of Albert Cleage, James Cone, or Martin Luther King, Jr. Contrarily, not only do they not push radical agendas, they are often staunch conservatives in the vein of Clarence Thomas, Ward Connerly, Alan Keyes, and Armstrong Williams. Unlike Thomas, Connerly, Keyes, and Williams, black ministers are able to mask their conservatism in religious rhetoric with God supposedly giving it his stamp of

approval. The messages of former National Baptist Convention leader Joseph H. Jackson and Opportunities Industrial Centers founder Reverend Leon Sullivan are examples of this trend.

In this madness, the real Martin Luther King, Jr., is lost. He has been reduced to a few utopian, out-of-context words taken from the "I Have a Dream" speech of 1963. Lost is the intellectual King who studied Marx, Neibuhr, Hobbes, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Thoreau, Nietzsche, and Ghandi and could engage their theories cogently and clearly. Lost is the rational, critical King who saw undirected emotionalism in the church as counterproductive. Lost is the warrior King who got angry and screamed that he was tired of marching and fighting for rights which should already be his. Lost is the political King who proclaimed that America had become the world's most intrusive imperial power. Lost is the revolutionary King whom the U.S. government considered the most dangerous black man in America, before Malcolm X presented a more radical variation on the same theme. Lost is King the lover of the people who died working for the rights of sanitation workers, not building a new wing onto his church or laundering Republican grant money through a 501c3 development corporation! What we are left with now is a false image of King which cripples and confuses.

To add fuel to this fire, as we begin the twenty-first century, many of our political and civil rights leaders continue to be little more than black preachers painted onto different canvases. While ministers like King have a long legacy of participating in the black freedom struggle beyond the walls of the church, the current crop is akin to traveling showmen who get paid well for their performances. Most of their appearances usually amount to little more than taking the sermonic tone and tactics used in the pulpit to secular venues. In the final analysis, most of these people deliver no serious challenge to the hegemonic structures which continue to oppress people of color and the poor. It is difficult to deny that men like Jesse Jackson, whom many in the black community correctly label "opportunistic," continuously travel to different sites of trouble, give stirring speeches/sermons, and may even lead a march or two.

Incredibly, in the midst of the crises which summon them, they always seem to have time to take healthy financial offerings from the masses that come out to be encouraged. Ultimately, these men offer little, if any, viable instruction or support for the organizing of sustained oppositional struggles by the people. Maybe the title of one of Jackson's books, coauthored with his son, says it best when questions are raised concerning many of these new-age ministers' primary motivation—*It's About the Money!* Where is Martin when we need him?

If we are to move forward with any liberatory sociopolitical agenda, we must always remember that it is detrimental to allow the greatest men and women America has given the world be used against us, and that is exactly what is happening to King. The sooner we rediscover the *real* King and reject his oppressive, posthumous doppelganger, the better.

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# Evel Knievel

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*Randy D. McBee*

Extreme sports—skateboarding, inline skating, BMX riding, surfing, wakeboarding, and freestyle motorcycle riding—have taken the country by storm over the past few years. The intricate twists, flips, and gravity-defying stunts and jumps competitors perform no doubt help explain the sports' growth and popularity. But that inexplicable need to push the body to unimaginable limits, that incomprehensible desire to flirt with danger, are not as new as some enthusiasts may have assumed. Extreme sports, which began with motorcycle jumping, date back to at least the 1960s and early 1970s; and only one man is generally identified with the sport—Evel Knievel.

Knievel's first public jump took place in 1965 as part of a publicity stunt to increase sales of Honda motorcycles at his dealership in Moses Lake, Washington. As the story goes, Knievel attempted to jump a distance of forty feet over two mountain lions and a wooden pen filled with rattlesnakes. Knievel fell short of the 40-foot mark, and the motorcycle smashed open the pen of snakes, which sent them slithering towards the frightened spectators. During the decade and a half after his less than spectacular start, Knievel would attempt more than 300 jumps, spend countless numbers of days in the hospital recovering from his often near-fatal injuries, but also thrill and captivate millions of men, women, and children across the country and around the world.

The excitement and energy of motorcycle jumping, the thrill of the spectacle, and the never-ending potential for a deadly outcome all contributed to Knievel's popularity. But his fame was as much a product of his behavior off his bike as it was a reflection of his daredevil stunts. Between the time when Knievel first attracted national attention until his retirement, U.S. involvement in Vietnam would escalate sharply, the Civil Rights Movement became overshadowed by Black Power, and the gay and women's liberation movements spread across the country. Never one to shy away from conflict, Knievel quickly became embroiled in the controversy surrounding these movements, and in some cases bitterly attacked them. While his comments often attracted the scorn of the media, they also help explain his popularity as



growing numbers of Americans shared his concerns about the changes taking place. The 1970s may have been a decade when Americans, consumed by disillusionment, despair, and distrust in national leadership, walked away from the social and political movements of the preceding decades in search of their own individual fulfillment. But the decade of the 1970s was not without its own energy and enthusiasm, and for some its own heroes. In this case their hero was not a politician or an activist but a man who wore a leather jumpsuit and made his living performing death-defying motorcycle jumps.

By 1967 Knievel was working full time as a stuntman, and he was beginning to attract national attention. During that year he attempted to leap over the fountains at Caesar's Palace. Knievel cleared the fountains but botched the landing. The resulting crash and injuries sent him to the hospital where he slipped into a coma for twenty-nine days. It was also in 1967 that Knievel set a new record by successfully jumping over fifteen cars at the Ascot Park Speedway in Gardena, outside Los Angeles, which ABC's *Wide World of Sports* filmed and aired a few weeks later. ABC's *Wide World of Sports* established a format that featured the unusual mix of high-profile boxing championships and other typical sporting contests with less traditional events like arm wrestling, rodeos, demolition derbies, ski jumping, and even chess. Knievel's daredevil antics fit well with the show's format; and throughout his career, he often appeared on ABC. In fact, his 1975 jump over fifteen Greyhound busses at Kings Mills, Ohio, remains *Wild World of Sports*' highest-rated broadcast in the show's history.

After Knievel attracted national fame, he began showing up on talk shows and on magazine covers, and imitators became all too common. By the early 1970s, other men and some women were joining the ranks of the motorcycle daredevil, and Knievel's claim to fame as the greatest was increasingly difficult to sustain. Men like Super Joe Einhorn, Wicked Ward, Gary Wells, and even Debbie Lawler, the single female stunt cyclist to attract national attention, became serious contenders, and in some cases surpassed Knievel's best efforts. To the dismay and alarm of parents, many of their children also began attempting their own daredevil stunts, generally with a makeshift ramp constructed out of wooden boards and bricks. The resulting injuries ranged from the minor cuts and bruises to more serious broken bones, lacerations, and concussions, causing parents and politicians alike to campaign to ban Knievel's stunts from being aired on television. Knievel's influence was so profound that one biographer claims that the slogan "don't try this at home" was coined in response to the scores of children attempting to impersonate Knievel.

By the early 1970s, manufacturers also began to produce toys based on the wily stuntman. In 1973 Knievel paired up with Ideal Toy Corporation and produced an Evel "Movable Figure" and a wind up "Stunt Cycle." The Evel figure stood seven inches high, had a hard plastic head and a removable plastic helmet, and came with a red, white or blue outfit. The "Stunt Cycle" was wound up with what was called a "Gyro-Powered Energizer." Before



Evel Knievel jumps over six Mack trucks at dragway 42 in Cleveland, Ohio, on May 28, 1974. AP/Wide World Photo.

long, Knievel was blasting across kitchen floors and down driveways and sidewalks in houses and neighborhoods across the country. The Evel “Figure” and “Stunt Cycle” quickly became one of the hottest toys on the market; its sales even surpassed those of the famous GI Joe. Other Evel-inspired toys started showing up on store shelves across the country, including the Knievel “Scramble Van,” the Canyon Sky Cycle, a Stunt and Crash Car, a Formula One Dragster, the Escape From Skull Canyon play set, and the Evel Knievel Artic Explorer set.

Knievel’s popularity, however, was not simply the product of his ability to jump great distances or his being the first stuntman to appear on the national stage. He attained his fame, in part, because he survived and because of his ability to endure the pain and violence of motorcycle jumping. By the early 1970s, Knievel was fighting to maintain his title as the greatest stuntman alive, but many of the individuals who surpassed him had either been killed or physically incapacitated. Knievel not only continued to jump, but also his crashes and the injuries he sustained became the focal point around which the myth of Knievel took shape. Stories about Knievel’s daredevil stunts routinely focused on his hospital exploits, often on the quality of the food he found at hospitals and the quality (or looks) of the nurses assigned to his care, but including specific details surrounding his injuries and the difficulty doctors had faced putting him back together. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Knievel was routinely compared to a host of personalities and fictional characters like Elvis Presley, Liberace, Paul Bunyan, Captain Ahab, Robert Mitchum, Jack London, Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, and Jesus Christ,

to name a few. But he was also known as the man of steel or referred to as Superman, attesting both to the degree of complication surrounding his injuries and his ability to withstand any kind of punishment. In fact, no sooner had Knievel crashed onto the scene, than the myth of breaking every bone in his body surfaced. Knievel's critics dismissed the claim as preposterous, and by Knievel's own count the number of bones he broke was thirty-seven. But the myth of breaking every bone in his body was such an integral part of the public's consciousness about Knievel that it survived.

Knievel was also politically brash and provocative. Knievel often referred to himself as a modern day P. T. Barnum and dismissed the idea that he was nothing more than a stuntman. He was a pioneer, a frontiersman, pushing man and machine to new heights regardless of the risks involved and the potential for injury. Yet Knievel was simultaneously looking backwards. Knievel came to prominence against the backdrop of the gay and women's liberation movements and amidst growing opposition to the war in Vietnam, and he was never shy about making his opposition apparent. His interviews, press conferences, and the speeches he gave before and after attempted jumps were laced with numerous references to religion and God, involved plenty of flag-waving and appeals to patriotism, and included tirades against drugs and support for "law and order." By the early 1970s, Knievel was also becoming known for his verbal attacks against Jews, Native Americans, Italians, Poles, gays, lesbians, and especially feminism, which in 1974 he described as a "bunch of horseshit." Indeed, as growing numbers of American men and women were asking pointed questions about men's behavior, Knievel was routinely boasting about his taste for Wild Turkey Bourbon, his love of hunting and other dangerous sports, his penchant for violence and his various brawls with other bikers, hippies, and an occasional reporter, as well as his numerous sexual exploits, which he claimed involved over six hundred women.

The controversy surrounding race in the late 1960s and 1970s also shaped the public's adoration for Knievel. During this period, the press frequently made comparisons between Knievel and Muhammad Ali, comparisons that led to debates about which one had the larger ego, who was the loudest braggart, whose respective box office draw was the most significant, and which of the two deserved the claim to fame as "the greatest." Comparisons became so common that a savvy promoter picked up on the controversy and attempted to organize a fight between Ali and Knievel. The promoter, who remained anonymous, was prepared to offer a \$10 million, winner-take-all prize for the match, if Evel and Ali agreed to a genuine fight. The pair would be allowed to establish their own ring rules, although the promoter felt that a bare-knuckle fight would be better than gloves and that kicking should be allowed to offset Ali's boxing skill, even though Knievel had described himself as an expert in street fighting. Knievel had apparently agreed to discuss the match, but Ali refused to take the idea seriously.

Comparing Knievel to Ali undoubtedly reflected Ali's status as the heavy-weight champion, a status that for decades had stood as the ultimate

expression of sporting talent, brute strength, and stamina. Yet Knievel's rise to fame coincided with whites' growing fears about the African American male athlete, who by the 1960s had become a dominant force in major league sports and who was openly challenging the racism he faced as an athlete and as an American; the most notable example was Ali, who attracted national scorn for his opposition to the Vietnam war and for joining the Nation of Islam. These growing concerns led white Americans to search for an explanation for this athletic supremacy, and to begin what appeared to be a renewed search for a "white hope." Knievel's claim to greatness and the constant comparisons with Ali were not simply a challenge to Ali as a formidable athlete. They were a challenge to Ali as an African American man who had boldly defied his station in society, and ultimately a challenge to the values Ali represented to other African American men and women across the country, during a time of intense divisiveness over race and over the meaning of equality in the United States.

Knievel's popularity did have its limits, however, and those limits were exposed when he tried to jump a little-known canyon in Idaho in 1974. During the late 1960s, Knievel first began to talk about jumping over the Grand Canyon. That jump would never materialize because of opposition from the federal government, forcing Knievel to settle for Idaho's Snake River Canyon. The jump would eventually take place in September 1974; and, instead of a motorcycle, Knievel attempted the jump on what became known as his Sky Cycle. The Sky Cycle was a steam-powered rocket that in theory was expected to shoot to a height of 3,000 feet at nearly 400 miles per hour. Once it reached this height, Knievel was supposed to pull a lever and release the parachute system, which would gently float the Sky Cycle to the ground and to the other side of the Canyon. Unfortunately for Knievel, the parachute prematurely released before the rocket cleared the tower. The rocket only reached a height of about 1,000 feet and then floated down into the near side of the Canyon, barely missing the river below. Knievel emerged only slightly bruised (except perhaps for his ego) and with only superficial scrapes to his face. Knievel had failed to complete his jumps on numerous previous occasions; despite those failures, there had been little doubt that he had given his best and that the jump and his intentions were genuine. Press reports about the Snake River Canyon jump were largely negative, and the jump was dismissed as a rip-off.

The fiasco at the Snake River Canyon marked the beginning of the end of the golden age of motorcycle jumping. By the mid 1970s, Knievel was beginning to have trouble finding promoters, and the public was quickly losing interest in these daredevil stunts, despite Knievel's best efforts to tantalize them. In the latter 1970s, for example, he proposed to jump between the towers at the World Trade Center, and came up with the idea of jumping out of a plane at 40,000 feet without a parachute (or a motorcycle) and then landing into one of thirteen hay bales.

A number of reasons might explain the public's waning interest in Knievel. But Americans were growing tired of Knievel just as they were losing interest in

the need for someone like Knievel. In other words, fascination with the stuntman was beginning to dissipate just as the political and social movements that helped define Knievel's public persona were subsiding or seemingly disappearing altogether. Knievel was not necessarily a product of these movements. But his popularity coincided with these struggles, and his anti-drug rhetoric, his patriotic style, his respect for the law, and his anti-gay diatribes and attacks against women's libbers and hippies spoke directly to a public growing frustrated with the pace of social and political change. That historic controversy and Knievel's daredevil antics left an indelible mark on the 1970s and help explain his enduring appeal as an icon.

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# Kodak Camera

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*Richard N. Masteller*

Consider disposable cameras. They have names like the Kodak “Fling” and “Fun Saver.” You can find them almost anywhere: in racks for impulse buying at grocery store checkouts, in pharmacies, in gas stations, in the caverns of big-box retailers selling everything from headphones to refrigerators, in fast-food restaurants at the beach, in “convenience” stores, hotel gift shops, and airport shopping malls. Disposable cameras became popular late in the twentieth century, and they all promised, in essence, what George Eastman first promised late in the nineteenth century: “You press the button, we do the rest.” In the twenty-first century, disposable digital cameras now appear beside disposable film cameras at drug store checkouts.

Over the decades between the first Kodak in 1888 and its most recent digital manifestation, billions of images have been framed and hung in “family rooms,” enshrined in photo albums, and stuffed into shoeboxes. The twenty-first-century equivalents of shoeboxes are digital memory cards, computer harddrives, and CD-ROMs. Given a variety of “storage media” and a glut of imagery, “disposability”—the option to “delete”—seems increasingly not only a convenience, but a necessity.

George Eastman’s Kodak camera first enabled this mass production of image-making: it brought popular, personal photography to the masses by enabling everyone—even a child—to become his or her own image-maker. As an icon of popular culture, the Kodak camera in fact helped to define that culture by certifying particular occasions as especially worth photographing: “Vacation Days are Kodak Days,” ran one advertising slogan. But we also learned that almost any event could be a “Kodak moment” or a “Kodak occasion”; on its Web site the Eastman Kodak Company now urges us to “Share Moments. Share Life.”

Briefly tracing the dissemination of Kodak cameras across the cultural landscape of twentieth-century life will indicate the extent of its diffusion and suggest its impact on taste-making. The iconic nature of the Kodak is apparent in books produced for avid collectors (Coe, Gilbert, Lothrop), as well as in numerous Web sites devoted to collecting and displaying various Kodak cameras, advertisements, and other ephemera. But the primary cultural sig-

nificance of the Kodak camera goes beyond the sheer number of different models that have carried the Kodak name for over a century and propelled the success of a major twentieth-century corporation. Because the Kodak as popular artifact spurred the act of photographing, the result was another popular artifact—the ubiquitous amateur photograph.

Tracing the Kodak camera as an icon leads inevitably, then, to questions about the iconic act of photography and to reflections about the significance of the billions of images that result—each the product of a single act, but each also resembling so many other photographs taken by the masses of largely untutored record-makers, who today can carry in their pockets sleek cameras no larger than a cigarette pack, and in some cases approaching the size of a credit card. Throughout its history, the Kodak camera has functioned on a variety of levels: as an aid to entertainment, as a means of fashioning memory, and even as a fashion statement itself. As Susan Sontag has argued in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the past is more likely to come alive for us these days not through stories we hear or read, but through photographs we see (89). The Kodak camera and counterparts produced by competing corporations gave millions of people a means of capturing a trace of reality beyond the lens, but they were also able to edit and revise that reality in ways that reveal and fulfill their own desires. Ostensibly a device for recording reality, the Kodak is equally significant as a tool of the imagination.

When George Eastman announced his Kodak camera in 1888, he stressed the simplicity of the photographic process: “you press the button, we do the rest.” The Kodak was easily portable; it could be held in one’s hand and weighed about 1½ pounds. It was bought already loaded with a roll of film that would take 100 circular photographs 2½ inches in diameter. When the roll was fully exposed, the camera was returned to the factory, where the photographs were developed and printed on cards roughly 4 × 5 inches and where the camera was reloaded with fresh film before being returned to the owner. The Kodak camera, together with its first roll of film, cost \$25; processing the exposed film and loading new film cost another \$10.



George Eastman, 1926. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

In her excellent *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, Nancy West has suggested that this initial Kodak was too expensive to democratize photography. The cost, she suggests, was roughly equivalent to \$400 in early-twenty-first-century prices, and only a little over 10,000 Kodak No. 1 and No. 2 cameras were manufactured from 1888 through 1890 (23–24). But innovations were rapid and ongoing. The production of the \$5 Pocket Kodak announced in 1895 led to

production runs of 25,000 a year from 1895 to 1900, and the Folding Pocket Kodak of 1898, weighing only eight ounces and selling for \$10, could literally be pocketed, thus anticipating by a century the portability of the latest digital cameras (24, 51). By the turn of the last century, Kodak had produced some thirty-five different camera models for public consumption.

As West suggests, to promote amateur photography Eastman Kodak marketed its invention as a toy. While production figures increased each year during the 1890s, it was the Brownie camera of 1900, marketed explicitly to children and their parents, that accelerated and assured the democratization of photography. Costing \$1 and recording six pictures on a roll of film that cost fifty cents to buy and develop, over 150,000 Brownies were sold within the year in England and America (75). In “The Wizard of Photography,” a television documentary tracing the career of George Eastman, one commentator suggested that Eastman well knew what he was doing with the Brownie campaign: he hoped to capture the young and turn them into full-fledged Kodak junkies as they grew up. The success of the Brownie was crucial, not only because it enhanced the dispersion and influence of the Kodak name and helped promote the Kodak habit, but also because it put the practice of photography into the hands of the masses.

Ancillary industries and marketing mechanisms accompanied this democratization. The Montgomery Ward catalog of 1900 contained an ad for photo belt buckles, photo watch charms, and photo garter belts, announcing, “It is now quite a fad for the ladies to wear the picture of a favored one on her garter” (Masteller 1209). Whereas personal albums in the nineteenth century were frequently leather-bound, gilt-edged tomes with brass corners and



A young girl takes a picture of her doll with a new Kodak camera, 1917. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



elaborate clasps, containing stiff ornamented pages with specially designed cut-outs for the insertion of standard size cartes-de-visite and cabinet photographs made in the photographer's studio, by the early twentieth-century albums were simpler and cheaper: on pages commonly black, one could use photo corners to arrange and attach rectangular photos of various dimensions and could buy additional pages to expand the album as photographs accumulated. In short, the democratization of photography occurred at the same time that companies like Sears and Montgomery Ward were learning the techniques of mass marketing and were seeking to create a public oriented toward consumption.

An ongoing, astute advertising campaign responding to current events throughout the twentieth century kept the Kodak habit in public consciousness. During World War I the small Vest Pocket Kodak was advertised as "the Soldier's Kodak." In the United States and in England soldiers heading to the battlefields of Europe were encouraged to "Make your own picture record of the War" (Coe and Gates 34). During the jazz age of the twenties, Kodak enlisted the talents of the prominent industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague to create the "Vanity Kodak" camera, essentially a Vest Pocket Kodak embossed with gold diagonal lines, dressed up in one of five fashionable color schemes—Bluebird (blue), Cockatoo (green), Jenny Wren (brown), Redbreast (red), and Sea Gull (gray)—and supplied in a matching carrying case lined with colored silk. Given the fickle fashions of the flapper, these streamlined Kodaks were not especially profitable items. By the mid-1930s Kodak reverted to predominately, always tasteful black, although Teague went on to design more successful "modern" looking cameras for the firm, notably the Baby Brownie of 1934, a camera molded of black plastic that sold for a Depression-era price of \$1, the same price as the original Brownie of 1900 (Coe and Gates 38–42).

In addition to competitive pricing and both cosmetic and substantive design innovations, Kodak used other strategies to keep its product in the public consciousness. Frequent ads appeared in popular magazines throughout the twentieth century. Young girls and women were particular targets, and the "Kodak girl" in her distinctive striped dress became a recurrent motif in Kodak ads from the first decade of the twentieth century into the 1970s (West 114–35). In the teens and twenties ads targeting boys suggested that learning and performing the operations of photography were particularly appropriate for future men of business and industry (West 101–4). From 1914 through 1932, Kodak published its own periodical *Kodakery*, containing the latest product news, advice for taking successful photographs, and examples of the work of amateur photographers. In the mid-1920s, Kodak sponsored a radio show titled *The Kodak Hour*.

An especially ingenious advertising campaign marked the fiftieth anniversary of the company in 1930. Kodak announced that it would distribute 500,000 free cameras to the "children of America" as a "nation-wide gift," and it was explicit about the two motives behind its munificence. One was

“*sentiment*”: the gift was to serve as “a token of appreciation to the grandparents and parents who for fifty years have played so important a part in the development of amateur picture-taking in America.” The Company wanted “to place in the hands of their children and grandchildren an . . . important educational and character-building force.” The other motive was “*business*”: the campaign was “a means of interesting hundreds of thousands more children in picture-taking. . . . For as amateur photography increases in popularity, the use of Kodak products will naturally increase with it.” The Company enlisted Mrs. Calvin Coolidge to explain further the higher goals of this campaign: “Instead of coming together to play games and eat ice cream and cake . . . each guest” at this anniversary party would receive a gift enabling him to “satisfy and develop his appreciation of the beautiful things of nature and make lasting records.” Thus, she explained, “he will be a guest at that delightful sort of party which never ends; and as the years pass he will be united with the other guests in a common interest” (Eastman Anniversary Camera).

Mrs. Coolidge’s testimonial, no doubt ghostwritten by an employee in Kodak’s advertising department, highlights some of the ideals that recurred throughout Kodak’s advertising campaigns in an effort to elevate the product beyond the status of a mere toy, ideals which help explain its popular appeal. A Kodak camera will elevate the sentiments by teaching one to appreciate beauty. It will document reality. It will arrest that reality, giving it longevity beyond the moment. Finally, “as the years pass”—indeed, despite the passage of years—it will reinforce community. Similar ideas appeared in the first user’s manual in the 1880s: “Photography is . . . brought within the reach of every human being who desires to preserve a record of what he sees. Such a photographic note book . . . enables the fortunate possessor to go back by the light of his own fireside to scenes which would otherwise fade from the memory and be lost” (Newhall 64). An idyllic ad from the 1950s reiterated the point more succinctly. It depicts mom in her tennis shoes standing on a lakeside dock photographing the rest of her nuclear family (father in the rowboat with his fishing rod, her two sons cheerfully holding up the catch of the day). The main caption reads, “With snapshots, the sun never sets on boyhood” (“Brownie Ads . . .”).

The Kodak became an icon in American culture, in short, not because the Eastman Kodak Company promoted a product, but because it promoted an idea—the idea of photography (West 25). The company’s astute advertising campaigns and promotions suggested that the act of photography could play—and even needed to play—a crucial role in a wide variety of activities. To that end Kodak worked to align their cameras with a panoply of events that constituted American life and leisure. Family occasions such as birthday parties, graduations, weddings, and anniversaries were obvious candidates for photographs. But even the earliest ad campaigns linked the camera with other leisure activities: camping, bicycling, and especially the burgeoning tourist industry. We were encouraged to evaluate a scene as a potential photograph, to judge it “as pretty as a picture,” including any “picturesque”

or “exotic” inhabitants thereof. By the middle of the last century, the ubiquitous role of the camera and the zeal with which Kodak promoted the idea of photography led the Company to this summary advice: “take your camera with you everywhere—for that’s where great snapshots are.”

The Kodak as icon fostered the iconic act of photography and created the photograph as artifact—a surrogate reality that was, in Kodak’s worldview, pleasant, worth remembering, and above all useful for establishing and reinforcing ideas of harmony, good fellowship, and community. At the turn into the twentieth century, the Kodak enabled the masses to create their own selective versions of reality, guided by Kodak’s advertisements. The assumption was that an innocuous world was ready for recording, and thousands of “family albums” seem to confirm that assumption. Of course, the serene idea behind Kodak’s campaigns—that “great snapshots” were “everywhere”—precluded certain kinds of images, and as the century and the practice of photography evolved, people began to create more personal albums and to record more carnivalesque moments that pushed against the boundaries or conventional norms of middle-class propriety (Holland 148). A “Kodak moment” more broadly conceived might include Mardi Gras in New Orleans, homecoming weekends in the fraternity, or snapshots of an annual reenactment of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

These days, amateur snapshotters once again include soldiers-in-arms, and while the iconic act of photographing pleasant events continues, the definition of pleasure is apparently evolving. The evidence from Iraq’s Abu Ghraib prison has once again reminded us of the predatory, aggressive language that permeates the photographic act: “capturing” the subject, “aiming” the camera, taking the shot. How can these images be understood as recording anyone’s “pleasant” moment? The photographic act here does more than document; it dehumanizes both the subjects and their captors, and one can speculate whether, over time, such images might also dehumanize their viewers, making them as callous as the photographers who posed their victims.

Such iconic images seem far removed from the sunlit world of mid-century Kodak advertisements or from contemporary ads touting digital cameras as fashion accessories. It appears that every moment can now indeed be a Kodak moment. But the array of imagery now so effortlessly available—you press the button, pixels do the rest—extends far beyond the conventions of decorum and decency that Kodak fostered when it promoted its first cameras. At the turn into the twenty-first century, as Kodak refashions itself and its cameras for the digital age, it and its contemporary competitors—Canon, Minolta, Nikon, Olympus, Panasonic, Sony—continue to sell cameras as aids to entertainment, aids to memory, and as fashion accessories in a culture of leisure and conspicuous consumption. The act of photography is deemed a natural act—easy, spontaneous, as necessary as breathing. The snapshot continues to show us ourselves as we fashion ourselves for the camera. We may now easily dispose of these selves—deleting whatever versions fail to please us. On the other hand, we may replicate them, worldwide, more

quickly than ever before. The digital Kodak as icon—and its cousins from other corporations—have made it easier than ever to fashion surrogate selves, or to capture fragments of the realities before us, or to give vent to the desires of our unfettered imaginations. But the evidence of the resulting images generates increasing distrust: can what we see in these images really be? Can we any longer believe our eyes? Is this really who we are? Can we—should we—dispose of the evidence?

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# Las Vegas

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*Lawrence E. Mintz*

As an American icon, Las Vegas has an identity that is as clear and definitive as any. Las Vegas is about “sin,” most evidently about gambling, sex, and self-indulgence in food, alcohol, and entertainment. Gambling, or as the industry euphemistically but ironically and correctly calls it, “gaming,” is not about accumulating wealth; it is about playing, and play itself in the American cultural tradition is “sinful” enough. Sex, too, is playful, in Las Vegas. It is more about the show, the quasi-public striptease than about actual sex. With the unlimited availability of good food and drink and good middlebrow entertainment, gaming and sex represent a focus on pleasure that superbly supports an escape into an underworld that visitors covet, but understand explicitly and completely as temporary and isolated. The careful, expensive, and exquisitely crafted environment for this safe and controlled descent into heavenly hell is truly one of the wonders of the modern, or postmodern world.

While the iconic theme of Las Vegas is unambiguous, the motifs that make up the environment of tourist Las Vegas are complex, and they represent an identity crisis that would make the members of the American Psychology Association salivate. While its current manifestation can be traced to the middle 1940s, Las Vegas has banked on a “wild west” image of “everything goes,” of excessive cash in search of adequate reward for the risk-taking, rough-living, dangerous, and onerous labor associated with prospecting and ranching. Cultural analysts as early as Mark Twain understood that the struggle for finding treasure in the new west had lawlessness and the pursuit of forbidden pleasure built into its cultural matrix. Town was an oasis into which hard-living fortune seekers slipped for recreation, if not rest, and the ethos of prospecting shaped their activities there just as it did in the wilderness.

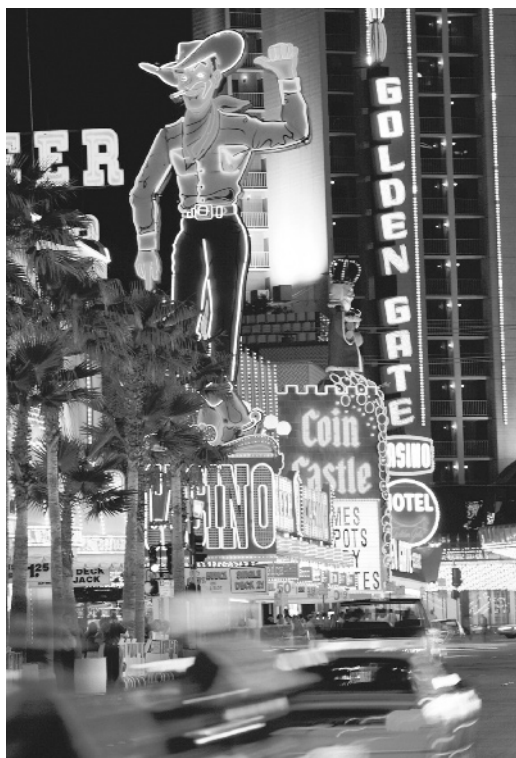
The notorious Bugsy Siegel, universally credited with dreaming up the twentieth-century version of Las Vegas, grasped this historical concept whether or not he realized or articulated it. With his background in the criminal underworld, he was able to realize that gambling, sex, alcohol, and an unabashed pursuit of and acceptance of pleasure was perfectly situated in this western town. His resort hotel started Vegas’s first identity as an oasis in

opposition to the natural “desert”—in terms of pleasure—which most of the visitors inhabited when they were outside this manufactured environment. First-generation resorts like the Sands, Dunes, Sahara, and Aladdin offered a place with pools and palms and available food and drinks and “dates,” in more than one sense of the word, to those adventurous travelers willing to risk the journey and to make an investment in a managed level of risk. These resorts provided excitement and enjoyment as a consolation prize in the event of failure at the slot machines and gaming tables.

The reality of the greater American social climate clearly dictated that the lawlessness and sin had to be brought under control and reinvented as a *simulacrum* or *hyperreality*, to use the terms of Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco, respectively. Just as American society would not accept polygamy, even if it was to be confined to the bordered and controlled space of the Mormons, it demanded that the real criminal elements be forced out of Las Vegas, that government supervision be installed, and that actual free-flowing sin be replaced by an artificial, closely managed and supervised environment. But we must remember that simulacra and hyperrealities are not mere imitations, replicas, or reproductions. Rather, they are entities unto themselves, real in their own original conceptualization, creating and maintaining unique, if artificial, landscapes and features.

So Las Vegas embraced the quest for themes that would contain the “sin” within more palatable, acceptable cultural borders. First it was necessary to create the sense of a special, man-made world in which normal concepts of time and all of the senses could be suspended and replaced with a boldly, unashamedly artificial place. The place had to support the visitor’s self-perception that the visit was just that, a temporary excursion that did not correspond to nor carry over to what she or he might do, how he or she might live, outside “the oasis.” In the 1960s, Caesar’s Palace was a brilliant, pioneering gambit to establish just such an ambiance. Its Roman setting was perfect. Libertine pursuits of gambling and consumption could be indulged in an environment clearly marked as not of the real worlds of the players. It was framed in the ancient past, connected with myths of Roman cavorting, and in a structure that was self-consciously fake, almost to the point of parody. Female employees who wore strange costumes that showed generous hints of breast and butt represented sex; however, these servants of food and drink entirely avoided inviting anything but decorous, professional interaction—look but don’t touch. The contemporary Caesar’s Palace has installed incredibly unreal animated spectacles that at specific times and places in the hotel reinforce the idea that the visitor can play-act in the fantasy, but not lose sight of its artificiality. Expensive but familiar and within reach, the shopping and other trappings of “class” in the hotel’s appointments further reinforce the idea that time spent in Caesar’s Palace is a luxury and “an experience,” but not a way of life that might ensnare the vacationing pilgrim.

The success of Caesar’s Palace proved that creating themed environments and suggesting luxury was the way to go. It also established another vitally



The famous Neon cowboy on the Strip in Las Vegas. Courtesy of Corbis.

important principle: Las Vegas has to have attractions that are spectacles in and of themselves, places to be seen, photographed, talked about, and visited for reasons other than the overt themes of gambling and self-indulgence. Visitors have to be reminded that they are tourists, not gamblers or sinners. Several devices work to maintain this crucial illusion. Actually it is not an illusion, but we need to remind ourselves that Vegas is what it is; that is, a place designed to be visited, gawked at, and experienced, just as much as it is a place to play slot machines, craps, and blackjack and to overindulge in food and drink. The mature actualization of Las Vegas early on discovered the power of bright lights, colorful and lively signs, and the transformation of a highway into the Strip, multiplying in an almost hypnotic or dizzying sense of “otherness,” of a special place. The signs and lights actually reference Broadway, but because Broadway is also a simulacrum, the reference supports rather than challenges Las Vegas’s

status as a special, bounded space.

And size matters. A crucial step was to make the resort hotels very big. This bulk adds to the spectacle, the reason to visit and to talk about the trip. Size also adds to the sense of the space as special, as extraordinary. Following Caesar’s Palace, large hotels like the MGM Grand, among many others, were deliberately created as cavernous environments embracing many restaurants, shops, theaters, lounges, and, of course, the immense casino floors that characterize just about all Las Vegas resort hotels. The use of the disorienting exotic themes was for many years less pronounced, at least compared with Caesar’s and in such hotels as The Riviera or MGM Grand, but it is now nearly always a part of the package. The huge Mirage has a theme, of course, but theme is overwhelmed by size and spectacle, most notably the nightly eruption of the famous man-made volcano. The basic Las Vegas hotel is a self-contained city that typically includes—regardless of the hotel’s theme—Italian, French, Chinese, and steakhouse restaurants, a coffeehouse or two, and a buffet. The all-you-can-eat buffet is another Las Vegas performance that signifies excess, but it also provides a rationalization for going to Vegas, for these buffets are typically low priced and often “comped” for hotel guests. The buffet feasts are in the minds of many part of the “good deal” that

is to be had in Las Vegas in addition to the one dealt one at the blackjack table.

Following the notion that people come to Las Vegas for the simulated sin but need to think of themselves as seeking spectacle and entertainment led to one of the few questionable decisions in the history of the town's self-invention. Perhaps with an eye to the Disney theme parks' success, Vegas moguls decided to feature family fun and mega-theme environments in their next identity incarnation. Hotels like Circus Circus, Excalibur, and Treasure Island jack up the visibility of the theme park ambiance and seek to accommodate families with children, hoping that the total package will attract the crowds, and that at least one member of the family can be counted on to drop the Strip-average \$500 or more at the tables and machines. The problem was that blatant promotion of family values changed the town's iconic projection, and Las Vegas began to seem, to many, like just another theme park or vacation place, rather than a unique and special site for licensed sinning. To be fair, the planners were facing competition from Native American and "riverboat" (read riverbank with an emphasis on *bank*) casinos, and they were facing a charge that Las Vegas was stuck in a 1950s or early 1960s past of rather lame, post-vaudeville shows, pedestrian buffets, and fraying environment. As Vegas began to seem more like Atlantic City, it was losing the interest and enthusiasm of the baby boomer with post-family disposable income, and failing almost entirely to attract a younger clientele, DINK (dual income, no kids) couples and partygoers made rich in the new economy.

So Las Vegas had to rereinvent itself. Once again, size mattered, but now it was allied with "class" and "hip" to attract the younger men and women who have the money it takes to do Las Vegas right. The first step was to follow the lead of the Mirage and use size and luxury to appeal to a sense of distinctiveness. In a way hotels like Bellagio, Luxor, Paris Las Vegas, New York–New York, the Venetian, and Mandalay Bay, among others and including some mega-works in progress, recall Caesar's Palace in their projection of escape via theme to an obviously manufactured fantasy world and play land through their use of size and luxury. A feeling of "class" is created in these hotels by the expense and devotion to detail in their physical plant, by the quality of their buffets (still a bargain but now featuring gourmet options rather than merely all the shrimp and crab legs one can consume)



Treasure Island and Bellagio's reflecting pool, Las Vegas. Courtesy of Shutterstock.



and their shows (bringing in headliners other than those associated with the nightclubs of the 1950s or casino-special lounge acts with no entertainment credibility outside the traditions of Vegas and Atlantic City), and their shops such as Hermes, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Prada—familiar, accessible, but a retail step well above the department store. The themes here are much better realized than at Caesar's (which remains my favorite Las Vegas hotel—camp should be proud or not at all). Like “The World Showcase” at Walt Disney World and “The Old Country” at Busch Gardens in Virginia, Bellagio's and Venice's invocation of Italy, Paris Las Vegas's representation of Paris, and the other Vegas theme creations are not advertised as substitutes for European travel. Vegas's New York–New York is not supposed in any way to provide a “New York” experience-west. Ironically the themes piled on top of one another visually say “Las Vegas” loud and clear.

These themed environments remind you that you are in a place of self-invention, an oasis that does not have to and does not correspond to the rest of the world. Fabricated as the reason to go to Las Vegas, they serve those who want the gambling and other pleasures, but need to convince themselves and others that this is a temporary indulgence rather than a slide into depravity. Indeed one of the reasons that most visitors are not deeply unhappy or angry when they lose their calculated grubstakes is that they can write it off in their minds as “gaming,” a part of the entertainment package and as the just wages of sin and far less expensive than in our traditional teaching.

For the younger visitors, today's Las Vegas is more openly and defiantly a place where sinning is celebrated. Hotels like the Palm and Hard Rock court the hip, Gen-X fun seeker with lively lounges, rock music, and a cleverly promoted image as “the in place” to see celebrities from the sports and entertainment worlds. Much of the new resident entertainment in Las Vegas, notably Cirque de Soleil's three shows, The Blue Man Group and Penn and

Teller, among others, openly appeals to hip, postmodern, somewhat esoteric tastes. To be sure, Wayne Newton still packs the house, and impressionists, traditional night club standup comedians, and Elvis impersonators are welcomed here as nowhere else. Vegas entertainment still has a few of the seminude, flashy reviews, and while the formula seems tired, the strip clubs seem to me to be ripe for the new vaudeville and new burlesque performance theater that is experiencing renaissance in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco these days. Some



A group of people plays poker in Las Vegas. Courtesy of Corbis.

vestiges of family entertainment will no doubt survive, but it is not likely that it will be too heavily promoted from now on.

In keeping with this current iconic reinvention, Las Vegas has a new, very successful advertising tag—"What happens here stays here," a slogan dear to Las Vegas mayor Oscar Goodman. While technically honcho of the downtown, but not of the Strip, he is a colorful figure and self-appointed spokesman for the city. He has even threatened to legalize prostitution, a possibility in Nevada but a long shot in Las Vegas given its brand of sinning. Goodman either misses the point of *controlled* sinning, of temporary transgression without fear of serious, permanent repercussions, or he thinks that the next generation of visitors does not share the fears of the present generation of visitors or the fears of those who actually have to live in Las Vegas. Actually, my guess is that he knows perfectly well that legalizing prostitution in Vegas can never happen and would hurt rather than help Vegas's appeal, but he is smart enough to know that just talking about it contributes to the iconic projection that makes the resort work.

In these early years of the twenty-first century, Las Vegas is hotter than ever, and that is not referring to the summer desert temperatures. More than a dozen current television shows reference it, some in fictions located there, others in documentaries, Vegas-located poker tournaments, and Food Network and Travel Channel specials. Films that use the locale are being churned out regularly. The classic overhead shot of the Strip at night, lights blazing and cars cruising past the familiar hotels has become ubiquitous. A recent cover story in *Time* magazine trumpets, "Its Vegas, Baby!" and a *New York Times* editorial frets that Las Vegas "has gone awfully mainstream." However it is not likely that the culture war between the forces of permissiveness and the guardians of traditional moral values will be won so quickly and decisively that Las Vegas will become the American norm. If that were to happen, it would lose its special appeal. Las Vegas has more to fear from "sin" becoming commonplace in America than it does from its gaming competition on the Mississippi and on the Native American reservations. Its iconic value is invested in representing a sacred space in which the rituals of licentiousness can be celebrated and kept within the mega-resort cathedrals.

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# Rush Limbaugh

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*Thomas A. Greenfield*

Radio historians are passionate about benchmarks and turning points in radio history. A handful of dates and accomplishments have survived the rigors of radiophile debate to emerge as landmarks of the medium: the first “official” commercial radio broadcast (1920), the birth of the first radio network (1926), and Orson Welles’s “War of the Worlds” mock Martian invasion (Halloween 1939) stand out as highlights. When the definitive histories of twentieth-century broadcasting are written, many historians will be arguing—not all of them happily—for the inclusion of August 1988: Rush Limbaugh brings his radio program to national syndication.

Limbaugh (b. 1951), the most well known, most listened to, and most influential American radio personality in the last fifteen years, completely re-invented American talk radio to accommodate his jovially abrasive on-air personality and uncompromising animosity toward liberalism. In the process, he elevated the talk format from innocuous low-rated late night programming to a top-rated national platform for a new kind of mass media star: the conservative broadcast political attack artist. Talk-radio icon Limbaugh yet keeps his audience loyal and large with a blend of homespun right-wing moralizing, impish humor, “radio outlaw” antics, and just enough antisocial malice to whet the attention of the establishment media he abhors.

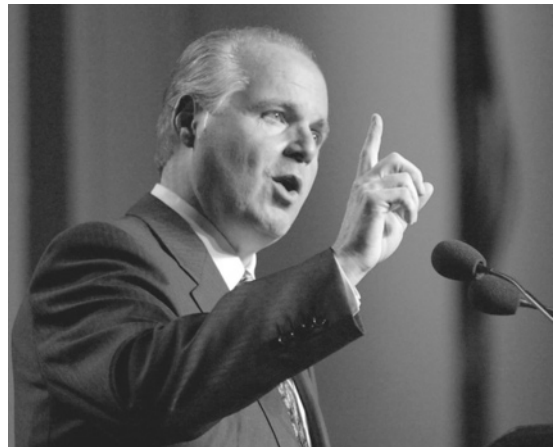
Leaving college after one year to pursue a radio career, Limbaugh had a lackluster first decade as a rock and top 40 disc jockey in the 1970s. Fired from several radio stations for offending listeners, callers, sponsors, and pillars of various communities, Limbaugh eventually realized that the music he was playing on the air was interfering with his self-admitted talent for insulting people in an engaging way. Landing his own talk show and the support of conservative management on KFBK in Sacramento, he honed the “right wing attack machine” style that made him, as he describes in his trademark mix of congenial self-inflated hyperbole and in-your-face bravado, a broadcasting phenomenon: “[I am] destined for my own wing in the Museum of Broadcasting” (McManus).

Like most mass-media innovators in the last half of the twentieth century, Limbaugh used established techniques and traditions in fashioning an approach to radio broadcasting that was altogether new. In the mode of radio pioneers from Walter Winchell to Edward R. Murrow, Limbaugh developed aural cues and signatures that resonate with his listeners and have become uniquely the property of Limbaugh and his audience (the most famous of these being the interactive “dittos” that his fans, self-proclaimed “ditto-heads,” use to affirm their allegiance to him moment by moment and point by point). While delving almost exclusively into political content, he brought a front-porch sage guy-at-the-corner-bar sensibility to political talk and in so doing drafted a blueprint for countless on-air imitators, disciples, and Rush “wannabees.” In the 1990s many neighborhood restaurants and taverns boosted daytime revenues by opening Rush Rooms where the local clientele would bond in political solidarity over Limbaugh’s show.

In a throwback to radio’s pre-World War II “golden era” Limbaugh rejected the modern broadcast editorialists’ self-imposed ban on reading commercials—a practice widely seen in contemporary broadcasting as compromising one’s integrity as a broker of political information. Like the pioneer news commentators of the 1930s and 1940s, Limbaugh moves effortlessly between pitches for weight loss systems or home improvement services and straightforward program content, be it allegations of treason on the part of liberal politicians or gasps of emotion as he recalls the videotaped execution of an American citizen by Iraqi insurgents.

While not the first political or conservative broadcast personality, Limbaugh is the first to successfully wed the upbeat, “full-tilt boogie” patter of the drive-time rock DJ with the call-to-action invective of the propagandist pamphleteer. Limbaugh on the air is often angry but never “down.” He is high-energy, high volume, and, no matter how dire the conditions or how roused his ire, rarely more than ten seconds from a witty putdown or irreverent quip at the expense of a Democratic politician or left-leaning journalist. It is, in fact, his irrepressibility and phenomenal on-the-air energy that powers his personal connection to his adoring audience. Even his political enemies openly, if begrudgingly, acknowledge Limbaugh’s astonishing skills as a broadcast personality and communicator.

Limbaugh’s appeal, however, goes far beyond his skillful merging of



Conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh gestures while speaking during the National Association of Broadcasters convention in Philadelphia, 2003. AP/Wide World Photos.

traditional radio gimmicks, DJ glibness, and hard-edged conservative ideology. While declaring himself a voice of mainstream America, he is actually a groundbreaking iconoclastic radio “bad boy,” demolishing long-standing traditions of broadcast gentility and sponsor-friendly inoffensiveness. Like his contemporary, “shock jock” Howard Stern who introduced new levels of sexual content to big time radio, or 1960s “outlaw” FM disc jockey Wolfman Jack who dropped more than casual allusions to the pleasures of illegal drugs into his on-air patter, Limbaugh rewrote the rules of political engagement in joyous, unapologetic, spectacular fashion. Prior to Limbaugh’s arrival on the national scene, traditional political broadcast talk, with some isolated exceptions, tended toward restraint and tastefulness: issue-oriented and only mildly personal by today’s standards. In many markets the sports talk shows were nastier. The traditional talk also tended to garner meager public service level ratings to match.

Not so in the Limbaugh era. While eschewing the sour personality of modern conservative broadcast predecessors Joe Pyne or Morton Downey, Jr., Limbaugh’s attacks are notoriously personal and often jovially cruel. In his ability to convert his political animus to amusing mockery and harassment of his political enemies—Democrats and liberals in politics, the media, and elsewhere—he developed a new kind of interactive mass radio audience which quickly evolved into an important and heretofore unknown force in American electoral politics.

By 1992, four years after his national debut, the number of stations carrying *The Rush Limbaugh Show* had grown from its initial fifty-six outlets to several hundred with weekly audience numbers well in excess of 5 million. By the mid to late 1990s that figure would exceed 10 million, and some current estimates go as high as 15 to 20 million. Limbaugh had already stunned observers with his ability to rally his “dittoheads” on any given issue to flood politicians’ offices with enough phone calls, faxes, and e-mails to shut down normal operations for days at a time. However, the broadening of his interests from high-energy political talk into direct advocacy for candidates and legislation began in earnest with the 1992 presidential campaign of Clinton-Gore versus Bush-Quayle, and peaked with the historic 1994 off-year Republican conservative “sweep” of the Senate and House of Representatives.

A number of factors contributed to Limbaugh’s gravitation toward establishment political power-brokering. As Philip Seib points out, during the 1992 campaign candidate Bill Clinton was using his pop culture savvy to reach young voters and control his media exposure in a way he could not through standard media outlets—the legendary “wailing saxophone” television appearance on the self-consciously hip *Arsenio Hall Show* being the most memorable of these forays (191–92). The Bush-Quayle campaign took notice of the power of alternative media and courted favor with Limbaugh, who broke his long-standing ban on in-studio guests and brought on both President Bush and Senator Quayle for separate on-air appearances. These broadcasts identified Limbaugh as an apologist for the Bush-Quayle campaign

rather than a completely “independent,” or at least unaffiliated, conservative voice (Fallows 61–66).

While Clinton’s impressive victory over an incumbent president was not going to dampen Limbaugh’s ardor, Clinton’s postinauguration honeymoon period might well have diminished, if only temporarily, the influence of diehard Clinton bashers. But Clinton seemed bent on ending his honeymoon quickly and Limbaugh was more than happy to capitalize on the moment. Clinton’s clumsy out-of-the-gate advocacy of gays in the military (“don’t ask, don’t tell”) immediately galvanized the conservative base against him, giving Limbaugh an ideal platform for two of his high-card plays: anti-gay humor and fear of liberal social engineering.

Adding to this postelection bounty, Clinton presented Limbaugh with a badly managed federal healthcare initiative presided over by Hillary Clinton. Healthcare would have been a serviceable left-wing target for Limbaugh’s right-wing shots, but having Hillary Clinton center stage made it almost too easy for Limbaugh to rally conservative troops to action. Right-wing visceral disdain for Hillary Clinton, the self-declared “co-President,” combined with her own early missteps in fashioning the image of the “new breed of First Lady” she aspired to be, gave Limbaugh plenty of hot burning fuel for his pre-election 1994 broadcasts.

Perhaps the most significant conduit between Limbaugh and the 1994 Republican election effort proved to be the flamboyant, media-wise Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich. As the Clinton presidency faltered early, Gingrich gained power and visibility as the White House’s principal political nemesis. As “point man” for the 1994 Republican congressional election effort, he designed for his candidates a powerful campaign rhetoric that mirrored Limbaugh’s daily radio broadsides: demonize the opposition with small details, cast them as cultural aliens out-of-step with real American values, stigmatize the word “liberal,” and ridicule the opposition into irrelevance. By November Limbaugh had become an important and visible operative in the Republican victory, which also served as a coming out party for the neo-conservative political movement. Observed Republican strategist-turned-commentator Mary Matalin: “Rush is a major reason for the 1994 sweep. When you look at the data, 44% of the voters say they got their news primarily from radio. That’s Rush” (*Rush Limbaugh: Always Right*). No broadcast personality before or since has exercised this magnitude of direct influence over national electoral politics. As Limbaugh himself would say, it was quite an achievement for “a boy from Missouri who just wanted to be on the radio” (*The Rush Limbaugh Show* Official Website).

Although Limbaugh’s radio show flourished after 1994 with Clinton-bashing remaining his stock and trade, his identity as a Republican party operative and insider receded somewhat. Gingrich, the politician with whom Limbaugh was perhaps most closely identified, lost public favor for high-handed political tactics. The dead-on-arrival 1996 presidential candidacy of the decidedly uncharismatic Republican Senator Bob Dole offered little

temptation for the high voltage, success-driven Limbaugh. New conservative media outlets and stars had emerged, making Limbaugh the top dog in a large pack but no longer the only one. Of course, in the late 1990s nothing in the realm of standard party politics could match the appeal to conservative broadcasters of White House intern and presidential paramour Monica Lewinsky and other events leading up to Clinton's impeachment hearings.

Limbaugh's daily on-air hounding of Bill Clinton (counting each day of his presidency as a day of America held hostage, thereby invoking press coverage of the 1980 capture of fifty-one American hostages in Iran) brought scrutiny to Limbaugh's inexhaustible creativity for attack humor. While normally trafficking in boilerplate insults of the "other side's" intelligence, patriotism, honesty, or physical attractiveness (he once referred to President Clinton's teenage daughter as the "White House dog"), Limbaugh's appeal and iconic stature owe much to his occasional forays into groundbreaking levels of cruelty and insensitivity. In 1994, without ever affirming its accuracy, Limbaugh broadcast a rumor that Clinton friend and White House attorney Vince Foster, who by all official accounts had committed suicide in a Washington, D.C. park, had been murdered in an apartment owned by Hillary Clinton—presumably with some unspecified level of complicity on the part of the Clintons. Although Limbaugh was neither the first nor only conservative commentator recounting variations of this rumor (which still surfaces occasionally in right-wing media circles), the clout of his radio program kept the Vince Foster murder story in the public dialog for weeks. Writing years later in his memoir *My Life*, Bill Clinton cited Limbaugh by name as the principal force in advancing the murder rumor, asserting by this example that those who attacked him personally were guilty of harming innocent bystanders—in this case Foster's family (587).

While normally glorying in the outrage he engenders in his victims, Limbaugh on rare occasions crosses an unspecified line of acceptable malice and finds himself on the defensive. Such an example occurred in May 2004 when he made comments trivializing U.S. soldiers' mistreatment of prisoners during the American invasion of Iraq. Major news outlets worldwide had broadcast a series of photographs showing American troops, in clear violation of the Geneva Convention, sexually humiliating and physically torturing prisoners at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. Domestic and international protest was so strong that the normally unrepentant President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld offered public statements of contrition for the troops' actions.

Limbaugh would have none of that. On his May 6 broadcast Limbaugh attempted to counter the cries of outrage: "This no different than what happens at the Skull & Crossbones initiation [a fraternity-like secret society of undergraduates at Yale University]... I'm talking about people having a good time... You ever heard of needing to blow some steam off?" (*The Rush Limbaugh Show*). Although Limbaugh was not the only conservative commentator or politician to assert that public outrage over the photographs

had been overblown for political purposes, his statements alone made sustained national news. He became *the* icon of downplaying the Abu Ghraib controversy, completely overshadowing U.S. Senators James Inhofe and Zell Miller among others who took nearly identical public positions.

Public revulsion over the photographs, however, was so deep that even Limbaugh's conservative base could not forcefully rally to his cause, and Limbaugh had to backpedal. While not apologizing for his remarks, Limbaugh offered public clarifications (he did find some of the photographs troubling and had said so on the air) and counterattacks (the liberal media had taken his words out of context) to explain away one of his few pronouncements that seemed not to be resonating with many of his admirers. He even gave an interview to *Time* magazine to get out from under the criticism—a rare instance of Limbaugh using a forum which he does not control, much less a nonpartisan one, to get his message out.

Limbaugh's "bad-boy" persona has also inoculated him against fallout from other potentially career-killing scandals and missteps. In an industry notorious for expelling talent for a single on-air breach of decorum, Limbaugh, like the old-time radio hero Superman, has "powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men." His radio program and political influence have survived, and even prospered, in the face of formidable challenges to his honesty and integrity—any one of which would have torpedoed the career of almost any other major broadcast personality.

- For years Limbaugh has simply brushed off numerous documented cases of his factual errors, fabricated evidence, and serious misrepresentation of data—routinely dismissing corrections and contravening evidence as politically motivated attacks;
- In October 2003, during a stint as a television commentator on sports channel ESPN, Limbaugh asserted that pro football quarterback Donovan McNabb was receiving unmerited favorable press owing to the sports media's penchant for hyping African American quarterbacks. Public protests along with McNabb's performance statistics and elegantly understated retort ("It's sad that you've got to go to skin color. I thought we were through with that. . .") drove Limbaugh from the television program. But his radio ratings and sponsor support showed not even a dent. For several days thereafter Limbaugh railed on the air about how the ESPN episode was a case of the establishment media's efforts to censor him.
- In 2004, Florida authorities charged him with illegally obtaining prescription drugs to support a self-admitted addiction. Excoriating the Democratic district attorney prosecuting his case, Limbaugh used the arrest and prosecution efforts to advance one of his show's signature themes: liberals are obsessed with silencing him.

Limbaugh's ratings and mystique flourish in the face of these eruptions, so much so that one can hardly imagine Limbaugh surviving long without them—or wanting to. This presents a paradox in assessing his legacy in



broadcasting and popular culture. To the unquestioned good of the medium, he redesigned the landscape of American daytime radio. By transforming talk radio from a marginal, largely local nighttime format to a staple of daytime programming nationwide, he discovered and cultivated a new, massive national audience for the medium. By declaring and then proving he could be the first talk-show host in radio or television history to carry a full-length daily talk show without guests or co-hosts, he expanded the definition of what a radio personality could do. By becoming a major political power broker through his broadcasts he expanded the boundaries of what a modern radio performer could be.

However, Limbaugh has also created an entertainment program that serves millions of listeners as their primary source for daily news. Limbaugh has no bonds to the journalism profession's standards for factual accuracy ("I am an entertainer") nor traditions of civility ("This is a program about what I think"). But his audience has conferred upon him the stature of a newsmen, and the rest of the medium has taken notice. His success has emboldened other news outlets, most notably Fox television news, to engage in advocacy journalism and *ad hominem* political commentary. Critics of mass media note that even mainstays of journalism—the old-line major television networks and newspapers—are feeling competitive pressure to incorporate "populist" journalism and modified advocacy in their reporting, an issue complicated exponentially by the problems of covering the post-9/11 "War on Terror" and American military actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

Just how the American mass media will face the challenge of defining and delivering news to the twenty-first century audience lies well beyond Rush Limbaugh's influence. To do so successfully, however, the media will have to keep up with the evolving demands and expectations of that audience. No one—absolutely no one—has done more to mold, sculpt, and empower that audience than has Rush Limbaugh. And no one understands it better.

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# Charles A. Lindbergh

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*Roger B. Rollin*

The airplane was silver, with sleek lines. Its pilot looked like a hero: tall and slender, unruly hair, boyish good looks. An early friend said he was “the most perfect man I have ever known” (Davis 157). The first good look the American public had of both plane and pilot came after they landed at Curtiss Field, Long Island, on May 11, 1927. Photographs of these newest entrants in the race to fly from New York to Paris, taken that day, appeared on May 12 in newspapers all over the United States.

Those news photographs show the 25-year-old pilot, Charles A. Lindbergh, still in his flying gear (he had just flown from St. Louis to New York), standing somewhat uncomfortably at the nose of his airplane. Behind him we see his Ryan New York-to-Paris’s (NYP) hammered aluminum spinner encasing a two-bladed duralumin propeller. Behind the prop, protruding from the engine cowling, are the business-like exposed cylinders of the mighty Wright “Whirlwind” J-5C engine, rated at 223 horsepower. It was then one of the world’s most reliable aircraft engines, and it would have to be. The monoplane’s name, *Spirit of St. Louis*, is also visible behind Lindbergh, emblazoned on the engine cowling. (The flyer was an airmail pilot, based at Lambert Field in St. Louis, and his financial backers were from that Missouri city.)

In the photographs, the man and the airplane almost become one. Soon, in the man’s mind, as he flew over the forbidding Atlantic, he and the machine would indeed become one. After he landed in Paris, in various statements he referred to “we.” Who do you mean by “we,” he was asked; after all, you flew alone. What he meant, he explained to the earthborn, who had never experienced the bond that can develop between an aviator and his airplane, was he and the *Spirit of St. Louis*. He entitled the book he wrote about his epochal flight, “*We*.” In a sense Lindbergh was the first “cyborg,” a machine-supplemented human being.

There is no evidence that the Wright Brothers, those bicycle-shop-owning geniuses, ever felt the psychological connection with their aircraft that Lindbergh did with the *Spirit of St. Louis*. Midway through his 1953 account

of his flight he writes, “Now . . . I’m taking a favor from my plane. It makes the *Spirit of St. Louis* seem more a living partner in adventure than a machine of cloth and steel” (210). Even the great World War I aces—Lufbery, Fonck, Ball, Bishop, von Richtofen, Rickenbacker—did not seem to identify with the frail, primitive aircraft that could just as easily kill them as transport them to fame and glory. But Lindbergh was of a later generation as an aviator, and the *Spirit of St. Louis* was an aircraft much advanced from those that did battle in the air in World War I. Early on, Lindbergh and the *Spirit of St. Louis* were as merged in the public mind as they were in the pilot’s. He was the most famous man in the world, the Ryan NYP the most famous airplane. No one ever flew it except him. The man was the greatest hero of the young twentieth century, the plane the aircraft that had done what no other had done—fly the Atlantic and land safely, almost routinely, at its destination, Le Bourget Field, Paris.

Today, when thousands daily fly across the ocean in jet-propelled airliners, it is difficult to imagine a time when a young American and a small single-engine prop plane could become international icons for doing that very thing. But in 1927 airplanes were still relatively primitive and few of them had the fuel capacity to fly non-stop even a thousand miles, much less 3,600. Aircraft engines were far less reliable than today, the weather over the Atlantic Ocean was notoriously unreliable, and even transoceanic weather forecasting was only slightly more reliable than informed guessing.

Furthermore, good men had died trying to fly the Atlantic. In 1926 France’s leading ace of the Great War, Rene Fonck, crashed on take-off in New York, and two of his crew perished. In April 1927 Navy fliers Noel David and Stanton Wooster died test-flying their huge Keystone Pathfinder, the *American Legion*. The famous aircraft designer and manufacturer Anthony Fokker crashed his own big tri-motor aircraft, injuring himself, the equally famous American hero Commander Richard E. Byrd, and renowned flyer Floyd Bennett. Another French icon of World War I, Charles Nungesser, who shot down forty-five German planes and was seventeen times wounded, set off from France for the United States on May 8, 1927, in his single-engine *L’Oiseau Blanc*, and, along with his navigator, François Coli, was never seen again. All six deceased flyers were well known and highly experienced, with serious financial backing.

By comparison, Charles Augustus Lindbergh was a kid, 25 years old but looking younger. In the great trans-Atlantic race, an underdog. He had been flying for only five years. He had been a barnstormer, one of those free spirits who flew from town to town, pasture to pasture, in World War I surplus training planes, selling rides and giving aerial exhibitions. Although he already was a skilled pilot, in 1922 he joined the United States Army Air Service and learned to fly the military way. He graduated at the top of his cadet class, but the peacetime Army had its quota of aviators and released Lindbergh from active duty. So he signed on to fly the airmail, at that time one of the most dangerous jobs in the world.

Lindbergh was no stranger to danger. In 1923 alone, eighty-five of his fellow barnstormers were killed in crashes and another 162 injured (Nevin 60). He had crashed in the middle of a small town in Texas, in a Kansas field, and in a Minnesota swamp. During a formation-flying exercise in the Army he had a mid-air collision, one of the most deadly of all airplane accidents, but managed to parachute to safety. Flying the airmail, he was twice forced to bail out of his aircraft. After his trans-Atlantic flight he would be called “Lucky Lindy,” and luck he did have. But he was above all a superlative pilot and a dreamer who also happened to be a meticulous planner.

It was while he was flying his airmail route that Lindbergh began to consider going after the Orteig Prize—\$25,000, a handsome sum in 1927—for flying non-stop New York to Paris or Paris to New York. (The *Spirit of St. Louis* itself would cost only a little more than \$10,000, and it was designed and built especially for Lindbergh.) The Atlantic had in fact already been crossed by airplane. In 1919 two former British military fliers, John Alcock and Arthur Brown, flew a Great War twin-engine bomber from a remote meadow in Newfoundland to crash-land in an Irish bog. The two of them, in a huge military aircraft, had flown but half the distance Lindbergh, in his single-engine private plane, intended to fly alone. Alcock and Brown were hailed in England as the heroes they were, and were knighted; but they never became icons like Lindbergh. For one thing, Sir John Alcock would die in a plane crash only a half year after his historic flight, and Sir Arthur Brown would never fly again. Charles A. Lindbergh was a survivor.

The mythology of the aviator-hero usually accords to him or her an element of the daredevil, and it would take a daredevil to attempt to fly the



Charles Lindbergh standing alongside his airplane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, 1927. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Atlantic alone. But Lindbergh was also efficiency itself in rounding up financial backing, in actively participating in the design and construction of the *Spirit of St. Louis*, and in planning his route of flight, from the details of navigation to the management of his plane's fuel. Before takeoff, the press labeled him "The Flying Fool"; he was, in fact, anything but.

The Lindbergh Story was a mass media dream. Against all odds, the young, good-looking aviator, after an almost sleepless night, barely lifted his overloaded plane—a flying fuel tank, a bomb waiting to explode—into air, ahead of his older, more experienced, well-heeled rivals. They staggered through the air, only laboriously gaining altitude—and to a flyer altitude is life. Heading northwest from New York he crossed his first patch of the Atlantic to hit Nova Scotia only six miles off course, a navigation error of merely 2 percent (Nevin 92). Planning! The last sighting of the *Spirit of St. Louis* in North America was over Newfoundland. The small plane disappeared over the monstrous Atlantic.

Another monster the hero must fight is sleeplessness. He had been awake for forty-eight hours, eighteen of them piloting an overloaded aircraft (Nevin 93). He would nod off, then jerk awake: sleep is death. He encountered towering clouds and the *Spirit of St. Louis* began to ice up. Ice also kills, adding weight to an aircraft and making it less controllable. Lindbergh descended to warmer air near the surface of the roiling Atlantic. He began to hallucinate, then to doubt his ability to carry on. In desperation he stuck his head out of the open window into the bracing, frigid air. Anything to stay awake!

Then, after twenty-six hours of flying, fifty-five hours without sleep, the young aviator caught a glimpse of fishing boats, the first sign of human life since Newfoundland. Now he was awake, alert, and when Dingle Bay, Ireland, came into view this master navigator, after flying alone the equivalent of New York to California, was only three miles off his intended course. By nightfall he had followed the River Seine to Paris, circled the illuminated Eiffel Tower, and felt his way to Le Bourget. After thirty-three and a half hours in the air, he made what he concluded was a respectable landing on the sod of that unfamiliar and largely dark airfield. Into fame. Into glory. Into history.

Tens of thousands of nearly hysterical Parisians surrounded the *Spirit of St. Louis*, seized its emerging pilot, and exuberantly passed him over their heads until he was rescued. So frantic was the moment that Lindbergh later noted he was afraid that his machine, his other self, might be "injured" (Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis* 496).

In the next few days, merely by making brief appearances and briefer speeches, young Charles Lindbergh conquered France and Belgium. The next Lindbergh conquest was England, with more honors, more medals, more accolades. Then the President of the United States sent a U.S. Navy cruiser to bring "The Lone Eagle" home. (Although Lindbergh had felt that it was "beneath the dignity" of his machine to be disassembled and shipped back to the States, it went back with him on the warship [Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis* 483]). Four and a half million New Yorkers gave him one of the biggest

ticket-tape parades yet seen. President Calvin Coolidge awarded him the Medal of Honor and jumped Reserve Lieutenant Lindbergh through four Army ranks to Colonel. In the gushing prose of U.S. Ambassador to France Myron T. Herrick, reflecting the near religious hysteria of the masses, Lindbergh becomes almost Christ-like: “No flaw marked any act or word, and he stood forth amidst the clamor and the crowds the very embodiment of a fearless, kindly, cultivated American youth—unspoiled, unspoilable” (Lindbergh, “We” 110). “Gods,” observes Kenneth S. Davis, “are created by those who worship them . . . created through the very act of worship; and Lindbergh, by the end of June, 1927, was worshiped” (227).

Lindbergh spawned an industry of buttons, posters, sheet music, anything that could be emblazoned with his portrait and pictures of the *Spirit of St. Louis*. Separately, jointly, theirs were the most recognizable images in the world. This iconic status was to an extent enhanced by what could be regarded as Lindbergh’s self-promotion. By popular demand and with the backing of the Guggenheim Foundation, he exhibited the *Spirit of St. Louis*—and himself—in all of the forty-eight states. Inevitably, wherever he landed he was cheered by hero-worshipping throngs, but he hobnobbed chiefly with the rich and powerful. He stayed in the news, and in the newsreels, with goodwill flights to Mexico and Latin America, with his public promotions of the struggling airline industry, and by allowing the forerunner of Trans-World Airlines to call itself “The Lindbergh Line.” Hollywood, naturally offered him stardom—which the hero rejected (Telotte 71).

A myth, in the truest sense of that term, is a kind of public dream, expressing fundamental human aspirations and fundamental human fears. In Lindbergh and the *Spirit of St. Louis* the Dream of Flight, of achieving transcendence of the earthly; the Dream of Technology, of achieving transcendence of human limitations; and the universal Dream of the Hero, of achieving personal perfection; all met. In time it would seem that the burden of those dreams, of incarnating an American myth, would become too much for the man to bear.

To complete the myth-cycle of the Hero, the son of a maverick U.S. congressman meets the Lady, a daughter of the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. Anne Morrow was gifted, shy, and pretty. The gifted, shy, handsome flyer, who heretofore had had no recorded romantic relationships—though American womanhood swooned at the sight of him—quietly married her less than two years after they met. To the media it was nothing less than a royal wedding: “The Eagle Meets his Mate;” “Anne Morrow Makes It ‘We Three.’”

But the Lady was also thoroughly modern: Anne learned to operate a radio, to navigate, and earned a pilot’s license. She accompanied her husband on a widely publicized flight to Central America. Then, on her twenty-fourth birthday, Anne bore Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Jr. This joyous event would, in less than two years, begin to transform the Romance of the Lone Eagle into the Tragedy of Charles A. Lindbergh. When the baby was under two years old, he was kidnaped and subsequently murdered. Both events, of



Charles Lindbergh on a podium on the Washington Monument grounds during his reception in Washington, D.C. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

course, made international headlines, as did the arrest, trial, and execution of the man accused of the terrible crimes, Bruno Richard Hauptman.

The relentless attention that had focused upon Lindbergh led over the years to his increasing alienation from the very media that had transformed him into an American icon. The death of his child and its aftermath were the final straws. With bitterness, the Lindberghs left their country to live in seclusion in England. Nonetheless, Lindbergh subsequently accepted an invitation to visit Germany, where he and Anne consorted with the Nazi high and mighty. Unbeknownst to the public, a part of which was uncomfortable with Lindbergh's lending his prestige to the Third Reich, his inspections of German aircraft factories and Luftwaffe bases on this and later trips resulted in intelligence reports he made to the U.S. government, including the Chief of the Army Air Corps, Major General H. H. Arnold.



Unfortunately, so impressed was Lindbergh by the progress of German aviation, which was then producing the most technologically advanced aircraft in the world, that he began to feel that the Nazis were unstoppable. He concluded that the United States should stay clear of the oncoming war in Europe and began to make isolationist statements in public appearances and on the radio. He seemed oblivious to the viciousness of Nazi Germany and its Japanese allies. Blatant racism and anti-Semitism, shocking even for the 1930s, pervaded his speeches and publications.

It is “The End of the Hero” (Davis 383ff.). At a time when President Roosevelt was risking his presidency to aid France and Britain, Lindbergh’s indifference to fascist aggression and tyranny appalled many. Disenchantment with “The Lone Eagle” grew, then rapidly increased when he enlisted in the “America First” movement, a coalition of isolationists and pro-Nazis. Even when his country was attacked at Pearl Harbor by the Japanese and declared war upon by Hitler, Lindbergh did not repudiate his pro-Axis statements—and never would, seemingly retaining an “invincible confidence in his own rectitude and infallibility” (*The American Experience* 13). To historian Arthur Schlesinger, “he was a man who very much misconceived the nature of the great struggle of the 20th century, [that] between democracy and totalitarianism” (*The American Experience* 1).

Yet Lindbergh did attempt to join the war effort. President Roosevelt personally quashed that. Finally Lindbergh did manage to wangle a position as “civilian aviation consultant” and headed for the war in the South Pacific. Before that war would be over he would—quite illegally and at an advanced age for fighter pilots—fly on fifty combat missions and shoot down Japanese aircraft in dogfights. More importantly, the expert in transoceanic flight instructed pilots half his age how to manage their aircrafts’ fuel and thus increase the range of their combat operations by five hundred miles—an enormously significant contribution to the war effort. He cannot help but be the Hero.

All of this, however, was top secret. As far as the general public was concerned, the greatest American icon of the first third of the century had disappeared into well-deserved oblivion. Eventually, though, his past obtuse arrogance began to fade in the public memory. President Eisenhower promoted the aging Colonel Lindbergh to Brigadier General in the U.S. Air Force Reserve. Then Lindbergh was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his magnificent account of the flight, *The Spirit of St. Louis*. A movie of the same title was released in 1957, on the thirtieth anniversary of the mythic flight. It starred one of Hollywood’s most popular actors, Jimmy Stewart, himself a real-life pilot-hero who flew bombing missions over Europe in World War II. It is also, arguably, the best aviation movie ever made. Though a critical success, it was a box office failure. Although the Lone Eagle had been publicly rehabilitated he was, it seems, to the public no longer an icon. Icons command attention, and the attention that Lindbergh had both sought and shunned was no longer accorded to him.

He became an avid proponent of conservation and moved his family to Hawaii. It was in Maui that Lindbergh spent his final days, dying of cancer on August 26, 1974. In accordance with his explicit instructions, only a few hours after his death his body was garbed in work clothes, wrapped in an old blanket, laid in a plain wooden coffin, and put into the earth.

The grave of Charles A. Lindbergh is obscure, but his *Spirit of St. Louis* to this day hangs in a place of honor in the world's most visited museum, the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. It is viewed daily by thousands of people. Some of them know the Lindbergh story; a few of them may think of it as the Lindbergh tragedy. The silver monoplane's pilot may be gone and largely forgotten, but the *Spirit of St. Louis*, the most famous airplane of all time, is very much with us, suspended from the great museum's ceiling as if it were still flying, as if it were still "we."

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# List

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## *Dennis Hall*

The word “listomania” entered my mind, without my consciously having heard or read the expression before, as a result of the work Susan Grove Hall and I have done on American icons. We became acutely aware of the power and resonance of lists as we struggled to develop a list of over a hundred icons to be included in this collection. People we discussed the list with quickly moved from the indicative to the imperative mode; our list invariably generated not only conversation but sometimes heated argument, revealing gender and generation differences, among many other cultural investments. While we talked about icons a great deal, we tried to avoid discussing the lists of them with our fellow iconomaniacs.

But I suppose that deep down I knew “listomania” must have been circulating “out there” for a long time and not in punning allusion to the nineteenth-century popular passion for Franz Liszt or Ken Russell’s 1975 flop on the same theme. You see, I still own and have often perused, if not exactly read, both editions of the immensely popular *People’s Almanac* (1975, 1978), and the twenty-fourth chapter of each edition is devoted to lists. Moreover, I seemed to have forgotten that David Wallenchinsky, Irving Wallace, and Amy Wallace, in both editions of the also very popular *Book of Lists* (1977, 1980) freely use the terms “listomania” and “listomaniacs” to describe the abiding interest, if not a consuming passion, that they share with all but the most passive of human kind. As H. Allen Smith (in Wallenchinsky et al., *Book of Lists* xvii), Louis Menand—citing Aristotle or was it Parmenides? (in *The New Yorker*)—and others have pointed out, the human being is less accurately defined as an animal capable of reason or able to use language or given to laughter than as a list-making animal, a creature apparently incapable of survival without making lists of one kind or another.

Indeed, lists are everywhere to be found, not only in the many books of lists (David Wallechnisky is not alone in the economic exploitation of this human propensity) but also from the poetic catalogs of Walt Whitman to the comic routines of David Letterman’s “Top Ten” lists (and its many predecessors and imitators) to the top ten lists that flood the press at New Year’s to the “all time”

lists of the top 25 or top 100 or top 1,000 movies, books, plays, record albums, celebrities, best- and worst-dressed people, children's names, roses, breeds of dogs, and the like which periodically feed a voracious popular press. Moreover, the World Wide Web has fueled this human passion for lists with an unprecedented technical leverage and democratic spirit. "Catalist," for example, is a Web site list of Listserv lists. One may find several lists of phobias—hundreds of them from ablutophobia to zoophobia. The Web has transformed the "who's who" phenomenon from a relatively narrow interest within distinct professional groups into what we now call "networking," with someone offering lists of people involved in every industry and occupation, diversion, and perversion known to humankind. Virtually every specialized periodical from *Accounting Today* to *World Trade Magazine* publishes a list of the 10 or 50 or 100 of the most powerful or most influential or "best" or "top" or "important" people in its realm of interest. At a recent Popular Culture Association convention, a heavily attended session focused on each speaker's list of the best A western movies ever, the best B westerns, and the best TV westerns; the session generated more discussion and dissension than any other I attended at the meeting. Some of us are old enough to recall seeing on TV Joseph McCarthy holding up a piece of paper and declaring that he had in hand a list of known communists working in the government or to recall Richard Nixon's enemies list. I remember seeing (and exactly what it looked like is seared into my mind's eye) the National Legion of Decency's list of current movies posted on the bulletin boards of my Catholic grade and high schools, with the list of "condemned" movies providing sure-fire recommendations.

My desk and yours are crowded with lists of "things to do." Many, perhaps most of us, at least enter the grocery store with a list, make packing lists for trips, compile Christmas lists, maintain lists of birthdays and anniversaries to remember. Cathy Guisewite's comic strip "Cathy"—particularly its run up to the title character's recent wedding—could not function without play on lists and list-making. Some of us, after the precedent of George Washington or Jay Gatsby or Mother Theresa, may even make lists of things we ought and ought not to do. Many of us suffer under the direction of such lists, while making others suffer under the direction of lists we impose. Nothing good or bad or important is without its list; nothing indifferent, however, warrants a list. No human activity or interest or fear or desire of any significance is without its list in the household, the interest group, the workplace, the neighborhood, the political party, the country, or beyond.

The entries for "list" in an unabridged dictionary (nine in *Webster's Third International*) provide better dictionary reading than do most words, as we make our way through such earlier but related senses of the word as *to gratify* and *inclination*, *to pay attention*, *edge*, and *border*, and *field of competition* before getting to such more familiar senses of the word as *roster*, *index* or *catalog*, *to enumerate*, *to categorize* or *classify*, or *to declare to be*.

It may be objected, of course, that a list is not sufficiently visual to be a genuine "icon," that it remains too abstract, is not sufficiently concrete, is too

much a verbal and mental construct to keep company with such human icons as George Armstrong Custer, Marilyn Monroe, or Babe Ruth, or Elvis Presley or with such artistically created icons as Whistler's Mother or Micky Mouse or Rosie the Riveter—with which we are more familiar and comfortable—or even with such iconic things as the Golden Gate Bridge, or the Hershey bar, or the Ford Mustang.

But we all do know what a list looks like, recognize it as a visual object. We recognize its fundamentally vertical rather than horizontal character, its pattern reflecting a paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic construct. The success of Microsoft's PowerPoint program, I am convinced, is owing in large measure to the ease with which it allows the visual presentation of a wide variety of "bulleted" lists and so legitimates the avoidance of syntactical structures (see Tufte).

Clearly, all icons are not created equal; some are more powerful, more salient, doing more cultural work than others, and often doing a different kind of cultural work. But the list, *qua* list, for all of its individual variation, I want to argue, rises to the level of popular culture icon, standing many, if not all, such tests of popular iconography as these: surviving change over time, stimulating use in ritual behavior, embracing contradictions, triggering memory and nostalgia, reflecting generational differences, prompting disagreement about meaning, and, perhaps most importantly, exhibiting rich metonymic resonance—that is, embodying associated ideas that allow a list, simply by virtue of its being a list, to deliver meanings into the contexts in which it appears, meanings beyond the simple utilitarian functions of a roster or an enumeration of items. The list delivers meaning quite apart from what it nominally contains.

The list, of course, has a long history, from the Code of Hammurabi and the Ten Commandments to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the genealogies of royals and commoners to the lists of the celebrated and the damned, ancient and contemporary. There are significant pleasures in these simple texts. Lists mediate between the abstractions of law, history, family, and fame and the concrete particulars of adultery, Black Death, King Henry, and William Shakespeare or the names on the Vietnam memorial wall, and the names and faces on the playing cards that circulated among soldiers in Iraq. This play between the abstract and the concrete is reflected in some of the common associations, teeming with contradictions, that any list bears: authority, definition, hierarchy, description and prescription, order and direction, among I suspect others.

The list suggests authority. The makers of lists either legitimately possess the authority to do so or assume the authority to do so. Parents, for example, have the authority to make a list of prohibited behaviors for their small children, but a brother will view his sister's making such a list as a usurpation of power. And lists also confer authority, as when we make the honor roll or the promotion list or appear in the organizational chart. Or they deny it, as when we do not. Some lists, of course, specifically condemn, as do the annual

tax delinquency rolls or the lists of America's most wanted criminals or the lists in fashion magazines (invariably photo-illustrated) of notorious fashion victims. Not to make some lists can be both a pleasure and an achievement. Indeed, the resonance of authority in a list is sufficiently great that it tends to shift the burden of proof from the maker of the list to the challenger of the list itself or of an item on the list. The list of prohibited items of dress in a high school, for but one example, may set students to objecting to not being allowed to wear rags or baggy trousers or low rise jeans and so allowing the whole question of a school dress code to be begged. So too, a bulleted list of twelve outcomes measures for English majors—or neighborhood beautification or city recycling or air pollution control or responsible stock investment—very often inverts the axiom that they who assert must prove, shifting the burden to those who object. Hence the affection for lists among the powerful.

But this very authoritative quality includes, in good Derridian fashion I suppose, the very seeds of its own displacement. The number of elaborate jokes that depend upon the rhetoric of the list, as is clear to readers of Jonathan Swift and of the humor pages on the Web, is legion. Undermining these associations of authority is in large part responsible for the success of Letterman's Top Ten list routine. There is something subversive about presenting a list of ludicrous causes or effects or characteristics with such authoritative fanfare. The power and authority of the list is, at least in current practice, unstable; it is very often kept in play.

Lists define far more effectively, if not more efficiently, than do manipulations of genus and specific difference and accounts of typical characteristics. An enumerative definition seems to be the real thing, while a genus and species definition feels like an escape we make when we are overwhelmed by too many things to count. The gratifications of something solid and affirming in lists, no amount of abstract taxonomy can replace. I count the people in my tribe, my friends and enemies; I can only hope to define by characteristics the citizens of my nation, or those likely to be my friends or enemies. Richard Nixon found comfort in an enemies list, not in an understanding of the characteristics of his enemies. The primitive satisfactions of lists defy philosophy, which may help to account for their ubiquity in American popular culture. Such lists, of course, do not so much define realities as present alternative realities, and they expose many, perhaps all of us, to the tender mercies of the growing profusion of lists.

Related to this defining quality is the list's capacity to establish the existence, the sense, as the *Third Unabridged Dictionary* puts it, of list as *to declare to be*, the list as creating word. "Let there be light" in Genesis is the first item in a not terribly long but crucial list. When people, places, and things have been listed, they and the categories to which they belong are culturally constructed. A place on the roster of the church or club or team or school or corporation or professional association goes a very long way toward establishing one's identity, one's reality. To have one's name stricken from the Book of Life is to cease to exist. But this central principle also

motivates the profusion of lists, at least in American culture. There is a list somewhere for everyone. They are like T-ball trophies or university service awards or entertainment industry honors; anyone can get on a list; some people get on them even as they try to avoid them.

One's place within lists points to the nearly inescapable association of lists with hierarchies and values. Lists, a lot like modern dictionaries, are both descriptive and prescriptive constructs. Often a list purports only to describe what exists, to provide an enumeration of reality; but no sooner than it appears, the list is taken as prescription, used to construct reality and evaluate it. Hard upon the concern about even being on a list follows the anxiety about place on a list. Whether one is concerned about one's self or children or friends or one's favorite movie star or saint or cultivar or baseball team or brand of beer or college or university or contestant for Miss America or any of the innumerable possibilities—place on a list is important, a matter of value and, as a consequence, a matter of contention. The more arbitrary the criteria for placement on a list, it seems, the more intense the struggle for place. The less arbitrary the criteria, the greater the claims that they are capricious by the lowly placed or (shudder) the displaced. Lists seem to have an axiological imperative all their own. Indeed, so great is the power of a list to impose hierarchies of value that we explicitly go to extreme lengths to impose order of appearance or alphabetical order or some other principle of organization upon lists in order to avoid such judgements. The effort is to no avail, for the Cole Porter Principle prevails: if "You're The Top," you are the best no matter what principle put you at the top.

Here again, the proliferation of lists undercuts this association. If one does not like one's place in a list, then one may with relative ease create a new list in a new category; the situation is like the ubiquitous characterizations of bridges or mountains or buildings; everyone of them seems to be at or near the top of a list of longest or highest or biggest of its kind or circumstance: "This bridge is the second longest suspension structure east of the Mississippi, constructed of steel made of scrap iron."

Lists can deliver order and direction, as many can attest who resort to lists of things to do in a particularly confusing week or use checklists to assure that important routines are met. A list can provide for one's self and for others a sense of an ending and a basis for evaluation. A list can be a powerful stimulus to dialogue and reflection, alone or in the company of others. And lists I think—at least those self-created ones—are predominantly a middle-class passion, for the very poor with little or no control over their environments and the very rich with a great deal if not total control, have relatively less need of lists, as of other kinds of assurance and insurance. The vast middle of America employs lists in an effort to control self and, to the degree possible, environment, and thus engages the list as an agent of self-definition, of identity formation. The penchant for lists is exhibited by Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, by George Washington and Jay Gatsby and Bill Clinton in their youth, in the Boy Scout handbooks and in the whole range of self-help

literature from Charles Atlas and Norman Vincent Peale to Alex Comfort and the latest accounts of the five, ten, fifteen, or twenty-five habits of successful people. These lists, however, tend to define what is valued more clearly than to explain how to achieve it; they have their eye more clearly focused on prizes than on processes, all their claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

The American passion for instrumental knowledge, the sheer bulk of “how to” discourse, particularly in American popular culture, collapses enumerations of what counts for pleasure or success or happiness or influence or whatever end is desired, into an undifferentiated mass. Too many lists, of course, can create disorder and misdirection, as those many people who spend more time on making lists of things to do than on getting things done can attest. All the paraphernalia that attends getting and being organized often enriches Office Depot and Staples at the expense of one’s control of self and environment. The resort to simplistic lists of steps in many, perhaps most, self-help books, is often a sign of indeterminacy, if not confusion.

Lists, I submit, are a kind of intellectual comfort food. We enjoy lists because we associate them with agents of direction and environmental control, authority, definition, clear value, and the like dispositions that Americans continue to hold in high esteem. But lists provide the pleasures of taxonomy and axiology without many—in some cases any—of the demands of rigorous analysis, whether we make and use our own lists or employ the lists of others, whether these lists attend to the trivial or the profound. Lists, particularly in their popular manifestations, are very often masks, convenient and satisfying substitutes for those very dispositions and disciplines we admire.

Lists also tend to oversimplify likeness and difference in an interesting way. Lists emphasize likeness and overlook difference within their own boundaries, and tend to overlook likeness and emphasize difference outside their boundaries. To be on a ten best (or worst) dressed list—or a list of the town’s outstanding volunteer workers or the state’s most wanted criminals, or a list of the top 100 albums of the decade or the twenty-five worst shows in the history of television or the university’s list of the ten best teachers or the student government association’s list of the ten worst teachers—foregrounds quantitative likenesses and backgrounds, and often even erases qualitative differences. Lists appear to fix the flux, and as a consequence are, in many respects, a modern rather than a postmodern tick; and I think the current passion for them is yet another in the long (dare I say) list of modernist responses to postmodernism.

Ironically, however, a proliferation of lists contributes to the very instability of meaning that this impulse seeks to counteract, and so contributes to the condition of postmodernity. Lists traffic in associations of security that are in high demand in a climate of intellectual and political insecurity. To employ distinctions John Cawelti applies to popular artifacts, lists are more formula than form, more conventional than inventional, more reassuring than challenging (“Concept of Formula”). That said, their profusion contributes to the climate of cultural insecurity.



Function as a mediating device is, I think, central to understanding all icons, and is the source of their resonance. Lists, as do all icons, perform their mediating function because they foreground the material; in this case, that typographical, vertically formatted, roster of nouns or phrases or sometimes even whole sentences. Moreover, lists, despite their being made up of words, perform much, perhaps most, of their work in a way more like the non-verbal functions of icons than the symbolic functions of language; that is, they attempt to forge relationships and understandings that cannot be expressed adequately in the conventions controlled by syntax. They seek a resonance of association—inclusion or exclusion, degrees of proximity and remoteness, likeness inside a category and difference outside of a category—that either cannot be expressed in the acts of predication that syntax demands, or cannot as adroitly or efficiently be expressed in syntax. This characteristic may account for the intense interest in icons in contemporary American culture, as it grows increasingly disaffected with niceties of conventional language, especially predication.

The list, then, I take to be a cultural space for play, and in play, a venue that is not entirely free of language but does not fully engage language. To put the point in other terms, lists engage the uses and gratifications of language in a sufficiently satisfying way, without entangling either the list maker or the list consumer in the complexities or personal, intellectual, or cultural demands of a fuller exercise of language.

The list, I submit, is a cultural venue especially suited for the exploration, for the reaffirmation, and for the destruction of relationships. While differences in degree, of course, may be very great, lists are in kind paradigmatic in their function; that is, they put existing relationships, the realm of the syntagmatic, into play and present the maker of the list and the consumer of the list with a structure of possible relationships, the realm of the paradigmatic. The list allows, even compels, one to explore possible utterances, possible stories, possible lives, possible identities, even multiple identities. Any list, for all of its associations of authority and definition, is open to challenge by an alternative list, by the relatively simple and widely accessible means of inclusion and exclusion. Relatively simple, that is, compared to exercises of syntax.

The list is a signally loose cultural artifact, despite all of its “modernist” associations of determination, definition, and authority. By virtue of its profusion, it helps to sustain “postmodernism.” Once remarkably unified in its meanings and associations, the list has slipped into the very condition of postmodernity that many felt resort to the list might resist. Moreover, the list has become fragmented and contingent, pointing less to structures of actual meaning, to fixed relationships, or to determinations, than to structures of possible meanings, to sets of contingencies, to indeterminations.

Every person is now his or her own maker of lists, participant in the struggle for authority and determination in the culture. While this democratization of list-making is not the equivalent of the Gutenberg revolution, it

is akin to it. The list, like so very many popular icons, materially signs the schizophrasia of the postmodern condition.

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# Log Cabin

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*William J. Badley with Linda Badley*

In the mid-1970s, I (or, rather, we) built a log cabin near Bouchette, Quebec, about two hours north of Ottawa, Ontario. At the time a resident of Louisville, Kentucky, I had been in Ottawa visiting a former college friend I had helped desert from the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War in 1969. As he was interested in buying property as a way to gain “landed immigrant” status, we went camping in Quebec to inspect a lot for sale that a Canadian friend had told him about. Like many American males in their twenties, I felt confronted with the alternatives of staying in the United States (with a good probability of ending up in Vietnam) or to going to Canada. Buying land in Canada offered a “backup” position.

Land in Quebec was cheap, with few strings attached. The two lots, with roughly 140 feet of shoreline and 150 feet to the back, were \$999.00 each or U.S.\$2,000 (which I paid in monthly installments, without interest), there being at the time no objection to Americans buying land. For a graduate student with virtually no savings, the deal seemed miraculous, and I put money down on two lots on a narrow, stony peninsula densely overgrown with spindly trees and surrounded by Lac Rond (Roddick Lake). I was, in the words of Canned Heat, “Goin’ Up the Country,” an American dream that (paradoxically) included leaving the United States behind. The dream blended a righteous civil disobedience with a fantasy of self-sufficient “living off the land,” a combination that couldn’t have been more stereotypically American. As for phrases like “getting back to the basics,” which we used unblushingly in those days, what we meant was modeled on Thoreau’s decision “to front only the essential facts of life” (2, par. 16). To me as an American living in downtown Louisville, as for many of my generation (and as for Thoreau) the land represented a garden that had been promised and long since lost.

Living in the woods, as I realized at the time, had emotional ties to the pilgrimages of my own childhood. My family left the sweltering July heat of Oklahoma City and drove to Alexandria, Minnesota, for a two- or three-week vacation in crude two-room cabins on Lake Victoria. The journey always seemed like moving from the desert to a land of tree-covered estates.

Even more so the log cabin, our eventual summer homestead, was a nostalgic gesture and a quintessentially American dream. Soon after my wife, in-laws, and I began making summer camping pilgrimages, we discovered two hand-hewn log cabins, one completed, nestled among the pine trees on the picturesquely rocky point of the peninsula, and the foundation of the other started in the lot next to ours. These structures led us to young Canadians on “our” peninsula who shared our ideals, and offered their skills and knowledge as well. The fellow who had completed his cabin led me to the man who had sold him his logs, a local French-Canadian farmer named Floribert Bastien, a man of the nineteenth-century values of frugality and personal trust, values that America had once laid claim to. Monsieur Bastien spoke as little English as I did French but agreed to cut logs in the fall, debark them for seasoning, and deliver them to the worksite. When I told him that I had no money but would be paid for teaching in the fall, he said, “Send it at Christmas; I’ll need it then.” We shook hands, and it happened.

Just as our log cabin was not strictly speaking “American,” Thoreau’s on Walden Pond was not, strictly speaking, made of logs. But, with the legendary borrowed ax, it was rough cut and hand-hued from “arrowy white pines” on the pond for joists, studs, and rafters and “shanty” wood that Thoreau bought for \$4.25: “the walls being of rough, weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night.” Even so, it seemed ethereal, even Olympian: “To my imagination it retained throughout the day more or less of this auroral character, reminding me of a certain house on a mountain which I had visited a year before. This was an airy and unplastered cabin, fit to entertain a travelling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments” (2, par. 8).

Thoreau moved into his cabin on “Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, 1845” (2, par. 8). I started building mine in the bicentennial year of 1976. I ordered 120 logs of poplar, red pine, white pine, and oak: sixty for the side walls to measure eighteen feet on the interior and sixty logs for the front and back to measure fifteen feet on the interior. These plus the sill logs, purlins, ridge pole, and planed lumber for the floors, purchased at a rural sawmill, cost about \$2,400. Other “incidentals” included twenty bags of cement, nine Sona tubes that were twenty inches in diameter, nine-inch and twelve-inch spikes, a load of sand, a fifty-gallon drum of water, and two books on building log cabins. As Thoreau borrowed an ax, we borrowed a cement-mixing box (metal sheet on the bottom, surrounded by two-by-eight-inch wood). Because we had no electricity, all of the nine Sona tubes were filled with hand-mixed concrete, from bedrock to heights of two inches to six feet. Our tools included a Craftsman twelve-inch chain saw (the piston had to be replaced), an ax, two hammers, two compasses, a cement hoe, a fifteen-inch bow saw, a carpenter’s crosscut saw, a level, a plumb bob, a lantern, and a propane camping cook stove with two burners.

Thoreau says that “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them”

(18, par. 5). M. Bastien and I built a “castle in the air” with our handshake, and the foundation began with the back-breaking job of mixing cement. The nine pillars on which the cabin now proudly sits had little in common with T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. As a matter of fact, the wisdom learned was that large rocks can be used to partially push into wet cement so that it can “tie” this portion with the next day’s cement. Other wisdom learned was that wetting the rocks for the cement leads to separated finger flesh when skin oil is leached out, that hand mixing cement changes the arms and upper body, and that touching logs after two weeks in cement and sand is like being reborn because it is touching something that was once alive.

From the earliest times, trees have been sacred and mysterious. The process of working with the logs—that is, building the cabin itself—had a noble simplicity as well as a good amount of tedium. For the basic design, we referred to the Lincoln Logs we had played with as children and stacked matches to simulate the process. Because M. Bastien delivered the logs to the top of the hill, the logs had to be hauled to the working site, about one hundred yards. At peak periods, “we” included five or six men and women who hoisted the logs in concert between our legs, lifting and pushing them down to the site a yard at a time. After getting the sill logs and subfloor down, the process of notching and placing the logs began. Using a compass to measure the depth of the log on which the new log would sit and then to draw a semicircle on each side of the log to be cut, we made five “watermelon” cuts across the log. Then we used an axe to knock out the slices of wood. Then came the process of setting the log on the one below. Because each log was different, we had to flip it several times, using the chain saw and axe to “flatten” and match the sides of both logs. Once the logs were sufficiently close to each other, after sealing the notch with oakum (*étoupe*), we reset the logs, and drove a twelve-inch spike down each corner to hold the joint. This process went on for the sixty-six logs, each one treated individually as if still a living thing. The positive side was that when we made mistakes, we could fix or “hide” them; the logs were forgiving of our lack of knowledge.

Thus we did not worry about exceedingly fine details, as working with logs meant accommodating their natural shapes, and we extended the principle to trees on the land, which we worked around rather than cut down. Instead of cement, we chinked the logs with oakum, a far more provisional substance. The windows were discards obtained from local farmers and shop dealers, usually after extensive negotiations, and therefore of different sizes, shapes, and conditions. Bestowing windows on the cabin meant remaking it to fit them. Eventually it sported a large front deck and a nine-foot dormer that turned the sleeping loft into something resembling a second floor.

This monument to self-sufficiency invariably became, at several crucial points, a cooperative process much like the community barn raisings of prairie settlers. Friends from the United States and several like-minded local Anglophone and French Canadians, some of whom had bought a farm collectively, worked to raise the rafters and put on the roof and to celebrate

afterwards. In fact, as it took shape, in this meticulously planned yet invariably haphazard fashion, our cabin, like Thoreau's, gave material form to several contradictions at the heart of American values. It was the culmination of our dream of "getting back to nature," yet its fundamental purpose was to protect us from the elements. (And so, while we scorned the amenities at first, as it grew it accommodated a second floor, larger families, electricity, a hot shower, and a flush toilet.) It represented freedom from traditional restraints and requirements while remaining a symbol of traditional values. As something we had made with our hands and that, as we often remarked in awe-struck voices, would probably (barring fires, floods, and Armageddon) outlast us all, it was a symbol of permanence. Yet it was a shelter raised quickly from available natural resources that were destined to be destroyed. It was built in opposition to all the values associated with American capitalism, and yet the simplicity of construction that made it a monument to the "do-it-yourself" ethos and American ingenuity also made it infinitely capable of rapid and rabidly patriotic mass production. We wanted Walden too, and reproduced it in our fashion—and so, as we have subsequently found, has everybody else.

In today's culture, the log cabin similarly includes nostalgia for simplicity and tradition while cultivating equally the desire for affluence intrinsic to a consumer culture. The "log home" that preserves and projects "traditional values" forward (and therefore expands exponentially outward) for the next generation is featured in ads in every medium. Thus, in a culture that is continuously in hyperdrive for change, the American log cabin is associated with conservation—with stability; continuity of past, present, and future; and the "real" as opposed to the "plasticity" of manufactured, modern culture. At the same time, it represents the opposite of such values, belonging perhaps more accurately with Thoreau's advocated practice of traveling light and burning or "busk[ing]" some possessions as was the custom of the Mucclasse Indians (1-E, par. 4). This is another side of American tradition—the cut-trees-plant-crops-leach-the-land-and-leave-for-more-land mentality. It can be seen in razing any building that stands in the way of progress and can be seen in the symbolic destruction of cities in American cinema (*Independence Day* and natural-disaster flicks like *The Day after Tomorrow*).

While sold nationally and internationally for their association with American frontier and traditional values and permanence, most of today's log homes are "vastly different" from those of yesteryear. Eric Fulton, communications manager of the Log Homes Council, the national organization of log home manufacturers and part of the National Association of Home Builders, notes that "When log homes were first built, they were generally one or two rooms . . . stripped by hand . . . finished as best they could and filled with chinking" (qtd. in Xiong, F3). Today they tend to be large, often two or three story "estates" with great rooms, large windows, and even indoor swimming pools.

These "dream homes," which "you" design, are almost invariably (according to the ads) constructed from prefabricated "kits." Conversely, most



A modern-day log cabin provides an alternative to traditional houses. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

home building kits are log cabins. After a few solar and other manufactured home kit sites, Google finds under “home kits” Web site after Web site advertising log or “timber” homes. Kits pretend to combine the American ideals of consumerism and freedom of choice with self-reliant do-it-yourself-ism in that one selects and seemingly designs one’s dream home from the ground up—if usually without lifting a finger. Despite their obvious mass production—the logs come from manufacturers pre-cut, numbered, and ready to be assembled—most log home kits are advertised as American

“originals.” For a conspicuous example, the Original Lincoln Logs, Ltd.: Authentic American Homes site advertises two “systems.” The “Classic Solid Timber” homes offer a choice of several packages of bleached, uniform, and uniformly notched logs and a choice of several wood “species” of pine and cedar; the “Thermo-Home Panelized Wall System” on the other hand offers the “beauty of a log home *and* the unlimited finish options of a conventionally framed home” by attaching a log facade to the outside of a traditionally framed home. The latter is touted: “Best of all, this building system is delivered partially constructed. This means that [as in the days of community roof raising] building is fast and easy” (The Original Lincoln Logs, Ltd.).

In the above instance, these modern, mass produced versions of the do-it-yourself (or communal) simplicity that made the log cabin a natural in the first place are opulent adult variations on one of childhood’s great pleasures. True, Original Lincoln Logs, Ltd., have taken both name and concept from “Honest Abe” Lincoln, the president most often identified as being born in a log cabin—in fact, their “frequently asked questions” feature is labeled “Ask Abe.” But boasting a history far longer than Original Ltd., and obviously their true source of inspiration, are the “Classic Since 1916!” children’s toy sets with the same “Original Lincoln Logs” name. Emphasizing their “Real Wooden Logs,” their home page features commemorative models such as the “Conestoga Homestead” set that promises: “Rediscover the Wild West. . . Enjoy hours of creative fun building a homestead, a covered wagon and settling on the new frontier!” (“Nostalgia: Collectors’ Sets”). Tabs prominently displayed at the top of the page advertise two distinct types: the “Nostalgia” models, which feature the “rich, deep color,” rugged look, and all-wooden parts that “Mom’s” generation would want to share, and the “Classic” models, which offer smooth-textured, light tan logs and a large variety of plastic parts that allow one to provide the same sorts of amenities as modern adult “kits” afford.

Emblazoned on yet another homepage claiming to be “The Original Log Cabin Homes” are the words: “Adventure, Dream, Imagine, Spirit.” The hot button “An American Original” pronounces log-home living “an intensely personal experience.” Thanks to “computer-assisted design and manufacture,” one can return to nature and have the comforts afforded in modern “estate” homes, “Designing the Dream” assures. The site’s boasted commercials for Log Cabin Homes are on three television programs: *Outdoor Moments*, *The American Outdoorsman*, and *Best of America By Horseback*. The advertisements’ range exemplifies crosscurrents of television, Internet, and magazine publishing, with some publishers printing several log cabin magazines sold at Lowe’s and other hardware stores, and supermarkets. But the big news is that TV star “Grizzly Adams” Dan Haggerty has joined the Log Cabin Homes, Ltd., Team as its “international” spokesman: “We’re excited about Dan joining our team. His portrayal of Grizzly Adams truly depicts the lifestyle of Americana that we desire for our worldwide marketing and sales efforts” (“Trump Elegance Inspires Grizzly Adams”).

A *Grizzly Adams* wilderness cabin lifestyle can also be purchased through Bison Log Cabin RV/Park, an Original subsidiary that ingeniously marries the ruggedness and stability of the log home with the mobility of the recreational vehicle, Thoreauesque aesthetics with the Thoreauesque tradition of “busking”: “Beauty, simplicity, and quality natural materials has [*sic*] been brought up to date with the latest in technology and design” (*Bison Log Cabin RV/Park*). Although Bison Log Cabin RVs are in actuality not as “mobile” as some might dream, they are prefabricated, easily erected and taken down, and moved. At the bottom of the Bison home page, below rusticized representations of the RV Park, is a miniature of Tom Verse, President and Founder, dressed like a forest ranger. Behind him, a herd of bison graze, and behind them is an evergreen forest.

Not only are log cabins more mobile than one might have thought; long associated with populist values, they are just as often claimed by Republicans. The Log Cabin Republicans, a group fighting from within the Republican Party for inclusion of gay and lesbian Americans, in its name refers to the first Republican President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, who “built the Republican Party on the principles of liberty and equality” and who believed the party “should return to its roots.” The group considers Ronald Reagan a hero for opposing attempts to ban gays and lesbians from teaching; their motto is “Inclusion Wins” (“A Proud History”). The icon brings positive associations for politicians of all kinds, however. Elsewhere, “The Political



Abraham Lincoln’s log cabin. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Graveyard” idealizes politicians born in log cabins, twenty of whom were Democrats, nineteen Republicans, one woman, six Presbyterians, two Baptists, two Methodists, and two Confederates (Kestenbaum).

Log cabins are for sale internationally, for rent in Georgia and Big Bear Lake, California, for adults or for “Little Tykes,” the brand name of backyard log cabin for the kids. The ads are usually, if not universally “white.” One can “work at home” to earn money for a cabin at [wealth.DukeCityAdvertising.com](http://wealth.DukeCityAdvertising.com), or learn how to get money to bid quickly on eBay to get a cabin at [auctionsniper.com](http://auctionsniper.com). A Google search of 0.14 seconds provides 1.3 million hits for “log cabin.” If only, thirty-odd years ago, I had known what I know today: Thoreau’s American dream lives on in various and sundry, populist and elitist, national and international—and increasingly mobile and mass-produced—forms.

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# Lorraine Motel

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*Thomas S. Bremer*

The Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, is less an iconic place than an iconic moment. In April 1968 the world awoke to a photograph, now indelibly etched in the collective American consciousness, of three men on a motel balcony pointing urgently upward across the street while another crouches down with a dying Martin Luther King, Jr. Just outside Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel about six o'clock on the evening of April 4, 1968, an assassin's bullet had struck down the indefatigable leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. The nondescript motel façade, with the metal railings of its narrow second-story balcony and the large drapery-covered windows, instantly became in that terrifying moment the place of martyrdom for one of America's most heroic, and most controversial, leaders.

Like other American sacred places, the Lorraine Motel quickly became, and remains today, a site of conflict. The motel still looks today as it did on the fateful day in 1968, serving as a poignant façade to the National Civil Rights Museum. For some, it stands as an ugly and embarrassing reminder of America's worst moment, a scar carved by the ruthless hatred in America's long history of racism and division. For others, the Lorraine Motel is a shrine to the legacy of Dr. King, and to the immeasurable sacrifice that he and others involved in the Civil Rights Movement offered to the highest ideals of American democracy. But even among those who agree that the site should honor the memory of Dr. King and what he stood for, differences abound. A place of collective memory; a pilgrimage destination that honors the life and martyrdom of Martin Luther King, Jr.; an educational center focusing on the history of the Civil Rights Movement; a site for carrying on the work of Dr. King through social activism; a tourist attraction that bolsters the local economy—the Lorraine Motel encompasses all of these and more.

The motel became the Lorraine in 1942 when Walter and Loree (short for Lorraine) Bailey bought the business and changed its name. Under their ownership it became a favorite lodging house for prominent African Americans visiting Memphis in the segregated South; as Kenneth Adderley notes, “it was one of the few places in Memphis where African-Americans could get

a room for the night” (27). Over the years such luminaries as Nat King Cole, B. B. King, Aretha Franklin, and Jackie Robinson all stayed at the Lorraine. But, Walter Bailey explained to reporter Lloyd Shearer, their most special guest was Martin Luther King, Jr.; they always reserved for him number 306, a double room that he preferred, and never charged him for it (4).

Just hours after Dr. King’s assassination, Loree Bailey suffered a stroke and fell into a coma; she died five days later, the same day as Dr. King’s funeral. Her husband was at a loss as to what to do with the motel. He continued operating it on his own, believing, as Shearer reported in *Parade* magazine, that he had “a potential goldmine”; Bailey knew right away that with thousands of people driving by every week to see the place where Dr. King had fallen, the Lorraine Motel “by all rights should become a hallowed shrine.” Bailey told Shearer, “I honestly think that Room 306 will go down in history as the most famous motel room in the world” (4).

Bailey contributed to the room’s enduring fame by establishing a shrine there in memory of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Loree Bailey. He glassed in the portion of the balcony where Dr. King fell, and inside Room 306 he collected, in the estimation of reporter Paul Turner, “a rather amateurish arrangement of photographs, newspaper clippings and plaques recalling the life and death of the civil rights leader” (A1). But the goldmine Bailey envisioned never materialized. As he sank further into debt, he looked for a buyer who would respect the hallowed ground where Dr. King had given his life.



The now-famous picture of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Joseph Louw/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images.

The deteriorating condition of the Lorraine Motel caught the attention of local attorney and civil rights activist D'Army Bailey (no relation to the motel's owner). In a 1979 editorial he complained that "leaders in the black and white communities have not done much to preserve the world-famous King assassination site at the Lorraine. It is one of the key places that concerned visitors to Memphis want to see. . . . [S]ome of those who visit are surprised and disappointed by what they see" (Adderley 31). D'Army Bailey went on to organize the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation that first acquired the motel property at a bankruptcy auction, and then sought government funding to establish the National Civil Rights Museum at the site. In 1987, the Foundation transferred ownership of the property to the state of Tennessee, but agreed to take continuing responsibility for operating the education center and museum there (Adderly 49).

With allocations of \$8.8 million from state and local governments, the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation was able to build a full-scale, professional museum that, according to the mission statement on their Web page, "chronicles key episodes of the American civil rights movement and the legacy of this movement to inspire participation in civil and human rights efforts globally, through our collections, exhibitions, and educational programs." The museum preserves the façade of the Lorraine Motel that includes the balcony where Dr. King was shot. But the rest of the motel building and complex were removed to make room for the new museum building. Inside, visitors can view temporary exhibitions on display in a special gallery just inside the main entrance. Next is a small auditorium where a short introductory film begins the tour of the museum. The galleries follow a chronological walk through African-American history and the Civil Rights Movement. Beginning in 1619 with the earliest African slaves in England's American colonies, visitors learn along the way about such topics as the Civil War; Jim Crow laws; the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case in the U.S. Supreme Court; the Montgomery Bus Boycott; Freedom Rides; the March on Washington in 1963 and Dr. King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech; and finally, the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis that brought Dr. King to the city in 1968 where he met his fate at the hands of an assassin. The various exhibits include life-size, interactive displays, such as a Montgomery city bus with the driver insisting that Rosa Parks move to the rear; protesters seated at a lunch counter with a couple of thugs looking on in a threatening pose; and a jail cell like the one in Birmingham where Dr. King wrote his famous letter.

The museum tour culminates with a solemn viewing of the shrine to Martin Luther King, Jr., in the reconstructed Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel. According to the museum's Web site, "The emotional focus of the Museum and the historical climax of the exhibit is the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. King was assassinated. Dr. King's room can be viewed as it was on April 4, 1968." Visitors can also peer out a window onto the balcony at the very spot where the slain civil rights leader fell, and look across the street to the small window at the back of the rooming house where the assassin fired from.

Leaving the somber experience of gazing into Dr. King's disheveled room as it was at the moment he died (reconstructed for the benefit of visitors), the path leads down a flight of stairs and into the museum gift shop. Since 2002, visitors can continue their visit across the street where they pass through a ground level tunnel that enters the former rooming house from where the assassin fired his deadly shots. This new section of the museum focuses on "Exploring the Legacy," and, according to the museum's Web site, its exhibits ask, "What happened after Dr. King's death? What happened to the Movement, did it die in Memphis? Are we any closer today to the life that Dr. King dreamed of than when he was assassinated 34 years ago?" The expansion of the museum includes the reconstructed room where convicted shooter James Earl Ray stayed and the bathroom from where the fatal shot was fired. The multimedia displays include conspiracy theories about the assassination as well as exhibits about the progress of the Civil Rights Movement since 1968. The tour ends with a film about nonviolent protests around the world and the international progress of civil rights. Again, visitors exit into yet another gift shop.

"Exploring the Legacy" responds to complaints about the original museum presentation of the Civil Rights Movement as static, depicting the assassination of Dr. King as the end of the movement. Mabel O. Wilson notes how the former museum "unwittingly denies its public the possibility of articulating their own meanings and associations. Thus, the endeavor to memorialize encourages, albeit unintentionally, a static interpretation of African-American history" (17). Wilson goes on to suggest that freezing the moment of Dr. King's death by making the reconstructed setting of the assassination the emotional focus of the museum "preempts the possibility of imaging the event from a contemporary perspective. Entering the museum, visitors become passive consumers of an image the media have made iconic" (18). However, the new, expanded version of the museum attempts to take visitors beyond the definitive moment of the killing and into contemporary perspectives on the legacy of the movement that Dr. King gave his life for.

But D'Army Bailey, now a Circuit Court judge in Memphis and estranged from the museum's Board of Directors, regards the new addition as "an abomination." He told Beryl Lief Benderly that it "takes a beautiful story of the civil rights struggle that covered everybody, every little person in the fields of Mississippi, diverts attention away from them, and sends people through a tunnel chasing the death and assassination of King and all kinds of conspiracy theories." Rather than working actively to overcome the pernicious realities of racial inequality that continue to exist in American society, the new part of the museum, he feels, offers little more than "just sort of general rhetoric" about how far we have come (Benderly 33-34).

Other critics go further than Judge Bailey in objecting to the museum's mission. Ever since her eviction from the motel in March 1988 to make way for the new museum, Jacqueline Smith has kept up a protest on the sidewalk in front of the site. For nearly two decades she has been there, talking to

visitors, distributing literature, and vociferously objecting to the whole idea of a museum on the site where Dr. King was killed. Her protest Web site, *Fulfillthedream.net*, describes the National Civil Rights Museum as

a Disney-style tourist attraction, which seems preoccupied with gaining financial success, rather than focusing on the real issues. Many people have criticized the “tone” with which information is portrayed—Do we really want our children to gaze upon exhibits from the Ku Klux Klan, do we need our children to experience mock verbal abuse as they enter a replica bus depicting the Montgomery bus boycott? Do we have so little imagination, that we need to spend thousands of taxpayers dollars recreating a fake Birmingham jail, to understand that Dr. King was incarcerated?

She concludes, “All in all, the greatest criticism of the Museum is that it dwells heavily on negativity and violence.” Moreover, Smith regards the museum as an insulting displacement of the very people that Dr. King most wanted to help, low-income African Americans who once lived in the vicinity of the Lorraine Motel but have been forced out of the neighborhood by redevelopment around the museum. The new businesses, Smith told Benderly, offer “a diet of croissants and cappuccino” that the former residents could scarcely afford (35). Benderly reports that Smith would rather see a homeless shelter or medical clinic for the poor instead of a museum appealing to tourists at the Lorraine Motel; in a more appropriate tribute to the ideals of the Civil Rights Movement, the goal would be to “help the least among us, just like Dr. King did when he came to help the garbage men strike for better working conditions and better pay. They were considered the lowest of the low” (Benderly 33). In a tradition of protest pioneered by Martin Luther King, Jr., Jacqueline Smith calls for a different engagement with the past from her sidewalk vigil across from the museum.

The protests of critics like Smith and Bailey urge visitors to the museum and the American public in general to move beyond the iconic moment of the King assassination and continue the struggle for freedom. Their dissenting voices remind us that the great accomplishment of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life was more a matter of process rather than a particular achievement. Certainly, the fight against racial inequality and the pervasive injustices of political and economic disenfranchisement did not cease with the fateful gunshot that ended Dr. King’s life. The iconic moment of the Lorraine Motel’s notoriety stands as a stark reminder of how distant the prize of equality still remains, how difficult the challenges that still lie ahead, how great the price we have already paid and are yet to pay again.

On the other hand, the fallen King lying on the motel balcony remains a momentous image in the history of the nation. In that instant we witness a martyrdom and the apotheosis of Martin Luther King, Jr., himself as well as the ideals for which he fought and died; from his repose beside Room 306, King rose to the realm of national deity, assuming his place among other great

figures of American democracy, standing beside the likes of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and especially Abraham Lincoln in the imagination of the American people. To the extent that Room 306 remains a shrine to Dr. King and his legacy, it serves as a memory place of the American experience, at once both tragic and hopeful.

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# Jessica Lynch

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## *Anna Froula*

The story of Army PFC Jessica Lynch is a narrative that riveted the nation in the beginning of the second Iraq War. In writing about the compelling features of this story, we are not evaluating or maligning one woman soldier or any other soldier. Rather, we are interpreting and examining the American cultural and mythic significance of the media's representations of women at war.

In April 2003, Jessica Lynch smiled bravely from magazine covers as the ideal embodiment of America at War. Her dramatic rescue by America's best—Navy SEALs and Army Rangers—and her subsequent celebrity eclipsed media coverage of the deaths of other soldiers and Iraqis, and destruction of Iraq's infrastructure. Furthermore, amidst criticism that the invasion could likely devolve into another military quagmire, her sensational liberation transformed the lingering Vietnam-War trope of America *fighting* itself into America *rescuing* itself. At stake in her story—more marketable than those of other soldiers injured or killed in the firefight—is that Lynch symbolized how the United States would present and represent itself in all wars. Image-makers from the Pentagon to *People* and *Newsweek* seized upon this pretty, blue-eyed blond to fashion an inspiring damsel in distress who served her country in the military yet fit within normative patriarchal gender roles. Manipulating the details of her ordeal, the U.S. administration would subsequently portray the war through the captivity narrative, a genre that Sacvan Berkovitch calls “auto-American-autobiography: the celebration of the representative self as American, and of the American self as the embodiment of a prophetic universal design” (136). This paradigm of understanding American experience dates from the seventeenth-century Indian wars and interprets the capture and rescue of a white hostage held in an alien culture. American studies professor Melani McAlister initially recognized how Lynch's story modeled the genre in which “the captive (an ordinary, innocent individual, often a woman) embodied a people threatened from outside. The captive confronted dangers and upheld her faith; in so doing, she became a symbol, representing the nation's virtuous identity to itself,” thus confirming the settlers' presence

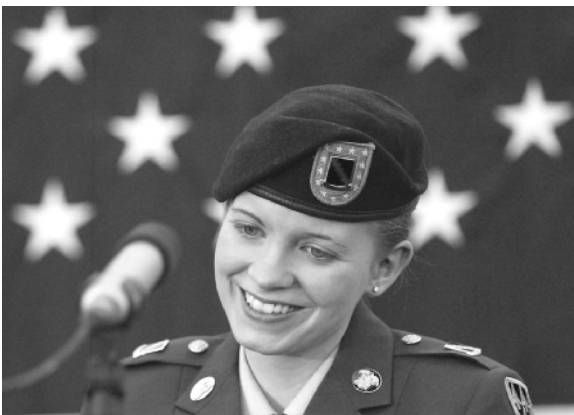


in the New World as John Winthrop's "city on the hill," from his 1630 sermon to his fellow Puritans *A Modell of Christian Charity*.

Promoting Lynch as an emblematic captive, the media images varied little—the shining blond hair, the brave smile, the ideal face of America abroad as victim, rather than invader. "If Lynch had been an ugly white woman," writes Charles Mudede, "the mission wouldn't have been as impressive or celebrated. In order for the plot to work, the men of Special Forces had to be seen saving a beautiful white woman" (par. 8). The story Mudede notes advances the cultural archetype of America at war, saving the captives from the wilderness and bringing the dark, savage captors to justice. The captivity narrative comprises much of the first American literature, with its metaphors used by ministers such as Cotton Mather—himself a quintessential myth-maker—as morals to guide colonists away from the temptations of "Indian" life and to exemplify the Puritan mission as a beacon of God's goodness in a wilderness of corruption (Johnson 17). The trope of rescuing the innocent victim from the vicious tyrant in many fiction genres—such as Westerns like *The Searchers* (1956)—recurs as well in our patriotic legitimizations of attacking other nations, most recently in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Berkovitch explains that the success of a myth lies within its adaptability. Via her own debilitating captivity, Jessica Lynch unquestionably fit the role of the innocent captive, particularly when night vision cameras captured her rescue in mass-produced images of her frightened face nestled in an American flag.

As Richard Slotkin explains, the captivity allegory "allows only two responses to the Indian and to evil, either passive resignation or violent retribution in the name of a transcendent and inhuman justice" (141). Legitimizing this mythic dichotomy necessitates forgetting the less savory ambiguities of its seventeenth-century precedents. In one of these, Mercy

Short returned to Boston in 1693 as a war orphan after eight months with her Abenaki captors. Destined for a life of servitude until she demonstrated symptoms of demonic possession, as a ward of Cotton Mather, she helped to convict and execute Sarah Good for witchcraft. In another, in 1697 Hannah Dustan stole hatchets from her Abenaki captors and killed four adults and six children in the dead of night; later she traded their scalps for bounty in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Historians' revisions of Dustan's story veer from Cotton Mather's celebration of divine motherly instincts to Nathaniel Hawthorne's



Jessica Lynch makes remarks from a wheelchair to hundreds of journalists who were in attendance to report Lynch's first public words since her ordeal, 2003. AP/Wide World Photos.

castigation of the “bloody hag’s” violent behavior (Weis 46). Even Mary Rowlandson of Lancaster, Massachusetts, who published her own captivity narrative in 1682, complicates the rescue of the good white woman when she uncomfortably realizes that her capacity for evil equals that of the “black creatures of the night” after she steals food from a small English child (71).

These incidents of women as agents of violence complicate the myth of heroic rescue. The accounts that praise Hannah Dustan justify her gruesome brutality by explaining it as a mother’s rage, because the intruders had bashed her newborn’s head against a tree during their attack. As Mather manipulated both Dustan’s and Short’s captivities, in similar story management, Pentagon sources not only planted a false story about Lynch “fighting to the death” and, later, being tortured by her captors, but refused either to correct the record or to release the full version of the filmed “rescue.” The “official” shaping of Lynch’s story responds to a nationalist desire to see the Iraqis as evil, to see them victimize Lynch as they would all of America with the then-presumed arsenal of WMDs. Furthermore, this fictionalized image of her shooting until cornered establishes her as a neat personification of America’s often-invoked “resolve.” Such a heroic narrative easily subsumes ambiguities and fictions within women’s purported pacifist nature. Whether concocted by Mather or the Pentagon, iconization requires eliding these more troubling facts of the stories, as well as other details such as the accounts of Lynch’s fellow troops.

The death of the first woman killed in Gulf War II, PFC Lori Piestewa, received comparatively little press coverage independent of Lynch. A Hopi, she was the first Native American woman killed in combat wearing a U.S. uniform. Her lack of media attention reenacts the stereotype of the Indian maiden who sacrifices herself for the white woman’s survival, an integral subplot of many Westerns and early dime novels. This mythic tradition recasts Piestewa as a spiritual force of the wilderness who would strengthen the white heroine before stepping aside, nobly and tragically, for the restoration of the innocent woman to the Paradise of America, as in such films as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *High Noon* (1952). Had Piestewa survived—linked as she was to the Iraqi captors by her dark skin and mythic associations to savage nature—her image could have provided the dark background on which to project the contrastingly white Lynch. The mythic narrative of conquest, of saving the white maiden from the wild, insists that the white woman remain sexually pure, and thus discounts an experienced woman such as Piestewa—a single mother of two—for her evident sexuality.

Unlike Piestewa, Spec. Shoshana Johnson survived the firefight and her subsequent captivity. Still, the Pentagon’s and the mass media’s reluctance to figure the nation and its mission in Johnson’s image speaks more to negative stereotyping of the single African-American mother and the racist underpinnings of nationalism, than to the bravery and sacrifice of soldiers who do not fit into America’s official self-image. The Black Entertainment Television network chose her as its 2003 Woman of the Year, and indeed, she has

a vaguely recognized name. However, American forces found the ex-POW “by accident” nearly three weeks after Lynch’s “liberation” (Mudede par. 5). Though images of her weary, scared face had proliferated in the televised coverage of the capture, Johnson returned not to the book and film deals but to a difference of \$600–\$700 in monthly Army disability payments, even though she and Lynch had received similar incapacitating injuries. Mudede explains how the Pentagon understood that rescuing Johnson would lack the political and cultural currency of saving Lynch, but “also, saving Johnson would have immediately presented the American public with ambiguities: Not only was she dark-skinned, like the ‘enemy,’ but a single mother too” (par. 5). The preferred picture of a helpless Jessica Lynch wrapped in the stars and stripes allowed the United States to appear at war with Iraq to save itself.

In contrast to the patriotic appeal of Lynch, the internet explosion of controversial photographs of PFC Lynndie England, one year later, raised troubling questions about the cultural premises and myths that would have allowed us to envision ourselves at war as both savior and victim—as Special Forces and Jessica Lynch, mythic hunter and maiden captive, rather than invader and torturer. Embedded within these myths reside American assumptions of sexuality and gender roles. Cynthia Enloe has demonstrated that “militaries need men and women to behave in gender-stereotyped ways.” Women should be maternal and need men’s protection. More crucially, the military needs men to believe that their masculinity depends on fighting and generally supporting, even desiring, that their nation go to war (Turpin 16). Like Lynch, England most obviously violated these conventions by serving not simply in the military but in a combat zone. Even more dangerously, she violated cultural assumptions of how and why we go to war. Not only did England invert the basic premise behind the captivity narrative of our nation’s beginnings, she also rendered woman’s traditional, home-front role in war outmoded.

General Robert H. Barrow argued in 1981 that women’s participation in combat “tramples the male ego. When you get right down to it, you’ve got to protect the manliness of war” (qtd. in Enloe 154). From Penelope fending off suitors during the twenty-year absence of Odysseus to Wilma Cameron (Cathy O’Donnell) patiently tending to her paraplegic veteran fiancé in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) to Julie Moore (Madeleine Stowe) tending to other military wives as they wait for their husbands in *We Were Soldiers* (2002), Western war culture abounds with popular images testifying to women’s inherent role in war: to wait, to nurture, to sanctify the veteran tainted by the violence and atrocities of war. Joshua Goldstein summarizes, “Women collectively, then, serve as a kind of metaphysical sanctuary for traumatized soldiers, a counterweight to hellish war” (304), a sanctuary corrupted by the threatening figure of Lynndie England.

The 2004 media spectacle of England revealed the sexual nature of American war. As Elliott Gruner explains, the mass media emphasizes “the abuse of women in enemy captivity while it seldom foregrounds American ‘Top Guns’ who gang rape or a ‘Major Dad’ who commits incest” (50).

Major General Antonio Taguba acknowledged at least one photo of an MP “having sex with a female prisoner” in Abu Graib (Ridgeway par. 1), yet stories of U.S. servicemen raping women do not garner the kind of media attention England has attracted. The public image of England holding a leash attached to a naked Iraqi—not to mention the *New York Post*’s reports of unreleased photos cataloging her “sexcapades” through Abu Graib—and the subsequent shock felt around the world threaten our gender and military system. If a woman displays enough sexual power, she not only may achieve a level of sexual dominance that could potentially surmount woman’s age-old subordinate position to man, but also may become the war rapist. If women provide a sanctuary for military men, then images of England desecrate this haven by redefining her as the weapon in the torture room, by her not merely possessing but becoming the phallus, a powerful symbol of masculinity.

Equally unsettling to American culture is how the Abu Graib photos undermine our mythic and racist ideology of sex. In her examination of how Hollywood has perpetuated this ideology, Ella Shohat invokes “the sexual politics of colonialist discourse” to understand how “the sexual interaction of Black/Arab men and White women can *only* involve rape” while “the sexual interaction of White men and Black/Arab women cannot involve rape” (682). Inasmuch as American popular culture normalizes the vision of a lascivious dark man overcoming a protesting, terrified white woman, the “official” statement that Jessica Lynch had been raped legitimates our continuing occupancy of Iraq. Yet the pictorial odyssey of Lynndie England exposes the sexualization of such international conquest. The infamous photos depict a short, white woman simulating forced sex with captive and feminized Arab men, images that subvert conventional ideology about wartime rape and peacetime sex roles. England’s initial torture hearings provided images of a pregnant soldier and produced the further visual oddity of military garb as maternity wear.

Various online media outlets accused England of intentionally getting pregnant in order to project a more nurturing Madonna image and restore her maidenhead via the social currency of motherhood. Though the paternity of Spec. Charles Graner, Jr. is uncontested, unreleased photos of her simulating and having sex with the prisoners, as well as the actual pictures of her impish gazes at their genitals, ironically suggest that she could have raped a detainee into fathering her child. Even the suggestion that Lynch was raped, combined with the reality of her injuries, fortifies her as a icon for America that, for many people, instills the idea that the vitality and future of the nation are at stake in Iraq. But then Lynch serves as the idealized metaphor that England subverts. The images of England’s allegedly raping male prisoners coupled with her pregnant body grant her a dangerous agency, but present her as too richly fertile, out of patriarchal control, and potentially an actual source of enemy combatants. Hence many media representations of England attempt to separate her from us, to depict her as a backwoods anomaly rather than a “real” American. But although they would, in effect, lynch England, they cannot erase the irony that—amid her service in a country that the United

States is violently occupying—England figures the America not in need of protection that Lynch personified, but the sort of rogue nation against which America should defend itself. Thus contemporary American war narratives reiterate our past, aided by the media deployment of national myths that continue to shape our national identity with a simplified story. These illusory tales gratify our collective desire to believe that our heroes are unambiguous and we are unequivocally right(eous) in kind.

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# Loretta Lynn

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## *Don Cusic*

Loretta Lynn became an icon to many women beginning in the late 1960s through her songs about a troubled marriage. All marriages have their difficulties, but some marriages are more difficult than others and that was certainly the case with Loretta and Mooney Lynn. While Loretta articulated the concerns and frustrations encountered in a marriage where the husband drank and ran around on his wife, she also became an icon for those struggling in poverty and obscurity. Loretta Lynn was a living example of someone who could come from a dirt poor background, a “nobody” on this earth, and become a “somebody” whose singing put her in the spotlight in front of millions of adoring fans.

The background of Loretta Lynn before she achieved fame in country music is as impressive—and colorful—as her story of achieving fame. Born Loretta Webb on April 14, 1934, in Butcher Hollar, Kentucky, to Melvin “Ted” Webb and his wife, Clara, Loretta, as her mother called her, was the second in a family that would include eight children—four boys and four girls. The family lived in a four-room house in the coal mining area of eastern Kentucky and Ted Webb worked in the coal mines.

On December 10, 1947, Loretta sang in a talent show at a church and, after the show, there was a “pie bidding” contest. A young man who had just gotten out of the Army, known locally as “Mooney” Lynn, bought Loretta’s pie for \$5—a princely sum in that part of the country. The pie was not particularly good; Loretta had used salt instead of sugar in the recipe.

Loretta was 13 years old at the time but she and Mooney soon began courting. It was a quick courtship; on January 10, 1948, Oliver Vanetta Lynn and Loretta Webb were married by a judge at the courthouse in Paintsville, about twenty miles away from her home. Loretta was three months away from being 14 years old at the time. Soon, she was pregnant with their first child and remembers that “I never knew where babies came from until it happened to me” (Lynn, with Vecsey 21).

The marriage was rocky from the start; Mooney had been in love with a young lady before he left for the service; during his time away, she had married. However, after his marriage to Loretta, Mooney began seeing this

young lady again—threatening the marriage. Loretta, pregnant with their first child, moved back in with her parents. When she found out about the “other woman,” Loretta sat down and wrote a letter to the girl; Mooney found out about the letter and confronted Loretta, saying, “If I ever had any love for you, I lost it today” (Lynn, with Cox 38).

Although that encounter broke Loretta’s heart, she managed to get back with her husband before their child was born. In 1950, Mooney, Loretta and their young family moved to Custer, Washington, near Bellingham, where they stayed on the farm of two bachelors, Bob and Clyde Green. Mooney worked in manual labor—as a mechanic and heavy equipment operator. Loretta stayed home and took care of their four children. In the evenings, Mooney was often out drinking and on many occasions, he was not faithful to her.

On Loretta’s eighteenth birthday, in 1952, Mooney had bought her an inexpensive guitar from Sears. She learned a few chords and enjoyed singing around the house and to her children. Mooney noticed she had a good voice and encouraged her to work on learning the guitar and singing; she did and learned some songs.

On their tenth anniversary, in January 1958, Mooney told her he wanted her to perform in public at a local bar; at this point, Loretta had never even been in a barroom or sung in front of an audience. However, they visited a club where Mooney badgered the bandleader to let Loretta sing. Instead, the bandleader invited them over to his house for an audition that week; Mooney and Loretta went over, her singing impressed the Penn Brothers, leaders of a group called The Westerners, and soon Loretta was singing with their group.

Loretta Lynn called her husband “Doolittle” and always admitted that “the singing career was Doolittle’s idea . . . without Doo and his drive to get a better life, there would have been no Loretta Lynn, country singer” (Lynn, with Cox 66).

The bar where Loretta first sang was filled with people dancing and drinking. “They wasn’t really listening,” said Loretta. “I was glad about that.” Loretta admitted that, when she sang, she looked at her feet; “I wouldn’t raise my head to face the crowd. But I knew they were there, just a few feet away. I could hear them.” After each song, “I turned my back to the crowd. I just couldn’t face the people. I was so scared, I didn’t even want to



Loretta Lynn sings during a solo concert at the Washington County Fair, 2004. © AP/Wide World Photos.

walk through the crowd to use the bathroom. Also, I was embarrassed to think people would know what I was doing” (Lynn, with Cox 67).

After a few months of working with the Penn brothers for \$5 a show, Loretta started her own band. Loretta’s group included her brother, Jack, who was living near them by this time, and they called themselves “Loretta’s Trail Blazers” and landed a job at a local tavern, playing six nights a week (Lynn, with Cox 69).

Buck Owens had a television show in Tacoma, Washington, and played at a club there. Owens hosted a talent show where singers were invited to perform for a prize. Mooney decided that Loretta should be on that show, so he and Loretta drove over to Tacoma and went to the club where Buck was performing. Mooney repeatedly asked Owens to let Loretta sing; Owens finally relented and let her sing one song and “he must have liked it because he let me sing another,” said Loretta. “Finally he came over and sat down with us and said we should really stay over for his amateur television show on Saturday night. Doolittle decided maybe we’d better manage it somehow” (Lynn, with Vecsey 108). On that talent show, Loretta sang “My Shoes Keep Walking Back to You” and won the contest; the prize was a wristwatch (108).

The show reached across the Canadian border into Vancouver, British Columbia, where Norm Burley was watching. Burley, a wealthy man from the lumber business, had just lost his wife. He contacted Doolittle and Loretta and offered to help them; Burley owned a record label, Zero Records.

Loretta Lynn started writing songs around 1960 after she bought a copy of *Country Song Round-Up*, a magazine that printed the lyrics to country songs. “I figured it looked so simple,” said Loretta. “Since everyone else was writing songs, I might as well, too. There was nothing to it, really. I’d think up a title first, then write some words, then pick out a tune on my little old rhythm guitar.”

One of the first she wrote was “Honky Tonk Girl,” which was “mostly about a girl I used to see in Bill’s Tavern drinking beer and crying. I don’t think she recognized that song was about her” (Lynn, with Vecsey 109). Burley liked the song “Honky Tonk Girl” and gave them some money to go to Los Angeles and record it. On that session Loretta recorded four songs: “Honky Tonk Girl” with B-side “Whispering Sea” would be their first single.

Doolittle had taken up photography so he took a picture of Loretta and they mailed that picture and a short bio with the records to 3,500 radio stations on a list they had obtained. Radio stations began playing the record and soon retailers began demanding copies to sell.

Norm Burley agreed to give them money to drive across country, visiting radio stations on the way to Nashville. Burley was a kind man who said to Loretta “one of the kindest things” she had heard. Burley told her that he thought she

had a lot of talent and he wanted me to learn as much about the business as I could. And he said that if I ever got a chance to go with a major recording



company, he would release me from our contract. He said he never wanted to stand in our way. (Lynn, with Vescey 111)

Doolittle and Loretta loaded up their old Mercury and drove down the West Coast, sleeping in their car and eating baloney and cheese sandwiches as they visited radio stations. When they came near a station, Loretta would get in the back of the car and change into her dress for the visit to the station. “I’d stay in those radio stations as long as they let me talk on the air,” said Loretta, while Doolittle sat in the car, listening to the interview on the radio and “getting burned up if I said something dumb” (Lynn, with Vecsey 112).

In 1961, Loretta and “Doo” arrived in Nashville. Her song, “Honky Tonk Girl” was a hit on country radio and led to her appearance on Ernest Tubb’s “Midnight Jamboree” radio program, held at the Ernest Tubb Record Shop, across Broadway from the Ryman Auditorium, after the Grand Ole Opry’s show was finished.

Although Loretta Lynn’s first trip to the Grand Ole Opry came soon after she and Doo arrived in Nashville when they scraped together their money for two tickets, her next visit to the Opry was when she performed “Honky Tonk Girl.” Soon, she was appearing regularly on the Grand Ole Opry as a “guest.”

Doolittle instinctively knew that he did not have the connections or know-how to further Loretta’s career once they got to Nashville. He met the Wilburn Brothers and agreed to let them manage and book Loretta as well as publish all of her songs. It was a lifetime contract—one which no artist with a good lawyer would have signed. But the Lynns were naive and struggling; they felt they had to take whatever opportunity they could get.

There were four Wilburn Brothers: Teddy, Doyle, Leslie, and Lester. Teddy and Doyle were “The Wilburn Brothers” who recorded for Decca and appeared on the Grand Ole Opry. Leslie and Lester took care of business. The Wilburn brothers publishing company was Sure-Fire Music and their talent agency was Wil-Helm Talent, co-owned by Don Helms, the former steel guitar player for Hank Williams.

Doyle Wilburn took a demo of Loretta singing “Fool Number One” to Owen Bradley, head of Decca Records in Nashville and the producer of Kitty Wells, Ernest Tubb, Patsy Cline, Brenda Lee, and other talent on the Decca roster. Bradley did not want to sign Loretta as an artist; he thought she sounded too much like Kitty Wells, and Kitty was already on the label. But he wanted the song, “Fool Number One” for Brenda Lee. Wilburn held out, insisting Loretta should be signed as an artist. Finally, Bradley relented, agreeing to sign Loretta Lynn to Decca if Brenda Lee could record “Fool Number One.” (Brenda Lee’s recording of “Fool Number One” reached number three on the pop charts at the end of 1961.)

Loretta Lynn’s first recording session for Decca was in 1961 and she had top-ten records on Billboard’s Country Singles Chart for the next five

years—but none that she wrote. However, beginning in 1966, she emerged as the first major female singer-songwriter in country music, telling the story of her life and marriage—and articulating the thoughts and feelings of women all across the nation—in songs like “Don’t Come Home A’Drinkin’ (With Lovin’ On Your Mind),” “What Kind of a Girl (Do You Think I Am?),” “Fist City,” “Your Squaw Is On the Warpath,” “To Make a Man (Feel Like a Man),” and “The Pill.” She wrote her life story in a song, “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” which became a best-selling book, then a movie starring Sissy Spacek.

Her two most controversial songs were “Rated X” and “The Pill.” In both of these songs, she addressed issues confronting women in the early 1970s. In “Rated X,” she speaks about the stigma of being a divorced woman; in “The Pill” she talks forthrightly about birth control.

By 1970, it was apparent that Loretta Lynn had outgrown the Wilburns; however, she had signed a lifetime contract with them for management, booking, and publishing. The Wilburns’ television show had ended by this time and they were no longer actively touring. Teddy Wilburn moved to California and Doyle was drinking heavily. When Loretta requested an end to her management contract, they balked but she signed with David Skepner, a former executive in the Los Angeles office of MCA Records, her record label, as manager. She and Conway Twitty formed “United Talent,” which became their booking agency. The Wilburns sued her for \$5 million; it was a lawsuit that would drag on for eleven years. In the end, Loretta was allowed to keep her income from booking and management, but the Wilburns owned the publishing on her most successful songs.

“The 1960s was a time I wrote more than ever before or after,” remembers Loretta.

I did it out of loneliness and love and there ain’t no better songwriting inspiration. There wasn’t nothing else to do after a show. If Doo wasn’t with me, I missed him. If he was, all he done was get drunk at the show and pass out on the bus or in the motel room. On the bus, I’d write to the whirl of the wheels. In a motel I’d write with the “background music” of people partying and raising cain out in the halls. Loneliness turned into a pile of hit songs. (Lynn, with Cox 113–114)

During the early 1970s, Loretta Lynn reached the height of her fame in country music. In 1970, Music City News named her “Country Female Artist of the Year” and the year ended with the release of her album *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, which would climb to number four the following year.

The year 1971 was a year of awards from the Academy of Country Music, *Music City News*, the Grammys, *Billboard*, and BMI. In 1972 Loretta Lynn became the first female to win the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year Award. In addition to her “Entertainer of the Year” award from the

CMA, she was also voted “Female Vocalist” and “Vocal Duo” with Conway Twitty by that organization.

By the end of 1972, Loretta Lynn had been a Decca recording artist for ten years, had twenty-five top-five records on the Country Singles Chart in *Billboard*, including six number ones as a solo artist and two more number ones as duets with Conway Twitty. But all was not sugar and spice; on the night she accepted the CMA’s Entertainer of the Year Award from Chet Atkins and Minnie Pearl, her husband was not there. Doolittle had elected to go hunting instead of accompanying her on the biggest night of her career. Adding to this heartbreak was the fact that she did not know whether he was hunting two legged or four legged “deer.”

“Doo not showing up for the biggest night of my career hurt me as much, maybe more, than anything he ever done,” said Loretta, who admits that she “cried because Doo wasn’t there with me” (Lynn, with Cox 132). Instead of savoring the sweetness of the accomplishment, Loretta climbed in her pickup truck alone and drove home after the show.

Loretta continued her string of awards into the early 1980s, but by 1976, her writing had pretty much stopped, a result of the frustration with the Wilburns lawsuit, her busy performing schedule, and an increasingly hectic lifestyle.

Still, she remained a spokesperson for women through her country songs, mostly written by other songwriters but expressing Loretta’s views. “My shows are really geared to women fans,” she said

To the hardworking housewife who’s afraid some girl down at the factory is going to steal her husband, or wishing she could bust out of her shell a little bit. Those are things most women feel, and that’s who I’m thinking about and singing to during my shows. And the girls know it. (Lynn, with Vecsey 115)

She was in the right field. “Country music is real,” she said

Country music tells the story the way things are. People fall in love and then one of ’em starts cheating around, or both of ’em sometimes. And usually there’s somebody who gets hurt. Our country songs are nothing but the truth. That’s why they’re so popular. (Lynn, with Vecsey 127)

In 1988, Loretta Lynn was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame. This was the height of her professional career, but her personal life remained tumultuous, a result of a hard-drinking, unfaithful husband. But when her husband contracted diabetes, she remained with him, taking care and nursing him. Mooney Lynn also had open heart surgery, and during the final years of his life he required almost constant care; Loretta provided it.

On one hand, Loretta was a liberated woman, refusing—in her songs—to accept a double standard. Yet, in her life, she was a faithful wife to an unfaithful, abusive husband. That seems to be a double standard, but it is a conflict many women deal with every day. To Loretta, “marriage” meant

forever, staying together through thick and thin. If she found her husband cheating, she was determined to win him back; if her husband was drunk, she accepted him and continued to love him; if her husband was abusive, well, she could fight pretty good herself—and struck a few blows on her own.

Loretta Lynn is an icon in country music because she spoke for the women in the country music audience. She spoke articulately and eloquently, in songs and in concerts, and gave women strength, hope, and empathy. Loretta was always transparent; she always let her audience know that things were not always perfect in her life, but she was determined to speak her mind and keep her man. Those songs still give many women moral support and a voice to express their feelings when they need it most.

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# MAD Magazine

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*Charles Hatfield*

*MAD* magazine was the single most important influence on American graphic humor, and arguably on popular satire, in the second half of the twentieth century. Conceived as a bracing contrast to the staid mainstream culture of the Eisenhower era, it became a signpost in the landscape of American adolescence, one that has endured for more than fifty years—a sort of cynical yet oddly affirmative landmark between youth culture and the strictures of adulthood.

The creators of *MAD*—starting with editor-writer-cartoonist Harvey Kurtzman, who dreamed up *MAD* for publisher EC in 1952—understood that making fun of common things is a way of bringing people together, of striking up relationships. Parody is a bridge, a means of establishing rapport, almost conspiratorially, with one’s audience, for it assumes a relationship between parodist and audience based on shared knowledge of the material being mocked—a logic as clear in, say, Cervantes or Lewis Carroll as it is in *MAD*. In short, parody is a way of ingratiating yourself to the audience. In the case of *MAD*, as with Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* or Looney Tunes cartoons, the audience being flattered is mostly young, bemused, and frustrated by the constraints of adult society, and prone to take a subversive low-angle view of all things serious, pious, and inflated. And, like *Alice*, *MAD* at its best went (occasionally still goes) beyond mere humorous imitation of cultural artifacts, into genuine satire based on an incisive understanding of the ideological precepts embedded in those artifacts.

So, for example, Kurtzman and artist Wallace Wood understood that the granddaddy of comic books, the early *Superman*, was a fable of beleaguered masculinity—the story of the closeted hero who couldn’t get the girl—and, accordingly, made their parodic response, “Superduperman” (*MAD* No. 4), into an acid satire both of the cringing milquetoast Clark Kent and of his hyper-masculine counterpart Superman. This satire revolves around Kent’s hapless desire for the Lois Lane character and, in the end, her contemptuous spurning of *both* his identities, wimp *and* hero. Similarly, Kurtzman and Wood’s “Woman Wonder” (No. 10) nastily punctured *Wonder Woman*’s

feminist subtext, consigning the superheroine to a life of housewifely drudgery and sexual domination. Among the sharpest of such examples, Kurtzman and artist Will Elder's take on *Robinson Crusoe* (No. 13) satirized Defoe's Protestant work ethic, colonizing zeal, and empire-building hubris, climaxing with Crusoe's Frankenstein-like construction of a female mate using the brain of his man Friday. While *MAD* would only occasionally rise to the political fury of contributor Max Brandel's Vietnam-era satire (for example, Brandel's pitiless photo-collage of political corruption and violence set to the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution), its best parodies grow out of a bitter understanding of the cultural myths implicit in the originals.

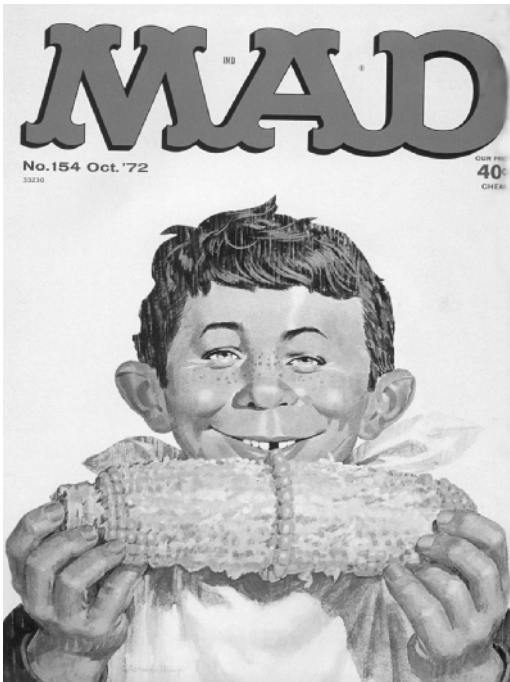
The style of humor pioneered by *MAD* had everything to do with the graphic and rhythmic possibilities of the comic book page. Creator-editor Kurtzman, who essentially scripted and laid out everything in the early issues, possessed a metronome-like sense of visual rhythm, and sought, through painstaking page layout, to control the pace of the reader's movement through successive images. This quality was not unique to *MAD*, but also distinguished the other EC titles edited by Kurtzman: the war comics *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*, revered by many for their unparalleled attention to verisimilitude, their ironic, Stephen Crane-like questioning of wartime heroism, and, above all, their gemlike formal perfection, most readily appreciated in their thumping, verbal/visual cadences. Again and again Kurtzman constructed pages that guided and disciplined the reader by manipulating the relative size, shape, and positioning of panels in sequence. Each page was a paragraph, an indissoluble unit of narrative design, and each panel within it a sentence, both crystalline in its architecture and inextricably tied to everything else on the page and in the story. Characteristic was the shifting between two-panel, three-panel, and four-panel rows, or tiers, and especially the exploitation of the three-panel tier—the Kurtzman triptych—with which he would parse action into deliberate increments: one, two, three.

In other words, the essence of Kurtzman's work was timing; prerequisite to his various comic effects was the precise control of cadence. What *MAD* added to the formula established by Kurtzman's war comics was, first of all, the exaggeration of the cadence, of the build-up, yielding a peculiar comic persistence and stridency, and second, the inevitable rim shot, a comic deflation after the prolonged buildup, which made every pretentious passage collapse in on itself. *MAD*'s original modus operandi was remarkably similar to that of the war comics—the deflation of pretense, the bracing disclosure of hard truths, the crowning of absurdity—but with that added rim shot, that surprising abruption, which distilled and perfected the formula. Not only was this, formally, a highly readable and endlessly fascinating approach, but it also fit with the thematic and ideological agendas of Kurtzman's humor, by setting up every sacred cow for demolition. *MAD*'s humor was not simply screwball, but mock-pompous, always walking hand-in-hand with the overheated cadences of pulp and the fatuous self-importance of officialdom; it was delivered by means of emphatic, almost incantatory repetition and rhythmic

control. Simply put, Kurtzman wanted to “set up” his readers, then shock them into recognition.

At least this was one part of the formula. But playfully at odds with Kurtzman’s control of rhythm was the abundance of background detail in *MAD*’s panels: a surplus of visual gags and comic asides, delivered via unnamed background characters, graffiti, billboard-like sloganeering, et cetera, all of it adding up to a lovingly rendered graphic excess. This surfeit of detail, what artists and readers came to call “chicken fat,” gave each and every page of *MAD* a potential for surprise, a quality that could slow down the expectant reader’s eye and inspire an even greater appreciation for the precisely delineated images. Kurtzman tried to drive the reader forward, but, in concert with the *MAD* artists who did the final renderings—none more so than Will Elder, a longtime chum of Kurtzman’s and the man who gave “chicken fat” its name—Kurtzman would also give the eye plenty to linger over. Vintage *MAD* pages by such artists as Elder and Wood teem with detail, all of it organized around Kurtzman’s unfailing panel rhythms but nonetheless endlessly inviting to the eye. (It helped that Elder was a master mimic, unerringly imitating the styles of countless artists: visual homage and parody became essential to the humor.) Thus *MAD* was not only a linear reading experience; it was a *gazing* experience, and the graphic asides that occupied the “backgrounds” were often as hilarious as the foregrounded action.

This was the basic template for *MAD* the comic book, which was the earliest and most seminal of *MAD*’s several incarnations. It originally included Kurtzman, Elder, Wood, John Severin, and the wonderfully versatile Jack Davis (who would become one of the most recognizable commercial illustrators of the late twentieth century). A slicker magazine format, though still short of the newsstand “slicks” of the day, followed in 1955, after the comic book industry’s adoption of a self-censoring, frankly authoritarian “Comics Code” nudged EC publisher William (Bill) Gaines toward getting out of the comic book business altogether. A brief flirtation with post-Code comics came to no good—these were too constrained, one suspects, to satisfy either Gaines or his readers—after which *MAD* vaulted to larger size to evade the suffocating Code. In short, *MAD* became a “magazine,” still under Kurtzman’s direction but with a notably



The cover of *Mad* magazine, October 1972. Courtesy of Photofest.

different look. Typeset text replaced the old hand-lettering; black-and-white replaced the comic book's original pulpy color. Also, mascot Alfred E. Neuman (the "What, me worry?" kid, modeled on a folk character far pre-dating *MAD*) stepped from the margins to front and center, starring in a long and mostly unbroken series of covers that continues even now. Along with all this came a ratcheting up of content, as the freewheeling and gleefully adolescent parodies established by Kurtzman and others mingled with satire reminiscent of hipster humorists such as Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl; in fact *MAD*, for a brief period, featured work by such well-known absurdists as Ernie Kovacs and Bob and Ray. (Sahl would later contribute to Kurtzman's *Help!*, while Bob and Ray, Kovacs, Steve Allen, and Sid Caesar all wrote forewords for early *MAD* compilations.) Some of the comic book's original high-spiritedness was replaced by a new attempt at classiness, a certain cultivated élan that was frankly more collegiate than adolescent in tone. But *MAD*'s graphic flamboyance and penchant for snot-nosed truth-telling remained.

An important rupture took place in 1956, when Kurtzman's failed bid for a controlling financial stake of *MAD* led to his firing by Bill Gaines. Kurtzman went on to create the short-lived *Trump*, then worked on *Humbug* and *Help!* before settling into his tenure with Will Elder as creators of *Playboy*'s smarmy strip *Little Annie Fanny*. At *MAD* he was replaced by longtime EC writer-editor (and Gaines' good friend) Al Feldstein. Against the odds, Feldstein consolidated Kurtzman's successes and drove the magazine forward to ever-greater visibility and clout.

Feldstein, though at first preserving his predecessor's sophistication, decoupled the magazine from Kurtzman's singular, highly personal approach. Feldstein's long tenure, likely never to be surpassed, established the parameters of today's *MAD* by making movie and television parodies an institution and establishing a diverse and frankly ill-matched stable of artists ("the usual gang of idiots"). This group included, incongruously enough, the staid Dave Berg, whose realistically-rendered "Lighter Side" strips expressed a bemused middle-class response to contemporary fads and controversies; the antic Don Martin, whose slaphappy cartoons were all big-footed, hooked-nosed grotesques; Antonio Prohias, the Cuban émigré whose pantomime strip *Spy vs. Spy* endlessly rehearsed the Cold War as a series of elaborate but graphically minimalist gags; Al Jaffee, whose "daffynitions," curious inventions, and "fold-in" covers were often surprisingly ingenious (he could have designed incredible pop-up books); and more conventionally trained illustrators such as George Woodbridge and Mort Drucker, the latter blossoming into a master caricaturist who was often called upon to do movie parodies and the like. Various prolific writers filled out the mix, such as associate editor Nick Meglin, ace versifier and song parodist Frank Jacobs, movie and advertising parodist Dick DeBartolo, and others who, like DeBartolo, came from and/or went on to writing careers in standup and television comedy: Stan Hart, Larry Siegel, Arnie Kogen, Lou Silverstone. This wild mix con-



tinued past Feldstein's retirement from the editorship in 1985 (he was initially replaced by co-editors Meglin and John Ficarra, the former retiring in 2004, the latter continuing as of 2005).

Even as Feldstein and his "gang" set the now-familiar *MAD* formula, codifying the magazine's agenda and style, *MAD* began to take effect in other media. Its first notable spinoff into performance media was *The MAD Show*, a successful musical comedy revue that premiered off-Broadway in 1965, with a script by *MAD*'s Larry Siegel and Stan Hart, a score by Mary Rodgers (daughter of Richard Rodgers), and innovative staging by director Steven Vinaver. Its hectic, non-stop humor, both verbal and visual (including comics-inspired devices such as word balloons), has been credited as an influence on TV's seminal *Laugh-In*. Much later, after *MAD*'s failed flirtation with a *National Lampoon*-like endorsement of a crass film comedy (*Up the Academy*, 1980), the Fox television network launched, as if in tribute to *The MAD Show*, its series *MAD TV* in 1995. (A previous *MAD* television pilot had failed in the early seventies.) However, *MAD TV*, a sketch comedy/variety show, seemed to have only a nominal connection to the magazine (aside from the occasional animated take on *MAD* strips, most notably *Spy vs. Spy*). Rather, it was a revue formatted much like the familiar *Saturday Night Live*, but without *SNL*'s legendary star-making capacity. Though never a huge hit, and of scattershot quality, *MAD TV* persists as of this writing (2005). In a sense *MAD TV* has been a victim of *MAD* magazine's success, for by 1995 *MAD*'s influence had become pervasive, bubbling through *Saturday Night Live*, David Letterman's late-night comedy, and *The Simpsons* (to name a few obvious examples), so much so that *MAD TV* never had a chance to seem fresh and innovative. By then even the magazine itself had been surpassed, in satiric boldness, by rather more adult publications such as Paul Krassner's cult classic *The Realist* (1958–1974, 1995–2001) and the more commercially visible *National Lampoon* (1970–1998).

After Bill Gaines' death in 1992, *MAD* underwent gradual changes as it was more thoroughly absorbed into its corporate parent company, Time Warner, Inc. Until then Gaines had retained control over *MAD*, despite selling the magazine in the early 1960s to the Kinney National Company (later to become Time Warner). In 1994 *MAD* became, in essence, an imprint of DC Comics (another Warner Bros. Entertainment brand); then, in 2001, *MAD* began to take outside advertising for the first time. This was widely regarded as newsworthy, and in some quarters as a blatant sellout, because *MAD*'s reputation for satiric independence had made ads a no-no since 1955. Along with ads, and presumably financed by advertising revenue, came increased use of color. Finally, the post-Gaines era has seen the induction of younger artists into the "gang of idiots," notably cartoonists who already had reputations with comics fans, such as Drew Friedman, Peter Kuper, and Bill Wray. Such artists, associated with alternative comics, have given the magazine a fresh infusion of graphic energy while chipping away at its classic,

Feldstein-era look. Yet *MAD*'s formula for humor has, in essence, remained the same.

This formula, institutionalized by Feldstein and perhaps best represented by television-minded writers like Debartolo, Siegel, Hart, and Kogen, and by caricaturist Drucker, was a far cry from *MAD*'s first incarnation. Feldstein and Company departed widely from the deliberately-timed humor of Kurtzman, and, over the years, the jokes became rather more direct, almost hectoring, in tone. The movie and television parodies began baldly declaring the ridiculousness of their source material without adopting matching styles, that is, without engaging in the kind of subversive mimicry that made the original *MAD* so disarming. In late-period Feldstein, dead-on celebrity caricatures and large, overbearing dialogue balloons—precisely rectangular balloons, linked in long strings across the page, a technique started by Kurtzman but now carried to the nth degree—were used to make wisecracks and to assert, rather flatly, the stupidity of the material being mocked. The approach taken was based less on inversion, less on a deep understanding of the ideological and psychological subtexts of the original material, and more on put-downs and quips. Kurtzman's rhythmic lures, his comic buildups and deflations, were deemphasized in favor of derisive taunting. (A Drucker parody would often begin with a roll call of celebrity faces, each making caustic remarks about the proceedings.)

Increasingly, the writing stood *outside* of the material being mocked, rather than parodying it from within. The kind of corrosive self-reflexivity that Kurtzman had shown at his most cynical (for instance, "Julius Caesar" in *MAD* No. 17, which was, in essence, a self-mocking treatise on how to do a *MAD* parody) became the norm: the characters were very aware of being in a *MAD* parody, and would often discourse on the parody as well as on the material being spoofed. Thus some of the delicacy, some of the spirit of ironic homage that animated the original *MAD*, was lost—what remained was the kind of sarcastic humor one might hear from David Letterman or in the opening monologues of *Saturday Night Live*. While *MAD* has always given pride of place to pop-culture satire, in recent years the humor has stemmed less from knowing inversion and more from the assumption of a hipper-than-thou attitude—the attitude of the disaffected adolescent consumer, armed with cynicism though still vulnerable to the same old commercial hard-sell that *MAD* began ridiculing more than fifty years ago.

By now *MAD*, for all its snottiness and reflexive self-deprecation, is an institution. Given its familiar formula and shameless marketing to young readers, the magazine is unlikely to sally forth into untested satiric waters. Though on occasion it still ventures a political barb (with, for example, a few post-9/11 takes on terrorism and war), *MAD* continues to give strictest attention to movies, television, and pop culture in general, making it, inadvertently, a time capsule of bygone fads, ephemera, and celebrity gossip. For long-time readers, the few surprises in it have to do with renegotiating the

boundaries of the permissible: what is just crass enough, versus what is just too crass (in this sense *MAD* serves as a barometer of changing tastes and tolerances). Yet, if the *MAD* formula has dulled with time, there is something perennially reassuring about the magazine's iconic familiarity and relative consistency. *MAD* is the low-brow humor magazine *par excellence* for American consumer society, a pinprick of satire against the constant, suasive pressure of a culture that encourages young people simply to buy, buy, buy. That its satire should have become so aggressively commercial—one more thing to buy—is perhaps the bitterest irony, but the magazine still succeeds, often, in being knowing, graphically playful, and funny.

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# Madonna

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## *Diane Pecknold*

Robert Christgau once wrote that Madonna “regards celebrity as her art,” and indeed her fame is so far-reaching that it is difficult even to measure (201). Try to count, for example, the number of magazine covers she has graced around the world. In 1993, the popular literature on her was so great that scholar David Tetzlaff equated reading it all to “mapping the vastness of the cosmos” (239). “Cut Madonna,” *Time* magazine quipped in 1991, “and ink comes out” (Tresniowski 75). Nearly any poll of the biggest, greatest, or best in popular culture includes her name: in 2003, VH1 viewers voted her the greatest female pop culture icon ever; Discovery Channel viewers voted her one of the top 50 “greatest Americans” in 2005; that same year, the Guinness British Hit Singles and Albums book ranked her the fifth most successful recording artist of all time. In March 2005, a month during which she released no new material of any kind, she was the most Googled celebrity in the U.S. Her claim to distinction as “the world’s most famous woman” seems to require no defense (Sexton). She even changed the English lexicon. *Time* coined the term “wannabe” in 1985 to describe the legion of teenage girls who imitated Madonna’s style and attitude (Skow 74); and the title of her first feature film *Desperately Seeking Susan* produced a new idiomatic phrase (consider the 2005 newspaper headlines “Desperately Seeking Boredom,” “Desperately Seeking Style,” and “Desperately Seeking Ratings”). With typical hubris, she acknowledges that her cultural significance extends far beyond mere pop music stardom in the title of her official fan club magazine, *Icon*, which in her case apparently requires no limiting modifier.

Many contemporary observers contended that from the very beginning of her career, Madonna’s main ambition was to become an icon, and that pop music simply provided the most convenient avenue for attaining that goal. It was a sensible choice of venue in the early eighties, when the advent of MTV made popular music a visual medium to an unprecedented degree. Individual television appearances—by Elvis and the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, in particular—had become cultural events and ensured superstardom prior to MTV, but the cable video channel changed the way the music business op-

erated, making visual presence a prerequisite for launching a major new artist. It also provided a format in which an artist could set multiple interpretations of a song against one another and make them accessible 24 hours a day. As a white artist (early MTV discriminated heavily against black artists) performing black music for a teen audience, and one who was exceptionally adept in front of the camera, Madonna was the MTV ideal. Her video image of a sexy, independent, streetwise vamp electrified her relatively innocuous dance pop and resulted in sixteen consecutive top-five hits—a record bested only by Elvis (another white artist playing black music for a teen audience). Her ubiquity on MTV, and the highly sexualized and controversial uses she made of it, reached its apex with the forty-eight-hour Madonnathon surrounding the 1992 release of the video for “Justify My Love.” The station declined to air the video because of its explicit depictions of sadomasochism, homosexuality, and group sex, but ran the Madonnathon nonetheless. Along with Michael Jackson, Madonna proved the power of the new music video format.

By the late 1980s, Madonna had become what cultural studies scholar E. Ann Kaplan labeled the “Madonna phenomenon”; she was not only an omnipresent figure but a polarizing one (131). More than once she appeared in the top five of *Rolling Stone* reader polls for both best and worst artists in the same year. In 1993, she was the subject of the *I Hate Madonna Handbook* and the following year the inspiration for *I Dream of Madonna*, a compendium of the ways she figured in the collective unconsciousness as seen through the dreams of ordinary women.



Madonna, 2003. Courtesy of Photofest.

The fact that not only her work but her person was open to multiple interpretations contributed to the rise of Madonna studies, a cottage industry of academic writing that heralded and hastened the development of American cultural studies. For most of the twentieth century, American scholars subscribed to the idea of an objective and universal canon, a system of aesthetic assessment that ranked art hierarchically from avant-garde high art to degraded commercial mass culture. Madonna’s pastiche of pop culture references, her use of avant-garde techniques such as camp, and her self-proclaimed affinity with high art figures such as photographer Cindy Sherman, typified the increasingly blurry boundaries between high and mass culture, and also accorded with intellectual trends that examined popular culture as an important medium for everyday resistance against power. By the early 1990s, academics were applying to Madonna the same sophisticated textual readings once

reserved for great literature. Moreover, because so many of her fans pilfered her image to create their own identities and cultural products, she was an excellent vehicle for analysis of the multiple meanings and pleasures readers can take from texts, another hallmark of cultural studies. She became part of the curriculum as no other pop star had before.

Critics, however, maintained that such writing about Madonna was not representative of an important new discipline, but instead merely a symptom of “contemporary academics’ attempts to counteract their own marginality by making desperate forays into popular culture” (Harris 790). By applying theoretical pyrotechnics to simple texts, detractors argued, intellectuals demonstrated that they had not been able to take popular culture seriously on its own pedestrian terms. Thomas Frank complained that such analyses obscured the real power relations of popular culture by presenting Madonna as a gender-breaking (or race-breaking, or Protestant-capitalist-breaking) revolutionary, a conclusion, he noted, that could have been derived “directly from a Madonna press kit,” and that “uncritically reaffirmed the mass media’s favorite myths about itself” as a force for cultural protest (153–54).

Although she was a canvas upon which commentators inscribed American discourses about race, ethnicity, religion, and money (to name only the most prominent themes), Madonna garnered the most attention as a sexual and gender rebel. The juxtaposition of her name with her sex-kitten visual style challenged the virgin/whore trope that dominates Western cultural representations of women, and she further undermined this discourse by playing such an exaggerated version of the whore that she reduced it to a caricature. Her famous cone bra, men’s suits with breast slits, and ironic evocation of past icons of blonde bombshell femininity, such as Marilyn Monroe, created a similar tongue-in-cheek burlesque that denaturalized gender roles by drawing attention to their superficial, performative nature. She also invoked elements of gay culture to destabilize heterosexual norms. Her connection with the gay male club scene, her flirtations with Sandra Bernhard, the simulations of lesbian sex in her 1992 book *Sex*, and even an unusual moment as post-motherhood provocateur in which she French-kissed Britney Spears on the 2003 MTV Video Awards, all illustrated an engagement with gay and lesbian cultures that some viewed as legitimizing and others viewed as appropriation.

Madonna’s whorishness was perceived in cultural and economic terms as well as sexual ones. Her pop commercialism was seen as a prostitution of authentic rock; and in her incarnation as Material Girl, she became a symbol of excess, greed, and acquisitive capitalism that captured, for many, the moral bankruptcy of the “me decade” during which she became popular. Yet for all of her good-time-girl posturing, Madonna’s work ethic—exemplified by her obsessive dedication to remaking her body through a rigorous workout regimen—contradicted her invitations to sexual rebellion and indulgence. “There’s a grim, aerobic, almost Protestant strenuousness to the Madonna spectacle,” observed Simon Reynolds and Joy Press (321).

Characteristically, she was embraced and scorned by both feminists and anti-feminists for her gender theatrics. Feminists welcomed her as a symbol of female independence and power, but cringed at video images of sexual submissiveness and worried that Madonna substituted “apathy and masturbation” for meaningful social change (Conniff 212). Post-feminist critic Camille Paglia argued by contrast that Madonna’s unabashed sexuality exposed “the puritanism and suffocating ideology of American feminism” (168). For “pro-sex” critics like Paglia, Madonna’s libidinous abandon offered a much-needed antidote to what Katie Roiphe later described as the helplessness and frigidity of “victimization feminism.” Madonna’s ambiguous relationship to feminist ideology, moreover, influenced a generation of female musicians, who extended contradictory elements of her explorations of femininity. She is widely regarded as a progenitor of the post-punk “riot grrrls”—whose girl-power aesthetic also dealt with the marginalization of women in music and with the relationship between power and sexuality—as well as a new generation of teen pop idols such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, whose sexualized marketing strategies evince none of the irony or self-reflexivity of Madonna, and so seem to bear out feminists’ worst fears about objectification.

For many years Madonna’s name served primarily as an ironic counterpoint to her provocative exploration of sexuality and her vamp burlesque. When she announced the impending birth of her first child, Lourdes Maria Ciccone Leon, she fulfilled the prophecy of her name and became a highly contested symbol of motherhood. Some fans posted online messages suggesting that the pregnancy was conveniently timed to resuscitate her flagging career, promote the U.S. theater release of her film *Evita*, and revise her image in the wake of *Sex* and *Erotica*. “What better way to prepare the public for a kinder, gentler Madonna than a baby,” one such message ran, predicting that magazines would be “full of photos with Madonna and baby, therefore burying the image of Madonna as sex-obsessed pop star from the *Erotica* era” (Manners 85).

If Madonna-watchers imagined her motherhood as, finally, one career maneuver that would not provoke consternation, they lacked imagination. Echoing the scandal surrounding her video *Papa Don’t Preach*, which generated controversy for its anti-abortion message, her decision to have a child out of wedlock intersected with discourses about welfare, work, and social reform, and her pregnancy occasioned fraught discussion of values and economics. By 1996, even the Clinton administration enthusiastically promoted legislation aimed at discouraging the formation of single-parent families. The rhetoric of welfare reform castigated irresponsible breeders and enshrined a new commitment to promoting the married, two-parent household as the normative family. In this atmosphere, *Newsweek*’s open letter encouraging Madonna to marry the baby’s father (“the next wave is restoring the family, and with it, the country itself. Ride it, Madonna”) came as no surprise (Alter); even if *People* sanctioned her decision by featuring approving comments from

the father's parents (Schneider 51). Other responses to Madonna's pregnancy evoked anxieties about the high cost of balancing family and work that emerged in the wake of second-wave feminism's collapse. Where once Madonna's business savvy and drive had been a source of admiration that seemed to give the lie to her air-headed boy-toy image, her identity as a powerful professional woman now seemed to threaten her maternal fitness. The question of whether a former pop tart could be a good mother was subordinated to whether an obsessively driven businesswoman of Madonna's magnitude could become anything other than a Mommie Dearest.

Since Lourdes's arrival and the subsequent birth of her half-brother, Rocco Ritchie, however, Madonna's maternal image has become her controlling identity; *Ladies' Home Journal* recently ran a fifteen-page spread on her home life in which she explicitly repudiated the outrageous sexual exploits that defined her through the mid-1990s. Indeed, conservative essayist Mary Kenny lauded Madonna as an example of a woman matured by motherhood who promotes "firm concepts of right and wrong, and proper standards of manners and morals" (20). Such an assertion suggests not only that Madonna's image has undergone yet another radical transformation, but that fundamental understandings of the nature of that image have shifted. Analyses of Madonna's earlier personas presented even the most intimate revelations as part of a self-conscious performance rather than as a window onto any "real" Madonna, a paradigm that was particularly apparent in discussions of the documentary of her Blonde Ambition tour, *Truth or Dare*. Yet the public portrayal of her home life today is generally accepted as the truth about Madonna. The chameleon who once served as poster-girl for postmodern indeterminacy and ambiguity has become firmly fixed as mother and wife.

Madonna's relationship to the religious dimension of her name has changed as well. Once she personified the 1980s obsession with getting and spending; now she signals the preoccupation with religion and spirituality that has increasingly shaped American culture and politics since the attacks of 9/11. Her identity as a Catholic was always central to her persona, but for many years it functioned primarily as the repressive foil to her campaign for sexual liberation and guilt-free personal indulgence. Her 1998 album *Ray of Light* introduced her as a "post-Catholic, anti-material/antimatter Indian princess," an image which, however much it reinforced Orientalist stereotypes of eastern spirituality, represented religion as an avenue to enlightenment and inner peace rather than as a source of shame and corruption (Tata 91). Her flirtation with Hinduism turned out to be fleeting, but her study of Kabbalah, a Jewish sect for which she is now the leading celebrity spokesperson, has solidified her status as a mystical, rather than material, girl.

In the new millennium, Madonna has also become an icon of American identity. The rags-to-riches story of her rise from Midwestern working-class girlhood to unimaginable wealth and cosmopolitan celebrity always qualified her as one incarnation of the American Dream, and that narrative was further enriched by her marriage to British noble Guy Ritchie in 2000. But even



before she adopted the conservative English country lifestyle, she began to represent both the imperiousness and the embattled defensiveness of American national identity in an international context. When Madonna was cast as Evita Peron in the film version of *Evita*, Argentinian outrage was a response partly to the notion that a self-styled notorious slut would be portraying a national saint, but also to the widespread perception that America was gobbling up yet another chunk of its neighbors' patrimony as grist for the global pop culture mill. Since the movie was released, Madonna's new pan-European accent has been the subject of popular derision, in part, no doubt, because it exposes longstanding cultural insecurities during a period of heightened nationalism. Her more recent work has also directly questioned America's materialism and imperialism, particularly in her 2003 album *American Life*, and the video accompanying the first single from that album. Ironically, given her more reflective awareness of her uniquely national nature, her explorations of American identity have been more popular abroad than at home, and she now inspires the same kind of daily news coverage in the United Kingdom that she once garnered in the United States.

Boy toy, sexual rebel, material girl, spiritual mom, ugly American. Madonna's fame seems due not so much to her own creativity, though she remains prolific, as to the creativity of her admirers and critics; not so much to her ability to reinvent herself as to her ability to be continually reinvented by her audiences, whether they love or loath her. More than anything, Madonna's career has been about creating and maintaining herself as "a container for a multiplicity of interests" (Sante 141).

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# McDonald's

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*Betsy Beaulieu*

It has long been the American way to like things big: big cars, big houses, big shopping malls, big-screen televisions. And so it is no surprise that as fast food became increasingly popular in the latter half of the twentieth century, both fast-food portions and the size of those consuming the portions grew. McDonald's, unquestionably the most high profile of the many fast-food franchises that dot the American (and, indeed, international) landscape, is known not only for burgers but also for the super-sized fries and soft drinks that are the inevitable accompaniment to the burger. In the 2004 documentary *Super Size Me*, director Morgan Spurlock charts his month-long experiment eating nothing but McDonald's fast food, examining the fast-food phenomenon and putting his own health at risk.

When the documentary premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on January 17, 2004, it garnered a great deal of international attention. Spurlock was inspired by a 2002 lawsuit filed by two Bronx teenagers alleging that McDonald's was responsible for their obesity and related health problems. In casting the spotlight squarely on questions of nutritive value, marketing strategies (especially those targeted at children), and consumer awareness, *Super Size Me* challenged McDonald's corporate responsibility. In March 2004, just weeks after the film's debut, McDonald's announced that they were planning to phase out their super-sized fries and soft drinks in U.S. outlets, and on April 15, 2004, the corporation launched a "comprehensive balanced lifestyles platform" in response to the Department of Health and Human Service's call for more attention on obesity and physical fitness in America (McDonald's Corporation Site). The new initiative is designed for both children and adults, emphasizes healthier food choices, and educates about the importance of physical fitness. It seems, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, that McDonald's is actively distancing itself from "super-sized" portions of high-fat convenience food, promoting instead food that fits in with the current national agenda concerning health and fitness.

In spite of menu makeovers, however, McDonald's remains the leading fast-food outlet in the United States, accounting for forty-three percent of the American fast-food market. It is estimated that McDonald's feeds more than 46 million people a day, with 20 million of those living in the United States. More than 30,000 McDonald's restaurants are presently in operation in over 100 countries. Indeed, the sign of the Golden Arches is one of the most familiar symbols worldwide, whether off an exit ramp in the midwestern United States, in the center of Paris, or in Indian or Israeli cities.

Ray Kroc is commonly believed to be the founder of McDonald's, but in fact the fast-food restaurant had its origins as McDonald Brothers Burger Bar Drive-In. Opened in San Bernardino, California, in the early 1940s by Richard and Maurice McDonald, the restaurant was extremely successful but eliminated the car-hops in 1948; at that time the brothers pioneered "Speedee Service System," introducing the concept of self-service to the dining out experience. Hamburgers (sold for fifteen cents apiece) were cooked on an enormous custom-made stainless steel grill, and condiments were dispensed by a machine that could dress six buns a second. Customers walked up to a counter, placed their orders, and received inexpensive but freshly-prepared food within minutes. Initially favored by workers with limited time for lunch, the restaurant soon became popular with families who enjoyed the picnic-like atmosphere of informal food and service.

Ray Kroc, a salesman with a shrewd combination of opportunism, creativity, ambition, and thirst for risk, was selling milkshake mixers in 1954 when he met the McDonald brothers and immediately saw the potential for franchising their restaurant. He persuaded the brothers to sell him the right to license the restaurant and recognized early that site selection would be key in spreading the chain across the nation. Kroc was extremely successful in establishing the chain, but he wanted more. In 1960 he paid \$2.7 million to the McDonald brothers to purchase McDonald's outright. He immediately began an effort to modernize and publicize the establishment, launching what has been described as the most expensive and aggressive ad campaign in American corporate history. Kroc's empire grew from approximately 250 restaurants in 1960 to 3,000 in 1973, to about 30,000 worldwide at the end of the twentieth century. Kroc turned McDonald Brothers Burger Bar Drive-In into an American icon through expansion and marketing. His success became our success as Americans all across the country sat down together over a meal of burgers and fries, living Ray Kroc's version of the American Dream.

A number of factors contributed to Kroc's achievement, among them the growing American car-culture and the increasingly fast pace of life. These two factors combined not only to enable consumers to eat in their cars but also actually to encourage it. McDonald's and other fast-food chains capitalized on postwar prosperity and Americans' love of the automobile by providing food that could be obtained quickly, eaten with one hand on the steering wheel, and in wrappings easily disposed of. Additionally, with more women working



The familiar golden arches of McDonald's.  
Courtesy of Shutterstock.

outside of the home, Kroc saw another market to be capitalized upon and marketed McDonald's meals as an excellent substitute for home-cooking. He insisted that the American flag be flown above all his restaurants, implying that the chain embraced wholesome family values, values that were transferred through the food that a working mom could proudly feed her family.

Indeed, as Kroc took over and McDonald's spread across the country, a certain ethos came to be associated both with the chain and with the food it served. Kroc tapped into a need for comfort and security by offering a menu that was consistent and familiar no matter which restaurant in the chain a customer stopped at; he tapped into a growing demand for convenience to accommodate a hectic lifestyle by providing food that was easy to purchase, to consume, and to clean up after. The products were inexpensive and popular; soon burgers and fries became a cultural norm signifying a casual, easy-going, wholesome lifestyle.

There was also an element of community built into a McDonald's meal; families who went to McDonald's for lunch or dinner were likely to encounter families like themselves, whether they were dining in their hometown or traveling across the country.

Although initially workers on their lunch breaks were the most reliable patrons of McDonald Brothers Burger Bar Drive-In and Kroc's first franchised restaurants, more than anything McDonald's came to be associated with families. This change occurred in large measure due to Ray Kroc's marketing genius. His target consumers were children, not workers. He believed, rightly, that every child who wanted to eat at McDonald's would bring along at least one paying adult, and he also counted on the fact that a lifelong loyalty would develop that would keep the children returning to McDonald's with their own children once they were parents themselves. Much of McDonald's advertising over the decades works to evoke a sense of nostalgia for the childhood experience of eating a fun meal in a familiar place, surrounded by loved ones—both parents and characters.

According to Joe L. Kincheloe in *The Sign of the Burger: McDonald's and the Culture of Power*, "McDonald's removes food from the context of cooking and presentation, as it focuses consumers' attention on the 'McDonald's experience,' . . . mak[ing] food a dramatic spectacle" (88–89). Most of what Kincheloe refers to as "spectacle" is aimed at the child consumer;

he lists the McDonaldland characters, the playgrounds, the Happy Meals (complete with toy), the colorful environment where the food is prepared in plain view as though on a stage, the process of unwrapping one's hamburger as if it were a holiday gift, as enticements for children who skillfully persuade their parents to spend money on food-as-entertainment. And by the time they have children of their own, nostalgia for the experience is so deeply ingrained that they want it for their children as well. Coupled with the convenience, the inexpensive cost, and the chain's ubiquity, it is hard for most Americans to stay away from McDonald's. Kroc's genius was anticipating and cultivating this type of loyalty; he trained the American palate to locate it under the Golden Arches in the form of a burger and fries. And then he trained the world.

Eric Schlosser says in *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* that Kroc "liked to tell people that he was really in show business, not the restaurant business" (41). Eventually, Kroc was not satisfied with producing the show only in America, and he launched an initiative to spread McDonald's across the globe. At the beginning of the twenty-first century McDonald's operates about 17,000 restaurants in more than 120 countries outside of the United States, and opens approximately five new restaurants a day, at least four of which are abroad. Schlosser argues that McDonald's now "ranks as the most widely recognized brand in the world" (229). The Golden Arches, symbol of opportunity and prosperity, is one of America's most popular and easily-recognized exports. A source of comfort for Americans traveling abroad (who among us hasn't hungered for a familiar meal in the midst of a grueling trip or when visiting a foreign country with children in tow?), McDonald's has also been more recently viewed as a tool of cultural imperialism for the ways in which the corporation co-opts national identity and replaces a country's traditional values and practices with America's capitalist hegemonic philosophy, embodied by the ubiquitous hamburger and the accompanying fries and soft drink. The emphasis on uniformity and standardization that established the foundation on which McDonald's the phenomenon rests has led to what some call the "McDonaldization" of the planet, a notion that the corporation's international slogan seems to confirm: "One Taste Worldwide."

Kroc began introducing McDonald's to the overseas market in 1970, and he faced numerous challenges. According to John F. Love in *McDonald's: Behind the Arches*, McDonald's "was attempting to export something that was now endemic to American life but totally foreign everywhere else. Quick service food was uniquely American" (418). Europeans in particular were accustomed to full-service dining, usually without children. Thus the McDonald's corporation had to figure out how to introduce a casual dining environment and new food items to their target middle-class consumers who were not in the habit of dining out with the family one or more times a week.

Initially McDonald's introduced local specialties to their menu, but this proved less than popular and McDonald's International soon concluded that

they would be more successful in changing local eating habits than incorporating local cuisine into their restaurants. “‘McDonald’s is an American food system,’ reasons Steve Barnes, chairman of McDonald’s International. ‘If we go into a new country and incorporate their food products into our menu, we lose our identity’” (qtd. in Love 437). They learned the same thing in terms of architecture; after several “experiments” in redesigning their restaurants to mimic local tastes and culture (Love mentions, for example, a Munich “beer hall” McDonald’s), the corporation returned to the familiar Golden Arches yellow and red theme for all of their restaurants. Clearly part of the appeal for international consumers is to participate vicariously in the American lifestyle that McDonald’s has come to represent in the global community.

Fast-food corporations have undergone increasing scrutiny in the latter half of the twentieth century, and McDonald’s, as the most dominant fast-food enterprise, has received much of the criticism. The industry has been indicted for a multitude of sins: labor activists point to the tendency of fast-food chains to rely on lower class, unskilled workers who are easily exploited; environmental activists are concerned with the amount of litter generated by disposable wrappings and also with the impact of fast-food production on the meatpacking and other agricultural industries. Health experts warn of an epidemic of obesity and related health problems that can be directly tied to American’s fondness for high-fat, high-sodium fast food. Advocates for children worry about the impact not only of diet but also, in an age when Ronald McDonald is as familiar to most American children as Santa Claus, of intense advertising pressure on the susceptible young as well. Fast-food chains threaten local independent businesses, and, in a climate where corporate ethics are viewed with suspicion, McDonald’s is keenly aware that it must acknowledge its responsibility to the world it wishes to feed. Hence the corporation eliminated its use of polystyrene containers in the early 1980s, refused genetically altered potatoes for its french fries in 2000, and introduced more healthy alternatives to its menu in the wake of *Super Size Me*. Critics, however, insist that these changes are not sincere and do not reflect an adjustment in corporate philosophy but merely have been enacted to counter negative publicity.

Nevertheless, America continues its love affair with fast food, which may well be the national cuisine. McDonald’s remains the American standard for fast food at home and abroad. The days of the 15-cent burger and the 12-cent fries are over, but today’s consumer still seeks comfort and convenience and a meal that is as familiar as a home-cooked one under the Golden Arches. The slogans, although they have changed over the years, reflect the corporation’s commitment to provide its customers with the best: “We do it all for you” (suggesting that you don’t have to do anything other than come to McDonald’s and enjoy a meal); “You deserve a break today” (insisting that only at McDonald’s will you get the respite you need from the stress of modern life); “My McDonald’s” (implying the personal nature of the dining experience you’ll have at your home-away-from-home), to the most recent

catch-all, democratic, upbeat testimony "I'm lovin' it!" For many who fancy a burger and fries, there's much to love about McDonald's. For others, it is difficult to overlook the perils presented by the fast-food industry, and McDonald's in particular. Regardless, though, of the views an individual may hold, it is hard to dispute the fact that McDonald's is truly a super-sized American icon.

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# Mexican-American Border

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*Susana Perea-Fox and Iván Figueroa*

A reform plan proposal called the Guest Worker Program has created a heated debate within American society about a topic that has long eluded the minds of many: the matter of undocumented immigrant workers who continue to arrive through the southern border, and the possible ways to protect the Mexican-American border, which has become an icon for the conflicted attitudes about immigration among a nation of descendants of immigrants.

The great majority of Latin immigrants cross into the United States via the Mexican-American border. Its 1,952 miles form one of the most differentiated borders of the world. It extends from San Diego–Tijuana, at the Pacific coast, to Brownsville–Matamoros, at the Gulf of Mexico. About half of its length is run by the Rio Grande–Bravo and the other half by the Sonoran desert. The border was set in 1848 with the signing of a treaty that ended the Mexican-American War and gave control to the United States of about one-third of what had been Mexican territory, from New Mexico to California.

The problem of how to protect the border is as large and difficult as the border itself. Homeland Security—encompassing the former Immigration and Naturalization Agency—hopes to deport 460,000 people by 2009. Yet, and in spite of all efforts, it is almost impossible to stem the flow of people across the border. There were approximately 9 to 10 million illegal immigrants in the United States in 2003, and it was predicted that about 3 million would enter in 2004. In the past, the main ports of entrance were the surrounding areas of towns such as Laredo–Nuevo Laredo, El Paso–Ciudad Juarez, or the river, for example. But with an increment of patrols in those areas, the route shifted to the Arizona desert. This route, however, has proven dangerous and deadly, even more deadly than the treacherous river, where many people have drowned. Since 1995, 3,500 people had died crossing the border. Two years ago, 200 people lost their lives as they tried to cross the border from Mexico into Arizona. They died from dehydration in the 120–130° heat of the Sonoran Desert (Ufford-Chase 20). In 2004, just from January to May, 30 people died making the trek through the desert, but according to Robert Bonner, the commissioner in charge of the border patrol, the worst was yet to



The barb-wired international border separates a truckload of Mexico's Grupos Betas, the Mexican government-sponsored group that tries to discourage migrants from crossing and aids those stranded in the Sonora Desert, 2004. AP/Wide World Photos.

come: 80 percent of the deaths in a year happen between May and August (Eagan 1).

However, agents feel confident that immigrants choosing the desert route also would fail to cross because of the increment of agents and resources in this area. In an interview with Carrie Kahn for National Public Radio (NPR), agent Johnny Bernau said that by June 2004, "a full complement of 260 agents will be in place along with four more helicopters and several unmanned surveillance drones." Because the new equipment is ultra-sensitive to movement, the agents expect to make record arrests.

Immigration is not a foreign concept to most American citizens. The vast majority in one way or another are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants. And yet, most Americans have little sense of the real situation of Latinos who are drawn to cross the border. Many citizens do not want more immigrants let into the country. A poll conducted by NPR, the Kyser Family Foundation, and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government from May 27 to August 2, 2004, showed that even though most Americans are not negative about immigration, 41 percent said that legal immigration to the United States should be decreased, and 59 percent said that illegal immigrants have hurt the national economy (Rosenbaum 1).

Others think that immigrants want to sign up for welfare programs and to get free medical services. But Alexander Monto, a health inspector of labor camps in California, observes that the idea of Mexicans using public services is a misconception. During his tenure as inspector, he was appalled by the conditions under which immigrants lived. He thinks that the great majority of

immigrants do not come with the goal of becoming welfare recipients: “[N]ot only is that stereotype untrue—their utilization of such services is lower than that of the native-born population, and many are not even eligible for such programs” (Monto xv).

Moreover, the jobs immigrants are taking are the jobs that very few American unskilled workers take. As a matter of fact, Massey, Durand, and Malone found that as societies become more industrialized, at least part of the jobs become highly skilled and better paid. These are the jobs favored by the natives of the country, while the “bad” jobs, the jobs that receive lower wages, are filled by immigrants. However, and most importantly, if there is not demand for their services, if the natives would do these jobs, “immigrants, particularly those without documents, would not come, since they would have no means of supporting themselves” (145). In other words, there is immigration of unskilled workers to the United States because there is a demand for these types of workers.

To aggravate the problem, some American companies that require middle-skilled factory workers, such as *maquiladoras*, have been moving to other countries for economical reasons. At the beginning they moved just across the border into Mexico, pulling north many people who would not have tried to move there otherwise. Ten years ago, 1,600 plants brought more than 750,000 new jobs; but in the last two years “more than 500 of those plants have closed [relocating into Asia], taking with them a quarter of a million jobs” (Fleeson 24). The displaced workers, having already moved north and being unable to find employment in other places, now look to the United States as their new source of jobs. Some of them will become nannies, housecleaners, hotel maids, or restaurant cooks; but others may compete for medium-skilled jobs, such as the ones they just lost.

Immigration is a long-standing problem for the United States and Mexico. Most years the presidents of both countries meet to discuss a series of bilateral issues, mostly associated with immigration. But stopping illegal immigration is so impossible to achieve that in 2004, the year of U.S. presidential elections, while Hispanic communities were pushing for immigration reforms, neither one of the major presidential candidates stepped up to address the issue. Instead, the U.S. government increased border patrol and security against the terrorist threat. It is true, as Robert Leiken of the Nixon Center pointed out, “with the exception of the Oklahoma City bombing, all terrorist attacks in America had been carried out by immigrants—that means that immigration has a real national security dimension” (Geyer). Yet, one can see that there is a great distance between Latin American immigrant workers and foreign terrorists who want to harm the United States.

One of the reasons that the problem of illegal immigration has persisted for so long is rooted in the deep poverty in which many of the immigrants live in their own countries. Most of them look toward the United States as the solution to their problems. Their dream is to get to the United States, work hard, and send or save money to take back to their families. According to

a poll sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank, nearly one Mexican in five regularly receives money from relatives employed in the United States, making this country the largest repository of such remittances in the world (Thompson). One can see why the government of Mexico would not try hard to stop the flow of emigrants to the United States. These workers not only send money back and help the Mexican economy; they also serve as an escape valve for unemployment and discontent there. These emigrants are desperate to make a living and are willing to risk their lives in order to do so. But little do they know about the treacherous journey.

While in the process of getting to the United States, immigrants learn the full meaning of modern immigration: *coyotes*, *cholos*, *la migra*, drug traffickers, the Mexican police, and white supremacist groups. Every immigrant will come into contact with at least one or two from this nefarious cast. The *coyotes* are the people who know the border well. They will charge an average fee of \$2,000 to smuggle people into the United States. In 1990, Barich reported, “*Coyotes* will lead a migrant across, store him in a safe house, and then refuse to release him until his relatives in the United States cough up a ransom” (77); and the same problem persists today. Legally, this tactic is nothing less than kidnapping. Unfortunately, there is no one to whom the migrants can go for help. When the family of the kidnapped person goes to the authorities and the authorities make arrests, not only is their loved one deported back to his or her country, but also they themselves run the risk of having their status reviewed.

*Cholos*, or young hoodlums, are others who take advantage of the migrants. Shorris in “Borderline Cases” claims that most of the killings at the border are done by *cholos*. Whenever *cholos* need money, or are bored and looking for fun, they hunt immigrants who stay in burrows in the hills (68). The police find hundreds of bodies along the border every year. Nobody knows for sure how many people have been killed by *cholos*.

Certainly the border patrol agents do not protect illegal immigrants either. They themselves have been guilty of abuses. To solve the problem, some years ago the Immigration Agency started to hire agents of Mexican-American origin, but this policy did not decrease the abuses. These new agents were eager to prove their loyalty to their employers by brutalizing their own people (Shorris 72).

However, abusive treatment of immigrants also comes from other groups. There are many white supremacist groups or other xenophobic individuals who think that Latins are here to take over their country and their jobs, or that they are bandits or drug traffickers. When interviewed by Chavira, a member of one of these groups tried to clarify: “We have nothing against Mexicans, . . . many of them are hard workers. A lot of the others don’t come to work. They steal, break into people’s homes, bring drugs” (12). Unfortunately, to the regular citizen, drug smugglers, bandits, and innocent people all look alike.

Latin American immigrants have done all types of work. They have cleaned tables at restaurants, worked with hazardous wastes, labored as roofers and

hod carriers, wrecked their backs and knees picking lettuce and tomatoes, cleaned sewers, and have been willing to do everything. It is not a secret that many farm owners use immigrants as cheap labor. Farmers can get away with not paying their workers minimum wage, not paying them benefits nor providing proper working conditions according to law. Some employers take even greater advantage of the illegal immigrants by turning the workers over to authorities one day before payday (Barich 89).

When immigrants are deported back to Mexico or are on their way north, another danger awaits them: the Mexican police. Although most savvy Mexicans know how to deal with the police, many rural Mexican peasants and Central Americans do not, and thus are more susceptible to their abuses and attacks. Shorris points out that “The danger is real. By the time they get across the border into the United States, most of the immigrants will have been robbed, beaten, extorted, or raped by bandits or Mexican police” (75).

The Immigration Act of 1986 provides a special section that can be used to help solve some of these problems: The H2 Workers. This section requires an employer “to apply to the Secretary of Labor no more than 60 days in advance of needing foreign workers, and then requires the employer to try to recruit domestic workers for the jobs that need to be filled” (228). If these jobs are not filled with domestic workers, then an employer could go to the border and legally hire temporary help. This way, both the employer and the worker will have more protection. The worker will not face the dangers of crossing the border illegally.

One problem that started the implementation of this act was the widespread exclusion of Latin American-looking people. Because the employer had to pay a fine for using illegal workers, the easiest way to avoid being fined was not to employ any “brown skins” and people with Latin names and accents (“Employing Immigrants. No Brown Skins” 42). Prospective employers did not differentiate among legal immigrants, longtime residents, and illegal workers, and probably forgot that up to 1853 the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and Texas, and portions of Wyoming and Colorado, were part of Mexico. When the United States annexed this area its inhabitants remained there; hence a large number of Hispanic-looking people still live there.

U.S. President George W. Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox have agreed that the system was not working and that there was a necessity for modification of the Act of 1986. They called for a reformed immigration policy—the Guest Worker Program—that would (1) open borders to legal travel and trade while shutting them to drug traffic, criminals, and terrorists; (2) serve the economic needs of the United States while providing fair income and legal protection for working visitors; and (3) offer incentives for immigrants to return to their country of origin (Ufford-Chase 20). But up to this day, these ideas have not been implemented because of political pressures

and because there seems to be confusion in differentiating between honest workers and criminals.

Drug trafficking, terrorism, and illegal immigration are separate problems; but they have become collapsed in American consciousness, and signed in the Mexican border. The United States government wants to protect its border from illegal drugs and terrorists, but at the same time it wants to stop illegal immigration. While governments of other countries are likely to cooperate to fight drugs and terrorism, they are less likely to involve themselves with illegal immigration, a problem they see as mostly internal to the United States. However, a simple solution is to grant more work visas so that the U.S. government could allocate all the economic resources and agents to combat drug trafficking and terrorism.

Another important point that must be addressed is the need to modify the quota of visas for Mexicans. It is inequitable that Mexico with its much larger population and closer cultural ties receives the same number of work visas as each other Latin and Caribbean country. For example, in 2002 the Dominican Republic with its 8.2 million inhabitants received 20,000 visas—the same number as Mexico with its 100 million people. An increased number of Mexican visas would assure that these workers would hold legal jobs, would pay taxes and social security, and would buy medical and vehicle insurance; this change ultimately would save the lives of many people. Historically, it has been proven that, given the opportunity, illegal immigrants would choose to enter legally. In the late 1950s a similar provision granted 450,000 *bracero* visas annually, reducing undocumented immigration to near zero (Massey et al. 159).

Current immigration projects fail to reach the heart of the issue. To make real progress, drastic changes are necessary to avoid more violations to the basic human rights of these people. Immigrants cross the border moved by hunger and in search of a better life, and that it is why the efforts by Homeland Security to stop them have been and will be unsuccessful. These immigrants, legal or not, are citizens of the world and have basic human rights that everyone should respect and protect. They need protection against *cholos*, *coyotes*, drug traffickers, and white supremacist groups. While the United States must make and carry out laws governing immigration, it has an even greater responsibility to protect the human rights of those immigrants who in fact provide valuable services to the United States. The United States always has been a powerful advocate for the implementation of human rights policies. It is important for the government, and for the American people who elect it, not to forget their own backyard in this regard.

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# Miami

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*Gary Harmon*

A city, even a contemporary American city, carries a wealth of signification, like that of ancient Byzantium and the sacred icons that filled its churches and households. Miami, stretching along the beaches of south Florida's Atlantic coast, evokes a range of meanings. It plays various roles in the lives of those who travel there in the flesh or, perhaps more commonly, those who explore the possibilities it represents in their minds. American cities, unlike their Old World counterparts, have commonly offered their visitors and newcomers and even their longtime residents a sense of what may be. In the colonial era, New York and Boston and Philadelphia and Charleston; in the era of westward expansion, St. Louis and San Francisco and Los Angeles; in the emergence of the New South, Atlanta and Charlotte and Dallas; in the era of industrialization, Chicago and Pittsburgh and Cleveland and Detroit, among many others, offered opportunity for wealth or pleasure or progress that life on the land, for all the promise of the legendary "territory ahead," could not. America, the land of opportunity, has been and continues to be a city.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the "city on a hill" of America's seventeenth-century founders has been replaced by the city on the beach, which retains many, perhaps, most of their aspirations in new millennial dress and in post-colonial practices of integration and diversity. Today's Miami contributes to the development of a new American mythos. It stands as an icon of American ideas, beliefs, and values for millions of people—hinterland Anglo-Americans avoiding lousy weather or pursuing economic profit in the fastest growing state in the union, Jews pursuing community on vacation or in retirement, Cubans escaping and expelled by Castro, Haitians retreating from poverty, Europeans seeking an informal sophistication, Latinos from across Central and South America fleeing economic and political turmoil, among many, many others. The melting pot, a concept lost to most of America in the 1960s and 1970s, is alive and well in Miami, but with a postmodernist embrace of diversity. This city enjoys a drawing power cutting across age, gender, race, and class as well as ethnic boundaries. Miami is not just another city on the American map or the world



map; it holds a special place in the minds of millions. Miami is now and has been for some time hot, hot, hot.

Apart from such data-driven mental disciplines as physical geography and economics, it is almost impossible to think about Miami, to get one's head around this city, without reference to the ads that promote it or sell other goods in a play on its associations; without images of its fashions in clothing, food, and architecture that we experience directly or vicariously; without the movies and novels that exploit it as a resonant setting, and without the tourist literature and guide books describing its exotic pleasures—all of these reveal Miami as the siren of South Florida's Gold Coast. By extension, Miami has come to represent, for very many people, all of Florida, particularly for those who do not actually live in Miami or in Florida.

Many of the guidebooks seek to render Miami a palatable, predictable place. From them we learn that Miami is the "Cruise Capitol of the World," the "Crossroads of America," or the "Magic City." A Fodor or Frommer guide offers an ordered summary of features, a catalog of tame adventures available to anyone who has the time or the money to visit. The guidebook Miami eventually enters the consciousness of millions, either as first-hand experience or as told-to-experience, and frequently moves one-time visitors to stay. Their function seems to be to tame the icon, to put a sober constraint on our imagined hopes and dreams about Miami.

Miami, of course, is not a single entity. The city proper is a mere 375,000 people. But as one quickly discovers, this great city consists of a web of interconnected subcities, including the American Riviera of Miami Beach; the style-setting South Beach; the horseracing burb of Hialeah; the upscale sanctuary of Coral Gables; Cocanut Grove with its art-crowd and night spots; the thriving hotel capital and business hub of central Miami; the elite Key Biscayne; and the sedate North Beach. More Americans have a greater awareness of, often even detailed knowledge of, the exurbs and suburbs of Miami than of any other American city: Bal Harbor, West Palm Beach, Coral Springs, Pompano Beach, Coral Gables, Homestead, Del Ray Beach, and Boca Raton, among others, register in the consciousness of people living in New Hampshire, Ohio, Minnesota, and Arkansas. Moreover, the ethnic communities of former outsiders and exiles from other countries and states color neighborhoods and suburbs with their architecture, activities, foods, style, and vigor to delight and sometimes frighten the uninformed tourist.

While technically Miami can trace its history to the early sixteenth century and Ponce de Leon, this polyglot of ethnicities and suburbs as a practical matter gets underway after the Civil War, not terribly long even by American standards, but it is a history with remarkable vigor, especially in the twentieth century. Miami is in every sense a modern American city.

Mild winters and the warm ocean attracted visitors to the Miami area, first Indians and then northerners in the late 1800s. Julia Tuttle, from Cleveland, settled on the north bank of the Miami River in 1891 and began to plan a city. Her first step was to entice railroad magnate Henry M. Flagler to extend



Winter bathing at Miami Beach Casino, March 1923. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

a line south to the tip of the Florida peninsula. Flagler had built a line to St. Augustine and then in 1893 to Palm Beach, but he was not interested in extending it another sixty-six miles to tiny Miami. In the winter of 1894–1895, however, a freeze destroyed most of the citrus crop, but the cold did not reach Miami, where oranges still blossomed. Tuttle, legend holds, sent Flagler a single orange blossom, and he quickly changed his mind. In April 1896, Miami’s 300 residents greeted the train and a new era, promoting itself as “America’s sun porch.”

In the early twentieth century, roads were cut and swamps were drained, beginning the demise of the Everglades. Waves of warmth and sunshine seekers wanted to move to Miami, and developers obliged by carving the farmland into subdivisions in the early 1920s. And rum-runners had a field day during Prohibition, followed by a phalanx of mobsters who operated with virtual immunity from the law. Miami’s vice took an early place in the American imagination. With the development of Coral Gables by George Merrick, the nation’s fascination with Miami erupted into a real estate boom, but it began to fade in 1925. In September 1926 nature burst the speculative bubble with a major hurricane. Many fled smashed houses and destroyed businesses, leaving Merrick bankrupt. But in the next decade, tourism picked up, especially in Miami Beach, where over 500 hotels, apartments, and businesses were constructed in the “modern” Art Deco style. Tourists again flocked to Miami for warmth and sophistication and the services flourishing gangsters could provide. In the 1940s, the war killed tourism. When a German U-Boat torpedoed a tanker in full view of the Florida coast in 1942,

hotels emptied. But the war sparked another kind of development. By the end of 1942, the department of the army turned 147 hotels into barracks and many hotels into temporary hospitals for wounded soldiers. GIs trained in Miami, and German prisoners of war were interned in Homestead. After the war, ex-soldiers returned to Miami, many becoming students on the GI Bill at the University of Miami. A new housing boom arose, as farms became suburbs. Arthur Godfrey broadcast his famous television show from Bal Harbour. With this national exposure, gargantuan hotels sprouted on the beaches, buildings made habitable in the summer months by air conditioning, which would soon become an American addiction. The future looked rosy, albeit suffused with gang activities and ethnic conflict.

In 1959 Miami took a major turn in its course. Fidel Castro deposed Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, declared himself a socialist, confiscated property, and nationalized many businesses. Cubans by the thousands fled to Miami. Overnight entire neighborhoods were transformed into islands of Spanish-speaking language and culture. After the failed CIA-led Bay of Pigs invasion, thousands of political refugees fled Cuba on “freedom flights” to Miami and by 1973 the Miami Cubans numbered over 300,000. The effect of these influxes was a squeeze on jobs held by Miami’s African American community. The city’s first race riot erupted in 1968 in Liberty City when Richard Nixon gave his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach. In the 1970s drugs brought in big money; a new, distinctly different underworld replaced Miami’s Prohibition-era crime, as people from throughout the country sought to satisfy their demand for illegal narcotics.



One of the streets in Miami Beach, 1939. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The Cuban community prospered by building successful businesses, and the city prospered; by the end of the decade international banking interests brought in more money from Latin America, and a rapid transit system revitalized Miami's downtown.

In 1980, blacks and disadvantaged Miamians rioted after a Tampa jury acquitted a white policeman of murdering a black man. Haitian "boat people" were landing in great numbers on South Florida beaches, and Fidel Castro permitted anyone who wanted to leave Cuba to do so, including inmates of Cuba's prisons and mental institutions. The 125,000 new "Marielito" refugees tarnished the city's reputation among tourists. South Beach, where many of them settled, became a near-slum, prompting whites from other parts of Miami to leave for Broward County, just north. Drug dealers injected over \$10 billion into the economy, and handgun sales soared, as did the murder rate; with 621 violent deaths in 1981, Miami assumed another nickname, "Murder Capital, USA."

Despite this turmoil the mid-1980s brought another building boom, and the city's romantic image was repaired, as was its image of adventure with the premiere of television's *Miami Vice* in 1984. A new Bayside Marketplace attracted tourists, and the Pope visited in September 1987, just before Miami Heat basketball arrived. These international events joined in the public imagination with the University of Miami football team's winning the national championship three times, the new Joe Robbie Stadium where the Miami Dolphins hosted Super Bowls in 1989 and 1995, and the roar of race cars through downtown in the Miami Grand Prix.

Those 1930s Art Deco buildings underwent transformation from housing Jewish retirees to become hotels, artist's lofts, fancy restaurants, oceanfront cafes, art galleries, and theaters. International celebrities spangled South Beach with their iconic presence. The city became a landing place for visitors from Brazil, Columbia, and the Caribbean as well as Germans, Brits, and Scandinavians. Even 1992's Hurricane Andrew, which destroyed much of Key Biscayne, or the killing, in 1993, of nine foreign tourists did not long dampen tourism or arrest Miami's economic expansion. Entering the new millennium, Miami challenges New York's claim to be the most cosmopolitan of American cities, as the complicated mix of races, cultures, and ethnicities has become an asset in attracting millions in investment and millions of tourists annually.

Miami, a place unusually rich in diversions, stands for America's passion for play. It offers a wider range of sports than perhaps any other American city. There are the Miami Dolphins, the Florida Marlins, the Miami Heat, the Florida Panthers, jai alai, stock-car racing, horseracing, parasailing, snorkeling, wind surfing, tennis, golf, biking, coral reef diving, jet skiing, boat racing, sky diving, and fishing, among others.

Miami is the city of "attractions" in a state that seems to have invented this distinctly American diversion. We can watch Lolita the killer whale somersault and dine on fish morsels from a maiden's hand at the Miami Seaquar-

ium; visit the Monkey Jungle or the Gold Coast Railroad Museum; taste jelly at berry farms; glide over swamp waters of the Everglades just a short drive away; take a cruise from the world's largest cruise port; visit architectural marvels by I. M. Pei or Philip Johnson; gawk at wild animals at the Miami Metrozoo or the parrot jungle and gardens; enrich our minds at the Lowe Art Museum, the Florida Pioneer Museum, the Museum of Science, the Goombay Festival (the world's largest African-American festival of art, music, and culture); the Miami Film Festival world premieres, the Holocaust Memorial, the Hispanic theater festival, the orchid show, the Coconut Grove Playhouse, the Redlands Fruit and Spice Park covering thousands of acres, an alligator farm, the Weeks Air Museum, or the Bass Art Museum, and even a wine festival, to name a few. We can ogle the Coral Castle created by a Latvian immigrant, Ed Leedstainen, who spent twenty-eight years building a strange coral structure that some compare to Stonehenge. These allure visitors with a sense of security and predictability. The prospect of seeing them all is numbing, but to have visited a few of them carefully tucks Miami into our imaginations through experiences at once familiar and exotic, safe and adventuresome.

As a resort of the celebrated, Miami itself becomes an attraction. Robert Frost not only visited but owned seven acres in Miami. Robert De Niro, Lana Turner, Cher, and Sylvester Stallone made news in Miami. Liv Ullmann, Janet Reno, and Jack Nicklaus live there; so did Jackie Gleason and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Gianni Versace brought worldwide fashion fame to Miami and Muhammed Ali extended his legend there (1961–1964), and Shaquille O'Neal moved there to lift the Miami Heat into NBA title contention. Edward Albee retired there—even getting caught on Miami Beach early one morning while air bathing in the dawn. These and hundreds more spark our imagination to the firing point.

Miami has a rich fantasy life, something like New Orleans, but with a New World rather than an Old World flavor, as much a taste of freedom to do as escape from. Miami's fantasy is reflected in the gritty but colorful detective series *Miami Vice*, in which a cross-racial pair of hard-boiled cops pit the powers of instinct and inductive reasoning against the forces of death and destruction. Out of the chaos wrought by the city's under life, the detectives outwit the bad folks and bring order to the steamy nightspots and engaging neighborhoods of multiracial Miami.

While *Miami Vice* may be the most widely known version of the Miami fantasy, a horde of novelists turn out forests of mystery and detection books focused on Miami's ambiguities, perhaps its largest literary industry. A few titles from recent popular books disseminating the mythic Miami may surprise for their consistency of impression. There's Marshall Frank's *Dire Straits*; Dirk Wylie's *Medical School is Murder* or *Biotechnology is Murder*; Tom Coffey's *Miami Twilight*; Dave Barry's humorous *Big Trouble* mystery; Ana Veciana-Suarez's *The Flight to Freedom* and *Cuba Confidential: Love and Vengeance in Miami and Havana*; Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's *Bitter*



Present-day Miami Beach at night. Courtesy of Corbis.

*Sugar: A Lope Solano Mystery*; Barbara Parker's *Suspicion of Betrayal* and *Suspicion of Malice*; Edna Buchanan's *Garden of Evil*, *The Ice Maiden*, and *You Only Die Twice*; Jilliane Hoffman's *Retribution*; Heather Graham's *Picture Me Dead*; Max Allen Collins's *Florida Getaway*; Michele McPhee's *Mob Over Miami*; James Grippando's *Last to Die* and *Beyond Suspicion*; Lisa Miscione's *The Darkness Gathers*; Elmore Leonard's *Pronto*; and Michael Gruber's *Tropic of Night*. This genre, the most prolific of all novel genres to feature Miami, again and again underscores the allure of mystery, suspicion, getting away, death, or looming doom. Miami's iconic fantasy rises here as a place of exotic, even erotic adventure, a place of lurid and troublesome passions frothing amid its orderly urban streets and neighborhoods.

New York and Los Angeles once dominated the mystique for American metropolitan edginess, but Miami is making a strong bid for the "naked city" franchise, as *CSI: Miami* has become a very popular TV drama. The color palette for Miami alternates between the dark geometries of the crime lab, where top cop David Caruso and his assistants apply high-tech instruments to pillow cases, glasses, carpets, steering wheels, or the like, and the lush warmth of Miami with its modern architecture, beaches, and neighborhood palms and palmettos. Questions of crime and punishment give way to the mysteries of discovery.

Probably nothing rivals the films shot on Miami locations for expressions of the fantasy Miami. Joe Buck, the “midnight cowboy,” was taking Ratso Rizzo on the bus to a fantasy Miami, so he could experience before he died the heat and beaches in the company of wannabe models with sculpted buttocks, voluptuous 36Cs, wearing leopard skin bikinis as he frolicked with them on the Florida sand. But then, there’s Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis, and Jack Lemmon who escape death in New York to reach Miami’s beach in *Some Like it Hot*. The list of films set in Miami is long: *Goldfinger*, *Big Trouble*, *Snow Dogs*, *Bad Boys II*, *Far from Heaven*, *Miami Blues*, *The Crew*, and *Any Given Sunday*.

Miami is, as Carl Hiassen suggests, a place where things happen that you cannot make up. The Miami of the imagination is a place for getting away, for finding sensuality, spontaneity, wildness, and unpredictability, but it is also a place to find safety and a new home. As do most icons, Miami embraces contradictions rather than resolves them.

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# Mickey Mouse

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*M. Thomas Inge*

There is no more widely known an iconic figure out of American culture in the world at large than Mickey Mouse. So successful have been the marketing strategies of the Walt Disney Company, so widely distributed have been the films and comics, and so strongly appealing is the image of the mouse to children and adults alike that there are few small corners of the earth where Mickey is not instantly recognizable, if by nothing more than a set of round ears. Crude reproductions of Mickey and his girl friend Minnie Mouse appear on the walls of bus stops and telephone booths in remote African villages, and children everywhere decorate the walls of their nurseries and schools with their images. In China the folk figure of the Monkey King has been known to appear with Mickey's face, and a 2003 exhibition of postmodern Russian art in Moscow featured a bronze statue by Alexander Kosolapov of Lenin with the head of Mickey Mouse. In Italy he is known as Topolino, in Sweden Musse Pigg, in Spain Raton Miguelito, in China Mi Lao Shu, and in Vietnam Mic-Kay. His admirers have included Sergei Eisenstein, E. M. Forster, William Faulkner, Charlie Chaplin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Updike, Maurice Sendak, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and George Lucas.

For socialists and left-leaning intellectuals, Mickey represents American capitalism and cultural imperialism at its most unscrupulous. For conservatives and those to the right, he represents the sweet success of free enterprise and capitalism at its most admirable. For ordinary people, however, Mickey is a symbol of what's good about America and its culture. Gentle but self-confident, sentimental but not maudlin, and naïve without being foolish, Mickey epitomizes a kind of character whose appeal cuts across class and national boundaries.

Stories about the creation of Mickey Mouse are legend and contradictory. Walt Disney had been producing a series of successful animated films for Universal Studios about a character called Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. When Disney traveled to New York from Hollywood to renew the contract in 1928, he discovered that the distributor, Charles Mintz, had hired away most of his staff and intended to produce the films at a lower cost with or without



Disney. Although created by Disney, the figure of Oswald had been copyrighted by Universal. Disney refused to cooperate with Mintz. At this moment he probably promised himself never again to work on a property over which he did not exercise control and to be sure that his own intellectual property was protected to the full extent of the law.

In search of a character for a new series, one story has it that Disney remembered a pet mouse that visited the young aspiring cartoonist's drawing board in Kansas City. Another was that he dreamed up the character and sketched him out on the train on his way back from the dispute over Oswald. He wanted to call him Mortimer, but his wife suggested that a better name was Mickey. The likely truth is that like all of his creations, it was a matter of consultation and collaboration, mainly with his friend and talented artist Ub Iwerks, who had remained faithful and refused to leave Disney for Mintz.

It may partly have been a simple process of elimination. While no one in particular had decided that anthropomorphism was to be the order of the day in animation, it has worked out that way, from Gertie the dinosaur to Ren and Stimpy. The cat had already been used most famously by Otto Messmer in *Felix the Cat*, as well as by Disney himself in a Felix look-alike named Julius in the early Alice comedies produced before the Oswald films. Dogs were being used by Max and Dave Fleischer in the *Out of the Inkwell* series, specifically in Bimbo and his canine girlfriend Betty (before she metamorphosed into a girl as Betty Boop). Oswald had cornered the market on rabbits for a long time, until Bugs Bunny came along. What they were left with were rats and mice, largely indistinguishable in how they were drawn in animated films. They had already been used by Disney and others as frequent background characters, except for that singular mouse Ignatz who threw bricks at the love-struck Krazy Kat but who never made a successful transition to the screen from his comic strip existence. If one examines the rodents who cavort in the Alice comedies, one can see Mickey in an early form not unlike the way he would appear in *Plane Crazy*, the first of the Mickey shorts to be drawn. (See especially *Alice Rattled by Rats* of 1925 where dozens of proto-Mickeys play music, dance, and cause chaos in the household. They even have rounded ears, and as in the case of *Alice the Whaler* in 1927, wear small pants.)

The idea may have been Disney's, but likely the physical form of Mickey is attributable to Ub Iwerks. In the operation of the studio, Disney had already turned over to Iwerks the painstaking art while he focused on plots, gags, and technical and business matters. Disney would remain strongly attached to and closely identified with Mickey all of his life, doing the voice of the mouse for the films and defending him against all criticism. In fact, many would view Mickey as Disney's alter ego, and on one occasion he made the oddly revealing statement, "I love Mickey Mouse more than any woman I've ever known" (Grant 23).

If the power of Mickey Mouse as an image is as important to his popularity as his character, then Iwerks remains equally responsible for his success. An incredibly rapid artist, Iwerks had finished work almost single-handedly on

*Plane Crazy* and *The Gallopin' Gaucho* when Disney was inspired to use in the third film sound and music, which he saw as the wave of the future. Thus *Steamboat Willie* was the first animated film to be drawn in full synchronization with previously selected pieces of music. Then music had to be added to the first two, although the third was the first to be released to the public on November 18, 1928.

It was not until *Steamboat Willie* that Mickey began to assume in full his traditional appearance. In the first film he wore no shoes and had a head more in the shape of a real rodent, except he had the round ears and wore pants. In the opening scene on the steamboat, Mickey is wearing the large round shoes that would become his trademark, adopted from what was known as the "big foot" school of cartooning in the comic strip world, and he has the large circular head that would remain with him. Like Felix, Bimbo, Oswald, and most of the animated film characters who preceded him, Mickey had a black body and head, large white eyeballs, and a white area around the mouth—all characteristics of African Americans as portrayed stereotypically in cartoons, illustrations, and advertising of the time and based on the image of minstrel-show performers in black face. When white gloves were added, Mickey moved even closer to his sources. None of these characters retained, however, any of the language or cultural nuances of black life, although Mickey has sometimes been thought to retain some of the free-swinging style of the hipster and trickster. Mickey then may be "black" in more than one sense of the word.

In terms of conduct, the Mickey Mouse in these early films is unlike the one the world would come to know and love. In *Steamboat Willie* he chews tobacco, commits violence against any number of farmyard animals to make his impromptu music, and apparently drowns a parrot at the end. *The Gallopin' Gaucho* features a Mickey who drinks, smokes, and treats roughly Minnie, who wears pasties over her breasts as a dance hall girl. He commits more violence against animals in *Plane Crazy* and is guilty of sexual harassment against Minnie, who escapes his unwanted advances by bailing out of his airplane. She uses her bloomers as a parachute and arrives on the ground with no pants at the end. All of these capers are laced with crude humor about cow's udders, dropped pants, and chamber pots.

The truth is that this early Mickey had no distinct personality of his own but borrowed it from notable figures of the time. In *Plane Crazy*, he imitates the national hero Charles Lindbergh, who had made the first non-stop transatlantic flight in 1927 and who appears in the film in caricature as Mickey tousles his hair to look like him. As a Latin lover in *The Gallopin' Gaucho*, Mickey is emulating Douglas Fairbanks, Rudolph Valentino, and other romantic leading men of the screen, and *Steamboat Willie*, of course, banks off of Buster Keaton's comedy *Steamboat Bill Jr.* released the year before. As parents noticed that children also greatly enjoyed the antics of the mouse, by 1931 they were complaining to Disney about the bad example he was setting.



Walt Disney examines a film with Mickey Mouse perched on his arm, 1935. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Under Disney's influence, therefore, Mickey began to develop a carefully delineated personality that would leave behind the early rambunctious Mickey, although he would continue this way for a number of years under the imaginative hand of Floyd Gottfredson in his adventurous comic strip and comic book stories. As Disney would describe the revised mouse, "Mickey's a nice fellow who never does anybody any harm, who gets into scrapes through no fault of his own but always manages to come up grinning" (Thomas 108). Years later he would add,

All we ever intended for him or expected of him was that he should continue to make people everywhere chuckle with him and at him. We didn't burden him with any social symbolism, we made him no mouthpiece for frustrations or harsh satire. Mickey was simply a little personality assigned to the purposes of laughter. (Disney 68)

What is to account for the staying power and the continuing popularity of Mickey Mouse as an icon? There are no easy or quick answers to that question. Writing in one of his columns for *Natural History* magazine in 1979, the popular science writer Stephen Jay Gould applied the psychological theories of Konrad Lorenz to Mickey and came up with this explanation:

In one of his most famous articles, Konrad Lorenz argues that humans use the characteristic differences in form between babies and adults as important behavioral cues. He believes that features of juvenility trigger "innate releasing mechanisms" for affection and nurturing in adult humans. When we see a living creature with babyish features, we feel an automatic surge of disarming tenderness. The adaptive value of this response can scarcely be questioned, for we must nurture our babies. Lorenz, by the way, lists among his releasers the very features of babyhood that Disney affixed progressively to Mickey: "a relatively large head, predominance of the brain capsule, large and low-lying eyes, bulging cheek region, short and thick extremities, a springy elastic consistency, and clumsy movements." (100–101)

Mickey, then, may appeal to innate instincts in all human beings, if Lorenz is right, although Gould would go on to suggest that these strong feelings of

affection may be learned from our immediate experience and environment rather than being inherited from ancestral primates.

Another cultural explanation, for Americans anyway, is the heroic folk tradition of the little man, the lost soul, or what Charlie Chaplin called the Little Fellow. Americans have always had a degree of sympathy for the underdog, the person handicapped by injustice or discrimination, but the little man proves inadequate because he is overwhelmed by the anxieties and insecurities of the technological society created in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. This tradition would include such figures as James Thurber's Walter Mitty, George Herriman's Krazy Kat, Chic Young's Dagwood Bumstead, the screen personae of Buster Keaton and Woody Allen, and of course Mickey Mouse.

In fact, Disney borrowed it directly from the artist who may have been its originator in American culture, Charlie Chaplin. Developed over the years and through numerous films, Chaplin's Tramp is a timid but brave soul overcome by the difficulties of life, yet resilient and cheerful in the face of the struggle for survival, and often wresting victory out of the jaws of defeat. He is a romantic who brings style to his meager existence through passion, imagination, and indestructible hope. Disney admitted the inspiration and influence in 1948 when he said, "I think we are rather indebted to Charlie Chaplin for the idea [of Mickey Mouse]. We wanted something appealing, and we thought of a tiny bit of a mouse that would have something of the wistfulness of Chaplin—a little fellow trying to do the best he could" (Disney 68).

There is also something powerfully attractive about the very design of Mickey, the way he is drawn, even though he has slowly but surely changed over the years in small ways. The scrappy little barefoot mouse of *Plane Crazy* in 1928 became in the 1930s better dressed with gloves and yellow bulbous shoes, although he has always worn short pants. By the 1940s his solid oblong pupils had given way to more clearly defined eyes, and his snout was elongated somewhat. He later began to wear a greater variety of clothes in accordance with the roles he played in the films, as in *Mickey's Christmas Carol* (1983) or *The Prince and the Pauper* (1990), although by the time of his last appearance in a short cartoon in 1995, *Runaway Brain*, he has returned to his familiar clothing as he



Mickey Mouse greets visitors to Disney World during its opening year, 1971. Courtesy of Photofest.

fights a rampaging monster to save Minnie one more time.

He looks easy to draw, and he has undoubtedly inspired many a child to want to become a cartoonist. It isn't that easy, however, as any Disney how-to-draw or instructional book makes clear. It is a matter of concentric circles handled in just the right way, and no matter the angle at which he holds his head, the ears must remain two black circles. As John Updike has noted,

These ears properly belong not to three-dimensional space but to an ideal realm of notation, or symbolization, of cartoon resilience and indestructibility. . . . A surreal optical consistency is part of the cartoon world, halfway between our world and the plane of pure signs of alphabets and trademarks. . . . To take a bite out of our imaginations, an icon must be simple. The ears, the wiggly tail, the red shorts, give us a Mickey. . . . Like totem poles, like African masks, Mickey stands at that intersection of abstraction and representation where magic connects. (8, 12–13)

Because of Mickey, Updike first tried his hand at cartooning before turning with greater success to fiction.

Children's book author and illustrator Maurice Sendak likewise was inspired by Mickey as a child to enter a creative field where the magic of imagery is the main mode of communication. As he would explain it,

Though I wasn't aware of it at the time, I now know that a good deal of my pleasure in Mickey had to do with his bizarre proportions: the great rounded head extended still further by those black saucer ears, the black trunk fitting snugly into ballooning red shorts, the tiny legs stuffed into delicious doughy yellow shoes. The giant white gloves, yellow buttons, pie-cut eyes, and bewitching grin were delectable finishing touches. . . . A gratifying shape, fashioned primarily to facilitate the needs of the animator, he exuded a sense of physical satisfaction and pleasure—a piece of art that powerfully affected and stimulated the imagination. (108)

To this day, Sendak surrounds himself with reproductions of Mickey to feed his imagination.

As a result of his continuing appeal, Mickey has found himself at the center of cultural and political controversy. In 1970 a group of young underground cartoonists, led by Dan O'Neill, gathered in San Francisco, called themselves the Air Pirates after a group of villains who opposed Mickey in the comic strips of the 1930s, and set about liberating Mickey from the strictures of corporate ownership. They felt that Mickey had passed into popular folklore and could be claimed by members of their generation as public property. Thus they began to publish a series of comic books beginning with two issues of *Air Pirates Funnies* in the summer of 1971, as well as three issues of *Dan O'Neill's Comics and Stories* (a parodic but close approximation in appearance to *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*), in which the Disney characters engaged in unusual conduct, with sex being one of the less startling

activities. Needless to say, the Disney corporation sued for copyright violation and trademark infringement in a case that went on for ten years, finally to be settled with the cartoonists promising never to draw Disney characters again.

Then in April of 1989 Eternity Comics began to publish a series of reprints of the 1930 comic strips of Mickey under the title *The Uncensored Mouse*. According to copyright law in effect at the time, the strips had fallen into the public domain in 1986. Only two issues appeared before Disney stepped in to claim trademark infringement, although the front covers of the publications were totally black and featured no image of Mickey. Publication ceased as Disney and other corporations lobbied Congress for a change in copyright law. In 1998, Congress passed the Sonny Bono Copyright Extension Act, which extended copyright to the life of the author plus seventy years. The legislation has been called by the press the “Mickey Mouse law.”

Although largely absent from the screen since the 1940s, but ever present as a costumed figure at Disneyland and Walt Disney World since the theme parks opened, and a continuing logo and spokesperson for all Disney enterprises, Mickey holds a central position in the popular imagination. Walt Disney himself once ruminated, “Sometimes I’ve tried to figure out why Mickey appealed to the whole world. Everybody’s tried to figure it out. So far as I know, nobody has” (Updike 12). John Updike may have put his finger on a central matter, however, when he wrote, “The America that is not symbolized by that Imperial Yankee Uncle Sam is symbolized by Mickey Mouse. He is America as it feels to itself—plucky, put-on, inventive, resilient, good-natured, game” (10).

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# Miss Manners

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*Dennis Hall*

“Miss Manners” is a figure familiar to all but the most isolated or disengaged of Americans. While many of us have some sense of what she looks like from the head shot that appears with Judith Martin’s byline, we don’t really need to see her. We are, rather, far more familiar with the distinctive voice of her syndicated columns and many consistently popular books with such titles as *Common Courtesy*, *Miss Manners’ Guide to Domestic Tranquility*, *Miss Manners’ Basic Training: Eating*, *Miss Manners Rescues Civilization*, *Miss Manners’ Guide to the New Millennium*, and *Miss Manners’ Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*. Although few of her readers have ever actually heard it, the rhetorical character of this voice is distinctive.

Whether we love her or loathe her, we have gotten to know Miss Manners, if not Judith Martin, through her patterns of speech, her singular taste for irony, and her authoritative habits of mind. She is an immediately recognizable force on the cultural landscape. Judith Martin, of course, does not own the entire etiquette franchise, but she possesses the largest chunk of it, as she assumed the crown once worn by Emily Post to serve as the unofficial official commentator on and arbiter of social behavior in contemporary American culture. Miss Manners is the American icon of etiquette.

Miss Manners, poised as she is between the personal reality of Judith Martin and an artistic creation, does not function as do such human icons as Marilyn Monroe or Muhammad Ali or as do such inventions as Mickey Mouse or Rosie the Riveter. Indeed, oscillating within this middle ground between real person and invention confers special iconic power upon Miss Manners, allowing her to survive change over time, to embrace contradictions, to trigger memory and nostalgia, to have a ritual function, to define generational differences, and to engender disagreement about the meaning of what she so forthrightly stands for. Miss Manners enjoys rich metonymic resonance; that is, she embodies a wide range of associated ideas that allows her to deliver meanings well beyond the practical business of giving directions on how the many parts of weddings or christenings or funerals are properly conducted, or on the forms of address or appropriate attire, or on



behaviors at table or the theater, in the ballroom or the workplace, at home or the club.

In the last decade of the twentieth and into the first decade of the twenty-first century, civilized, not to mention decorous, behavior has come under intense scrutiny, owing in large measure to the pressures of political and cultural warfare, of the sudden and unpredictable creation of wealth, of the qualitative and quantitative extension of celebrity, of the “reality” phenomenon in the mass media, of the rise in the power of the opinion of everyman and everywoman and the decline in the social influence of elites of every stripe, among many other forces. Miss Manners stepped into the epistemological and ontological chaos surrounding “the practices and forms prescribed by social convention or by authority,” as *The American Heritage Dictionary* crisply defines “etiquette.” Her authoritative voice is archly shrill, certainly as compared to that of Emily Post, but even compared to those of her competitors and colleagues in the practice of etiquette discourse. Miss Manners is as much a sign of the dissolution of widely accepted conventions governing social behavior, from the White House to the house next door, as a sign of correct behavior. Miss Manners rides the crest of a wave of other etiquette columns and books and courses, whose popularity reflects a post-modern tear in the fabric of civility, a nostalgia for the loss of what are selectively remembered as the plain good manners of some unspecified time past. Miss Manners is the most conspicuous sign of the intense interest in these honest trifles that marks the fear of a betrayal of values with much deeper consequences, as American culture lurches into the new millennium.



Miss Manners. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

Etiquette, and Miss Manners as its most powerful personification, occupy a distinct place in the system of contemporary social intercourse and in the culture that system sustains, as much with ideas and associations about the relationships between self and other individuals and self and society, as with the specific behaviors they promote or inhibit. While often described as the lubrication that makes social intercourse possible and pleasurable, etiquette operates somewhere between those devices (as Thomas Hobbes would have it) that keep us from killing one another and those devices (as Eric Fromm would have it) that propel us to love one another. The practices and forms that Miss Manners stands for are significant for the information they convey about the practitioner and his or her relationships to others. When one is—how shall I say, “doing” etiquette—when one is engaged in the prescribed forms of conduct, engaged in

observing the codes of propriety, one is engaged—particularly in this impolite and unrefined age—in conspicuous behavior, behavior singular and apparent to all but the somnambulant. When once the observance of the common proprieties went without saying, now their observance can scarcely pass without notice or comment. One's manners, whether they are the result of ignorance or habit or deliberation, whether they conform to or resist a prevailing paradigm or hover somewhere in between, are loaded with meaning.

The discourse on conduct, and more narrowly on etiquette, of course, has a long and venerable history, one too long to rehearse here. But from Castiglione's *The Courtier* (1528) to Miss Manners's *Guide to the Turn-of-the-New Millennium* (1989) a central concern has been what has variously been called *sprezzatura*, grace, ease, comfort. An atmosphere of ease is the goal, if not necessarily the lived experience, of all of Miss Manners's counsel. Ease is marked neither by rigid conformity, nor by loose nonconformity; rather, etiquette seeks to create a social space wherein one is bidden to be easy, but not so easy as to put others ill at ease. Miss Manners seeks to mediate between maintaining distance, on one hand, and indulging in intimacy, on the other hand.

Given their relatively short cultural history, Americans commonly accentuate etiquette as a sign of wealth and status, if not aristocracy, a matter of being both to the manor and the manner born. Americans often have a difficult time, as famously reported by nineteenth-century European travelers, precisely because they either escape contact altogether or rush to familiarity. Miss Manners promotes etiquette in terms of convenience and efficiency, concepts which mark behavior legitimated by middle-class earnestness and hard work, distinct from wealth and luxury. Miss Manners—in, to my mind, a singularly American turn—redefines ease and comfort in terms of efficiency and convenience, so as to maintain civility's delicate balance between unproductive distance and destructive intimacy.

Lest this mediating function seem like a painfully mechanical operation of the spirit of social intercourse, remember the strain that the postmodern condition imposes upon this interest and the needs that Miss Manners satisfies, including negotiating the separate spheres of men and women; understanding the increasing feminization of men and masculinization of women; managing the increasing confusion of public and private space; dealing with increasingly stark differences between parents and children; and between youth and middle-age and age, among a good many others. Miss Manners, reactionary in the strictest sense of the word, is an icon that traffics in associations of authority, definition, description and prescription, order and direction in the teeth of postmodern indeterminacy. As Julia Reed, reviewing the latest edition of *Miss Manner's Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*, puts it, "Though I myself am a transgressor, I find such passionate certitude not only refreshing—and often hilarious—but also extremely comforting. There should be more areas in life where there is so little room for doubt" (8).

Miss Manners speaks with the voice of authority, partially earned through the success of her column and books, reinforced by her every clear and

unshakeable utterance, and by the ready acceptance of her command. While not immune to parody and other forms of postmodern irony, Miss Manners has not been the target that other reactionaries have been, most notably Martha Stewart (even before serving time). Moreover, Miss Manners confers authority on those who follow her practices and forms, even when they are not aware of it, as well as to those who cite her rule. Indeed, the resonance of Miss Manners's authority is sufficiently great that it inverts the axiom that they who assert must prove, shifting the burden of proof from the maker of the rule to the challenger of a rule. Her use of the question-and-answer format in the books as well as the column subvenes this confiscation of authority.

Miss Manners defines etiquette in the new millennium far more effectively than do her fellow columnists in magazines and free weekly tabloid papers, and than do the encyclopedic books on etiquette which continue to occupy bookstore shelves. While one might expect this proliferation of etiquette columns and books to undercut Miss Manners's hegemony, the confusion of alternatives ends up advancing her authority, by revealing that Miss Manners is, finally, the ever fixed mark in this sea of discursive instability. Her arch and often ironic authoritarianism, while it can be off-putting, is finally very comforting. Her voice speaks to the fears of contemporary culture; it is with manners as with politics, people flock to voices that speak without the slightest reservation or doubt.

Miss Manners prevails in this environment principally because of her focus and comprehensiveness. Although most of these alternative columnists employ the question-and-answer format Miss Manners exploits so effectively, they very often are limited by the narrowness of their focus: that is, their orientation to a niche market of readers in a certain generation or gender or subcultural group or socioeconomic class. In addition to their variability of focus and voice, they commonly bleed into the advice-psycho-personal idiom ranging from the successors to Ann Landers to Dr. Phil. Moreover, their use of the question-and-answer format does not exhibit the quality of Miss Manners's dialogue, which a careful combination of selection and editing and writing is able to create. Judith Martin is a major talent in this kind of writing. Most of the alternatives to Miss Manners create texts encyclopedic in character. While it may be possible for readers to construct a narrative of propitious practices and forms from them, the dialogues Miss Manners creates in her columns and books amount, like those of Plato, to a systematic philosophy of etiquette. Miss Manners's conversations elucidate principle through practice. The concrete examples that emerge from the dialogue between "Miss Manners" and the "Gentle Reader" teach by example rather than precept; after the fashion of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, they provide a representation of the real thing.

Related to this function of definition is Miss Manners's capacity to establish the existence of etiquette, her office as etiquette's creating word in what often seems the barbarism of the new millennium. Miss Manners

operates as if “manners” and its venues have all but died, as if they need to be born again. One of her primary functions is to establish, to demonstrate by examples and concrete particularity, that there really are people, places, and activities characterized by ease, comfort, efficiency, and convenience, that somewhere “out there” are households and parties and restaurants and dances and older people and young people living the life that Miss Manners’s account of etiquette not only describes, but promises. The pleasures of the texts Miss Manners creates are many, but in large measure reside in their definition of places and associations that go a very long way toward establishing one’s identity, one’s reality. She makes important social rituals possible.

Miss Manners resonates with us because she is a signally fixed bit of social discourse, succeeding in an era of discursive looseness. Miss Manners is unabashedly modern rather than postmodern. She provides an escape from the fragmented and the contingent, pointing to a relatively unified self and fixed relationships. Miss Manners, like so very many popular icons, materially signs the attempt to escape the schizophrenia of the condition of post-modernity.

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# Marilyn Monroe

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*Ann C. Hall*

Marilyn Monroe. She is omnipresent. Cultural wallpaper. Films. Photographs. Books. Cell phones. The internet. Postcards. Magazines. Cups. Souvenirs. T-shirts. Tattoos. The Ultimate Product. Forty-two years after her death, she still “sells,” even in scholarly circles. A recent book by Sarah Churchwell, ostensibly about the “many lives of Marilyn Monroe,” is less about Monroe and more about the numerous biographies on Monroe. As all academics know, such a tertiary work insures Monroe’s status as cultural icon in both pop and scholarly circles.

Like other cultural artifacts and icons, the iconic Monroe encourages study and reflection which generates opposing viewpoints and conflicting opinions about her work, her life, and her fame. She was an actress and a comedienne, yet her obsessive need for perfection prohibited her from enjoying her screen success. She made “sex seem like eating an ice cream cone” (Mailer 306), yet she never found a satisfying romantic relationship. She represented the American rags-to-riches dream, yet she was an American rebel and the archetypal lost child. Above all, she was and continues to be beautiful, a testament to nature and her own instincts, as well as a monument to Hollywood invention, glamour, and artifice. For many, the Monroe dialectic is best represented in the shift from her birth name, Norma Jean, the natural, “real girl,” to her screen name, Marilyn Monroe, the artificial Hollywood-created woman. Given the work of postmodernists, the conception of the “real” is complicated, and it is perhaps more fruitful to see the interplay of her screen personae, her off-screen publicity, and her biography in order to understand the persistent appeal of her image over the generations. As Roland Barthes explained in *The Pleasure of the Text*, textual pleasure comes not from finding the truth but from its pursuit; it is not the nude that delights, but the veils.

Norma Jeane Mortenson was born in Los Angeles, California, on June 1, 1926, to Gladys Baker, who suffered from mental illness throughout her life. With no father on the scene and Baker in and out of asylums, Monroe’s childhood was at best chaotic and at worst abusive and terribly lonely. Her own account in *My Story* depicts a frightened and desperate little girl who

creates “daydreams” in order to survive the uncertainty and instability of her young life. As she recalls, “Aunt Grace,” a friend of her mother’s who took care of Marilyn for a time, “was the first person who ever patted me on the head or touched my cheek” (15). According to Donald Spoto, Grace also instilled the desire for a film career in the young Norma Jean by taking her to the movies, particularly Jean Harlow’s films of 1933 and 1934, proclaiming, “There’s no reason you can’t grow up to be just like her, Norma Jean, with the right hair color and a better nose” (38). And that, as they say, is history.

When Monroe, however, was sixteen and Grace could no longer care for her as a result of financial and personal limitations, Grace encouraged a relationship with a 21 year-old neighbor, Jim Dougherty. In a few months, the plan worked, and Marilyn married, thereby sparing her the abuse, isolation, and feelings of abandonment which characterized her previous stays in foster homes. Most biographers depict the marriage as pleasant, but Monroe’s own description belies domestic bliss. She recalls going outside after dinner to play with neighborhood kids while Jim and his family talked after dinner. And she claims, “the first effect marriage had on me was to increase my lack of interest in sex” (28). When Jim joined the Merchant Marines in 1944, Monroe went to work at a parachute factory and was “discovered.” She began modeling and taking acting lessons, pursuits that eventually led to the end of her marriage in 1946. That year also brought her name change to Marilyn Monroe.

Monroe began her career fervently, saying “it was like being in jail and looking at a door that said ‘This Way Out’” (Monroe 39). Biographers agree—she relentlessly pursued perfection in her film and modeling careers. She was the ultimate starlet, one of the many young women who came and continue to come to Hollywood seeking fame and fortune. Today, Monroe continues to embody the term, as a quick Google search illustrates. Starlet costumes and wigs are defined by Monroe’s wardrobe and makeup, most notably through costumes from *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) and *The Seven Year Itch* (1955).

Like all things, however, the starlet’s life had a darker side, one which Monroe and her biographers present differently. Monroe says, “Hollywood’s a place where they’ll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss, and fifty cents for your soul. I know, because I turned down the first offer often enough and held out for the fifty cents” (47). But biographer Barbara Leaming writes that by late 1947, Monroe “had joined the countless other starlets, models, and assorted young women on the Hollywood party circuit. . . . In exchange for dinner and the chance to meet some of Hollywood’s most important players, the women were expected to make themselves available to” the men. Leaming also reports that Monroe moved into a cottage on the estate of one of the most influential men of the time in order “to be nearby when he wanted her at night” (15).

Whatever the case, she landed some small roles in 1947, and finally a more substantial but still small role in John Huston’s *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). Her performance in *Niagara* (1953) was the role that finally launched her

career. Ironically, it is unlike her subsequent work. In it, she plays a *femme fatale*, a young woman married to a depressive and abusive man, George Loomis, played by Joseph Cotten. She and her lover plan to kill Loomis, but he thwarts the plan by killing the lover in a great *film noir* plot twist. Interestingly, the film takes great pains to avoid blaming only the woman. Monroe's character, of course, is clearly guilty of adultery and plotting her husband's death; however, not only is Loomis no picnic to live with, but also both characters have allowed passion to overtake them as powerfully as Niagara Falls. The other married couple, brilliantly played by Max Showalter and Jean Peters, in contrast, exemplify a wholesome, companionate love, a true love that reaps a daring rescue on the rapids of the Niagara river and a happily-ever-after-ending as its reward.

Monroe's next role, with Rosalind Russell in *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), is a comic masterpiece more akin to her later works. Both women are out to find husbands, one for love and one for money, but while Monroe's character is the more mercenary of the two, the film repeatedly illustrates her practicality, not her greed. We all need to live, after all. It is Russell who delivers one of the great lines of the film when the two are trying to get the better of a detective hired to spy on Monroe by her millionaire's father: "If we can't empty his pockets between the two of us, we're not worthy of the name woman." In the end, both women earn dividends—marriage to the men of their choice.

Monroe's classic, *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), presents her as an innocent beauty: "the celebrated skirt-blowing scene is, of course, the finest instance of Monroe's character's ability to suggest simultaneously both childlike pleasure and sexual delight" (Rollyson 78). Richard Sherman, exquisitely played by Tom Ewell reprising his stage role for the screen, possesses an overactive libido and imagination, and the film's success lies in the fact that "the girl" is unaware of Sherman's feelings. As the doe-eyed, unnamed, and beautiful neighbor, she serves as a perfect screen upon which Sherman and the audience can project fantasies. But as the set underscores, this sexual fantasy is a "stairway leading nowhere." Unlike the play version, the film keeps the relationship chaste. As a matter of fact, through Monroe's deft performance which simultaneously rebuffs Sherman's advances while bolstering his virility by admiring his fidelity to his wife and family, the film establishes a new definition of a "manly" man, one who remains true rather than one who counts his conquests while the family is away for the long, hot summer.

Monroe's role as Cherie in *Bus Stop* (1956), once again based on a stage play, takes her screen sexuality further than other films. She is clearly more experienced at sex than her cowboy partner, but she is also an honest, but gullible beauty, who will neither trick an innocent, uncultured cowboy into marriage nor will she be "roped into" a marriage by this handsome but crass man who promises her a better life. It is only in the end when she confesses

her sexual experience and he promises to become more mannered and less selfish that she feels free to marry.

*Some Like It Hot* (1956) offers another version of Monroe's sexual innocence, and it is one of her finest performances. Disguised as a female band member, Joe, played by Tony Curtis, wins the trust of Monroe, aptly named Sugar Cane, the band's most delectable singer and ukulele player. After learning that Cane is interested in only millionaires with glasses, Joe dons the appropriate attire and a poor Cary Grant impersonation and claims that he is unmoved by women and their kisses. In one of the film's funniest scenes, Cane attempts to cure Joe through a series of passionate kisses. Here Monroe practices an early version of Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing." She has it to give, and gladly she gives to help a fellow human being, who happens to be rich and meets all the criteria she has established for a marriageable mate. The film underscores the fact that sex is fun, healing, and enjoyable; and as the other romantic relationship between Daphne, played by Jack Lemmon, and Osgood, played by Joe E. Brown, demonstrates, it is also liberally defined. Daphne explains, "You don't understand, Osgood! Aaah... I'm a man!" To which Osgood replies, "Well, nobody's perfect!" All motor off into the sunset together.

Through these and other films, even the more serious *The Misfits*, Monroe projects an innocent sexuality that could go wrong under adverse circumstances, but instead, for her and her characters, it does not. The sexuality portrayed in her film career remains life-giving, fun, enjoyable, and definitely entertaining. According to Barbara Leaming, Monroe "promises us that sex can be innocent, without danger. That, indeed, may not be the truth, but it continues to be what we wish. And that is why Marilyn remains, even now, the symbol of our secret desires" (431).

Monroe's life and modeling career, of course, were nothing like these films, but the tell-all biographies with lurid details of her "real" life and her "real" troubles perpetuate her iconic status as effectively as the films. According to Groucho Marx, Monroe was "Mae West, Theda Bara, and Bo Peep all rolled into one" (Spoto 148). This characterization adds the glamorous, the artificial, and naughty side of sexuality to Mailer's "ice-cream" characterization. Marilyn's sexuality was particularly calculated and provocative off-screen. As Barbara Leaming notes, Monroe was "brilliant with the press": everything she said "appeared to be utterly innocent and uncalculated" when it in fact was not (41). When promoting *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1956), for example, she sabotaged her own dress strap, timing its break during the press conference on the film (Spoto 379).

Early in her career, she took publicity into her own hands. Her nude calendar, for example, threatened her success, and film executives advised that she deny the photo. She would not: "Oh, the calendar's hanging in garages all over town. . . Besides, I'm not ashamed of it. I've done nothing wrong. I was told I should deny I'd posed . . . but I'd rather be honest about it" (Leaming



41). Later, she attended an awards ceremony in 1953 in a dress that she had to be literally sewn into. She wore no “brassiere, slip, or underwear beneath the costume,” prompting the following comment from columnist Florabel Muir: “With one little twist of her derriere, Marilyn Monroe stole the show” (Spoto 237). Later, a publicity session for *The Seven Year Itch* secured Monroe’s naughty image:

Several hundred professional and amateur photographers had gathered, and by midnight they were joined by almost two thousand bystanders eager for as much of Marilyn as they could glimpse. . . . What ensued was promptly dubbed by columnist Irving Hoffman ‘the shot seen around the world.’ Marilyn stood over the grating, special effects chief Paul Wurtzel controlled a huge fan below the street, and Marilyn’s white dress flew up, revealing (as planned) white panties but no underskirt or half slip. (Spoto 283)



The famous photo of Marilyn Monroe standing over a grate. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Perhaps her most memorable moment as a “bad girl” was when she sang “Happy Birthday” to President John F. Kennedy. Once again sewn into a skin-tight garment with “nothing, absolutely nothing, underneath” and covered in sequins, she sang, using JFK’s words, “in a sweet and wholesome way” for the president and 15,000 others in Madison Square Garden (Spoto 512–20). Her marriage to Arthur Miller and her decision to leave Hollywood and study with the Actor’s Studio, as well as her numerous affairs with foreigners and American “bad boys,” fueled the rebellious image of Monroe. She might be vanilla ice cream on screen, but off, she was red hot.

Despite her naughty side, she did not wield the same threat as other sex symbols like Mae West and Madonna, women who one can imagine would not only be capable of but might even enjoy castrating a man. Admittedly, Tony Curtis claimed that kissing Monroe during the filming of *Some Like It Hot* was like “kissing Hitler” (Spoto 400). But though director Billy Wilder tells equally unsavory stories, he ultimately says of his experience with Monroe:

We were working with a time bomb, we were twenty days behind schedule and God knows how much over budget, and she was taking a lot of pills. But we were

working with Monroe, and she was platinum—not just the hair, and not just her box-office appeal. What you saw on screen was priceless. (Spoto 405)

In addition to her performances and work, Monroe's dark side, her addictions, failed marriages, and obsessions fuel an image of a lost child, not a raging, rapier wielding woman. Thanks to the self-help phenomena of the 1980s and 1990s, Monroe's biographies ostensibly presented her life as a case study from the popular adult-children literature of the day: Janet Woititz's *Adult Children of Alcoholics* or Robin Norwood's *Women Who Love Too Much*. Her lapses, her despair, and her mistakes were not entirely her fault; they were the result of her upbringing. Even rescuers, her husbands and lovers, were abusive. When, for example, Monroe posed for the infamous photo shoot for *The Seven Year Itch*, she reported for work the next day with bruises, according to Spoto, as a result of a fight with then-husband Joe DiMaggio. Two weeks later, she filed for a divorce (285). Monroe then becomes a precursor for the adult children to follow. She is their symbol—the overachiever who is dying inside and using the alcohol and popular drugs of the 1960s and 1970s to ease the pain.

While watching one of Monroe's final films, *The Misfits* (1961), it is tempting to entertain the Monroe-as-victim interpretation. She is still very beautiful, but her character and her performance seem otherworldly, and given the fact that the screenplay was written by her ex-husband Arthur Miller and directed by the gambling addict, John Huston, it is amazing that she survived the film at all. She and her character appear to be fighting a losing battle in a violent world. She hopes to find and encourage love among men who know only death, murder, and destruction. In the end, several of the cowboys begin to understand love, compassion, and tenderness; but there is so little hope in the rest of the world, that this solution seems temporary at best. In Clark Gable's words in the film, "why did they have to go and change everything?"

For Sarah Churchwell, interpreting Monroe as the existential prison house for the pure, natural, Norma Jean is too simplistic (14). Yet as Gloria Steinem points out, this dichotomy furthered her popularity among her audiences across the generations, for not only was there a Norma Jean there to find, there was a Norma Jean there to be rescued:

Men who had never known her wondered if their love and protection might have saved her. Women who had never known her wondered if their empathy and friendship might have done the same. For both women and men, the ghost of Marilyn came to embody a particularly powerful form of hope: the rescue fantasy. Not only did we imagine a happier ending for the parable of Marilyn Monroe's life, but we also fantasized ourselves as the saviors who could have brought it about. (15)

In the end, Monroe continues to appeal. There is "something" about her that draws us to speculate, simplistically or not. Her films give us the opportunity to fantasize about not only her but also our own lives. Her life

invites us to examine ourselves and our understanding of glamour, ambition, and fame. And, finally, her death forces us to face our own mortality, the underside but equally essential component of life and beauty.

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# Mount Rushmore

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## *Susan Grove Hall with Dennis Hall*

Called “The Shrine of Democracy,” the sculpture of four president’s heads in a granite peak among the Black Hills of South Dakota is an icon made of icons. This one curious sight now draws over three million people a year, more than the over two million acres of Yellowstone National Park. Moreover, the photographic image of Mount Rushmore has increasingly represented the nation and patriotic values to the public since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, displayed on items from post office posters to drugstore disposable lighters. President George W. Bush drew upon the “shrine” appeal in announcing his Homeland Security plan on August 15, 2002, from the viewing terrace at Mount Rushmore, furnishing the media, and history, visual record of his face alongside Washington’s, Jefferson’s, Theodore Roosevelt’s, and Lincoln’s, as he addressed the audience and cameras. Because the granite visages portend leadership in the nation’s birth, expansion, preservation, and development of world power in its first 150 years, and President Bush was addressing the crisis of a new century and historic era, he foregrounded himself upon the icons of the past with some daring, but adroitly, in a setting more appropriate to Americans’ sense of security in a “homeland” than the country’s other symbolic places in Washington, D.C., or New York City, so recently attacked, could provide. The “Shrine of Democracy” set in stone of the West seems a monument of permanence, removed from the changing politics and scandals in the White House or Capitol, serenely remote from the Statue of Liberty with its French origins and welcome to displaced foreigners.

The National Park Service (NPS), in its Visitor’s Guide, brochures, and ranger programs, emphasizes its interpretation of the mountain sculpture with visual and aural repetitions of the four presidents’ accomplishments on every hand, in digest histories and quotations that omit mention of political strife, social turmoil, or any enmity. The presidents are enshrined as patriarchs, the leaders who formed the nation’s character and its progress; no conflict between the veneration of four men and the participatory struggle of a democracy is admitted. An impression of historical unity seems the goal.

The recently erected entryway and Avenue of Flags, through which visitors approach the site, structure their viewing in a procession toward a unity of gazing upward at the carved eyes overseeing them. The granite entry gate frames the colonnades ahead and the iconic mountaintop beyond in a visual temple leading to the “shrine.” Through the pillars with flags of the states, the vision of the distant sculpture has sudden emergences and obliterations, enhancing one’s approach as the progress of a pilgrimage, and reframing perspectives for camera shots. The architecture, as John Taliaferro observes, brings a “cathedralesque preamble to the altar of Mount Rushmore” where you “can savor the moment as a member of a group, or you can shut out the madding crowd and commune with the presidents, just you and the four of them” (397–98).

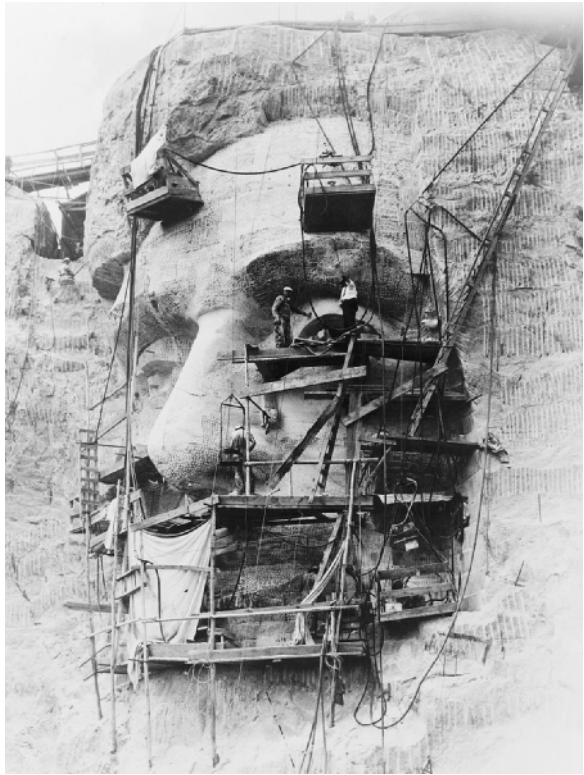
One of the NPS’s three purposes is to provide opportunity for “contemplative” experiencing of the sculpture and its surroundings (National Park Service 2). Contemplation of this icon immediately tells us that the civil religion in which it is venerated has no connection to the Pilgrim founders, who strenuously adhered to the biblical commandment forbidding any graven images.

On the other hand, the heads on this altar do not, as does Catholic saint statuary, invite or foster prayer or imitative devotion. Aloft and aloof, colossal, bodiless, the countenances represent unique marvels of individual accomplishment, far above the rubble of stone waste and rabble of tiny people beneath their set jaws. The visitor, however, communes with the icon through the technological reverence of making photographs in the many vistas, and with friends and family framed before the polished, gleaming visages. If, as we suspect, icons serve an endeavor to reconcile competing desires for quasi-religious awe and for technological control and manipulation, here in the photographic pilgrimages Mount Rushmore performs admirably. The reality of historical time is suppressed, sheered off like the dark granite of nature, to model the four heads that countenance our national preeminence, at which we can gaze in blank, unquestioning marvel among the throng who affirm our journey to marvel, or assert an individual perspective, manipulation, and acquisition of the icon on our Kodak film.

To view mammoth human features that were blasted and chiseled from a mountain involves simple curiosity, a unifying mindless wonder at the sight, photography with a camera or postcards, and the car or tour bus essential for the trip. Such are the lures of any odd tourist attraction, fleeting sensations sponsored by commerce, in which we savor freedom granted more by automobiles than by democracy. Sculpture in the Black Hills was first proposed as a means of drawing tourists to South Dakota, in 1923 by a state historian; but the chosen sculptor, Gutzon Borglum, envisioned a national monument of massive scope and significance surpassing a tourist curiosity, one inspiring awe and excluding commercial exploitations. Borglum’s stated aim for gigantic art to commemorate American “‘civilization’” carved “‘as close to heaven’” as possible, and his perseverance and industry to create it, indeed,

engage the viewer of Mount Rushmore far more than the sight of the sculpture or ideas of liberty and democracy it allegedly conveys. After brief gazing and photographing, visitors' attention turns to the whys and wherewithals of Borglum's art, to his idiosyncratic quest and his technology. The NPS acknowledges this main current of interest in devoting two-thirds of the text in its brochure and answers to all the "Frequently Asked Questions" in its Visitor's Guide, to Borglum's rationale and the process of crafting the sculpture. It serves and abets this interest in its film and exhibits highlighting Borglum and the industry that scaled, blasted, and chiseled the mountain, in the new Lincoln Borglum Museum, his Sculptor's Studio, and through ranger talks on the Presidential Trail leading to the base of the granite rubble. In one of the Museum's popular, hands-on exhibits, you select a film image of the mountain, push the dynamite plunger, and watch the granite explode.

The persevering sculptor with his technology and industry becomes our marvel of individual accomplishment more than the presidents' values or democratic liberties. Borglum's aim for a monument that will outlast our time makes physical values that are abstract, that must be culturally continuous to be meaningful, must be experienced in the actions and community of life to be emotionally or morally felt. In the reification of an idea, the idea is lost, as the thing becomes much more interesting and, therefore, important. At Mount Rushmore, Jefferson's upward gaze of apparent dreaming aspiration holds little wonder after we learn the material fact of the fault in the granite which, in Borglum's original casting, would have shafted Jefferson's nose, and of Borglum's shifting the face upward to avoid the crack. Thoughts of our novel, noble government memorialized for future millennia dissipate before exhibits of Borglum's method for sealing fractures, its limitations, and the current technology and endeavors applied to retain the faces. The reification celebrated at Mount Rushmore, however, tellingly suits American passion for material culture.



Close-up of workmen carving the head of Abraham Lincoln on the granite face of Mount Rushmore, 1937. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Borglum, as quoted in the orientation film, wanted to make something that would last for 10,000 years, that would then represent our “civilization” even if it had passed away. The icon of endurance in stone also embodies the opposite awareness, that our civil being is constantly in change and may well be transitory. The confidence in our character and progress apparently asserted by the colossal sculpture carries with it the fear of our undoing and disappearance, which is implicit in the need for a granite monument to our historically short reign on the continent.

In our icons, so we speculate, we attempt to reconcile conflicted impulses; a look exceeding a tourist’s passing gaze exposes the competing, contradictory aspects. As to disparate significations, Mount Rushmore is a tremendous icon of conflicted iconic appeals, Borglum’s ambiguous need for a headstone marker for our civilization among them. Meant as bold affirmation of patriotism without ambiguity or irony, the sculpture’s true, pure experiencing arrives, as touted by the NPS, in its Evening Lighting Ceremony uniting the summertime crowd in the amphitheater to stare with the spotlights and sing the national anthem. This ritual bears no small resemblance to the opening of all our ball games, and John Taliaferro’s account of its assemblage of southern ladies, Boy Scouts, and black-leathered bikers into a chorus with hands upon hearts conveys the same temporary harmonization of diverse lives we sense in ceremonies for our sports (21). Another description of the floodlighting as “a heavenly view of the presidents” quickly turns to the lessons of the “full meaning” of the “Shrine” in the NPS explanations of its construction technology (Presnall 99). Any meditation on heaven’s possible view of the colossal white heads on Mount Rushmore quickly encounters their problematic assertions of pride and conquest. Imagine just so far as the heavenly perspective of Theodore Roosevelt, the closest president to us in time above us, whom we unanimously revere for his conservation of nature in establishing Yellowstone National Park, gazing down on the blasted mountain.

From its proposal, the sculpture in the Black Hills drew the protest from conservationists that it would be a desecration of nature, and promoters’ countering arguments that it would represent man’s ordained role to improve and finish God’s creation (Taliaferro 59–60). The natural spire shapes of the granite Needles towering in the Hills are suggestive of soaring cathedrals; and their slender, erect, and curving forms evoke uniquely human attributes, yet in unearthly, mysterious transcendences. They inspire wonder, along with humbling, troubling awareness that nature’s saints don’t look like us, rather more like the superior aliens from outer space we fear. So the desire to anthropomorphize the Needles by carving them into Indian chieftains and western explorers—the original plan—stems from deeper longings than a tourist curiosity meets; and the presidential sculpture imposes the national visages to replace nature’s discomfitting, superior aspects with faces we trust, as on our money.

The impulse to see our self-image in stone, with noble and benign providential countenance for our ways, has long been evident in reverence for New

Hampshire's Old Man of the Mountain. Daniel Webster acclaimed it God's own sign that "in New England He makes men" (Saine, epigraph). In Nathaniel Hawthorne's parable "The Great Stone Face," meditation on this visage gives a humble farmer wisdom, benevolence, and prophecy surpassing the hollow attainments of the renowned entrepreneur, military general, politician, and poet. The White Mountains' Old Man, however, collapsed in a storm on May 2, 2003. New England's former claim to represent the nation as heirs of the Pilgrims, moreover, has shrunk along with the physical Plymouth Rock, whose iconic rise, changing interpretations, and wane to a focus of disillusionment are superbly explored and explained in John Seelye's *Memory's Nation*. Mount Rushmore, by contrast with the Old Man, stands as an icon not of nature and humility, but of national prowess and pride. In its dark shadows lurk our fear, in our cultural insecurity within the world and our fractured, diverse communities, and our guilt.

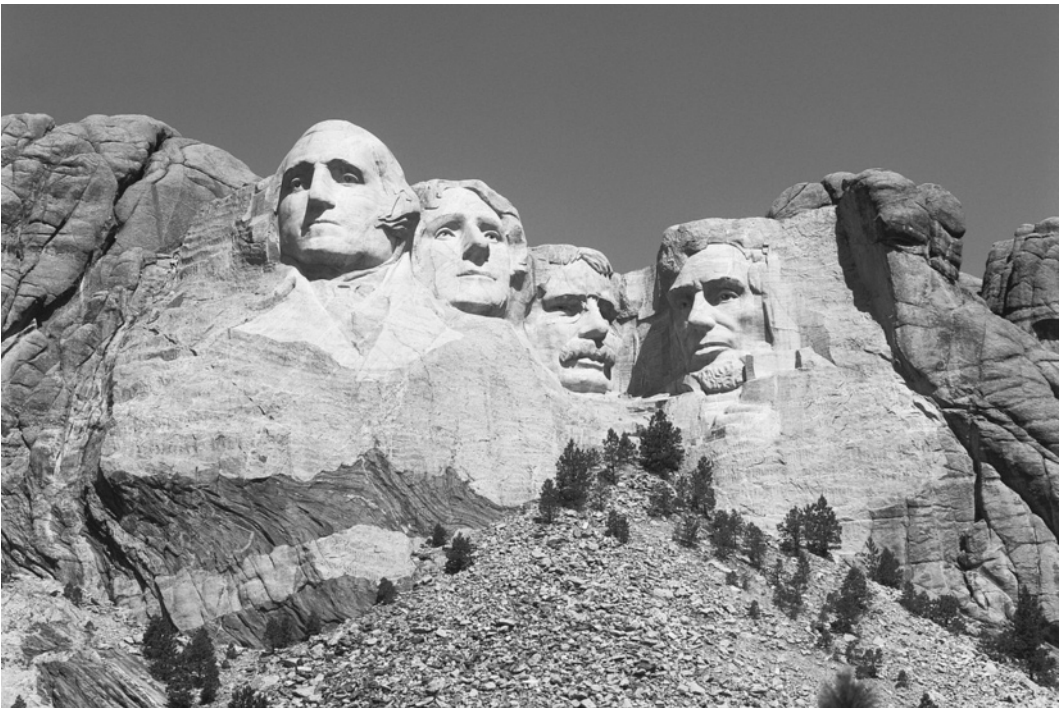
The Black Hills were the center of the vast Plains homeland of the Lakota Sioux, and for them "a holy place, a place for vision quests" encountering the Great Spirit. Through the encroachments of settlers, wagon trains, and railroad, the hills remained land promised them when the 1868 Treaty established the Great Sioux Reservation. In 1874, however, Brevet Major General George A. Custer led his 7th Cavalry into the Hills to discover gold; and the gold rush that followed, and popular support for it, forced the Sioux from the hills. Before and after, the treatment of "the Sioux people will always be among the sorriest chapters in this nation's history," as Edward Lazarus concludes his judicious study *Black Hills White Justice* (433). Lazarus' father Arthur Lazarus, Jr., arguing for compensation of the Sioux before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1980, summarized the case:

The United States took the bulk of the Sioux land under the 1868 Treaty and . . . paid them \$40 million less than the land was worth. As a result of that they started [reservation life] impoverished; that was the fault of the United States. And the United States kept them from their hunting grounds, so they became dependent on the United States for food. Then, the United States first encouraged the miners to come in and then withdrew the troops. Then, the United States rounded up the Sioux and put them on the reservation and took their guns and horses so they couldn't hunt. . . . The Sioux are among the most depressed people in the entire United States and they are so depressed, not in the least part, because the United States in 1877 took their most valuable asset, the Black Hills, and hasn't paid for it yet. (Lazarus 391)

Arthur Lazarus, Jr., won this case, and a compensation of \$106 million for the Sioux; in 1987 a U.S. Court of Claims awarded them \$40 million for land relinquished in the 1868 Treaty. The Sioux people, however, despite their continuing severe poverty, have rejected monetary compensation, because it represents for many an immoral sale of their sacred land and a betrayal of their essential, identifying cultural values (Lazarus 401, 424, 433).



In 1931, the Lakota Chief Luther Standing Bear, author of *My People the Sioux*, suggested to Borglum that he should sculpt the warrior Crazy Horse beside Washington and Lincoln, and Borglum agreed that a Sioux chief should be memorialized in the Black Hills. After both had died, Chief Henry Standing Bear took the cause of the Indian hero to another sculptor, Korczak Ziolkowski, who began work on a mountain ten miles southwest of Mount Rushmore in 1948, with a model of Crazy Horse on his steed, and a plan far out-scaling the presidential heads (Taliaferro 321–22, 328–29). The dynamite carving still proceeds, continued since Ziolkowski's death in 1982 by his family and a nonprofit foundation. After over 8 million tons of granite have been blasted, the visage alone, 87 feet high (Washington's is 60 feet) has emerged. The popularity of the Crazy Horse Memorial with tourists has evidence in its financing sheerly by their contributions and souvenir buying (Romero). Whether it is an appropriate memorial, however, is a debatable question among the Lakota for many reasons, among them, its enshrinement of an individual man (Larner 362–63). As a companion piece to Mount Rushmore, an icon of mastery, conquest, and progress, moreover, the statue of the warrior who bravely resisted white civilization but died in a military guardhouse, unarmed, from a soldier's bayoneting, is tragically ironic (Taliaferro 38). But its sheer size will attract tourist marvel more than its form or meaning.



Work closes on Mount Rushmore, 1944. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The bigness of Mount Rushmore obviously dominates its iconic appeal; the material, technological accomplishment evokes, and mostly consumes, our awe. Consider Steve Gottlieb's summation of "the noble sculpture" among his "Symbols of Freedom" in his photographic study *American Icons*: "One must view Mount Rushmore from so far away that even those twenty-foot noses don't seem particularly big. Dare I suggest that if you want a real sense of nose size you would do better to see the closing sequence of Alfred Hitchcock's movie *North by Northwest*?" (170). Yes, for "nose size," but not for a "real sense" of the sculpture's. Hitchcock first composed the terrifying scene of Cary Grant's and Eva Marie Saint's peril atop Mount Rushmore in his notebook sketch of the "TINY FIGURES" there with a suggested scale that enlarges the sculpture, in my estimate, by about 25 percent. The presidential faces for the filming were constructed on an MGM soundstage (Auiler 355, 340). Hitchcock's camera angles and focus magnify the noses while dwarfing Grant and Saint.

The compelling illusion to which Gottlieb testifies has significant relation to Hitchcock's genius in capturing more of our attractions to the icon than sheer awe at its size. One is the desire to get near to it, physically grasp it, and measure ourselves by it, as the film lets us pretend to do. This urge brings thousands of people a year to try to climb on the mountain, necessitates extensive ranger surveillance to keep them away from the sculpture, and motivates the new Presidential Trail which allows visitors a much closer access to the presidents; as John Taliaferro remarks, "You can look right up their noses, as Alfred Hitchcock had wanted" (399). This desire draws tourists into expensive helicopter rides that approach the heads on their level, and noisily anger rangers delivering their homages to the Shrine.

A second urge Hitchcock fulfilled was the need for a popular story for the icon. The story of its sculptor's quest is tied to his generation's Teddy Roosevelt optimistic expansionism, and now bears suspicion as megalomania, or worse, as Jesse Lerner relates Borglum's prior work on a Confederate monument on Stone Mountain, Georgia, to his association with the Ku Klux Klan (187–231). Hitchcock's story casts an innocent man into a heroic struggle for survival in a Cold War spy chase. That the insidious enemy nation is not identified, and its agents are powerful, attractive, and ubiquitous, plays to American fears that have abruptly heated since 9/11, of unsuspected deceptions of our innocence, and usurpations of our freedoms that can destroy them—or us. For all its outdated trappings, Hitchcock's film carries the ominous implication of Borglum's intent to create a headstone to memorialize our "civilization" long after it has disappeared. Mount Rushmore is "portentous" in the meanings of pompous and amazing, and also in portending a national anxiety which usually remains unspoken. Greil Marcus has voiced this cultural dread in contemplating something so far from the gigantic sculpture as Bob Dylan's 1967 "basement tapes":

Just as every schooled American carries a sense of the country's beginning as event, so too does every such American harbor a sense of national ending, less

as a historical event than a fading away, a forgetting, a common loss of memory experienced all at once in a single heart: a great public event locked up in the silence of the solitary. (69)

The nation that revered Plymouth Rock as a “sacred icon” (Seelye 31) has been forgotten. But Mount Rushmore centers the conflicted aspiration, pride, power, possessiveness, guilt, and fear within American identity; and it continues to generate controversy, as well as celebration. If it is “The Shrine of Democracy,” however, it enacts this role by gathering flocks of tourists, from many lands, who bring their cameras and trade them for shots, share their marvel or jokes or criticisms with strangers, and freely demonstrate their particular allegiances on their tee shirts, uniforms, or other attire, like the person on stilts costumed as a giant Gandhi who was parading on the Avenue of Flags during our July 2004 visit, bearing the sign, “We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”

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# Muppets

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*Robert Barshay*

In view of their formative role, we could well say, “Muppets are us.” Jim Henson’s Muppets have been the most powerful piece of children’s popular culture in the second half of the twentieth century, veritable icons of Americana. They are outgrowths of the first nationally popular children’s shows on television, the *Howdy Doody Show*; *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*; *The Pinky Lee Show*; *Lunch with Soupy Sales*; *Captain Kangaroo*; *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*; and *The Shari Lewis Show*. *The Howdy Doody Show* first aired December 27, 1947, and the others began in the 1950s. Ostensively, these shows became popular because the medium of television was relatively new, and because they were the first network programs aimed exclusively at children. The changes in children’s shows since the 1950s have been quite dramatic. The seltzer shooting episodes of Clarabell the Clown, the anarchic pie throwing antics of Soupy Sales, and the vaudevillian frenzies of Pinky Lee were replaced with educational themes of math, spelling, vocabulary, and Spanish lessons in *Sesame Street*. Such a transformation in the broadcasting content of children’s shows deserves some explanation.

First, children’s television shows can be divided roughly into two categories: those that relied on a real human being as the source of all the content, be that moral instruction or humor, usually the vaudevillian kind, or both; and those that relied principally on a puppet(s) or a marionette(s), or both, along with a human being, to convey their entertainment and/or instructional value. The movement away from the prominence of a human element in these shows to a lesser role ultimately led to the marginalization or even total absence of visible humans. This shift eventually enabled the puppets and marionettes to control the action of the story, learning, entertainment value, and, as we will see, the subversive element that we enjoy in *Sesame Street* and the Muppets’ television series and movies.

Second, the main attraction in the earliest children’s shows, when dominated, usually always, by humans, was mischievous behavior performed by adults, behavior forbidden to children by their parents and teachers. But precisely because activities such as pie throwing or seltzer squirting were

prohibited, children could imaginatively indulge in this behavior not allowed at home or school, and gain the approval of a grown-up, even if the grown-up was the naughty, hyperkinetic one on television who threw the pies or squirted the seltzer. Such pleasure to a repressed child of the 1950s must have been delicious because it was parentally forbidden, yet approved of at the same time by the grown-up world presented on television.

*The Pinky Lee Show* was a one-man frenetic show. Pinky sang, danced, joked, and spoke with a lisp for a full half-hour each weekday. Wearing a checkered beanie, an oversized checkered sport jacket, and a checkered bow tie, Pinky was clearly a strange descendant from his early days in vaudeville. Dismissed as a “five-foot-four lisper” by a columnist, Pinky, whose real name was Pinkus Leff, became so successful with children that his show, which debuted on January 4, 1954, became a big hit for NBC daytime, and a solid lead-in to its long-running *Howdy Doody Show*. Though beloved by children, not many adults shared their sentiment. Milton Berle once commented at a gathering of famous comedians that “if a bomb hit this joint, Pinky Lee would be a hit”; and *New York Times* reviewer Jack Gould labeled him “crude, tasteless and . . . a conspiracy against parents” (“TV Acres”).

On September 20, 1955, during one of his hysterical routines telecast from NBC’s Burbank studio, Pinky Lee collapsed from an apparent heart attack, which was later explained as a severe sinus attack (“TV Acres”). It has been said that while he was writhing on the ground, those who were producing the show as well as the kids watching it at home, thought that he was doing one of his crazy *shticks*. Under doctor’s orders, the host was forced to take a year off to recuperate. Though he recovered, his reputation didn’t, and he lost his show and his celebrity status, partly a result of his crude vaudevillian style.



Joan Cusack with the Muppets during *It’s a Very Merry Muppet Christmas Movie*, NBC, 2002. Courtesy of Photofest.

But kids had loved his anti-establishment antics as much as adults disdained them, and their devotion made his show a hit.

The frenetic pace of the *Pinky Lee Show* brought complaints from a number of parents who felt the show got their kids unnecessarily wound up, causing discipline problems after the show was over. In fact, in August 1955, NBC agreed to tone down the gratuitous crudeness of *The Pinky Lee Show* and *The Howdy Doody Show*, “limiting the destruction of property, bad grammar, seltzer water squirting, throwing things, name-calling, and other anti-social behavior that was parentally forbidden” (“The Pinky Lee Show”). Of course, it was precisely that antisocial activity that explains the source of the success of these shows in the ’50s, a time of conformity for adults and constricted behavioral standards for children.

The ultimate bad boy of children’s shows was without question Soupy Sales, whose behavior reminded one of the clowns and buffoons who performed between acts at the old time burlesque shows. His program, *Lunch with Soupy Sales*, made famous for children the pie-in-the-face routine. And the slapstick *shtick* did indeed become routine. One internet source counted at least 19,000 pie-throws, mostly at Soupy, and at the height of his popularity such stars as Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr., begged to be on the receiving end of one of his pies (“Welcome to Soupy Sales Biography!”). Soupy’s urgent verbosity and mischievous grin were calculated to appeal to his audience.

*Lunch with Soupy Sales* may have been the first children’s show to introduce non-human characters (with the exception of Flub-A-Dub, a hybrid creature on *The Howdy Doody Show*), and characters they were: White Fang, Black Tooth, Pookie, and Hippi. White Fang and Black Tooth were just a white dog paw and black dog paw, not much more than terrycloth sock puppets that barely reached into camera range, though Pookie and Hippi were actual puppets. White Fang, the most popular sock on television then, never spoke English; he intoned in a gruff voice that was intelligible only to Soupy. The show’s popularity was based on the secret desire of its young audience to throw pies in the puss of American adulthood respectability and mores. As frosting on the “pie,” such behavior was condemned with the usual moralizing, disapproval, and punishments of parents, but was loved by children and enthusiastically endorsed by the adults who programmed this show, and Soupy, the adolescently adult impresario.

*The Howdy Doody Show*, *Kukla Fran and Ollie*, *Captain Kangaroo*, *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, and *The Shari Lewis Show* all used marionettes and/or puppets with human beings, who were dominant in the shows. *The Howdy Doody Show* was by far the most popular and long standing children’s show until the appearance of *Sesame Street*. It began in January 1947 and continued through June 1956, five days a week, then from 1956 to 1960 every Saturday, all on NBC. The show bridged the transition from black-and-white to color television. All told, according to one Web site, there were 2,543 episodes (“Classic TV Shows”). What my friends and I enjoyed the most was the subversive role of Clarabell, first played by Bob Keeshan, who would

subsequently become the respectable Captain Kangaroo in his own show. Like Harpo Marx of the infamous Marx Brothers movies, Clarabell uttered no words or sounds, communicated only by squeezing a small horn, and disrupted the other “straight” players by causing mischief, squirting seltzer, and generally disregarding all the rules, conventions, and customs of adult interaction—seemingly just for the pleasure of being perverse.

What made Clarabell attractive as a character was that he got away with this perversity. Although he was lightly reprimanded by “Buffalo” Bob Smith on these occasions, he was never punished or “grounded.” Moreover, the reprimands came to naught, as he would indulge in the same subversive play time and time again, frequently several times in the same episode. The squirting of seltzer water in *The Howdy Doody Show* was equivalent to the tossing of pies in *Lunch with Soupy Sales*.

The other character we all loved was the Phineas T. Bluster, a sneaky curmudgeon who was deliberately disagreeable and sometimes outright dishonest. A marionette who blustered, sputtered, and schemed, Mr. Bluster was the dark sheep of the cast who secretly elicited children’s affections by undermining the activities of the adults in the show. In the end his schemes and misanthropic plans never materialized, but we loved his efforts at disrupting the bland and predictable behavior of Buffalo Bob and the other “straight” characters, as we might a cranky uncle who always spouted insulting or embarrassing comments at family affairs, to the chagrin of the other adults.

As we can see, there has been a gradual shift away from human beings to non-humans, mainly puppets and marionettes, as the dominant focus of children’s shows. Pinky Lee, Soupy Sales, and others of that ilk were slammed by critics and parents alike for being vulgar, unseemly, wild, undisciplined, and, yes, naughty. In a word, they subverted adult respectability. However, puppets, marionettes, and, more recently, Muppets can act subversively in ways unacceptable for adult actors in children’s shows. When a Muppet sticks his tongue out at cleanliness and acts perversely, or stuffs his mouth at every opportunity (and eats with his mouth open as crumbs fly all over), not only do children laugh, but parents think such behavior cute. For Muppets are cuddly, furry, and adorable, unlike their vaudevillian forbears.

The adult view of the Muppets was shaped by *Sesame Street*, the first popular show in which the Muppets dominated a children’s show. It first appeared on television on November 10, 1969. Parents loved *Sesame Street* not only because it would not harm their children, as it was patently without violence, frightening happenings, or dark undertones of any sort, but also because the program would teach them numbers, letters, words, and good family values. Thus mothers plopped their children in front of the television in the morning because it kept them quiet—a cheap and easily accessible babysitter—and because it was a source of seemingly wholesome entertainment and vital education. Moreover, many parents of the 1970s were aware that *Sesame Street* originated from the Children’s Television Workshop and

was subsequently picked up and telecast by the Public Broadcasting Service, which had the imprimatur of a near-divine entity, or so it seemed to enlightened moms of the time. Watching *Sesame Street* was the equivalent of playing with educational toys, but cheaper.

So *Sesame Street* was popular with children as well as their parents. I believe that children enjoyed the show for some of the same reasons that children in the 1950s enjoyed their comedies. First, some of the prominent Muppets were subversive of respectable adult norms and standards of behavior. Cookie Monster is, after all, the incarnation of one of the seven deadly sins—gluttony. Not only does he gorge himself in virtually every episode in which he appears, he gorges himself on cookies, a dessert which children may enjoy only if they eat first their vegetables and other boring foods. So here we have a creature who stuffs himself with a beloved delicacy, one which children may be deprived of if they don't comply with adult eating rules, such as eating their spinach or liver. His maniacal focus on stuffing himself on cookies simulates obsessive/compulsive behavior, such that concerns for others and their interests do not register at all on his sensitivity barometer. He is what children wish they could be at home.

Some years ago, *Sesame Street* created a satirical segment called “Masterpiece Theatre,” in which one “Alistair Cookie” is portrayed by Cookie Monster. Naturally, he sported a silk ascot and a velvet jacket, and sat on a wing chair surrounded by leather-bound books. At the end of the sketch, he mumbles, “Me love culture,” through a mouthful of chocolate chip cookies (Hymowitz). Though it is doubtful that many children who enjoyed that show were actually familiar with “Masterpiece Theatre,” most were able to understand on some level that the trappings of high culture were being mocked by the “monsterfication” of low culture. The intellectual pretensions to which adults often aspire were being leveled by what children most admire: unmitigated appetite run amuck, without censorship or punishment, all conveyed in bad grammar.

One of the most famous Muppets is the Oscar the Grouch, whose appeal is that he not only can be grouchy—a forbidden middle-class trait—but that he is always grouchy, particularly to the adult humans on the show. Many American adults impose upon their children a militant niceness as *de rigueur* behavior. This standard of behavior may be experienced by the children as unnatural, though they would not be able to express that in words or thought. For most children, to be grouchy when other children are nasty to them, or when they don't feel good, or when they sense they have been insulted, is natural, though more often than not they will be instructed to suppress grouchiness under any circumstances. So they identify with Oscar the Grouch who gets away with grouchiness all the time, despite the admonitions of the surrogate parents on the show. For children who are constantly reminded to clean up their room or pick up their clothes off the floor, seeing Oscar the Grouch live in a trash can out in an urban street only evokes admiration for the ultimate rejection of adult hygiene and rectitude.



In the previous television shows, prominent vaudeville behavior contributed enormously to their appeal. Though we don't have the pie-in-your-face and seltzer water in-your-pants kind of burlesque in *Sesame Street*, we have the "watered down" version of Abbott and Costello in Muppets with Ernie and Burt. Burt is the pointy headed one who is the butt of Ernie's verbal assaults, or sometimes playful ignorance. More to the point, Burt, as the straight man of the team, and Ernie, as the jokester, engage in the repartee of vaudeville duos. And the sketches, like the traditional vaudeville acts of the George Burns and Gracie Allen prototype, mock the values and expectations of the straight man, which represent respectable society. It's the ignorance of the Ernies in the world that wreaks havoc upon the settled order of things. Humor, even the benign kind practiced by Ernie, subverts culture that takes itself too seriously.

I have heard grumblings from some parents objecting to Burt and Ernie's sharing the same bedroom. Notwithstanding potential challenges from the fundamentalist right or the adherents of gay and lesbian critical theory, no "queer" conspiracy or latent homoerotic content complicates their relationship. After all, preschool and elementary school children share the same bedroom with friends of the same sex, chatting past their bedtime, in sleepovers, and would use that model to relate to the Ernie and Burt relationship. Homophobia is part and parcel of the adult world, but unknown to the more honest world of children's friendship. We see the same vaudevillian dynamics at work in the characters of Statler and Waldorf, two curmudgeons who appeared weekly in *The Muppet Show* (1976–1980) and *Muppets Tonight!* (1996–1997). These old codgers sat together in the mezzanine boxes, humorously insulting the other acts that appeared on the television show in the guise of a variety show. The fast repartee, the straight man and jokester roles, and the perverse joy of being not nice were all trademarks of their routines that children loved. The zingers were aimed not just at the performances of the Muppet entertainers, but, more important, at polite society in which all effort is to be commended, no matter the merit, a value that adults attempted to inculcate in their children.

In one conversation between these senior citizens—who look somewhat similar to the infamous Mr. Bluster—one says to the other that he likes the last act. The other asks why, evoking the response, "because it *is* the last act." Children appreciate the truth over nice falsehoods, particularly when expressed with humor and in the mouths of funny looking adults. Old people and children have in common an indifference to socially acceptable behavior that attempts to call something it is not: the former because they don't care, and the latter because they don't understand the concept.

To become an icon of American popular culture, the Muppets have to resonate with adults even more than with children, as they are the ones who employ *Sesame Street* as a dependable babysitter and invaluable classroom. Kay S. Hymowitz indicates that it has been more successful than any

other children's show not only in this country, but also all over the world. Moreover, "In the United States, *Sesame Street's* popularity is staggering; 77 percent of American preschool children from all areas, ethnic groups, and income levels watch the show once a week or more. In many locales they can take their pick of three or more broadcasts a day" (1). In addition to its popularity over a quarter of a century, it has won fifty-eight Emmys, two Peabody Awards, and four Parents' Choice Awards, and also become the subject of retrospectives at the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of Modern Art (2). Possibly it is even more popular with parents than with children, for very different, perhaps opposite reasons. The most important reason that *Sesame Street* resonates with adults is that for them the show has been culturally constructive, particularly so when it first came on the air in the late 1960s and 1970s, a time when cultural values were in turmoil and conflict.

*Sesame Street* celebrates diversity in its cast of humans, who are white, African American, Hispanic, and Asian. As Hymowitz points out, "the rainbow cast is inclusive, embracing a deaf woman using sign language and a child in a wheelchair" (3). More important, the cast of Muppets, the focus of the interest for children, is equally diverse. The main Muppet is Kermit, who is a green frog, and proud of his identity and color. The brilliance of the show is that such diversity is not ideologically exhorted, but rather is demonstrated naturally and unselfconsciously in an urban environment. Moreover, though the show does not gloss over the disagreements and conflicts that occur among friends and acquaintances, the Muppets treat each other with basic respect, dignity, and fairness. Implicit in all the relationships is belief that though each of the Muppets has different strengths, talents, and flaws, and identities, none is ridiculed or scorned for those differences. In short, tolerance is demonstrated in their relationships, a more powerful lesson than preaching about its importance.

So the popularity of the Muppets, as reflected in *Sesame Street* and in other media, continues to powerfully engage both adults and children, who often have different views on what is amusing, important, and interesting. A pie-in-the-face or a squirt of seltzer down the pants is not the only way of mocking adult prissiness, sanctimony, or pretentiousness. The Muppets's behavior maintains the anti-adult messages from the earliest television show of the 1950s by poking fun in less physical ways at the values of respectability, niceness under all circumstances, cleanliness, order, and conformity. At the same time, the Muppets, as seen in the early television episodes, the movies, and most enduringly in *Sesame Street*, appeal to adults, because by their behavior, by their personalities, by virtue of whom they represent, and by their relationships with humans and, most important, with each other, they reflect the values of diversity, tolerance, and the dignity of all creatures. And, of course, the children learn their alphabet and numbers, and are exposed to Spanish, while their mothers can go about their business around the house knowing that their children are in good, albeit furry, hands.

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# NASCAR's Bristol Motor Speedway

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*Barbara S. Hugenberg and  
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Bristol is phenomenal, much like Green Bay (Wis.), where everybody stands behind their Packers. It's like a Magic Kingdom, in both Virginia and Tennessee.

Olin Burton Smith, who purchased Bristol Motor Speedway in 1996 (UMI Publications 117)

You drive to Bristol, Tennessee, from miles away (because every hotel room within twenty-five miles is rented by NASCAR fans), you park your car two miles away from the track on the side of the road (because all the parking lots are full or you refuse to pay \$40 to park in someone's front yard), you walk up the hill to the raceway, you hear the rumble of a couple of cars racing around the track as teams practice and tune their cars to anticipated track conditions, and you enter the track and notice 160,000 seats in a large bowl surrounding this half-mile oval track (originally exactly a half-mile track, it was reshaped in 1969 and became a .533-mile track, according to *Bristol Motor Speedway History*). The recreational vehicles arrive during the week preceding the race and NASCAR fans run their American and Confederate flags up homemade flagpoles. Other fans set up their "shrines" for their favorite drivers with tents, coolers, chairs, flags, banners, and other equipment in the team colors. On race day, the hillside by the track is covered with hundreds of recreational vehicles, shining in the sunlight, and appearing to be stacked on top of each other in a sea of green grass (or brown mud if it rains).

The area around the track fills up hours before the race, as fans shop in the makeshift NASCAR memorabilia yard sale where vendors set up tents in residents' front yards or along the town sidewalks. Other fans arrive early to catch a glimpse of their favorite driver arriving at the track by helicopter or leaving their mobile home, parked right next to the track, to begin their race

preparations. The stands start filling up long before the start of the race or even the beginning of pre-race ceremonies: the parachuting of military personnel into the center of the track, the introduction of the drivers as they circle the track waving to the stands, the invocation by a local religious figure, the presentation of the United States flag by a military honor guard, the singing of the national anthem by a well-known entertainer, and the fly-over by military aircraft. Finally, you hear the four most famous words in racing shouted by a corporate executive of the company sponsoring the race, “Gentlemen, start your engines!”

As the forty-three racecars rumble to life with their 800-horsepower engines, the stands fill with exhaust fumes. The cars roll off pit road and down the track behind the pace car and the noise of the cars is deafening (so you put in your earplugs). The noise level at Bristol Motor Speedway is constant and loud because it is a short track encircled by the 160,000-seat stands. As a result of this constant, loud noise, Bristol Motor Speedway is known as “Thunder Valley.” At other NASCAR tracks the noise levels are less constant because tracks are larger or stands are smaller and cars become more and more separated as the race progresses. After several laps, the pace car drops off the track, pulls into pit road, and the race starter, perched above the track at the start-finish line, drops the green flag. The forty-three cars race past the start-finish line straining to get to top speed. Two and three cars wide they enter the first turn, which is banked so high that track workers have to climb on their hands and knees to the top of the track to clear debris or soak up an oil spill.

Then it happens: drivers are banging into each others’ bumpers or rubbing other cars as they carom around this small track, and finally one of the cars is spinning out of control and hits the wall—bits and pieces of the car explode all over the track. Sometimes, as a car is spinning other cars are captured by the initial wreck and are sent into the wall at the top of the track or into another car in front of them that has slowed down. The yellow caution flag is thrown to slow down the race field behind the pace car, which gives the crew time to sweep up bits and pieces of racecar left in the wake of the wreck. After the track is cleared and deemed safe, the entire cycle begins again with the pace car exiting the field, the sprint towards the start-finish line and the inevitable wreck. The fans cheer the constant action and the wrecks—unless it is their favorite driver spewing oil or losing fenders. This same sequence happens over and over throughout the 500 laps—green flag racing, caution flag, green flag racing, caution flag, and so on.

In UMI Publications’ *Bristol Motor Speedway: 40 Years of Thunder*, the racing at Bristol Motor Speedway is described as “old-fashioned beating and banging that reminds fans what the sport used to be. In fact, the most famous remark about the place came from a Winston Cup driver, who said when asked how it feels to race at Bristol, ‘It’s like flying a F-16 in a high school gym’” (141). Matt McLaughlin, a long-time reporter for Speed Channel, wrote the following regarding the popularity of Bristol Motor Speedway for NASCAR fans:



Aerial view of the Bristol Motor Speedway. AP/Wide World Photos.

Yes, in the grand scheme of things racing pales to religion, but when it comes to what has formed this crazy cult of stock car fans, Bristol is indeed the closest thing we have to a tent revival. It's part revival, part rock and roll show, part demolition derby, part brass knuckled rumble, part Bruce and the E Street Band Detroit Medley encore, part Christmas morning for six year olds, and 100% pure racing. I've said it before and I'll say it again Brothers and Sisters, don't take me to the river preacher take me to the banks of Bristol. (Ben Trout, Senior Manager of Communications, Bristol Motor Speedway, letter, June 1, 2004)

If attending a NASCAR race at Bristol Motor Speedway is your first, you become hooked on NASCAR and a life-long fan of this track, if not all of NASCAR. One fan wrote in the October 21, 2004 issue of *Scene Magazine*,

This year, I was invited to join my girlfriend on an all-expenses-paid one-week cruise to Bermuda to celebrate both her and her son graduating from college and her daughter graduating from the eighth grade. Guess what weekend they planned to leave? The weekend of the Bristol night race... After much soul searching and the comment from my racing buddy at work that, "Bermuda would be there forever, but Bristol only happens once," I decided to decline the invitation to go to Bermuda and go to Bristol. Now most "normal" folks would think I was nuts, but us rabid NASCAR fans are different. ("From Our Readers," *Scene* 28: 83)

When non-fans think of NASCAR racing, they may think of rednecks, fast cars, all left turns, NASCAR dads, and wrecks. Moderate NASCAR fans move beyond these simple perceptions to think of several famous tracks where they attended races or watched them on television: Daytona, Indianapolis Speedway (home of the Brickyard 400), Charlotte, or Atlanta. Or they might think of famous drivers; such as Richard Petty, Bobby Allison, Dale Earnhart, Jeff Gordon, or Benny Parsons. Other moderate NASCAR fans might recall the track where they witnessed their first NASCAR race (Darlington, Rockingham, Martinsville, Bristol, or Talladega). However, when many longtime, devoted fans think of NASCAR many of their immediate thoughts go to their experiences and/or the reputation of Bristol Motor Speedway. For these fans, Bristol Motor Speedway is an icon, “independent of time and place” (Martin 207). This image is frequently the result of witnessing their first NASCAR race at Bristol and becoming hooked on NASCAR racing at that point. Or it might be the result of attending a spring race or the August night race at Bristol Motor Speedway, and listening to the roar of the forty-three cars, seeing the other 160,000 plus fans rooting for their favorite driver, and seeing banging, rubbing competition among forty-three drivers for hundreds of laps. The contest does not have the regulating device of other tracks, the restrictor-plate which limits the vehicles’ speed at times of concerns with safety. A fan extolled the virtues of NASCAR racing at Bristol in writing,

So put me on the Bristol side of this debate. It is a spectator’s track, not a TV track. If you want to see a bunch of cars go really fast, go to a restrictor-plate race. If you want to see a stock car race, then go to Bristol. (“From Our Readers,” *Scene* 27: 84)

This latter statement about racing is our experience with NASCAR as well. In August 2003, the *Bristol Herald Courier* reported,

A majority of more than 96,000 fans reaffirmed that the Sharpie 500 is the hottest ticket in Winston Cup Racing. NASCAR online polled site visitors asking them, “If they could attend just one Winston Cup race, which would it be?” The Sharpie 500 collected 50,043 votes (52 percent) placing the August night race classic at the top of the list. (“Fans Say . . .”)

Bristol Motor Speedway is a focal point for NASCAR fans during the spring, but the hardest ticket for NASCAR fans to secure is for the August night race each year:

Both NASCAR Winston Cup Series races—one in the spring and one in August—are sold out well in advance. Having precious tickets and suggesting a Bristol race to anyone who enjoys racing is like inviting a preacher to a screening of what awaits in the hereafter. (UMI Publications 7)

Tickets on eBay sell for hundreds of dollars over their face value. Tickets for these races are also sold through ticket brokers at highly inflated prices. Fans lucky enough to be selected to purchase tickets via the lottery sponsored by the Speedway do not give them up. In fact, there are fans who sell their tickets for the spring race, receiving sufficient profits to purchase their season tickets for both races.

The town of Bristol is divided down the center of State Street by the state border between Tennessee and Virginia. Bristol, Tennessee, is a small town with a population of approximately 25,000 people. The first NASCAR race at Bristol International Speedway, as it was called originally, took place in July 1961. Forty-two cars started the Volunteer 500 and only 19 cars finished the race. The second race occurred in October the same year, the South-eastern 500. The first night race at Bristol Motor Speedway took place in August 1978. The original stands held only 18,000 fans. The increased seating capacity and interest in these races predicted and paralleled the growth of NASCAR. According to *Bristol Motor Speedway History*, by April 1997 there were 118,000 seats with 22 new skyboxes (making Bristol Motor Speedway the largest sports arena in Tennessee); by August 1998 there were 131,000 seats and 100 skyboxes at the track; by the March 2002 race, seating capacity was raised to 147,000; and by the August 2002 night race, seating capacity reached 160,000. In this growth, "Bristol Motor Speedway was truly a 'build-it-and-they-will-come' sort of thing. To many it must have seemed every bit as bizarre as hacking out a baseball diamond for ghosts in the middle of an Iowa cornfield" (UMI Publications 9).

There is nothing so impressive in sports as approaching the track from the city and walking up the hill to the track. To NASCAR fans, this speedway is the "Shining City on the Hill." It is completely surrounded by the stands in the shape of a perfect oval. Fans carry in their coolers full of beer or plastic bottles of Jack Daniels or some other clear liquid, probably brewed locally, in plastic milk jugs. They carry their chair backs, coolers, and food up the stands, row after row to their seats at the top of the stands, in rows there counted by double and triple letters. Fans of all ages perform this ritual—most of them twice a year for the spring and August races. Sitting in the stands is a microcosm of white America with fans coming from all over the country to this NASCAR Mecca. There are young and old fans, children, men and women, fans from every walk of life, tall and short. Few people of color, however, attend NASCAR races at the Bristol Motor Speedway.

Fans scream for their favorite drivers and, because of the nature of the track, are certain their voices are heard above the thundering engines. The four corners of the track are pitched at approximately the same angle (36 degrees) as the stands rising from the edge of the track. Because of this unique configuration at Bristol, fans in the first row to the top row of the stands, can see directly into the car and see their favorite drivers' faces or helmet as they pass. This "intimate" relationship with the drivers during the race is unique



to Bristol. This contributes to the fans' perceptions of this track—this place—this hallowed ground of communion with the heroic daredevil drivers.

But these perceptions are only part of the fans' idyllic infatuation with Bristol Motor Speedway. Another part of this fascination is the racing that occurs once the green flag is dropped. NASCAR fans familiar with the phrase, "If-it-ain't-rubbin', it-ain't-racin'," see the most track-related contact between the drivers of any NASCAR track. This is, in the eyes of many fans, stock-car racing at its finest and racing the way it ought to be. On every lap, cars are rubbin' against each other in all four turns. Sometimes this contact causes a car to spin up the track and crash into the wall. As the race progresses, more and more cars lose more and more pieces, to the point where at the end of the race, their cars are circling the track with no front fenders or hood or no back fenders and a crumpled trunk. Also, as the race progresses, some drivers lose their patience with other drivers so the contact between them becomes more and more intentional, and the race for track position becomes more and more intense, and, because two cars cannot occupy the same space at the same time, there is more and more rubbin' and more and more wrecks. Bob Pockrass, a staff writer for *Scene Magazine*, observes, "Such is life at Bristol where tight racing results in drivers bumping each other to get someone out of their way, followed by retaliation."

One of many memorable events at Bristol occurred during the 2002 spring Busch Series race when Kevin Harvick was wrecked by Greg Biffle and attacked him in pit row after the race. At the same race, Jack Sprague was standing on the pit wall at the end of the race waiting for Jimmy Spencer who wrecked him on the last lap. When these events occurred, fans rose to their feet as one and cheered. Another memorable event occurred when Jeff Gordon "bumped" Rusty Wallace, who had not won a race in a very long time at that point, near the end of the race, causing Wallace to temporarily lose control of his car so Gordon could pass him for first place to win the August 2002 night race. In the 2004 Spring race, Tony Stewart and Scott Wimmer were each penalized a lap by NASCAR during the race for bumping into each other a couple of times—first when Stewart hit Wimmer in the back when he slowed down to avoid a crash and later when Wimmer, in retaliation, ran into Stewart as they were racing side by side.

Broadcasters add to the idyllic persona of Bristol Motor Speedway during their pre-race, race, and post-race comments. They tell the fans that this track tests each driver's patience because they are always in close quarters with other drivers for 500 laps. Broadcasters tell viewers prior to the race that some drivers will become so frustrated at times during the race, because they are being held up by slower cars or they have been bumped or rubbed for the past two hours, that they will initiate contact with other drivers causing them to spin out or temporarily lose control of their cars. Commentators predict increasing contact between drivers to heighten fans' anticipation and, hopefully, fulfillment of the NASCAR fan's mantra, "If-it-ain't-rubbin', it-ain't-racin'." They tell the fans that car owners and crew chiefs do not like these

Bristol races because of the amount of sheet metal on their expensive cars that is bent, scratched, dented, mangled, and/or demolished during one race at Bristol; not to mention two races at Bristol. The fact that drivers will race hard side by side, rub against cars in the turns, bump slower cars out of the way in the short straight-aways draws fan to Bristol for the races—they believe the racing at Bristol is a throw-back to historic, traditional NASCAR racing from decades ago.

If the track at Bristol were similar to other tracks on the NASCAR Nextel Racing Circuit, fans would not express the demand for tickets the owners of Bristol Motor Speedway currently enjoy. Fans are drawn to this half-mile track because of the racing, the intimacy, and the reputation of the track. The most famous track in NASCAR with the most popular race in the Nextel Series will continue to attract new fans to the sport and reinvigorate the affections of more long-time fans to NASCAR.

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# Niagara Falls

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*Patrick McGreevy*

Nearly all Americans can conjure an image of Niagara Falls. It confronts them in books, magazines, newspapers, on cans of Niagara Spray Starch and boxes of Nabisco Shredded Wheat. They have seen footage on television, and in movies like *Superman II*, *Canadian Bacon*, and countless others. They know it is a place of natural power and beauty, long associated with romance and honeymoons. They have heard tales of stunts, accidents, and rescues. Many know that its casinos attract millions of gamblers. Many also know that its power now serves to generate a great deal of electricity, and some remember that cheap electricity was directly related to the Love Canal disaster. A few know that it is also a place of religious shrines, and of suicide.

Reports of a great waterfall on the St. Lawrence reached Europe before the founding of Britain's first permanent colony in Virginia. By the end of the seventeenth century, Niagara Falls had become an emblem of North America itself—the wild heart of a continent most Europeans considered the polar opposite of their own long-civilized countries. As such, Niagara represented the wildest of nature. While this has remained the most persistent symbolism of the falls, the meanings Americans have associated with nature have been bewilderingly varied.

Although well known for over 150 years, it was only with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 that Niagara became accessible for ordinary travelers. This access coincided with the rise in the United States of a new commercial and industrial middle class with the leisure and the resources to travel for pleasure. Niagara Falls emerged as the chief goal of the North American “Grand Tour” that always included the Hudson River and the Erie Canal. A great many Europeans joined American travelers on this pilgrimage to the falls. Niagara quickly became a fashionable resort, the haunt of literary, artistic, and educated travelers (McKinsey; Sears; Adamson).

Although earlier European visitors lacked a vocabulary to express what they felt at Niagara, the new middle-class tourists were well schooled in the aesthetics of the natural sublime that helped them to value and express the complex mixture of terror and joy that scenes like the falls seemed to inspire.

The overwhelming and apparently limitless in nature is attractive, they believed, because it awakens a recognition of the viewer's own inner dimensions of spiritual depth, imagination, or reason. Anthony Trollope, for example, suggested this prescription for a sublime experience at Niagara:

To realize Niagara, you must sit there until you see nothing else than that which you have come to see. . . . At length you will be at one with the tumbling river before you. . . . You will fall as the bright waters fall, rushing down into your new world without hesitation and with no dismay; and you will rise again as the spray rises, bright, beautiful, and pure. Then you will flow away in your course to the uncompassed, distant, and eternal ocean. (140–41)

Because of the different ways women and men were socialized during this period, women were much less likely to measure themselves the equal of a colossal waterfall, and therefore to use the language of the sublime. In an earlier visit, Trollope's mother, Frances, could not bring herself to express any sense of mastery over the scene. Although she was quite familiar with the conventions of the sublime, she concluded: "It is not for me to attempt a description of Niagara; I feel I have no powers for it" (303). Unlike the men who accompanied her, she was unable to enter the "appalling cavern" behind the Horseshoe Falls. "I lost my breath entirely," she wrote, "and the pain in my chest was so severe, that not all my curiosity could enable me to endure it" (308).

Niagara's antebellum visitors were also deeply affected by romanticism—and its particular American expression, transcendentalism, which emphasized the correspondences between American nature and the sacred, often viewed reflexively as an individual spiritual meaning. Caroline Gilman, an 1836 visitor who had been deeply influenced by Emersonian transcendentalism, described Niagara by moonlight. "One feels thoroughly *alone*," she wrote, "while overhanging that thundering mass of waters, with the silent moon treading her tranquil way. I thought of *soul*, and this almighty Fall seemed but a drop compared to the cataract of mind" ([emphasis in original] 116).

Because many saw nature itself as sacred, they often spoke of a visit to Niagara as a pilgrimage. At first glance, this may seem to be at odds with Niagara's infamous circus atmosphere. Museums of morbid curiosities and freaks, as well as public attractions—like sending animals over the falls in a boat—were present at Niagara from about 1830; daredevil stunts began in the 1830s. P. T. Barnum once tried to purchase Goat Island, which sits between the two waterfalls, as a permanent site for his big top. Today, dozens of museums and circus acts—and most recently two gambling casinos—have enhanced this tawdry aspect of Niagara's landscape. Yet Niagara's circus atmosphere corresponds to the exotic fairs and markets that always surrounded medieval Christian pilgrimage sites; as anthropologist Victor Turner suggests, both the sacred and the profane belong together, apart from the ordinary world of day-to-day life.



Niagara Falls, 1886. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Many visitors had imagined Niagara so romantically that they could not help but be disappointed by the natural reality. To the first generation of distinctively American writers and painters, however, romanticism was intertwined with nationalism. As Elizabeth McKinsey has convincingly argued, for the antebellum northern middle class, Niagara Falls became an icon of the American Sublime. The United States may not have a deep history or a long-settled landscape, but with spokesmen like James Fenimore Cooper and Thomas Cole, the nation could boast of its forests, the Natural Bridge, and Niagara Falls. In the relentless power of Niagara, many Americans could see a metaphor for their own nation's burgeoning energy.

From the opening of the Erie Canal until the end of the century, Niagara's visitors produced a torrent of words and images. Writers like Margaret Fuller, William Dean Howells, and Mark Twain, and

painters like Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, along with countless others, contributed their interpretations of Niagara Falls. In a more popular vein, word of mouth, guidebooks, advertisements, songs, and stories explored similar themes in a complex blending of folklore and popular culture. In more recent times, advertisements, Broadway melodies, and Hollywood movies have served the same purpose.

One of the most persistent and recognizable of Niagara's associations is with romance, sexual passion, and honeymooning. Couples celebrating their wedding journeys began to arrive in the 1830s. Certainly no other North American place is more associated with this practice. In the Hollywood and Broadway productions of the 1930s and 1940s, when sex could only be openly explored within marriage, Niagara Falls was shorthand for the sexual culmination of courtship. Henry Hathaway's 1953 film *Niagara*, starring Marilyn Monroe and Joseph Cotten, exploited these connotations. The theme had already been well established by nineteenth-century poetry, novels, and travelers' accounts. Sexual urges, like other passions, were often characterized as something wild and natural within that required channeling. The wildness of Niagara was contained within its gorge just as the wildness of

passion should be contained within the institution of marriage. In the early twenty-first century, sexual enhancement drugs are still generally advertised as aids to marriage—as opposed to facilitators of rape. Is the name “Viagra” a coincidence?

A common response to Niagara Falls throughout the nineteenth century was an urge to confront and symbolically conquer it; some expressed this urge in words, others preferred to walk on tightropes or ride barrels over the cataract. While stunts had appeared in the 1830s, the first successful trip over the falls in a barrel was accomplished in 1901 by Annie Edson Taylor, a middle-aged Michigan school teacher who never profited from her accomplishment.

The first touristic competitors to Niagara Falls were the Erie Canal locks at Lockport, about twenty miles to the east. Here was a technological marvel that demonstrated new human capabilities; to some, it seemed obvious that it was the canal that had made Niagara a sensation. Indeed, the locks ascend the same escarpment over which Niagara glides. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who visited the falls in 1834, was initially very disappointed by the falls but later complained that many Americans were more impressed by the locks at Lockport. The first great technological marvel at Niagara itself was Jacob Reobling’s Railway Suspension Bridge that began to carry trains and carriages over the gorge just below the falls in 1855. Although not as well remembered as Reobling’s Brooklyn Bridge, it became a tourist attraction in its own right and made its creator famous.

Perhaps the most obvious way of taming Niagara was to harness its power for industry, a notion that appeared as early as the late eighteenth century. Indeed the founders of the first village at Niagara Falls named it after the greatest manufacturing city in the world, Manchester. The first large-scale power development was a hydraulic canal that cut diagonally across the Village of Niagara Falls, New York, creating a concentrated manufacturing district that thrived from 1875 to 1900 at the top of the gorge a few hundred feet downstream from the falls. An international movement to free the immediate vicinity of the falls from industry and private exploitation of tourists led to the creation the Niagara Reservation (1885) in New York—designed by Frederick Law Olmsted—and Queen Victoria Park (1887) on the Ontario side. For the first time in American history, a wild landscape had been preserved by government action.

By the 1890s, momentum began to gather for a much larger power development at Niagara Falls. Niagara was becoming an icon of the future. Many ideas were proposed. King Camp Gillette, who would later become famous and wealthy for inventing the razor blade, suggested that efficiency and logic would eventually lead to a single great city where the all of North America’s manufacturing could be concentrated. He believed there was enough power at Niagara to supply such a city. The flamboyant entrepreneur William T. Love wanted to create a utopian “Model City” by diverting water from the upper Niagara River through a power canal; one mile of the canal was

completed when financial problems halted the project. The scheme that eventually reached fruition created enormous excitement. Thomas Evershed suggested digging a deep tunnel under Niagara Falls, New York, into which would pour water from the upper river, turning turbines and generating electricity. The Niagara Falls Power Company consulted with recognized experts such as Lord Kelvin, Thomas Edison, and George Westinghouse to help design this unprecedented project. In a decision that would set the basis for much of our twentieth-century world, Nikola Tesla's unpopular idea of alternating current was chosen against the advice of Kelvin and Edison, but this decision turned out to be the key to transmitting electricity. In 1896, the company successfully initiated the first long-distance transmission of electricity to power the streetlights of Buffalo, a phenomenon that was fully exploited and demonstrated at Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition in 1901 (Adams).

Beginning at the turn of the century, a nascent electrochemical industry concentrated at Niagara Falls to take advantage of the inexpensive power. The Hooker Chemical Company used the abandoned canal from William T. Love's failed utopian project as a toxic waste dump. Ironically, the canal finally achieved the notice Love had hoped for when harmful chemicals began to ooze to the surface in the 1970s after the City of Niagara Falls had tragically allowed a school and a residential neighborhood to be built there. The Love Canal disaster gave impetus to the burgeoning environmental movement of the 1970s; it fostered an awakening of concern about toxic chemical pollution that, in turn, led to state and federal legislation.

Niagara Falls has a longstanding connection to the rhetoric of disaster. For anyone who wished to emphasize the impending catastrophe of some political action or policy, it is hard to imagine a more effective, and immediately understood, image than of a ship heading into the Niagara Rapids. In his 1867 book *Shooting Niagara: And After?* Thomas Carlyle used just such an analogy to criticize the entire direction taken by the industrial world. The most recent example is a widely quoted warning from former Central Command chief General Anthony Zinni. Appearing on the CBS program *60 Minutes* on May 23, 2004, Zinni criticized President Bush's rhetoric of "staying the course" in Iraq: "To think we are going to stay the course; the course is headed over Niagara Falls."

Analogies of disaster have their roots in the history of actual deaths at the falls. Many have perished accidentally. Others have died attempting stunts. A great many more have committed suicide. There is no place in North America where more people—as many as fifty-three in a single year—have taken their own lives. Nineteenth-century poets often compared the Niagara River to the course of life; the falls itself represented the abrupt end of life. Perhaps the world's largest collection of horror museums is clustered here, successfully exploiting the awareness of human mortality the falls has so often awakened in visitors (McGreevy 41–70).

Although humans have redirected the power of Niagara itself to their own purposes, the cruel fact remains that, as individuals, we are not the equal of

nature: we are all eventually swallowed by it. But horror is not the only reaction to mortality. For some, the connotations are of eternal peace. We see this not only in written responses to Niagara Falls, but also in the establishment of several shrines and a monastery. In 1861 the Catholic Church officially declared Niagara Falls a pilgrim shrine to Our Lady of Peace (McGreevy 34). Indeed a number of peace conferences have been held at Niagara. Partly in celebration of the world's longest undefended border, the Peace Bridge—which spans the river upstream from the falls—was dedicated in 1927. Leonard Henkle, another utopian entrepreneur, proposed the construction in 1895 of a colossal “International Hall” where representatives of all the nations could meet to settle their differences peacefully and work to eliminate war and poverty. Finally, at the end of World War II, Niagara Falls nearly became the site of the United Nations Headquarters; only the Rockefeller family's gift of land persuaded the committee to choose Manhattan (McGreevy 65–68).

Despite the commercialization and environmental problems, Niagara Falls attracts more visitors than ever, an annual horde of over 10 million. It is no longer an elite resort; in fact, with its gambling casinos and kitschy attractions, it probably reminds many visitors of Las Vegas. Although its public image has changed through time, there seems little chance that Niagara Falls will lose its purchase on the imaginations of Americans.

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# Jack Nicholson

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*Thomas A. Van*

As of early 2005, Jack Nicholson has appeared in seventy-eight films, in many of them for only a few minutes, but the range of his dramatic interpretations is phenomenal. He has played well an enlisted sailor and a Marine colonel; a private detective, a mafia hoodlum, and a comic book villain; an obsessive-compulsive, a psychotic, and a psychologist; cowboys, the homeless, Prince Charmings, and satyrs, the Devil himself, even a publishing executive who turns into a wolf. An icon in a temple (or a supermarket) enjoys *iconostasis*, or what some have called “motionless magnificence.” But performing artists, particularly movie actors and their directors, search relentlessly for new roles in new plots, as they hope that name recognition will sell tickets. For the viewer, the transaction at the box-office offers a comfortable paradox: always the exciting promise of something absolutely new, but done by established and familiar personae. From these moving targets, popular opinion and memory sort and construct icons, one of them Nicholson.

Nicholson’s earliest movie work was in the B-movie thrillers of Roger Corman, starting with his role as a troubled adolescent in *Cry Baby Killer* in 1958, followed by *Little Shop of Horrors* in 1960, where he plays a masochist in a dentist’s office. His early films were not box office successes, with the exception of two westerns which became cult hits in France; but *Head*, which he wrote and produced in 1968 about a television executive who experiments with LSD, got the attention of Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda, who were casting for a movie about motorcycling hippies. The rest is cinematic history. The films Nicholson was involved in during the ten years before *Easy Rider* enjoy cult status, sometimes as pure camp, but often as myth: the unpromising youth of a hero before his ascent to fame. But if the interest in Nicholson’s earliest films is based on what was yet to come, a great deal of critical opinion about Nicholson’s most recent movies is based on what he did earlier. Reviewers and fans talk about “classic” Nicholson films and use them as a standard for comparisons. Five films usually top any list of his best. That they all came out between 1970 and 1975 is remarkable: *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), *The Last Detail* (1974), *Chinatown*

(1974), and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). Any discussion of Jack Nicholson as an American icon begins with them.

Nicholson's work in the early 1970s stunned Hollywood, which recognized immediately what it had been needing. Marlon Brando and James Dean had introduced new idioms for presenting what was supposed to be the authentic masculine self in postwar America. Gone was the stoic decency and reliable patriotism of Cooper and Bogart. The new offerings were disenchanting brooding, artful inarticulateness, sexual turmoil at the fork, and fits of what was supposed to be totally instinctive behavior. There would be no going back. By 1970 a country which had begun to doubt its leaders and its policies was distraught and angry. Nicholson's characters, stark and powerful in themselves, vented that anger. From the screen they issued a stream of verbal abuse and sarcasm more memorable than the story lines. Brando and Dean, who tended to rely on suggestive understatement, seem almost subdued by comparison. If they implied introspection, Nicholson unapologetically, almost lyrically, proclaimed narcissism.

Nicholson's portrayal of an alcoholic Southern ACLU lawyer in *Easy Rider* (1969) brought him national attention, but the plot (bikers versus rednecks) stayed with the obvious. The American icons in that movie are the Harley-Davidsons. The much subtler *Five Easy Pieces*, which came out the following year, offers the first fully developed Nicholson persona, in one of his finest performances. Nicholson plays Robert Eroica Dupea, a sensitive and volatile young man who has rejected his upbringing among a family of classical musicians for a drifting life as a laborer. As the film opens, he has a job he hates in a Texas oil field and a troubled relationship with Rayette, a waitress who deals with her emotional distress by playing or singing Tammy Wynette songs. He is psychologically abusive to her and routinely unfaithful. When Dupea finds out that his father is dying, she accompanies him to a family reunion which merges a past and present he despises. He complicates things further by having a brief but intense affair with his brother's fiancée, before she ends it. After a drunken bender, Dupea leaves his home again, heading back to Texas with Rayette. But suddenly he abandons the apparently pregnant Rayette, at a gas station along the highway, and hitches a ride in a semi bound for the far North.

It is choice melodrama, well acted, which juxtaposes two very different areas of America, Texas and coastal Oregon; but the real flashpoints for Dupea are culture and class. The consensus required to produce cultural behavior also imposes predictability and conformity, which enrage him. The identity of one community is too often predicated on the absence of the traits which give identity to another: there is no Chopin among oil rigs and no Tammy Wynette in a music conservatory. To Dupea, cultural markers and boundaries offer invitations for attack. He has never been able to stomach Rayette's taste in music or her country ways, but he excoriates a salon of Oregonian aesthetes when they sneer at her for saying she misses her television programs. He tells them they are a "bunch of pompous celibates." With

his brother's beautiful fiancée, cultural boundaries can be crossed sexually, giving him an opportunity to bring something wild and instinctive to a place ruled mainly by the discipline of musical performance. But he does not cross any boundary intending to stay. Dupea moves Katherine to tears when he plays Chopin perfectly, then stuns her when he insists he has absolutely no feeling for it. In refusing to join her emotional response to the beauty of Chopin, he is refusing to come back home to the caste of aesthetes. Yet earlier, in a traffic jam on a Texas highway, he could leave his car and mount the back of an open pickup to vamp happily on an old upright, as the truck pulled out in another direction. Dupea's willed fate is to need to be somewhere else.

Dupea's frustration with society and consequent retreat into nature is only time-honored Romanticism. The Nicholson iconography in *Five Easy Pieces* owes most to the affair between Nicholson and the camera eye, which dutifully attends a superb cast, but which favors only him. One way to realize this favoritism is to watch the movie with the sound off. Physically, he is wiry and compact, but coiled. His movements, like his words, can be sudden, but completed with a poise which is almost balletic. The men he brawls with in this movie are taller, heavier, and stronger, so naturally he gets the worst of it. They have the heavy walk and lumbering posture of stage bullies. Nicholson's stride recalls the soft lope of a coyote. The adversaries are usually dull-eyed, with slack, beefy faces. Nicholson's sculpted face, somewhat off-scale with the rest of him, is the expressive center of most scenes. It is a face ruled by a knife-like glance, with dark acrobatic brows and a ruthless smile almost too

big for its container, which can range from an invitation to Saturnalian wildness to a contempt words cannot contain.

The Nicholson hero may get the worst of a storyline, but he never loses in the exchange of aggressive remarks. He delivers the final (and quotable) piece of insolence, which usually ends the scene. To a mass audience, he is the center of attention they cannot be, giving the toothy snarl they would like to send back at whatever controls and ignores them. Regardless of the plot, his audience knows that it is being treated as an insider, as someone who is able to appreciate hip responses and crafted verbal aggression. Dupea is selfish, unfaithful, even self-destructive, but he is never false or lame, which can't be said of anyone else around him. The other characters, whether decent or hateful, have no idea that they lack his authenticity, but the audience knows.



Jack Nicholson in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, 1980. Courtesy of Photofest.

There are conventions behind these edgy exchanges. Taunts and raillery have long been staples of dramatic comedy. Most television sitcoms are, at base, vaguely plotted insult contests, with timely infusions from a laugh track. The abusive lines in a Nicholson script are offered at calculated intervals as *noir* confections for his admirers. The laughter they cause is sadistic, and it comes in many shades. When Dupea verbally devastates someone socially more powerful than he is, there is usually an approving roar. The laughter following his sudden venom to a waitress about the details of a chicken sandwich or to an easily intimidated girl friend is more tentative, but with a Nicholson hero, routine insensitivity is usually accepted as a point of style.

The powerful and complicated dynamics between Nicholson the master actor, the directed and edited cinematic eye, and audience expectations were just beginning. *Carnal Knowledge*, written and directed by Mike Nichols, vivisects male sexual behavior, with Nicholson and Art Garfunkel playing the selfish sinners. Shrewdly observant and sententious, it has become a classic in gender studies. Nevertheless, interpreting Nicholson's presence and performance here is wildly problematic, because even in a morality play it takes more than homiletics to contain, much less banish, a fascinating devil. In cinema, so much the more so. The movie astutely argues that sex is a game mainly for the benefit of male consumers and that the playing field is the female body. As young men, Nicholson's Jonathan and Garfunkel's Sandy are undergraduate roommates at a private college, sexually involved with the same woman, unbeknownst to Sandy. They meet several times later in life to compare sexual experiences, until Sandy seems appalled by Jonathan's predatory history. Not only does Jonathan not deny his selfishness: he proclaims it. At one point he screams at a voluptuous and abused mistress, "I'm already taken. I'm taken by me." It's more a war cry than the confession of a lost soul. Jonathan's selfish quest for ecstasy, while it dehumanizes an entire gender, is also Faustian, and militantly unrepentant.

*Five Easy Pieces* and *Carnal Knowledge* introduced the range of the Nicholson persona. To this day, *The Last Detail*, *Chinatown*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* create the standard for evaluating Nicholson performances. The Robert Towne scripts for the first two are some of the best screenwriting in the history of cinema. Most Nicholson films in the following thirty years or so attempted to duplicate the dark and uncompromising intensity of these three films. Too often, the result was mere echo and repetition, or worse, parody. All three films offer an unsweetened picture of the American underclass. In *The Last Detail* Nicholson's character Billy "Bad Ass" Buddusky and his sidekick Mule are career sailors who have to escort another sailor, Meadows, from Norfolk to Portsmouth, where he will do eight years in the brig for attempting to steal forty dollars from the contribution box of the admiral's wife's pet charity. Bad Ass's minor scheme to rob the Navy on their per-diem expenses changes when he and Mule realize that the vague creature in handcuffs and navy blues is little more than an overweight petty thief with a sweet tooth: Meadows is passive, uncomplaining,

and a loner. Bad Ass and Mule are not particularly concerned about the severity of Meadows's sentence, which is only unfairness in an unfair world; but Bad Ass perceives Meadows's personality as an insult to the human condition. He wants to get their infantile prisoner some of the experiences he does not know he has missed, before he disappears into Portsmouth.

For three days, Meadows's guards are his comrades. He carouses with them, joins in when they brawl with Marines, smokes dope, and goes to a brothel, all probably for the first time. Bad Ass wants Meadows to recognize pleasure in all its variety and to reach out and take. As the hours race on, Meadows comes to life. He finally wants something, which is the one thing he can't have: freedom to live the life he has just now been introduced to. When he tries to escape, Badass beats him savagely, before delivering him to Portsmouth. Too late, Meadows has found something to cry about.

Meadows is pathetic, but sympathy for him does not drive this story. The movie is a tribute to the unadvertised vitality of American life at the margins. It is life on an enlisted man's salary, of cheap diners, bus stations, sleazy bars, whorehouses, and fist fights; but it contains essential values of individualism and personal loyalty. Bad Ass and Mule are ornery sailors, but they befriend Meadows from a patriotism deeper than the uniform and the code which goes with it. They had no control over whatever produced his sad case, but they acted out an enlightened alternative to it.

*Chinatown* involves a much more explicit encounter between a hero, a rotten entrepreneurial system, and the victims he is powerless to protect from it. In the film, Chinatown and the rest of Los Angeles are beholden to a few powerful individuals with a ruthless will to acquire. The rule for the police, or for that matter anyone who wants to survive, is to not ask questions and to "do as little as possible." Nicholson plays Jake Gittes, a private detective who insists on seeing what others have been taught to ignore. His sarcasm and cold, skeptical gaze unsettle every conscience, guilty or innocent. In the end, when ruthless corruption again has its way, Jake's glare alone asserts a sense of justice that prevails against crass self-interest and ironic indifference. In addition to his not-for-sale detective character, the sophisticated appetites and style of this hero add to the film's refinement of the hard-boiled detective into Nicholson's image.

In the background of *The Last Detail* and *Chinatown* lurks a question: why help people abused by a system which will win anyway, when helping them will probably only add to their misery? Such suspicion invites one not to act but to become part of the passivity which fuels that system. Bad Ass and Gittes ignore the invitation, and so does Nicholson's Randall Patrick McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. There the system to be hopelessly resisted is a public insane asylum, a house full of Meadowses, with a head nurse monitoring all of them to keep them passive. The inmates queue for their tranquilizers every morning to the strains of Mantovani. Later on, Head Nurse Ratchett will preside over humiliating group therapy sessions. Enter McMurphy, who has decided to act insane in order to be put in the

asylum temporarily and avoid prison farm work. Too late, he finds out that his release depends not on time served but on the whim of those in charge of the asylum.

McMurphy plays the trickster every sleepwalking community dreads and needs. The men's pointless predictability ignites him. He tries to teach them about the excitement of uncertainties, like watching a World Series game, or discovering that they might be able to outplay the asylum staff in a pick-up basketball game. But taking the whole ward deep sea fishing in a stolen boat is his greatest trick, because it puts the asylum in the double bind of wanting to discipline McMurphy and having to admit that he has made a fine contribution to patient morale. Finally, McMurphy organizes a drunken party at which the patients trash the ward and McMurphy's girlfriend gives the youngest inmate, Billy Bippy, his first sexual experience. When Nurse Ratchett sees the carnage next morning, Billy guiltily commits suicide, at which McMurphy assaults Ratchett and earns a lobotomy. Life in the asylum then goes on as usual, with one exception: the huge Native American who has witnessed all this mercifully smothers what is left of McMurphy, breaks out, and heads north. He leaves behind a geyser foaming from a water fountain he overturned on the way out—an erotic tribute to a dead trickster, who led rites of mid-winter paganism in the house of the dead, but also modeled a type of ancient sacrifice and redemption.

Dubbusky, Gittes, and McMurphy see the contexts in which they have to function as farcical, but they themselves are not farcical. If a Nicholson character is being laughed at, he cannot be the existential resister or heroic loser. In *As Good as It Gets* (1997) Nicholson plays an obsessive-compulsive writer of romances who insults Jews, gays, women, blacks, Latinos, and every other polite person in his painful way. He is a poster boy for political incorrectness who becomes sensitive and caring, but not before delivering his quota of shocking remarks. After that, Nicholson played a recently retired police detective in *The Pledge* (2001) and a recently retired insurance executive in *About Schmidt*, neither of whom know what to do with themselves; then he went on to a bit of high (and posh) comedy about seniors in love in *Something's Gotta Give* (2003), which begins with Nicholson's character having an infarction as he is about to bed a much younger woman. Viagra and Lipitor jokes abound, until the right lovers are reunited in Paris on a bridge over the Seine.

The Nicholson persona and person blend and separate regularly. Reports of his angry fits and endless amours are a publicist's dream. When Nicholson loses his temper at a basketball game or attacks somebody's windshield with a golf club in the midst of a traffic snarl, he somehow seems more real both on and off screen. Reports of Nicholson's sexual endowment and stamina have provided benchmarks for male fantasies, as well as "in-jokes" for whenever a Nicholson character fails sexually. Stealth publicity made the same use of Warren Beatty's sexual reputation. When Beatty played the impotent Clyde Barrow in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) or a hairdresser in *Shampoo* (1975)

pretending to be gay so that he could cuckold a rival, there was a harvest of knowing guffaws. These same fans maintain a watch on Nicholson's advancing age, receding hairline, and expanding girth, all of which the actor has been using lately to court an aging population at the box office.

In the reign of his combined performance and personality in the popular imagination, Nicholson has updated the role of Frank Sinatra. "Old Blue Eyes" projected a unique romantic image through changing decades, throughout publicity of his drunken brawls at the Waldorf, his physical and verbal confrontations with the press, his womanizing, and his outrages as leader of the "Rat Pack." His rhythmic stylings of ballads, from the big band era on, still set the standard, like Nicholson's early crafting of screen characters. Furthermore, Sinatra brought a swinging hedonism from the bandstand to radio and records for the working class which had been through the Depression and World War II and impatiently awaited pleasure; Nicholson has continued and elaborated the restive desire, uninhibited behavior, and anger in fantasies of successive audiences bent on having more of everything. Whereas Sinatra's poignant ballads, however, became the idiom for male loneliness and romantic melancholy, and his suicide attempts after his breakup with Ava Gardner publicized his vulnerability, Nicholson's screen persona has never veered from machismo, never disclosed reflection on his affections or sorrow.

It pleases Nicholson fans to assume that his love life on screen and his personal relationships are extensions of one another, but the fans are more interested in the statistics than in the psychology of his amours. They are much more curious about the biographical sources of the disenchantment and cynicism he specializes in. A much circulated story is supposed to explain Jack's interior and with it some of the roles he has played. The story is true. What it has to do with Nicholson personally or with his art is another matter. When he was thirty-seven, Nicholson found out from a researcher for *Time* magazine that the people he thought were his parents were really his grandparents, and that the woman he thought was his elder sister was really his mother, who had born him out of wedlock when she was sixteen. All of them were deceased when Nicholson learned this, and he had already done some of his finest work; but many of his followers will swear that this explains all about Jack: the continual anger, the attitude toward women, and so on. A grain of salt would help here. The singer Bobby Darin's mother turned out to be his grandmother, and his sister his mother, through a teenage pregnancy. Fans used this story, rather than Darin's doomed rheumatic heart, to account for his insecurities—it at least offered a respite from blaming Sandra Dee.

Nicholson's iconic contribution to American culture has much to do with the paradox in Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that Americans are uncomfortable being in a minority on any issue. They at once wish to hold a minority (individualist or rebellious) position, and to see it as the dominant stance that is affirmed by others and will prevail. Nicholson has acted out pungent invitations to resist and ridicule unthinking cooperation and assim-

ilation. That can be done with a mocking grin, a coarse uncensored phrase, or just authentic individual behavior which is fair and commonsensical. On some days, anyone ought to be able to stand up like Nicholson's Joker in *Batman* and say "What this town needs is an enema," and expect a second to the motion. Perhaps David Mamet would oblige.

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# Olmsted Park

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*Thomas J. Mickey*

To walk in a public park is the right of every American. The idea of a “public park” has a history in this country that originates with one man, Frederick Law Olmsted. In the nineteenth century Olmsted undertook the design and construction of Central Park in New York. That was his first of many such endeavors in landscape design. Though he went on to design private estates like Biltmore and college campuses like Stanford, it is his legacy of the public park that all Americans revere.

Nature has always been an area of contention. Just to figure out a definition of nature that everybody agrees on is an impossible task. When we approach the question of controlling nature, we are in an even thornier place. Today to exert control over the land, including trees, stone, and water, means to open the door to environmental questions from many quarters.

In the nineteenth century of Olmsted’s America, nature represented the last frontier for human solace. People, according to Olmsted, were living the new industrialized life in big cities. Factory work, severe working conditions, and scant employee benefits squeezed the worker at the same time as the culture witnessed the rise of the robber barons in its midst. Olmsted envisioned a park with scenic vistas that included trees, an extensive lawn, and pathways to give the city dweller an escape and an opportunity to relax and renew in the outdoors. Such a vision of the park inspired Olmsted his whole life. Olmsted proposed a view of nature that he felt would really help modern society.

This country was not quite 100 years old when Olmsted began his work on Central Park. It was just beginning to realize its potential, especially through the growth of urban populations in major cities along the East Coast. As people from other nations immigrated to America, they frequently settled in cities where others like themselves had already come to build a new home. Life in urban environments created congested living conditions. Tenement houses were routine in large cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Olmsted was raised in a religious family who gave him an altruistic vision that characterized his life’s work. He always felt that people were entitled to certain rights, no matter what their color or origin of birth. It never occurred to him to

think that there was any other way to treat people. He carried that spirit with him throughout his life. Early on, he thought slavery was dehumanizing and should be abolished. His position originated from a deeply felt humanism that motivated all he did. He considered the natural beauty found in extensive lawns and trees to be something that would comfort, inspire, and benefit all people.

The idea of using nature in a way to show that all people can live together propelled his desire to create a public park. All people can enter the park and mingle with one another. Olmsted did not value the tradition of hierarchical social classes of people. The public park, as he envisioned it, would be a real expression of democracy. Here all people were welcome. People of all classes would mingle with one another. In that process they would learn about their differences and commonality, and create a stronger country.

In regard to the view of nature as under human control, an idea popular at many times in history, Olmsted wanted to control nature for the best of reasons: to create a more democratic way of life. This goal also guided his recommendations for national landmarks like Yellowstone and Niagara Falls. He wanted these natural treasures open for all to enjoy and not set off as concessions to make money for a few.

The area that Central Park covers was originally a swamp with mounds of soil and lots of rock. Olmsted along with his associate Calvauz Vaux designed



Saturday afternoon in Central Park, ca. 1900. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

a plan to fill that space with rolling hills, pathways, trees, and water. It would be a refuge from the turmoil and confusion of the city.

Today when you walk in Central Park, you are struck by the daring and courage it took for Olmsted to position his vision for that space. The street that runs parallel to the park on the west is called Central Park West. As you walk north from the Park Plaza, the glorious old New York hotel, and into the park, you feel like you are in another world. At one point you follow a gravel stone path far below street level. Through the trees you can see apartment buildings rising above you on Central Park West; but here you are in a spot of natural beauty, a true refuge for the weary city dweller.

Public parks followed in other cities around the country, including Boston, a project Olmsted also undertook. The Boston public park system designed by Olmsted has the glorious name of the Emerald Necklace. His approach there was to link several green areas together. Bodies of water like the Charles River and Jamaica Pond have pathways that line them just like the water walkways along the water in Central Park. The Emerald Necklace stretched for seven miles.

His work in Milwaukee is illustrated in his design for Lake Park, along the shores of Lake Michigan, marked by the characteristic rolling lawn with an occasional tree. Today in Wisconsin the county parks number 600. And so he designed other parks around the country as well. As Olmsted designed one park, he brought his experience of the earlier parks to the current project.

Olmsted opened up America to appreciate nature in the city. To him, that contact with nature was something people needed in order to be fully human. Through giving people the public green space of a park, Olmsted felt he contributed in a way that his own privileged life dictated he must act.

As a result of his foresight and benevolent spirit, the country has thousands of parks today. For example, the Boston Parks and Recreation Department now oversees 2,200 acres of parkland including 215 parks and playgrounds, 65 squares, urban woodlands and street trees, 3 active cemeteries, 16 historic burying grounds, and 2 golf courses. The department also programs a wide range of community events and live entertainment in the parks under its jurisdiction.

Within the city limits of Seattle, the first public park was Denny Park, a gift to the city by David T. Denny in 1884. In 1887 the Board of Park Commission was established to oversee development of the Seattle park system. Seattle Parks Commissioners hired the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm in 1903 to design a comprehensive system of parks and boulevards for the city. The Olmsted Plan for Seattle's parks spurred the early development of the Seattle park system and has been the basis of its modern day park system.

Olmsted worked on many parks around the country. Later in his life his sons took over the landscape business and continued a public park focus. From 1857 to 1950 the firm designed over 5,000 projects, one-third of which were residential.

The basic idea of the park was something Olmsted addressed in his middle years. His earlier life involved a series of different jobs both on the East Coast and in California. He often depended on the money that his father loaned

him. It was only when at mid-life he entered the new field of landscape design that he found himself in a profession and became self-sufficient.

That journey took many years.

Olmsted's ideas about nature originated with his family. His father loved to contemplate nature at the Connecticut homestead of the Olmsted family. Domesticity and civilization became common themes in Olmsted's prolific writings. He saw home life as the place to establish personal meaning, and involvement in the community as a way to secure social meaning. Both were extremely important to him.

Also, on a visit to England Olmsted fell in love with the rural English landscape. He especially admired and referred to the English public park called Birkenhead.

A more important early influence on Olmsted, however, came from the American horticulturalist and landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing, from Newburgh, New York. Downing edited and wrote *The Horticulturalist*, a magazine that proposed the picturesque view of nature. The home landscape, according to Downing, was composed of trees, shrubs, and pathways. The lawn around the home was to be an extensive grassy area with little emphasis on ornamental flowers.

Olmsted wrote letters to Downing and considered him his mentor. It was Downing who proposed the idea of a public park in New York, which later became Central Park. Because Downing died in 1852 at the early age of 37 in a tragic boating accident, he was unable to see his vision of Central Park become a reality. Five years later Olmsted picked up the gauntlet when he was 35. Olmsted actively sought the Central Park supervisor job. Downing had brought an engineer and draftsman from England, Calvert Vaux, whose friendship with Downing lasted seven years. It was through Downing that Olmsted met Vaux, who would become his collaborator on Central Park and several other landscape projects.

A public relations genius before public relations was seen as a profession, Olmsted often sought to publicize his vision and his work. Throughout his life he pursued recognition and status for his accomplishments. Fitted with a strong ego, Olmsted often ran up against opposition to his ideas, and that stress cost him, especially in his physical health. He often worked to exhaustion. He was frequently frustrated with bureaucracies of government and business, but nevertheless kept pursuing his vision. He measured a park's success in terms of its ability to give the citizen who enters it an appreciation of nature. In his writings, he proposed reasons for establishing national and state parks.

From early in his life, Olmsted urged the importance of protecting natural beauty, whether mountains, forest, or scenic areas like those of California. He thought California, where he lived from 1863 to 1865, one of the most beautiful places in the country. It is in California that he began to show the mind of a landscape architect, an artist whose media are the natural resources of landform, plants, stone, and water.

In California he designed the Oakland Cemetery and thus began his work as a landscape architect, in 1865. He designed Berkeley like Central Park,

with pathways to take advantage of the view. He avoided a gridiron pattern in his designs for outdoor space, because they seemed so unnatural compared to what he saw as nature.

Some consider Prospect Park in Brooklyn, built after Central Park, his masterpiece of park design. It exhibited Olmsted's essential elements for a public park: meadows, woodland, and lake. Here too there was never any decorative planting, only what he called the natural look.

However, the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, built by George W. Vanderbilt, remains the best-preserved work of Olmsted. One of Olmsted's decisions was to plant rhododendrons along the entrance road to the estate. A perfect choice by a real plantsman!

Olmsted also played a major role in setting the landscape theme for the Columbian Exposition, the world's fair in Chicago, from 1890 until it opened in 1893. There a park, which was part of the Exposition and boarded the lake, was Olmsted's design.

In 1881 he moved from New York to Brookline, Massachusetts, where he would continue his work as landscape architect and set up his own firm with his sons. In Brookline he found the "communicativeness" he sought all his life. That term Olmsted used to describe social contributions and obligations, but also the pleasures of the ideal citizen.

His ideas took form in writing and editing for a magazine, *Garden and Forest* (1888–1897), which he founded along with Charles Sprague Sargent, director of the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, and Olmsted's friend, horti-



Bird's-eye view of Central Park, 2004. Courtesy of Corbis.

cultural editor and writer William Augustus Stiles. It was an early American journal devoted to horticulture, botany, landscape design and preservation, national and urban park development, scientific forestry, and the conservation of forest resources.

Family problems like the death of his son and his daughter's disability weighed on his shoulders. His own health finally gave out and he had to be hospitalized. He died at the McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, in 1903.

Though his personal and family life presented him with many problems, Olmsted continued to work as a landscape architect as long as he could. He, in fact, is credited with starting the profession of landscape architecture. While some of his designs have not been preserved, his lasting legacy is his vision of the public park, which can be found in every American city and state, and in many sizes and shapes.

Today the country needs that public space defined by trees and lawn and pathways more than ever. In many cities around the country, real estate values have escalated. Though their land value is high, the continued construction of new public parks and the ongoing funding to maintain existing parks say how much they mean to a democratic society.

In a society so obsessed with instant messaging, the need to enjoy nature is not easily met. We think we have to be doing something "constructive" all the time. Yet isn't the act of contemplating nature a sublime action in itself? The need to enjoy the outdoor green space of the public park is more important than ever.

Although society and culture have changed, the public park today is a refuge just as it was in the nineteenth century. Thanks to Frederic Law Olmsted, the public park stands open for all to enjoy.

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# One-Room Schoolhouse

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*Ray B. Browne*

America has always been a nation which prided itself on the education of its citizens, and it has tried to provide facilities for all who sought to better educate themselves. To do so the citizens have had to integrate the cultures of the countries from which they emigrated into the great “melting pot” of American culture, and become a part of the “Citie on a Hill,” as the Puritans called it. They could fulfill a new way of life, the “American Dream,” as later generations characterized it, and live “the American Way of Life,” which always included the goals of social equality and political democracy. From the beginning of the American experience, education has been looked upon as an indispensable and the one-room schoolhouse has been its icon. In 2006 some 400 one-room schoolhouses remain, most in Montana and Nebraska, each with one to seven pupils.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most Americans, with the conspicuous exception of slaves and Indians for many generations, were at least minimally literate. They developed their literacy by reading materials largely imported from and imitative of British culture, principally the King James Bible and various catechisms. By the middle of the twentieth century, three-quarters of Americans had a high school or higher education.

The American Revolution introduced a general debate about the purpose and most effective methods of teaching, the remnants of which survive into the twenty-first century. In the new and opening frontier there was, of course, the book of nature, which many people felt was the ideal for a new nation. On a more formal basis, some schools, looking to the past, favored the teaching of republican principles. Thomas Jefferson, on the one hand, advocated a layered system, consisting of elementary schools, followed by academies and then universities, so as to develop a politically responsible population of elite leaders. Toward this goal he founded the University of Virginia in 1819, which opened for classes in 1825. Benjamin Franklin, on the other hand, favored a more democratic curriculum that instructed in English and taught practical subjects such as drawing, calculation, and the immediate past rather than classical or ancient history. He and many others

advocated establishing a “common school,” what became known as the American “public school.”

The approach that evolved in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from these conflicting views, known as the Quaker system, was based on ideas advocated by Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, and Andrew Bell, a Church of England clergyman. Their goal was an inexpensive form of mass education, teaching literacy and religious precepts. The system assumed a single teacher who could control several hundred children, using “monitors” who in turn trained younger children to drill still younger children. The curriculum consisted of reading, writing, and arithmetic for boys and needlework for girls. The curricula were modified on the receding frontier as needed.

Depending on the number of students, the location of the school, the qualifications of the teacher, and the attitude of students’ parents, the school could be an unqualified success, or, often, a limited failure. The plan for these schools was promising, but the execution generally exposed its weaknesses. There was, first of all, the difficulty in finding a central location for a student body that was often dispersed over wide, commonly rural, areas. Then there was the trouble of finding a teacher who was educationally and emotionally qualified.

The one-room schoolhouse, often called a “blab school,” was a mixture of all levels of instruction being conducted at the same time. Generally, various levels of instructional needs were grouped together; the higher level instructed the next level below it, and that level then taught the level below it. The “schoolmarm,” for the teacher was generally a woman, reserved herself for teaching the highest level, but made herself available to all levels as various needs arose. Sometimes the teacher knew enough to cover all subjects at all levels; sometimes she was just a figurehead. But she was always overworked. In remote areas she arrived at the school early to prepare the school for the coming day; in the winter, she gathered firewood and built a fire, often in a cast iron stove, to make the coming day bearable.

In a classroom filled with children of varying ages, sometimes discipline got out of hand. Often in rural areas students were overgrown farm boys who had no desire to be in school and took out their dislike of being cooped up all day by bullying the younger and smaller students. Sometimes they took their anger out on the teacher and threatened her with physical violence. There are records of students physically attacking their teachers. Sometimes efforts to maintain strict rules of discipline led to absurd consequences, as a cartoon from *Harper’s Weekly* of May 21, 1875, illustrates: a Negro lady, who returned to school to learn to read and write, is forced to stay in and study during recess because she had not learned her lessons for the day. She was 71 years old.

Through the years and across the country, millions of children of all ages attended such schools and succeeded after leaving them. The most famous, of course, was Abraham Lincoln, who occasionally attended classes in log schoolhouses for less than a year altogether, but learned, as he said, “to read, write and cipher to the Rule of Three.”





A one-room schoolhouse near Marlinton, West Virginia, 1921. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Reading and learning are central themes in Hamlin Garland's popular memoir, *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917), which details, particularly in the eleventh chapter, "School Life," experience of the one-room schoolhouse. After the Civil War, Garland's family was drawn westward into Iowa, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas by a father who, like many Americans of the day, was looking for El Dorado, seeking their fortunes in the ground or on the farm. For them, the sun rose in the west. Though the youngsters in the family had to work continually, they attended school when they could. The schoolhouse stood for education and for the community's capacity to weather the storms that racked the prairie. Garland recounts how once a snowstorm

leaped upon us at the close of a warm and beautiful day in February [which] lasted for two days and three nights, making life on the open prairie impossible even to the strongest man. The thermometer fell to thirty degrees below zero and the snow-laden air moving at a rate of eighty miles an hour pressed upon the walls of our house with giant power. (110)

After the storm passed,

we met our schoolmates that day, like survivors of a shipwreck, and for many days we listened to gruesome, tales of stages frozen deep in snow with all their

passengers sitting in their seats, and of herders with their silent flocks around them, lying stark as granite among the hazel bushes in which they had sought shelter. (111)

Yet for all the safety it provided, the temperature in the schoolhouse never seemed to be comfortable. As Garland describes it,

It was always too hot or too cold in our schoolhouse and on certain days when a savage wind beat and clamored at the loose windows, the girls, humped and shivering, sat upon their feet to keep them warm, and the younger children with shawls over their shoulders sought permission to gather close about the stove. (115)

At Garland's school, and most others, the texts were McGuffey's Readers, which introduced the students to all kinds of literature—to Whittier, Bryant and Longfellow, and to Cooper's novels *Deerslayer* and *The Pilot*. But the main bread on which the students feasted was, of course, Shakespeare, whose literature "became a part of [their] thinking," Garland says, and helped the students "measure the large figures of [their] literature" (113).

Because many Americans themselves attended such schools (or have relatives who did or know someone who attended or taught in them), there has grown up a mystique about their power to "teach the basics," and, more significantly, to shape character. *Harper's Weekly* (February 13, 1875) pictures an idealized version of the one-room school as a teaching and learning



Interior of a one-room schoolhouse in Crossville, Tennessee, ca. 1934. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

community with teacher and children gathered round the stove, tempered with touches of reality in the representations of the cold and the decaying room. Some of the merit attributed to the one-room school is certainly deserved; some is perhaps exaggerated. I myself attended such a small one-room schoolhouse in Ohio County, in Western Kentucky, in 1930 and found it less than fulfilling. It depended too much on discipline and order. In general, the feeling that the hickory stick is the magic instrument of teaching prevailed, as it has done throughout most of educational history. Uninformed psychology has insisted that violence, or at least firm pressure, has been effective in forcing society, or portions of it, into compliance. But the question takes on different dimensions when applied to education. In the school, the hickory stick perhaps has been as much the devil's stick of negative results as the magic wand of positive accomplishment.

In twenty-first-century American society, the concentration of school children into larger and larger groups and schools and the development and dissemination of distance learning technology has all but eliminated the reality of the one-room school. Perhaps the closest modern equivalent is the small kindergarten, though the differences are obvious. Yet we continue to hold the one-room school in high regard, as an icon of the large part education has played in America's past and plays in its future. Bowling Green State University has such a school building on its campus, built in 1875 in Huron County, Ohio, and moved and reassembled brick-by-brick after nearly 100 years of use. Twenty-minute tours are conducted of the building inside and out to demonstrate what teaching and learning was like in the nineteenth century. It is one of many one-room school shrines across America.

Perhaps the most romanticized version of one-room school nostalgia is the popular song "School Days (When We Were a Couple of Kids)," with words by Will D. Cobb, music by Gus Edwards, first published in 1908. On publication the song sold over a million copies, and it is still occasionally heard. The words take us back to the dear old golden rule days, to "readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic," all taught to the tune of a hickory stick. In the song, love greased the troubles encountered in the one-room school. With us today, distance in time and advancement in educational facilities enhance and polish the icon of education which once glowed in the weak rays of the oil lamp that guided young people on the path of our educational system.

American icons are often static and represent the unchanging, but the one-room schoolhouse has grown from its original purpose. It represents American educational development, as well as the personal advancement of individual Americans. As opportunities for those achievements have opened up, so has the icon of the one-room schoolhouse developed. The single room has grown into a complex of buildings, the single teacher into a group of trained specialists, the administration into a hierarchy of overseers. Although their training and purposes are well placed, sometimes the results are not ideal. Maybe that is why we look back to what we think were the good old days when all educational needs could be met and problems solved through a

system we idealize by turning the antiquated one-room schoolhouse into a formal, sufficient educational icon.

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# Oscar

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## *Robert Holtzclaw*

He's an inanimate object that stands just over one foot tall and weighs less than ten pounds, yet each year rich and successful men and women spend millions of dollars to woo him, careers rise and fall based on where he goes, and hundreds of millions of people around the world watch to see the decisions he makes. Like the biggest stars in Hollywood, he needs only one name. He is Oscar.

Considering the glitz, tension, and high-stakes business dealings with which he is now associated, Oscar had quite modest beginnings, arising almost as an afterthought in the planning stages of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). From these humble origins, however, the statuette and all it represents have grown into a highly coveted sign of peer approval and career success. The prestige of an Oscar victory is part of the allure, but a more concrete motivation is also at work: winning the award, particularly in the major categories, can add millions of dollars to a film's box-office gross and subsequent DVD and video revenue and also increase the salary for future projects of the winners. Speaking in a 2004 Arts and Entertainment (A&E) television "biography" of Oscar, critic and film scholar Neal Gabler summed up the golden man's reputation this way: "Oscar is a celebrity—more famous than just about any star in Hollywood."

Such fame and success for the Academy's yearly prizes could never have been predicted when the idea was first developed. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences itself began in 1927, and its initial primary goals were to mediate labor disputes in the film industry, promote advancements in movie technology, and help rehabilitate the somewhat unsavory public perception of Hollywood and the film business. The idea of an award from the Academy was a minor component of AMPAS's overall mission; according to Robert Osborne, writing in *70 Years of the Oscar*, the "presentation of awards [was] definitely a secondary matter" (15).

Two years after AMPAS's creation, on May 16, 1929, the first Academy Awards presentation was held at the Blossom Room of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. The event was a far cry from the lavish, lengthy ceremony it

has become in the subsequent seventy-five years. The night featured dinner, and conversation, but the actual award presentation ceremony took approximately five minutes (including the first Best Picture award to *Wings*). Recipients were announced in advance, with their names printed in the programs, and there were no production numbers and no long speeches—just a quick acknowledgment of the winners as part of the evening’s festivities.

The Oscar statuette has reached iconic status in the years since that tentative first night; it is instantly recognizable, even in silhouette, throughout the United States and much of the world. The award’s design has changed very little since it was created in 1928 by MGM art director Cedric Gibbons and sculptor George Stanley. Oscar stands 13½ inches tall and weighs 8½ pounds, and he is made of the alloy britannia metal with 24-karat-gold plating. The actual figure is a knight holding a crusader’s sword, standing upon a reel of film with five spokes which represent the five original branches of the Motion Picture Academy—actors, directors, producers, technicians, and writers.

Precisely how the Academy Award got the nickname “Oscar” is not certain: there are competing theories, however, which only add to the statue’s storied history. The most prevalent account, and the one officially endorsed by the Academy itself, asserts that Academy librarian Margaret Herrick once commented that the statue resembled her uncle, Oscar Pierce. According to this version, other Academy workers began using the term and it spread informally throughout the industry.

Although Herrick herself confirms this story and it is the official Academy version, two other theories also have some support. Both involve celebrities, and are perhaps more quirky and enticing to believe in terms of the creation of the Oscar legend. The first of these involves playwright Oscar Wilde. When asked if he had ever won the Newdigate, a poetry award, he is said to have offhandedly replied “While many people have won the Newdigate, it is seldom that anyone gets an Oscar.” Hearing of Wilde’s clever remark at a dinner party years later, playwright Charles MacArthur reportedly said to his wife, actress Helen Hayes, “I see you’ve won an Oscar” (referring to her 1932 Academy Award for *The Sin of Madelon Claudet*), and the term spread from there (“How Did Oscar Get His Name?”). If this is the case, Wilde essentially (and accidentally) named the award for himself before it was even created.

The other competing theory attributes the nickname to actress Bette Davis, who is said to have remarked that from the rear, the statue resembled her then-husband, Harmon Oscar Nelson. This risqué comment was supposedly passed around at various dinner parties and industry gatherings until “Oscar” became the preferred term for the statuette.

Whatever its origin, “Oscar” crossed over into public use in 1934, when Walt Disney referred to the award by that name during his acceptance speech and a newspaper columnist used the term in print. The Academy itself resisted adopting the nickname for several years. AMPAS tried, unsuccessfully, to



A giant Oscar statue at the entrance of the red carpet in Los Angeles. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

garner support for calling their award “the golden trophy” or “the statue of merit,” and the entertainment paper *Weekly Variety* attempted to popularize “the iron man.” But “Oscar” won out, and the organization officially began using the nickname in 1939. Perhaps AMPAS’s initial reluctance to embrace the term can be attributed to the organization’s desire to bestow a more “dignified” name on its prestigious award, not a nickname based on a librarian’s uncle, a controversial playwright, or the rear end of Bette Davis’s husband.

Oscar’s significance built slowly during its first decade, functioning primarily as an important industry award that received some national attention but faded quickly until the next year. The transformation of Academy Awards night into an entertainment event began in earnest at the 1940 awards. This year, for the first time, attendees were informed that cameras would be present and the ceremony would be captured on film, with highlights to be shown at theaters before their main features. Knowing that the general public would see the ceremony led to some changes in the format and atmosphere; the stars dressed more formally and extravagantly, presentation and acceptance of awards became more structured, and the entire event began to take the

shape of a briefer version of the ceremony as it is seen today. Entertainer Bob Hope also made his first appearance as host of the awards in this year, a role he would fill many times in the future. Celebrities’ clothing choices have now become one of the most prominent elements of the entire evening, as there is pre-show speculation about which designers will be chosen by various stars, commentary during the red-carpet arrivals, and post-show media analysis of the winners and losers in the fashion competition.

Another element of the Oscar mystique also came into play after the 1940 ceremony. The Academy had stopped its practice of announcing the winners in advance several years earlier, but news outlets were still informed of the victors in advance (so they could print them up for the next morning’s paper) and had agreed not to leak the results prematurely. In 1940, however, the *Los Angeles Times* published the results early, and the now-famous secrecy and “sealed envelopes” were introduced the following year. This little scandal itself led to more publicity for the Oscars, increasing the public’s interest and, consequently, the award’s value within the industry.

The next big year in the development of Oscar's iconic status came in 1954, when NBC broadcast the ceremony to a national television audience for the first time. This inaugural telecast set a television ratings record, and by 1958 viewership had reached 100 million people. Now, of course, the program is a television ratings event with few equals in the broadcast industry. Each Oscar telecast draws almost 1 billion viewers worldwide, employs approximately 35 cameras and 500 workers, and goes into preproduction five months before its air date—a dramatic change from the brief, almost casual nature of the first few years of Academy presentations. Television and the movie industry both benefit from the event, and the two rivals for consumers' entertainment time and money happily join forces each year.

Some recognition of the basic value of an Oscar win came very early in the Award's history, however, and along with this recognition came one of Oscar's lingering controversies: the idea of "campaigning" for the award. AMPAS executive director Bruce Davis has said the primary rule is to "run a dignified campaign—don't beg" ("Oscar"). However, some strategies and expenditures continue to draw attention and criticism. Steve Daly, in his 2004 article "Noms That Were Bombs," reports that "Oscar-season advertising, say Hollywood observers, has gotten completely out of hand in recent years. Even the Academy has been moved to decry 'monetary outlays and questionable tactics that have far outstripped anything in the past'" (88). Voters (the approximately 5,800 academy members) are often unhappy with overly aggressive advertising, and campaigning studios must balance this potential problem with the perceived need to draw attention to the work. With varying degrees of tact and subtlety, studios often launch elaborate, expensive campaigns for their movies and stars. In his *Parade* article "How Much Is Oscar Worth?" Sandy Kenyon states that "for the studios, an Oscar can add up to tens of millions of dollars in additional revenue. That's why, combined, they spend an estimated \$50 million . . . to win them" (16).

The first Oscar campaign controversy came in just the second year of the award's existence. In 1930, actress Mary Pickford invited the five judges to her Pickfair estate for an elaborate dinner, and then a few weeks later she won the Best Actress Oscar. After this incident, the rules for selecting the winner were changed. Perhaps the most criticized Oscar campaign during the award's first fifty years was actor Chill Wills's unsuccessful attempt, in 1961, to secure a Supporting Actor victory for his work in *The Alamo*. The entire *Alamo* campaign is considered one of the more excessive in Oscar history, but it did result in seven nominations, including Best Picture (with only one win, for sound). The ad placed by Mr. Wills's publicist, however, is considered among the most extreme. Turned down by *Daily Variety* but accepted by *The Hollywood Reporter*, the ad pleaded: "We of the *Alamo* cast are praying—harder than the real Texans prayed for their lives at the Alamo—for Chill Wills to win the Oscar." Wills lost to Peter Ustinov, and later the Academy's Board of Governors issued a rare public denouncement, terming *The Alamo*'s



attempts an “excessive and vulgar solicitation of votes” (Daly 89). This and other controversies have helped keep ad campaigns somewhat under control, but controversies continue to erupt, with Miramax Studio’s hard-driving (and sometimes successful) campaigns a target of criticism in recent years. Some observers, however, find nothing wrong with overt attempts to influence voters: Peter Bart, a journalist for *Variety*, has said “Why pretend it’s the Nobel Prize? It’s not. It’s okay to advertise and campaign” (“Oscar”).

The annual telecast itself is often criticized for its overall length, lousy production numbers, and long-winded speeches, but the controversies and surprises of the program are part of the reason viewers keep coming back year after year. Among the many incidents that have outlived their fleeting moments on screen and entered the public consciousness as Oscar legend are the following three:

1. In 1974, as David Niven was speaking to the audience, 33-year-old Robert Opal streaked across the stage flashing a peace sign and wearing nothing but a smile. Niven turned around to see why people were laughing and gasping, and upon seeing Mr. Opal he remarked that the poor chap had made the unfortunate decision to gain attention by “showing his shortcomings” to the world (Osborne 224). The shock of the streak, and the wit of Niven’s quick retort, had people talking for some time.

2. Sally Field, perhaps to her regret, made an unscripted remark upon winning her second Oscar (in 1985) that has since come to be closely associated with her and used in various other movies and television shows, often as parody. Field’s reaction to her victory was probably one that many award winners have felt, but she made the mistake of saying it aloud and acknowledging her pleasure too directly: “I can’t deny the fact that you like me, right now, you like me.”

3. While Oscar telecasts through the years have a sad (or perversely entertaining) history of awful musical numbers, one of the most maligned is from the much-ridiculed 1989 telecast, produced by Allan Carr. The opening number featured a performance of “Proud Mary” by the singing and dancing duo of Rob Lowe and a woman in a Snow White costume; horrendous in every measurable way, it is imprinted on the minds of many viewers and was even singled out in *Vanity Fair* magazine as “the worst moment in the history of television” (“Oscar”).

Beyond these more amusing highlights, however, Oscar has also cemented its iconic status through a number of much-discussed controversies. George C. Scott announced that he had “contempt” for the Academy and would refuse to accept an Oscar if he won (which he then did, in 1971 for *Patton*), and Marlon Brando sent Sacheen Littlefeather (actually an actress named Maria Cruz) to refuse his 1972 Oscar because of “the treatment of American Indians . . . by the film industry” (Barr, Brown, and Schwartz). Some winners who did accept their Oscars also stirred up controversy and attention. Vanessa Redgrave, accepting a Best Supporting Actress award in 1978 for *Julia*, used the occasion to comment on the Middle East conflict by denouncing the “zionist hoodlums” she saw as interfering with efforts to reach an appropriate resolution. That phrase in particular, and her remarks in general, led to strong reaction from the assembled audience and debate within the media and general public. Later in

that broadcast, writer Paddy Chayevsky denounced Redgrave when it was his turn at the podium: “I am sick and tired of people exploiting the occasion of the Academy Awards. Her winning is not a pivotal moment in history and does not require a proclamation. A ‘thank you’ would have sufficed” (“Oscar”).

More recently, controversy has continued through such events as the Academy’s decision to award a special career-spanning Oscar to director Elia Kazan, revered by some for his craft and artistry while disliked by others for his actions during the Hollywood Blacklist era. His appearance onstage at the Oscars was met by a mixture of cheers, boos, and even stoic silence from those who elected not to join in the standing ovation. And documentary filmmaker Michael Moore elicited strong reaction when he accepted his Oscar in 2003 for *Bowling for Columbine*, making reference to the election of a “fictitious president” who is now waging a “fictitious war” in his criticism of President Bush and the war in Iraq. Moore’s comments, too, were received with a loud mixture of cheers and boos, both for their content and the perceived appropriateness (or lack thereof) of using the Academy Awards as a venue for such speeches.

All these facets of Oscar combine to secure his place as a cultural icon in America and throughout the world—his history, the great movies and performances he commemorates (and has overlooked), the spectacle of the Oscar ceremony, the controversies, the millions spent in his pursuit. Winners value the recognition from their peers (and the subsequent salary increases they often receive), while movie fans enjoy the chance to see the human side of their favorite stars as they win or lose on awards night, and to experience vicariously some of the glamour and the tension. Contests to predict the winners spring up both officially (in newspapers and magazines) and through many office pools, and debates inevitably erupt over the wisdom or folly of Oscar’s choices. Everyone’s a movie critic, and this extends quite naturally into the role of Oscar critic too.

Perhaps two final quotes from the *A&E Biography* of Oscar can help to encapsulate the nature of his enduring appeal and his significance to both the public and the industry. Actor and director Ron Howard notes the pervasive influence of Oscar and the way it seeps into our consciousness at a very young age: “It’s been ingrained in our psyches. . . . Even a third-grade oral report [might begin or end with] ‘I’d like to thank the academy.’”

And the master himself, Federico Fellini, is succinct and incisive in his comment on the Academy Award’s importance in the massive, expensive, creative world of the movie business: “In the mythology of the cinema, Oscar is the supreme prize.”

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# Patchwork Quilt

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*Judith Hatchett*

I'm probably among the last generations of Americans whose mothers, aunts, or grandmothers spread homemade quilts under shade trees on hot summer afternoons and said, "I'll make you a pallet," meaning that children should stay on or near the quilt, thus out of the house, and make themselves content with a cigar box full of crayons and many coloring books. That my grandmother had in the distant past actually made these quilts we took for granted, if we thought about it at all, as part of her ancient lifestyle that included gardening, canning, and chopping the heads off her own chickens. To us baby boomers, these were things old people had done because they didn't know any better.

As I think about those quilts today, though, I am haunted by questions I didn't know to ask and can now never answer. Why did my grandmother make the quilts—was it habit, perceived necessity, or pleasure? Did she take pride in them? If so, why didn't she mind throwing them on the ground or seeing them hauled off in the backs of cars for afternoons of picnics or sunbathing? Why didn't anyone save them? I realize that I don't remember how any of her quilts looked, but I do remember keenly the smell of them—grass and cotton and sunlight.

As I began to research and reflect on quilts and quilt-making, I realized that the unanswered questions surrounding my own family's quilter permeate the history of quilt-making, a history in which fragments are pieced together to form a design that conjures powerful but different reactions. I began to understand that in the history of quilts and our perceptions of them lie many tensions—between beauty and usefulness, appreciation for and denigration of women's labor, individual and communal efforts, and most especially, between stories told and stories silenced. I also became intrigued by the way quilts appear in American literature and the ways their symbolic presentations reflected their actual history. Eventually I chose to examine the ways two contemporary Kentucky writers employ the quilt as symbol and to juxtapose their treatment of the quilt against the actual history of quilts.

The texts I chose to examine were by Bobbie Ann Mason and Silas House, but choices abounded. A Web site called *Quilts, Quilters, Quilting, and Patchwork in Adult Fiction* lists over 150 literary works that center on quilts. Visitors are invited to submit their own annotated entries, so the list is constantly growing. That the patchwork quilt seems a near-perfect embodiment of all things American makes this extensive literary treatment understandable. The quilt's combination of art and utility evokes collective memories of our pioneer pasts, wherein thrift and ingenuity turned castoff scraps into creative coverlets that warmed both bodies and souls of families struggling to make their lives and fortunes in a New World.

As my personal, historical, and literary reflections revealed, the quilt is so inextricably entwined with American history that it looms a far more complex icon than our national myths might acknowledge. Writers who seize upon the quilt and foreground it as a symbol within their narratives may or may not encompass the contradictions and ambivalence reflected in the real history of quilt-making.

In his first novel *Clay's Quilt*, Silas House presents quilts as unambiguously positive objects, at once comforting and beautiful. The chief quilter in the story is Clay's Uncle Paul, although several members of Clay's family—even his rebellious mother Anneth, who was murdered when Clay was four—have helped to quilt at one time or another. Readers encounter no conflict between quilt as art and quilt as bedcover, such as that in Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use," wherein the two views of quilts represent mutually exclusive lifestyles. Clay and his family appreciate the beauty and warmth of quilts in equal measure. While House's symbolism is obvious, and deliberately so, it is also effective in underscoring the novel's theme that, no matter the difficulty, Clay must take up the fragments of his life and form his own orderly pattern.

In this novel, then, quilts and quilt-making are instructive. Paul tells Clay about the crazy quilt: "They don't go by no real design. It's all up to the quilter'" (37). Clay also learns from Paul that his mother would choose only bright colors for quilts because she refused to see, as Paul explains, that "a quilt needs some browns and grays to even it all out'" (38). When he handles the scraps from Paul's basket, Clay knows he can feel "geography and history beneath his fingertips" (37). Clay instantly associates the quilt scraps with the scraps of information he has gleaned about his mother's life and wishes that he "might stitch them together, and have a whole that he could pull up to his neck and feel warm beneath. . . . If he did, he would take two corners in his hands, snap the whole out onto the good air, and let it sail down smooth and easy to settle on the ground. It would be a story made up of scraps, but that was all he had" (40). At the novel's end, Clay feels wholeness for the first time when he receives a Flying Bird quilt that Paul had made from scraps of Anneth's clothing. *Clay's Quilt*, then, views quilt-making as a trope for seizing the elements of one's life—even if they are leftover, cast off, or clashing—and shaping them into something strong, lovely, and useful.

This use of quilt as symbol also reflects core American values such as hard work, building something from nothing, importance of family, and individual responsibility for coping with whatever life brings. Such connections resemble those of Eliza Calvert Hall's *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*, published in 1907, wherein Aunt Jane tells stories and offers advice while working on quilts. Aunt Jane also associates piecing quilts with making sense of life: "‘how much piecin’ a quilt’s like livin’ a life? . . . The Lord sends us the pieces, but we cut them out and put ’em together pretty much to suit ourselves’" (74).

Joan Mulholland argues in the *Journal of American Culture* that quilts are and always have been a form of discourse, a language shared among a quilter, the quilter's teacher—usually her mother—and the quilter's community (1–3). Thus Clay, his Uncle Paul, and Aunt Jane "read" the quilts as both instruction and emblem of how to approach life. In Bobbie Ann Mason's "Love Life," Opal Freeman reads her family quilts quite differently. A retired algebra teacher who spends her evenings drinking peppermint schnapps and watching MTV, Opal is bemused by her niece Jenny's interest in the quilts Opal keeps wrapped in plastic and stored in a closet. "‘Do you know what those quilts mean to me?’ she asks Jenny. ‘A bunch of old women ruining their eyes.’" Opal then declares that she will take up aerobic dancing (10). Opal at first refuses to show Jenny the quilt she is most curious about—the family burial quilt, which Opal refers to as "‘that old rag’" (3), which she later complains is "‘too ugly to put on a bed and too morbid to work on’"



Four women working on a patchwork quilt, ca. 1910. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

(15). Jenny declares the quilt to be beautiful but Opal says, “‘It’s as ugly as homemade sin’” (14). Opal gives the quilt to Jenny, who says she will learn to quilt and complete the blocks for family members who have died since Opal inherited the quilt and stopped the tradition of adding a block upon each death. Although it remains doubtful that the unsettled Jenny, single like her aunt, will actually learn to quilt, Opal feels no regret upon relinquishing the family heirloom and reflects again on “‘All those miserable, cranky women, straining their eyes, stitching on those dark scraps of material’” (15). While watching MTV from her recliner, Opal covers herself with a comforter, presumably mass-produced and therefore in no way oppressive. Opal therefore reads her family quilts as stifling and depressing, and as instructing her to lead a life she clearly rejects.

House and Mason, like the other 150 or so writers included on the *Quilts in Fiction* Web site, recognize the iconic power of the quilts in the American consciousness and build their narratives around them, but the two writers project their significance in contrasting ways. The history of quilts and quilt-making explains how this can be: the affirming and oppressing stories read in the quilts are actually one narrative. Quilts do have two sides, a duality that extends through their origins, their makers, and their use.

The most obvious duality is that between a quilt’s beauty and its usefulness. The American patchwork quilt, as it evolved from European needlework traditions, was born of necessity. Protectionist Navigation Acts of the 1660s prevented colonists from producing wool and cotton, and even after the acts were repealed cloth was prohibitively expensive. Even the scrap pieces required for quilts were scarce because settlers had few changes of clothes. Colonial women pieced scraps together, added padding and a back cover, and then quilted the three layers to form a coverlet both strong and warm (Mulholland 1–2). Yet here also begins a major mystery for our reading of quilts. A colonial woman could assemble a “tack” quilt—the basic three layers, warm and strong, yet hastily and artlessly put together—in a single day (Walkley). So why did these women add hours and hours of stitching to their already daunting workloads in order to work their scraps into decorative patterns and shapes? And why, generations later, did frontier women, equally burdened, do the same?

Students of quilt history argue that from the outset American women began to “speak” through their quilts—perhaps their only form of self-expression—and quite deliberately to distinguish quilt-making from other chores. Both Ann Mulholland and Christina Walkley contend that many pioneer women also saw quilting as a sign of gaining control in lives made chaotic by harsh conditions. Walkley quotes an early Texas settler:

Sometimes you don’t have no control over the way things go. Hail ruins the crops, or fire burns you out. And then you’re just given so much work in a life and you have to do the best you can with what you’ve got. That’s what piecin’

is. . . . Your fate. But the way to put them together is your business. You can put them in any order you like. Piecing is orderly. (2)

On the other hand, social pressure eventually became a strong force in women's quilt-making. Young girls were expected to sew quilt blocks by the age of five and were given "stints"—certain specified amounts of stitching—to do each day. By the nineteenth century young women were expected to produce a quilt set of at least twelve quilts that spoke to their communities about not just their needlework skills but also their worth as potential wives. This portfolio told the community that "the girl not only knew her job in life but she was able and willing to perform it" (Mulholland 2–3). Naturally young women who resented the forced labor and assumption of inevitable destiny read quilts as restrictive guides into lives they did not choose but were often forced to accept.

A further duality in quilt production is that between piecing and quilting, both of which may be done by one or many. Here again are a bright and dark side. Certainly the quilting bee offered isolated farm women a social release as well as collaborative production of useful home goods. Other collaborations were forced, as when slave-owning women might choose to piece all or part of a quilt's cover and then order their slaves to do the quilting. This collaboration extended the artistry of quilts, however, because the slaves incorporated their own design and self-expression (Mulholland 4). Another problematic type of collaboration occurred when entrepreneurial women paid other women to produce quilts that they then sold for profit. As will be discussed later, this means of production blurred the connection between owner and creator in ways that often exploited the creator.

Other dualities within quilting further underscore its complexity as a national icon as well as literary symbol. Its history involves a give-and-take, for example, between creativity and technology. One might assume that using machines would threaten a pre-industrial art like quilt-making; but the advent of the sewing machine in the nineteenth century actually increased the creativity of quilters because it reduced the hours of hand-stitching and enabled more reflection on and experiment with design. The artistic aspect of the quilt was further enhanced as the industrial revolution enabled women to purchase inexpensive cloth for the sole purpose of quilt-making. By the Victorian era, wealthier women produced quilts—or had them produced—solely for display. Significantly, though, during hard economic times, such as the Civil War or the Depression, women would return to piecing and quilting by hand and forming quilts from leftover materials.

Other advances did adversely affect the creativity of quilt-making. During the Colonial Revival of the 1930s, quilts became popular and sought after, and quilt patterns were published in magazines or could be ordered by mail. While this popularity increased the quilting population, it homogenized quilt design, with many regional quilt names being changed or blended, and dis-



tinct community designs forsaken for popular national ones (Waldvogel 12–29). Beginning late in the nineteenth century, another contrast appeared. Whereas earlier generations of women had been expected to be modest about their quilting skills, women could now enter quilts in county fairs and even win prizes. *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society* documents how, during the nineteenth century, quilts enabled women to enter an increasingly public discourse as they “used their quilts to register their responses to, and also their participation in, the major social, economic and political developments of their times” (Hedges 11). A further contrast emerged, then, between the modest homemaker bent quietly over her quilting and the abolitionist or suffragette designing and displaying a quilt with a public and political message.

The chapter in quilt history that best encapsulates the dualities and ironies of quilting is that of the Sears and Roebuck quilt competition within the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair. A public relations coup for Sears, the contest attracted 25,000 entries. The quilt revival of the 1930s only partially explains the excitement created by the contest: the prize money explains the rest. Merikay Waldvogel and Barbara Brackman’s *Patchwork Souvenirs of the 1933 World’s Fair* contains their carefully researched account of the contest, interviews with participants, and photographs of surviving quilts and quilt pieces. This account also explains how Sears designed the contest: prizes were awarded locally, regionally, and nationally, with local winners receiving \$5 or \$10 and regional winners receiving as much as \$200. The grand prize was \$1,000 plus a \$200 bonus if the winning quilt incorporated the Fair’s theme of A Century of Progress. Today the prize would be the equivalent of about \$20,000 (35). Inez Ward, of Horse Cave, Kentucky, recalls that when she received news of her \$200 prize, she ran to the fields to tell her husband and father-in-law: ““They were so excited. They brought the team to the house and decided that was enough work for the day’” (Waldvogel 45).

An astonishing six of the thirty finalists were from Kentucky. Waldvogel and Brackman acknowledge that “Geography may have played some part as Kentucky’s location allowed its quiltmakers to send quilts to mail-order houses in Memphis, Atlanta, or Chicago,” thus tripling the chances for a prize. But they also argue that even increased odds were not so important as the “legendary” quality of Kentucky quilts during the 1930s (Waldvogel and Brackman 56). An ironic likelihood is that Kentucky was able to fare so well in the Century of Progress competition because the state, and particularly its women, had actually experienced so little progress. For Kentuckians the Colonial Revival was hardly that, but instead a sudden attention to the ways they had been and were still living. These quilters were quilting for the most part as they always had, some with the additional stress of contracting their work for very modest pay. With little education, isolated homes, and few job opportunities, Kentucky women turned to sewing as the only way to support themselves or their families. At least the contest offered the possibility of more customers. One of the Kentucky winners, Susie Jackson Combs, intentionally

used the contest as free advertising for her quilts and received over 200 orders as a result (Waldvogel and Brackman 57).

Although extremely popular, the Sears contest sparked much controversy. Despite Sears's offering a bonus for quilts illustrating the fair's theme, only two final prizes were awarded to themed quilts. The competition rules did not distinguish, moreover, between originally designed quilts and those made from kits. The judges Sears selected preferred traditional quilts, just as they valued stitching over design and creativity. Thus they awarded the grand prize to the Unknown Star, submitted by Margaret Rogers Caden of Lexington, Kentucky, because they were impressed by the intricacy of the padded quilting, even though the design and color were both considered ordinary by skilled quilters (Waldvogel and Brackman 46). We can make our own judgments only through photographs and replicas, though, because the prize-winning quilt disappeared after being presented to Eleanor Roosevelt.

The darkest problem with the contest was not exposed at the time, even though it fueled Lexington gossip for decades: the problem that Margaret Caden did not make her prize-winning quilt, even though she signed the required Sears document stating that the work was entirely her own. "The Quilt of the Century" had been pieced and quilted by four Kentucky women who knew about neither contest nor prize. Margaret Caden, who contracted out all the quilts sold through her Lexington shop, long continued to profit from the quilt by selling its pattern and renaming it the Bluegrass Star. When the quilters eventually found out about the prize, they realized that they were in no position to protest. As the daughter of one quilter explained: "It was Depression times; my father was an invalid, and they had to have their jobs. That was the reason my mother kept her mouth shut" (Waldvogel and Brackman 55). Defenders of Margaret Caden have suggested that she had no intention of deliberate deception but was defining quilting as the collaborative process she knew it to be. Her choice of Chicago for her regional submission gives her away, however. Speculation is that she avoided the other submission sites available to Kentuckians because they were in the Southeast where the judges would know, as one anonymous interviewee put it, that "'Margaret Caden did not know which end of a needle to thread'" (Waldvogel and Brackman 59).

This questionable conclusion to the Century of Progress quilt competition further extends the ways quilts "speak" to their makers, communities, and viewers, and emphasizes the dualities intrinsic to this American art. Thus when Silas House presents quilts as positive, instructive, and equally useful and beautiful, he is telling one true story of quilts. Bobbie Ann Mason's story is also true. Just as Opal views the work on quilts as drudgery, she may also be discomfited by their historical connection with marriage and submission to community standards. The traditions associated with the burial quilt force Opal to read her life not as a happy professional woman who has chosen to be single, but as an "Old Maid" who must complete the quilt and as a child whose parents wanted a boy to carry on the family name. When she sees



A woman working on her quilt in San Francisco. Courtesy of Getty Images/PhotoDisc.

women quilting together not as a festive quilting bee, but a group of “miserable, cranky women straining their eyes,” she recalls ways the collaborative nature of quilting has been exploited, and the bitterness such exploitation could cause. Importantly, the reader can neither see nor read the quilt—Opal calls it ugly, but Jenny says it is “gorgeous” and “beautiful.”

Likewise, readers who associate quilt-making with oppression will salute Opal as a pioneer exploring new ways for single women to live. Others may view her break from the past and its traditions as self-destructive. Both *Clay’s Quilt* and “Love Life” end with quilts being passed to young adults who welcome them as connections to their unknown pasts. In a larger sense, quilts do that for all Americans. As we read an art form that has evolved from horizontal to vertical—from pioneer beds to museum walls—we can see how inextricably quilts are bound with American history and our attitudes toward it. Like that history, their stories are both comforting and complicated by conflict—and many have never been told.

Those untold stories return me to my grandmother. When I asked my mother why Granny Wade produced so many quilts, she answered, “I think she didn’t want our home to look cheap.” She also recalled my grandmother and the neighborhood women gathering to can their produce, to exchange slips of plants, and to quilt. These women were all born farm women, but exiles driven to town by hard times, who during the Depression used nineteenth-century skills they were too poor to abandon to sustain neighbors affluent enough to have lost something.

I have lost forever the opportunity to read my grandmother’s quilts, and I can have no certainty about what they meant to her, except to know that she would never in her entire life have used the word “discourse” in connection with them. Some historians might contend that she must have devalued her quilts if she let them be thrown under sweaty grandchildren, sunbathers, and picnic meals. I like to think that for my grandmother and hundreds of women before her, quilts were a form of beautiful largesse, perhaps the only form they had to offer to those they loved, their only opportunity to practice the careless generosity of the better off. I hope it is true that they created beauty and comfort and threw both into the world of everyday use, offering a single final blessing from their abundance: “Enjoy these quilts and wear them out. There’s plenty more where they came from.”

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# Walter Payton

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*Clyde V. Williams*

They walked past, slowly and quietly, almost reverentially. Each of the 36 of them reached out and touched the outstretched bronze hand. Then they assembled beneath the south goal post, where a painted paper curtain urged the Columbia Wildcats to a Homecoming victory over rival Poplarville High. (Columbia, Mississippi, October 18, 2004)

Created by Columbian Ben Watts, paid for by Columbia citizens, and dedicated in July 2003, the bronze statue stands just north and slightly east of the stadium's scoreboard, at the top of which appears "Walton Payton Field." Marcus Wood, CHS's new football coach in 2003, initiated the idea of his players' touching Payton's bronze hand before each home game that autumn as "an additional tribute to Walter and what he meant to the school and community." Each Columbia Wildcat has his photo taken beside the statue, and before each road game, players visit the statue. "The kids especially like the words on the plaque below the statue," Wood said.

Thirty-four years earlier, on the sweltering night of September 4, 1970, Columbia High defeated nearby Prentiss High 14–6 before a capacity crowd. In his play-by-play radio broadcast, sportscaster Frank Glenn excitedly chronicled CHS's two touchdowns—Walter Payton's runs of 70 and 88 yards. That September 1970 game marked Columbia High's first football game as an integrated team and school, and the first time that thousands of African Americans and white adults participated in a significant public event in the south Mississippi city of 6,000. As Payton's high school coach and close family friend Charles Boston later recalled: "To me, that did it for integration [issues]. I don't think they looked at Walter as a black boy, but as a [Columbia] Wildcat" (John).

Walter Payton thus became the central figure in one of Columbia, Mississippi's most important events in its 185-year history. He played a fundamental role in a major cultural change.

Leading his football team to an 8–2 record, however, reflected but one aspect of his first and only year at Columbia High. He continued his interest

in music as a drummer in the CHS band, and performed respectably on the baseball field; and he won the state broad jump championship in May 1971, several days before he graduated at age 16.

Payton's reputation as a star athlete dramatically increased during the 1971–1974 seasons at Jackson State University, a small historically black institution in Mississippi whose sport team competed at the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division I-A level. He started and played 37 games at J-State, where in 1973 his 160 points led the nation in scoring and led the Tigers to a South Western Athletic Conference (SWAC) title, the latter having more importance to Payton than his scoring record.

Since the 1960s, individual statistics in American intercollegiate football have become as significant as team records. As professional football emerged as America's team sport of choice in the last third of the twentieth century, pro teams and scouts scrutinized individual statistics carefully. In Payton's J-State career, they found durability and effectiveness (he carried the ball 584 times for 3,563 yards and scored 66 touchdowns) and versatility (he passed for 474 yards, kicked five field goals, and added 53 points-after-touchdown), in all, contributing a school record of 464 points. In one game he scored a conference record 46 points. In December 1974, he ranked fourth in ballots for the Heisman Trophy, awarded to America's best college football player. That year's Heisman winner, Archie Griffin, played halfback at Ohio State, which competed in the NCAA's prestigious Division I Big Ten Conference.

Payton's coach, Robert Hill, who held J-State's single-season rushing record of 1,623 yards—one of the few school offensive records that Payton did not break—called him “college football's best running back.” Many observers in 1974 and later attributed Payton's loss of the Heisman to his playing in the relative obscurity of the Division I-A SWAC. A Jackson city commissioner stated that had Payton played for a team in Division I's South-eastern or Big Eight conference, he would have been “a serious candidate [winner] for the Heisman” (James). The Heisman vote and award occurred several weeks before Payton graduated, after 3½ years, from Jackson State, at age 20.

Both Payton's statistics and his character attracted close attention from National Football League scouts. During spring 1975, the Chicago Bears, with the NFL's fourth overall draft selection, chose Payton in the first round.

Departing Mississippi in July 1975 for the Bears' training camp in Platteville, Wisconsin, and ultimately to their game venue, Chicago's Soldier Field, he followed hundreds of thousands of the state's African Americans who migrated to Chicago, often via Jackson, Memphis, and St. Louis, during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century—a migration which reversed during the final decades of the century.

As the Columbia Wildcats prepared for their October 2004 Homecoming game against Poplarville, video editors at the Fox Sports Network in New York and Atlanta neared completion of their work on *Beyond the Glory!*

*Walter Payton* for nationwide broadcast on October 31. It was filmed in Columbia and elsewhere. In a Chicago suburb, visitors to the Lake County Discovery Museum viewed displays in an exhibition honoring Walter Payton. Across the land, knowledgeable football coaches from children's community leagues to middle school and high school conferences invoked Payton's name when they encouraged their players to teamwork and hard work.

During the decade before Payton arrived in Chicago, the Bears' losing record did not diminish the team's solid base of fan support, especially among blue-collar citizens. During his first nine years as a Bear, Payton's team had seven losing seasons and made NFL playoffs only in 1977 and 1979, losing in opening rounds both years. Before the end of his fifth season, Payton had broken the team record for yards gained rushing. In Chicago, sportswriters characterized him as the one bright hope for the team's future and praised his dependability (he missed playing only one game during his entire career), his commitment to the team, and his enthusiasm for the game. Despite his team's record and its limited talent, especially in areas that would have enhanced Payton's personal offensive statistics, Payton's comments to the press did not criticize teammates; instead, he often thanked fans for their support.

Payton's numbers began to add up; during his fifth year, he had broken twenty Bear offensive records and three NFL records.

By early in his eleventh season (1984), he surpassed former Cleveland runner Jim Brown's 19-year NFL rushing yardage record of 12,312 yards. As 1984 began, Payton trailed former Pittsburgh star Franco Harris in the chase to overtake Brown; but on October 7, Payton broke Brown's record. As Payton and Harris approached the record, Brown indicated his hope that Payton would emerge as winner because, Brown said in wire-service stories, Payton never ran out of bounds to avoid punishing open-field tackles, while Harris tried to escape being hit by skipping out of bounds. What Brown did not know was that crashing into opponents, actually seeking contact, had been an underlying principle of Walter Payton's offensive play from his high school years.

During the 1984 regular season and playoff games, Payton ran for 1,684 yards and set a team record with 45 pass receptions. Before the Bears-Washington Redskins game for the division championship, Payton told Knight-Ridder's Bob Verdi that the Bears' team and franchise needed to defeat Washington, and, perhaps thinking of the perpetual failure of the Chicago baseball Cubs to win a championship, he added, "the city of Chicago needs it" (Verdi). The Bears won that game, but lost the conference championship to San Francisco the next week.

Setting the rushing record, together with the team's success, resulted in Walter Payton's gaining substantially greater attention outside the Chicago area, and made him one of the NFL's most recognized players nationally. Two other events—the Bears' Super Bowl championship in January 1986,

and Payton's retirement in 1987—solidified his place in the league's history and in American popular culture.

The Bears' 15–1 regular 1985 season record, two playoff victories, and smashing New England 46–10 in the Super Bowl drew massive attention to the team, to Payton, to flamboyant quarterback Jim McMahon, and to rookie offensive lineman William “Refrigerator” Perry. A rock-rap piece, “Super Bowl Shuffle,” had played around the clock days before the big game in New Orleans. *Time* magazine featured Payton and Perry on the cover of its January 27, 1986, edition, and Tom Callahan's cover story concentrated on Payton, whom he called the game's “Regal running back,” adding: “How Payton has endured these eleven seasons, physically and spiritually, still so near to the top of his game, is more than a wonder” (46–47).

Perhaps the most dramatic moment of Payton's career came at its end, on January 10, 1988, in a 21–17 loss to Washington. On the Bears' final play, needing eight yards for a first down to give the team a chance for a tying field goal, McMahon passed to Payton, who gained seven yards. Game over. But the chilled crowd repeatedly yelled his name, then quieted, then left Soldier Field, with Payton still sitting on the Bears' bench. Mitch Albom's analysis noted:

For a while it seemed as if he might never leave. His head was bowed, his body limp. After 13 years and 199 games, and more yards than any football player has ever gained, there were tears running down a grown man's cheeks. Walter Payton did not want to go home. (D1)

At his departure, he carried dozens of team and league records; the most important included career rushing yards (16,726), career rushing attempts (3,838), seasons with 1,000 or more yards (10), yards gained rushing in a single game (275). He left at the top of his profession, at age 33.

As a receiver coming out of the backfield, or throwing the ball, or carrying out a fake, or chasing down the opponent on an interception or fumble, he did everything. Guys in that arena, a superstar like he was, they don't have to do that. But he did it because he was setting the best example he could for his teammates. (Mike Ditka, qtd. in Payton, with Yaeger 103)



Chicago Bears star Walter Payton poses with the Gordon's Gin Black Athlete of the Year Award in New York, 1985. AP/Wide World Photos.



Payton's final NFL coach, Mike Ditka, a gruff guy not commonly given to commending his own—or opposition—players, repeatedly and enthusiastically praised Payton, calling him “The best blocker by far that they’ve [other NFL coaches] ever seen at running back” (Payton, with Yaeger 103).

Statements about him from his relatives, friends, fellow athletes, coaches, and writers consistently reiterated several key elements of Walter Payton's character: determination and preparation, privacy and quiet, and generosity.

Coach Boston observed that, as a high school junior learning the game, in practice Payton simply would run over rather than around teammates attempting to tackle him. Boston taught the youngster the stiff-arm to elude tacklers; Watts's bronze statue of Payton, whose hand current players touch before games, depicts that element of his game.

Coaches and teammates gave him one of several nicknames, “The Big-Eyed Boy,” which Coach Boston explained: “Before games, Walter's eyes seemed to get bigger and bigger. When you looked at him with his helmet on, all you seemed to see was his eyes, almost like fiery coals.” Years later an opponent noticed this intense concentration and determination. After losing to the Bears 23–19 in the 1984 divisional playoff game, the Washington Redskins stellar defensive end Dexter Manley said of Payton: “He's like Superman...you look in his helmet at those eyes and say, ‘Where is this guy coming from? Where do you find people like this?’” (Boeck D6). High school teammate Forest Dantin, soon after Payton's death in 1999, said, “Walter was always very intense and wanted to win” (Boothe A16). At that time, family friend and East Marion (Mississippi) High School coach Les Peters said, “he always had a burning desire to succeed, and he did” (Boothe A16).

Gannett News Service writer Greg Boeck called him “The complete football player, the NFL's most treasured asset” (D6). The Knight-Ridder chain's Mitch Albom saw him as “A running back who so dazzled the sport that he defied logic” (D1).

These repeated plaudits by NFL players and writers reflect the fact that numbers alone, no matter how impressive, do not fully characterize an athlete. For instance, after the Bears defeated Washington to earn their conference championship appearance in 1985, Redskins defensive back Curtis Jordan said, “Whatever Payton gets, and he's gotten it all because he may be the best ever, he deserves it” (Boeck). A Payton block knocked Jordan out of that game with a cracked shoulder.

Coach Boston also recalled that during Payton's childhood, Walter would gallop around neighborhood yards carrying smaller children on his back. His brother Eddie recalled their father instilling a strong work ethic in his children; one that included heavy manual labor in the yard and family garden. Walter commonly ran alone on the sandy banks of the nearby Pearl River, and later, his physical conditioning regimen became legendary in the NFL. His physical training occurred year-round, every year, until he retired. In 1986, Dallas Cowboy coach Tom Landry called Payton, “Tremendously

strong, stronger than any other player ever at his size [5'10", 205 lbs.]” (Isle 6). Moreover, he mastered his offensive play assignments and his opponents’ defensive tendencies. “He was always prepared, physically and mentally, for any opponent, at any level,” Coach Boston said.

Once a Chicago reporter asked him to enumerate his favorite things. Payton responded, “Hunting and privacy.” Peters noted, “He was a private person,” and Dantin added, “He never raised his voice or fussed at the other [players]” (Boothe A16). Fans and observers saw an additional manifestation of his avoiding the spotlight even during games. When he made an especially dazzling play, he would hand the ball to the referee and trot back to the team huddle. After scoring, he typically handed the ball to a Bears lineman before heading back to the sidelines. Coach Boston, a quiet man himself, had emphasized to Payton and his other youthful charges, “Remember when you score, you didn’t get there by yourself.” Throughout his football career, Walter Payton placed teammates and his team before his personal goals; at all levels, he acknowledged and expressed gratitude for their efforts.

Sweetness—the grace, ease, and speed of a great running back’s movements? Sweetness—kindness and generosity of spirit?

Stories of how Walter Payton’s nickname became “Sweetness” circulated around Jackson and Chicago from the mid-seventies. Perhaps it derived from the adjective “sweet,” that word which then and now shows youth approval of a person, event, or action; certainly it could describe Walter Payton’s activities on the gridiron.

But it could as well describe the gentleness and generosity of the Jackson State football star who as a student worked with physically and intellectually disabled children. It could describe the man who understood the importance of children receiving toys at Christmas and established a foundation which provided toys and volunteers to distribute them to hundreds of thousands of Chicago-area children. And the man whose rise from rural south Mississippi to wealth and fame in the great metropolis led him to create a college scholarship program at his alma mater, a program which seems about to expand nationally.

It could describe the tenacity of a man who, loving privacy, upon retiring from football became an active, persuasive spokesperson for many charitable organizations and who participated in many events to support those organizations. It could describe Walter Payton’s successful efforts during his final year of life in 1999 to encourage Americans to become organ donors, to save or prolong the life of fellow citizens; it could describe what NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue called “The grace and dignity he displayed in final months” and how his teammates and friends recalled his facing death during those months which concluded on November 1, 1999. He was 45.

For the Columbia High Wildcats and Coach Wood, their October 18, 2004, 44–12 Homecoming win was comfortable and convincing. All 36 team members played. As the team trotted off Walter Payton Field, a younger Wildcat who had gotten to play most of the final quarter looked over to the statue, winked, waved, and gave a “thumbs-up” sign. The words on the plaque beneath the statue of Walter Payton say, “None of us are as strong as all of us.”

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# Polyester

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*Patricia A. Cunningham*

Microfibers and performance textiles are key players in contemporary fashion. Yet hip consumers don't recognize them as polyester. And if they did, they might be too young to recall that by the late 1970s, wearing polyester, or any synthetic fabric, was decidedly uncool. However, that was not always the case. When it was first introduced, polyester was a highly touted new synthetic fiber that was first made into woven fabrics for men's suits in the early 1950s. Polyester was a "miracle fiber" known for its wrinkle-free qualities, toughness, and resiliency. But its negative qualities—low moisture absorption, oily soiling, static, and pilling problems—soon put it in a bad light. Its real downfall came when the price dropped and it became the fiber of choice for double-knit fabrics used for inexpensive menswear. The knits were often produced in pastel "fashion colors" for men's leisure suits. The fashion for leisure suits fizzled quickly, and they became a much despised and parodied clothing item that quickly sent polyester down the road to infamy as an icon of bad taste, and even of all that was wrong with American society.

Since the late 1970s, many dollars have been spent by the textile industry to remove the stigma. Thanks to the introduction of micro-denier fibers and performance fabrics, such as Coolmax, they have almost succeeded; but it has not been without the help of textile technology and changing American lifestyles. Although polyester became an icon of ugliness, the miracle fiber of the twentieth century has been transformed into a high-tech necessity for the twenty-first century. The story begins and ends in the laboratory.

Much of the credit for the discovery of polyester, as well as nylon, belongs to a young American scientist, Wallace Carothers, who worked at DuPont from 1928 until his untimely death in 1937. Carothers discovered polyester while working on a project to understand the nature of polymers. Carothers sought to convince fellow scientists that polymers were long chain molecules held together by ordinary chemical bonds. His research on polyester, carefully patented by DuPont and widely published, led to the later development of polyester into a spinnable fiber. This development was accomplished by two Englishmen, Rex Whinfield and his assistant James Dickson, working at

Calico Printers Association. In 1941 they received a patent on a process for producing a spinnable polyester fiber from ethylene glycol and terephthalic acid. However, World War II interrupted further development until 1944, when ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) began serious development of polyester, which they named Terylene. Through the Co-operation Agreement on Patents and Processes with ICI, DuPont acquired polyester fiber patents for the United States in 1946. They first named their fiber Fibre V, but re-named it Dacron in 1951 (Brunnschweiler and Hearle 30–39).

Initially, DuPont was anxious to produce a yarn that would replace wool for men's suitings. Certainly polyester had the requisite resiliency that prevented a fabric from wrinkling easily. However, in the process of developing the fiber, DuPont encountered numerous processing problems, product limitations, and performance deficiencies. Nonetheless, the first commercial entry was a man's tropical weight suit manufactured by Witty Brothers that was advertised in the *New York Times* in June 1950. Schoeneman of Baltimore offered a cord suit in 1952; Hart, Schaffner, & Marx presented a blend of wool and polyester in 1953, the same year that Cone Mills announced oxford cloth shirts in a 65 percent cotton/35 percent polyester blend. Clearly trade interest in the fiber was high. However, the initial interest of consumers was low. They needed to be educated about the wash and wear qualities of new synthetic fibers (Brunnschweiler and Hearle 44–47).

Throughout the 1950s gains were made in all aspects of the business. American consumers, in particular, became keen on "better living through chemistry," and technology that gave rise to a new contemporary style. Disneyland's *Tomorrowland* even featured a futurist house (c.1986) built entirely of plastic by Monsanto. An early sponsor of Disneyland, Monsanto later featured a giant oil lamp with mannequins wearing "Polyester." Yet there were challenges to the euphoria for plastics.

At the same time, opposition to technology and technocrats emerged, dramatized, for instance, as widespread fear generated by the invention of indestructible clothes, in the film *The Man in the White Suit* (1951). After all, what would happen if clothes never wore out? Fiber wars also developed. The natural fiber interests (wool and cotton) struck out at synthetics. Cotton manufacturers used advertising campaigns to promote ease of care and comfort qualities of resin-treated 100 percent cotton. They believed that their wash and wear fabrics were superior to anything made of blends of polyester and cotton. The campaigns were effective; Dacron prices for filament yarns fell by 20 percent (DeMeo 358–59). Competition from Kodel, an Eastman Chemical polyester (of slightly different chemical makeup), exacerbated the problem for DuPont. But then, DuPont counterattacked with a program to improve the qualities of polyester through modifications, such as high luster and pill resistance, and the introduction of new fiberfill products (Brunnschweiler and Hearle 47).

Nonetheless, the competition did not cease; in fact, it increased. In the early 1960s, the original polyester patents expired. Many companies throughout

the world joined in the polyester merry-go-round. DuPont now had more than cotton and Kodel to contend with. They had worldwide competition that was fierce. Diversification that opened up markets to polyester, and expansion beyond staple and filament yarns into non-clothing industrial end use, continued unabated (Brunnschweiler and Hearle 40–47). In the 1960s, polyester was an icon, but not of bad taste. It served as a beacon for a new high-tech world that would move Americans beyond merely being modern. But this association did not last. In many respects polyester became its own worst enemy, fueled by the success in knitwear. The knitwear industry began using textured polyester (crimped) filament yarn (such as Taslan, developed in 1953 by DuPont) for double-knit fabrics for women's and later men's clothing. The success of this combination brought about a boom for polyester. It provided a catalyst for innovation and technological change that resulted in an unprecedented exciting era for the textile industry. Knits were everywhere. The inevitable bust came with overproduction of knitting machinery and fabric. Demand waned when fashion took a different course.

Of course, it is the man's leisure suit, often constructed of double-knit polyester jersey, that is credited with the downfall of polyester. However, at first, leisure suits were quite acceptable, as was polyester as a fabric for suits. Things began to change when the widely read fashion and textile industry magazine *American Fabrics and Fashions* suggested using textured polyester knits for men's suits. In an article titled "The Knitted Suit for Men, What Are We Waiting For?" their keenest argument rested on the property of resiliency provided by both the knit and the polyester. It was the perfect travel suit; it could be rolled up for a week without wrinkling (n.p.). Using double knits for men's suits was another means to expand the market. Men's traditional suits were in fact made of polyester wovens and wool-polyester blends. However, menswear moved toward more fashionable styles at this time. The menswear designers Pierre Cardin and Hardy Amies offered a variety of new looks for men, the Mao jacket being just one. They used polyester. In the thick of this Peacock Revolution in menswear, more casual styles, such as the shirt suit, or leisure suit, emerged as a viable alternative to the traditional business suit. It was more formal than jeans.

The leisure suit was a major trend in 1974, but by the end of the decade it had become passé. John Travolta's polyester-clad disco dancing character in the 1978 film *Saturday Night Fever* provides a quick glimpse of the polyester suit's association with tackiness, showiness, and the working class. Or think of Elvis in his Las Vegas period wearing rhinestone-studded jumpsuits. But the demise in part was owing to price. Polyester that had once been made into fabrications sought after by high-end suit designers was now available at low price points. The now low cost of the fabric made it accessible to the shoddy end of the menswear market. Proliferation was its downfall. Polyester had lost its luster as the fiber of the future. Its heyday was over. The leisure suit became the icon of bad taste in America, and with it polyester. As testament to the power of the leisure suit to evoke disdain in the late 1970s, it is

purported that Lutece, New York City's most famous restaurant, posted a small sign, "Please! No Leisure suits!" (Stern and Stern 154).

The leisure suit does not have to take all of the blame for the fall of polyester, however. Fashion changed; anti-plastic thinking was energized by antiwar, anti-establishment sentiment in a strong youth culture. The hippie movement grew out of these sentiments. Hippie culture demanded everything natural. In general, during the seventies Americans became more aware of the environment, fueling an interest in all things natural. It is not surprising that cotton made a comeback. Consumers wanted to be environmentally correct, and so demanded natural fibers. Fashion also took a turn toward looser fitting clothing, and the stretch imparted by knits was no longer a necessity. Casual dress meant fewer men wore traditional suits. More young people were wearing jeans with L.L. Bean jackets and hiking boots. Although the dress for success movement began to counter the casual look, it too warned against polyester.

The 1980s were tough times for synthetics. The decade was one of opulence. Natural fibers prevailed; silk especially had a great revival. Furs, silk brocade, linen, cotton, and cashmere were the preferred prestige materials. Women had entered the workplace in droves and needed smart, professional looking clothes. Knits were viewed as too casual; John Malloy's dress-for-success ideology supported tailored suits for both men and women. Even the push for "casual Fridays" did not support the wearing of leisure suits. Casual dress meant khaki pants and cotton knit polo shirts for men. Nonetheless, technological developments continued in the polyester industry. Polyester continued to be produced and improved, finding new markets and growth in diversity of uses. Japanese designers took fashion by storm in the 1980s, and their tradition includes a keen interest in textiles. Issey Miyake introduced his 100 percent polyester "Pleats Please" collection in the late 1980s. The line remains popular with consumers, and has become a signature style for Miyake. Miyake and other Japanese designers continue to collaborate with textile firms, and have no qualms about using polyester and other synthetics (Handley 132–35).

Yet, for all of the expansion of the fiber, the jokes persisted. It seemed that no matter how much the industry sought to recover the image of polyester, the leisure suit and thus polyester remained a source for humor. Polyester and leisure suits together became emblematic of "the loser," as in the video game *Leisure Suit Larry* and in John Waters's film *Polyester* (1981). Even worse, in the Spenser series of detective novels by Robert B. Parker, polyester is drawn on as a symbol of consumer values. The idea that the leisure suit wearer has no taste allows Parker to use polyester as a symbol "of not knowing any better." Ill-fitting polyester clothing is deemed inappropriate. At one point in a novel, Spenser quips, "you can't look tough in Ban-Lon." (In this case, one must ignore that Ban-Lon is a trade name for another synthetic fiber, nylon. That would be bad taste too.) The basis for the reader's understanding the meaning comes from what Jackson Lears calls "acquisitive consumption."

Inept tasteless consumption is associated with inappropriate social behavior; whereas people who act appropriately, it is assumed, consume appropriately—that is, with good taste. The purchase of a leisure suit seems clearly inappropriate behavior, and is understood as such by the public and thus the reader (Goodwin 739–45). As noted in the *Encyclopedia of Bad Taste*, leisure suits became an “emblem of the churl, the bumpkin and the cheapskate” (Stern and Stern 154).

During the 1990s American culture began to look back at the 1970s; The decade produced at least one nostalgic television series, *That '70s Show*. Certainly 1970s clothing styles were revived by the fashion industry. In Des Moines, Iowa, a local radio host, Van Hardin, continued to put on a Leisure Suit Convention that he started in 1988. The convention has been an opportunity for folks to bring out their leisure suits, don their disco duds, and have fun. The convention offers dancing to 1970s music, a fashion show, and awards for the best dressed. While these piqued an interest in the seventies and leisure suits, it is, perhaps, two discoveries that really aided the comeback of polyester. First, recycling of post-consumer plastics by Wellman Inc. set the stage for a polyester revival (Brunnschweiler and Hearle 105–7). Such items as soda bottles made from a rigid form of polyester were recycled into new fleece fabric, the most well-known one being Polartec. The fleece was then manufactured into cold weather clothing that became popular almost immediately, and remains so. Second, microdenier fibers (less than 1 denier) made a strong entry into the marketplace. They are the “dual knights” that rescued polyester from a certain death (at least in the clothing business). Given that polyester could not shake its bad image for many years, it is not surprising that the word polyester is underplayed in both of these new textiles.

Yet, one of the unique aspects of the new polyester is that few people realize they are, in fact, wearing polyester. In the 1990s, especially, the fiber industry still felt the sting of the leisure suit. In order to counter this association, they chose to refer to polyester as “microfiber.” (Microfiber can also be made of nylon and rayon, so it is not always polyester.) More important, perhaps, was that microfibers were expensive compared to higher denier fibers, and thus needed a new name to make that distinction clear: the lower the denier the finer the yarn. As observed by both Elaine Underwood and Susannah Handley, the industry coined unusual names for the microfibers (Tactel, Micromattique, Micronesse, and Microspun), and promoted them widely. (It seems that they were following the tactic used for Ultrasuede, made popular by the American designer Halston; no one knew that Ultrasuede was polyester!) The fiber industry promoted the new microfibers with designers as well. Many consumers, when asked, could not distinguish between the feel of the microfibers and silk; the uniqueness of fabrication made with microfibers have made them popular not only with high-end fashion designers, but also with artists who create one of a kind “art to wear” (Underwood 16; Handley 145–68).



Since their introduction, the microfibers have had great success in high performance active wear because fabrics made from them, such as Coolmax, are comfortable to wear, tough, and attractive. They breathe, they don't trap moisture, they don't pill; in fact, some of them behave like our skin. The sportswear industry has been quick to pick up on these factors and predicts great growth in the market for high-tech fabrics for urban and country living, as well as for serious amateur and professional athletes, and those who engage in active sports such as bicycling, hiking, running, and skiing (*Coolmax*). There is no question that the 1990s were the "body boom" decade that has continued into the twenty-first century. Going to the gym has become an important feature of the American lifestyle. The online publication *Textiles Intelligence*, devoted to business and market analysis for the world's fiber, textile, and apparel industries, sees the performance apparel market as one of the fastest growing sectors of the international textiles and clothing industry. A summary of a report on product developments ("Product Overview") reveals that they looked at consumer lifestyles and made a forecast that active sports will continue to grow; thus they could predict that high performance textiles will also see growth. Polyester fibers are part of the picture; just look at the garment label ("Product Overview" 1–2).

Although unknown to many Americans, polyester has been touching almost every aspect of our lives, and will continue to be part of them; it is the mass-market polymer. Textiles are incorporated into about one-third of industrial and engineered products. Polyester yarns, fabrics, and non-wovens are used in many of them. They include tents, awnings, sewing thread, rope, hoses, webbing, car seats, home furnishings, flexible storage tanks, automobile tires, and outer skin for boats. Monofilaments are used in screens, stencils, printed circuits, and industrial and surgical filters. Rigid polyester plastics show up in furniture, irons, and tools. Finally, thermoplastic elastomers appear in athletic shoes, ski boots, telephone cords, gear wheels, hair brushes, and even flex joints for windsurf masts (Brunnschweiler and Hearle 276–86). The list of uses is inexhaustible. It is worth recalling, perhaps, that the space suit for the first lunar landing in 1969 was made of DuPont products—nylon, Dacron, Lycra, Neoprene, Mylar, and Teflon. In the end, the story of how polyester became a signal for bad taste is but a blip in the larger picture of polyester and the rise of technology in America. Polyester has surpassed the level of perceptible icon; it has become the ubiquitous fiber of our lives.

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# Poster Child

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*Mary Johnson*

“Poster child.” “Poster boy.” “Poster girl.” An individual—usually a youth, but not always—whose name or image is invoked to stand in for an issue, the “poster child” is an icon unique to contemporary society. It can occur only in a society with a mass media—or means of mass dissemination—for without mass dissemination, it would lose its iconic power.

A search of Google brings up thousands of instances of the term, few of them actually having to do with the image of a child on a poster: Thomas Edison is called the ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) Poster Child. Slovenia is the “Poster Child for the New Europe.” To liberals, Halliburton is the “Poster Child of the War Profiteers”; to conservatives, Rosie O’Donnell is the “Poster Child for Homosexual Adoptions.”

Matthew Shepard, the young Wyoming college student brutally murdered in 1998 for being gay, became the poster boy for hate crimes legislation. Columbine High School student Cassie Bernall, murdered in the April 1999 massacre, became the poster child of the Christian Youth movement when the story spread that she had been shot for saying that she believed in God. Five-year-old Elian Gonzalez, rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard in November 1999 in waters off Miami, was for a time the poster child of Cuban-American discord.

In all these cases, an individual (in the case of Halliburton, a corporate “individual”), standing in for an issue, provides a single face, and thus a focus, for a larger and usually unwieldy abstract notion. In one sense, the individual might be said to be serving as an icon, albeit sometimes temporary, for an issue.

But it is actually the poster child itself, as a modern conceit, that is the icon.

The poster child originated, of course, on a real poster. A creation of those who sought public support to cure one disease or another, the poster child began calling out to our nation during the first half of the twentieth century, her smiling face and appliance-laden body—wheelchair, braces, crutches—working hard to instill pity and just enough guilt to get the money flowing. Although Donald Anderson was, the Smithsonian Institution tells us, the first

March of Dimes poster child, poster children have most often been little girls. Six-year-old Mary Grimley served as polio's poster child, dining with President Roosevelt at the Warm Springs rehabilitation center and posing in her wheelchair for publicity shots.

The idea behind these twentieth-century posters—to use the image of a supposedly suffering child to tug at the heartstrings—sprang from a sentiment that found its flowering in the Victorian age. Tiny Tim is as good a poster child as we are likely to find, and although Charles Dickens didn't put the child with his crutches on an actual poster, Tim Cratchit served the exact same purpose as did Anderson and Grimley: he was there to remind us of our obligation to the less fortunate. He set the tone for all disease poster children that would follow: that of the “happy cripple” who, because he is meek and enduring, calls forth the best in those of us who do not so suffer—at least this is the lesson as the Victorians would have us take it.

Indeed, during the 1840s in our own nation, thousands of little books of moral instruction for children published by Christian tract societies followed the path laid down by Tiny Tim. The titles themselves are instructive: *The Deformed Boy*, *The Happy Mute*, *The Little Hunchback*, *Poor Matt*, *The Clouded Intellect*, *The Patient Cripple*, *Crazy Mary*, *Blind Nelly*, *The Lame Boy*, *The Deaf Boy's Triumph*. The child in each of these stories is, like Tiny Tim, a kind of “pre-poster child”—and like him, each carried to readers an overtly religious message: to accept one's lot in life, no matter its difficulty; to be grateful if one's lot is not as hard as others, and in all cases to provide Christian charity to the less fortunate.

In a world without television, movies or the Internet, these unflinchingly illustrated little booklets, under the guise of moral instruction, also taught both adults and children, both non-disabled and disabled, how to understand disability: to understand that it was the role of the disabled child to be cheerful and enduring, and that disability was sent by a God to instill moral character or to serve as a means whereby Christians could exercise charity and thus save their souls.



Tiny Tim, seen here in the 1938 version of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, set the tone for all disease poster children that would follow. Courtesy of Photofest.

Thus the original message of the poster-child icon became fixed, paving the way for the work that would be done by the children that first graced the posters and then populated the telethons of the 1950s and 1960s: the brave and smiling little girls with their braces and cerebral palsy, the cheerfully hopeful Jerry's Kids of the Muscular Dystrophy Labor Day Telethon, which persists to this day.

Today, disease foundations still use the poster child for fundraising. An Arthritis Foundation poster shows a pretty little girl with a big bow in her hair: "This little old lady has arthritis," reads the poster. A poster for a Shriner's hospital shows a little girl—at first standing with crutches, then dropping them and running off to play: "Giving kids back their childhood," reads the poster.

Children raise more money than adults, white kids bring in more money than black kids, and girls are better than boys at tugging the heartstrings, fundraising executives of the nation's Easter Seals chapters were told at a national session that included how-to's for making their poster child campaigns a monetary success. The public sympathizes with images of "the most weak," they were counseled. Such thinking isn't by any means confined to executives of disease charities. United Way agencies, which offer all manner of human services to those in need, will more often than not use a disabled child as their poster image. Children with visible disabilities—using crutches, walkers, or wheelchairs—are thus frequently found on United Way posters.

Poster children can be expected to do more than merely lend their physical image to a group's fundraising poster. They appear at charity events. If the group sponsors a telethon, they are an integral part of that as well, performing on stage with celebrities. Yet their performances, unlike those of the celebrities, are not expected to necessarily showcase a talent: they are there for a different purpose. Just as the celebrity's job is not only to entertain, but to play the role of the beneficent helper, someone for the viewer to identify with, the poster child's job is to play the opposing role, that of the suffering victim whose fate can be ameliorated only by the beneficent helper.

Other than the fact that their role is that of a victim, poster children function, ironically, much as do beauty pageant winners. Like the Miss Ham and Yam beauty queen, the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America's National Poster Child, according to its Web site, serves as "Goodwill Ambassador" by:

- "Making public appearances on behalf of the Association;
- Acting as an emissary to various public officials including the President of the United States;
- Being a positive example and role model to others with sickle cell disease;
- Educat[ing] the public and assist[ing] in securing public and private sector support" (12 July 2005 <<http://www.sicklecelldisease.org/info/poster.phtm/>>).

This list of “duties,” paired with the role the child assumes on the poster and in the telethon, gives us an insight into the dual nature of the iconic image of the poster child. For the poster child serves as both hero and victim, an image that both attracts and repels us, an image from which, its creators hope, we will be unable to turn away.

Today the term “poster child” has come to mean any individual who “puts a face on a problem.” Thus we have Matthew Shepard, Cassie Bernall, Elian Gonzalez, and Terri Schiavo, each of whose names can be expected to elicit strong feelings—stronger feelings, certainly, than we would have for the issue alone, had we not come to associate it with its “poster child.” For that is the power of the icon: the emotional power that can be called forth from us by focusing on an individual human being transcends (or so it appears) the power generated by a mere disembodied idea. As a symbol for hate crime, Matthew Shepard has served admirably: a Matthew Shepard rally on Capitol Hill soon after his death brought out celebrities including Ellen DeGeneres and Barbra Streisand. Melissa Etheridge wrote the song “Scarecrow,” dedicating it to Shepard. Elton John presented a concert in Laramie and played “Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me” in Shepard’s memory. Peter, Paul, and Mary performed at a concert in Shepard’s memory. The play “The Laramie Project” has been performed by community theaters across the nation. In 2002, NBC broadcast a made-for-television movie, *The Matthew Shepard Story*, starring Stockard Channing and Sam Waterston.

The poster child has succeeded far beyond its original purveyors’ dreams, moving from image to icon in the course of little more than a century. So reliable is this emotional calling forth that it cannot in fact really be contained or managed, as much as we might wish to do so: the “poster child” for any one issue will just as easily represent its opposite, for, as it embodies an issue, it does so completely: issues that polarize us will not be less, but more, polarized by invoking the icon. Thus Terri Schiavo becomes our poster child both for the right to life and the right to die. Elian Gonzalez is invoked as both the poster child of “the revolution” and the poster child of anti-Castro sentiment.

Once embedded in the public mind, the successful poster-child image takes on a life of its own and is set adrift from its moorings. Misty Bernall’s book *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall* (1999) landed on the Publishers Weekly bestseller list with 350,000 copies in print, and the Bernalls appeared on *Today*, *20/20*, and *Larry King Live*, despite reports that the story the book told simply never happened. The now-discredited tale—other Columbine youths have confirmed that Bernall’s “witnessing” never occurred—has nonetheless continued to inspire what supporters claim is a massive surge in Christian youth group rolls.

The original poster-child icon—and its extension far beyond disability—could never have been brought about without the mass media. Journalists have been taught that to humanize what would otherwise be dull statistics;

they need to put “a face on the problem.” Thus no far-reaching story can be told without focusing on an individual who is supposed to embody the issue.

Depending on how well the reporter does the job—and depending on how cleverly the individual is chosen—the “poster child” does indeed draw our attention to an issue. Whether we focus on the issue as a result of focusing on the individual, though, is a more iffy proposition. Is it not often true that the more the image is focused on, the more the larger implications of the story cease to exist? Then the very reason for the poster child in the first place—to draw attention to a larger problem—is subverted. How many times did we look at Matthew Shepard’s boyish smile before the horror he suffered began to recede, replaced by only his image? Terri Schiavo’s face and smile told us one thing: that she was aware, trapped and unable to communicate, but conscious all the while, smiling at her mother. Medical experts insisted on a different understanding: that her brain was shrunken, atrophied; that she had no conscious awareness. Thus is the poster child also able to obfuscate rather than enlighten.

In order to focus on the poster child icon and understand its power, we cannot forget that although the term “poster child” has come to mean any individual who puts a “face on the problem,” the original manifestation of the poster child icon was intentionally that of a child, and was always an image about disability.

The original poster-child image was intended to call forth pity and sympathy from a superior perspective. The relationship is intentionally unequal; it is by the looker giving to the cause of the poster child that the looker gains. That effect has remained unchanged from the original crippled children stories of the nineteenth century, which were designed to instill in the Protestant populace the habit of Christian charity toward the less fortunate. “Less fortunate” is part of the original content of this icon.

Just as the poster-child cannot be separated from the media campaign that makes use of her, the icon of the poster child can only call forth feelings that are invested in the larger issue which the poster child represents. Thus, in its original manifestation, the poster child icon goes hand in hand with the image of, and our common feelings about, disability, which have been shaped by the fundraising charities that created and so effectively made use of the poster child. The feelings are a mix of pity, fear, and hope—feelings which we have yet as a nation to untangle. They rely for their power on stereotypes about disability that people today who have disabilities, particularly those who have grown up with their disabilities, are still fighting to free themselves from in order to live normal lives.

That is why in recent years this manifestation of the poster child has come under fire from disability rights activists, many of whom were actually poster children themselves.

“When I was in first grade, my teacher passed out a flyer to encourage everyone to get their polio vaccinations,” Cyndi Jones told the curator at the Smithsonian Institution. “She said, ‘Cynthia’s photo is on this flyer.’ As the flyers were passed out, to my horror, I saw that the March of Dimes had used

one of my poster-child photos and above my photo pasted, 'NOT THIS.' I can still feel the sense of hurt and betrayal. I was cute, intelligent, even sparkled. How could they say that about me? That day I became an activist" (15 July 2005 <<http://americanhistory.si.edu/polio/howpolio/disability.htm>>).

A close look at many of the Mary Grimley poster-child photos reveals something a bit different than the "cheerful invalid" that Grimley was supposed to be projecting: mouth closed in a frown, eyes defiant and proud, this forthright stare suggests to us a child less than impressed with the label of "poor crippled girl." In 2000, Mary Grimley—now Mary Grimley Mason—produced her autobiography, *Life Prints*, for the Feminist Press. In it she recounts growing up as the embodiment of the poster-child icon and her decades of living within—and struggling against—its strictures.

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# Elvis Presley

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## *George Plasketes*

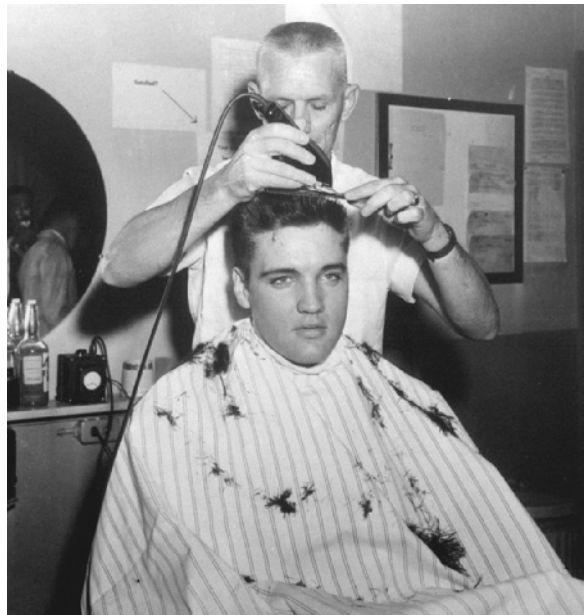
Long live the King—and Elvis Presley has. Like no other king. Like no other person, place, or thing. There is no image or icon in American popular culture with more paramount, profound, and pervasive resonance than Elvis. Look or listen no further than the mere mention of “Elvis” or an utterance of “The King.” The rare first-name-basis only carries considerable cultural credibility and an inexhaustible iconic catalog of references, subreferences, and cross-references. Elvis reigns as the icon of icons, the all-inclusive metaphor, an omnipresent lodestar of American culture.

Elvis’s biography has been a rich source of images and iconography. The story is a synthesis of the familiar heroic journey, an allegory and cautionary tale, and “rags to riches” mythic narrative, replete with revisions that run from rags to riches to reinvention to ruin to resurrection and “Once upon a time” meanings and magnitude. From his birth and humble beginnings in Mississippi to his hip shaking, sneering establishment rattling, rock-and-roll arrival in the 1950s, to Memphis and movies, to Las Vegas’s entertainment excess, to an early demise that was both disappointing and doubted, followed by an enduring, eventful afterlife, Elvis has evolved into an epic encore of Second Coming proportions.

Purists insist that music is the most distinct and comprehensive body of evidence Elvis endowed, and thus the foundation and thread of what I call his “*icontinuity*.” In contrast, when Sir Elton John had difficulty raising funds for a Princess Diana memorial two years after her death, observers argued that the waning interest and her leveling legacy were primarily a result of the absence of any significant body of work. There is no great speech, no defining moment, no crowning contribution beyond Diana’s charity work and the inherent recognition accompanying her aristocracy. Royal observers suggest that lack ultimately separates her, or any contender, from the supreme icon hierarchy of Elvis, martyr JFK, archetypal rebel James Dean, and sex symbol Marilyn Monroe, a Fab Four that have remained relevant decades beyond their deaths.

Elvis endowed America's cultural heritage with more than music. His signature songs, the unique black and white fusion of rockabilly, blues, and gospel, are far from the sole defining dimension of his vast mythology. An abundance of familiar reference points enhance Elvis's composition and cultural chronology into a collage that resembles a "Connect the King's dots" contest. As the transcendent iconic figure, Elvis embodies other elements which sustain his sex, drugs, rock-and-roll identity, as well as sense of the sacred. The iconic inventory includes artifacts and objects (Cadillacs, souvenirs, and memorabilia); facial features (sideburns, lip snarl); gestures (hip shake and martial arts moves that defined his latter-day career and training manuals for impersonators); places (Tupelo, Memphis, Graceland, Hollywood, Las Vegas); clothing, costume, and style (rhinestone jumpsuits, belt buckles, gold lamé, black leather, scarves, sunglasses); fatty foods (deep fried peanut butter and banana sandwiches); and sayings ("Thank you, thank-you-very-much," "Elvis has left the building"). His story also contains defining moments such as concerts and comebacks, including his alleged death which spawned a grass roots social/psychological/religious movement of true believers and a cult of fanaticism manifest in the Elvis is Alive phenomenon; groundbreaking appearances (*The Ed Sullivan Show*), turning points (drafted into the Army), career shifts (movies), bizarre political encounters (approaching Richard Nixon about becoming a Federal Drug and Narcotics agent). There are heroes and villains (his mother Gladys, father Vernon, twin stillborn brother Jesse Garon, wife Priscilla, daughter Lisa Marie, Colonel Parker, Dr. Nick) and personas (rebel, sneering androgynous punk, Hollywood hunk and hero, bloated, addicted Vegas act, religious figure, zombie). And there is legacy; his daughter Lisa Marie, whose ex-husbands include Michael Jackson and Nicholas Cage, is two records into her own music career.

These iconic conventions constitute an elusive, expanding, enigmatic, exploding, enduring Presley presence that permeates postmodern culture and subculture. It is both pulse and plague; prism and puzzle. A kingdom of consumer oddities, commodities, and endless Elvistas defines the Elvis "icontinuum." Through mass meditation and mass media attention, occupation and preoccupation, images of



Elvis Presley receiving his first Army haircut at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, March 25, 1958. AP/Wide World Photos.

Elvis—from black velvet and blue suede, to pink and pastel, to vinyl, solid gold, rhinestone, or 100 percent cotton—consume and captivate our consciousness and imagination like no other. Elvis's likeness—whether jailhouse or jumpsuit, junk or junkie, punk or parody, Cadillac or coffin—has been pressed, placed, preserved, and packaged in plastic and on postage stamps; credit cards, checks, and currency; art and artifact; greeting cards and cologne ("For All the King's Men"). Businesses, boulevards, and babies bear and borrow his name, a revered and registered trademark. There are waves of UFO-like sightings, "Elvisitations," ritualistic pilgrimages to Graceland, death and anniversary commemorations in January and August, and his living likeness in legions of impersonators. His omnipresence hauntingly hovers, from a King-connected constellation "rock star" in the heavens to highway horizons on billboards to the depths of Ruby Falls, 1,100 feet inside Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where "Elvis '75" is magic marked onto the side panel of a utility light.

An excessive enterprise, empire, and entity, Elvis appears on memorabilia and merchandise, in roadside relics and Graceland's gift shops; at fast-food chains, in front yard flea markets and backyard shrines; on World Wide Web sites in cyberspace and sporting events; at parties and parades; or as part of promotions, protests, and pranks, even as Presidential personas. In 1992, Elvis was a kindred spirit "running mate" for then-Arkansas governor Bill Clinton in his successful campaign to win the White House as king of the country.

The mass media and popular arts have been prolific purveyors of the pervasive and perpetual Elvis-lution. A Presley prism, they reflect and disseminate Elvis icons in messages, meanings, metaphors, and motifs with multiple points of view defined by generation, genre and gender, race, religion and region, social class and occupation. For example, the literary landscape is no longer limited to tell-tale biographies, blurred between factual fiction and fictional fact, but now includes Elvis cookbooks, encyclopedias, photo collections, travel guides, poems, children's books, novels, and short stories in science fiction, fantasy, romance, and mystery genres, and even subliterate modes such as comic books.

Beyond the bookshelves, Elvis representations routinely appear in tabloids, talk shows, advertisements, situation comedies, dramas, songs, radio formats, films, videos, musicals, paintings, portraits, performances, plays, parodies, and puns and fat jokes ("Love Meat Tender," "Return to Slender"), sculptures, shrines, needlepoint, quilts, cartoons, comic strips, graffiti, ballet, books, newspapers, magazines, politics, and sporting events.

In the process, the story is retold, revised, and reinterpreted; the images transformed and transported, juxtaposed with everything and everyone. Elvis is not only the King, but has been widely recast, reconsidered, and reconstructed as the Queen, the Fisher King, King of Kings, and King Kong. A clown, clone, cartoon character, Cajun and Kennedy; athlete and addict; drug and drag; Dean and Dylan; Air Jordan and Jordanaires. He is Seinfeld,

Springsteen, and the Statue of Liberty; landmark, legend, lyric, and Lazarus; vampire, Venus, Valentino, and Virgin Mary; Pelvis, Melvis, Hellvis, and Hitler; high priest, pauper, prince, prescription pill popper, parody, politician, and president; pioneer and New England Patriot (logo); primadonna, Madonna, Mona Lisa, and Marilyn; mascot, messiah, and murderer; demon, deity, and Disney; ghost, god, glutton, and gimmick; saint, sinner, savior, succubus, and siren; Bigfoot, Buddha, Beavis, and Butthead; beauty, beast, and burden; Pez, pet, prophet, and profit.

One of the forces driving Elvis's iconcontinuity lies in dichotomies reflected in his two distinct careers and personas, unique until Madonna redefined reinvention repeatedly during the past quarter century. The endless Presley points and puzzle pieces contain contradictions and contrasts crisscrossing American popular culture. Overweight and overwrought, exhumed, exploited, and exhausted, Elvis's image accommodates dualities ranging from royalty and rip-off, grunge and gospel, Graceland and Disgraceland, the glamorous and grotesque, aesthetic and athletic, fact and fiction, the hysterical and historical, the iconic and ironic, the exalted and exiled. He epitomizes the feminine and masculine, good and evil, heaven and hell, young and old, faith and doubt, rich and poor, comic and tragic, black and white, life and death, mirror and mirage, whisper and shout, primitive and profound, mainstream and fringe, sacred and sexual, unique and universal, convention and invention. He is vision and voice; kitsch, catechism, and contagion; time and space; prophecy, parody, paradox, and paranormal; fetish and fashion; corpse and corporation; rhetoric, rumor, ritual, and religion; occupation and preoccupation; genre, generation, and gender; the cosmic, concrete, coincidence, complex, and contradictory; demographic and the democratic.

The pinnacle of the Presley polarity and presence was best illustrated in the 1992 Presley-dential stamp election when voters decided which Elvis they wanted to be King, choosing between the "young 1950s" and "late model Vegas" Presley poses. The winner would be represented on a 29-cent postage stamp. The stampaign was a precursor to recent election controversies, as the die-hard "Elvis Is Alive" faction declared the election invalid, pointing to United States Postal Service regulations which stipulate that people must be dead ten years before their image can be considered for a stamp. The accumulation of these art and infotainment expressions, or "ricochets" as characterized by William Fox in his novel *Dixiana Moon* (1981), might best be captured in one of the final frames of John Crawford's eight-panel cartoon, "Baboon Dooley Rock Critic Consults the Deity!" (1988). A divine voice from the heavens reveals the "the Great Secret of Existence" to Baboon, that "the universe is one big Elvis Presley."

Such religious allusions and pious parallels are prevalent dimensions of Elvis's myth and iconography that converge with consumerism and cult of personality. Elvis has always been viewed as a Messiah figure, his story a passion play of "Greatest Story Ever Told" proportions that includes a doctrine, disciples, deification from faithful followers, and spiritual sugges-

tions of resurrection, redemption, prophecy, conversion, and a second coming. "And unless you understand that Elvis Presley was more than anything a spiritual leader of our generation, there's really no way to assess his importance, much less than the meaning of his music he created," writes music critic-biographer Dave Marsh in Elvis's obituary (1992).

Fragments of both traditional and non-traditional religions and cult conventions are widely represented in Presley-terian devotion, a range that includes Catholic, Southern Baptist, Scientology, Numerology, and mysticism. Beyond the cognitive dissonant fanaticism of the "Elvis Is Alive" movement, one of the most obvious manifestations can be identified in the millions of faithful followers and curious consumers who are part of a congregation that makes an annual Presley pilgrimage through the gates of Graceland, where, suggests the Paul Simon lyric, "we all shall be received." Ritualistic commemorations of Elvis's January birthday and August death are marked by candlelight vigils, cross-shaped floral arrangements, and weeping worshipers. Souvenirs are anointed saintly relics. Rooms, houses, and gardens are transformed into shrines and altars decorated with Elvis icons. Impersonators are high priests disseminating a musical gospel. One of the most haunting heavenly images is located in the Memphis mansion's Meditation Gardens, where a giant marble statute of Jesus, arms outstretched, stands in front of a cross. "Presley" is inscribed on the base beneath; the juxtaposition wickedly surreal. Whether catechism, coincidence, or comic, such King and King of Kings comparisons continue to mark the Elvis icontinuum.

The scope and depth of Elvisiana, its sightings, citings, and sightseeing, have generated another level of iconic inquiry beyond artistic and entertainment expressions, Graceland gatherings, and annual impersonator conventions. More formal assemblies dedicated to the study of this cultural phenomenon have emerged on college campuses and at regional, national, and international conferences, where groups gather to contemplate the King. Elvis has gradually become a serious subject of scholarly studies. Among institutions offering courses on the King are the Smithsonian and the University of Iowa, where "Elvis as Anthology" is part of the English and African-American World Studies curriculum. In April 1994, EducArts, a non-profit organization dedicated to interdisciplinary education, sponsored a symposium, "Icons of Popular Culture I: Elvis and Marilyn," at the Georgetown University campus. In August 1995, the University of Mississippi, host of yearly seminars on native son William Faulkner, held an International Conference, "In Search of Elvis." Though traditionalists resisted, citing the lack of academic merit, the conference convened. "We see this as broadening the areas of Southern culture," says conference co-director William Ferris. "What we're doing is raising an academic recognition of not only Elvis but popular culture in general . . . because of the power that these things have in our lives" (Hardy).

The Elvis Icontinuum is vast, varied, and unavoidable. The Mojo Nixon and Skid Roper novelty song "Elvis Is Everywhere" (1986), though a more

playful observation than stunning revelation, remains relevant. In *Dead Elvis: Chronicle of a Cultural Obsession* (1991), cultural critic Greil Marcus, author of some of the most perceptive works on Elvis, places Elvis's "permanent ubiquity" and "infinite circularity" in a Big Bang context, writing of the "universe he [Elvis] detonated still expanding, the pieces still flying, taking shape, changing shape again and again"; a boundless, fluid form that cannot be contained (viii).

Boundless and binding. The symbols, signposts, sightings, and citations solicit some response, be it a smile, smirk, suspicion, scorn, or celebration. Whether fanciful fascination, accidental attraction, casual confrontation, or critical inquiry, Elvis has proved irresistible. Presley participation and pursuits are pluralistic, no longer the exclusive domain of obsessive El-fans. Iconic attraction and involvement are inevitable, an El-virus we are all capable of contracting. Marcus foresaw the fixation nearly thirty years ago, referring to it as a "helpless commitment" because "a self made man is rather boring one thing, a self made king is another" (Marcus, *Mystery Train* 143).

On a daily basis, we continue to filter through the flood of fallout and fragments, the pieces of the Presley puzzle scattered across Elvisiana, contemplating the King and his Kingdom, the lessons learned and lost in his life and legacy. We are endlessly entangled in dead-or-alive discussions and dialogue, debating his demise. We measure the messages, metaphors, and meanings delineated by generation, gender, and genre, race, region, and religion, occupation, social class, style, or era, comparing and contrasting points along the Elvis Icontinuum, hoping to uncover connections, closure, and clues not only to Elvis, but to our own individual and collective identities.

This curious convergence of consumerism and all-encompassing iconicity is a condition described by Isabel Bonney, a character in Jack Womack's futuristic novel *Elvissey* (1993): "I knew no escape from the King... while E's presence was daily extruded into our lives, it unavoidable [sic] that we be baptized in his flood" (62). Collectively we have been baptized, a congregation of post-Presley iconographers—expressionists and impressionists, artists, writers, and musicians, painters, performers, politicians, poets, and prophets; critics and scholars, accidental tourists and innocent bystanders—endlessly exploring and experiencing Elvis's life, death, and afterlife through the complex conundrum and overflowing, overlapping collection of chaos represented in his iconicity. In words and images, sights and sounds, allegories and metaphors, litany and language, parallels and parables, quotes, comments and comparisons. History and mystery mingle, the messages simultaneously muddled and magnified, dissipating further into myth. There is no end to the Elvis-story, its ricochets, resonance, and multilayered meanings. Nick Tosches was right when he wrote in *Country* (1977), "I think Elvis Presley will never be solved" (47). Elvis Presley persists as the paragon of icontinuity, his chronology an infinite Icontinuum. It's good to be King.

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# Railroad

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*Arthur H. Miller*

The heyday of intercity rail passenger service has passed, eclipsed in the 1950s and 1960s by cars and federal highways as well as by inexpensive long-distance intercity jet air travel. Even so, the railroad lives on as an icon, embodied in powerful electric and diesel locomotives, ubiquitous commuter trains in population centers, great transcontinental freight trains serving global commerce, and even nostalgic preserved scenic and railfan short-line service, often with restored steam locomotives or trolley cars. Unlike other pervasive American images, perhaps, railroads reflect a continuity of contemporary vitality with a distinctive and long heritage tied to American industrial or economic and also geographic development.

By 1996, Americans' love of railroading was best expressed in popular culture, as George H. Douglas found in *All Aboard! The Railroad in American Life* (352). The power and centrality of the railroad image in American life recently was recognized in a 2004 conference entitled "Iron Icon: the Railroad in American Art," whose proceedings were published in 2005 as a special number (14) of *Railroad Heritage*, the periodical of the Center for Railroad Photography and Art.

## **OVERVIEW OF PERIODS**

As railroads and locomotives burst on the American scene in the 1830s and 1840s, they were only one of a number of significant inventions of the time promising irrevocably to alter the character of life on the continent. The railroad's appearance in America was part of a cluster of changes that launched an epic of expansion, as the East Coast-focused United States spanned the North American continent between the 1830s and the 1890s. Through all this development, the railroad's image as a powerful force for change was a dominant national symbol.

European and British precedents led to a U.S. rail network by the 1850s, mostly in the industrial and relatively urban northeast. The unprecedented push into areas unsettled by European descendants by mid-century sparked a



crisis of transatlantic consequences as the American union's regional rivalries descended into open civil war, in 1861–1865. This conflict was won by the industrial and rail-organized north, and it settled the hub of western expansion at Chicago—where eastern lines from the Atlantic shore terminated and the new lines west began. The first line of five thrown across the continent to the Pacific Ocean was completed in 1869, and by 1893 the by-then settled continent frontier was declared closed by historian Frederick J. Turner at the Chicago world's fair of that year.

As rail travel erased time and distance it introduced a new culture of standardization: time zones, standard track gauges, and combined or merged rail lines, which swept away local isolations and initiatives; rail terminals and depots recentering communities; new commuter and light-rail lines decentralizing the exploding new metropolises like Chicago and New York (while at the hub grew new skyscrapers); new wealth for (and from) rail builders, financiers, and wholesalers; and a new unified transatlantic, largely urban/suburban culture. The pervasiveness of the railroad in the nineteenth-century United States was signified, even often anthropomorphized, in the image of the locomotive, also an epochal culmination of machine age power and the pinnacle of industrial achievement. Controlled and channeled raw, elemental power—fire, steam, smoke, and iron—in motion, the locomotive sped across the landscape in the daylight, momentarily lit up the rural night, and reached far beyond its immediate visible area through the sound of its mighty, distinctive whistle.

The locomotive, its train, and the people who ran them were also powerfully iconic figures in popular American perception. They represented the best of the new industrial men, the engineers and the conductors asserting their authority over the lifelines of communities and regions and serving as stewards of the lives of passengers and customers. Synchronizing their watches in classic photographs, they appear as men ultimately integrated into the Machine Age—sovereign but subject to the higher, preordained rules of timetables and their subculture's strict social hierarchy. Richard Rhodes observes that for every country boy over four years old and into maturity, one ambition in life . . . was to be a locomotive engineer or, failing that, to ride with one (91).

As rail lines pressed inexorably westward, the locomotive pulling a train symbolized, as in the famous Currier & Ives print “Westward the Course of Empire,” the wedge being driven by railroads between the exploding industrial, European-American culture and the retreating and shrinking hunter-gatherer Native American way of life, which was in harmony with nature. As recently as the 1990s this iconic image has been vividly portrayed in the Disney animated feature film *Spirit*, wherein a dark, menacing steam locomotive is the villain for this story, centered on wild horses and Native Americans in western America of the late mid-nineteenth century.

There was indeed a dark or sinister side of the locomotive in this period of its stretching out to encompass and settle the continent. It brought fire, noise,

and soot into the heart of pristine nature and bucolic settings. If all the efficiency and standardization broke down, dramatic train wrecks also captured the popular imagination, and many memorable surviving photographic images record these fearsome and somehow wonderful iconic occurrences. In his novel, *The Octopus* (1901), Frank Norris creates in his title a highly visual image of the 1890s railroad, at its peak with the country settled, reaching out with its tentacles to strangle the by-now-subject farmers with confiscatory freight rates for their grain, after having given them easy access to the land. By the 1890s many railroad workers had organized to protect themselves against the monopoly power of the railroads. Labor organizer Eugene Debs arose as an icon of workers' dissent during the 1894 Chicago Pullman company strike, which quickly spread nationwide to the workers on lines that operated Pullman cars, due to the new unions. Distrust by workers and customers led to regulation of the rail lines in the early twentieth century.

Emerging in the 1890s, flourishing into the 1940s, and surviving into the 1960s and some beyond within Amtrak, the new elite high-speed, long-distance deluxe express trains incorporated the best of the sleeper, diner, and club car technology and luxury which had been introduced by George Pullman of Chicago in the years following the Civil War. As longer lines were consolidated from local ones, and as the new transcontinental lines west of Chicago developed, speedy and comfortable transit became a sought-after commodity for elite business and leisure travelers. The major east-west lines especially competed for passengers with their ever-better, faster trains—such



A group of railroad workers standing before a building and alongside locomotive wheels, 1904. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

as the New York Central's "20th Century Limited" and the Pennsylvania Railroad's "Broadway Limited," which competed and even raced between Chicago and New York in less than a day, over their respective rail rights of way. High society, important businessmen, and, later, entertainers chose their favorite lines to their destinations. Photographers in Chicago stations snapped shots of film stars between trains, for example. Starting in the 1930s Lucius Beeby (later joined by photographer Charles Clegg) brought to the general reading public the beginning nostalgia for the era of great trains of the Gilded Age; soon after, he helped mold an image or icon of a great age of high-speed rail travel in books such as *High Iron*. The glamor and popularity of trains and celebrities were represented in Arthur D. Dubin's *Some Classic Trains* (1964) and *More Classic Trains* (1974), reproducing several hundred images of trains, cars, layouts, menus, celebrity travelers, and routes.

The era of the great trains between the 1890s and the 1940s was characterized by stiff competition which stimulated creative and innovative advertising, to distinguish one from the other among the various lines, which all ran Pullman standardized equipment. By 1948–1949 a change in rail promotion was signaled by the Chicago Railroad Fair, held for two summers on the site of the 1933–1934 Century of Progress exhibition on the lakefront near the Loop. The romance, simplicity, and comforts of long-distance modern rail passenger travel were touted, but without the need to contrast them to the post–World War II automobile boom already underway, or the increasing viability of air travel advanced by technical developments from wartime and new airfields, such as Chicago Midway.

Most major railroads gave up their intercity deluxe and regular passenger service by around 1968. To fill the vacuum, around 1970 the federally-funded Amtrak corporation was established to preserve, through subsidies, the essential and most viable intercity and long-distance trains. In the cities commuter service still carries hundred of thousands of travelers daily, but with a highly simplified service based on conductors to take tickets. This matrix of services provides an alternative to the car in an age of high gas prices, and the image of the railroad is on the rise as an efficient carrier, a modern civilized counterbalance to the age of the automobile since World War II. The train, no longer a monopolizing and controlling power squeezing the populace, offers a lifeline of alternative commuting for many.

At the same time as intercity trains changed, the world trade, especially with Pacific nations such as Japan and later southeast Asian countries, and by 2000 increasingly with China, led to a greatly increasing volume of trade from the West Coast. Thus, train watchers at Flagstaff, Arizona, can see an unbroken series of long Santa Fe freights heading east from southern California ports with goods from Chinese factories. The image of the train is still one of power and even speed, but more an icon of computer-controlled transport efficiency, essentially labor-free compared to the days of steam. A few fortunate men and now women staff the locomotive cabs to wave at youngsters as they pass by.

## THE “IRON ICON” ACROSS THE MEDIA AND IN MATERIAL CULTURE

Popular stories about railroaders and their life were the staple of *Railroad Stories*, a periodical which flourished in the 1920s and 1930s—becoming in time *Railroad Magazine*, and later *Railroad* and *Railfan*. From the glory days, stories and articles on railroad subjects appealed to railroaders and to young men especially. Not surprisingly, these pulp stories highlighted the dangers and thrilling experiences of railroad life. In this period the railroad was a ubiquitous presence in American life, with all the romantic and escape images that offered to young people, especially those in small towns and on farms, promises of travel, interesting colleagues, and colorful escapades.

From before the first running of railroads in this country, they had become the subject of song. The first stage of the rail icon was the booster's rose-colored view. It began with the July 1, 1828, publication of the “Carrollton March”—looking forward to the opening of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad that year (Douglas 353). Railroads were staple subjects of songwriters in the nineteenth century, who wrote tunes printed up as sheet music, to be played and sung at home. This era was the most participatory period for audiences of songs and music relating to trains. As radio came along in the 1920s and 1930s, when rural electrification was subsidized, the rural and Southern audiences for country music identified with the subjects of rail-riding hobo songs by Vernon Dalhart, including his “Big Rock Candy Mountain,” which by the 1940s and 1950s was in elementary school song books. By the 1940s, of interest to elite travelers and workers both were the train songs from films and musicals, such as “The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe” from the Judy Garland film *The Harvey Girls*.

As movies, with sound after 1930, evolved and matured, trains provided good settings for action, due to the limits imposed by the compact, fast-moving, standardized and well-known settings. Also, trains continuously have provided the dangerous settings for action films, as in the recent *Mission Impossible*, utilizing the subway train and the added constraint of a tunnel overhead. Fast freights and subways are modes of railroading known to a wide, popular audience and, thus, they reflect the image of the rail icon today. On the other hand, by the 1980s Amtrak had so much become the butt of jokes in John Candy and Steve Martin's *Trains, Planes, and Automobiles* that the company would not let any reference to the organization be shown.

For the specialist railfan there have been 8mm home movies since World War II by amateur train-watchers. Preservation and conversion of these to videotape by the 1980s has provided a major advance in access to railroad sites for a wide popular audience. In the last decade again these videos and photographs have been converted to CDs and DVDs, increasing the likelihood of their ultimate preservation, as well as wide distribution at low cost. The Internet has been a major new distributor of railfan information and of



A photograph showing Union Pacific's 291-ton locomotive, 1930. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

associated community building, promoting preservation of the railroad as icon.

Making model trains and also toys goes back to the nineteenth century, but this hobby reached a high point in the era of radio, from the late 1920s to about 1950, when listeners' ears were occupied but their eyes and hands were not. After World War II many youngsters were able to own H or HO small scale model train outfits from Lionel and American, archotypically first set up in an oval under a Christmas tree. As with other 1950s images and icons, the model train, with its idealized microcosm of ordered suburban or ex-urban living served by handsome trains, suggests a postwar/Cold War yearning for an idealized, uncomplicated world. The young, mostly male, model railroaders, with their fathers and grandfathers, worked together to create little utopias centered on trains, with all the iconic power and dominance implied, which they could manage, grow, and ultimately control.

On a larger scale have been the preserved railroads and rail museums, of the last forty years especially. These now are in every corner of America and offer a nostalgic, preserved sample of railroad life or glimpse at railroad history. Notable examples include the still-running narrow-gauge Durango and Silverton line in southwest Colorado, since before 1960 a tourist mecca; the Baltimore & Ohio Museum in Baltimore, with its significant collection of early locomotives; and the California Railroad Museum in Sacramento, which includes the collections of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society and also the Beeby and Clegg photo archive. Smaller, more informal

museums are located across the country and are run largely with amateur volunteer efforts.

As in many other popular hobby areas, various collectibles are sub-icons, if you will, of the larger whole. Antique and recovered signal lanterns recall a pre-electronic era of standardized, ingenious labor-intensive communications. Dining china, linens, and servers' uniforms recall and represent the elegant era of the great trains. Posters, brochures, and timetables incorporate increasingly treasured railroad commercial art, as seen for example in Michael Zega's "Iron Icon" conference paper (24). One of Zega's examples is *The Burlington Number One*, with an engineer in the middle of the illustration and flanked by locomotive views and high Rockies scenery, highlighting a new fast locomotive employed by the line. The engineer, the new locomotive, and the scenery reflect in one view the icon the advertisers sought to convey to their would-be passengers, bringing them speed, reliability, and exotic mountain views: the new America of the Machine Age.

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# Robot

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## *Ira Wells*

Robots are our assembly-line workers, space and ocean explorers, household vacuum cleaners, and toy companion pets; they reflect us, and serve our needs and desires. It can also be said that we resemble them, for in our ever-increasing hours connected to electronic systems, whether of robots, computers, cellphones, or Internet, we are under cybernetic controls and leading “cyborg lives”; the cyborg is “an icon of contemporary labor” (Hicks 95, 91).

Since Mary Shelley’s fictional scientist Frankenstein jolted to life a hybrid creature in *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), science fiction has explored the hopes and fears of a synthetic android superior to human nature. Shelley’s hybrid was a male monster who punished his creator’s ambition with horror. In recent years, however, women science fiction writers have projected female cyborgs and robots who liberate women from domination and empower them. In such works as Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* (1991), women’s cyberfiction takes up the possibilities raised in Donna Haraway’s 1985 essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” that cyborgs are “potentially utopian” figures for women (Hicks 86). As Brian Attbery explains in *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction*, “according to Haraway, the story of a cyborg assumes no original wholeness, no fortunate fall, no natural order of things that always, somehow, ends up elevating the signs of masculinity at the expense of the feminine” (95). Haraway synthesizes the artificial as a means of liberating the female subject from patriarchal myth and signification.

Haraway’s theory points to a related question, though: why is it that, in the popular conceptualizing of the cyborg figure in speculative fiction, the cyborg is coded predominantly as male? The robotic hardware itself—used for radical resignification by Haraway—seems to have been preemptively claimed for the masculine by popular culture. This trend is evidenced not only in the countless examples of male robots and cyborgs in recent science fiction articulations, but also on a more basic grammatical level. English speakers refer to most inanimate entities, from boats to nations, by the female pronoun; technology, however, is different. Linguist David Crystal writes, “The

only consistently male trend in personification which the author has heard in recent years is in computing, where word processors and other devices are widely given male pet names and pronouns” (209). Crystal cites the apparently male super-computer Deep Thought as an example. A great majority of science fiction’s robots—technically, as sexless as cars and screwdrivers—are popularly understood as “male.” Why is it that robots are almost always men, and what, in turn, does that say about men? Moreover, why do robots (generally) so perfectly embody their manliness? Through a pair of popular examples, we can trace the relationship that exists between the masculine and the robotic.

Cinematic representations of the robotic have existed for almost the entirety of the medium’s short life—consider Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927)—and robots and cyborgs continue to populate the silver screen with some frequency. While Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1950)—itself given the blockbuster movie treatment in 2004—did much to popularize the anthropomorphized robot character in the popular mind, the prolific Asimov invented neither the term, nor the concept. The word “robot” was first used in the modern sense in a 1920 play by Karel Capek, *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)*; the word corresponds to an old Greek word meaning “forced labor.” The origins of the robotic concept—that is, of an invented agent contrived to operate in place of a living being—are, of course, more ambiguous, although Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* presents one obvious precedent. Like Haraway’s cyborg, the Frankenstein monster is not of woman born (indeed, he may not be “human” in any sense—animal parts were used to an uncertain extent in the composition of the monster), and yet his manhood is patent: the monster demands a female counterpart, a wife, for the procreation of children (and for the satisfaction of those manly urges implied therein). Robots were somehow masculine, therefore, before they were even “robots”—or at least Frankenstein’s and Pinocchio (who so desperately wanted to be a “real boy”) seem to suggest as much.

The qualities of scientific deduction and analytical reasoning are highly valued in science fiction’s male icons. The various masculine heroes of *Star Trek* (1966), for example, are frequently able to save themselves (and thus all of civilization) from certain galactic destruction due to a highly developed capacity for scientific analysis. This dispassionate positivism enables the heroes of *Star Trek* to devise weapons that are more effective, and strategies that are more cunning, than those of their (often animalistic) enemies. Examples proliferate; consider the original series episode “Arena,” in which Captain Kirk, stranded in a desert environment and locked in mortal combat with an immense green lizard, harvests the planet’s natural resources to fashion a diamond-shooting bazooka. Importantly, it is not Kirk’s *physical* prowess that saves him (although admittedly, much of the episode’s considerable excitement comes from watching William Shatner wallop on the terrible hulk). The episode ends with a revelation: the encounter between Kirk and the Gorn creature was staged by some vastly more powerful species;



Kirk, as the representative of humanity, is allowed to live because he didn't kill his opponent, even when he had the chance. In other words, "Arena" underlines that, in science fiction, the passions are subservient to the intellect. In *Star Trek*, it is science that allows humanity's journey to the stars in the first place, and it is science, ultimately, that saves the men and women of the Federation from the malevolent, and often barbarous, forces of the universe; the animal logic of tooth-and-fist violence is more at home in the jungle than in the stars. In short, science seems masculine, and led by men.

In the *Star Trek* universe, then, who could be more masculine than Data, the synthetic crewmember aboard the *Enterprise D*? Data, an android, is capable of nothing less than perfect logic (and is, therefore, the "science officer"); his "positronic neural network" (his brain) is incapable, in the television series, of the stereotypically feminine quality of emotion. (Apparently, this stereotype still roars in the twenty-fourth century: it is Deanna Troi, after all, who is ship's counselor aboard the *Enterprise*.) Moreover, Data demonstrates other, more traditional codes of hegemonic masculinity. He possesses immense, superhuman strength. Despite his modest frame, Data is the ship's most physically powerful crewmember—often to the chagrin of the Worf character. Furthermore, Data is also the first *Enterprise* male (we know of) to engage in sexual intercourse with a woman. In "The Naked Now"—only the third episode of *The Next Generation*—the sultry Tasha Yar entertains a lingering technofetish, and propositions the android. He seems more than willing to oblige, announcing, "I am programmed in multiple techniques and a broad variety of pleasuring." Thankfully, the steamy specifics of the "robot-on-woman" sex are left to the viewer's imagination.

It would seem that Data's stoic, masculine aspect attracts more than just twenty-fourth-century females. Women in our own century have also taken a liking to the pasty, Pinocchioic robot. There is, apparently, an entire subculture of women in the United States dedicated to worshipping the emotionless super-robot as a love-object. The "Spiner-Femmes"—named in honor of Brent Spiner, the actor who portrays Data—demonstrate a fanatical devotion to all things Data, from attending *Star Trek* conventions, to creating



In *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994) the android Data, as played by actor Brent Spiner, embodied such stereotypically masculine traits as reason unencumbered by the "feminine" quality of emotion, superhuman physical strength, and apparent sexual prowess. Courtesy of Photofest.

elaborate Web pages detailing their intimate fantasies involving the character, to stalking Spiner himself. While the “Femmes” take their name from Spiner, the actor is in fact not their principal focus; rather, it is Data, Spiner’s android alter ego, on whom these women project their fanatical energies. “Fan fiction” (or “fan *friction*” as it is sometimes called) constitutes a primary activity of the Spiner-Femmes. While Data’s sex-life aboard the *Enterprise* is restricted by the standards of decency imposed by prime-time television, the peculiar writings of the Spiner-Femmes liberate Data from the draconian impositions of the FCC, and allow him to fully explore his robot sexuality. One Spiner-Femme, known online as “Rosie,” authored what proves to be a fairly typical example of the Femmes’ fan friction—a work of short fiction entitled “Losing Control: A Data Story.” In the climactic scene, Data operates upon Laira, a character unfamiliar to *Star Trek*:

Data moved his mouth from her thighs to the thin fabric covering her soul and began to warm her even further with his mouth. . . . She had orgasm after orgasm, leaving her dizzy with sensations she’d never felt before. . . . He then executed his voluntary erection, but he was afraid that, being so well endowed, he would hurt her. All he wanted was to make her happy. (<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Nebula/5525>)

In this passage, the technofetish surfaces as the central metaphor: as a mechanical and electrical device covered by a skin-like membrane, Data is, essentially, a man-sized vibrator.

In *Star Trek*, then, as with other science fiction articulations, the android figure proves to be deeply masculine—perhaps more masculine than men themselves. Data is physically stronger, more logical, and more sexually virile than his fleshy counterparts. Women, in both the twenty-fourth century and our own, affirm his robot masculinity through sexual desire.

*Star Trek*, in its plethoric incarnations, amounts to only a fraction of contemporary science fiction; but a similar argument applies to a great number of recent science fiction articulations, which often equate technology with phallic power. Indeed, when James Cameron cast his menacing cyborg assassin in *The Terminator* (1986), only a former Mr. Universe, Arnold Schwarzenegger, could properly embody the machine’s hyper-masculinity. Powerful machines are not necessarily gigantic; in fact, history has shown the reverse: through successive generations of technology, machines grow proportionately more powerful and more compact. Nevertheless, to dramatize the fetishized, phallic power of the Terminator, it took the biggest of all men. The “meaning” of the Terminator’s bulk, therefore, resides in metaphorical and psychological levels of interpretation, rather than in the literal and technological.

The Terminator, like Data, possesses astonishing strength. Unlike his pasty counterpart, however, the Terminator is not completely bereft of emotion: he does, after all, develop a sense of humour. Consider one of the final scenes in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), in which the battered cyborg, who has

finally dispatched the homicidal T-1000, hobbles on-screen, limping and one-armed, and moans, “Ah need a va-ca-shun.” The Terminator, it would seem, is incapable only of stereotypically feminine emotions, such as empathy and sadness. Indeed, during one early conversation with John Connor, the cyborg’s teenage charge, the Terminator tells us that he is incapable of tears.

The Terminator, as the sequel goes, arrives from the year 2029, sent by human survivors of an apocalyptic war against machines. The cyborg’s mission is not only that of the messenger, to warn John, but also to protect him from an imminent attack. The Terminator’s mission, in short, is to provide John with a father, and in the end, the machine proves to be a better father than a man ever could—he keeps the boy alive when all others have failed. In the process, the Terminator also becomes a surrogate husband to Sarah Connor, and satisfies her needs for security, protection, and companionship. In his twin roles of father and husband, the Terminator shows that, in the realm of science fiction, the robot comes to inherit the role of its male creators.

Popular culture has long associated masculinity with robots. According to the logic of Western dream narratives—that of comic books, graphic novels, fantasy, and science fiction—masculine men, or super-men, are quite literally men of steel. When we explore the connection between robots and masculinity, we find that, in science fiction, the robot comes to embody a masculine perfection unattainable by biological men. In *Star Trek*, robots are more logical thinkers than men are; they are more powerful and, it is sometimes implied, they are better lovers. In *Terminator 2*, robots are better killers, and better fathers. Of course, robots lack an embodied soul, but perhaps that’s appropriate. For men, flesh has always been a liability—science fiction shows us that in the future, there will be more perfect men, for whom the phallus will be made of steel.

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# Eleanor Roosevelt

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*Maurine H. Beasley*

Every four years a U.S. presidential election foregrounds the roles likely to be played by the candidates' spouses—will a potential first lady be “another Eleanor Roosevelt,” journalists ask, meaning will she be a political activist in her own right like Roosevelt’s best-known successor, Hillary Rodham Clinton? Or will she follow a more traditional White House model of a wife, supporting her husband and being cautious in airing her own views like Barbara Bush and her daughter-in-law, Laura? According to reports in *Newsweek* and other news media, Roosevelt’s influence on Rodham Clinton was so great that she held imaginary conversations in the Clinton White House with her famous predecessor. Rodham Clinton apparently was endeavoring to determine whether Roosevelt’s example could provide guidance in coping with her own personal difficulties as a first lady criticized for allegedly being too powerful. It would be unlikely to find any more telling example of Roosevelt’s iconic status.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962) occupied an unparalleled place in the history of the twentieth century. Acclaim peaked at the time of her death on November 7, 1962. In a cartoon titled simply “It’s Her,” published on November 13, 1962 in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and widely reprinted elsewhere, Bill Mauldin pictured a group of angels peeking out from heavenly clouds to get a glimpse of a new arrival. There was no doubt to whom the cartoon referred. After years of being in the public eye, Eleanor Roosevelt had become a symbol of humanitarian concern for the downtrodden everywhere, acquiring the status of an icon known all over the globe.

Tributes flowed to her family from world leaders including President John F. Kennedy, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, Secretary-General of the United Nations U Thant, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and Queen Elizabeth of England. At the United Nations, U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson eulogized her in a memorable quotation. It was circulated throughout the world in Associated Press and United Press International dispatches of November 9, 1962: “She would rather light candles than curse the darkness.” The *New York Times* of November 11, 1962 praised her

devotion to duty along with “thirst for life and insatiable curiosity” that brought her stature “far beyond her position as a President’s wife and widow.”

As first lady from 1933 to 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt established a precedent for the wife of the United States to involve herself in good works on behalf of the nation. For years, both before and after her death, public opinion polls ranked her as the most admired American woman. Betty Winfield, a journalism historian, pointed out that she was the first president’s wife to play an important role in public, raising expectations in the political realm that her successors would (or should) do likewise. Lewis L. Gould, a scholar of first ladies, called attention to the use Roosevelt made of publicity to spotlight her activities.

Through lectures, press conferences for women journalists, radio and television broadcasts, magazine articles, a daily newspaper column, and some two dozen books, Roosevelt endeavored to communicate her ideas on political and social issues to a wide audience. She stood for racial justice, religious tolerance, government aid to the disadvantaged, and a host of causes linked to the liberal agenda of her day. A political partner to her husband and the mother of six children, one of whom died in infancy, she personified a gracious, motherly figure, nurturing those around her.

Even more importantly, when she left the White House after the unexpected death of her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, on April 12, 1945, she emerged as a powerful diplomatic force. Appointed U.S. delegate to the United Nations from 1946 to 1953, she led the successful effort to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A half-century later, Mary Ann Glendon, Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard University, praised the declaration as the foundation for the contemporary human rights movement and referred to it as Eleanor Roosevelt’s preeminent achievement.

Yet, her iconic status has not obscured the controversy that marked her career and continues to color reappraisals of her life by contemporary writers. Even in the midst of their profuse adjectives, Roosevelt’s obituaries, like some recent studies, were not altogether worshipful in tone. Writers commented on her personal appearance, noting that she had described herself as plain, and that she had experienced difficulties for many years with her mother-in-law, Sara Delano Roosevelt. For example Cynthia Lowry, an Associated Press feature writer who knew Roosevelt personally wrote in 1962 that “She was a curious mixture of kindly, deep concern for people and impersonality” who became interested “in individuals only when they had problems.” An Associated Press report from New York the previous day referred to her as being “as controversial as she was prominent,” adding, “loved or despised, she was a woman too vital ever to be ignored.”

Despite her iconic status today, historians still are trying to assess her influence as first lady, disagreeing on the extent of her impact on public policy. Gould, for instance, contended that she did not always focus her efforts productively. The extent of her feminism was argued based chiefly on

her opposition for many years to the proposed equal rights amendment on grounds it would wipe out protective legislation for women and children. Her sexuality and family relationships were hotly debated in the wake of the opening of correspondence between her and Lorena Hickok, a newspaper reporter and intimate friend. The nature of the correspondence, released to the public in 1978 by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, New York, suggested, but did not offer conclusive proof, of a lesbian relationship between the two women. The Roosevelt family denied such a relationship existed. Also, her attachment to Earl Miller, a highway patrolman who was her bodyguard in the pre-White House era, was scrutinized as a possible romance, although letters between the two have been lost and the exact nature of their friendship is unknown. Somewhat similarly, her friendships with Joseph P. Lash, who later became her biographer, and David Gurewitsch, her doctor, testified to her intense personal involvement with a few individuals who occupied an extraordinary place in her life.

Blanche Cook, who is writing a multivolumed biography of Roosevelt, contended at a centennial celebration of her life, “The truth is that a full understanding of her life requires an appreciation of its great complexity” (209–10). Roosevelt was a deep personality whose life took on many dimensions. Viewing her as an icon of sainthood masks the facts of her life. They reveal a woman who willingly described how she coped with adversity on several fronts, but kept other parts of her life separate from public scrutiny.

In her extensive career as a writer and speaker, Roosevelt referred to her own perception of herself as far less attractive than her beautiful mother, and gave details of a sad childhood in which she was orphaned by the time she was ten years old. She told of her insecurities as a young wife and mother and her resentment of what she saw as the domineering role of her mother-in-law. Relating how her interest in politics developed after her husband was stricken with infantile paralysis in 1921, Roosevelt called attention to a network of influential feminist associates. She pictured herself as a woman who emancipated herself from the conventional life of an upper-class matron, personified by her mother-in-law, while still fulfilling the role of a wife



Eleanor Roosevelt, 1945. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

helping her husband. "I was one of those who served his purposes," she wrote in assessing her husband's presidential legacy.

At the same time there was much that Roosevelt did not say. She did not reveal her emotional devastation in 1918 when she discovered her husband was having an affair with her social secretary, Lucy Mercer, and agreed to stay with him for the sake of the children and his political career. She made little reference to her own needs for understanding and affection, which she found with a select number of persons who were outside, rather than within, her own family. By no means did she touch on issues of her own sexuality. She did not deal with what appeared to be growing estrangement between her and her husband during World War II that led her to spend much time away from the White House. Neither did she reveal conflicts with and among her children. Nor did she delve deeply into her relationship with her mother-in-law, whom she may have depicted somewhat unfairly, according to a recent study by Jan Pottker.

No doubt, it is well for Roosevelt's iconic status that she did not. Factual data, which still is coming to light, may eventually result in a more realistic interpretation of her life. At present she is enshrined in American collective memory as a woman of superhuman devotion to others with little thought for herself.

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# Rosie the Riveter

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*Kathleen L. Endres*

When Westinghouse artist J. Howard Miller created a poster during World War II that featured an unnamed woman factory worker in overalls and bandanna, flexing her muscles and asserting “We Can Do It!” no one predicted the power that image would convey. Here was an image that captured the spunk, determination, and confidence of millions of American women who “enlisted” for war production. This image—Rosie the Riveter—also came to represent female empowerment for another generation of American women. Rosie the Riveter—as she appeared in that poster that debuted in Pittsburgh for the Westinghouse War Production Coordinating Committee in 1942—has been reproduced on millions of t-shirts, mugs, buttons, stickers, post-it notes, and Web sites as a sign of a strong woman—a feminist—who can accomplish anything.

A closer look at the Rosie the Riveter image of that poster—along with the World War II advertising and editorial content employing its appeal—suggests that feminists might be better served with another icon. There is a duality of meaning packed in the self-assured cultural icon named Rosie. During World War II, she embraced all the traditional values of the day—home, family, motherhood, and apple pie—even as she packed her lunchbox and headed out for the work that promised to speed victory. That Rosie looked forward to giving up her job, marrying her favorite GI, buying a house, and settling down for the *really* important work, raising a family. In contrast, the Rosie icon of the feminist movement promised much more. She took the slogan “We Can Do It!” literally. The feminist Rosie is strong enough to break traditional bonds and accomplish anything she wants. The feminist Rosie is one empowered babe.

It was inevitable that World War II Rosie would be a conservative lass, who embraced all the traditional values that had made America a great, powerful, affluent land (Honey 28–47; Lewis and Nevill 222–24). After all, she was at the very heart of a publicity campaign designed to bring millions of women into the workforce during the war. Developed within the War Advertising Council in 1942 and 1943, the Women in War Jobs/Industry



campaign, which continued until 1945, culminated in approximately 125 million advertisements in the major magazines in the nation. But this was not just an advertising campaign. Rosie the Riveter, the personification of this campaign, was a personality in motion pictures, radio programs, newspaper stories, magazine covers, and in-store displays. The Women in War Jobs/Industry campaign has been called one of the most successful recruitment campaigns in American history (“Women in War Jobs”).

Few advertising executives could have predicted such enormous success. Creating a personable image of a woman factory worker ran counter to accepted advertising practices of the time. As late as March 1942, an advertising executive bemoaned the fact that the only women featured in advertising were white-collar workers or housewives (Karp 26). But how do you portray a personable female factory worker, one that would be appealing to middle-class American women who clung to traditional values? One woman writer for *Advertising and Selling Magazine* thought she had the answer—develop an image of a female factory woman that reflected the values American women treasured. Advertisers needed to “appeal to women’s basic instincts—mother’s love, self-preservation, the search for happiness, the desire to improve their lot in life . . .—that is the starting point of powerful advertising to which women will react,” the writer observed. Advertisers needed to make a “heroine” of the “lady on the assembly line” (Carewe 23).

The Rosie the Riveter of World War II was the “heroine” on the assembly line. With few exceptions, Rosie was an attractive miss. Her hair might be tucked beneath a bandanna, but a curl always seemed to peek from beneath. Rosie might work a long, hard eight-hour shift, but her makeup remained perfect—arched eyebrows, a touch of mascara, a fresh application of lipstick, and, of course, the perfectly manicured, painted finger nails (“Announcing the New Grit”; “Tale of Lucy and Polly”; “Don’t Shirk War Work . . . Still, Don’t Let It Harm Your Charm”; “2,000,000 Girls with Paychecks Are Learning to Buy”). One “Trousered Angel” featured in the *Saturday Evening Post* had “lips like rose petals” (Lynch 84). The tiny miss who handled the heavy press had “spun-gold hair” (“Woman-power”). And one boss observed that the “Rosie” from the Pond’s advertisement had “‘as pretty a pair of hands as ever monkeyed a wrench’” (“Hints for Hands”). It was Rosie’s duty to keep up her appearance. As one advertisement for Formfit undergarments asserted, “everyone agrees that preserving feminine charm is a big factor in maintaining morale” (“Don’t Shirk War Work”). As another advertisement—for Tangee Lipstick—claimed, “It’s a reflection of the free democratic way of life that you [women workers] have succeeded in keeping your femininity—even though you are doing man’s work” (“War, Women and Lipstick”).

Moreover, Rosie never challenged gender-specific roles. She merely *transferred* her traditional responsibilities from the home to the workplace. Her sewing ability gave her an edge in everything from riveting airplanes to welding ships—or as a writer for the *Women’s Home Companion* emphasized, “Any woman who can run a sewing machine can run almost any

factory machine” (McNutt 41). One advertiser in the *Saturday Evening Post* boasted, “Give them [women workers] a rivet gun for a needle, sheets of metal for material, and these war workers will stitch you an airplane wing in half the time it used to take” (“Now, They’re Sewing Metal Twice as Fast”). “Joan of Arc,” a fictional character working in the shipyards, stitched “steel for fighting ships,” another advertiser asserted (“Joan of Arc Is Stitching Steel for Fighting Ships”).

Even Rosie’s experience in child rearing could be transferred to the workplace. Mothers had patience and that was an ideal trait for women working in a factory. The patient Rosie could easily deal with the endless routine of factory work. “Repetition, monotonous tasks fail to break down this care taking attitude,” observed one writer for *Advertising and Selling Magazine* (Gray 70). And was the kitchen all that different from a factory? One

advertisement for GE Mazda Lamps emphasized the similarities. A woman worker, writing to her husband away at war, explained that she had started at the war plant as a drill press operator. The factory, she assured her husband, was “bright and cheery as our own kitchen” (GE Mazda Lamps).

Rosie was retaining her feminine charms and keeping up her traditional skills—in the home or in the factory—because she was planning to return to the family after the war. According to advertisements and stories during World War II, Rosie never saw herself as a permanent employee in the factories. She was just “helping out” during a wartime crisis, showing her patriotic stripes, so to speak. But this was Rosie’s decision.

So inculcated with traditional values, Rosie looked forward to giving up her job and going home where her true responsibilities rested. As early as 1942, editors and advertisers were emphasizing this message. Two writers for the *Ladies’ Home Journal* insisted that young women working in war plants, “when the war’s over, will probably go home again and wash dishes” (Matthews and Hannah 30). As the war ground to a halt, a *Ladies’ Home Journal* survey asserted that the women looked forward to leaving their jobs,



Norman Rockwell’s cover illustration of “Rosie the Riveter” for the *Saturday Evening Post*, 1943. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

having families, and caring for their homes (Gilles 22–23). Even if some women wanted to keep their jobs, they were greatly influenced by popular opinion—and a real fear of being termed an “old maid” (“Woman’s New Independence”).

Rosie the Riveter of World War II accomplished much with her “We Can Do It” attitude. She encouraged women of wartime America to work outside the home in war-related industries—and thereby speed victory to the Allies. She accomplished this by emphasizing that women who worked outside the home during the war need not surrender any of their traditional values. Wartime working women could retain their femininity. They were not challenging traditional gender roles. They were merely *transferring* their traditional responsibilities from home to the workplace; and, at the end of the hostilities, they continued those same responsibilities from within the home.

What happened to the demure little miss with the “We Can Do It” attitude of World War II? She was introduced into a new cultural milieu. Stripped of her advertising and editorial context, Rosie the Riveter found herself smack dab in the middle of the feminist movement—and she was quite comfortable there.

When the women who were employed outside the home during World War II—the real-life Rosie the Riveters—went home, they married and raised a whole new generation of daughters. Those daughters were brought up with stories of how their mothers—and, in some cases, grandmothers—worked in munition plants and factories to help win the war. They had been, the mothers and grandmothers insisted, real-life Rosie the Riveters.

These daughters, who had been born in the first decade of the baby-boomer era, came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when the feminist movement was flourishing. Betty Friedan had identified the “problem with no name”—the dissatisfaction of middle-class housewives with their narrow role in society—in *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 15); Congress had passed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act barring discrimination in employment on the basis of race and sex and the Equal Pay Act; the Supreme Court struck down state laws prohibiting the use of contraceptives by married couples in *Griswold v. Connecticut*; feminists (including Friedan) had started the National Organization for Women, pledged to end sexual discrimination, especially in the work force; *Ms.* and a host of smaller periodicals had debuted to give voice to the feminist movement. Not all was well in feminism, however. Younger, radical feminists feuded with their more conservative sisters, over goals and strategies. Young feminists took to the streets—and were greatly lampooned by the press of the day. Meanwhile, the more conservative feminists pushed hard for a constitutional amendment. Finally in 1972, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and sent it to the states for ratification. As the feminist movement seemed to be on the brink of unparalleled success, hopes were dashed when the ERA fell just three states short of ratification. (Felder 243–51, 265–74).

The feminist movement seemed fractured, stalled.

What American feminism needed was a new icon, one that would be non-threatening but empowering, one that would bring middle-class women into the fold and galvanize the next generation of feminists.

Into this breach came a pleasant little miss with a “We Can Do It!” attitude. Rosie the Riveter was the ideal icon for feminism for several reasons. She appealed to the baby-boomer generation, many of whom were active in the feminist movement. These women had grown up hearing the stories of how their mothers and grandmothers had speeded victory for the Allies by working in factories. These women realized that no one ever doubted Rosie the Riveter’s patriotism. No one ever lampooned Rosie’s strategies or motives.

Moreover, much of Rosie the Riveter’s editorial baggage had long been forgotten. The stories and advertisements—that told how Rosie needed to be ever attractive, how she did not break the bonds of her traditional roles, and how she needed to return to the home after winning a war—had long been filed away, seldom consulted.

But there was also a more practical reason why Rosie the Riveter was the ideal new icon for feminism. When she was created in Pittsburgh in 1942, neither the artist, J. Howard Miller, nor Westinghouse ever got around to copyrighting the image of the girl with the “We Can Do It!” attitude. That meant that the Pittsburgh-born miss could be reproduced in publications, t-shirts, stationary, post-it notes, and anything else without fear of copyright infringement or paying royalties.

And, thus, the feminist Rosie the Riveter emerged. Stripped of her editorial and advertising bondage, Rosie emerged with a new identity. She could do anything. She could accomplish anything. She was one empowered babe.

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# Route 66

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*Thomas A. Greenfield*

Aristotle got it right. Tragedy stays put. Epic and romance move around. As America enters a third century of defining its cultural identity, the genres of mobility—epic adventure and romantic journey—have emerged as the national narrative forms of choice. From Lewis and Clark, to the Underground Railroad, to the California Gold Rush, to Huck Finn, to *Easy Rider*, the quintessential American story (whether literary, historical, or cinematic) tells the tale of the willful, restless optimist heading out from the oppression of Who-Needs-This to the undefined promise of God-Knows-Where.

Remarkable in its persistence, the American journey as rite of passage and consecration of cultural citizenship has changed little in two hundred fifty years of post-colonial history. Making adaptations in logistics as necessitated by the passage of time, the American pilgrimage evolved in the twentieth century from a pioneering quest onto uncharted waterways and newly-blazed wagon trails to a modern automobile journey along America's byways and back roads. In the literature and folklore of such journeys, the one road that came to symbolize the spirit of every automotive quest and the adventures that it held was U.S. Route 66, stretching 2,400 miles from Chicago to Los Angeles.

At various times in its history and various locations along its path, Route 66 was at once a smoothly paved highway, a foreboding desert trail, a country back road, and the chain that linked together countless small town main streets across the Midwest and South. In the late 1930s Route 66 embodied all the promise of America's ascendance to international power as it supported newly emerging truck commerce and pre-war military preparations running east and west. Only a few years earlier it was the primary roadway for desperate families fleeing the Oklahoma Dust Bowl for California, aided, abetted, and often rescued by the "mom and pop" gas stations, diners, and auto campgrounds that lined its path. And as the one highway in America's first nationally planned public road system specifically designed to link small towns together, Route 66 gave shape and form to the still resilient, mythical idea of Small Town, USA.

Form followed function and so did fable. By the time it was decommissioned as a U.S. highway in 1985, Route 66 had come to represent, as one anonymous traveler noted, “a multitude of ideas: freedom, migration west, and the loneliness of the American heartland.” Often adulated through personification, Route 66’s “resumé” rivals that of an A-list celebrity. It is the subject of over 100 books and documentaries, and it “Googles” over 1 million Web references. It has its own national museum. It inspired a popular hit song that has been recorded over 100 times (at least once in each of the past seven decades) as well as a solid-selling tribute CD album of eleven different songs devoted exclusively to it. It commands its own chapter in one of the greatest American novels ever written, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and as a long-running, golden-age-of-television weekly series it in turn, fire-glazed the myth of the Chevrolet Corvette convertible, an American cultural icon in its own right.

The free-spirited independence and solitude commonly associated with Route 66 belie the highly political and bureaucratic nature of its creation. From the Civil War era to the end of the nineteenth century, road transportation was a local matter. Federal interest in transportation was confined to trains and shipping. The early 1890s saw a shift in public attitude toward a definitive government role in road-building, owing to the popularity of the bicycle and a growing awareness that the automobile was looming on the



Route 66 gave shape and form to the still-resilient, mythical idea of Small Town, USA. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

horizon. In 1893 the federal government took its first baby step into roadway development, creating an Office of Road Inquiry to provide states and local communities with roadway engineering advice and other consultant services (Weingroff). With the advent of the automobile in the mid-1890s, public demand for better roads developed in earnest. Travel advocacy groups (more or less early political action committees, including the now ubiquitous AAA founded in 1902) sprang up all across the country. Their efforts came to be known collectively as the Good Roads Movement, which pressed for improved roads (constructed with the newest technology: pavement), durable automobiles, and accurate maps.

Events leading to a national road system moved rapidly thereafter. The first transcontinental automobile trip on record occurred in 1903 with much ballyhoo and fanfare. In 1907 the Supreme Court ruled that federal funding and management of roadways were legitimate, constitutional exercises of government authority. By 1908, Henry Ford had introduced the Model T, making automobile ownership affordable for the middle class. The idea of widespread individual automotive ownership and road travel over long distances, only fifteen years earlier a remote fantasy, was now a vision coming quickly into focus and a dream clamoring to come true. To its credit, the federal government was paying attention.

The 1910s saw a flurry of federal legislative lobbying efforts as farmers, arguing for rural farm-to-market roads, contested with motorists' associations advocating for national highways. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1916, the first major congressional legislation to fund road planning, supported the farmers over the motorists groups. However, the fact that Congress had appropriated funds for road construction at all catalyzed political efforts to create a national highway system.

A journey of inestimable significance occurred in 1919, when the army conducted its first successful cross-country troop convoy. This accomplishment might have amounted to little more than a footnote in American highway history but for the fact that along for the ride was 28-year-old Lt. Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower, whose excitement about the journey made of him a lifelong advocate for progressive road travel. Twenty years later, as general of the U.S. army preparing for America's entry into World War II, Eisenhower would send convoys of troops west on Route 66 for assignment and training. As President in the 1950s, he would place what would become today's interstate highway system at the top of his administration's agenda (D'este 143).

A 1921 revision of the original Federal-Aid Highway Act called on states to identify local roads for possible inclusion in a forthcoming national highway system. A federally-supported national roadway system was finally "on the table" in Washington, and ensuing lobbying efforts for competing master plans and route locations became intense.

A Chicago-to-Los Angeles route was an early "no-brainer" priority floating in Washington during the lobbying period. However, the idea of having that



route dip south into Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, linking town main streets along the way, was the result of local visionary thinking and hardball public relations. Many of the national highways were being planned as direct-route, high-speed roadways for commerce, which would necessitate bypassing population centers. Small town businesses and politicians felt threatened by this concept and pressed for compromises on behalf of local communities. The idea of designating a national roadway running through small towns, rather than away from them, linking “Main Streets Across America” is generally attributed to Cyrus Avery, an Oklahoma oil and coal entrepreneur. Avery and his supporters “sold” the federal government on the idea of running the Chicago-to-Los Angeles route diagonally through towns and cities of the southwest red-clay region, including Avery’s hometown of Tulsa.

The year of consecration was 1926. Congress formally approved a national highway system, appropriating funds and developing national policies for highway paving and maintenance. A newly-created Federal Highway Commission formally numbered and mapped out the designated national highways, conferring upon Avery’s Chicago to Los Angeles diagonal “red line” across America’s heartland the seemingly innocuous name “U.S. Route 66.” That same year Henry Ford, America’s leading automobile manufacturer, lowered the price of some of his models and increased production, anticipating correctly that the next phase of his good fortunes lay in expanded volume and the rising expectation of the average American family that they could and should own a car (Weingroff). By 1927 credit purchases of automobiles would exceed cash purchases. One year later, Herbert Hoover would be elected to office on a campaign of prosperity that promised famously a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage.

By the time the Great Depression hit in 1929, Hoover’s prophecy on automobile ownership may have been more accurate than his prophecy on chickens. By then Ford had sold 15 million Model T’s alone and total automobile sales had reached approximately 30 million since the 1890s. Ownership rates from the outset were higher in small towns and rural areas than cities, because rural economy and culture had long-since depended upon individual transportation afforded by horse and wagon. Many small town and rural families who had not been prosperous even during the 1920s boom nonetheless owned a family car at the start of the Depression. For many of them, that car and U.S Route 66 would be their salvation as the economy and the weather turned against them in the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

The flight of “Dust Bowl Okies” was a well-known social phenomenon before Steinbeck immortalized it in his 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. But Steinbeck is duly credited with initiating the cultural mythology of Route 66 by making that road the focus and symbol of all automotive flights from Depression-era poverty. The novel’s immortal Chapter 12, devoted entirely to the particulars of life on 66 during the Depression, conferred upon Route 66 two of its most enduring appellations, “The Mother Road” and “The road of flight,” and immortalized the highway with apocalyptic solemnity:

66 is the path of people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northern invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all of these, the people are in flight. (118)

Its federal highway designation notwithstanding, pavement of U.S. Route 66 was not completed until the end of the decade, and the journey of Steinbeck's minions was often long, difficult, and hazardous. Steinbeck's migrant families are eerily reminiscent of eighteenth-century American pioneer covered-wagon parties, with flat rubber tube tires replacing broken wagon wheels and gasping engines replacing dying horses. Gas was as precious as the early settlers' water . . . and in summer so was water. The kindness of strangers and the camaraderie of the shared journey intersected with larceny and even violence spawned by the pressures of limited supplies, fuel, time, and patience.

In a curious way Steinbeck's stark portrait of life along Route 66 validated Cyrus Avery's wide-eyed vision of a single American main street. Steinbeck's narrative names towns along the way, in many cases immortalizing places heretofore unheralded outside of their own regions: "66 across the Panhandle of Texas, Shamrock and McClean, Conway and Amarillo . . . then the high mountains, Holbrook and Winslow and Flagstaff . . . and then the great plateau rolling like a groundswell. Ashfork and Kingman" (118–19). Thereafter, the naming of towns became essential to chronicling the Route 66 journey—a theme picked up in song, story, and a weekly television series.

By the 1950s America's economy and morale had progressed from the grimness of the Depression and World War II to a new era of prosperity. Young war veterans and their families excitedly set out by car for new lives in the burgeoning suburbs of America's cities and the flowering economy of the West Coast. As the fortunes of this new car-driving, car-driven middle class grew, so did the legend of Route 66, now a major route for westbound emigration to the tan-lined promised land of Southern California. Motorists on this far more pleasant journey than the trip Steinbeck chronicled still celebrated the adventure of discovering America along 66's main streets just as they had a generation earlier. No single artifact of popular culture embraced the post-war Route 66 adventure so richly as did the hit song by which most people probably yet know its lore and legend, Bobby Troup's "Get Your Kicks on Route 66."

The genesis of the song embodies postwar optimism as powerfully as does the song itself. In 1946 Troup, a young pianist, songwriter, and newly discharged war veteran, set out from Pennsylvania toward Route 66, hoping eventually to make it in the Los Angeles music scene. Troup claims, credibly enough, he wrote most of the song on a motor trip west, and used Steinbeck's naming devices from St. Louis, Missouri; through Amarillo, Gallup, and Flagstaff; to Ponoma, California. Troup's turn of fortunes bore out the



The Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas, on Route 66. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

joyous, youthful swagger of his verse. Promptly upon his arrival in Los Angeles, he got the song into the hands of music executives and within a few weeks he joined all America in listening to Nat King Cole snappin' out his hit tune on radios across the nation.

The broad, sustained appeal of the song's upbeat, man-on-the-move message is reflected in the astonishing array of artists who have recorded it in the sixty years since its initial release: 1940s pop icons Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters; 1950s jazzmen Oscar Peterson and Mel Torme; then rock superstars Chuck Berry, the Rolling Stones, and Van Morrison; 1980s British electro-pop's Depeche Mode; country crooner Michael Martin Murphy and honkytonkers Asleep at the Wheel, among some 100 others. In the twenty-first century, the song found new life, perhaps even immortality, by way of regular inclusion in "song packs" for Karaoke machines.

The legend of Route 66 received yet another boost from popular culture in the early 1960s with a four-year run of a CBS weekly television series of the same name. While not great television, *Route 66* added well-drawn characters and filmed-on-location adventures to the folklore of its namesake. Debuting only five years after publication of Jack Kerouac's classic Beat novel *On the Road*, the *Route 66* television series charmed with well-written road stories, amiable young stars (Martin Milner and George Maharis), a hot convertible car, and a nimble instrumental theme by soundtrack maestro Nelson Riddle. (Urban legend to the contrary, Kerouac's *On the Road* has very little connection to Route 66. Kerouac traveled on and around U.S. Route 6, a northern, lesser known numeric first cousin of 66.)

Even as the television series was making its mark on Route 66's cultural legacy, the federal government was well on its way to orchestrating the

demise of the original national highway system—and Route 66 along with it. The end of the road for Route 66 came in the form of today's interstate highway system, a federal approach to roadway planning that was different from the original U.S. route system in both degree and kind. While the original U.S. routes were so many disconnected strands of cross country roadway, the emerging interstate highway system laid out interconnected regionally-based roadways to form a true, national network. Moreover, nationwide access to “superhighways,” with more and wider lanes, upgraded pavement, roadside amenities, direct routes, and high speed limits (at all costs bypassing residential areas that would slow down traffic) had by the mid-1950s taken on the status of an inalienable human right. Eisenhower made the new interstate highway system a top priority of his presidency and Congress went along with him. In 1956 a new Federal-Aid Highway Act gave birth to “the Interstate,” signaling the end of the U.S. route as the motorist's road of choice.

Over time the original U.S. routes were formally decommissioned, losing their status as federal projects and eligibility for highway funds. Route 66 was decommissioned in 1985 but, having already been subsumed by several Interstate routes, had long since ceased to be a heavily traveled thoroughfare. Lack of federal funding and motorist adoration of the Interstate resulted in physical deterioration of many of the original U.S. routes. Today several stretches of Route 66 are no longer traversable or do not even exist.

Nevertheless, Route 66 as a vivid image of the restless modern American spirit survives in the legacy of Steinbeck's novel, along with Troup's song, countless academic and trade publications, auto museums, numerous Route 66 preservation and revival societies, the memories and tall tales of old timers, and the surviving roadside gas stations and diners that still cater to the off-road traveler embarked upon the definitive twentieth-century American journey.

For many Americans, perhaps for America itself, Route 66 will always be *the way west*.

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# Babe Ruth

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*J. Peter Williams*

You know, I saw it happen, from beginning to end. But sometimes I still can't believe what I saw: this nineteen-year-old kid, crude, poorly educated, only lightly brushed by the veneer we call civilization, gradually transformed into the idol of American youth and the symbol of baseball the world over—a man loved by more people and with an intensity of feeling that perhaps has never been equaled before or since. I saw a man transformed from a human being into something pretty close to a god.

—Harry Hooper, Babe Ruth's teammate on the 1918–1919 Red Sox

The point of departure in approaching any iconic figure is always this: public figures lead two distinct and separate lives. One, of course, is the natural life of the individual, a progress through time, shared by everyone, from birth through life and, ultimately, to death. The other is a mythical life unintentionally contrived by a usually adoring public, a public comprised of people who, with few exceptions, have no personal connection with or knowledge of the icon. When Red Smith said that George Herman Ruth had an “uncanny sense of the theater,” he had it backwards; the epic drama in which Ruth starred was really written by the fans.

As Harry Hooper suggests, the popular construction of a mythical figure is no different from deification, and the icon that results will usually have qualities we associate with gods. Here is a partial checklist: (1) great strength, even as a child or an old man; (2) magical powers and the ability to work miracles; (3) a Dionysiac, Olympian appetite; (4) immortality, and (5) eventual martyrdom. If an individual who is prominent in the public eye can possess one or some of these qualities, that person is likely to become an icon.

Babe Ruth had all of them.

One of the obvious proofs of Ruth's rank at the very top of the iconic pantheon is that his name has become a standard of excellence against which anyone, in any field, might be measured. Robert Creamer gives a few examples: Willie Sutton was “the Babe Ruth of bank robbers,” Franco Correlli was “the Babe Ruth of operatic tenors,” Alfred A. Knopf was “the Babe Ruth

of copy editors” (16). Creamer’s book is thirty years old, but the analogies persist: on Mia Hamm’s retirement from women’s soccer in 2004, the headline in the sports section of the December 8 *New York Times* emphasized that she would have a place in sports history “LIKE RUTH.”

In most cases, a hero’s iconic life is measured in stages, years or decades in his career which call him most to mind: think of Sinatra the teen idol, Sinatra the failure and, finally, Sinatra the jazz singer and leader of the Rat Pack, or of Cassius Clay the loudmouth morphing into the international hero Ali. Babe Ruth’s mythical history is different in that it is best measured less in temporal periods than in isolated (and very dramatic) moments. True, he hit 714 home runs during his career, but the one he hit in September 1927, his sixtieth of the season, is much better remembered. For that matter, can all of us remember the very recent year Barry Bonds set the new record? Or what it is? And, yes, Ruth was a Catholic Democrat who allowed his name to be used in support of Al Smith over Herbert Hoover in the presidential election of 1928, but all we recall is one comment: when, just after the stock market crash, he was asked why he made more money than the Republican incumbent, Ruth pointed out that he should have, because he’d had a much better year.

Still, isolated moments can define an iconic trajectory as well as chronological periods and, in Ruth’s case, they clearly do. In 1914, for example, the young hero (he was not nicknamed “Babe” for his good looks) was poorly treated by Red Sox veterans and stars Tris Speaker and “Smokey” Joe Wood. Rather than sit still, Ruth got the Boston manager, Bill Carrigan, to call a team meeting for him. In that meeting Ruth said that if Speaker and Wood did not agree to stop their hazing, he wanted to fight them then and there, in the locker room. Speaker and Wood said nothing. The hazing stopped. Ruth was 20 years old.

Ruth’s strength, of course, is legendary. Maris, Aaron, McGwire, and Bonds never hit home runs as long as the ones Ruth stopped hitting in 1935. Often Ruth seems to be the figure Bernard Malamud modelled on him in *The Natural*, or one based on the earlier legend of Arthur and *Excalibur*. Descriptions of Ruth’s bat—Malamud’s *Wonderboy* or Arthur’s sword—underscore that power.

It weighed fifty-four ounces, and, as he told F. C. Lane, “I have enough strength to swing it . . . when I meet the ball, I want to feel that I have something in my hands that will make it travel.” Jim Bottomley, a pitcher, said his hand was sore for three days after fielding one of Ruth’s drives (Wallace 59, 198–200). Damon Runyon was relieved that Babe hit few line drives through the infield, because “he would kill or dangerously injure any man who got in front of one of his powerful punches at short distance” (Reisler 107). In *Headin’ Home*, the 1921 silent film in which Ruth starred (and in which he looks remarkably youthful, even thin), he whittles his own bat from a large tree limb and immediately starts hitting more home runs than anyone else. As “Bugs” Baer, who wrote the film subtitles, put it, “he made



Babe Ruth crossing the plate after hitting his first home run of the season, 1924. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

the nation of leagues forget the League of Nations.” Or as the *New York Times* said in the year the film came out (1921 was one year after the non-fictional Babe’s first great season, the year he hit one home run for every ounce in his bat), “Sir Isaac Newton would have found out much about the laws of gravitation if he had seen Ruth bang baseballs. He probably would have decided that there weren’t any” (Reisler 201). Finally, of course, there was 1927, when he used his version of Excalibur or Wonderboy to hit sixty.

Ruth’s strength seemed, if not supernatural, at least superhuman—or possibly even atavistic, the strength of a neanderthal. The *Times* said that “with no weapon but a primitive club” he made “the famed clubbers of the Stone Age” look as if they were playing badminton. His teammate Joe Dugan, wondering where on earth Ruth had come from, said he couldn’t simply have been born. “The sonofabitch fell from a tree,” he said. In fact, Ruth was himself the standard against which he was measured. “You can’t compare him with anybody else,” said his first Yankee manager, Miller Huggins. “He’s Babe Ruth” (Reisler 230, 109, 129).

Nor did Ruth lose his legendary strength even as an old player. On May 25, 1935, he hit his last major league home run, number 714, in Forbes Field. His legs were so shot the pitcher who threw him that ball said Babe could only hobble around the bases. That last home run was Babe’s third of the day, the

first ever hit over the right field grandstand and the longest ever hit in Forbes Field, a very spacious park. The pitcher who watched Ruth limp around the bases was Guy Bush, the same man who had needled Ruth from the Cubs' dugout just before Babe's "called shot" in the 1932 World Series.

Ruth's final home run in Pittsburgh was unusual in that, although it became part of the iconic legend, it was also a tremendous effort by a real man. That was not the case with the "called shot." The "called shot," possibly still the most famous home run in baseball history (with due apologies to Messrs. Thomson, Mazeroski, Fisk, and Dent), provides a clear example of the individual diverging from the icon. Virtually all serious authority agrees that the Babe never pointed to center field, to the exact spot in the bleachers where his drive would land, before he hit that pitch. The myth, however, was both too good to be true and too good to pass up. Ruth *was* gesturing angrily, and he *did* point, but probably either to Guy Bush on the Cubs' bench or at Charlie Root on the mound. Still, and as is always the case with icons, the myth is what we remember. Ruth, in his role as magician and miracle-worker, promised something only divinity can achieve, and he delivered. Even eyewitnesses who clearly knew better consciously chose denial. Here is sports-writer Joe Williams on his preference for fable over fact:

This much I do know. Even if Ruth didn't mean it, the thunderous drama still lives in my memory. And no amount of testimony to the contrary is ever going to change it in the slightest. I always was a pushover for wonderful fairy tales, anyway. (Williams 64)

The other memorable miracle in Ruth's iconic life also involves promising a home run and then hitting one (this moment remains vivid enough to have inspired a *Seinfeld* episode involving Kramer and latter-day Yankee Paul O'Neill). In 1926, just before the World Series, 11-year-old Johnny Sylvester was in hospital after being thrown by a horse. A friend of his father with a clubhouse "in" brought Johnny a bunch of autographed baseballs along with Ruth's promise to hit a home run in the Series. The Series went a full seven games, and Babe, with twenty at-bats, hit four homers, later visiting a delighted Johnny in his sick room. Not a bad performance for an individual ballplayer, but not good enough for an icon. The legend insists that Johnny was dying, that Babe picked the game and at-bat for a single home run, and that it saved Johnny's life.

Ruth had great strength, then, both as a youth and as a has-been; and he had (or, rather, was assigned by his adoring public) a magical capacity to work miracles. Given what we already knew, how could his appetites be moderate, even human? It's hard to imagine where to start in this category. He was a notorious womanizer who often entertained a plural number of women a night and who, according to Creamer, "was very noisy in bed, visceral grunts and gasps and whoops." He had, according to the same source, by far the foulest mouth in the Yankee clubhouse. And he ate and



drank enough for half a dozen men, with predictable results. “He belched magnificently,” says Creamer, “and, I was told, could fart at will.” Among Ruth’s numerous trophies, in fact, was one of which he was inordinately proud. “I won first place in a farting contest,” he said, pointing it out to a friend. “Honest. Read the writing on it. Boy, I had to down a lot of beer and limburger to win that one” (Creamer 321, 329, 320, 326).



Babe Ruth autographing a wooden statue of himself made by Carl Hallsthammar, 1930. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The single moment that best illustrates the Babe’s Dionysiac propensities is given an entire chapter by Creamer: “The Disaster: The Bellyache Heard Round the World.” Once again, there is a gulf between icon and individual. According to the Ruth myth, one of two cardinal sins put him in the hospital, either gluttony or lust. W. O. McGeehan circulated the story that it was gluttony, that, trying to match his season record for home runs (in 1925, when the Babe got sick, it was fifty-nine), he had tried to eat the equivalent number of hot dogs. The other version, spread *sotto voce* among those who thought the sin was lust, was that McGeehan’s hot dog tale was just a ruse, a cover-up to prevent Mrs. Ruth from discovering that her husband was really being treated for a severe venereal infection. The truth, if less flamboyant, was far more dangerous, too much of an early reminder that, however iconic, Babe Ruth was still a very vulnerable and mortal human individual: he had diverticulitis, a frequently fatal condition, and only immediate surgery saved him.

Because the operation on the human was a complete success, the public could return to considering Ruth as the unshakable divinity he had always seemed, the man virtually every biographer calls a “legend,” an “immortal,” a “god” who “transcended sport,” a hero who added the word “Ruthian”—roughly synonymous with “Jovian” or “Jehovan”—to the dictionary. Ruth the god was not so much above the law as beyond it: once, driving the wrong way down a one-way street, he was pulled over by an angry cop who immediately softened when he recognized the Babe, even apologizing for slowing him down. Another time, in training camp in Shreveport in 1921, the locals gave Apollo a chariot, a brand-new luxury car with no plates, only “Babe Ruth’s Essex” painted on the spare, and he was, of course, never stopped.

When the god finally proved himself only an exceptional individual by having the temerity to die, it was hard if not impossible to accept. At the funeral, one of Ruth's pallbearers, Joe Dugan, turned to another, Waite Hoyt, and said, "I'd give a hundred bucks for an ice-cold beer." "So would the Babe," Hoyt said (Ritter and Rucker 289). A pitching coach frustrated by his staff's reluctance to challenge hitters wanted to remind them that they would never have to face the greatest hitter in history, so he had a T-shirt made. "Babe Ruth Is Dead," it read: "Throw Strikes!" (Rubin 69). Red Smith marvelled at the god's lasting power, how—even long after the individual's death—he seemed "insistently alive," and Creamer, the best of the biographers, said as much, pointing out the essential difference between indomitable icon and fragile man: "Ruth lives, all around us," he said, adding that, even though he had the historian's obligation to be objective, "Ruth is alive for me, too" (Creamer 17, 18).

But George Herman Ruth is not alive. He has been dead for more than half a century. In 1947 he grew very sick, and in June 1948 attended the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Yankee Stadium, "The House That Ruth Built." He had been given two earlier "Babe Ruth Days," both in 1947, but this is the one we remember, if only for the famous photograph of a thin and ravaged Babe using his bat as a cane. George Herman Ruth died of the cancer he probably didn't know he had on the morning of August 17, 1948, at age 53. In doing so he achieved one more quality of the icon, martyrdom. Had he lived beyond middle age, like his rival Ty Cobb and most of the other stars of his era, some of the mythical luster might have been tarnished, but when the individual exits not long after the icon stops playing, the public has more reason to preserve the heroic image of a man denied old age.

There is one more iconic quality that can conveniently be attributed to Babe Ruth: that he was the emblem of the culture of his time. Ruth was as perfectly suited as any public figure to the free-wheeling, high-living atmosphere of the 1920s and early 1930s—as, for example, his polite and Columbia-educated teammate Lou Gehrig was not. Babe drank with Bix Beiderbecke, asked Marshal Foch if he had been in World War I, and, in the Second, got fan mail *from* Betty Grable. His name was even used by the enemy in an attempt to dishearten our troops: Japanese soldiers in the Pacific theater would shout "To hell with Babe Ruth!" before they attacked. But his real era was the period between the wars. One historian put it succinctly: "Ruth's heyday, 1921 to 1933, was in relation to the American era of which his incredible home run performance was so spectacular a part if not, indeed, symbol. . . . He was *the* American success story of the 1920's" (Meany 162).

Just as Frank Sinatra epitomized the urban "cool" of the fifties and Muhammad Ali served to represent the rebellious sixties and seventies, so did the Dionysiac Ruth personify the melodrama and colorful hedonism of his era. In looking over his twin careers—his progress through life as both individual and popular icon—it's hard to resist a bit of wistful melancholy, a sadness in knowing we can't attend a Dempsey fight, or watch Walter Hagen play golf

in the tux he was still wearing from last night's party, or find a speakeasy with a password like "swordfish," or sit down at a table in the Stork and share a martini with Nick and Nora Charles.

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# Scrapbook

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## *Patricia Prandini Buckler*

The enthusiasm for scrapbooking today is massive—by some estimates one in every four American households makes and keeps scrapbooks—and lucrative, estimated at \$2.5 billion per year. The magnitude of this pastime and the mass production of supplies and materials would seem to indicate that scrapbook-making is a phenomenon of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In reality, today's scrapbook makers ("scrapbookers" in their jargon) are engaged in a practice with long and deep connections in American culture.

Teresa Viewegh of Greenwood, Indiana, typifies modern scrapbookers. Shortly after the birth of her first child, Viewegh and her mother-in-law, Brenda, attended a scrapbooking party sponsored by the giant scrapbook materials supplier, Creative Memories. Teresa wanted to begin a scrapbook of photographs to record her son's growth and development, along with their family and friends. She also hoped a common hobby would cultivate a closer relationship with her mother-in-law. The two women have been scrapbooking now for six years—they have strengthened their friendship and produced numerous decorated pages of photos and other memorabilia marking events in their lives.

Teresa explained in an interview on June 3, 2005, that although she started the hobby in order to save and display photos, she continues it for many other reasons. Once a month she gets together with a group of friends to work on their scrapbooks, usually for six or seven hours on a Friday night. These gatherings allow them, mostly busy mothers, to visit and catch up with one another's news, while providing a scheduled time for them to update their scrapbooks. They enjoy socializing as much as they enjoy crafting their pages. At other times, Teresa and Brenda get together at one of their homes to crop, cut, and paste. Once a year, the group goes on a weekend scrapbooking retreat at some vacation cottages. The purpose is to "crop 'til you drop." They also take classes from Creative Memories consultants that introduce new methods or materials for enhancing their pages, such as the use of die cuts, stickers, rubber stamps, eyelets, and stencils.

From sources such as *Creative Memories*, *Creating Keepsakes Magazine*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*, they have learned to follow several basic principles: tell a story, identify everybody, record the dates and the ages of the kids, and explain the activity or event portrayed. Additional “journaling” includes writing thoughts that others might enjoy reading later. For Teresa, describing her feelings about her son at different stages is as important as recording his facial expressions, his first steps, and his first words.



Teresa Viewegh proudly displays her scrapbook. Courtesy of Patricia Buckler.

In fact, Teresa and Brenda and their millions of co-hobbyists are participating in an American practice pursued for nearly 250 years. The Library of Congress’s online catalog cites a “Scrapbook of poetry, newspaper clippings, etc., ca. 1760” (LC Control Number mm 83093096); and another “Scrapbook of newspaper clippings, etc. . . . : commonplace book, 1770–1846” (LC Control Number mm 82075671).

Over the years, the form and materials have changed along with the tastes and technology of the times. Yet for individuals and institutions alike, the scrapbook (also referred to as “album,” “friendship book,” and “self book”) has persisted as a focal point for compiling and organizing information, preserving memories, exploring identity, and expressing creativity. Scrapbooks also served as repositories for collections of color advertising cards, clippings on specific topics, or educational materials, and even as herbaria.

The scrapbook evolved from the commonplace book, a type of school book used for copying exercises. Usually the child would copy excerpts of classical works and their translations, quotations of wisdom and virtue from the Scriptures, famous authors, or preachers, poems, and other bits of literature or “scraps.” (One American commonplace book in the Perkins Library Special Collections at Duke University is dated 1720. However, the practice of the commonplace book in Europe can be traced as far back as the Middle Ages.) Besides learning the languages, practicing penmanship, and internalizing wisdom and virtue, the student was expected to keep the commonplace book as a lifelong repository of quotations for use in everyday life. Compiling books for storing all types of information was a natural extension of the schoolroom practice. When paper and printing became inexpensive early in the 1800s, people clipped interesting or important passages. Many pasted over the writing in their commonplace books, and others thriftily recycled business or domestic account books in this manner. While the

making of copy and commonplace books continued, the scrapbook genre began to go in its own direction.

For many, the making of scrapbooks, albums, or friendship books combined an impulse to preserve memories with the urge to record, examine, and appraise the bits and pieces of an individual's daily life. These personal memento volumes included singular, hand-created items such as autographs, handwritten poems or prose pieces, drawings, and theorem paintings (paintings made from an arrangement of stencils on paper or cloth), as well as objects with emotional associations, such as ornaments, fanciwork, locks of hair and jewelry (Motz 75). Items were arranged in a manner that made sense of personal experience by systematizing it. Handwritten comments often complemented the pasted-in items, indicating their personal or historical significance (Allen and Hoverstadt 16).

In the nineteenth century, girls and young women used their leisure time to compile friendship albums (a type of scrapbook with a specific focus). The blank books, made by hand or purchased from a local printer, were passed among friends who hand-inscribed verses, quotations, pictures, or glued in cuttings from mass-produced sources. Judging by diary entries, letters, and domestic advice books of the day, composing albums was considered a leisure activity but not a frivolous one. Order, symmetry, and system were valued qualities. Family members discussed the appropriateness of various submissions, and contributors frequently practiced their drawings, paintings, and penmanship elsewhere beforehand, so that the actual entry would be flawless. It was customary for individuals to collect scraps on a variety of subjects so that a suitable contribution could be made (Smith 66–69).

Advances in color printing technologies made printed colored images available for use in albums early in the nineteenth century. These “scraps” or “chromos” were the leftover pieces from larger printing jobs, sold to collectors who preserved them in books or scrapbooks. Other printing inventions and improvements contributed even more paper collectibles, until printed paper artifacts became common.

In 1825 a serial called *The Scrapbook* described the hobby of scrapbooks as the keeping of a blank book in which pictures, newspaper cuttings, and the like were pasted for safe-keeping. Cheap printing and the invention of photography tapped into the collecting urge of an increasingly capitalistic society, and people hoarded mass-produced paper items such as newspaper and magazine clippings, valentines and other greeting cards, invitations and programs, trade cards and printed scraps. Although colored scraps were added to personal memento scrapbooks, they also became the focus of collections, resulting in albums dedicated to preserving and displaying them. In true American fashion, advances in technology and increased prosperity fostered a hobby available to all. By the mid-nineteenth century, scrapbooks had become icons of American culture.

Nineteenth-century entrepreneurs recognized the commercial potential of scrapbooks. Besides scraps and other ephemera especially produced and marketed for scrapbooks, the blank volumes themselves became customized.

Some were preprinted with headings, picture frames, and quotations that suggested organizational patterns; some had pages of different colors for different sections; some had star connections such as the Jenny Lind scrapbook featuring a frontispiece portrait of the glamorous opera singer. The Mark Twain Scrapbook, patented in 1873, came with pages precoated with mucilage—one moistened the glue and applied the scraps.

Scrapbooks signify both the individual maker and the culture in which they are created. Although many are autobiographical statements, many more reflect the particular interests or obsessions of their compilers. Scrapbooks were created with single subjects or with single types of materials—they focused on a particular individual, historical event, stage or opera star, disaster, or world's fair. An extremely popular subject for collectors was the theater. These scrapbooks, found today in almost all library special collections, can be single format—devoted to playbills, photographs, drawings, or ticket stubs—or they can concentrate on a single performer, theater, company, or genre.

Scrapbooks were made to mourn lost loved ones. These books held death and funeral announcements, obituaries, personal writings about the deceased, condolence notes, prayers, religious poems, locks of the deceased's hair, sentimental verses and, after the advent of photography, photos of those who had passed away. Photographs and paintings of dead infants and of mourners grouped around an open casket were common.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a popular collectible for scrapbooks was the trade card, an advertising card that usually had a printed color image and the merchant's name and address. Millions of the cards were distributed inside product packages, door-to-door, in the mail, and at national expositions and local fairs.

Scrapbooks in library archival collections are often anonymous and without reliable provenance; however, enough are identifiable to suggest that members of both genders and all ages practiced the hobby (Smith 66–69).

Nineteenth and twentieth century scrapbook keeping is generally associated with girls and women, who found that through their scrapbooks they could articulate who they were in a society that did not privilege female voices. Furthermore, scrapbook-making was linked with the nursery and the education of children, endorsed by educational and child-rearing experts: scrapbooks fostered artistic values, neatness, dexterity, attention to detail, and organizational skills. They were inexpensive, easy-to-make, valuable resources for information on any subject ranging from history through science, art or biography. Teachers compiled information about their subjects as resources or textbooks for their students, while housekeepers relied on scrapbooks for recipes and hints on housekeeping and the toilette. Scrapbooks even became the sources for published books of household hints.

Men and boys also composed scrapbooks; however, they had different purposes and audiences in mind. Most notably, men kept scrapbooks that tracked their careers or compiled a knowledge base to which they could refer professionally. Successful men, especially, had secretaries or assistants, or

wives or daughters, who did the actual compiling. In these cases, the scrapbooks may have been about personal subjects—themselves—but were not exactly personal. For instance, physicians at the turn of the twentieth century assiduously compiled scrapbooks of new knowledge and practices in their field.

Individuals kept (and keep) scrapbooks, but communal or collaborative scrapbooks were also popular. For instance, Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, kept her own personal memento scrapbooks as a young woman, but later her clippings and collections focused on her religious movement and its institution, and they were organized and placed into scrapbooks by her assistants. In New Orleans, a communal scrapbook was kept at the Ursuline Convent and School (Tulane University Library). In Rhode Island, the Perry Davis and Son pharmaceutical business kept a scrapbook that included their patent for a vegetable pain killer, and the Gorham Manufacturing Company kept a scrapbook of its silver patterns. In Boston, members of the Utopian Club, “a popular Hebrew organization,” kept an organizational scrapbook that included newspaper clippings, invitations, programs, tickets, and small posters. (The Davis, Gorham, and Utopian Club scrapbooks are in the John Hay Library at Brown University.)

The universality of scrapbooks in the United States can be measured both by the volume of trade in blank books and scraps, and by the variety of individuals who compiled them. Besides Christian Scientists, Roman Catholics, Jews, silversmiths, and pharmacists, people from many other segments of American society assembled scrapbooks. Monte Grover, a prostitute in nineteenth century Wyoming, kept a scrapbook, as did author Willa Cather. Cather made her scrapbook by sewing pieces of cotton cloth and binding them with a fabric cover. This scrapbook reappears in her American classic novel *My Antonia* as the picture book Jim Burden makes for Yulka and Antonia. (See Ott, Tucker, and Buckler for accounts of both these scrapbooks.)

African Americans likewise documented themselves and their relationships in scrapbooks. Besides personal scrapbooks, they compiled historical clippings, photo albums, and collection scrapbooks. African American leader W.E.B. Du Bois created photo albums for the 1900 Paris Exposition to show African Americans as “not different than whites in terms of religion, politics, language, and daily life, yet as members, also, of another ‘vast historic race.’” Japanese-American children held in American internment camps during World War II were encouraged to make scrapbooks about their experiences to be shared with chapters of the American Junior Red Cross (Ott, Tucker, and Buckler).

Scrapbook materials are highly corruptible, especially those from former times, and their irregularity and fragility make them difficult to preserve, to categorize, and to use. However, in recent years, archivists and scholars have gradually recognized scrapbooks’ value for studying not only the material cultures that produced them, but also as repositories of information neglected



by history books. Because of this combination of brittleness and significance, modern scrapbook makers look for materials that are acid-free and lignin-free, an important marketing point made by manufacturers of scrapbook supplies.

By the 1930s, the most popular type of scrapbook in the United States was the photo album, not surprisingly, since cameras had become more and more portable and less and less expensive to own and use. Kodak had a folding, pocket camera on the market in 1902, and the first Brownie in 1907; Kodak models targeted at females included the Girl Scout in 1929; the Camp Fire Girls' in 1831; the Coquette, a Petite Camera with matching lipstick holder and compact; and the Ensemble, a Petite Camera in a suede case, with lipstick compact, and mirror, that came in beige, rose, or green, with cosmetics by the House of Tre Jur.

Large bound blank books provided the canvas for photo artists to show off their creative accomplishments. As the times changed, the albums were re-designed to appeal to different social groups and consumer markets. In the 1950s, for example, books with symbols of the youth culture aimed at the large teenage market.

One of these teenagers was Lyndel Petry Trissell of Piqua, Ohio, who received her first camera for her sixteenth birthday in 1956. The camera took black-and-white photos using 127 film. Lyndel began her scrapbooking hobby at that time, using the "Pony Tail Photo Scrapbook." In the years since, she has consistently collected, mounted, and labeled photos of friends, family, co-workers, special occasions, ordinary occasions, and anything else that she thought worth capturing and preserving. Lyndel carries on a custom that she learned from her parents, themselves passionate photographers who taught her to carefully label and organize her collection. Today she has seventy-nine, and is still collecting and compiling.

Lyndel's procedure is different from scrapbook makers like Teresa and Brenda; her work is usually solitary, and she does not use commercial products to embellish her pages. She labels her photos by hand and cuts out her own paper trimming when needed. She prefers plain pages without plastic leaves and uses old-fashioned photo-corners—simple but thorough. Although she usually works by herself, she does enjoy sharing her collection and was very generous during our interview on June 11, 2005. When asked why she has continued this hobby for nearly fifty years, she explained that she has a strong sense of history and family tradition. Scrapbooking keeps her connected with family and friends, and helps her stay in touch with herself and with people now departed.

The scrapbook has endured as a primary repository for information, memorabilia, photos, and other artifacts for centuries. People like Teresa, Brenda, and Lyndel carry on the practice rooted so deeply in the American past, but still growing new branches and leaves. If anything, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have stolen the nineteenth's reputation as the "golden age of scrapbooks." The hobby continues to expand to new social

groups that do not come from a scrapbook-rich culture, while the spreading popularity of digital cameras and computers makes picture-taking more accessible than ever. Retirement parties, weddings, birthday parties, and even funerals often project digital photo albums for the guests.

In fact, many modern scrapbook-makers create their pages wholly on computers. Digital scrapbooking has grown rapidly as Web sites become available from which hobbyists can download images, embellishments, and even special effects that make computer pages look three-dimensional. “Digi-scrapppers” and “paper-scrapppers” share the same demographics, however—women between thirty and fifty years of age. Furthermore, the digital scrapbook pages are often printed and bound into an album to be shared with family and friends (Balint).

Scrapbooks adapt remarkably well to changes in technology and culture, a fact that may explain their longevity in American society. Whether using advanced digital methods or plain old-fashioned paper, scissors, and glue, the essential human impulse to keep and share memories remains a driving force in the creation of self-made books. For it is this mixture of creativity, self-representation, and sharing that comprises the most enduring and pleasurable quality of the scrapbook hobby. Until these elements disappear, scrapbooks will remain a significant part of American life.

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# Tupac Shakur

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## *Mickey Hess*

The first time I heard Tupac's voice was on Digital Underground's 1991 single "Same Song." I was 15, and Tupac was four years older. His rhyme style was more restrained than it would become in his later releases, and his lyrics hadn't shifted to the social themes they would become known for, but already he was a dynamic presence. A decade later, I watched Digital Underground play a show in Louisville, Kentucky. Tupac had left Digital Underground for a solo career in 1991, and was murdered five years later, so I was surprised when the group launched into "Same Song." I wanted to believe the conspiracy theories that Tupac had faked his own death, and I hoped that Tupac would make his reappearance that night. But when the song came to his verse, Digital Underground held their microphones to the crowd and we shouted Tupac's lyrics. This tribute was followed by Digital Underground vocalist Shock-G's performing a cover of Tupac's "Hail Mary," a dark song from a posthumously released album. Shock-G asked at the end of the song for a moment of silence in remembrance of his friend, then asked us to follow the silence with "a moment of motherfuckin noise," which is exactly how Tupac lived his life. His performance treaded a line between optimism and fatalism, and caught him between his belief that he would influence his listeners to change their world and his belief in the inevitability of his living, and ultimately dying for, what he called a Thug Life.

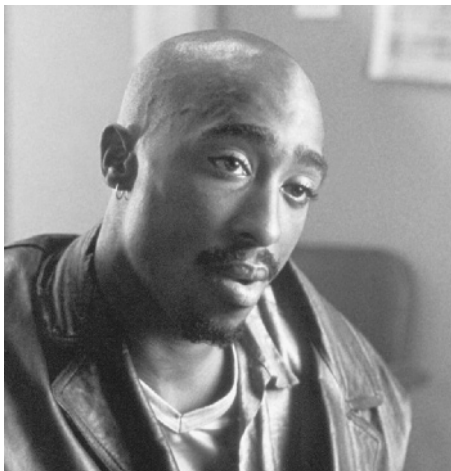
It is fitting that the 2003 MTV Films release *Tupac: Resurrection* is narrated by Tupac Shakur himself. While Tupac was murdered in 1996, he had talked extensively in interviews about his birth, life, and death, and from these interviews the film's directors created voiceovers which frame the film as an autobiography in which Tupac narrates the story of his life, from his *in utero* stage during his mother's incarceration in 1971, to his murder at age 25 in a drive-by shooting in Las Vegas. Tupac's music shared this autobiographical focus, chronicling his impoverished childhood and often contextualizing his own message and actions as a legacy of his mother's involvement with the Black Panthers. Tupac most directly explored his connection with his mother in "Dear Mama," a song that chronicles his

troubled youth with a mother who was often absent in his early childhood because of her activist involvement, and during his teenage years because of her addiction to crack cocaine. Afeni Shakur appeared in the video for “Dear Mama,” which reenacts her reconciliation with Tupac. Afeni’s place in her son’s music works to establish two key facets of his credibility with listeners. First, Tupac connects himself to black radical history through his mother’s affiliation with the Black Panthers. Second, her appearance in his music and videos confirms Tupac’s music as autobiography and confirms that his life and performance form an organic whole, as she proves to the audience that 2Pac the artist is one and the same with Tupac the performer, and that the two share a common history and identity.

In both *Tupac: Resurrection*, and the “Dear Mama” video, Tupac calls the viewer’s attention to the fact that Afeni actually spent time in prison while pregnant with her son. These images of Tupac’s origins contrast with the death imagery which became a central focus in his music after a first, unsuccessful attempt on his life in front of a New York studio. In his music, his birth and death form a continuum; and as his career progressed, his lyrics became increasingly concerned with his own mortality, with the afterlife, and with resurrection. Tupac’s artistic attention to his origins and to his mortality creates an organic performance that makes him vitally real to his audience. Tupac has sold more records worldwide than any other artist in hip hop, a music form that values authenticity and is concerned with the real. Tupac’s lyrical skill and delivery find him ranked consistently among the best MCs of all time, but he is most iconic in the autobiographical nature of his lyrics. He connected with his audience by making himself authentic, organic, and vulnerable through his themes of birth and death, and by bringing together his life onstage as 2Pac with his life offstage as Tupac Amaru Shakur. His work included several albums, films, and a volume of poetry, but essentially his life became his performance, and his art stands as a legacy to his message. His murder in many ways works to validate this message through his own vulnerability to the issues about which he spoke.

Emerging at a historical moment when popular music listeners had become very mistrusting of the digitized and the simulated, Tupac made himself both authentic and organic. Tupac released his first solo album *2pacAlypse Now* in 1991, in the wake of hip hop’s second, and furthest-reaching, wave of mass commercialization. MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice had crossed over to the *Billboard* pop charts, outselling any rap artists to date; but these artists each saw a backlash as listeners accused them of removing hip hop from its roots in the black urban community and watering it down for a mainstream audience. This backlash was heightened through two specific scandals. Within pop music, in 1990 the group Milli Vanilli was stripped of its Grammy award for Best New Artist after the group’s record label admitted that Rob and Fab, who performed on stage and in videos as Milli Vanilli, had not recorded the vocals on their album and did not perform live vocals in concert. A few months later, Vanilla Ice plummeted from rap’s biggest selling artist to its

most discredited when a story from Ken Parish Perkins in the *Dallas Morning News* revealed several pieces of misinformation in the official artist biography Ice's record label had released to the press. The SBK Records bio claimed a connection to black urban experience, but the article's research revealed a very different and more middle-class upbringing.



Tupac Shakur as Ezekiel "Spoon" Whitmore in the 1997 movie *Gridlock'd*. Courtesy of Photofest.

With such scandals weighing on the minds of music fans, Tupac seemed to embody the real. Through his autobiographical lyrics he sought to remove the distance between 2Pac the artist and Tupac the performer, and his albums stood as a testament to his experience. Although he was involved in the music chart dominance of crossover pop rap as a dancer and vocalist for Digital Underground, Tupac as a solo artist worked to strip away the comedic showmanship and costumes that brought that group to pop listeners with their hit single "The Humpty Dance." Tupac's first solo video, for the song "Trapped," is filmed mostly in black and white, features him performing behind bars, and depicts him as the victim of police brutality. Tupac would soon experience such brutality off-screen, and in 1992 brought charges of abuse against the

Oakland (California) Police Department. In an incident stemming from an original citation for jaywalking, Tupac was physically assaulted by two police officers and charged with resisting arrest. The case was settled out of court, with the Oakland Police Department paying Tupac over \$40,000 in damages. In this case, his lyrics preceded his lived experience.

While Tupac's lyrics often narrated his own childhood and young adulthood, songs like "Brenda's Got a Baby" and "Keep Your Head Up" spoke about women's issues in the poor black neighborhoods in which he had grown up. Tupac's dedication to women's issues in his lyrics complicates his performance of hypermasculinity, and creates a complex picture of him as a young black male. His lyrics acknowledge his mother's sacrifices and urge young women to stand up and take charge of their lives. He tells women they don't have to rely on men to make their lives better, but then he objectifies them in a song like "I Get Around," or brags about having sex with the wife of rap artist Notorious B.I.G. on "Hit Em Up." It was this side of Tupac's lyrics that brought criticism from figures like Dionne Warwick and C. Delores Tucker, who blamed Tupac and other male rap artists for the perpetuation of violence and disrespect against black women. But nothing complicates Tupac's performance further than his 1995 conviction for the sexual abuse of a fan. Tupac spent eleven months in prison, and although he claimed he was not guilty of the charges of sexual abuse, he acknowledged that he was not

innocent in his personal interaction with the 20-year-old woman who brought the charges against him.

In the weeks before the jury had made their decision in this case, Tupac was robbed and attacked by an unknown assailant who shot him five times. Only hours after surgery, Tupac checked himself out of the hospital, and days later went to trial in bandages and a wheelchair. In interviews included in *Tupac: Resurrection*, Tupac makes clear that he suspected rap artist Notorious B.I.G. and his producer Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs of being involved in the attack. The pair had been recording at a studio in the same building Tupac was shot in front of, and he never believed their innocence. This suspicion formed the basis for the “East Coast versus West Coast” rivalry that would end with both Tupac and Biggie dead in shootings that will be forever linked in the public mind, although police investigators claim there is no connection between the crimes. The murders of Tupac in 1996 and Notorious B.I.G. in 1997 will be remembered as markers of the end of gangsta rap’s most violent and commercially viable period. The two stars became icons, then martyrs, of the rivalry between Los Angeles’s Death Row Records and New York’s Bad Boy label. The gangsta posturing from both camps during the 1996 MTV Music Awards became all too real only days later when Tupac died in a Las Vegas hospital one week after he sustained five bullet wounds in a drive-by shooting. His death sparked numerous conspiracy theories among his fans; and his killer, like Biggie’s, has never been found. While the death imagery on *Me Against the World* forms the basis for many theories about his murder, some fans believe lyrics on Tupac’s posthumously-released album *Makaveli—The Don Killuminati: The Seven Day Theory* seem to allude directly to his plans to fake his own death.

After the first attempt on his life in New York, Tupac’s music became further concerned with death, resurrection, and the afterlife. He left behind the more overt political themes of his early songs like “Panther Power” and “Trapped” for more directly autobiographical treatment of his own mortality. A look at the track listing for his album *Me Against the World* reveals song titles like “If I Die 2 Nite” and “Death Around the Corner.” To fans, these songs became prophecy after Tupac’s murder. Most haunting is his video for “I Ain’t Mad at Cha.” The video, released only weeks after Tupac’s death, depicts his being shot and fatally wounded after leaving a movie theater with a friend. Tupac performs in heaven, dressed in all white. The timing of the release of this video, only weeks after Tupac’s murder, lends itself to conspiracy theories that either he faked his own death, or that his record label murdered him. The storyline of the “I Ain’t Mad at Cha” video may be alternatively explained in that it was the last video he released under the name Tupac before his *Makaveli* album would hit stores.

Tupac was obsessed with the idea of resurrection, leading many fans as well as critic Michael Eric Dyson, in his book *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*, to position him as a Jesus figure. The *Makaveli* cover art supports this reading. Tupac’s first posthumous album was released

under the artist name Makaveli rather than 2Pac. Death Row Records released Makaveli's *Don Killuminati: The Seven-Day Theory* with cover art that featured a crucified Tupac with five bullet holes in his body. The Makaveli album's title and design sparked conspiracy theories among fans. Many of the theories center on numbers. Most obvious is the fact that the five bullet wounds of the cover art match the exact number of wounds Tupac sustained during the shooting that took his life. However, he had also taken five bullets when he was robbed in New York, and more likely the *Makaveli* cover was created in reference to that incident. Further theories are built from Tupac's Makaveli alias and the album's subtitle *The Seven-Day Theory*. Tupac was a fan of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which advocates faking one's death in order to gain power, and the number seven resounds in many statistics surrounding Pac's death. 2Pac died seven days after he was shot. He was 25, and two and five added together equal seven. Similarly, Tupac's time of death was 4:03, which again adds to seven.

Tupac's productivity during the last months of his life spurs more conspiracy theories from fans. Tupac certainly had a sense that he was not long for this earth, and after Death Row CEO Suge Knight bailed him out of prison, he began working furiously on recording new tracks. His mother won a court case for control of his unreleased work, and in 1997, she released *R U Still Down*, the first of several albums of material collected and produced after her son's death. While some fans still believe Tupac is alive and recording music in hiding, his resurrection is more likely achieved through these posthumous releases, including *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*, a collection of Tupac's poetry that his mother released in 1999 with a foreword from Nikki Giovanni. In one poem, "In the Event of My Demise" Tupac voices his urge to die for something he believes in. *Tupac: Resurrection* echoes this sentiment with Tupac's statement that while he may not change the world himself, he is certain he will influence the person who will. His influence stands today through such forums as the University of Washington course "The Textual Appeal of Tupac Shakur," a University of California—Berkeley course on his poetry, and in English classes in schools like Los Angeles' Crenshaw High. Along with such courses, Afeni Shakur has established a scholarship in her son's name, and oversees his legacy through her control over Tupac's unreleased recordings.

Through *Tupac: Resurrection* and the songs, albums, and compilations still being released more than seven years after his death, Tupac continues to speak to his fans. His untimely death, as with other American icons like Marilyn Monroe or James Dean, has furthered his cult of celebrity, yet Tupac's celebrity is perhaps more intensely linked to his death through the death imagery of his music. His lyrics anticipated his murder, so his murder seems to complete the narrative of his lyrics. The reality of his death authenticates his work in a music form where artist authenticity remains a shifting and debated issue.

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# Spaceship

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*Angela Hague*

The appearance of the spaceship in modern American culture dates from June 24, 1947, when private pilot Kenneth Arnold, who was searching for a crashed C-46 Marine transport plane, reported seeing nine crescent-shaped objects flying in formation at approximately 1,200 miles per hour over Mount Rainier, Washington. His sighting is the origin of all mythic narratives that feature the spaceship as cultural icon, and his description of the objects as moving “like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water” to William Bequette, a reporter for the *East Oregonian*, led to the phrase “flying saucer,” a term that early on created a less-than-serious context for the spaceship that would continue long after flying saucers were renamed “unidentified flying objects” (Arnold 11). Arnold’s claim generated a huge amount of publicity, but it was not the first time Americans had been riveted by stories of strange objects in the sky. From November 1896 to May 1897 what became known as the Great Airship Controversy captured the imagination of the public and newspapers when reports of “airships”—typically metallic, cigar-shaped vehicles with wings or propellers and high-intensity searchlights or colored lights—occurred first in California and later spread to Nebraska, Kansas, Michigan, Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, West Virginia, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

When unexplained aerial phenomena reappeared fifty years later, their hold on the public imagination would persist until the present day and become an important reflection of the fears, desires, and fascinations of postwar American culture. The spaceship has proven to be a protean signifier of our cultural needs that develops and changes as our world evolves, functioning as a warning of government and military vulnerability, conspiracy, and cover-up; as an indicator of our ambiguous relationship with science, technology, and medicine; as a reminder of the limits of human power and autonomy; and, finally, as an image of the ultimately mysterious and inaccessible nature of the world we inhabit.

There had been other reports outside the United States of strange objects seen in the sky during and immediately after World War II. What became

known as “foo fighters,” small balls of variously colored lights that appeared to follow bombers in the European and Pacific war theaters, were reported by Allied and Axis pilots, and both military forces speculated that they were the secret weapons of the other side. A military explanation was also offered for the “ghost rockets” that were seen in the Scandinavian countries in 1946. But Kenneth Arnold’s sighting initiated a very different attitude in the American public. Large numbers of people quickly claimed to have seen flying saucers, overwhelming the Army Air Force with reports, and the flying saucer phenomenon almost immediately became inextricably linked with Cold War paranoia. Flying saucers allowed the public effectively to displace fears of Soviet invasion and nuclear attack with the possibility of watchful and ubiquitous aliens traveling in spaceships around the planet: a force much more frightening and fascinating than the Russians was making incursions into our skies.

Two films released in 1951 set the model for two very different ways that aliens and their technology would be perceived in the future. Robert Wise’s *The Day the Earth Stood Still* established the alien as benefactor: “Klaatu” comes to earth to warn against war and atomic weapons and to give a brief show of superior alien technology. He is rewarded by being shot, for the film depicts human beings as woefully primitive in their violent emotional responses and ignorance of the consequences of their actions. Just as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* reflected Cold War fears about the atomic bomb, Howard Hawks’s *The Thing from Another World* spoke to contemporary anxieties about communist invasion and takeover. When a spaceship crashes at the North Pole and its frozen occupant thaws out, the monstrous creature turns out to be an alien vegetable life form that reproduces asexually and—like H. G. Wells’s Martians in *The War of the Worlds* (1898)—needs human blood to survive. Like many of the aliens of the future, he lacks an emotional and sexual dimension and is uninterested in the fate of his intended prey. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing from Another World* early on provided the blueprint for two divergent ways of portraying the alien presence: beneficent or predatory, vastly superior or inferior to human consciousness and morality, human-like in appearance or akin to the monsters that roared and stormed through the horror movies of the time.

Aliens and their spacecraft were at the center of another movement in popular culture in the 1950s, a group of people who became known as “contactees” who claimed encounters with individuals from planets in our solar system and beyond. These “space brothers” and their female counterparts were described as physically flawless, human-appearing entities who, like Klaatu in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, had come to earth to save it from nuclear devastation and to preach a doctrine of peace, love, and spirituality. The most famous of the contactees, “Professor” George Adamski, wrote several books documenting his relationships with aliens and trips to other planets, as did the other contactees, who included Harold Menger, Truman Bethurum, “Doctor” Daniel Frye, and Orfeo Angelucci. Another well-known

contactee, George Van Tassel, founded the Giant Rock Space Convention in 1954, which until the 1970s brought together contactees and individuals interested in aliens and space travel. The contactee movement, more than any other single event in the history of the public's perception of the spaceship, made the issue of alien visitation the butt of jokes by undermining the necessity for scientific enquiry into the phenomenon and by characterizing people who believed in the reality of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and aliens as crackpots and eccentrics.

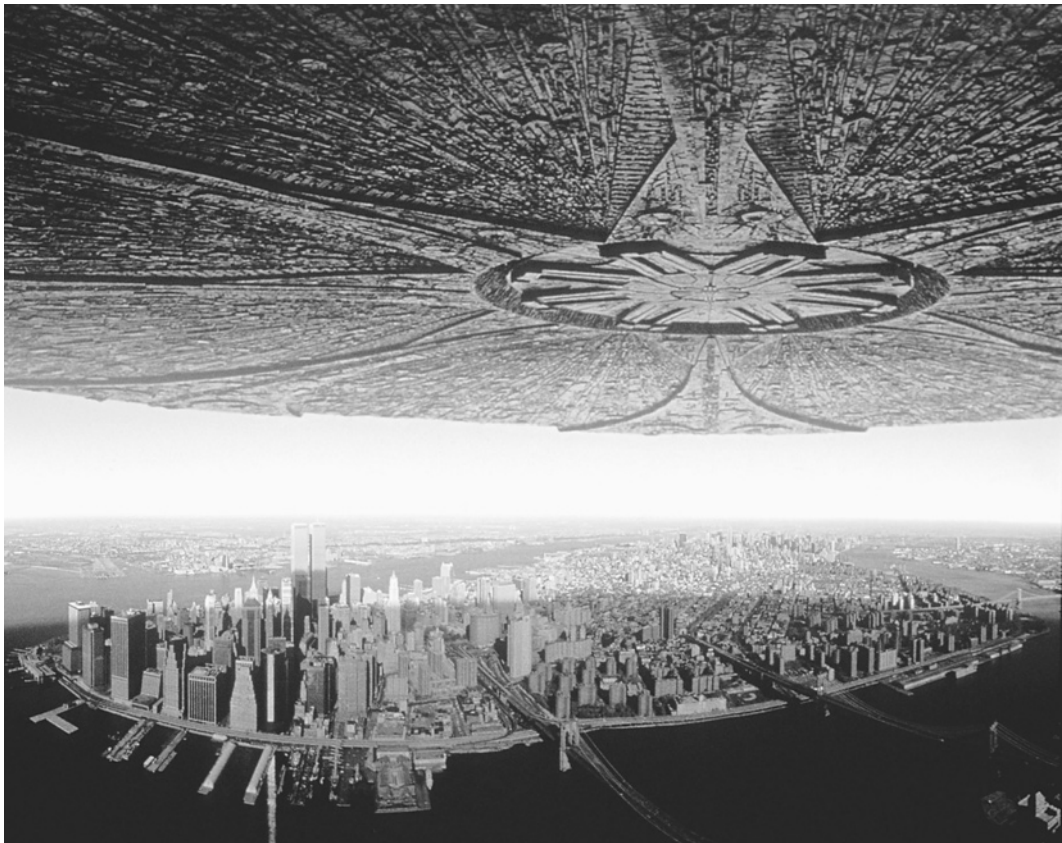
But while many people, including scientific and military critics of UFO believers, were laughing at the absurd claims of the contactees, UFOs were gaining national attention and inciting some citizens to join civilian UFO research groups which challenged the official pronouncements of the Air Force about the reality of UFO phenomena. From the 1950s onwards the spaceship came to represent conspiracy and cover-up, by a government and military that consistently lied to the public about its knowledge—or lack of knowledge—about UFOs and aliens. These attitudes were intensified when it came to light that in September 1948 the Project Sign team, the first organized military group to investigate UFOs, had produced a top-secret “Estimate of the Situation” that determined that spacecraft seen in the skies were probably extraterrestrial. The Air Force's response was a significant event in the history of UFOs as images of governmental conspiracy and cover-up: it claimed that the report hadn't proven its case, declassified it, and ordered all copies burned.

Events, however, kept spaceships in the public sphere, particularly the July 1952 “Invasion of Washington,” when during two consecutive weekends (July 10–26) unidentifiable objects were reported flying over the capital by Air Force and commercial pilots. Seen also by ground observers, the objects were picked up on radarscopes at Washington National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base. The Air Force's explanation, that temperature inversions were responsible for the phenomena, was generally accepted by the public. But the publicity surrounding the event and the intervention of the CIA into the controversy resulted in the formation of the Robertson Panel, whose recommendations issued in January 1953 increased the suspicions of a growing number of UFO believers. The Robertson Panel concluded that UFOs posed no physical threat to the United States, but that belief in and publicity about them created a glut of reports that could compromise the military's ability to protect the country from real threats of invasion. As a result, the panel recommended training citizens to recognize natural objects in the sky and, in a more controversial move, suggested that a program of debunking should begin that would make use of the media to reduce public interest in UFOs. In addition, civilian UFO research groups should be “watched” because of their influence on mass thinking.

The Robertson Panel's recommendations firmly established the profound suspicion with which many UFO believers and researchers viewed the U.S. government's attitudes and actions, a suspicion that continues today and has

become an important dimension of many mythic narratives that involve spaceships and aliens. Chris Carter, the creator of the Fox Network's *The X-Files* (1993–2002), calls the show's "mythology" its continuing narrative of alien intrusion into earthly matters, including abduction of citizens and hybridization of human-alien beings; and this "mythology" has as its basis the government's knowledge of and collusion with aliens and its long-term deception of the American people. Carter's plots drew on the real-life "Dark Side" theories of John Lear, Paul Bennewitz, and William Cooper, just as he made use of the conspiracy theories that surrounded the stories of a crashed spaceship and alien bodies near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947.

The spaceship narrative continued to grow and develop more complex associations after the 1950s. When in January 1969 the University of Colorado published its study of UFOs commissioned by the Air Force, it concluded that "nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge. . . . further extensive study of UFOs



The depiction of the immense spaceships and nearly invincible warrior aliens in *Independence Day* (1996) is an example of the darker side of popular culture's fascination with spaceships and their inhabitants. Courtesy of Photofest.

probably cannot be justified by the expectation that science will be advanced thereby” (Condon 1); and the Air Force used the report to eliminate Project Blue Book in December 1969. However, as sightings of landings and occupants were increasingly reported in the 1960s, the UFO ceased being imagined simply as a mysterious machine and became imagined more as the environment of the beings who piloted it. Alien creatures were first reported near landed spacecraft taking samples of soil or plant life; and, as the narrative developed, human-alien interaction became more complex, culminating in stories of humans abducted for the purposes of physical and reproductive examination. The first reported abduction in the United States, which allegedly took place in the White Mountains of New Hampshire on September 19–20, 1961, involved Barney and Betty Hill, and their abduction, like Kenneth Arnold’s 1947 sighting over Mount Ranier, is the founding event for the series of mythic narratives that derive from it. Abduction accounts increased dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s, accounts that depicted the spaceship as housing entities vastly more scientifically and technologically advanced than human beings.

The spaceship became the locus for events that positioned earthlings as both ignorant and powerless, the victims of alien research, experimentation, and genetic hybridization with alien creatures. In this scenario human beings, rather than functioning as empowered individuals who colonize, manipulate, and harvest other places and peoples, become the invaded and the colonized. The spaceship becomes a sign of a complete reversal of the power relations between the human and nonhuman, an image of the diminution of human achievement and knowledge, and of the dangers of the consequences of science and technology in the hands of an alien power. And at the same time, the alien “doctors” who examine and implant humans with monitoring devices and hybridized fetuses embody our own troubled attitudes toward medical technology and personnel, particularly their lack of concern with the individuals whom they serve and the increasing anonymity of medical procedures and relationships.

The spaceship has always had a close relationship with modern conceptions of science and technology; and the connection has elicited a variety of strong responses from both the scientific and UFO communities. For scientists such as Donald Menzel, Carl Sagan, and Phil Klass, belief in UFOs and aliens is part of a rising tide of irrational belief systems, and they view these “pseudo-sciences” with alarm and irritation. For many UFO believers, scientific rejection of their beliefs is an indication of the narrow-minded paradigms that science forces on phenomena that it refuses to investigate. UFOs and aliens, which have increasingly become an important aspect of New Age beliefs and practices, have also become associated with other popular anomalous phenomena such as crop circles, animal mutilations, “men in black” visitations, and sightings of black helicopters. The spaceship continues to be an icon of all that is mysterious, unexplainable, and unavailable to scientific enquiry, an image of an alternative world that interfaces with our

own but refuses to reveal itself or to become assimilated into our mundane existence. At the same time, the narrative of alien visitation in popular culture helps provide an explanation for the confusion and irrationality of postwar American culture: television shows such as the short-lived *Dark Skies* (1996–1997), Steven Spielberg’s ten-part miniseries *Taken* (2002), and *The X-Files* use UFOs and human-alien relationships as a prism through which to comprehend the complexities of postwar events.

Popular culture’s long love affair with the spaceship and its inhabitants began in the 1950s and still shows no sign of tiring with its content; aliens both friendly, as in the cases of Steven Spielberg’s *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) and Jeff Bridges’s alien character in John Carpenter’s *Starman* (1984), and monstrously dangerous, as in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979) and Roland Emmerich’s *Independence Day* (1996), continue to flourish. Throughout its history as an icon, the spaceship has both created and derived its meanings from its manifestations in film and television. Radio has made other important contributions to its development: Orson Welles’s 1938 *War of the Worlds* broadcast preceded the first sighting of a flying saucer but clearly revealed the power of the spacecraft to mesmerize and terrify, and, in the 1950s, Long John Nebel’s late-night talk show provided a forum for the contactees to publicize their experiences. In the 1990s talk radio programs such as Art Bell’s *Coast to Coast AM* and shows hosted by Jeff Rense and Laura Lee provided more evidence of radio’s close relationship with UFOs by offering stories of sightings of spacecraft and encounters with alien beings to their listeners.

The spaceship has continued to evolve as a cultural icon, developing a narrative that has increasingly brought alien beings to the foreground. As abduction stories proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s, beginning with the publication of UFO researcher Budd Hopkins’s *Missing Time* (1981) and horror novelist Whitley Strieber’s first-person account of his abduction in the best-selling *Communion* (1987), the spaceship has become less important as a narrative element, sometimes disappearing altogether; in many abduction stories no “ship” is ever referenced. Instead, the spaceship has become a visual correlative of the alien experience, functioning as an image that evokes a powerful response to the notion of a universe that exists beyond what human beings can comprehend, and as a cynosure for other anomalous phenomena that connote the mysteriousness of the world we inhabit.

Like most influential cultural images, the spaceship signals profoundly ambiguous and diametrically opposed meanings. The aliens are here to save us from ourselves and also to exploit and destroy us, just as the spaceship represents both our reverence for and suspicion of scientific technology and achievement. Alien spacecraft suggest the ignorance and failure of our government and military to protect us, and, simultaneously, their collusion with alien invaders; they also assert the primitive nature of human knowledge and achievement while placing the importance of human beings and their DNA at the center of the abduction narrative. The spaceship is an icon that has

remained remarkably accessible to a wide variety of meanings from its beginnings as a “nuts and bolts” flying saucer in the 1940s and 1950s to its emergence as the referent of the abduction narrative, which continues to evolve in the direction of supernatural, mystical, and even quasi-religious experiences. The hazy, dreamlike image of a flying saucer that began the credits to *The X-Files* is particularly indicative of the spaceship’s iconic status: protean, mysterious, imprecise, and ambiguous, its vagueness provides a blank slate upon which any number of cultural narratives can be written.

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# Sports Bar

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*William R. Klink*

“Let’s get another. Unnh. I just can’t get down the line as quick as I used to.”

“Yeah, well, look at Sosa, he can’t either.”

“He’s in a slump again.”

“Maybe we should go to a game.”

“Nachos? Waitress!”

A conversation like this could occur in any place that serves food and drink. But it is the kind of conversation that is the signature of the sports bar: two men talking about sports, a little about themselves, referencing current professional sports, and making plans to do something, all while eating and drinking. There is no direct mention of feelings, no personal disclosure, no linearity; action, group identity, and pastiche is what there is, all supported by the iconic meanings of the sports-bar space.

The history of sports bars is a history of evolution rather than revolution; the English medieval publican dispensing local knowledge to a crowd is now supplanted by the television. The Victorian era’s three-sectioned space—tap room, saloon, and lounge—has given way to bar, tables, and video game areas. The earlier division of interior space to reflect social distinctions is paralleled in America by bars separately catering to different classes, race, and genders. Sports bars, which morphed from originally male working-class neighborhood bars, bring together, arguably, the two most prominent leisure-time activities of the working class—drinking and television watching. Clearly, they are a distinct social space, differing from other male niche bars, such as strip clubs, which feature feigned intimate relations between patrons and employees; singles bars, where the supposedly unmarried go to attain new partners; and the Hooters-type bar which tries to span the differences between the two. In patriarchal America, there can be no female sports bars. By definition these spaces would be lesbian bars; the closest to the niche would be the “dykes on bikes” bar.



As a social third place, situated between work and home, sports bars have important cultural intersections of even deeper meaning. The shriveling of open public spaces for adults (parks in the cities and suburbs), the decline of the church, and the amorphous quality of communities all create social and political pressures that are resisted by sports bars. One may argue that neighborhood bars perform the same service, but there is a difference. Neighborhood bars feature a discourse that replicates the other side of masculine culture, the side that values self-control, efficiency, and a work ethic. The discourse is frequently directly about these topics or about intimate feelings and admiration for, and about social consequences of, certain valued behaviors. Most of these concerns, by contrast, are directly devalued in sports bars by the technology of alcohol consumption and without the moral agency of female influence. To illustrate, consider if the essence of the conversation cited above were to remain the same but be spoken in a neighborhood bar:

“Can I get you another drink? Unnh. It bothers me I can’t move the way I used to.”

“Oh, what’s wrong? Have you gone to the doctor? Stuff happens at our age.”

“I’m just putting it off for now. I don’t notice it at work.”

“If it’s bothering you now, we can leave.”

Here the discourse models male behavior in its self-control, shown through caring for each others’ feelings and the linearity of topics; efficiency, through concern about time usage; and economic value, the judgment that anything that does not affect job performance is trivial.

The value of sports bars in part for the working class is in their democratic aspect: they are places where leisure behavior is self-selected and therefore

contests prescribed behavior in employment. Sports bars also contest other hierarchies in society; they are, for example, by choice of their patrons usually, places of no particular race or ethnicity, especially if they are destination sports bars.

Sports bars sell or commodify for sale traditional masculine values in three specific iterations: the site-specific sports bar, the franchised sports bar, and the independent sports bar. Murphy’s Bleachers, for example, which occupies its space just outside the bleachers at Wrigley Field, home of the lamentable losers the Chicago Cubs, and which



Waitresses at Hooters strike a pose as Charlie’s Angels. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

started as a hot dog stand, is a site-specific sports bar. Its patrons are upscale office workers. The expensive beers and the rail drinks reflect the economic power of their consumers, who cheer with usually restrained enthusiasm for their Cubbies. Site-specific sports bars are especially found around college campuses and other locations where there are nearby sports teams that charge admission. These sports bars exist because they are close to sporting events, in the same way the Murphy's Bleachers is a sports bar taking advantage of its location close to a major sporting venue. One other such near-stadium sports bar is Bob Baumhower's Wings Sports Grille in Birmingham, Alabama. He is a former football hero at the University of Alabama, a hotbed of college football, and a great player for the professional Miami Dolphins. There, before, during, and after Alabama football games, pitchers of beer, loud shouting, and broad gesturing are the norm, reflecting the down-home values of the fans of southeastern college football.

Some sports bars, in contrast to the site-specific sports-bar model of Murphy's, are born whole. Major sports-bar chains Legends, Champs, Champions, and ESPN Zone are well established, though challenged by the fastest growing restaurant franchise, Darden's Smokey Bones Sports Bar and BBQ. Of all of these franchises the most spectacular is ESPN Zone. Interestingly, it replicates the segregation within its space that existed in the early English tavern three-section set-up. There is the bar space and soft-chair area right in front of a giant television with little televisions and electronic tickers surrounding it as the bar space. There is a parlor area with tables, chairs, and televisions farther away from the big screen in rooms that nevertheless provide some access to the bar view. There is an arcade area, with its many athletic electronic games and other machines where patrons may try their hand at shooting basketballs, among other skill tests. Rather than by age or gender, the segregation is by level of attention deficit to the television(s).

Another kind of sports bar is the one located in no particular proximity to any sports venue and not a franchise operation. Among these is Willie and Reed's in Bethesda, Maryland, notable for its sleek, modern, chrome look, and for its efforts to broaden appeal to women's tastes by acquiring cable packages that feature television shows favored by women—such as *Sex and the City*—available in slack times of sports television viewing.

Models for independent sports bars are so ubiquitous that “the bars and pubs with and without food in the U.S. are normally distinguished only by the degree of their sports orientation,” say Krotz and Eastman (18). Sports bars are a genus with limitless species.

There are then two physical requirements of a sports bar that differentiate it from any other kind of bar. The first is that the television tuned to sports must be prominent, and the attention of the clientele must be on that sports event or one that is aligned with it. There may be one television; there may be twenty; there may be one twenty feet wide with twenty flatscreen televisions surrounding it, and others over every urinal. The second physical requirement is that the television focus is abetted by decoration of the interior space with

sports memorabilia that directs attention to history in the making on the television and suggests that patrons have a place in the unfolding of that history. For example, a locked transparent case (one that might otherwise be found housing a Grecian urn in a museum) containing hundreds of baseballs autographed by all members of the last twenty Major League Baseball All-Star teams creates a backdrop to set the customer in a place that shares its history and that of its patrons with the history to be made on the television. All things are commodified as sports history, a history that is about and written by men for men.

The main requirement of a sports bar is not its things however, but the behavior that the things lead to within the space. The prevalence of bars with televisions and memorabilia not only works as a model for those attempting to start one, but also provides models for the behavior of those who enter one seeking peak experiences of consumption at a relatively low cost. In a sports bar, both men and women produce behaviors that fit gender perceptions of male behavior and support gendered roles in the networks of social relationships that they establish and maintain. Behavior is not a function of freedom in a sports bar, but instead a matter of conformity to the expected behavior of such a public house, whose eye is the television and whose other senses are the sports memorabilia, both of which, along with other patrons, provide estimable models to follow. Television and memorabilia reflect manly images that are so effective at controlling behavior that these athletic images are themselves therefore iconic, making acolytes of sports-bar patrons and those with whom they interact both inside and outside the bar.

To some, going to a sports bar is better than going to a neighborhood bar because sports-bar behavior is mediated and altered to conform to the behavior of being at the live sports event on the television. Thus, the bar chooses what is on television and that in turn influences the behavior of patrons. To that end then, managers of sports bars use television to attract customers for food and drink sales by providing entertainment, decoration, and atmosphere that construct sports-bar behavior.

Going to watch television in a public space is to watch television in a male area—the public space traditionally controlled by men. The visual cues at the public sports bar enable sports-bar patrons to pursue what researchers call typical male friendships, begun in a place of socially constructed sexual segregation and then built on behaviors that share less than intimate emotional experiences. To some sports bar patrons, these behaviors are liberating and nostalgic. Sports bars provide the perfect setting for developing male friendships in the way that team sports do. The combination of cooperative and antagonistic competition, central to team sports, as Steven J. Harvey notes, is encouraged by the sports-bar space, the simulacrum of a team-sports setting. The television itself manages and is managed by the cooperative and antagonistic behavior of the male viewers speaking and directing activity both toward and away from the television. In turn, this behavior dramatizes the patrons as performers in the making of their own self-images as men who go

to sports bars and who are constructed from the range of social interactions that take place there as real sports-loving men.

During big games on television that monopolize the attention of the patrons, men huddle in groups like a football team, and respond to the television together with shouts and curses, many specific to the teams, “Wa-Hoo-Wa,” for example, for a University of Virginia team. When there is no big game on and the multiple screens show a wide selection of sports events, the behavior is less unified. Men and the few women huddle in basketball team-sized groups to cajole and tease each other with sex and sport jokes. The conversation points to its analog, the sports talk radio show. In both scenarios, the overriding sound emits such phrases as “Sosa sucks,” “They’re all on steroids anyway,” “f\*\*\*ing ump is blind,” “Stewart is a mean bastard,” “She’s got a nice leg,” “The wings are better at Smoky’s,” “I was totally wasted,” repeating the nonlinear discourse that could be heard on a team bench during that very game on the television or televisions, while speakers are reminded of such patter by the memorabilia that surrounds them. Meanwhile, some patrons may rebel, asserting their American individualism by talking quietly about their sports preferences or sexual objects or even discussing matters as if they were at a neighborhood bar.

The individual is destabilized by the mirroring effect of self-reflexivity demanded by sports bars, even while amplifying the small differences in behavior that he is allowed within behavior rules in sports bars, whether by dress, gesture, or speech. Sometimes these differences themselves are picked up by others and replicated so that small differences become first imitated and then dominant when taken up by everyone. The most obvious of these behaviors is the impromptu cheer that gets adopted and then reused constantly. Its successful progenitor becomes a heroic icon himself. His behavior is replicated because it suggests the totality of the experience.

In that way, highly controlled physical and verbal behavior produces a social order that mimics that of a team. Though patrons are well aware of the contextual and behavioral knowledge of sports bars that contributes to their behavior (for example, that movement is encouraged, as is yelling at the television, and crude, aggressive joking), such knowledge is never part of the actual conversation. As a kind of subtext, the discourse at sports bars is competitive about teams and individuals, both those provided by the cues and those in attendance. The topics range from food, particularly beer, to women’s roles in a male-dominated culture, to talk about group behavior and distinctions. Power flows away from those with little to say and those who display little energy to say it, to those who have lots to say and lots of energy to say it. The discourse as a microproduction reproduces the macrorelations of the sports bar itself, representing the opinions and favored topics of discourse of its clientele, who choose it specifically for that reason. Other discourses are resisted—what happened today on “Days of Our Lives”—and some discourses are contested as marginal, for example, talk about high school experiences, as skewered in “Glory Days” by Bruce Springsteen.

Power circulates unevenly among all on the “team” as if everyone is allowed a turn at bat. Though some may decline and some may be forcibly pinch hit for, others will swing and miss and strikeout, others will draw a walk by uttering apt but unpointed remarks (the glue that holds discourse communities together), and others will get their hits. In the end, language is institutionalized as sports-bar language which becomes a normative behavior furthering its own hegemony, marginalizing or extinguishing all other discourses.

So while the patrons are legally free to say what they want, they are quite controlled by forces that construct the discourse to its own preexisting rules, an approximation of those governing a team as well, having limited themes, modes of thought, ideas, values, actions, interactions, and technologies.

Drinking, watching, and talking create consumption that in turn constructs socially-situated identity and its icons by customizing behavior that differs with behavior at a neighborhood bar and with behavior attendant to television watching at home. The sports-bar customization does away with individuation altogether, deferring individuation for just those other sites, the neighborhood bar and at-home television. The at-home experience features just a few pre-chosen others who already know the personal items that are avoided in the sports bar and who will refer to them in the most off handed way. “Just like you, the way he dropped that pass,” is a phrase from the at-home sports watcher who is just as likely to drink in the same pattern as if he were at a sports bar, but who is just as unlikely to gesture, to move, and to shout at length in a neighborhood bar or at home as he would in a sports bar.

Sports bars, thus, despite regulating customers’ practices, work against rather than for social homogenization because they encourage temporary behavior based on illusory or virtual realities which do not have to be lived in the day-to-day existence but which, precisely because they are an escape from day-to-day life, present an opportunity for a peak experience. That peak experience is the dramatization of the self to a roomful of like-minded people, encouraged and supported by the technology present in the sports bar in the form of television and memorabilia.

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# Stadium

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## *Sylvester Frazier, Jr.*

It is almost a daily occurrence. Thousands of people congregate at an indoor arena or a stadium to watch a sporting event. Many of the people come because they love the sports, others because of the social activities surrounding the event. Outside of the venue, the stadium provides needed work and income for some, but brings others annoyances. In short, for different people a sports stadium can be anything from a Mecca to a massive inconvenience.

Sports stadiums maintain a complex relationship between the cities in which they are located and the residents of those metropolitan communities. To the residents, the stadium can play opposite roles: a hostile interruption of their daily routine, a mere eyesore, a generator of income, a centerpiece monument of the city. Burdensome issues of financing the stadium through tax dollars, providing public transportation to the venue, or improving the infrastructure to and from the stadium complicate the citizens' situation more. The types and manner of relationships to the stadium apparently are equivalent to the number of communities or even individuals located in the city that houses the sports facility. If one regards the idea of stadium as a text, then it becomes possible to apply textual analysis to the multitude of interpretations that communities or individuals have of a sports venue.

Stanley Fish set forth the idea of interpretive communities in his larger work "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976). Literary scholars use Fish's ideas to analyze why certain persons read the same text in certain ways. He presents two central principles: "(1) The same reader will perform differently when reading two 'different' (the word is in quotation marks because its status is precisely what is at issue) texts; and (2) different readers will perform similarly when reading the 'same' text" (217). Again, replacing the idea of "stadium" with the idea of "text" and considering two stadiums in two different locations, one can look at how a person views a stadium built across town or in another city in a different manner from one built near his home. In *It's Hardly Sportin': Stadiums, Neighborhoods, and the New Chicago*, Costas Spirou and Larry Bennett describe the widespread reverence for Chicago's

Wrigley Field: “For those who take the history and lore of baseball very seriously, Wrigley Field is, quite simply, a pilgrimage site” (108). However, Wrigley Field, especially its post lights, provides a different view and meaning for those who live near the stadium: “But for the local residents the ballpark, which itself is usually viewed as an amenity, represents a threat to peace and local stability as the atmosphere of revelry spreads to adjoining areas” (138). For a baseball fan and resident of the Lake View on Chicago’s north side, Wrigley Field can be viewed as essentially two texts, first as a historic sports stadium, a type of sports Mecca, and second, a nuisance that interferes with his or her daily life. The person belongs to two interpretive communities, baseball fans and local residents. His relationship to Wrigley Field will then be determined by the standards of which community he deems more important. This discrepancy often produces a sports fan who votes against improvements of a stadium or even the construction of a park that is located in his neighborhood, but would have no qualms about voting for improvements or construction in another part of town. Fish explains this phenomenon: “a single reader will employ different interpretive strategies and thus make different texts [because] (he belongs to different communities)” (219–20).

Fish’s second notion is that different readers will read a text the same way. In regard to stadiums, varied individuals can view the same text in the same manner. Looking at the community mentioned above that considers Wrigley Field a pilgrimage site, one can think of two baseball fans, one who lives near the stadium in Chicago and another who lives in Dallas. If both have the same idea of Wrigley Field, it is because they are interpreting the stadium for its value to baseball. The actions of the individuals will correspond to their reading of value. The fan living in Chicago will cherish the fact that he can spend multiple afternoons in the stadium, while the Dallas fan, viewing Wrigley Field as a prized destination, may take a summer vacation to Chicago in order to experience a game in the bleachers, possibly sitting a row below the Chicago fan.

Like people, cities also view stadiums in different manners depending on the beliefs of their community, as represented by their government officials. Many cities, for example, value stadiums as economic-generating entities even when there is no real proof that the stadiums are. Spirou and Bennett point out, “Most of America’s older industrial metropolises are presently attempting to redevelop their physical spaces and redefine their national and international identities through sports- and culture-driven growth initiatives” (13). Later, however, the authors question the true economic benefits: “there remains considerable uncertainty concerning the utility of sports construction projects as tools for economic development and urban regeneration” (19). In such instances, individual cities view stadiums as necessary entities. The city and those involved in urban planning read the idea of the sports stadium in the same manner, as an economic and social must for their particular city. In situations such as this, Fish writes, “it has always been possible to put into action interpretive strategies designed to make all texts one, or to put it more





Franklin D. Roosevelt seated in the presidential box at Griffith Stadium preparing to toss a baseball onto the field, 1933. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

accurately, to be forever making the same text” (218). The cities all read their needs as the same; so one city will have the same relationship to a stadium as its so-called rival city. In this sense, all cities then make the same text of meaning, with, in Fish’s terms, “a set of directions for finding it, which of course is a set of directions—of interpretive strategies—for making, that is, for the endless reproduction of the same text” (219). The city official who finds justification for building new stadiums, despite evidence that contradicts the economic benefits, then becomes no different from the literary critic who forces a novel into a certain genre even when the work only has one or two characteristics in common with the genre.

When building a stadium is proposed, the community’s reaction to the project is often problematic. Different members of what appears to be the same community employ different strategies of interpretation, which are constantly in flux. Communication and cooperation often become difficult to achieve between the government and members of the community, on crucial issues such as location, funding, economic value, and audience attraction. In such cases, Fish observes, “the only stability, then, inheres in the fact that interpretive strategies are always being deployed, and this means that the communication is a much more chancy affair than we are accustomed to think it”

(220). Understanding the divergent texts of the responses is difficult because one can never be sure of the relationship that an individual community member has to the stadium. Judging a response to be more or less representative or authentic cannot be objective: as Fish concludes, “the only ‘proof’ of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community” (221).

To highlight the differences in the reaction of the same group to a similar stadium project, two recent projects in the city of Arlington, Texas, just west of Dallas, can serve as examples. The first involves a new stadium for the Dallas Cowboys. The other proposes a new stadium and football program at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA).

In the first case, Texas Stadium, located in Irving, Texas, has been what many view as a classic stadium. It has been the home of a successful sports franchise. The stadium has a unique feature—the hole in the roof—and has been the site of historic games; the stadium is also aging in disrepair. Despite its physical decline, Texas Stadium is an icon. The city of Arlington already has the Ballpark at Arlington, the home of the Texas Rangers. Moreover, Six Flags Over Texas Amusement Park viewed the opportunity for a new Cowboys stadium as adding another piece to Arlington’s collection of leisure destinations. The cost to the city involved raising sales tax and kicking some of its residents out of the lower-cost areas of the city. Arlington, which is a middle to upper-middle-class city of around 300,000, does not have a particularly large or intense crime problem in its poorer side of town; however, despite that fact, proponents of the stadium marketed the plan with that implication. The pro-stadium marketing was aggressive, high-cost, and professionally done. The anti-stadium campaign, on the other hand, came from the grassroots, with homemade handbills. The stadium referendum passed easily. With the tradition of the Dallas Cowboys and the economics of entertainment prevalent in the city already, that anti-stadium interpretation had little chance.

With the proposed stadium at the UTA, the same city used a different strategy in order to come to its conclusion. The stadium project at UTA was analyzed using economic logic and common sense. The university has not had a football team in twenty years. When there was a football team, it was poorly supported and only moderately successful. After consideration, the university tabled the idea of bringing back football and building a new stadium for five years. Unlike the Dallas Cowboys, the university did not have widespread intangible goodwill to bank on. In parallel, a new Cowboys stadium was nearly a slam-dunk to win, but the UTA proposal was nearly a guaranteed loser. In central differences, there existed a positive relationship between the community and the professional team proposing the stadium. The Cowboys maintained a relationship of goodwill and fellowship within the community. In Arlington, the same group of people read similar texts of stadiums in different ways.



Aerial view of Busch Stadium in St. Louis. Courtesy of Corbis.

In regard to a stadium, the fellowship that builds “membership” arrives in the form of people congregating to view a sports event. The nod of recognition then comes from votes cast by the constituency during a referendum to build or not build a stadium. Outside that, the community seems to play a guessing game as to whether or not everyone is in agreement regarding having a stadium. Each group, even each person, has his own interpretation of the importance of a particular stadium or the idea of a stadium.

In sponsoring fellowship, stadiums function as a gathering places for the fans to be participants as well as viewers. One activity that has grown is tailgating. Tailgating entails ticket holders coming early to an event and congregating in the parking lot to eat, drink, and socialize prior to the event. Joe Cahn, the self-proclaimed “commissioner of tailgating” explains its offer of “membership”: “Tailgating. The last great American neighborhood. . . . In today’s society, people yearn for socialization and the parking lot provides the perfect place for everyone to come together.” At first, many stadiums fought the idea of tailgating because it potentially cut into profits on concessions, but now tailgating is not only allowed, but also encouraged as part of the game-day experience. Contests are held as to who has the best food or most energetic group. The previously mentioned commissioner of tailgating

rides from stadium to stadium attempting to determine which stadium has the best tailgating atmosphere.

Also, the game-day experience is enhanced by other attractions surrounding the stadium. The owners of the stadium directly sponsor some of these activities. These types of events include mini-fairs which have skill contests mimicking the sport which is being attended. Besides that there are dancing girls, t-shirts being shot out a cannon, half-time contests, and myriad other distractions for the casual fan. In fact, to a large extent sports no longer market to or develop hardcore, long-term fans; instead, they attempt to market to the casual fan who does not want to learn the complexities of the particular sport. All of these activities that invite casual fans occur within the confines and jurisdiction of the stadium, contributing to its iconic stature, making it superior to the game inside.

The modern sports stadium of services is a centerpiece to an economy based on leisure. Arlington, Texas, exemplifies cities where the major industry is not a productive plant, but rather where the center of the economy is leisure-time entertainment. As stated earlier, the city is home to an amusement park, a baseball stadium, and soon a football stadium. The venues are all within five minutes' drive of each other. The area has restaurants and hotels in the general vicinity. The appealing text that has been sold to the sponsoring city residents is that after the games, fans frequent eateries and bars near the stadium. Arlington, though, unlike other cities, has not used the stadium as the center of a specific entertainment district; but the economic welfare and more importantly the cultural identity of the city are centered on the three large entertainment venues. While the economic benefits of a specific building are probably overstated, the cumulative effect of how a city portrays itself remains vital. Andrew Zimbalist contrasts the economic importance with the cultural importance of a city's sports team: "It is a common perception that sports teams have an economic impact on a city that is tantamount to their cultural impact. . . . In most circumstances, sports teams have a small positive economic effect, similar perhaps to the influence of a new department store" (58).

While marketed as a place of fun and games, the modern stadium is anything but just a place to go and take in a ballgame. Once a person drives or walks near the grounds, the ballgame is now an experience involving the consumption of products and services surrounding the venue. Not all of the stadium's features serve merely entertainment, but all play for the goals of cultural and economic benefits for the city involved in hosting the team. Stadiums are about much more than just the game.

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# Stonewall

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*Thomas Piontek*

The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar located at 53 Christopher Street, just off Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village, New York, gave its name to what has become arguably the most emblematic event in American gay and lesbian history: the Stonewall Riots that took place at this site starting on June 27, 1969. As it happened, this was also the day that Judy Garland, the tragic actress, singer, and gay male icon in her own right was buried in New York City—an event that, some have argued, may have in part precipitated the riots. In any event, the Stonewall Riots have long been considered to mark the beginning of the contemporary gay and lesbian political movement; for many, the term “Stonewall” itself has become synonymous with the struggle for gay rights.

Gay writers, historians, and politicians have compared the significance of Stonewall to a wide variety of other highly symbolic historical events, including the tearing down of the Berlin Wall (Carter), the effect of the Six Day War on Jews around the world (Kaiser), Rosa Parks’s taking a “Whites Only” seat on a bus, and even the Boston Tea Party. For more than three decades, the Riots have been memorialized with annual Gay Pride marches and festivals in the month of June throughout this country and around the world. In Germany and several other countries these commemorative celebrations are more commonly known as Christopher Street Day (CSD), celebrating the Stonewall Inn’s location and what post-Stonewall was considered “the gayest street in the U.S.” In spite of its indisputable status as an important and enduring sign in gay history and gay politics alike, the precise meaning of “Stonewall” remains a bone of contention even today, more than thirty-five years after the riots that were the raw material out of which the icon has been fashioned.

The Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City had been known as a bohemian community of artists and intellectuals since the early twentieth century. A homosexual subculture became visible in “the Village” as early as the 1920s, and in later decades it developed a reputation as a center of gay and lesbian life. In the 1960s, however, the situation of gay men and lesbians

was significantly different from what it is today, and tolerance of homosexuals was severely limited. For one thing, in the course of the decade the New York City police systematically closed all gay bars by revoking their licenses. Thus, far from being gay-owned and operated, the only gay bars at the time tended to be run by the Mafia, who paid off the local police, so that they would turn a blind eye to what were basically illegal operations. In this climate the patrons of gay bars were used to police harassment and routine raids, and it is commonly assumed that it was a failure to pay off the police that led to the raid on the Stonewall Inn in late June 1969. However, as one historian remarks, “it turned out not to be routine at all. Instead of cowering—the usual reaction to a police raid—the patrons inside Stonewall and the crowd that gathered outside the bar fought back against the police” (Duberman, *dust jacket*). During the five days of rioting that followed, patrons of the bar and other protesters resisted arrest, threw bottles and cobblestones at the police and Tactical Patrol Force reinforcements, and even used an uprooted parking meter to ram the door when the officers retreated into the bar to regroup.

Gay activists who organized in the wake of Stonewall, for example by establishing the Gay Liberation Front, capitalized on the implausible fact that, “for once, cops, not gays, had been routed” when they coined the phrase *gay power*, to describe a novel force to be reckoned with (Duberman 202). For the new generation of gay liberationists, the Stonewall Riots signified a point of rupture, a radical break with the past, that suggested that there was a qualitative difference between the time period on either side of the divide—before and after Stonewall. The most extreme version of this before-and-after model of gay history has found expression in the notion that Stonewall marks the *beginning* of the modern gay and lesbian movement. This definition of Stonewall as an absolute beginning trivializes—or altogether ignores—gay and lesbian organizing and community building in previous decades. For example, the exclusive focus on Stonewall disregards the fact that the political efforts of gay men and lesbians in the 1970s were preceded by a generation of activists in the 1950s and 1960s who composed the Homophile Movement, comprised of such organizations as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis.

According to several historical accounts, homophile organizers and gay activists, in spite of their differences, did work side-by-side in organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front (Jay and Young). Nonetheless, gay activists portrayed the discord between the two groups as a generational conflict between the old homophile organizations, which they disqualified as assimilationist, and the younger group of gay radicals. In a way, this rhetorical strategy, which recalls the 1960s maxim “Don’t trust anyone over 30,” allowed the young activists to save the Stonewall Riots “from being simply ‘an event.’ They fleshed out the implications of the Riots, and ensured that they would become the symbol of a new militancy” (D’Emilio 245). In order to claim an identity of their own, gay militants who were committed to a utopian vision encapsulated



Parade participants ride past the site of the original Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village during the annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade, 1989. AP/Wide World Photos.

by the slogan “revolution in our lifetime” had to figuratively “kill the Father” by openly challenging the authority of the older generation.

For gay radicals, then, Stonewall functioned as an enabling fiction in their conflict with the homophile movement, and the metaphorical connotations of the bar's name and its compound parts—stone and wall—helped to make it a sign for an event of resistance. No poet or novelist could have intentionally devised a name more expressive of the characteristics of the “new” Gay Liberation Movement. The name connotes toughness, solidity, resistance, and steadfastness. A stone wall is also a line of demarcation, separating two spaces absolutely from one another—one side and the other or, metaphorically speaking, the before and after. Would Stonewall have been so easily mythologized if the bar had been named something else? Is it any accident that the word “Inn”—with its pretentious connotations of country comfort, hospitality, and old English warmth—almost never appears in mythologizing references to “Stonewall”? The first act of creating the icon, then, was to drop the “Inn” from the proper name out of which the mythical sign was fashioned.

Not at all coincidentally, the gay militants chose the name Gay Liberation Front for their organization, in homage to the Vietnamese guerrillas. The name also refers to a marked difference between gay radicals and their predecessors. Gay liberationists considered themselves a component of the decade's radical movement for social change, part of a “front” in the political sense of the word (a collection of groups). They saw gay oppression as one



social issue among many, and they also opposed capitalism, racism, sexism, and the war in Vietnam. In the words of Allen Young, writing in 1971, “gay liberation is a total revolutionary movement” (24). Along similar lines, the sign “Stonewall” was in the beginning essentially tied to the sign “Riots.” By semiotic correspondence, the sign “Stonewall Riots” ties the gay and lesbian movement to the 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles, the student uprisings at Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State University in Mississippi (among others), and perhaps most crucially, to the riots at the Democratic Convention in Chicago the preceding summer. This correspondence of “riots” figures Stonewall as normative, part of a larger movement for peace and (sexual) liberation.

In the late 1960s, homophile organizations such as Mattachine had a “reputation as the ‘NAACP of our movement,’ a damning description during years when groups like the Black Panther party were capturing the fancy of young radicals” (D’Emilio 2). Things had been decidedly different in 1950, when Mattachine was founded by five men in Los Angeles, among them the activist Harry Hay. The men had been members of the Communist Party, which was reflected not only in their tactics, but also in their early radicalism. The direction of Mattachine changed drastically in 1953 when a convention in Los Angeles marked the society’s takeover by a more assimilationist strand of gay thinking, and the end of involvement of many of the original founders. In fact, the new leaders threatened to turn over to the FBI the names of any members who were also members of the Communist Party, unless they resigned. The “Stonewall generation,” then, pioneered neither the radical stance of the gay movement nor its militant tactics. In fact, it could be argued that gay militants in the early 1970s picked up where the founders of Mattachine had left off in the early 1950s, continuing a tradition of radical gay politics established by the early homophile movement.

It is ironic that, as was the case with the homophile movement, radicalism did not remain the dominant tendency of the “post-Stonewall” movement for long. Almost from its inception, the Gay Liberation Front was the subject of sometimes severe criticism. Only six months after Stonewall, on December 21, 1969, nineteen people meeting in a Greenwich Village apartment created a platform for those who disagreed with the GLF’s philosophy and tactics by constituting a new organization, the Gay Activists Alliance. Whereas the GLF considered the fate of gay people in the context of a broader “revolutionary” movement, the GAA was exclusively dedicated to securing basic rights for homosexuals by working within the system, rather than trying to transform it:

The Gay Activists Alliance . . . and later more professional and organized efforts such as the National Gay Task Force (later renamed the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and still in existence), soon took gay liberation down another path. The goals of ‘gay rights’—assuming a place for us in existing society rather than pursuing a utopian vision—began to replace “gay revolution.” (Jay and Young xxxix–xl)

Under the sign “Stonewall,” gay and lesbian activists joined a larger movement for social change—“The Movement,” as it liked to call itself—and so found a legitimacy that they had not had before. This transformation of Stonewall led to the hegemony of rights-oriented gay activists, for whom liberation means simply extending the legacy of American freedoms to homosexuals in a pluralistic society. Ultimately, the myth of Stonewall came to mean, after some historiographical work, that gay men and lesbians had joined the mainstream, even if this was admittedly the mainstream to the left. Originally conceived as a catalyst for a radical political change, Stonewall eventually became the central trope of a mainstream gay culture that grounded its conceptions of gay identity within the “specific experiences of urban, middle-class white men” (Bravmann 10). This shift in political strategy was also reflected by the iconography of Stonewall: in the decade following the riots, Stonewall was represented as a rebellion of *white men*.

The erasure was twofold. First, there was the effacement of gender and race in accounts of the riots, which do not mention that Puerto Ricans, drag queens, and lesbians were among the patrons at the Stonewall Inn during the first night of the riots. On a symbolic level, celebrating Stonewall as the “birth” of the (white) gay (men’s) movement eclipses the history of those who came to gay liberation via the black Civil Rights struggle, who, as it were, proclaimed that “Black Is Beautiful” before they realized that “Gay Is Good.” Furthermore, the exclusive focus on Stonewall erases female specificity by discounting the experience of lesbians who trace their own origins back to the Women’s Movement or lesbian feminism rather than to Stonewall.

In addition, gay rights activists were—and are—characterized by a highly pronounced respect for the middle-class sensibilities of mainstream America. Lesbians, people of color, and the so-called “fringe elements” of the gay community, such as drag queens and leathermen, were no longer considered ideal poster children for a movement intent on assimilating into mainstream culture by convincing the white, heterosexual, male powers that be that “we are just like you”—except for that one minor difference which eventually came to be known as sexual orientation. Paradoxically, while today’s gay movement traces its origins to the radicalism of the “Stonewall generation,” what seems to have endured is a peculiar sense of respectability, which clearly is more reminiscent of the later homophile movement.

Only in the mid-1980s did gay historians begin to challenge the traditional representation of the events at the Stonewall Inn as an all-male, all-white revolt. According to more recent accounts, gay men and lesbians fought back in 1969, and many of them were of color, and many were drag queens. While the participation of several Puerto Rican drag queens in the riots has been incorporated, albeit reluctantly, into the lore of Stonewall, the lesbian presence at Stonewall remains contested. According to one view, the arrest of a cross-dressed lesbian (and her violent resistance) was *the* incident precipitating the riots, while other accounts firmly deny that a lesbian was even

present in the bar (qtd. in Duberman 190, 196–97). The changing iconography of Stonewall thus reflects the gay movement’s historical difficulty in acknowledging the ways that race complicates sexual identity and the difference that gender makes.

In the continuing struggle over the meanings attributed to Stonewall one can distinguish two different approaches. To this day, a number of writers and historians persist in their attempts to ground “the symbolic Stonewall in empirical reality” (Duberman) and to “present the clearest possible picture of what happened and why” (Carter). This trend raises the question of whether the appeal to “empirical reality” and the promise to finally tell the “full story” still have any persuasive relationship to contemporary theories of history that have called into question the notions that the historian controls the facts and that history conveys an objective truth. In addition, the notion that it would be possible to establish some reliable historical narrative seems particularly questionable in the case of accounts such as Duberman’s and Carter’s, which, to varying degrees, are based on oral history interviews with people twenty-five years or more after the events they are being asked to recall.

An alternative to this idea of a “total history” of Stonewall can be found in Nigel Finch’s film *Stonewall* (1995), which in its opening credits is characterized as a “fictionalisation based on the book by Martin Duberman.” Finch’s dramatization of the Stonewall Riots and the weeks leading up to this event is narrated by one of the film’s fictive characters, a Puerto Rican drag queen called La Miranda (Guillermo Diaz). The difference between Duberman’s and Finch’s respective approaches to the question of historical representation becomes apparent with La Miranda’s first words. In a direct address to the camera, she tells the audience:

See, there’s as many Stonewall stories as there’s gay queens in New York, and that’s a shit load of stories, baby. Everywhere you go in Manhattan or America or the entire damn world, you gonna hear some new legend. Well, this is my legend, honey. Okay? My Stonewall legend.

History, La Miranda reminds us, tells “stories” and creates “legends,” thus calling our attention to the constructed nature of all representations of the past, however ostensibly “real” they might be.

It might be helpful to follow La Miranda’s example of cheerfully abandoning the quest for a total history that would provide us with an objective, reliable, and definitive historical narrative of what happened at Stonewall. Because any historical representation is necessarily partial, we need to question the notion that Stonewall has some kind of settled, definitive meaning. La Miranda’s history writes race, gender, and class into her account of the riots in order to enable a future politics that includes people of color, women, and those “fringe elements” of the community symbolized by the figure of the drag queen. As I have argued elsewhere, a greater number of

queer fictions of the past will allow us to challenge the notion of a unitary gay community with a single shared history, to acknowledge the diversity that exists among queer historical subjects, and to proliferate the number of approaches to the project of gay liberation.

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# Suburbia

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*Philip C. Dolce*

Suburbia often is seen in alternate images, as an American dream or dilemma. The remarkable growth of the “middle landscape” in the last half of the twentieth century established the United States as a suburban nation. Today more Americans reside in suburban communities than in rural areas or cities. The post–World War II suburbs still heavily influence our views of suburbia. Massive numbers of families bought single-family houses and established a lifestyle based, in large part, on the well-being of children. The suburbs seemed to be the new promised land that signified the middle-class success of its residents.

Yet, suburbs were neither new nor simply middle-class. There always have been many different types of suburban communities, including working-class suburbs, black suburbs, ethnic suburbs, industrial suburbs, and in-city suburbs, among others. None of these suburban communities were seen as representing the image of the American middle landscape. In fact, until recently, most of these suburban communities were underrepresented in literature and in popular culture. In addition, the iconography of suburbia rarely deals with suburbs as specific places, but rather with suburbia as a state of mind. The iconic image of the American suburb evolved into one of a white, middle-class community of nuclear families.

The development of suburbia and its dominant image was unforeseen just over 100 years ago. With both anticipation and trepidation, the city was viewed as the major force in American life in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The city would give upstart America the powerful and sophisticated image needed to rival European nations. In a sixty-year span between 1870 and 1930, American cities bloomed with great museums, concert halls, skyscrapers, corporate headquarters, and other developments that marked these urban centers as world-class venues. The 1920 census established that more Americans lived in cities than in rural areas. The urban destiny of the United States seemed assured. There also, however, was a darker side to the image of urban America, including slums, crime, vice, and overcrowding.

At the same time, rural areas and small towns came to stand for a simpler, premodern America. Historically, countless numbers of Americans left rural areas and small towns for better opportunities in cities and later suburbs. Yet, a 1990s Library of Congress exhibition stated, “America remains in beliefs, in values, in spirit and soul, a small town nation.” The need for urban amenities and the nostalgia for the small town would become part of the iconography of the American suburb. The duality of image for the middle-class suburb was that it was to represent urban modernity while preserving the mythical, home-grown virtues of the small town.

In the late nineteenth century, the image of suburbia began to take shape. For privileged members of society who moved to the suburbs, the middle landscape represented a way of escaping the worst aspects of modern, urban life. It also allowed well-to-do families to be in close contact with nature without having to give up the modern comforts of the city. Urban amenities would be cloaked in a rustic atmosphere. Roads would wind, and unique



Walkerville, a suburb of Butte, Montana, 1905. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

single-family houses on large pastoral lots would be the norm. Nature also would be converted to residents' desires. Each house was set in a sort of personal botanical garden where only certain trees, flowers, and bushes were permitted to grow.

Suburban residence also connected strongly with an older view of how domestic life should be lived in the United States. The cult of domesticity stressed the house as a nurturing shelter in which a wife would establish a physical and moral environment for her family in a natural setting beneficial to all. A single-family house in suburbia, therefore, was more than a physical location. It was designed to be a home which would strengthen family bonds, improve the character of each family member, act as a symbol of family prosperity, and reconnect those chosen Americans with an agrarian past, without losing the benefits of urban amenities.

These early elitist suburban communities, such as Llewelyn Park, New Jersey, were not viewed with alarm for America's urban promise. It was believed that only the affluent few would live there, and that the city would dominate in terms of image, economy, and population. However, the availability of mass transit, the negative aspects of urban life, and the allure of the middle landscape, turned cities inside out as middle-class Americans from the professional-managerial class began to move to the suburbs in greater numbers. These newcomers, by and large, altered the elitist suburban dream of a unique house in a pastoral setting with a pattern-book house on a smaller lot. However, the idea of living in a homogeneous community of single-family houses on private lots, in which nuclear families would follow a prescribed pattern of behavior on a voluntary basis, demonstrated both an extension and a continuity in the allure of the suburbs. For the middle-class, home ownership not only fulfilled the needs of the cult of domesticity, but also offered a significant sign of upward mobility.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, some reformers saw the suburbs as a pristine landscape in which planned communities, based primarily on the British Garden City principles of Ebenezer Howard, would be built. An example would be Radburn, New Jersey, the "town for the motor age." This idea was popular enough that a display of planned, suburban, residential communities called Pleasantvilles was a major focus of the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. The belief in planned, suburban communities continues to this day. In short, suburbia as an icon has seemed to represent a new and better way of life, even if the images of what that meant were widely different.

This positive image of suburbia was partially offset by a more critical view of the middle landscape. In 1927, novelist Edith Wharton chided authors who situated their stories about modern American life in suburbia. Critics believed that the standardization, consumerism, and materialism of twentieth-century America seemed to be routine parts of life in suburbia. Cosmopolitan commentators pictured the suburban single-family house as a standardized

dwelling filled with standardized furniture in a community of uninteresting, middle-class neighbors.

These criticisms did not deter a new generation which came into its own after World War II. Federal government programs, the automobile, the availability of inexpensive land, and other factors allowed more blue-collar workers and middle-class professionals to move to the suburbs. They sought much the same ambience that earlier generations did in suburbia. Families with an income of \$3,000 a year now could afford to buy a home. In the 1950s, 13 million new houses were built, and 11 million of these were built in the suburbs. In places like Levittown, New York, a whole new community was created consisting of 82,000 people living in over 17,000 new houses. The iconic picture of suburbia was focused not only on the traditional images of house, domesticity, upward mobility, and natural environment but also on other factors as well.

For instance, suburbia seemed to be the true melting pot for America. White working-class and middle-class families were leaving their ethnic neighborhoods in cities and living together in the middle landscape. It seemed that class and ethnic differences would be less important than individual preferences in suburbia. The long-term, American goal of *E Pluribus Unum* seemed possible in the suburbs.

Some motion pictures of the 1940s and 1950s depicted these symbolic values. In *Father of the Bride* (1950), for instance, suburbia is viewed as a middle-class haven where children grow up to be model citizens like their parents. The complex problems of modern life are missing in these early films. The biggest problem in a youngster's life seems to be whether a son can borrow dad's car and the details of a daughter's wedding. Long-running television series such as *Father Knows Best*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Leave It to Beaver* reinforced the constant tranquility and uncomplicated image of life in the middle landscape. This popular culture image of the nuclear family nestled in a colonial, ranch, or cape cod house filled with modern conveniences spoke to how suburbia came to embody the American past, present, and future while taming the dilemmas of modern life.

As the suburban population increased so did the hostility of critics. Concern over conformity, mass culture, and standardization had grown and seemed linked to life in the middle landscape. The works of Sloan Wilson (*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*), David Riesman (*The Lonely Crowd*), John Keats (*The Crack in the Picture Window*), and others addressed the standardization of houses and the conformity of people in the suburbs. To some commentators, the expansion of the American middle-class and the mass movement to suburbia represented a degradation of the more established professional-managerial class. The house in suburbia was no longer a guarantee of status and social privilege. To these critics, the suburban house was not a home or an individual refuge any more than the corporate offices white-collar professionals worked in.



More importantly, the suburbs seemed to have sidetracked America from its urban destiny that had looked so clear at the beginning of the century. The suburbs were seen as exploiting the resources of cities and giving little in return. This concern grew with the urban crisis that impacted American cities in the 1960s and 1970s, which was tied to “white flight” and the growth of suburbs.

Motion pictures began to question the cult of domesticity and prescribed pattern of behavior that were supposed to be hallmarks of suburban life. While the title of *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) offered some reassurance, the film unnerved America. This motion picture strongly implied that there was something wrong with the American family, and living in suburbia was no cure. In the following decade, films such as *The Graduate* (1967) and *Goodbye Columbus* (1969) portrayed affluent youngsters disillusioned with their parents’ self-absorption and focus on material possessions. In the 1980s young suburbanites simply mocked their parents’ pretentious lifestyles or flaunted the “rules” of middle-class, suburban society in films such as *Risky Business* (1983) and *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (1986). By the 1990s children of the middle-class landscape portrayed good reason to fear or despise their parents in motion pictures such as *American Beauty* (1999) and *Happiness* (1999). The majority of suburban films in the last forty years have featured white, middle-class families trying in vain to find the comfort zone that suburbia seemed to represent in an early age.

In part, this critical turn occurred due to the fact that American values were changing. Diversity came to be valued more than homogeneity, especially in matters of race and, later, culture. The salad bowl rather than the melting pot became the dominant cultural metaphor. The cult of domesticity also came under attack as suburban life was viewed as contributing to the powerlessness of middle-class women and confining them to the responsibilities of house and home. The expansion of new suburban communities has come into question, as seen in attempts to limit sprawl and foster sustainable development through smart growth. Today there are attempts to find metropolitan solutions to the mutual problems impacting cities and suburbs.

Demographics also are changing the suburbs. The reality is that by the start of the twenty-first century more people continue to live and work in the middle landscape than in cities or rural areas. However, the nature of this population is changing. Recent black migration to the suburbs has, at times, exceeded white migration. Over 40 percent of Hispanics now live in suburbia, and Asians are the most suburbanized group in the nation. We now recognize that the suburban population includes an expanding number of single-parent families, gay and lesbian couples, and single people. The United States is a suburban nation not only in terms of population but also in economics. Suburbs have a significant share of businesses and jobs in the United States.

Yet the image of suburbia, especially in novels, film, theater, and the popular mind still features a narrow, stereotypical, domestic view of the middle landscape. In a way, this shallow vision is understandable. The suburbs always have been seen as an icon—a representation of life—rather than the reality of



Aerial view of the suburbs of Orange County, California, 2002. Courtesy of Corbis.

lives lived. Unfortunately, the iconic image of the middle landscape often appears in an extreme, either as an American dream or troubling dilemma. This false dichotomy has clouded our vision and impaired our ability to understand the complex and evolving nature of the suburban society which has brought a degree of satisfaction to residents' lives, and is still a much sought-after place to live and work.

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# Superman

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*P. Andrew Miller*

Look! Up in the sky. It's a bird. It's a plane. It's Superman!  
—opening of the *Adventures of Superman* television show

Perhaps the most famous introduction in American popular culture is for the last son of Krypton, the Man of Steel, Superman. While we may not be able to spot the blue and red streak flashing through the sky, the average American is very likely to encounter Superman on any given day, without ever walking into a comic book shop. It's not unusual to spot the big red S on the yellow shield as you walk through the mall or down the street. Scores of songs reference Superman as well. Every decade since his creation has its own television or movie representation of the American superhero, often propelling such actors as George Reeves, Christopher Reeve, Dean Cain, and Tom Welling into stardom. But what this character did for these actors is nothing compared to what he did for the superhero genre in comic books, television, and movies.

Superman's comic book origin is well known to most Americans. The planet Krypton was dying. Superman's father, Jor-El, a Kryptonian scientist, foretold the destruction of the planet but no one would believe him. The death of Krypton came too soon, when Jor-El had completed only a prototype rocket. Strapping his infant son Kal-El into the rocket ship, he sent him off to earth, and a crash-landing in a Kansas field. Found by Jonathan and Martha Kent, the baby was adopted by the couple and reared in Smallville, Kansas.

Less well known but equally important is the real-life origin of the character created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two Jewish boys from Cleveland, Ohio. Siegel was the writer while Shuster provided the first visual representation of Superman. Like most creations, Superman went through several versions, including starting off as a villain. But the partners eventually created the heroic Superman as a series of comic strips. However, they could not sell their creation. Then in 1938, when DC Comics was looking for something to put in the new comic book format, Siegel and Shuster sold

Superman and he appeared in *Action Comics* number 1: He was an immediate success. Of course, there is more to the story than that, as Dennis Dooley and others detail in a variety of histories and essays devoted to Superman.

But the significance of that debut cannot be underestimated. It started a whole new genre in American culture, and many costumed heroes hit the newsstands over the next several years. Batman appeared the year after; then Captain Marvel, the most direct imitator of Superman and biggest newsstand rival; and then Wonder Woman. An entire league of heroes emerged, and the stories of caped adventurers reached their peak during the World War II era. Yet it is a genre that continues today, with new superheroes introduced every year. In *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, scholar Richard Reynolds looks to *Action Comics* number 1 as defining the genre much as Aristotle looked to *Oedipus Rex* to define tragedy. Almost every theme and characteristic used in the genre since 1938 can be found in this comic book.

Much as Reynolds views the significance of Superman's first comic book appearance, John Kenneth Muir in *The Encyclopedia of Superheroes on Film and Television* credits the 1950s *Superman* television series starring George Reeves as one of the most influential examples of the superhero genre for the big and small screens. Muir argues that the long-lived series, running from 1952 to 1958, "set the tone for no less than five decades of superhero programming on the tube. Because it lasted so many episodes . . . , it eventually featured every story and superhero formula known to Hollywood, ideas that would one day become cliché" (9). In fact, story lines such as Superman's getting amnesia were redone in both a *Superboy* series and *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, starring Dean Cain as the Man of Steel.

Superman, in a variety of incarnations, has influenced the genre in a variety of media. His popular success is owing to a convergence of differing characteristics. Certain elements of the character had appeared before. The Phantom wore tights. Zorro had an alter ego. But many comic book historians point out that what made Superman innovative was placing the extra-terrestrial superhero in Metropolis, a contemporary, if invented, American city. The children of the time wanted more and they got it; the next year Superman had his own comic book. There was no stopping the hero, not even with Kryptonite.

This spectacular hero with amazing abilities certainly spoke to the youth and readers in his Depression-era debut. And in the following years, Superman fit with Roosevelt's New Deal ideology as well as the fight against America's enemies. Siegel and Shuster penned a two-page story where Superman flies to capture Hitler and Stalin, and brings them to the League of Nations for judgment. Max Fleischer, in his stunning animated cartoons, has Superman battling "Japoteurs" as well as Nazis in some of his episodes. Superman readily suited his early audience. However, even after World War II and the congressional hearings of the 1950s that labeled comic books dangerous to youth, Superman persevered, staying in continuous production

along with Batman and Wonder Woman, while most of the rest of the costumed adventurers vanished from newsstands.

His longevity brings one of the complications that attends any consideration of what Superman represents, and how his character and mythos appeal to Americans. Through the years, the character has evolved and been reinterpreted for different decades and different media. Nevertheless, some things remain the same. Superman is always the orphan from Krypton. He is always found by the Kents and raised in Smallville. He always heads off to Metropolis. He always has a girlfriend, whether it is Lana Lang during his teenage years or Lois Lane, from whom he is separated because of his abilities. And in most versions, he faces off against his arch-nemesis, Lex Luthor. These are the important and essential elements of the mythos. Different interpretations of the myth look at different aspects of the constant elements.

Jonathan and Martha Kent, for instance, are an important part of the Superman story. The orphaned Kal-El (and the orphan is often the hero in American culture) is adopted by this generous, loving, all-American couple who are Kansas farmers. Naming the extraterrestrial orphan Clark, the two instill in him the values of Truth, Justice, and the American Way. He is reared with the work ethic of the Midwestern farmer as well as the cultural values of small-town America. He learns to use his powers responsibly to help people. DC Comics has explored the importance of the Kents by doing Elseworld stories, stories set outside the main continuity of the comic books, to imagine what would happen if Kal-El had been found by someone else. For instance, *Superman: Red Son* has Kal-El's rocket landing in Russia. The importance of the Kents is also brought out in the television series *Smallville*. In the series, Clark and Lex Luthor start off as friends, but Clark's nurturing relationship with his adoptive father Jonathan becomes contrasted with the dysfunctional relationship between Lex and Lionel Luthor.

Gary Engle, in his essay "What Makes Superman So Darned American," looks at Superman's status both as an orphan and as an extraterrestrial to argue that Superman is the ultimate American immigrant. Because America is a nation of immigrants, the American public readily took to the alien child who comes to this country and adopts it and its values as his own. He remakes himself into an American, not just a Kryptonian-American. For Engle, his is the quintessential American experience, the need, perhaps even moral imperative, to remake oneself:

Thus the American identity is ordered around the psychological experience of forsaking or losing the past for the opportunity of reinventing oneself in the future. This makes the orphan a potent symbol of the American character. Orphans aren't merely free to reinvent themselves. They are obliged to do so. (83)

Engle also sees Clark's abandonment of Smallville for Metropolis as following the patterns of many immigrants in the twentieth century, leaving the

small towns and farms for the promises of the big city. The Clark Kent identity is essential for the myth of Superman to work, because Clark Kent is actually the identity that Superman assumes, and not the other way around: “This uniquely American hero has two identities, one based on where he comes from in life’s journey, one on where he’s going. One is real, one an illusion, and both are necessary for the myth of balance in the assimilation process to be complete” (85).



Superman in front of stars and stripes, forming a peace sign with his hand, 1970. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Of course, most Americans don’t look so deeply into the reasons they like Superman. For many it is fairly simple. Superman is a good guy, the ultimate boy scout. He has all these incredible powers that place him far above the rest of humanity, but he still loves his parents. He can fly to the other side of the world, but ordinary Jimmy Olsen is his pal. He can shatter meteors with his fists, but he still has trouble asking Lois for a date. For many of Superman’s male readers and fans, he is the ultimate wish fulfillment: if only the girl of my dreams really knew what I could do. For others, he offers an escape, not just in his adventures, but in his origins. He may have been raised on a farm with boring parents, but secretly he is much more; he just has to discover it for himself (a common theme echoed in the popular *Harry Potter* series). And what cool super powers he has! Super strength, flight, x-ray vision, bulletproofness. Who wouldn’t want such powers?

Superman’s appearance is also significant, especially because many people know of Superman only through his appearances on the small and large screens. He is often played

by an actor with classic boy-next-door good looks. Women particularly are targeted in the choice of actors. Christopher Reeve, the Superman of the 1970s and 1980s, Dean Cain, the Superman of the 1990s, and Tom Welling, the Clark Kent of the 2000s, have all been attractive actors and have made it to pin-up status. Their handsomeness is appropriate because Siegel and Shuster based Superman’s appearance on Hollywood romantic heroes such as Douglas Fairbanks, Senior. The various incarnations of the Man of Steel have played up Superman/Clark’s sex appeal in a variety of ways, including an episode of *Smallville* where Clark is thrown into a furnace and emerges naked, because all his clothes burn off. Of course, the actresses playing Lois Lane have also reached varying degrees of pin-up status, especially Terri Hatcher, the Lois Lane to Cain’s Clark Kent. Kristin Kreuk, Lana Lang on

*Smallville*, has also appeared in magazines and television commercials after her starring role on the show.

Every good superhero must also have a good supervillain, or villains, and Superman is no exception. Lex Luthor is the archnemesis for the Man of Steel. The bald Luthor is almost as recognizable as his rival. Luthor has gone through a few more changes than Superman, however, with more numerous reinterpretations depending on the decade of the updates. Originally the mad scientist with nifty evil machines, he eventually became the evil CEO during the 1980s revamp of the title and in subsequent TV portrayals. For a while, in the DC Comics universe, he was even the President of the United States. In such ways, Luthor has evolved more than the very static Superman. His “villainy” gets updated with the times, unlike Superman’s moral identity. Of course, his basic animosity toward Superman remains the same: Luthor knows Superman is not human and refuses to let the alien run free and retain power and respect.

Only a few superheroes have come anywhere near to being as recognizable as Superman. Batman, debuting the year after Superman, has seen nearly as many incarnations as the Man of Steel. John Kenneth Muir lists the 1960s camp *Batman* series as the most influential superhero television show, even above the 1950s *Superman*. The movie franchise that started in the late 1980s and through the 1990s brought the Batman back to the forefront of the American public’s attention, in a darker, scary kind of way. Batman represents different things, though, than Superman. For one, he is completely human, with no super powers. Training himself to the peak of human capabilities and having a wide array of cool “toys,” Batman follows the tradition of Zorro and other masked, human crimefighters. He is also an orphan. However, while Superman’s birth family died with Krypton, it is a remote loss that the baby Kal-El did not witness or experience in a personal connection. Batman’s personal origin lies in the murder of his parents while he watched. He is born of pain and trauma and anguish; and, while readers might want to drive the Batmobile or have the nifty Batbelt, most would not want to spend the rest of their lives in emotional distress like the Batman characters.

Spider-Man, Superman’s much younger cousin (coming some twenty-five years later) also comes close to matching Superman in iconic stature. The spider emblem, like Superman’s shield and the Batsignal, is easily recognizable and reproduced on a variety of clothing, thanks to merchandising campaigns. Also the star of a live-action television series and many different cartoon series, Spider-Man really jumped in popularity with the successful movies starring Tobey Maguire. With excellent special effects, a recognizable star, and a beautiful damsel in distress, the movies played well around the world. Because Superman’s contemporaneous incarnation was stuck on the small screen and costume-less in *Smallville*, Spider-Man took center stage in public awareness. Obviously, Spider-Man has many similarities to the Man of Steel, such as wearing glasses. Peter Parker, a science geek, is bitten by a radioactive—or genetically modified, depending on the version—spider, and



then gains great powers. However, he remains vulnerably human. Also an orphan, he feels responsible for the death of his father-figure, Uncle Ben (thus having something in common with Batman), because he refused to stop a thief who later killed his uncle. He has a family responsibility for his aunt and bills to pay, which he finances by photographing himself for the *Daily Bugle* newspaper. Yet, as comic-book veteran Danny Fingeroth points out in *Superman on the Couch*, Spider-Man also has fun being Spider-Man, and playing his alter-ego: “But the thing that makes Parker so modern—and so human—is not merely the combinations of emotions that spur him on, and hence his multiple innovations, but that he . . . is like all of us, capable of encompassing contradictions” (75).

Spider-Man and Batman echo other American heroes in their stature as “rugged individuals,” standing on the border of society, much like the hard-boiled detective. Batman is a vigilante, Spider-Man painted as a menace by J. Jonah Jameson and the *Daily Bugle*. The X-Men, stars of comic books and blockbuster films, also exist in this border area. The X-Men are mutants, each born with their amazing abilities that, like Superman’s, set them apart from the common masses. However, the X-Men are not welcomed as heroes but instead feared as dangerous threats to normal humans. Therefore, these individuals come together to find their own community, at Professor Xavier’s School for Gifted Children. Orphans such as Scott Summers (Cyclops), Ororo (Storm), Logan (Wolverine), and Kurt Wagner (Nightcrawler), join together to protect humans from evil mutants and to protect each other from humans. They create their own family. This theme seems to be popular in superhero teams, especially those with teenage or young adult members. In an America where the family is not a constant, individuals are free to create their own families. The X-Men all live together in the mansion just like Buffy the Vampire Slayer and all her friends wind up living together as a family in her home in Sunnydale. If Superman is the ultimate American immigrant, the X-Men could be the metaphor of the melting pot, because the roster at times includes a Canadian, a German, a Russian, an Irishman, an African American, a Jew, and an American Indian.

What Superman started back in 1938 lives on into the twenty-first century. Despite several setbacks along the years, Superman and superheroes are still part of American culture and probably will be until we find a way to create such powers in ourselves. The reason is fairly simple. These costumed characters speak to Americans in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, from the ultimate immigrant Superman to the family metaphor of the mutant X-Men. So long as they do, they will be part of our culture.

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# Tara

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## *Diane Calhoun-French*

Before I was ever allowed to read *Gone With the Wind* (which in my 1960s Catholic girls' high school was kept off the shelves at the library and reserved for check-out by those deemed "mature" enough to read it), I knew about Tara, the legendary plantation home of Scarlett O'Hara, immortalized in David O. Selznick's 1939 film treatment of Margaret Mitchell's epic novel of the Old South. I actually "saw" it much before my long-awaited opportunity to meet Rhett and Scarlett on the screen finally materialized during one of the film's many re-releases. For on Griffith Avenue in Owensboro, Kentucky, there is a home whose façade is a copy of Selznick's Tara and, while it was slightly out of the way to take this route on the three-hour trips to and from Grandma's house, I always begged Dad to "drive us past Tara." The never-dulled excitement of these fleeting glimpses of "grandeur" is among my most vivid memories of frequent childhood journeys from Louisville to Owensboro. These memories furnish personal testimony to the iconic power of Tara in American popular culture. It represented for me then only some ineffable wonderfulness without specificity. Now I hope to explore its power and significance with more illumination—but no less appreciation.

The conception of Tara that dominates the popular imagination is far from what Margaret Mitchell envisioned when, in 1927, she began the untitled manuscript that she worked on for the better part of a decade. The house Gerald O'Hara, Scarlett's father, builds on a North Georgia plantation he won in a card game is made of whitewashed brick, "a clumsy, sprawling building...built according to no architectural plan whatever, with extra rooms added where and when it seemed convenient" (45, 53). Mitchell, who had a journalist's healthy fear of libel charges, always insisted that Tara was not modeled on any actual home, present or past—a fact she verified through extensive research and travel through Clayton County, its fictional setting. Despite her protestations, however, visitors to Georgia, particularly Atlanta, routinely request directions to it. If there was no "real" Tara, Mitchell was nevertheless adamant that the O'Hara dwelling and farm accurately reflected plantations of the Civil War era. Moreover, her version of Tara is consistent

with—and emblematic of—her desire to look honestly at the South with all its warts (including hypocrisy and crudeness) and to interrogate the competing claims of the old Southern order and the new.

When Hollywood producer David O. Selznick bought the film rights to *Gone With the Wind*, however, his conception of what readers imagined and viewers wanted to see of plantation life was very different, grander in both scope and style. The Tara he created was its own imaginary place, almost wholly different from its antecedent in the novel. In her letters Margaret Mitchell recounts her struggles, along with those of film advisors Susan Myrick and Wilbur G. Kurtz, to restrain Selznick's ambition, both with respect to Tara and Twelve Oaks, the plantation home of Ashley Wilkes, another of the novel's main characters. They were almost wholly unsuccessful with the cinematic Twelve Oaks, which boasts two magnificent broad staircases in its interior and massive round white columns on its façade. Mitchell pleaded for a column-less Tara and considered it a small victory that, if Selznick would not agree to that, he did at least concede to a porch with modest square pillars. It is noteworthy that in the popular imagination, the "mansions" in the film version of *Gone With the Wind* (Tara, Twelve Oaks, and Rhett and Scarlett's house in Atlanta) have become conflated; the more modest Tara is routinely pictured and described as one of the large, round-columned extravagances to which Mitchell objected, so much so that architectural writer and columnist Jackie Craven, in defining the antebellum style, refers to Tara as "the palatial plantation home featured in *Gone With the Wind*."

More curious still are the descriptions, renderings, and floor plans of Tara that appear in Rosalind Ashe's *More Literary Houses*. Despite supposedly drawing inspiration from the novel (as opposed to the film) for its illustrations and narrative, Ashe not only describes a "typical gracious Southern home" in her paraphrase of the original text, but offers as well an altogether lavish imagined painting of Tara that features four massive columns and an elaborate two-story portico.

It is not surprising that Selznick's changes in the physical Tara reflect the film's thematic shift away from Mitchell's more balanced perspective on the Southern past. From the opening credits (preceded by a shot of Selznick's studio headquarters—itsself a Hollywood-styled mansion much more akin to what he envisioned for Tara than what he eventually settled for), Selznick's vision of Scarlett's plantation home as a romanticized embodiment of an idealized world "gone with the wind" is everywhere evident: in the montage of idyllic agrarian scenes that accompany the credits, in the nostalgic invitation of the opening text (not found in Mitchell's book) to enter this bygone era, and, most clearly, in the dramatic, hyper-technicolor images of Scarlett silhouetted on the hills of Tara that mark the film's beginning, middle, and end. Clearly for Selznick, Tara epitomized an era of chivalry, comfort, beauty, and honor—the hallmarks of idealized antebellum Southern living which, if they could not be wholly regained, could nevertheless be celebrated and valorized. It is clearly Selznick's vision of Tara, altogether more gracious than the raw and rather crude setting described by Mitchell,



Vivien Leigh (as Scarlett O'Hara) runs from her stately mansion, Tara, in *Gone With the Wind*. Courtesy of Photofest.

that resonated with the popular psyche and remains rooted in the contemporary imagination.

Another part of Tara's iconic power undoubtedly comes from its name: its origins in the Latin *terra*, meaning earth, and its evocation of Ireland's Tara, the ancient seat of kings and sacred site for Celts, Druids, and Christians. (We can only speculate how American cultural history might have been altered had Mitchell persisted in calling the O'Hara home "Fontenoy Hall," the name she used until halfway through completion of the manuscript.) It has been argued that Tara itself is the most important "character" in *Gone With the Wind*. Indeed, Gerald O'Hara's assertion that land is "the only thing in this world that lasts . . . the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for—worth dying for" supports this reading (35). Max Steiner, composer of the Oscar-winning film score, believed that Tara was more important than any of the individuals in the story; this "is why the 'Tara' theme begins and ends the picture and permeates the entire score" (quoted in Ussher 165). In a perceptive essay titled "Gea in Georgia: A Mythic Dimension in *Gone With the Wind*," Helen Deiss Irvin explores the role of nature in the novel and particularly Scarlett as a "child of Earth" (57). Irvin convincingly argues that Tara not only represents, as Gerald O'Hara suggests, the permanence of land in an otherwise transient world but is also associated with mother earth, symbolically represented by Scarlett's two "mothers," Ellen O'Hara and Mammy, both of whom she associates with home.

The mythical Tara, then, embodies a constellation of values—grace, plenty, beauty, permanence, the safety of home and mother—that continue to exert a powerful influence in a world in which time and circumstance conspire to make such commodities scarcer and scarcer. Seeking to “lose” oneself in an epic novel or film whose fictional cosmos embodies them is one way to regain them; the enduring popularity of both the novel and film versions of *Gone With the Wind* attests to this compelling urge. Another way is to recreate or recapture the world out of which such values emanate. The continuing fascination with modern-day recreations of Tara and with items that bespeak its elegance and era has abundant evidence.

Contemporary Taras can be found not only in the South, but from Pennsylvania to Utah. Many feature Selznick-like architecture and décor; others do not. All, however, promise the elegance and gentility of Southern comfort, the world of Tara recreated—sometimes thorough direct reference to the fictional plantation and sometimes only indirectly. The Red Brick Inn of Panguitch, Utah, for instance, boasts rooms “Scarlet [*sic*] O’Hara would have cherished”; visitors at Rooms at the Inn in Hart, Michigan, or The Ballastone in Savannah can escape the everyday world in Scarlett’s Room or Rhett’s Retreat. The Chretien Point Plantation Bed and Breakfast in Sunset, Louisiana, proudly notes that it copied Tara’s architecture for its own interior staircase. And Calhoun, Tennessee’s Pinhook Plantation House declares that when visitors approach its ponds and rolling hills, they will see a vista much like what Gerald O’Hara enjoyed. Tara—A Country Inn is found not in Georgia but in Clark, Pennsylvania; despite its Yankee environs, proprietors Jim and Donna Winner promise “the grace, grandeur, and romance of the Antebellum South” to prospective guests. Most interesting of all in this connection is Tarleton Oaks near Barnesville, Georgia, billed as “the fictional plantation home of Brent and Stuart Tarleton,” the young suitors bantering with Scarlett O’Hara on the porch at Tara as the narrative opens. This antebellum mansion is owned by Fred Crane, who portrayed Brent Tarleton in the film. The central hallway of the home has been transformed into the *Gone With the Wind* Hall of Stars Museum, featuring Crane’s collection of rare memorabilia; and guests can be sure of a warm greeting from Rhett Butler, the Cranes’ Missouri Fox Trotter horse.

Escapes from the hectic present to the elegance of Tara can be “manufactured” for those not lucky enough to retreat to antebellum mansions or modern-day plantations. Dean Bell Special Events of San Antonio will host themed *Gone With the Wind* parties. Spirits and wines popular in the Civil War era are served amid “large faux magnolia trees” and hothouse greenery flanking impressive rounded white columns. Tara’s square-columned architecture is more accurately captured by Catered for You of Dallas/Fort Worth, which promotes similar events. Vintage Gardens of Modesto, California, promises luxury for weddings, banquets, and other events, and, while it does not specifically offer Tara-themed events, its Web site features a sample of the online wedding announcement provided for engaged customers. The happy couple? Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara.

The places and settings described above provide both natural and architectural spaces reminiscent of Tara and the idealized Southern plantation. In addition, they frequently feature objects or replicas of objects that are part of the material culture of the antebellum South to enhance the experiences promised: period furnishings, art, dinnerware, and household decorations. Interestingly, with one conspicuous exception, neither Mitchell's nor Selznick's Tara is associated with particular objects or furnishings. Perhaps there's almost no borrowing because the principal action of the novel and film take place elsewhere, and scenes at Tara are relatively few, despite the overwhelming shadow cast on the narrative by Scarlett's ancestral home; or because the most prominent scenes at Tara feature the privations of the war and early reconstruction years. The exception of which I am speaking, of course, is Tara's green velvet draperies, one of the few items remaining after its Yankee occupation. Clearly, these have come to be emblematic of the lost comfort, elegance, and plenty the narrative eulogizes. Even those who have not seen *Gone With the Wind* have heard the story of how Scarlett, desperate to impress Rhett Butler in order to get money to pay the taxes on Tara, fashions an elaborate dress, cape, hat, and purse from Miss Ellen's green velvet portieres. This ensemble, reputed to have weighed thirty-five pounds, is among the most reproduced of Scarlett's elaborate garments; it is certainly the most widely recognized. Today it is possible to secure both a modified "costume version" of the dress as well as an exact museum quality reproduction, complete with real gold-clad chicken feet. In an interesting reversal of the original metamorphosis, Terry Kowatch of Touch of Fabric created an award-winning fantasy window entitled "Tara—Gone With the Wind," using Scarlett's dress as a model for an elaborate green velvet window treatment.

In such instances, consumers are purchasing goods and services which—at least partially—achieve their desired outcome of enjoying the elegance or beauty associated with the plantation South: fine dining, gracious hospitality, comfortable furnishings, and elegant attire enjoyed in beautiful natural settings and architecturally interesting structures. One variation on this notion is, of course, the popularity of Tara-related merchandise. Indeed, *Gone With the Wind*-related items of all sorts are a veritable industry. Many of these are billed as "fine" collectibles: hand-painted miniature buildings, delicate china plates, porcelain boxes, hand-blown glass. To the extent that in materials or workmanship these objects represent modern-day manifestations of antique-quality objects from the past, we can view their acquisition as yet another variation on the desire to recapture past elegance. More significant, though, in a discussion of Tara's iconic power, is the desire simply to possess a recreation of its image or a product imprinted with its name: plastic Christmas tree ornaments, machine-made afghans, cross-stitch patterns, puzzles, and souvenirs such as combs, jewelry, and ballpoint pens.

Indeed, if one way to gauge the staying power of an icon is to determine the extent to which, over time, it remains capable of commercial and economic exploitation, Tara has demonstrated its endurance. Businesses, services, and

products such as those described above show no signs of waning in popularity. In fact, the use of the World Wide Web permits even greater exploitation than before. cursory internet searches will uncover the briefest, most tangential references to the object of desire: consider what happened when I “Googled” *Tara* and *plantation*. One link led to a law firm whose headquarters building is reminiscent of Tara. Another introduced me to Sims Stone, a company that manufactures patio materials; their “Tara” pavers create a “timeless weathered feel reminiscent of southern plantation charm.” The Oak Grove Plantation Bed & Breakfast in South Boston, Virginia, did not explicitly associate itself with either Tara or Southern plantation life. It did, however, appear in my Google search because its Web site made reference to “Tara, our resident Dalmatian.”

Perhaps the best evidence of the ubiquity of Tara in American culture is the extent to which its story, as well as its image, continues to be created anew. Three sequels have carried forward the story of Scarlett and Rhett, left so painfully unresolved at the end of *Gone With the Wind*. Two of these—Kate Pinotti’s *The Winds of Tara* and Jocelyn Mims’ and Melanie Pearson’s *My Beloved Tara*—were unauthorized and are largely unknown and virtually unavailable today. Alexandra Ripley’s *Scarlett*, which appeared in 1991, was a major bestseller and probably the most-anticipated sequel in literary history, although it was panned by critics and generally disappointed readers. Significantly, the source of reader dissatisfaction with both *My Beloved Tara* and *Scarlett* seems to be that *Gone With the Wind*’s major character—Tara—is nearly missing. While Scarlett retreats to her plantation home initially, the major action in both novels is set elsewhere—in Ripley’s case, in Ireland. One wonders if both writers retreated from a narrative grounded in Tara because the task of recreating so powerful a mythic setting seemed too daunting.

Attempts to parody Tara, on the other hand, have proven quite successful, perhaps because parody acknowledges its object’s iconic power without attempting to recreate it. In her provocative and controversial 2001 novel *The Wind Done Gone*, Alice Randall interrogates the master-slave relationship at the heart of *Gone With the Wind*. Ironically, however, Mitchell would almost certainly have approved of Randall’s characterization of the plantation as the “Cotton Farm,” something much closer to Mitchell’s own vision of Tara than the one that dominates the popular imagination. New Line Cinema’s *Gone With the Wind* Web site provides readers with the opportunity to post their own versions of classic scenes from Selznick’s film, imagining directors and actors of their own choosing and modifying scenarios and dialogue as they wish: “There is no replacing *Gone With the Wind*, but participating in our homage to the greatest American romance ever told may just bring you a little closer to Tara.” Responders to this program “As Directed By” envision how Peter Wier, Woody Allen, James Cameron, Quentin Tarantino, and others might have interpreted the movie’s greatest scenes; whatever the changes, however, by implication, Tara remains sacrosanct and safe from meddling. Perhaps the most memorable parody was the “Went With the Wind” sketch



on *The Carol Burnett Show*. The skit features Starlet O'Hara sweeping down the staircase at Terra to meet Rat Butler wearing a dress made of green velvet drapes and tassels—complete with curtain rod! At seventeen minutes, the laugh that greeted her entrance is often cited as the longest in television history.

As this brief discussion illustrates, the mythical Tara exerts its power into the twenty-first century. It remains a part of our collective imaginations. Its image still works its way, both directly and indirectly, into our material, literary, and popular culture. Helen Taylor, British scholar and author of *Scarlett's Women: Gone With the Wind and its Female Fans*, perhaps sums it up best:

However much I know of Hollywood's historical distortion . . . [I] absorb an interpretation of America's real and legendary past, more vivid to me than any verbal re-creations I have read in my researches into American history and literature. . . . [T]he South's agricultural past will be for ever Tara. (15)

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# Tattoo

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*Karen Aubrey*

We see them on nearly every singer on MTV, on movie stars, on television stars, on supermodels, on sports celebrities, on soccer moms, on many of the “heroes” of popular culture, and on those who shape the cultural habits of Americans. Tattoos are everywhere. In the twentieth century Americans have gone from disdain of the tattoo to such widespread cultural acceptance that it seems more people under 40 are tattooed than not. Even the association of tattoos with biker culture has been forever tamed due to the television series *American Chopper*, where Paul, Sr., sports the traditional biker/tattoo look, yet allows us to see the underlying middle-class “family” man at heart. He’s no outcast, just another middle-class American trying to make money while raising a family.

Why has the tattoo gone from being a symbol of the primitive and uncivilized to a poetic statement of the middle-class self and of one’s spiritual connection to the world and beyond? What has made the tattoo a part of today’s fashion? What changes in tattoo designs and in societal attitudes contributed to the creation of this American icon?

In *The Tattoo History Source Book*, Steve Gilbert tells us that an amazing number of ancient Greek and Roman writers, including Plato, Seneca, and Aristophanes, discuss tattooing, and almost always associate it with barbarians. Those societies used tattooing as a means of identifying prisoners, slaves, and deserters from the army. The Romans used the term “stigma” for tattoo, and that original meaning for “stigma” still exists in modern dictionaries (15). This early attitude of associating disgrace with tattooing carried into European encounters with the tattoo practices of other cultures, and has existed until very recently in America.

Most accounts of the history of tattoos and tattooing begin it in Polynesia over 2,000 years ago, though evidence of tattooing has been found in all regions of the world. Gilbert mentions that tattoos were even on the Iceman, a 5,000-year-old mummy found in a glacier between Austria and Italy (11). But the American design of tattoos has been especially influenced by the Polynesian islands of Tahiti, Samoa, and Hawaii. Samoa is thought to have

developed the most artistically sophisticated tattoo designs. In fact, Samoan tattoo artists today are still regarded as being the best in the world.

The Polynesian style of tattoo design for males, extremely painful to receive and taking years to complete, would cover the entire body from between the waist to just above the knee. This included the genitalia. Traditional female designs cover a smaller area. Polynesians associated tattooing with spiritual and social issues. Early tattoos in Polynesia usually signified rank, including passage into manhood or into a leadership role, and were a primary means of beautifying the body. To refuse to be tattooed would ensure that one would become a social outcast with doubtful success in courtship. Incomplete tattoos were just as much a sign of shame. Some Polynesian cultures tattooed the full body, but most cultures have negative connotations with tattooing the face and head.

When eighteenth-century British sailors, like Captain James Cook, came into contact with these Polynesian cultures, they regarded the tattoos as primitive yet exotic curiosities. Very quickly, these sailors began to get small tattoos themselves from the native islanders and brought those designs back home to Europe. Also, native tattooed Polynesians were taken to Europe to be displayed as oddities. Thereupon, as anthropologist Margo DeMello notes in her book *Bodies of Inscription*, the initial Western reaction to tattoos was to begin “constructing a narrative about tattooed people as savages” who were shown as exotic displays (47).

Anthropologists find that, almost simultaneously, native islander designs began to exhibit elements of European influence. So Europeans were exposed to Polynesian design images, yet the Polynesians began to use Western images that were shown to them by the British. This cultural exchange has continued to today to influence modern tattoo designs.

Negative social attitudes toward tattoos appeared quickly in European minds, primarily as a result of missionaries’ declaring that tattoos were unchristian and should be prohibited. This attitude may have been an attempt of missionaries to subvert the religious, spiritual, and cultural significance tattoos had in Polynesian society in order to further the influence of Christian practices. But missionary prohibition of tattoos was a total failure among the native islanders. Among Europeans, the prohibition did little to stop sailors from getting tattooed; however, it had a profound effect on the direction in which Western social attitudes toward tattooing would develop.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the display of tattooed people had become a “freak show” industry where the tattooed put themselves on display for a fee. The first tattooed sideshow exhibits consistently developed their explanations of how they received their tattoos by typically claiming to have been captured and held against their will as they were tattooed over a period of months by savages. Then, DeMello writes, “In 1840, P.T. Barnum . . . [brought] the freak show to prominence. It was here that . . . tattooed people were exhibited alongside people with disabilities, natural wonders like wild animals, native people, and ‘gaffes,’ or manufactured fakes” (54).

Over time, more white Europeans began to show their tattoos, especially sailors; and the tattoo began to represent different ideas to the white working-class male: travel, adventure, and freedom. The tattoo in America became particularly “Americanized” by soldiers in wartime. DeMello notes that perhaps the first professional tattooist in America, Martin Hildebrandt, who owned a tattoo shop in New York City by 1846, reported that he not only tattooed sailors, but also tattooed soldiers on both sides in the Civil War (49–50). After the Spanish American War and particularly after World War II, tattooing became a way of showing one’s patriotism and became very closely associated with those who served in the military.

Probably due to advances in tattoo techniques which made it easier, faster, and cheaper to create tattoos, tattoos became available to the lower classes. As with many things in society, when the lower classes can participate, the upper classes avoid the practice. So tattooing became associated with the lower classes early in American history. Because many who serve in the military tend to be from the working class, the connection of tattooing with the working class was further reinforced.

The designs of tattoos during this time were images that would appeal to military men, names of beloved individuals such as “Mom” or a girlfriend, images of hula dancers or pin-up styles of scantily dressed women, military insignia, one’s own initials or name, or designs which would signal bravery, patriotism, and traditional American ideals. Classic American tattoos also tend to include images from popular culture, such as cartoon characters. It seems that these American tattoos express an association with love of family, country, and American culture.

Most who study tattooing agree that, beginning around the 1960s, the attitude toward tattoos began the shift toward general acceptance in America. Ironically, as a result of widespread concern about blood-transmitted disease, better cleanliness practices were developed in the tattoo industry, and tattoo machines were designed which facilitated ease of cleanliness. In fact, today, walking into a high-end tattoo shop is more like walking into a medical office. Such increased focus on receiving a “healthy” tattoo is more palatable to the mainstream. Although, during the 1960s, tattoos were often associated with bikers, gangs, hippies, and others who were societal outcasts, the general



A sailor being tattooed, World War II. Courtesy of Corbis.

atmosphere of freedom of self-expression, including the freedom to express oneself in ways that had formerly been taboo, included acceptance of the tattoo. Public entertainment figures began to publicly display tattoos, like Janis Joplin, Joan Baez, Peter Fonda, Flip Wilson, and Cher (DeMello 75).

The women's movement, too, especially influenced American tattoo designs. With freer control over their own bodies, American women getting tattoos encouraged more "feminine," subtle, smaller tattoo images. These more "tasteful" designs often had undertones of the philosophy of the freedom and peace movement of the times. So images of peace signs, peace slogans, and images from the psychedelic movement became popular. Tattoos became an expression of ideology rather than of exoticism or of patriotism. Those tattooed were seen as expressing their individuality and their own spirituality, rather than simply being marginalized from society.

Mainstream media plays a large role in the current acceptance of tattoos. In 1982 the first tattoo magazine aimed at the middle class was founded, *TattooTime*. This magazine was considered middle class because it did not feature biker images or sailor-style Americana tattooing designs. It also had a large educational component to its content (DeMello 80). Today, many tattoo publications also emphasize the tattoo's cultural history and cultural significance, making the tattoo a form of cultural acknowledgment. Tattoo magazines are prolific and don't have to be found at your local cramped, seedy tattoo parlor. They can be bought in the grocery store checkout line. These types of magazines have allowed people to write letters, ask questions, view tattoo designs, and read about tattoo artists and techniques.

Tattooing has also become a marketable and saleable commodity, again placing it squarely into mainstream values of middle-class American life.

Partly through contests or the display of tattooists' works and through massive advertising of anything tattoo-related, tattooing has become, according to the online article "Attitudes about Tattooing," the sixth-fastest-growing retail business in the United States; middle-class suburban women make up the fastest growing clientele.

With all of the heightened talk about tattoos in the last twenty years, tattoos are getting attention from journalists and scholars as well as the tattoo community. University professors now research tattooing and the cultural attitudes toward it. Many tattooists advertise themselves as "better" because they have Fine Arts degrees. Museums are offering exhibits dedicated to tattoo design and the art of tattooing. As described in "Attitudes about Tattooing," the tattoo parlor has become more of an



A modern tattooed couple. Courtesy of Corbis.

art studio setting with “the ambiance of an upscale beauty salon,” requiring appointments. These studios draw the “same kind of clientele as a custom jewelry store, fashion boutique, or high-end antique shop.” Some tattoo magazines have furthered the tattooist-as-artist view by refusing to print “anonymous” tattoo images, and insisting on naming the artist of each pictured design.

Instead of a tattoo’s being explained as something one did while drunk one Saturday night, tattoo magazines allot space for the tattooed to express why they got tattooed and what meaning their tattoo design has for them. These expressions of personal meaning lead to the overall impression that getting a tattoo is a long thought-out process, for a permanent change to the body, which has significant meaning rather than a drunken impulse behind it. Such forums have allowed the shameful aspect of getting a tattoo to disappear. They, too, present the tattoo as a conscious, moral or sentimental statement which has an uplifting purpose for the bearer. Tattoos can almost be seen as a mark of spiritual triumph. If the tattoo was chosen for its aesthetic beauty, the values inherent in fine art are expressed.

More frequent tattooing may also be a result of mainstream Americans’ wide acceptance of a range of permanent body modifications. The popularity of “extreme makeover” television shows attests to this approval, as well as a look at the number of plastic surgery procedures that are advertised in mainstream newspapers and magazines, and discussed on afternoon talk shows. Elective body modification and cosmetic dentistry have surged in popularity and availability. Breast implants are now so common that they are given as high school graduation gifts to daughters. So the general attitude toward body modification is one of wide acceptance; tattoos are just another form of this practice.

Tattoo conventions, tattoo Web sites and chat groups, as well as tattoo publications, have all given the tattooed a sense of group identity, and the middle class generally finds group identity comforting. Rather than being an expression of individuality *outside* of the mainstream, as tattoos once were, tattoos now express an individuality *within* the context of remaining a part of the middle-class embraceable group. There is even a Christian Tattoo Association with its own site on the internet where issues such as the law against tattoos in Leviticus 19:28 (“You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord.”) are discussed on “The Bible & Tattoos” page. So the tattooed are both different, individualized by their particular image design and by their particular reasons for choosing to be tattooed, yet they are also part of the accepted group of middle-class Bible adherents. Because their designs are more philosophical and personal rather than expressions of rebellion or of the exotic, their tattoos do not offend mainstream sensibilities. So a mix of individualism and group dynamics is involved with modern American tattooing.

This seemingly contradictory mix of individuality and group dynamics seems particularly “American” to me. Instead of blending as in the common “melting pot” metaphor, Americans celebrate differences in culture and

ethnicities, while retaining a group identity that is somehow “American.” Where once the tattoo “community” was only the group that frequented a particular tattoo shop, now that community expands as far as the Internet will reach. So tattoos simultaneously signify one as an individual and as a member of a group.

One example of the Americanization of a tattoo design that has carried the spirituality aspect palatable to the middle class involves the “tribal” designs. Tribal designs, from Polynesia, tend to use heavy black lines without a lot of intricate detail. At its origin, it has social and cultural significance. Once the tribal designs became popular and widespread, tattooists began modernizing them and creating new designs which only look non-Western. One such example, discussed by DeMello, is the “Hawaiian Band,” a tribal-looking motif that is designed to wrap around the upper arm. White tattooist Mike Malone designed this style in the 1970s. “Not only do native Hawaiians wear these tattoos . . . but Malone has seen his ‘Hawaiian’ tattoo appear in the *National Geographic* as a representation of traditional Hawaiian tattooing” (91). So the acceptance and prevalence of tattoos act to influence the very roots of tattooing traditions.

Other evidence that society has embraced tattoos is the abundance of “tattoo-like” products. There are temporary tattoos for sale at almost any large discount store or applied in many tattoo shops. These temporary tattoos are often elaborate, barely distinguishable from the real thing, and are routinely used by children under eighteen; so the acceptance of tattoos begins at an early age. Temporary painted tattoos are offered at fairs. Bathing suits with cutouts provide natural suntanned tattoos on the body. Stickers cut into various shapes, such as a heart, can be bought to cover a spot on the skin to prevent it from tanning, resulting in a “tattoo” of sorts.

As to the trendiness of being tattooed, one tattooist DeMello interviewed described the attitude toward tattoos as becoming part of a fashion statement: “because of all the attention it’s getting, you know MTV, the media, it’s like anything else where the kids see something on TV, whether it’s a tattoo or a pair of shoes or something, they treat it as the same thing” (191).

I realized just how entrenched the tattoo is in our culture when I saw a parody of the tattoo on a recent Miller Lite beer commercial during prime-time television. Two men are fishing in a boat while a football referee stands thigh-deep in the water next to them. The referee blows his whistle and announces a “penalty” on one of the men in the boat for having a tribal arm design tattoo. The referee accuses him of using the tattoo as a clichéd attempt to fit in.

If we can now get the humor of a particular tattoo design being a cliché, we’re certainly used to seeing lots of tattoos, whether we’ve thought about it or not. According to the online “The Vanishing Tattoo,” *Esquire* magazine estimated in 2002 that 1 in 8 Americans has a tattoo. I’m surprised that number wasn’t higher. As a college professor, I look at my students on hot Georgia days, when they’re wearing as little clothing as modesty permits, and

nearly every one of them has at least one visible tattoo. We're in an era where Americans have enthusiastically accepted the tattoo, but only after we changed its cultural meaning and raised it to iconic American stature.

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# Henry David Thoreau

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*Daniel S. Kerr*

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for Absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with freedom and culture merely civil, to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society.

—Henry David Thoreau, opening sentence of his posthumously published essay “Walking.”

Few causes have so conscripted a writer as the modern environmental movement has conscripted Henry David Thoreau. The nineteenth-century icon best known for his association with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the American literary movement called Transcendentalism, and once observed to have been too “self absorbed to be politically diplomatic” (Lucas 267), has taken up a new mantra in popular culture more than a hundred years after his death. And, of course, Walden Pond is mecca, drawing nature-loving pilgrims from around the world. Noting the importance of the place and the writer who immortalized it in American life, Robert Sattelmeyer comments that “Walden is not only a literary shrine but also a cultural site that provides a focal point for a series of environmental concerns and beliefs that continue to be central to our collective social life a hundred and fifty years after Thoreau moved back to town” (235). The enshriner of Walden Pond becomes an “environmental hero” in Lawrence Buell’s oft-quoted book *The Environmental Imagination* (315), a work that, according to Sattelmeyer, documents “the successive possessions and repossessions of Thoreau and Walden Pond by disciples, publishers, literary scholars, environmentalists, and the public” (236). Buell names the latter third of the book for Thoreau’s “Environmental Sainthood.” In an older classic of American dissection titled *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Frazier Nash credits the Concord eccentric for “the classic early call for wilderness preservation” (102). Today his essay “Civil Disobedience” is sacramental to activists of all kinds. Cast in the attitudes and partiality of his own day, Thoreau’s words do transcend time to live at the spiritual core of the modern environmental movement, affixed in

the public consciousness as much to the struggle for the preservation of wilderness as to the great movements of passive resistance.

Yet, the relationship between today's environmental movement and Thoreau does not come easy. The slightest scrutiny shows a marriage forced and orchestrated, built on selection and omission. Little more than a cursory inspection of *Walden* and especially his essay "Walking" yields a more complex environmental philosophy immediately contradictory to itself and sometimes at odds with that of today, or at least to current portrayals of environmental sensibilities. Opposing his iconic role, Thoreau's writing instructs that, in the end, nature is not delicate and that humans are not inimical to nature, because humans are nature. Thoreau is an uneasy saint of modern environmentalism; but the words he did speak for nature, agreeable or not to today's polarized polemics, offer people hope for a more accessible relation to the natural world. Part of the problem today is that the nature movement has failed to heed those words.

The idea of a nature that flourishes despite a certain level of human use agrees with William Cronon's contested essay "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," now infamous in certain environmental circles. The trouble he refers to "embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural" (80). Many of the most beloved figures of modern environmentalism embraced this false dualism, important as they are to shaping our heightened environmental awareness today. Rachel Carson, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Paul Ehrlich, and David Brower are recognized as the "main inspiration" for the Deep Ecology movement, which arose with 1960s activism. The philosophical underpinnings have been traced back to Thoreau himself (Sessions ix-x).

Thoreau's nature is not so clearly defined, though, which is good because, as Cronon and many others before him have warned, the pristine wilderness so many of us seek is likely nonexistent. The most valuable lesson Thoreau the environmental icon offers us today is a more realistic view of our relationship with nature and a way to preserve it.

## WILDNESS AND WILDERNESS

In a world where the interests of people and animals seem increasingly to conflict, some environmental groups, such as Earth-First!, have asked that we place the interests



Henry David Thoreau, 1879. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

of what they see as the real nature ahead of human interests. To many environmentalists best represented by what has come to be called the Deep Ecology or the New Environmentalism, wilderness demands the complete absence of humans. Nature activists and rhetoricians today often enlist one particular passage of Thoreau's essay "Walking" to encapsulate this environmental saga. Often misquoted as "in Wilderness is the preservation of the world," the Thoreauvian phrase "in Wildness is the preservation of the world" ("Walking" 61) became the title of the well-known Sierra Club book. Susan Lucas writes of the selection's extensive environmental service: "Again and again we see this statement extracted from the essay and wildness used to promote wilderness preservation" (269). Like much of Thoreau's writing, these words hold significance for many thoughtful environmentalists today, and justifiably so; yet latent in this apparent salvo for wilderness preservation lies a concept contradictory to the movement's most basic tenet that, by definition, wilderness cannot coexist with humans. Thoreau said that, rather, one does not necessarily portend the end of the other. Humans and wilderness share a commonality he called the Wild. Thoreau found sustenance in such wildness and not necessarily in wilderness. Contrary to much of contemporary environmental rhetoric, the philosopher sought wildness both in wilderness and in civilization—and there lies the threat to environmentalists who seek foremost to preserve islands of wildness in designated wilderness refuges, mythological places defined by the absence of anything human.

To understand that Thoreau's "Wildness" is not synonymous with his wilderness is to understand that Thoreau thinks of nature not as fragile and susceptible to destruction by humankind, but, rather, as resilient and able to coexist with responsible humans—to understand Thoreau's "Wildness" is, in his words, "to regard man as an inhabitant, or part and parcel of Nature" ("Walking" 49).

Wildness alone attracts us to "Literature," explained Thoreau in "Walking," an essay one editor condensed and renamed "The Value of Wildness." Nature writing is not what Thoreau means, necessarily, but "the uncivilized free and wild thinking in 'Hamlet' and the 'Iliad,' in all Scriptures and Mythologies, not learned in the schools" (64). Wildness sustains—or preserves—the world: wildness drives the plow and fills the sail, trees seek it beneath ground, and "cities import it at any price." Wildness is sustenance for governments as well as for individuals: "The founders of every State which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar wild source." Even domestic animals retain "wild habits and vigor" ("Walking" 61, 66). Thoreau's wildness exists outside of wilderness, a point environmentalists are wary to concede, perhaps understandably in consideration of such opposing dialectics as "Wise Use," the motivations of which are at best dubious.

In Cronon's landmark essay the environmental historian reminds us that "*wildness*" (as opposed to wilderness) can be found anywhere: in the see-

mingly tame fields and woodlots of Massachusetts, in the cracks of a Manhattan sidewalk, even in the cells of our own bodies” (89). Thoreau, according to critic Barbara Nelson, was trying to formulate “a more realistic definition for a wild American heritage,” not the “American continent as empty, wild, and pristine, newly delivered from the creating hand of God to his chosen people.” The phrase “in Wildness is the preservation of the world” never implied that wild nature is delicate. “He does not say wildness needs our condescending protection, but that wildness will protect us,” Nelson continues: “Although Thoreau definitely values wilderness, wildness and wilderness are not interchangeable signifiers in his mind” (257–58).

### THE INEXORABLE AND TRANSFORMABLE WILD

At first this idea of a resilient nature seemed to me either self-interested or antique, set against the contemporary environmental fatalism of the so-called Deep Ecology, which more often maligns humankind as a disease of nature than acknowledges the species as part of nature. Later, however, I remembered an example of nature’s resiliency from my own region’s ecological history. Where I grew up on the southern high plains, concerted efforts to eradicate predators to enforce the agroecosystem of livestock were tragically successful in the nineteenth century. Government provisions of poison and settler-supplied firepower made short work of the well-adapted wolf, a keystone species that won its place at the top of the plains’ ecological hierarchy through thousands of years of evolution. But unsentimental nature adjusted. The wolf’s former prey nourished the smaller, more versatile coyote, which quickly assumed the lobo’s place at the head of the table, the ancient ecological superstructure. These are the same “wily” animals that hunt and reproduce in New York City, along with the Red Tailed Hawk, which also shares my home. The shameful extermination impoverished my relationship with an older form of my home, yes; human interference sent the ecosystem into a tumult. Unlike more progressive places where wolf populations have rebounded, the predator’s reintroduction in the Texas Panhandle won’t come anytime soon. But instead of collapsing into environmental cataclysm, nature rebounded, other predators held the numbers of prey animals in check, and people continued to coexist with the morphing ecology of the Llano Estacado. Today if I walk across the high plains or through a canyon, there I can still enjoy the wildness of nature. The wolf’s disappearance left a shameful mark on the region’s environmental history, but the unquellable force of life drove nature relentlessly forward, if in new form.

Thoreau shows his confidence in nature’s regeneration when he writes in *Walden* of finding the “potato of the aborigines,” or ground nut, decimated by cultivation:

In these days of fatted cattle and waving grainfields, this humble root which was once *totem* of an Indian tribe, is quite forgotten . . . ; but let wild Nature reign

here once more, and the tender and luxurious grains will probably disappear before a myriad of foes, and . . . the now almost exterminated ground-nut will perhaps revive and flourish . . . , prove itself indigenous, and resume its importance and dignity as the diet of the hunter tribe. (154)

### THE LACK OF CREDIBILITY

Environmentalists deserve credit for calling attention to the consequences of our tendency to transform nature for our exclusive benefit. And Thoreau did cast the human as a potential environmental antagonist, as he cast the “surveyor,” another vocation of the writer, as “The Prince of Darkness,” in “Walking” (53). The modern environmental consciousness does much to compensate for the justification many people have taken from Judeo-Christian teachings to use nature without thought to the obligations involved. Both Romantics such as Thoreau and Deep Ecologists have sought to overthrow this anthropocentric worldview, despite the Christian vocabulary he slips in and out of in his writing, and despite the spirituality modern environmentalists often impose on their “wild” surroundings. Animism and Deism



Site of Thoreau’s hut, Lake Walden, Concord, Massachusetts, 1908. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

offered both groups, Thoreau's associated Transcendentalists included, what traditional Western religious teachings did not: a view of the earth as something other than man's personal garden, as something autonomous, as something wild. Romantics of contemporary ilk still worship nature because they see in it a tangible promise of immortality and, thus, transcendence.

Still, today, for all the gathering knowledge that local actions have global consequences, our general public attitude of self-righteous arrogance concerning the environment has been humbled little. A debate between anthropocentrists and ecocentrists may be understandable, but the verbal contest has polarized people, and has paralyzed any satisfactory movement toward sustainability, as the ongoing consequences of our mindless exploitation of nature attest so unfortunately. The sides have become entrenched. Despite our new environmental awareness, we have accomplished little in curbing the excessive behaviors that have brought emergency alerts.

The capacity of humankind to alter the global system of life in drastic and dangerous ways is now undeniable to all but the most stalwart ideologue, thanks more to our enhanced powers of observation than any kind of religion or spirituality, Christian or environmental. Those observations tell us something else: we belong to Thoreau's "Wild" earth as much as any creature before us. The arguments for pristine nature in environmentalism today fail because people reject any message telling them they do not belong in nature as other animals do.

With the stakes so high, a compromise is desperately needed. Confidence in nature, in some form of nature, to survive the deliberated affronts of humankind might seem at first naïve from today's perspective, framed by what has become traditional environmental thinking. However, considering the adaptability in nature, Thoreau's deliberation on the profound-yet-limited effect of humans appears from my perspective to be more honest—less rhetorical—than the Deep Ecology. We need to ask questions that will direct us to ways to minimize the impact we will inevitably make. What kind of nature will we leave for the next generation? How much human-induced change is acceptable? Correctly or not, a great many people sense rhetorical overstatement on both sides of the nature debate today. Consequently well-meaning environmentalists become labeled "treehuggers" and lose credibility, to the detriment of nature, which includes us. The ostensible distance between human-centered and nature-centered philosophies need not be as wide as the extremes insist.

As inhabitants of the world, people bear a responsibility to sustain a symbiosis with nature, at their own certain peril. Equally important for nature, those who live there must also be able to use the place in relation to their sustenance, both physical and spiritual, without the moral condemnation many in the environmental community today thrust upon humanity as an inherent destroyer of nature. Such a hard line is too easily dismissed by the majority of Americans. If people are encouraged to accept themselves as a working part of the environment, as many already have, to protect that

natural whole will become more of a responsibility, whether it means occasionally we seek solitude and efficiency in the woods or that we just decide to pay more for the “all natural” label. If the interests of the earth and its human inhabitants are seen clearly, as one and the same, then the difference between the anthropocentrism that Deep Ecologists decry as the root of environmental degradation and the ecocentrism they demand as the solution would cease to exist. Credibility is the single most critical problem that confronts environmentalists today. If embraced forthrightly, the nuanced environmental philosophy of Thoreau could offer the modern environmental movement the authority it so desperately needs.

### **ACKNOWLEDGING THOREAU'S GREAT GREEN MYTH**

That nature writers and advocates in the contemporary environmental movement have overlooked these philosophical conflicts to embrace Thoreau as compatriot and even a potential savior—a messiah for the natural world—has become a conspicuous rhetorical stance. They have drawn a line in the sand and simplified and distilled his environmental philosophy into a polarized battle of evil against good, land developers and politicians against the sacred mother earth. Thoreau, instead, embraced the complexities of his American culture and American environment from the standpoint of his time and place, incorporating humankind as “part and parcel of Nature”—not inherently destructive. Thoreau saw nature not as something to put aside and protect in veneration, but, rather, as something to celebrate in sustained, responsible use.

The unbending stance of man as the destroyer of nature is a rhetorical simplification that precludes a more honest assessment of the human place in nature, that of component and, therefore, dependent. Thoreau no doubt ranks among the first nature advocates in a line that stretches to the nature writing of today, but his relation to nature is more complex than the idea forwarded by many who revere the man as an environmental saint. Thoreau was an original, but he necessarily viewed the world through the lens of his own times. As Lawrence Buell points out, the myths that grow around authors are, though important, “popular simplifications” (314). To understand them as such can lead to nothing but a clearer picture of not only the author’s world, but ours, as well.

Thoreau suffers the fate of any cultural icon. His appropriation is necessarily incomplete, hardly a full reflection of the man’s ideals, aspirations, and partialities; but the reverence of nature that his iconic status encourages can serve as an important check on human exploitation of nature. Environmentalists today are too often and too easily marginalized as “wild-eyed liberals.” Thoreau offers a kind of reconciling hope that potential social reformers must take, if we are to gain the credibility to effect the cultural reform that our environment—our home, my home—needs so badly. If the more radical strains of the modern environmental movement accommodate

the human place in the natural world, the message Thoreau has come to represent will resonate with a wider audience, even if that message takes what it may from his legacy and leaves the rest. Thoreau's philosophy of a resilient nature can propel the all-important cause of environmentalism into the mainstream of American values. If acknowledged, it must.

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# Tractor

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*Robert T. Rhode*

In suburban gardens; on rural lawns; in flame-shooting, dirt-cloud-gushing contests; and in presents to children, we further our devotion to the tractor. That nostalgic icon of American culture, the farm tractor, evolved slowly and contributed to various values that developed in the country's history.

The origins of the tractor are to be found in the great age of steam power. When, in 1805, Oliver Evans's amphibious steam dredge named Orukter (or Oruktor) Amphibolos waddled down the streets of Philadelphia and splashed into the Schuylkill River, there had already been several attempts to make a steam engine pull itself along a highway by its own might. Although various steam historians give Evans the credit for having designed and constructed the first successful traction engine, the evidence shows that traction engineering dates to the time of the drafting of the United States Constitution.

Jack Alexander's *The First American Farm Tractors: Developments to 1917* offers several examples of early experiments in traction engineering. In 1790, Nathan Read of Salem, Massachusetts, applied for a patent for a steam carriage. David Burgess Wise's *Steam on the Road* suggests that a prototype of Read's machine may have been driven through the streets of Warren, Massachusetts. Wise also mentions a Dr. Apollos Kinsey, a contemporary of Read, who drove a steam carriage in Hartford, Connecticut. Alexander's *Steam Power on California Roads and Farms (1858–1911)* substantiates that traction engineering was advancing in California in the late 1850s.

In 1858, the Newark Machine Works in Newark, Ohio, was building a traction engine described as "self-propelling." According to *The Ohio Farmer* for July 21, 1860, one of the machines made a spectacular forty-six-mile round trip up and down the hills of Cadiz, Ohio.

The September 29, 1860 issue of the *Scientific American* announced that, on September 14, John Walker of Mount Vernon, Ohio, had exhibited at the United States Agricultural Society Fair in Cincinnati a self-propelling locomotive that powered a crosscut saw.

From 1916 through 1917, the *American Thresherman* carried a series of articles by C. M. Giddings, a designing engineer for the Russell Company of

Massillon, Ohio; Giddings reported that a farmer near Mount Vernon, Ohio, designed a traction engine in 1868 and 1869. It was steered by a team of horses harnessed to a tongue.

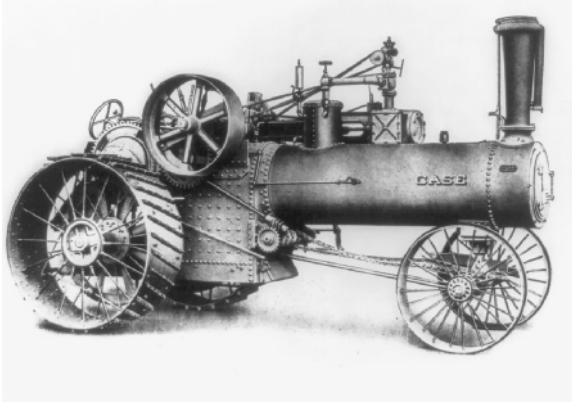
In its *Twenty-sixth Annual Report*, published in 1872 but covering events in the year 1871, the Ohio State Board of Agriculture noted that Hulburt & Page of Painesville, Ohio, had built a self-propelling steamer for threshing small grain such as wheat, oats, or barley. Threshing was one of the most important activities of the rural calendar. First, machines called reapers mowed fields of mature grain. The mowing was the initial phase of harvesting. In various regions, the mowed grain was formed into bundles; machines called reaper-binders paired the functions of mowing and bundling the crop. The bundles were arranged in shocks, or small stacks, and allowed to rest, or cure. After a few weeks, the shocks were loaded on wagons and brought to a threshing machine, or thresher, which separated the grain from the stalks on which it had grown. Threshing helped to clean the grain, which was saved for food and for planting future crops. Variations on this process were found in different locales. The Hulburt & Page steam engine provided power to run a threshing machine by a belt extending from a wheel on the engine's crankshaft to a pulley on the thresher. Since the 1840s, stationary and portable steamers had been belted to threshers, but self-propelled steam engines were still a novelty in 1872.

In 1874, the Ohio State Board of Agriculture presented to Job E. Owens and the firm of Owens, Lane & Dyer Machine Company of Hamilton, Ohio, a gold medal for a traction engine that Owens had designed.

By the late 1870s, several American steam engine manufactories were producing traction engines. Chains or gears were employed to this end. With its ideal location west of the mountains on the border of the most fertile land of the day, and with its all-important proximity to railway centers, Ohio developed the largest number of traction engine factories, thirty-one in all. As Alexander has explained, early traction engines went under a variety of descriptors: steam carriages, road engines, road locomotives, and field locomotives among them. By the turn of the last century, the term of choice was *traction engine*.

The era of the agricultural traction engine's greatest popularity dates from the latter half of the 1870s through the 1920s, with farm steamer production continuing into the 1940s. In the late teens, the noun *tractor* began to appear in advertising. Although most historians associate the word *tractor* with the kerosene- and gasoline-powered machines that eventually eclipsed the agricultural steam engine, ads for late-model steam engines frequently called them *tractors*.

Almost from the beginning, the tractor became an icon. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, steam was king, and children admired farm steam engineers. Despite their simplicity of both design and function, agricultural steam engines were dauntingly complex machines, and a relatively small proportion of farmers could master their intricacies. As engines and associated equipment



Engraving of a turn-of-the-century tractor. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

like threshers and sawmills were expensive, only a few agriculturists could afford steam rigs. For these reasons, engineers occupied a high status in rural communities. In turn, engineers were to lead exemplary lives. Early textbooks for operators of farm engines often addressed the lifestyle of the engineer and urged cleanliness and temperate living. Images of the steam tractor became associated with technological savoir-faire, authority, wealth, and power. More than a hundred prominent agricultural steam engine factories published annual catalogs depicting and describing their machines.

For farm families, these catalogs were a source of literature, and writers employed to compose the catalogs invoked a host of tropes to proclaim the virtues of their wares. Steam engine companies further promoted their products through commemorative buttons, watch fobs, small mirrors with advertising on the back, matchboxes, and iron toys.

In a 1910 survey, the U.S. Department of Agriculture found there were over 100,000 working steam engines on American farms. An indeterminate number of steamers had been junked before 1910, and several thousand more were produced through the teens and twenties. In World War II, thousands of steam engines and kerosene- and gasoline-powered tractors were scrapped to contribute to the production of ammunition.

In spite of the scrap drives and perhaps in reaction against them, a movement to restore old iron and to preserve agricultural history gained momentum. This movement had begun in the late 1930s, and it aimed to celebrate the legacy of threshing and sawmilling with steam engines. The first "threshing reunion," sponsored by the Stark County Threshermen's Association, was held at the F. E. Slutz farm near Battlesburg, Ohio, in 1939. In that same year, Lyman Knapp of Blackwell, Oklahoma, and Paul R. Woodruff of Ponca City, Oklahoma, staged what was probably the first public exhibition of steam plowing as it had been performed in the "good ol' days." In 1941, Joseph T. "Steam Engine Joe" Rynda of Montgomery, Minnesota, held a threshing bee. In that same year and in subsequent years, Ben Markley near Wichita, Kansas, collected engines and hid them in a woods to keep them from junk dealers and scrap hounds. After the war, steamers hidden from the scrap drives were hauled from storage and put in preservation. On September 19, 1947, Nelson L. Howard, who had begun collecting and preserving steam engines in 1944, attended a meeting of a new thresher club named the Indiana Brotherhood of Threshermen, and he was elected pre-

sident. In 1948, the group hosted its first show; in 1949, the name of the organization was changed to the Pioneer Engineers Club of Indiana. The club was based at Rushville, Indiana. LeRoy Blaker began hosting a steam gathering at his farm near Alvordton, Ohio, in 1945, and a formal association rapidly developed. In 1948, Guy Sams named the organization the National Threshers Association. It was incorporated in 1950. The NTA reunions later were held at Montpelier, Ohio, and still later at Wauseon, Ohio.

In 1948, Arthur S. Young presided over the first meeting of the Rough and Tumble Engineers Historical Association at his farm equipment dealership near Kinzers, Pennsylvania. Young had collected engines since the steam-power era itself. In that same year, President of the Illinois Brotherhood of Threshermen Dan S. Zehr of Pontiac, Illinois, originated the Central States Steam Threshers Association. Ray Ernst of Wayland, Iowa, began the reunion at Mount Pleasant, Iowa. It eventually became the largest event of its kind in the country. In the beginning of the restoration movement, the shows featured steam engines and the earliest kerosene tractors, which were as large as the largest steamers. Year by year, exhibitions included more and more of the relatively small gasoline tractors that became popular after the steam era had faded.

Threshing reunions and similar events honoring the history of agricultural machines proliferated at a rate far more rapid than anyone had the right to expect. The 2004 *Farm Collector Show Directory* listed over 1,300 vintage iron shows throughout the United States. In addition to these exhibitions, numerous county and state fairs showcased agricultural implements. These gatherings spawned a myriad of items to be purchased by enthusiasts. Lamps in the form of tractors, lampshades depicting tractors, photo mirrors, pillowcases portraying tractors, souvenir plates, stationery, postcards, rubber stamps, jigsaw puzzles made from tractor photographs, belt buckles, belts stamped with tractor designs, watch fobs, calendars, embroidery, coffee mugs, neckties, key chains, buttons, handkerchiefs, saw blades painted with scenes of tractors, and mailboxes shaped like tractors appealed to the tractor aficionado.

Television personality, author, humorist, and erstwhile professor Roger Welsch of Nebraska has published a handful of wildly popular books on tractor restoration, including *Love, Sex and Tractors*. Welsch is only one of numerous authors who have contributed books on vintage iron. Entire



A woman in the midwest driving an Oliver tractor, ca. 1940. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

catalogs are devoted to tractor books available from booksellers who specialize in titles ranging from classic automobiles to heavy equipment. Shelves in chain bookstores are laden with books on the art and science of preserving antique tractors. As Farm Bureau statistics for 2002 indicate that farmers are only 1.9 percent of the population, booksellers wishing to earn a profit have no incentive to appeal only to an audience of agriculturists. Clearly, inhabitants of rural areas are not the only people bitten by the tractor nostalgia bug.

Fair and show organizers have recognized that tractor pulls are a real pull, attracting thousands of spectators from farm and city alike. At such events, tractors, which have been rebuilt to be more powerful than their manufacturers ever intended they should be, struggle to draw massive weights along parade routes in front of grandstands packed with cheering devotees. Churning up clouds of dust, the tractors belch fire and lunge forward in the present-day equivalent of the medieval joust. Such machines are the proverbial far cry from the simple, sputtering, modest little tractors that pulled two-bottom plows across America's heartland in the late 1940s, yet the souped-up puller is emblematic of the unpretentious plower. While not every old-iron enthusiast is a fan of tractor pulls, fairs and exhibitions that host these events fill the parking lots.

Part of the motivation behind the first threshing reunions was nostalgia, or a compulsion to prevent a glorious past from disappearing into obscurity. During the steam century, grain harvesting and threshing in many regions constituted a grand communal endeavor. As not every farmer could afford a steam rig, farm families joined rings, also known as *runs*, to collaborate in threshing. The steam-powered threshing machine made the rounds of the ring of farms, and the families that formed the run met at each other's farms to assist with the process of mechanically separating the grain from the stalks on which the grain had grown. For years after the passing of the threshing epoch, people who had experienced steam threshing spoke nostalgically about steam engines and the golden age of American agriculture that such machines had helped to induce. This nostalgia arose partly from fascination with the machinery and partly from awareness that the steam technology had fostered an enjoyable camaraderie. At one time, most Americans had intimate knowledge of threshing. Just before the 1920 census, over half the people of the United States were farmers or were engaged in pursuits that assisted agriculture.

A host of factors led to the end of the threshing epoch, not the least among them the widespread adoption of the combined harvester, known as a *combine* (pronounced with the accent on the first syllable), which united in one machine and one operation the mowing of the crop and the separating of the grain from the straw. The rise of the combines occurred with the symbiotic availability of small, affordable gasoline tractors to pull them. (Later, combines became self-propelling.) When each farmer owned a tractor and a combine, communal threshing disappeared.

At the time of this writing, the people who remember steam threshing are few, yet the nostalgia they have felt has grown exponentially. In the masses of the newly nostalgic are farmers whose memories include small gasoline tractors but not steam threshing, and city dwellers who took summer jobs on farms. These two groups account for only a tiny percentage of those who buy tractor books, purchase tractor memorabilia, or attend tractor pulls. The nostalgia for a golden age of agriculture permeates a large segment of the population that perceives the rural past of the United States as enshrining significant values, including the work ethic, Christian religiosity, and a secure hearth and home. From the creation of threshing reunions, through the efforts to preserve steam engines during the scrap drives of World War II, through the old-iron restoration movement, through the hundreds of tractor shows and fairs, to the current tractor pulls and tractor books, the tractor has emerged as the icon of these values.

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# Tupperware

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*Judith Hatchett*

“It has to burp,” my Aunt Mallie solemnly explained to my sister, my two younger male cousins, and me, as we, equally solemn, watched her practice her Tupperware demonstration. Then we got a chance at the Wonder Bowl ourselves, until we too had mastered the magic burp that would keep food fresh, possibly forever so far as we knew. We were too young to really care about the freshness of food, surely an adult problem, but we could easily grasp that there was something inherently modern and exciting about Tupperware, its colors, its variety of containers, even its very plasticity. We lived in a world where something new and brilliant was always being created to replace the old and dull, and Tupperware appeared to be a logical part of this progression graciously planned for our generation.

My Aunt Mallie was a farm wife and a Tupperware dealer. I’m sure that the money she earned through the amazing plastic containers replaced the egg money saved by earlier generations of farm women. For my cousins, my sister, and me, Tupperware meant adventurous drives down country roads to isolated farmhouses where women eagerly awaited the delivery of their Tupperware, not to mention the visit. It also meant that Aunt Mallie had a great deal of Tupperware herself, and we thoroughly enjoyed the Popsicle makers and unbreakable orange and turquoise tumblers and looked forward to each new incarnation of Tupperware. We had no idea that we were very small parts of a revolution in American consumerism fueled by science, war, Yankee ingenuity, Southern extravagance, subversive women, suburbia, and of course that amazing burp.

The first point to establish in a discussion about Tupperware is that everything about it is amazing in a distinctly American way. That a plastic kitchen container is recognized worldwide as an American icon seals the special place of Tupperware in twentieth-century consciousness. Although the iconography we associate with Tupperware is part and parcel of the 1950s, even now Tupperware is sold in over 100 countries, and every 2.5 seconds a Tupperware party is beginning. A second point is that because Tupperware burst on the scene already iconic in its design and construction,



the plastic phenomenon has been analyzed and researched by scholars, designers, and business people, its significance and impact measured and debated. A third point is that while all analysts agree on the basic story of Tupperware—its origin, function, artistry, economics, and major players—they certainly do not agree on how to interpret it. This entry offers the Tupperware story and examples of varied interpretations including my own, which have, not surprisingly, changed over time. The most thorough treatments of the Tupperware story are Alison J. Clarke's *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*, published by the Smithsonian Institution, and *Tupperware!*, a 2004 *American Experience* video which acknowledges its debt to the Clarke book. The following summary is based on those sources.

First comes the basic story. Earl Silas Tupper, a New England tree surgeon and amateur inventor, developed Tupperware from polyethylene, a plastic used as a seal in World War II industry and aviation. While others had recognized the unique qualities of polyethylene—it “bridged the gap between categories of rigid and non-rigid plastics, retaining toughness and flexibility at extremely low and comparatively high temperatures” (Clarke 38)—it was Tupper whose many experiments established that the plastic could be molded into an infinity of forms. It could also be produced in many colors. When in 1949 Tupper patented the Tupper seal, which he had modeled on the sealing of a paint can, his “revolutionary, generic kitchenware”—water-tight and air-tight—was born (Clarke 35). An office memo of 1949, in which Tupper describes his plastic, affords a glimpse into his quirky personality: “With the end of the war [polyethylene] was another young veteran that had accelerated from childhood to a fighting job. It had done its job well but like all young vets returning from the wars it had never had civilian adult experience” (Clarke 37). Tupper would gain fame and fortune providing that experience.

Ironically, the art world embraced the revolutionary kitchenware before American housewives did. In 1956 the Museum of Modern Art in New York showcased a variety of Tupperware containers for a national exhibit of “outstanding twentieth-century design,” having determined that “Tupperware embodied the machine aesthetic of technologically determined, functional form” (Clarke 36). This accomplishment was less impressive to thrifty post-war housewives, however, who did not flock to department stores to purchase the new product. Financial success came to Tupper in the form of Brownie Wise, a divorced single mother who persuaded him to sell Tupperware exclusively through home parties, whose benefits she had learned through a tenure with Stanley Home Products. Tupper and Wise formed an “unlikely but perfect match” (*Tupperware!*), with Wise heading the marketing side of the business, which she soon moved to Kissimmee, Florida; Tupper handled the production side, continuing to design personally each new piece of Tupperware.

Wise knew women. She knew the frustrations and isolation of 1950s housewives who were expected to erase Rosie the Riveter from their mem-



Women gathered at a Tupperware home party, 1958. AP/Wide World Photos.

ories and confine themselves to the domestic sphere of the new suburbia, reigning over home and hearth and never challenging the breadwinning status of their husbands. She knew how much having their own spending money could mean and how to create a business empire that would enable women to get that money without shedding their lady-like, stay-at-home-status. Wise developed a structure wherein the Tupperware party was also and equally a social event. The dealer recruited women to give the parties, invite friends and relatives to their homes, feed them light refreshments, and offer them the opportunity to buy the water- and air-tight (also vermin-free) containers that would, after all, save money by preserving food. There were also games and demonstrations, breaking the ice and showing how to achieve that all-important burp. For her efforts the hostess received free Tupperware and the opportunity to become a dealer herself. Very successful dealers could become managers, earning larger commissions and overseeing and recruiting more dealers. Top managers had a chance to become distributors. Because Earl Tupper was always designing new products, and because the parties were considered pleasant social events, the supply of friends and relatives willing to attend and make purchases would not necessarily diminish over time.

In Kissimmee, Wise developed a pilgrimage site for her empire of the Tupperware sales force, where beginning in 1954 she held annual Jubilees—motivational reunions for the “Tupperware Family.” In addition to lavish

prizes, leading sellers won public recognition and acclaim. All received information and hints and advice for improving sales. The Jubilees also required some work: business education sessions with homework and a formal graduation ceremony. Jubilees also included enthusiastic rallies where participants sang songs and performed rituals Wise had created. Wise, always beautifully dressed, would sometimes spontaneously give items of her own clothing to high-achieving members of the Tupperware family.

Phenomenal success resulted. For several years Tupperware achieved an equipoise in which all its participants seemed happy with what the system provided. Brownie Wise became the public face of Tupperware—she was the first woman ever to appear on the cover of *Business Week*—and Tupper was content to remain in New England and design and produce more Tupperware. With success, though, came eventual strain. By 1957 Wise and her feminine kingdom had taken more orders than Tupper's factory could produce, and when Wise urged (or in some versions, demanded) increased production, Tupper was annoyed. Tupper, who had never even attended a Jubilee, began for the first time to question Wise's spending and judgment. Various interpretations of these events linger but the essential facts are these: Tupper fired Wise in 1958 and subsequently sold the company, which he owned outright, for \$116 million. Brownie Wise received—but only after Tupper was pressured by others in the company—a severance package of \$35,000. None of the properties in Florida, neither her house nor her clothes, were hers.

The Tupperware empire continued quite successfully without its two founders, becoming international in scope. Wise and Tupper seemed to remove themselves from the world. Tupper gave up his U.S. citizenship, divorced his wife, and moved to an island in Central America. Wise attempted a few ventures, none of which succeeded. The Tupperware patent expired in 1984, eliminating the product's uniqueness and opening the door for cheaper competitors. Earl Tupper died in 1983 and Brownie Wise in 1984.

That's the story. Branching from it are alternative versions and interpretations. As *Tupperware!* reveals, Wise's departure remained a mystery among the Tupperware family, with many assuming she had retired in the wealth and splendor exhibited at her Jubilees. Another version is that Tupper wanted to sell the company and knew that no one would buy it with so prominent a woman at its marketing head, so he picked the fight because "Bankers didn't talk to women" (*Tupperware!*). One version even declares that Tupper broke with Wise because she advocated a Tupperware dog dish. Certainly the ending seems to topple Wise from that savvy businesswoman pedestal. *Tupperware!*'s Laurie Kahn-Levitt explains in an interview that "Back then, things that are basic for women now weren't obvious. I don't think it occurred to her to ask for stock, for example. . . . So when Earl fired her, she didn't have anything."

Reading those words, I understood that "back then" leads to our various interpretations of the Tupperware narrative. Whether we can bring ourselves

to an understanding of “back then” makes all the difference. From the vantage point of 2005, the exploitive dimension of the Tupperware setup seems obvious, the party games ridiculous, and the rituals of the Jubilees embarrassing if not humiliating. “Back then” women actually seemed to enjoy grabbing a shovel and digging for prizes buried in a Florida field or singing, with religious fervor, “I’ve Got That Tupper Feeling,” to the tune of an old Sunday School song about having joy, joy, joy down in the heart. They didn’t mind, or didn’t seem to mind, the absurd party games or purchasing their own demonstration kits or inviting their friends and relatives to parties.

Watching the *Tupperware!* video, I seemed to split into two viewers: one who was genuinely moved by the reminiscences of the former Tupperware salespeople and another who was repelled by everything about the world they so fondly remembered. An anonymous Amazon.com reviewer, obviously much younger than I, also found the footage of the Jubilees to be a “sort of creepy and bizarre” reminder that “there was some pretty strange stuff going on in the 1950s.” She and I would certainly never grab a shovel and dig for a prize; and we wouldn’t want mink stoles even if we did dig them up. Yet careful attention to the interviewees’ stories fleshes out the many poignant differences between then and now and explains why the opportunities offered through Tupperware did indeed improve lives. Most telling for me is that of a woman who learned at her first Tupperware party that the dealer had made ten dollars on the party. Nowhere, she explains, in the entire rural area where she lived, was there a job she could get, even working all day long, that paid ten dollars. Others describe how they identified what they perceived as luxury items—a television set, a new sofa—and counted the number of parties it would take to make enough to purchase them. Tupperware funded family vacations and college educations. Another woman recalls with pride that her earnings enabled her to support her elderly mother. Others remind us that many of these women had never completed high school, had never been honored in any way, had never seen their names in a publication; for them the Jubilee graduations and diplomas and Tupperware newsletters and personal notes from Brownie Wise were the most glorious affirmations of accomplishment they ever had or would receive, and they valued them highly and without cynicism.

The same gap emerges in attitudes toward Tupperware parties. I attended my last one in the very early 1980s, after I’d had my second child. As a “second wave” 1970s feminist I found the party silly, a pageantry in time warp, but at the same time I was suspicious that my life wasn’t as different from those original suburban Tupperware parties as I’d expected it to be. “Why can’t you just relax and enjoy a night out?” asked my friend, who’d had her third child. Why not indeed? Many attendees at 1950s parties had no car during the day—it went off to work with the breadwinner—so a party in the neighborhood, like an earlier quilting bee or sewing circle, offered a welcome social outlet, communal childcare, and collective advice on husbands and children. Buying a bit of Tupperware was a small price to pay, and

besides, Tupperware actually saved money. Perhaps my discomfort lay not so much with the party as with the reality that women like me, who unlike our 1950s forebears were both educated and employed, were still assumed by all (especially by ourselves) to be fully responsible for home and children. “Back then” was simply a lot closer than it should have been.

Attitudes toward the 1950s also shape reactions to Clarke’s book. In “Life of the Party,” Susan Porter Benson says that Clarke made her realize that “one of the many ways we second-wavers missed the boat was in failing to appreciate the subversive meanings lurking in the 1950s suburbia we were reacting against” (1). Certainly Brownie Wise got her women out of the house and making money in a culture that frowned on both actions. Second wave feminists may not like the way she did it, but they never walked in her shoes. Further, the women interviewed for *Tupperware!* firmly establish that they viewed themselves as rebels. In a contrasting current perspective, Susan Vincent in her review faults Clarke’s book for presenting an unsuitably favorable view of Tupperware by emphasizing success stories and glossing over the exploitive features of the system. In another article, “Preserving Domesticity: Reading Tupperware in Women’s Changing Domestic, Social and Economic Roles,” Vincent argues more extensively that Tupperware’s continued success is possible only because working women are driven to sell it to supplement inadequate salaries and because they are still responsible for the domestic sphere. “Back then” and “Right now” are the same for them.

Certainly both Clarke and the video emphasize Tupperware success stories rather than the many failures that there must have been. Both do convey, however, that those who became involved with Tupperware in the 1950s and early 1960s remained quite aware that it was enabling them to advance within a system stacked against their upward mobility. According to couples in the video, there was no point in objecting to the rule that when a woman advanced beyond manager to distributor—the most lucrative of all positions—she would then in effect work for her husband because it was he who was given the title and was expected to quit his job and relocate wherever more Tupperware was needed. That many couples did just that proves the genuine monetary advantage the system offered to those at the very top. But it is obvious that not all couples, even if able to attain this status, could accept it without conflict. Even Brownie Wise, credited by so many women with lifting their status and self-esteem, was an acknowledged Queen Bee whose helping hand never led another woman to the center of the hive. And although Clarke describes the Tupperware party as a “celebratory and consciously feminine activity” (107), April Austin counters that “the currency of social interaction has changed, making many women skeptical of a selling event masquerading as a party” (1).

The many tensions among the themes of the Tupperware story ultimately tell us that our degree of skepticism, or cynicism, or rebellion, is commensurate with our opportunities. Ingenious invention, kitchen container, modernist art, gender-bending sales revolution—Tupperware provided its

extended family with money and social bonds gratefully welcomed during a crucial decade when rules and roles were changing on and beneath the surface. Those women (and some men) in the early Tupperware sales force would be astonished to know that highly educated people have analyzed Tupperware and written articles about it. What would not astonish them is that some of those higher educations are likely to have been funded by Tupperware sales.

Tupperware as icon, then, shifts in the eye of the beholder. For the most part Americans seem to regard it as a distillation of American ingenuity and 1950s kitsch. To me, Tupperware looms as a transitional item poised between the frugality of the Depression generation and the frivolity of the postwar boom, between the generation who would never throw away anything and the one whose foundation was planned obsolescence. My mother and my aunts saved jars, paper bags, rubber bands, and, yes, string; the idea of using an item and tossing it never occurred to them. The advertising campaign for cheap, disposable containers designed to replace Tupperware was based on the national awareness that Tupperware was a cherished item that could bear food to the picnic, potluck, or wake, but that must of course be treated correctly and promptly returned.

At the recent graduation party for Aunt Mallie's great-granddaughter, my cousin and I talked about the Tupperware days, and he produced one proudly saved item. It was a ham carrier. As we stared at the ham carrier, it really was like examining an artifact from the ancient past whose use we could barely fathom. Earl Tupper must have had a good time designing the handle that fit under the ham and could be used to lift it out. I could see Brownie Wise introducing the item as the latest boost to modern convenient living. And yet to us the container called up a world long gone, one of family picnics, church suppers held outdoors, cousins who actually knew each other, and kitchen items washed and dried after every meal and carefully put away. We remembered stacks of Tupperware ready to be returned after family deaths, and the box of Tupperware lids kept just for teething babies. Somehow, even though we admitted our use of those cheap containers whose ads mocked Tupperware's durability and a generation's values, we acknowledged that they can never really replace Tupperware. They lack its color and design, but even more importantly they lack its sense of fun.

Besides, they don't even burp.

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# Underground Railroad

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*J. Blaine Hudson*

When the Fugitive Slave Act was repealed on June 28, 1864, the work of the Underground Railroad, assisting fugitive slaves, was no longer a violation of American law. By the end of the next year, after the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified on December 18, 1865, there was no longer a legal institution of slavery in the United States from which the Underground Railroad might seek to deliver an enslaved African American. However, while the Underground Railroad belongs to the ever-receding American past, it remains a cultural icon, a powerful symbol of a multiracial human rights movement for racial justice on American soil. The congressional actions and National Park Service initiatives of the 1990s, the proliferation of Underground Railroad sites and freedom trails, a wealth of new research and publications, and the opening of the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati in August 2004 all attest to the enduring hold of this icon on the American imagination, and its power and vitality in our time.

The popular image of the Underground Railroad has flaws in its portrayal of history. In the facts related to this icon, though, we find one of those exceedingly rare cases in which the truth is actually more meaningful than the myth. We need only briefly to examine the history of both the icon and the Underground Railroad itself.

In his classic 1898 study, Wilbur Siebert defined the Underground Railroad as “a form of combined defiance of national laws, . . . the unconstitutional but logical refusal of several thousand people to acknowledge that they owed any regard to slavery” (Hart viii). The law in question was the Fugitive Slave Act (first of 1793 and then of 1850)—and the offenses criminalized thereby were several specific acts of rendering assistance to enslaved African Americans escaping from bondage in the antebellum South.

Understood properly, the history of the Underground Railroad brings together two overlapping historical narratives. The first, and more important, is the chronicle of enslaved African Americans who sought freedom through flight—who they were, why and how they escaped. Considering only the



half-century before the Civil War, their numbers were anything but trivial, as summarized by the following table (Hudson 162):

**Estimated Rate of Slave Escapes: 1810–1860**

	East	West	Total
No. of Slave Escapes 1810–1829	24,000	16,000	40,000
Escapes per Year	1,200	800	2,000
No. of Slave Escapes 1830–1849	30,000	30,000	60,000
Escapes per Year	1,500	1,500	3,000
No. of Slave Escapes 1850–1860	15,000	20,000	35,000
Escapes per Year	1,500	2,000	3,500
Total (1810–1860)	69,000	66,000	135,000

Not only were the numbers of fugitive slaves significant, but the fugitive slaves themselves were often exceptional. For example, George Washington Williams, the true “father of African American history,” concluded that slave escapes were “a safety valve to the institution of slavery. As soon as leaders arose among the slaves, who refused to endure the yoke, they would go North. Had they remained, there must have been enacted at the South the direful scenes of San Domingo” (58–59). Larry Gara observed that fugitive slaves were atypical individuals, noting that “it was the gifted and highly intelligent slave who enjoyed the semi-freedom of a hired laborer, and having greater sophistication and more freedom of movement, was better qualified than most bondsmen to conceive and put into action a plan of escape” (42–43). Similarly, Richard Wade stated that “the slaveholders’ fear of fugitives was understandable. . . . [T]he traffic usually involved many of the best bondsmen—those with the highest skills, the most literate, the most energetic. Some were also the most obstreperous and ungovernable” (221). The “quality” of fugitive slaves was even cited by defenders of slavery as proof of the benefits of the institution. Responding to such claims, Frederick Douglass commented, “We give slavery too much credit, judging it by the fugitive slaves whom we see” (*The North Star*, 20 Oct. 1848).

Equally significant, although seldom noted, was the simple fact that most escaped alone and received little or no assistance on their desperate flight to freedom. Taken together, this fact and the massive numbers of fugitive slaves over time constitute the first flaw in the iconic representation of the Underground Railroad.

The second flaw is embedded in the popular interpretation of the historical narrative of the exploits of those who assisted runaways in violation of law and custom. Few “friends of the fugitive” could be found in slave territory, particularly in the deep Southern interior. There, fugitive slaves faced their greatest danger and succeeded or failed based largely on their own courage



*The Underground Railroad* by Charles T. Webber, 1893. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

and/or good fortune. Once in the border-states, however, there was slightly less danger and a far greater likelihood of finding help, particularly in free black settlements and communities. The danger grew correspondingly less as freedom seekers moved farther North. As noted perceptively in the National Historic site nomination materials for Rokeby House in Vermont:

The popular conception of the UGRR . . . is of brave, white abolitionists taking great risks to transport hotly pursued fugitives in deepest secrecy. As “agents” moved the “dusky strangers” along the “route” from “station” to “station,” they were well concealed in secret hiding places. . . . Yet, the oral tradition of the UGRR . . . is more melodrama than history. The key to the popular conception is pursuit. All of the conventions of the popular understanding—the need to operate clandestinely, to communicate in secret, to travel at night, and to create hiding places—arise from the assumption of hot pursuit by a determined, ruthless, and often armed slave catcher. While many fugitives were in precisely such danger in the first days and miles of their escapes, it diminished as they put more and more distance between themselves and the slave south. (National Historic Landmarks Survey)

When assistance was rendered, “friends of the fugitive” could break the law in several ways. For example, they could “assist” or “entice slaves to escape” or, in a few instances, “conduct” fugitive slaves from slave to free territory, as did Harriet Tubman and John Parker. If they “harbored” fugitive slaves in their homes, barns, churches, or elsewhere on their property, these

sites served as “stations” in Underground Railroad parlance at which fugitives could find sanctuary and from which they would often be “conducted” to the next “station,” perhaps eventually to Canada. In some cases, an entire free African American community or a community in which blacks and whites worked collaboratively became a “junction” of sorts—in essence, a complex of individual stations. Still, before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, harboring fugitive slaves in such communities was not the work of an organization, but simply the result of persons of good conscience helping others in need, often African Americans simply helping one another.



Harriet Tubman, 1911. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Several hundred antebellum slave narratives—and postbellum accounts by William Still (1872), Levi Coffin (1876), Laura Haviland (1882), R. C. Smedley (1883), Wilbur Siebert (1898), William Cockrum (1915), and others—support the legend of an “elaborate, organized and far flung conspiracy” to assist fugitive slaves who could scarcely have escaped without such help. More recently, some scholars (Gara) dismissed the legend, while others (Blockson) revised it by assigning fugitive slaves and free people of color far more prominence. However, these were simply conflicting and competing interpretations of an historical record that remained largely unchanged for nearly a century.

The past decade has brought new empirical evidence (Franklin and Schweninger; Hudson; Switala, *Underground Railroad in Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia*; *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*) against which to test the long-accepted interpretative framework—and, by extension, the cultural icon itself. This research affirms the centrality of fugitive slaves to their own “story” and the centrality of free people of color as sources of sanctuary and aid for freedom seekers, but adds that:

Deepening sectional divisions over slavery in the late 1840s and through the 1850s were the catalyst that wove isolated local efforts into such a larger network in the Kentucky borderland [and the North]. In other words, crossing this critical threshold transformed friends of the fugitive, collectively, into a more organized social movement. However, becoming better organized was not synonymous with becoming an organization and this movement spawned more

formal organizations only in a few sites [nearby in the free border states].  
(Hudson 158–59)

Still, simply establishing a new set of facts is not sufficient to repair the icon if these facts are viewed through an old interpretive lens. This distorting lens is the third and final flaw in the cultural icon, and is embodied in the controlling image of the Underground Railroad: one or more poor, befuddled and bedraggled fugitive slaves being assisted in some way by one or more noble and well-meaning whites, often Quakers such as Levi Coffin and Thomas Garrett. That there were such scenes is indisputable; however, the notion that they were representative is unsupportable. In other words, the predisposition to accept this image has less to do with the quality of historical evidence than with how and why the evidence is “constructed” along particular and predictable lines.

To understand this predisposition, and the exit from the dilemma it poses, it is necessary to confront how the construction of race in the United States changed fundamentally after the American Revolution and why this change made it virtually certain that, if the Underground Railroad became a cultural icon, it would be flawed. In the colonial period, many English men, women, and children were in bonded servitude, temporarily sharing the bondage of slaves; and racial differences seemed only “skin deep”:

Behind the most vicious assaults on the character of people of African descent during the first two hundred years of American slavery stood a firm belief that given an opportunity, black people would behave precisely like whites, which was what made African American slaves at once so valuable and so dangerous.  
(Berlin 364)

However, after the American Revolution, a new and radically different racial ideology of white supremacy was advanced to justify slavery, not on the grounds of “might makes right” or as a “necessary evil,” but rather as a positive good. This ideology stood on assumption that persons of African descent were inferior in their abilities and character, and that these deficits were fixed and natural. Put simply, the raw reality of slave escapes flatly contradicted this assumption—making each fugitive slave “a living refutation of stereotypes of racial inferiority, African American dependence on and contentment with slavery, and the ubiquity of kindly and paternalistic masters”:

That the stereotypes seldom fit the facts created a rather thorny dilemma and its solution necessitated the fabrication of a complex illusion. . . . First, whenever possible, the number of slave escapes was minimized in an effort to deny the existence of the “problem.” Second, when the evidence could not be denied, its meaning was interpreted within the limits of prevailing racial myths. . . . and slave escapes were often blamed on “evil” whites who spirited away ignorant slaves. (Hudson 6)

As evidence of the lengths to which pro-slavery advocates were willing to go, a new category of mental illness—drapetomania, literally the “flight-from-home madness”—was even invented to account for this seemingly inexplicable behavior (Thomas and Sillen 2). Ironically, there were also those who opposed slavery in principle but could not view its living victims as their equals. From their perspective, African Americans were incapable of human agency and, hence, slave escapes were possible only if noble whites assisted witless and benighted blacks to freedom. Thus, the façade of the cultural icon masks the familiar illusion that there were only a handful of slave escapes, that fugitive slaves were either “crazy” or helpless—and that the “stars” of this drama were invariably white. Fortunately, the historical record supports a different and more balanced conclusion.

Perhaps, the Underground Railroad as a cultural icon might be represented most accurately by not one, but three controlling images—arranged, following the conventions of ancient Egyptian (Kemetic) art, by size to reflect their relative importance. The largest and most imposing image would be an African American escaping alone; next would be a free African American helping a fugitive slave—and the last, and smallest, would be the familiar image of legend. Each embodies the struggle for freedom, and their combined legacy is a powerful affirmation of the ideal of multiracial democracy—and a reminder that, apart from the Civil Rights Movement, the Underground Railroad was the only sustained multiracial movement for racial justice in American history. This legacy is also a lesson repeated often in American and global history that, in the haunting words of Frederick Douglass, “he who suffers the wrong must be the one to seek redress” and, in the case of white friends of the fugitive, that those who truly believe in freedom must find the courage to make common cause with others unlike themselves, even at the risk of their lives and of becoming outcasts among their own people.

In truth, this is a cultural icon that uplifts us all.

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# Viagra

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*Bennett Kravitz*

Before discussing the iconic status of the blue diamond, better known as Viagra, we should situate this phenomenon in the context of the revolutionary and perhaps outlandish behavior of Americans in regard to all prescription drugs. In 2003, retail drug sales worldwide were \$317 billion, with American consumers spending just over half that amount. The pill-taking life is a trend that has its origins in the 1950s, but only recently has it reached alarming proportions. To mention just one example, we should acknowledge that never before have antidepressants been prescribed for preschoolers in such large amounts. It is as if one shouldn't wait too long before embracing a lifestyle dependent on drugs. Thus, I think it is fair to say that "Homo Pharmaceuticus" has arrived in America, as prescription drugs and the pursuit of happiness have become synonymous. As a result, what we once considered normal or a mundane part of the aging process is no longer tolerated. Baldness, incontinence, erectile difficulty, and even the very concept of aging are out. These unacceptable "deficiencies" have become cultural concerns that the medical profession is expected to address, of which the most urgent seems to be erectile dysfunction.

The journey to chemical perfection of the sexual experience received its biggest boost with the development of Viagra, whose name derives from an odd combination of the roots of the words *tiger* and *Niagara*, creating a vision of a powerful and erect stream of water. Viagra started out as a product for sexual enhancement in sexually dysfunctional elderly males, yet has transformed American society in ways that could not be imagined when the product first came to market. The drug companies refused, or we did, to accept the limiting marginalized role of the product, so that it has become as liminal as Emersonian philosophy. Who could have predicted the portrait in a current Viagra ad of a seemingly horned and horny middle-aged man with the message, "Get back to mischief"? Who would have imagined that Mike Ditka would be pushing Levitra, Viagra's dark other, to middle-aged men as a product of masculinity right on par with an outstanding football hit? Who would have thought, as did the creators of the Cialis campaign, that the best

way to advertise a product of sexual enhancement initially targeting the elderly, would be to show a giggling thirty-something couple in a Jacuzzi, apparently imagining the sexual benefits of pharmacology?

The “blue diamond,” Viagra, affects culture and society in so many ways, subtly and overtly, that it is reasonable to claim that the products of sexual enhancement, especially Viagra, have revolutionized American society, and established the blue diamond’s status as an American icon. How? Let us count the ways.

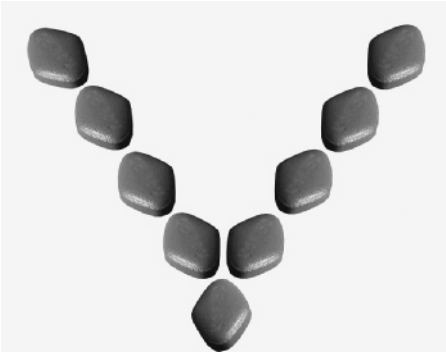
To start our investigation, we should note that over half of American men over 40 either need or think they need a product of sexual enhancement to safeguard their sex lives. According to a Massachusetts survey, 52 percent of 1,290 males from ages 40 to 70 suffered from erectile dysfunction. The drug companies have come to rely on these and similar statistics to expand their market even though there is no attempt to sort out minimal sexual snafus from chronic dysfunction. Apparently, anything less than perfection is unacceptable in matters of sexual performance. As a result, any instance of problematic function over a six-month period qualified as erectile dysfunction and thus was counted as part of the 52 percent. Moreover, in a noteworthy shift from past medical thinking, the psychological component seems to have disappeared in the diagnosis of erectile dysfunction. Do problems of the psyche have no effect on sexual performance? Are they not worth exploring? If someone is able to have an erection while sleeping but is incapable of having one during a real time sexual encounter, should Viagra be the solution instead of psychotherapy? Apparently, in a society of the quick fix, the pharmaceutical takes precedence over the psychological approach, only partially because the latter is much more expensive. According to the new norm, one should take the pill and “get busy,” without worrying about the underlying cause of imperfect sexual performance.

Because of the above phenomena, one might argue that erectile dysfunction has become a cultural disease or, at the very least, a malady, which, despite its physical and psychological causes, has become a social norm via cultural manipulation. In other words, once the surveys begin to show high numbers of males suffering from erectile dysfunction, the disease becomes pervasive and “real.” In order fully to understand erectile dysfunction, we should approach it holistically and allow for a cultural as well as physical or chemical explication. Indeed, I would argue that the advertising for the “cure” to the problem to some extent creates the malady as well. In a bizarre reversal of fortune, the disease has become desirable for the simple reason that the “cure” is so attractive. Males of all ages find it easier to belong to a group suffering from a sort of universal erectile dysfunction without nuance or distinction, because the solution to their collective problem is so simple. Pop a sexy blue pill and the difficulties, real and imagined, go away. The disease may not even actually exist for many males who think they suffer from erectile dysfunction, but accepting such an “in” illness that has such a pleasurable solution is easier than undergoing psychological evaluation, in-



trospetion, proper diet, exercise, or any other regime that involves hard work. Why endure the discomfort of traditional self-help when better living through chemistry is available in an attractive shade of blue?

In an apparent endorsement of this attitude, approximately 6 million American men and 23 million men worldwide have taken Viagra for erectile



Pills of Viagra. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

dysfunction in the seven years since Pfizer released the “blue diamond” on the market in 1998. These numbers do not include the millions of people who have purchased counterfeit pills currently available around the world at discount prices. Furthermore, the new competitors of Viagra, Levitra and Cialis, have already captured an additional million clients of their own. These numbers pale, however, in light of the grand scheme of the pharmaceutical companies that produce these products: to entice 30 million of the 60 million males in America over 40 to use their product. This figure doesn’t broach, of course, the numerous other middle-aged males worldwide or the

young people in America and abroad who aren’t necessarily suffering from impotence, but are looking for that dating edge. After all, not everyone has the wealth the rich and famous use, according to advertisements, to attract women, so taking a drug that is proven to prevent erectile dysfunction might be the next best thing. It seems that the ultimate goal of the drug companies that produce these products of sexual enhancement is to have all males indulge on a regular basis, situating the use of Viagra on the same level as that of popping an Omega-3 fatty acid dietary supplement. Why not start your day with Cialis, the long-lasting version of Viagra, and be prepared for any sexual encounter that might come your way?

But let us return to our investigation of sexual function, sex, and sexuality by reevaluating the original group of elderly sexually dysfunctional males who were offered Viagra to preserve and rekindle the sexual union of matrimony. Their problems were “legitimate,” often the result of disorders that interfere with circulation, such as hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes. In retrospect, Robert Dole, Pfizer’s first spokesman for the blue diamond, seems to have been the perfect Puritan spokesman for a product that was initially marketed as consistent with mainstream Republican family values. In line with seventeenth-century Puritan thinking on the topic, the earliest ads appeared to be saying that sex is okay, so long as it takes place only with one’s heterosexual spouse. They also implied that a legitimate disease causing erectile dysfunction shouldn’t necessarily put an end to an officially sanctioned couple’s sexual activity.

Viewed in the above light, the Viagra phenomenon became a type of chemical self-realization, just as what was once said of Prozac. That is, the

drugs of sexual enhancement do nothing more than to allow males to reassert their true selves. With that goal in mind, many users imagine that there is nothing artificial about a product that restores their “natural” abilities. After all, they might argue, is a product of sexual enhancement any more intrusive or unnatural than taking a pill to prevent manic episodes or to lower high blood sugar?

But the answer to that question, I would argue, is yes. We should at least acknowledge that there are problematic aspects of relying on Viagra and similar products for erectile function and that these products are over-prescribed and even abused. For example, once our original target group, these elderly males, discovered that the “blue diamond” delivered the goods, so to speak, many of them abandoned their Puritan mores. That is to say, they decided to “spread the wealth,” and seek out partners more appropriate to elderly male fantasies. Thus age differential has become less of a factor in determining the limits or possibilities of a sexual relationship once an elderly male has the confidence and ability to enjoy solid penetration with a younger female. Moreover, regardless of the age of the partner, with sexual confidence comes more temptation and thus opportunity to have sex outside the officially sanctioned relationships initially promoted by the drug companies.

Another psychological/cultural complication of using Viagra is that the drug might also have a paradoxical effect, so that if one does not take it, the very concept of achieving an erection is beyond the pale. If men fear the sexual consequences of their not taking Viagra, that apprehension might easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, some physicians have already begun to refer to Viagra as psychologically addictive for a number of users.

A further difficulty inherent in the use of products of sexual enhancement is that we tend to view the disease (or dis-ease) of erectile dysfunction strictly through the perspective of patriarchy. How can we be certain, for example, that just because men find it easier to function sexually, women are necessarily overjoyed? Indeed, Viagra could also promote paranoia among the wives of sexually energized males: “Now that he can do it, who is he doing it with?” might be one such paranoid introspection. Women might also undergo undue sexual pressure from husbands or lovers. After all, if hubby or lover boy has taken the pill at \$10 a pop, one should not be wasteful, even if one or the other has had a change of heart or is no longer in the mood.

In general, it does not seem that the desires of women influenced the development of the products aimed at preventing erectile dysfunction. Can we be sure that women are pleased that their elderly male husbands are now willing and able to have sex with them? Who says they are interested in having sex with their husbands, or having sex at all? We seem to have made the assumption that Viagra is every bit as pleasing for women as it is for men. In a seeming preponderance of this mode of thought, the next big Viagra project is to produce an effective version for women. But unlike its male

counterpart, Viagra for women will have to function as a mood enhancer, if it is to have any value at all. At present, though, the drug companies' research indicates that there will be enough of a market for this product, or that they will be able to create the market as they go along, just as they did with the male version of the blue diamond.

As I have already implied, the more the group of Viagra users moves to a kind of universal mode of behavior, the more cultural implications there are. As we have seen, although elderly married males were the original target group for Viagra, that reality has changed with a vengeance. For example, upon superficial reflection, one would suspect that the most unlikely group to embrace the use of Viagra would be males in their twenties and thirties. Yet there is no ignoring the ways that sexual practice among thirty-something and even twenty-something males has been influenced by Viagra and other performance enhancement drugs.

A typical night out for a representative of either group might begin as follows: to head out the door with a wallet, two or three condoms, and a blue diamond or two. No, the second pill is not for the overly ambitious, but in yet another twist of fate, Viagra has taken on the value of currency and is used as a tip at bars and other hip locations. More important, Viagra has become a kind of party drug, to be taken together with Ecstasy or crystal methamphetamine as if to combine erectile possibility with the enhanced desire other drugs offer. In fact, the potent combination of Viagra and Ecstasy is known as Sextasy. Nevertheless, an erection is an erection is an erection, and if one does not suffer from erectile dysfunction the drug on its own will not have much of an effect.

In this light, then, Viagra has become a misguided insurance policy for the sexually bold and restless. In accordance with its multiple possibilities, the pill might give one the confidence to consume alcohol with abandon, believing that Viagra will offset the effects of drinking. Moreover, in line with American optimism, there is always the hope that sexual prowess will increase even if there is no dysfunction to speak of. After all, the reasoning goes, if one has an opportunity to make a good thing better, why not go for it? Perhaps the overriding secret hope is that the pill will not only enhance sexual performance, but actually create desire where there is none. As one young forlorn male asked me in confidence, "Is there any chance that my using Viagra or Cialis will help me see my wife as sexy and attractive?" As amusing or pitiful as that might sound, to identify one's marital aspirations with the taking of the blue diamond is clearly a product of cultural rather than erectile dysfunction.

In this state of affairs, even teenagers feel they must somehow engage a Viagra rules world. One sex therapist reports that 16-year-old boys have come to ask for a prescription for Viagra in order to have sex for the first time or enlarge their penises. Thus, it is fair to say that products of sexual enhancement have developed their own versions of urban legends and rewritten basic cultural assumptions about their limits and possibilities.

Another problematic aspect of the Viagra phenomenon is the way products of sexual enhancement are advertised. Mike Ditka, the ultimate macho male, with a distinguished career as an NFL tight end who is also a Super Bowl-winning coach, insists that anyone not willing to try Levitra for improved sexual performance is simply too much of a sissy to do so. Millions viewing his commercials, no doubt, must be wondering what is wrong with their sexual prowess if they find no need for enhancement. The drug's brilliant advertising campaign has somehow created an equal alliance between virility and sexual dysfunction, with the latter leading to the former if one is "man" enough to use Levitra.

The sports macho advertising theme works well for Levitra even without Ditka, as it does in the ad with the middle-aged quarterback who cannot successfully thread the needle—throw his old football through a tire swing—until he is willing to try Levitra. The viewer can only imagine that as an added bonus, our rugged quarterback not only regains his sexual prowess but improves his football-throwing accuracy as well. His young, sexy female partner stands beside him adoringly as he throws the ball through the tire time after time. There is even a little suspense and uncertainty generated by the television commercial, as it is not quite clear what the couple's priorities will be: will they first embark upon a touch football game or a sexual encounter, with an outside chance of their combining the two activities in the bedroom? So whoever uses the product is apparently fortunate enough to recover two skills for the price of one. Rather than using sex to sell goods, sports are being used to sell satisfying sex. And if you can't march unimpeded down the field to score how good are you anyway?

But the ultimate Viagra cultural paradox questions and perhaps redefines the very nature of the sex act itself. I would argue that Viagra, because it encourages the phallogentric view of sex, seems to have limited rather than enhanced sexual possibility. As a result, the only sexual act that has meaning, at least according to the advertising campaigns, is reduced to penile-vaginal penetration. Must one have a perfect erection all the time for couples to enjoy sex? As this view becomes more entrenched, the holistic view of legitimate sexual activity diminishes accordingly. In such a scenario, all other sexual activities—touching, kissing, stroking, and so on—lose their value and meaning.

So what does all this tell us about our sexual and cultural future? While unable to answer this question specifically, I would argue that the most interesting issue for future exploration is not just how Viagra and other drugs have changed our lives and become cultural icons, but whether they have redefined what it means to be human. Past assumptions about the human condition must take into consideration a new chemical reality that prolongs the quality and length of life. An elementary question worth considering in light of the way we now live is whether or not human beings will become happier and more satisfied because of their altered chemical state. As just a small cog in the cultural machine, I suspect that it will take more than a pill to

overcome the fundamental existential conundrums that have always troubled human life.

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# Video Game

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*Ken S. McAllister and  
Judd Ethan Ruggill*

The video game is iconic in every sense of the word. It has been featured in news magazines, mocked on television programs, studied by academics, scrutinized by U.S. senators, worshiped by children and adults alike, and has spawned thousands of spin-off products, from shot glasses to feature-length films. In fact at one point during the early 1990s, Nintendo's mascot—Mario—"was more recognized by American children than Mickey Mouse" (Sheff 9).

Like all icons, the video game is simultaneously simple and complex, its iconicity at once masking and revealing a rich network of sociocultural, economic, and political meanings. In order to understand the iconic power of the video game, therefore, it is necessary to apprehend and historicize this network. In this essay, we will do precisely that: we will unpack the five major semiotic domains that constitute the meaning-making network of the video game. We will situate games technologically, aesthetically, psychologically, socially, and politically.

## **HOW VIDEO GAMES MEAN TECHNOLOGICALLY**

Though video games are often thought of as distinct from the technology on which they run (e.g., game consoles, personal computers, cell phones), game hardware is a crucial contributor to the meanings games produce. Some of the first video games, for example, were designed for and played on oscilloscopes, devices that visually indicate fluctuations in electrical voltage and current. Though not especially expensive or difficult to obtain, oscilloscopes are by no means popular devices. Even today they tend to be used only by scientists, engineers, home electronics enthusiasts, and other "nerds," that is, by people so technically proficient that they can turn the complex behaviors of electrons into passable imitations of ping pong. In 1958, when *Tennis for Two* (arguably the first video game) was developed, oscilloscopes were even more arcane than they are today.

Early video games were also developed on industrial computers such as the venerable PDP-1 (e.g., *Spacewar* [1962]). Again, these devices too were then out of the mainstream, requiring a level of expertise to operate and program beyond even some computer scientists. As a result, the video game languished as little more than an inside joke among society's most elite technicians until the early 1970s, when affordable computer chips prompted consumer electronics companies and toy manufacturers to begin marketing home gaming consoles and handheld devices (Magnavox Odyssey [1972], Atari Pong [1975], and Mattel Football [1977]).

Though the video game has since been popularized, its icon still resonates with a highly technical “nerd” image. Console manufacturers brag about bus speeds, online service providers advertise ping rates, players compare polygon counts when shopping for hardware and software—all despite the fact that advances in consumer electronics design have made video-game play (and in some cases, design) simple enough for young children (e.g., *Walt Disney's The Jungle Book: Rhythm and Groove* [2000], *Dora the Explorer: The Search for Pirate Pig's Treasure* [2002]).

The icon of the video game resonates with other technological markers as well: modularly-designed arcade cabinetry that allows new games to be efficiently installed over old ones, input and output devices designed to simulate the hardware of genuinely dangerous occupations such as soldiering or race-car driving, and the equating of technical characteristics (i.e., floating point operations per second, storage device access speeds, gesture recognition algorithms) with game-play quality are just a few that endure in various guises today. The technologies that enable video games, therefore, not only shape the look and feel of games themselves, but define who gamers are, and how and where games are played.

## HOW GAMES MEAN AESTHETICALLY

Aside from the actual technologies of the video game are the aesthetic decisions and boundaries that technology enables. How games look, sound, and “feel” are integral both to their commercial and iconic success. This is not to say that more realistic or elaborate aesthetics necessarily translate into sales, but rather that game aesthetics contribute directly to the play experience, a phenomenon that is often talked about in terms of “immersiveness” and “engagement.” Old games such as *Space Invaders* (1978) and *Pac-Man* (1980), for instance, while not very complex by current audio-visual standards, were (and still are) powerfully engaging primarily because their gameplay aesthetics are extraordinarily high. The gameplay aesthetic is one of the components of the video game that makes it unique from all other media. It also makes it possible to reasonably compare an old game such as *Asteroids* (1979) to a new title like *Ace Commander 5* (2004). In its seamless combination of what the senses perceive and the ways that the player's body and mind respond to those perceptions in order to alter the game world, the

gameplay aesthetic generates a fundamentally ineffable experience that can also be deeply memorable. Put another way, the gameplay aesthetic helps create iconic experiences.

Aesthetics contribute to making meaning and game iconicity in other ways. For example, the video game has always borrowed icons to tell its stories. From the crudely rendered spaceship in *Galaga* (1981), to the film noir symbolism of *Max Payne* (2001), filmic, televisual, and literary iconography is used by developers to combat technical limitations to meaning-making such as low processor speeds and lack of available memory. Embedding older, more established icons into game content allows developers to reference vast amounts of information without taxing the hardware that enables that information to be depicted audio-visually and kinesthetically. Naturally, as technology has improved, so too has the video game's ability to reference, reproduce, and repurpose iconography.

Interestingly, this ability to draw upon, adapt, and project virtually any icon is key to the video game's capacity to teach. Games use icons—or rather, the vast meaning sets icons signify—to teach multiple things in multiple ways, from simple hand-eye coordination to complex resource management skills. Granted, not everything games teach is necessarily appreciated. Sometimes parents, teachers, and lawmakers feel the need to regulate game content. Such regulation, of course, contributes to the iconicity of the video game too, at turns celebrating and vilifying the cultural work games do.

## HOW GAMES MEAN PSYCHOLOGICALLY

Broadly speaking, aesthetics provide a baseline for how games mean. Like statistics, however, this baseline is useful only on a large scale. Applying a “video game aesthetic” to analyze individual player experiences inevitably results in mismatches, half-truths, and poor descriptions. The fact of the matter is that icons often mean different things to different people.

Consider the outcry against video games after the Littleton, Colorado, massacre. In 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold walked into Columbine High School and shot thirteen of their classmates to death. As people around the country struggled to process the tragedy, the icon of the video game—already seen as excessively violent thanks to such titles as *Contra* (1987), *Smash T.V.* (1990), and *Night Trap* (1992)—became a lynchpin linking media and real-life violence. Harris and Klebold had been passionate about *Doom* (1993), a popular first-person shooting game. The young men's passion simply confirmed what many parents already thought: video games are incubic, surreptitiously planting the seeds of evil into the minds of children.

Not surprisingly, the game industry has worked hard to combat this vision of its product. In the early 1990s, the major game publishers joined together to establish the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB), a game-content rating organization modeled after the Motion Picture Association of



America's Classification and Rating Administration (CARA). Much like CARA, the ESRB has done a great deal to assuage parental concern. As we noted above, however, icons are highly dynamic semiotic constructs, often meaning different things to different people. ESRB ratings thus can work against their intent, encouraging the misappropriation of restricted content. For instance, while parents may use ratings to ensure their children do not obtain "Mature" titles, many young gamers see the "Mature" rating as an attractor that promises particularly exciting gameplay. In this way, the icon of the video game is incredibly dynamic, especially at the level of how it affects psychological processes such as human responses to media content.

### HOW GAMES MEAN SOCIALLY

While the video game was once an elite in-joke, it evolved into a cultural icon after being introduced into the public space of the bar, nightclub, and bowling alley in the 1970s and early 1980s. During this era, games were associated with such working-class pastimes as hanging out at the neighborhood bodega, occasioning the local pool hall, and "cruising," that is, staking out various public venues in search of a sex partner.

Through the early 1990s, the video game was a focal point around which revolved a variety of bad habits: illicit sex, drugs, alcohol, smoking, gambling, gang activity, and so on. Like the penny arcade almost a century before, the video game arcade was seen by many as a den of iniquity.

Through the concerted efforts of home console developers such as Nintendo, however, this tarnish has been largely burnished away. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Nintendo ran an intense—some might even say "fascistic"—campaign to domesticate the video game. The company not only brought arcade-quality graphics into the home, but released toy-like consoles (the Nintendo Entertainment System [1985]), handheld devices (the Gameboy [1989]), and games (*Super Mario Bros.* [1985]). Nintendo worked hard to transform the icon of the video game into something child-friendly and wholly innocuous, qualities that to this day still mark the company's game devices and in-house games. In fact, so successful were these efforts by



A girl playing games on her Super Nintendo, 2002. Courtesy of Corbis.

game companies to reverse the bad associations of video games that they are now largely—though erroneously—considered child’s play, a consideration that in part explains the fierceness of the ongoing debate over violent game content.

### HOW GAMES MEAN POLITICALLY

Like many icons, the video game has long been a political plaything. After the devastating crash of the game market in 1984, for example, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) launched a probe into the trade practices behind what was widely perceived to be a highjacking of the industry by opportunistic developers. These developers, the probe proclaimed, had glutted the market with inferior product, in essence destroying a multimillion-dollar cash cow. Curiously enough, though the FTC probe was meant to protect the game industry, it prompted the creation of various video-game trade lobbies seeking to protect the developers from governmental inquiry and regulation.

In both 1993 and 2002, the federal government again turned its eye toward games. Instead of trade policies, however, these later investigations focused on game violence. The turn toward game violence is significant because overtly violent games such as *Soldier of Fortune* (2000) or *BloodRayne 2* (2004) are rarely top-sellers. And yet, Senators such as Joseph Lieberman (Connecticut) and Herb Kohl (Wisconsin) have spent years trying to control game violence, in the process so infusing the icon of the video game with the rhetoric of graphic violence and sexuality that even hard facts such as unit sales and net profits are ignored. Much of this rhetorical power is a consequence of politically motivated witch hunts, the kind ideal for tawdry media reportage and the careerism of socially conservative politicians and activists.

This is not to say that many video games are not needlessly violent, sexual, racist, and otherwise offensive. Rather, the issue here is that as the video game is subjected to politicized investigations, its iconicity changes accordingly. Instead of being discussed in terms of aesthetic merits or commercial strength, the video game comes to signify issues of constitutional rights (freedom of expression) and the ethics of free-market capitalism (equal access to the marketplace). Such political significations, while not usually at the forefront of most consumers’ thoughts about video games, nonetheless shape how games mean generally. When senators, representatives, mayors, and even presidents weigh in on how games mean, public perception of games and gamers changes, and thus does the icon of the video game.

The video game is without question one of the definitive icons of contemporary society. It not only signifies the computer age in a most graphic way, but also links the development of digital technologies and methods of communication to one of the primary human instincts: play. Indeed, play is the “primaeval [*sic*] soil” in which “myth and ritual . . . law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science . . . are rooted” (Huizinga 5). The icon of the video game thus embodies play in a simulta-

neously modern and ancient sense, a simultaneity seemingly at the heart of every icon.

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# Vietnam Veterans Memorial

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*Linda Marie Small*

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., is built of polished black granite that reflects the faces of visitors gazing upon its 140 panels of names. Etched upon the two lengths of wall that meet in an apex 10 feet, 8 inches tall are the 58,245 names of military personnel who died as a result of their service in the U.S. war in Vietnam from 1961 to 1975. Those named are deceased warriors, honored not for winning or losing a war unpopular at home, but honored because they served. Their sacrifice, rather than the rightness or wrongness of this conflict, provides the common ground of grief for the many who died. However, many more, 2.7 million Americans, served in the war zone, with 304,000 wounded in action, 75,000 permanently disabled, and more than 1,300 who remain missing in action. Most of their countrymen and women were affected in one way or another, in one degree or another, by this war that was televised in nightly news stories at home for over a decade. While “The Wall,” as it is often called, commemorates those fallen in battle, it also stands for the travail of a whole generation of Americans.

The Memorial was built with \$9 million in private donations. Congress allotted space for the Wall to stand—space at the nation’s center. Jan Scruggs, who served from 1969 to 1970, started and shepherded the movement to honor America’s Vietnam War dead. The Wall was designed by Maya Ying Lin, an architecture student at Yale who won the competition to design the memorial. The Wall is as bereft of the usual verbal and visual funerary language as it is free of any value judgments on the Vietnam conflict itself. The deliberate omission of such language is in keeping with the highly polished, reflective stone panels that form the wall, to define a place for reflection, for remembering, in the center of the U.S. capital. Dedicated in November of 1982, the Vietnam Memorial stands as if this shining monolith had erupted through a fissure in the grassy mall at the heart of the nation.

From the beginning the Wall emerged as a site of remarkably democratic ritual practices. Funerary greenery and material artifacts and letters were hand-carried to and deposited at the Wall. So important are the grave goods,

that family members of the fallen enlist the help of neighbors, associates, and others embarking on travels to Washington to take the time to carry personalized grave goods to the Wall.

Rituals include searching the Book of Names, locating the panel bearing an individual's name, and making a rubbing of that very name engraved on the Wall's polished surface, as well as leaving grave goods. Visits to the Wall often include photographing these ritual processes. Sometimes strangers photograph tearful Veterans as each searches for the names of fallen comrades; that is to say, that a tearful person sporting military dress of any kind and searching at the Wall is given instant and public recognition as "returned Warrior Hero" such that even strangers want to take home a picture of a "national hero."

Although more organized by the turn of the century than at the time of dedication, there have always been veteran volunteers on site to serve as an honor guard and to help visitors find the names of the fallen. A cottage industry hastily grew up around the Wall to sell military insignia, flags, flowers, tracing paper and soft pencils, frames, statuettes, and other artifacts of commemoration so that no visitors need be left out of the rituals at the Wall because they had not come prepared to participate.

Since the Wall was dedicated, a replica of the Wall has traveled to cities throughout the nation and virtual Walls have appeared on the Internet. On one day in September 2004 an Internet search netted seven and one half million hits for Vietnam Veterans Memorial. There have risen Internet-based



Reflections of visitors are caught in the black marble of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

organizations that offer volunteers to produce name-tracings from the Wall and then to send these, pictures, and other items to families back home. The Wall itself remains the most widely visited Memorial in Washington, with the number visiting the Wall estimated to be in the millions yearly. Surprisingly, quiet prevails at the site at all times of day.

After the first two years, National Park Service officials began nightly to collect the material artifacts, but not funerary greenery, left at the wall. This daily collection and curation (everything is preserved) confirms the participation of survivors of the conflict, and those who would remember the conflict, in the construction of its meaning. This curatorial practice doubtless has influenced what is left. Families leaving items at the Wall know that their gifts will enter into the nation's heritage. Thus, these grave goods link the living with their warrior dead while also preserving each hero's family line into the future of the Republic.

Reflection is encouraged and orchestrated by the memorial's design. And from the beginning the Wall has mediated a dialogue between Americans and the popular cultural experience of the Vietnam conflict by creating new connections between a people and its warrior heroes through image-making, rituals, and the deposition of grave goods. Unlike most war memorials, the focus here is not on the war itself or even an abstraction like "sacrifice"; rather, it is upon the individuals who perished. The long list of names, which seeks to be exhaustive, demands that attention be paid to particular persons. Moreover, also unlike most war memorials, the relationship of the visitor to the memorial is up close and personal. One can—no, one is invited to—touch it. Rituals of feeling the texture of the names, of tracing names, of leaving tokens allow visitors, both veterans and ordinary citizens, to make concrete connections with people. Indeed, grave goods left at the Wall have become an integral part of the experience of Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The memorial has initiated a popular reconstruction of national identity, of how a nation reenvisioned itself after a season of social discordance.

The gifts left daily at the Wall are not grave goods interred with the deceased in burial rites such as archaeologists have uncovered in the material remains of other cultures from a distant past. These grave goods, rather, are hand-carried daily by the living to a place of remembering erected quite apart from grave sites. The artifacts are, however, just as totemic as those artifacts from the past deposited in actual graves. An incredibly wide variety of tokens are left at the Wall, including, for example, a hat worn in the field by a soldier, pictures of surviving children of the deceased, a motorcycle, a Christmas tree adorned with emblems of a hoped-for future—baby shoes, wedding rings, a football letter, a graduation cap, a birthday gift. And there are many many more, numbering more than 80,000 material artifacts and increasing daily. These grave goods assert a relationship between the living and the dead: a motorcycle representing past happier travels, pictures linking the deceased with descendant children, a hat as stand-in for a particular soldier. Grave goods left at the Wall are personal, often handmade, artifacts

that extend in totemic fashion the ancestral lines of these deceased warriors, bridging gaps between the nation's past and her future, between individuals and families, and among generations, all unfolding in the popular reclamation of the sacred and the quotidian. So strong is the Wall's power that these objects began to appear even before its dedication.

Perhaps an initiating event is the tale of the soldier and the purple heart. The story first circulated in 1982; and having since been retold and retold, it has risen to the level of myth. On a day that the footings for the Wall were being poured, a soldier is reported to have passed by and tossed his brother's purple heart into the wet concrete. Thus commenced a popular cultural dialog conducted in part through the deposition of grave goods, and leading to a reconciliation of a nation once bitterly divided by the war and the unfolding of a common future.

Further evidence of popular culture's role in this process can be seen in some of the films appearing in the years after the war ended. These postwar films cast soldiers of the Vietnam War era as heroes within images of America's leatherstocking past. Vietnam Veterans are linked to this nation's pioneer history as typified by the rugged individualists that first hued out a nation in a new land. *The Deer Hunter*, for example, portrayed soldiers of the Vietnam conflict as rugged individualists, enduring much in the service of the same nation that had earlier produced the likes of Daniel Boone, Sam Houston, and other leatherstocking individualists from America's mythical pioneer history.



Statues at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

As icon, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial functions as do many, possibly most, of the cultural signs associated with social upheaval and reconstruction—that is, it came to mark a move toward reconstruction of social identity and toward national reunification. Americans, for example, still negotiate Civil War memory and meaning in symbols, films, battle reenactments, cemeteries, memorials, living histories, commemorative ceremonies, and oratory, political and ceremonial. Memory thus manipulated reconstructs social identity, creating a popular notion of the past that advances the nobility of those commemorated, as well as advancing the standing of a nation and of its surviving citizens who remain to collectively remember. These devices elicit emotions quite apart from considerations of the rightness or wrongness of the war or conflict. The reworking of memories is a means of searching for and finding the sacred within the quotidian, the commonplace. At issue in the Civil War was the nation's unity, for which over 600,000 Americans died. For these Union and Confederate dead, hundreds of thousands survived to mourn and labor to construct a viable national identity out of a divided republic. Rituals of mourning and remembrance became a social duty. These activities proliferated after the war, with monuments increasingly erected in areas unassociated with graves, such as at town squares, government centers, American main streets, and city centers. Memorial sites became gathering places and served as set-apart spaces for rituals of remembering and for commemorative display including funerary greens. Memorials and rituals thus provided the living with geographical and cultural space to install all those who died in the conflict into the social category of the “honored dead.” By agreeing on interpretations of the past, on what should be remembered, people employed shared categories, symbols, myths, and legends to legitimize a new social identity. These devices reestablish relatedness and exemplify the sacred so to underscore present social relations now governing those who together share a collective past.

In the new millennium we again see similar memorials put into place with regard to the Iraq conflict. Originally a collection of fifty pairs of combat boots was left along the footings of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on one Memorial Day, an orchestrated display of remembrance. Repeating this thematic portrayal of sacralizing national service, is an array of pairs of footwear, one pair for each American who died to date in the Iraqi-American War. The footgear has been assembled into a traveling Iraq War Memorial as a collective remembrance of America's warrior dead from this more recent conflict that has spawned a new period of social discord at home. Such memorials imply a commonality of belief in image and personal relics as reflective of the souls of individuals. Thus, also noteworthy here is the effort of 200 artists in creating an iconographic memorial of the Americans who died in the Iraqi conflict—an exhibit consisting of individual portraits of the faces of each of America's war dead, a memorial display titled, appropriately enough, “Faces of the Fallen.” A similar impulse drives the publication of the names and/or pictures of American service personnel killed in action in various newspapers, on *The*



*News Hour* on PBS, and in the comic strip *Doonesbury*. The names and images of the fallen in these instances stand in totemic relationship with these deceased warriors, their families, and their nation's collective history, just as the material objects and images left at the Wall also assert totemic connections of the named deceased with the American people.

As a nation we labor in search of the sacred. In a certain sense sacredness is a feeling directed toward what is great, what is transcendent, what is beyond the physical present and the commonplace. All memorials seek to mediate this engagement with the sacred, but it is mediated in a particularly American way and with signal effectiveness by memorials like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, memorials which allow people to engage the sacred physically, to contribute to the creation of the sacred.

Most significantly, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, as reflected in searching the book of names, in taking rubbings, and in leaving grave goods, ties individual visitors to particular deceased veterans of war. At its core, the exercise of memory that the Wall demands is far more focused upon the individual than the collective. Individual experience has far greater resonance than the sum of the conflict.

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# Wal-Mart

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## *Richard Daniels*

I've made several shopping and observing visits to Wal-Mart discount stores and Supercenters in Washington state and Oregon, and I haven't once been "greeted" by anyone, although I haven't found the experience of being there particularly less friendly than what one finds in other "big box" stores, such as Sears/Kmart, Home Depot, Kroger/Fred Myers, Costco, or Target. Still, I'd heard so much about "greeters" and the cheerful helpfulness of Wal-Mart hourly wage employees, or "sales associates," as they're officially called, that I'm disappointed not to have met the legendary friendly greeter on first entrance into the domain of the world's largest corporation (by total sales income, \$288 billion in 2005), even if I was there only to look around and maybe buy a t-shirt or fishing lure.

Once inside the stores (which, like other box stores, are essentially identical) I've made a point of browsing slowly through the departments and aisles, spying on both associates and customers as they sell and shop, occasionally stopping to check out a pair of shorts, a lamp, or a bag of candy, and noticed that in almost all cases the employees are trying hard to be friendly and helpful, but that they're also so very busy and constantly distracted by their many chores, such as the seemingly endless reshelving, that my main impression of them is like that of the white rabbit in the Wonderland story, frenetically hurried and looking about as if being watched at all times, constantly afraid of being late, or perhaps of being accused of stealing time. The result is that only when I actually come to the point of buying something, the point of consumption—a watchband, in one case—do I get a harried worker's undivided attention, and even then it's to answer a question about size and then to say, of another woman hastily unpacking stuff, "she'll help you put it on; that's not my job." With that she turns away, and the other worker—like the first a middle-aged woman—does help me out and take my money, but without saying a word that isn't strictly necessary.

I was beginning to feel like I must have some odd, unpleasant smell about me, but probably, I suspect, all the sales associates are simply showing the effects of corporate speed-up, the time-honored business method for wringing

ever more work per unit of time, and thus ever more profits, out of employees (on the floor, mostly women). And this is clearly one of the ways Wal-Mart increases income year by year, even, it seems, hour by hour. As Lee Scott, President and CEO, writes in the 2005 Annual Report (readily available online):

Global revenues for the fiscal year 2005 exceeded \$285 billion, and net income surpassed \$10 billion. We grew earnings faster than sales by doing the basics well—better in-stock, less markdowns and an improved merchandise mix. As a result, we generated higher profits for our shareholders without passing along higher prices to our customers.

Even with fewer markdowns? He does not mention the hourly workers, or associates, as part of the company's driving purpose, yet clearly their speeded up, disciplined, inexpensive productivity is essential to creating value for customers and, most important, stockholders. The average wage for Wal-Mart's 1.25 million U.S. employees is \$9.90 per hour, two-thirds that of Costco workers; CEO Lee Scott makes approximately \$10,000 per hour (Greenhouse 1). Wal-Mart puts employees first only in its contradictory, mystifying rhetoric.

Wal-Mart has clearly replaced General Motors and joined (if it hasn't yet replaced) Microsoft, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's as the most popular icons of corporate America, although this could of course change at any moment in the ups and downs of corporate capitalism—one need only remember the case of Enron, now little other than a business-page joke but just a short time ago thought to be the very model, or icon, of American corporate success as well as a terrific place to be employed, although no one ever quite knew exactly what Enron *did*. But Wal-Mart as a corporation is much more substantial and deeply woven into the fabric of American society and the ideology, the system of beliefs and feelings, that gives that society cohesion and emotional appeal. Thorstein Veblen observed a century ago that America is a business civilization, and Wal-Mart is now the chief icon of that civilization, like it or not.

My wife and I visited the new Lebanon, Oregon, Supercenter two weeks before its official opening on July 20, 2005, and walked around it (perimeterized the site). Quite big, tire center in back. Very shiny from the outside. Then we went to the old store only a block away, which will close when the new place opens, and everything inside of it seemed disorderly, rushed, the associates brusque and hurried, although I suppose understandably so. Every employee in a Wal-Mart store seems constantly busy restocking shelves (because of Wal-Mart's policy of perpetual inventory, made possible by instantaneous feeds from store to satellite to the monster computer in Arkansas, and back again), replacing customer discards, moving about from one area to another, stealing the odd moment of time to sigh or stretch.

Very American all of that—the shiny exterior, the bright, optimistic façade, but beneath the smiley face a sort of shabby, hurried, anxious interior, and all



Super-sized Wal-Marts such as this one in Ohio are springing up all over the country. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

devoted (the company, if not the country) to wringing as much profit as possible from all concerned, customers as well as workers. In a business civilization, it's the owners and stockholders that count, finally; as for the rest, the devil take the hindmost.

The customers and associates are pretty much all of the same social class, lower-middle-class working folk (with some exceptions, of course), families who often are basically one paycheck or less away from slipping beneath the poverty line. The goods for sale reflect that condition, because they're mostly (although certainly not all) cheap stuff that will soon show their lack of quality. Still, that's what folks figure they can afford, and I can feel the same consumerist (and cheap) urges at work within me as I browse and shop, planning simply to observe but falling into the trap of trying to save money by spending it, buying unneeded items along with apparent necessities. More to the point, buying things—like a new table fan—that I didn't know I needed until I saw them stacked in neat rows among their fellows and remembered the hot sunshine outside. Indeed, I bought some items partly because I saw them, partly because I wanted the experience of buying things at Wal-Mart.

Of course, consuming experiences similar to this can be had pretty much anywhere in the United States, not to mention the rest of the “developed” world, and not just in a Wal-Mart store.

Since Sam Walton—who was a kind of ultra-parsimonious latter-day Henry Ford—started Wal-Mart in a disorderly store in Rogers, Arkansas, in 1962, the company has grown in deceptively deliberate stages until it is a

huge international retailer (over 1,500 stores in other countries on four continents) and the world's largest corporation (again, in terms of income, \$288 billion in 2005, from its over 5,000 stores). From its start, the company has reflected the small-town southeastern conservative populism and patriotism of its area and founder (sometimes called "cornpone populism"), colored by patriarchal Christian fundamentalism, and above all driven by the bottom line, the very American compulsion to find profits under every stone it stubs its toe on. These qualities have determined the company's astonishing growth into the present moment, while both company and qualities have been to an extent altered and disciplined by the competitive forces of the global economy they have become a significant part of.

Such qualities also account for the company's well-known sexist, anti-immigrant, and anti-union employment practices, as detailed for instance in Liza Featherstone's book *Selling Women Short*, a fine account of the record-size class-action lawsuit over a hundred female employees have brought against the company for exploiting the labor of more than 1 million women in often illegal ways—promises of promotions that are never kept, harassment on the job, lower wages than men doing the same work—while projecting the image of being the poor working woman's friend and benefactor. More than 60 percent of Wal-Mart's hourly workers but only a third of management are women (Featherstone 25). As a department manager said to a female worker, women "will never make as much money as men" because "God made Adam first, so women will always be second to men," the memory of which prompted the woman worker to say to an interviewer, "Isn't it incredible that [someone] could believe this crap?" (Featherstone 128). Not only do women workers at Wal-Mart in the United States face discrimination and harassment, but, in addition, most of the goods the company sells are made in China by poor, often underaged women working long weeks and hours in sweatshops, and disciplined by the Red Army (which has been known even to execute workers to enforce labor discipline [Greider 156]). And the company's price bargaining with employees and suppliers drives down wages and benefits in various U.S. businesses—such as Safeway, Albertson's, and other supermarkets in the Los Angeles area—and drives some even long-established companies out of business altogether, for example, Rubbermaid, in favor of always-cheaper overseas, mainly Chinese, competition ("Is Wal-Mart Good for America?").

Wal-Mart is also the major force instituting the new "push-pull" structural dynamic in the global economy. That is, Wal-Mart tells manufacturers what and how much to make, and what they will pay for the wares, and the manufacturers obey or run the risk of going out of business by being shunned by their biggest customer. (Things could, however, change in a hurry if China strengthens its currency versus the dollar, making imports costlier to the United States.) Wal-Mart thus plays the major role in making ours a retail-driven economy, not a production-driven one, which means among other things that wages and benefits decline and that the older manufacturing un-

ions are largely obsolete, irrelevant to most contemporary workers' problems. It's not bad, of course, that unions should have to change with the times, but today—since the Reagan years—only about 11 percent of workers are union members (just 8 percent in the private sector), down from a high of one-third, which greatly decreases their ability to bargain for working folk. Unlike General Motors, which in the 1950s was the icon among American corporations, Wal-Mart, arguably today's iconic U.S. company, produces absolutely nothing (except surplus value), and is the surest sign that we live ever more in a low-wage, next-to-no benefit service economy that in reality focuses on the economic interests of stockholders, not those of working people. A business civilization, indeed.

A further problem with Wal-Mart, and a sign of its fundamental corporate hypocrisy, is that it's perhaps the biggest recipient of corporate welfare—immense public, taxpayer-funded subsidies in terms of public assistance (e.g., some employees on food stamps), Medicaid (which the company has encouraged its workers to apply for), local tax abatements, and free or cheap land and public services (again at taxpayer expense), job-training and worker-recruitment funding, and more (Dicker 200). These practices are hypocritical to say the least for a company that takes every opportunity to propagandize workers with the free-market, anti-union ideology of individual rights, right-to-work, and self-reliance. So Wal-Mart exploits its workers by paying always low wages and next-to-no benefits; its customers (mostly from the same class of women as the workers); and then all of these same people, who are of course taxpayers, yet again by feeding lustily at the public trough. As U.S. Rep. George Miller of California has written, "Because Wal-Mart fails to pay sufficient wages U.S. taxpayers are forced to pick up the tab. In this sense, Wal-Mart's profits are not made only on the backs of its employees—but on the [back] of every U.S. taxpayer" (Dicker 208).

As I've walked through various Wal-Mart's, the impression has grown on me that they offer an illusion of plenty and choice. There are many departments, and certainly lots of stuff, but very few choices (sometimes none) of brand or quality *within* any department. One reason (aside from the "always low wages" workers complain of in private) the company can offer "always low prices—Always," is that they don't sell anything much that claims to be of substantial quality; that is, everything is cheap to begin with, from watch bands to Bermuda shorts to polo shirts, lamps, TV sets, CD players, bags of candy, the whole range of groceries, women's garments, and a thin selection of fishing lures and equipment (well, I'm a fisherman and know that market). Whole realms of possible choice involving quality simply are not there, a lack easily noted in a tour through the full service grocery section, say, of a Supercenter. Bread? Meat? Coffee? Choices strictly limited. Want fresh meat? Looks like mostly roughly butchered feed-lot specials. Particularly interested in healthful food, or organics? Next to nothing offered. In another department of the store, how about men's shorts or wash pants? You can indeed find enough very cheap ones, one or two brands, but little if any choice

of quality; sometimes things that cost a little more wear and look better, last longer and thus make good economic sense. But the temptation and desire to buy cheap is palpable, and to me—a family man without a lot of cash—understandable.

What does this retail global behemoth mean? What is Wal-Mart's cultural resonance? Is it an evil business corporation, unlike all others in its exploitation of workers and customers for the sake of the bottom line and its stockholders, not to mention the multibillionaires of the Walton family? Critics gain nothing by trying to demonize the company. It has plenty of faults, contradictions, and moral failings, but surely not many more than the other mammoth corporations that make up American and global capitalism. Wal-Mart has a tremendous impact on business and trade decisions throughout the global economy, but this is because of its size, steady high growth, push-pull tactics, and evident success at making profits. Wal-Mart is the icon of American and even perhaps of global business today for these reasons primarily, and thus not radically different from other corporations in its practices—just better than most, more efficient at turning labor power, what its workers and others, including the Chinese, do, into surplus value and thus into the profits that go to major owners and stockholders. The worker becomes “a worker-in-general,” in a “formation of *abstract labor*” (Laibman 301). Employee turnover at Wal-Mart averages over 45 percent a year; that is, every year over 550,000 of the company's 1.25 million or so employees quit (or are fired), and 550,000 or so new Sales Associates are hired—every year! (Dicker 30–31). Clearly, such workers are, as David Laibman characterizes them, “interchangeable and dispensable” (301), as indeed are vast numbers of working people around the world in this glutted labor market.

Wal-Mart in part represents the American consumer's addiction to the cheap, on the cheap. John Dicker (215) bluntly points out the depth and practical complexity of this problem when he contends that, as human beings,

We require so much more than everyday low prices. One day perhaps we'll have the courage to realize that this entitlement to “cheap” is our new crack cocaine. In the meantime, those taking on Wal-Mart on so many disparate fronts must grapple with one of the most complex social-change questions of our time: How do you convince a poor person that a \$28 DVD player sucks? (215)

Such a poor person might be a single mother trying to rear two kids on the \$17,000 a year she makes working (almost) full-time at Wal-Mart, or an immigrant laborer trying to live with some self-respect while sending dollars back to Mexico or El Salvador and also saving to try to bring his wife and child to the better life he wants to build in El Norte. To compound the dilemma of the worker, consider that neither can afford health insurance.

Wal-Mart, as a sign of the power of corporations and of the global economy, represents a profound social and human disconnect, one of the great problems of our time, and one that involves every American whose income

and whatever benefits, savings, and pensions ultimately derive from the corporate exploitation of the labor of the poor and other working-class people—here and in every continent and country of the world. Indeed, with the explosion of the service economy the vast majority of Americans *are* among the workers of the world, which pretty clearly suggests the struggle we're engaged in and the remedy we should be working toward, a struggle which includes but does not end with supporting the efforts of Wal-Mart's employees everywhere to organize to get better working conditions and a living wage.

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# John Wayne

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*David Magill*

Despite having been dead for over twenty-five years, John Wayne is still one of our most enduring icons. He ranks as one of the most popular and influential Americans; as late as 1995, he was still voted America's favorite actor and in 2004, he ranked in the top ten. Thanks to special effects wizardry, he has appeared in recent Coors Light and Coca-Cola commercials; in each case, he has appeared as one of his most famous figures (cowboy or soldier), conveying his masculine potency to the potables advertised. In 2004, the U.S. Postal Service honored Wayne with a stamp, while the army named an attack helicopter after him. Former actor and California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger headlined the 2004 Republican National Convention with a speech that garnered its loudest cheers when he reminisced about his boyhood days watching Wayne's films. Schwarzenegger's reference not only nostalgically revisited Wayne's political conservatism but also provided an important claim to American identity and masculinity by revealing a cinematic and political debt to "The Duke." No other actor has been more popular with moviegoers, and no other celebrity represents the American ideals of masculine courage and strength more forcefully than John Wayne.

Joan Didion captured it best when she wrote, "When John Wayne rode through my childhood, and perhaps through yours, he determined forever the shape of certain of our dreams" (30). John Wayne's iconic status arises from his embodiment of the ideal American male identity. He resolves the contradictions of both masculine and national identity for his viewers, creating his titanic star figure out of the ambivalences of modern life and exhibiting a mastery of those tensions: the quest for individuality balanced against the need for social conformity; the desire for women versus the desire of freedom from domestic life; the allure of brutal violence against the responsibility for social order. John Wayne was born Marion Michael Morrison, an unlikely name for the icon of the essence of American manhood. Yet Morrison chose his new moniker consciously to represent his masculine identity to film audiences, and he created his John Wayne persona with the same care, playing

characters that accessed the mythic archetypes of the American hero in the service of the nation and shaped U.S. manhood after World War II.

A major tension of the post-World War II generation pitted the loss of individuality against the perceived need for moral and political unity in the Cold War struggle. John Wayne resolved that contradiction with characters that represent the rugged individualism of the U.S. frontier while also supporting larger ideals of justice, law, and duty to family and country. *Stagecoach*'s "The Ringo Kid" (1939), for example, is a loner and a gunslinger, yet he seeks revenge only against the criminals who murdered his brother and protects the stagecoach community on its journey. The Kid's introduction in the film supports this vision—the camera first swings in for a close-up that identifies him as apart and alone, then widens to a shot which includes him in the group. He is committed to his personal quest for retribution but also to communal ideals of justice and chivalry. *Stagecoach* also represents Wayne's masculine control over psyche and body. When asked why he seeks revenge for his brother's death, he answers quietly, "He was murdered," maintaining control of his faculties as well as the violence he will direct at the killers. Similarly, his powerful body often stands at ease, demonstrating to the audience his mastery of his own strength. But when action is required, the Kid does not hesitate; in one famous scene, he jumps from horse to horse to stop the runaway stagecoach. Thus, even in his earliest films we see Wayne developing the iconic persona that would bring him such adulation.

Although he headlined a number of films during the 1940s, *Red River* (1949) announced the beginning of Wayne's true stardom in its portrayal of another dominant masculine figure: Tom Dunson, an isolated cattle rancher who single-handedly built a productive cattle ranch on the frontier and now must drive his herd 1,000 miles to payday while training men, fighting the elements, and battling with his adopted son Matthew Garth (played by Montgomery Clift). Wayne's iconic persona is evident in this film in multiple ways: he plays the ultimate man who can out-work, out-shoot, and out-drink any man in the group. He lives by a simple code: a day's work for a day's pay, with no quitters allowed. He expects other men to follow his grueling lead, yet as the film's cinematography shows, no one is Wayne's equal. When Wayne surveys his herd and his workmen, the camera angle is always focused downward, emphasizing his higher status. And when the son Matthew challenges his authority verbally, Dunson responds with violence and threats that demonstrate his physical superiority. These two attributes come together as the film ends. Having tracked down his betrayer, Dunson marches through the herd, parting the cattle physically in his implacable quest for retribution. Gerald Mast notes of that scene, "[No one] can ever walk the way Wayne does, devouring space with his stride" (qtd. in Wills 147); visually it marks his unique masculinity. Wayne's manhood is hard and brutal, and his final battle with the son reflects it. But the restoration of family reflects Wayne's support for community.

Wayne depicts a similar resolution to this tension with the other central character he would play: the U.S. soldier, who further accented Wayne's "American" identity while also developing his masculine identity. In *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), for example, Wayne's Sergeant Stryker is both an independent leader who can shape his men through violent masculine competition and a willing participant in the military command structure. While Stryker breaks the rules to train his men (striking one with a rifle butt, for example), he also follows orders faithfully and leads his unit to victory, taking a sniper bullet for his country. He is a hero and a role model, converting even his staunchest rival to his views. Stryker has even lost his wife and child as a result of his military commitment, but he adheres to his duty nonetheless. Thus, Wayne creates another version of modern manhood that assuages the anxieties of contemporary men by enacting a model for emulation.



John Wayne as Hondo Lane in the 1953 movie *Hondo*.  
Courtesy of Photofest.

*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) portrays similar ideals of masculine identity and individualism within the community. Wayne plays Tom Doniphon, a gunfighter who renounces the love of his life to Ranse Stoddard (Jimmy Stewart) and protects that man's honor by secretly killing Liberty Valance and giving the credit to Stoddard. Wayne's portrayal makes clear his masculinity and its connection to individuality; in contrast to Stoddard's talk of law and civility, Doniphon represents the controlled violence that counters Valance's threat and reveals the need for individual men standing strong against evil. But Doniphon also recognizes the responsibilities of social order and supports them through his vindication of Stoddard. He allows Stoddard the spoils for killing

Valance and the love of Doniphon's sweetheart because he recognizes that this sacrifice is necessary to support Stoddard's idealism and commitment to justice that will enrich the community. Even though he is the stronger man physically, Doniphon controls his own desires to support the communal good. Wayne's films thus create him as larger-than-life to demonstrate his overt manhood, yet these films always control that masculine vigor within a code of conduct. Wayne could play violent men because that violence was always directed through a conservative vision of justice and fairness, as in *Liberty*

*Valance*. He depicted the means by which men could do their duty and remain potent in their manhood.

*The Searchers* (1956) represents Wayne's most critically successful film, and while his character is far more troubled and negative than most of his other portrayals, Ethan Edwards fits within the trajectory of American manhood Wayne develops in his films. Edwards is a man on the line in multiple ways. He is connected to his brother's family by emotional bonds, yet, as the film's opening and closing shots reveal, he can never be part of that family officially. Edwards is always separate and alone, framed by the open door he does not enter and silhouetted against the frontier's mountain range and blue sky. Following a vicious Indian attack that kills Aaron and his wife, Edwards sets out to rescue Aaron's daughter Debbie from the treacherous Scar. Wayne's complex portrayal of Edwards critiques his racist ideals but also locates his transformation in Wayne's honorable manhood. While Edwards threatens to kill Debbie to remove the taint of her rape, and reacts violently towards Native Americans on several occasions, he controls his violence and his anger at the film's climax. His redemption lies in her rescue and return home, and Wayne's idealized manhood allows viewers to see Edwards's transformation as natural. The cost he bears, and the scars he hides, represent the sacrifices that American men must take willingly to secure the nation's future. *The Searchers*, then, is a vivid and powerful allegory of masculinity's duty to national interests. Wayne's American iconic persona stems from his portrayal of strong individuals who nevertheless obey communal ideals of duty, loyalty, and honor. By successfully melding the contradictory impulses of individual interest and group allegiance through strength and honor, he creates a masculinity which all can admire and emulate.

As John Wayne aged and faced the trials of cancer, he shifted his iconic persona from individual gunslinger to community patriarch. Later Wayne films portray him as a masculine figure that bestows knowledge and identity upon the younger generation. Thus, Wayne continued to represent masculine potency while also balancing the demands of community leadership and fraternal obligation. Wayne repeatedly portrays men who own property, love feisty women, and battle corrupt businessmen and ranchers in a fight for an egalitarian society where individual acumen is the primary measure of success. Of course, John Wayne's character is always the most successful figure. His later Westerns, such as *True Grit* (which won Wayne his only Oscar for lead actor) and its sequel *Rooster Cogburn*, follow this formula in that they create unique characters (Cogburn, for example, is a drunk with an eyepatch) who nonetheless fulfill their duties to communal order and justice by dispatching villains and protecting women.

His final movies, made as cancer wracked his body, cinematically represent Wayne's passing of the torch through a patriarchal motif. *The Cowboys* and *The Shootist* both involve an older cowboy teaching young men the ways of the West. In *The Cowboys*, Wayne hires schoolboys to accompany his cattle

run when his regular hands run off in search of gold. The film's anticapitalist, nostalgic individualism cemented Wayne's persona as the father figure of American cinema. *The Shootist*, Wayne's final portrayal, is a referential portrayal of a cancer-stricken gunfighter who returns to his town to settle his life, bestow words of wisdom on a young man (played by Ron Howard, himself a figure of youthful innocence on television as Richie Cunningham and Opie Taylor), and then die with guns blazing. In both these films, however, Wayne's character teaches his young protégés the lessons of his life: live by a code of honor, fight for your principles, and act like a man.

Another attribute of several later films is Wayne's increasing conservatism. His patriotism and pro-America loyalties arise in several films to highlight his connection to an ideal "American" identity. *The Green Berets* marks both Wayne's turn as a director and his statement on Vietnam to a country divided. For Wayne, the war held no questions; and his portrayal of the steadfast Mike Kirby had its dramatic foil in the skeptical reporter who follows Kirby into battle and ultimately enlists. While critics panned the film for its heavy-handed portrayal of American patriotism, moviegoers flocked to see Wayne once again inhabiting the role of true American hero and man's man. So even though he would have been too old to fight and lead combat runs, Wayne's character not only leads his men into battle but presents a larger-than-life figure, thanks to filming angles that make him appear larger and more menacing than his men. Wayne's portrayal combines an overtly didactic patriotism with his typically strong masculinity to present a compelling figure of American manhood.

Wayne's other directorial project was *The Alamo*; in that story he found the American ideals that he supported as an actor and as a public figure throughout his life. Perhaps no speech summarizes Wayne's views better than the one he gave as Davy Crockett in this film:

"Republic"—I like the sound of the word. . . . Some words give you a feeling. Republic is one of those words that makes me tight in the throat. Same tightness a man gets when his baby makes his first step, or his boy first shaves, makes his first sound like a man. (qtd. in Wills 213)

The speech links patriotism to manhood in a controlled sentiment voiced by a legendary American hero. The combination works so well because it taps into the mythos of American culture: the self-made strong and powerful man who succeeds individually yet lives by a code of ethics that puts country and duty ahead of self-interest.

Joan Didion writes,

And in a world we understood early to be characterized by venality and doubt and paralyzing ambiguities, he suggested another world, one which may or may not have ever existed, but in any case existed no more: a place where a man could move free, make his own code, and live by it. (30–31)

Wayne represented a mythic fantasy of masculinity and individuality based in an ethic of freedom and choice; in other words, he represented the American ideal for men. Like Superman, he fought for truth, justice, and the American way, and like Superman, he is a mythic figure in American culture. He is a legend, and as his friend notes in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, “when the fact becomes legend, print the legend.” Wayne became such an icon at a time when world war had shattered the globe, madmen dictators had killed millions, and nuclear annihilation seemed imminent; as such, he represents a simpler past nostalgically created to counter present anxieties, as well as a vision of a world where good and evil are easily discerned and right always wins out. But he also represents a humane heroism and a promise that someone is always there to protect the downtrodden and less fortunate from the dictates of evil. John Wayne is an American icon because he represents America’s ideal vision of itself as a protector of individual freedom and choice.

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# Whistler's Mother

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*Elaine A. King*

Throughout the twentieth century, James McNeill Whistler's painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (1871) has functioned as an icon of motherhood, love, respect, and yet also indifference. This mother's stoic gaze is embedded in the part of our cultural fabric that does not seek powerful sensations or transcendence; she is not the kind of icon that invites being challenged or toppled; and, so she remains a well-known but idiosyncratic, and perhaps archaic, image of American culture. "Whistler's Mother," as the painting is commonly called, occupies a prominent position within American popular culture despite its chilly portrayal of maternity in a little lace bonnet and widow's weeds.

The quiet, enigmatic likeness of Anna Whistler along with Grant Wood's *American Gothic* and Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* are perhaps the three masterpieces most Americans are familiar with. A good part of its popularity, like theirs, stems from the number of derivations drawn by cartoonists, illustrators, and advertisers over the past 100-plus years. At the University of Pittsburgh in the Art History Slide Library, a drawer contains a widespread collection of popular culture's reinterpretations of art masterpieces, especially Whistler's Mother. In like manner at Stanford University the art historian Wanda Corn has amassed an impressive assortment of transformations of Wood's *American Gothic*. Her analysis can also be applied to the portrait of Whistler's mother: the simple compositional formula and the mute facial expressions of the couple made it possible for Americans to "use *American Gothic* as an all-purpose 'blackboard' on which to write their messages, voice their concerns, or hawk their wares. They have discovered, as the critics have before them, that the image is protean, capable of addressing an infinite number of issues" (134).

The emergence of the American icon from Whistler's brush has a greater peculiarity than does Wood's portrait from the midwestern heartland. Before the painting became popular as a protean icon of motherhood, it was revered as experimental Modern art by an expatriate American who had challenged the European art establishment and gained celebrity through controversy.

The son of a Lowell, Massachusetts, railway engineer, Whistler left the country for Paris at age twenty-one after failing at West Point, and thereafter lived in Europe, where he pretended to be a Southern aristocrat. The painting was created in England, purchased by the French government after much connivance by Whistler and his friends, and housed in a Paris museum. Whistler's idiosyncratic behavior, along with his radical ideas about art in the late nineteenth century when Modernism was beginning, contributed to his fame and to the love for this portrait. "One would like to think that Whistler the artist flies clear of Whistler the celebrity, the 'character,'" Robert Hughes points out. "Not so. On the one hand, his self-construction, his sense of the self as a work of art, remains as fiercely impressive as Oscar Wilde's. 'Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee'—he did that long before Muhammad Ali was born" (238). The portrait embodies Whistler's aesthetic philosophy that challenged "the traditional academic rule that the highest art must possess a high degree of finish and illusionistic detail at the same time as conveying moral narratives or ennobling ideas" (Bjelajac 274).

At first, Whistler's works were perceived to be unacceptable and shocking. At the Salon of 1863, Whistler's painting *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* and Edouard Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur L'Herbe* were rejected for essentially the same reasons—their technique and their "lewd" subject matter. In 1877 the renowned English critic John Ruskin blatantly charged that Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* amounted to "the artist flinging a pot of paint in the public's face" (McCoubrey 182). Outraged, Whistler sued Ruskin for libel, but won only one farthing in damages. This trial almost ruined him financially. Whistler, however, was a master at using adversity, and made the most of the trial's controversy to further establish his reputation as an artist, and his notoriety as a critic of "devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like" in art, as he proclaimed in the London paper *The World* in 1878 (Bendix 33).

Whistler was aligned with the Aesthetic Movement; he and its artists argued that the primary quality of a work of art resided in its beauty, which translated into its formal elements of line, shape, and color. He admired the formal beauty and colors of Japanese prints, which influenced his specialized style of fusing figurative and abstract elements. Woodcut prints with sharply angled lines, bold cropping, and flat-pattern design appealed to him as ways to make supremely confident statements. In his resolutely simplified compositions—especially portraits—Whistler painted mostly solitary figures, and reduced them to a single form within a finite tonal scale. The monochromatic character of the portrait of his mother lucidly delineates what Whistler called his "tonal envelope." This composition remains one of the mysteries of American art, and yet, according to E. H. Gombrich, "perhaps one of the most popular paintings ever made" (400). In its carefully structured linear pattern, the mother subject is silhouetted and framed by the wall; she sits in profile fronting a light background. The horizontal lines of the skirting boards hold the elements in place. This painting is unlike maternal portraits painted by such other artists as





Whistler's Mother. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Dürer, Rembrandt, or Cassatt: Whistler was making an aesthetic design. In his collected writings *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* he observed, “To me it is interesting as a picture of my mother; but what can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?” It was, he insisted, an “arrangement” without concern for sentiments or imitation of its subject (128).

Whistler's acceptance as an internationally significant American artist began shortly after 1885 among Paris's creative and literary society. No previous American painter had been held in such high esteem. His reputation

flourished in the United States from the mid-1890s onward, when private collectors, notably Charles Lang Freer, and major museums began to acquire his work. His art appeared in six Carnegie Internationals between 1896–1907, where it can be said to have been a touchstone by which other contemporary painting was judged. (Strazdes et al. 480)

Following Whistler's death on July 17, 1903, many critics went through a period of mourning befitting the loss of a luminary American painter and controversial celebrity. Over a span of five years some eighty-eight articles appeared on the subject of Whistler, despite the many who questioned the significance of his position in the history of art (Knaufft 173). Within the

realm of popular culture, a cigar was named after him because he had been a lifelong cigarette smoker, and a lithograph of the artist's image was made to grace the boxes of the Leopold Powell and Company of Tampa, Florida. Because he was a famed, sophisticated, and controversial American artist, his name and image naturally lent their allure to advertising and commodity marketing. A New York City department store produced a Whistler line of stationery, perhaps swayed by the success of his Metropolitan Museum show of 1910 and his contentious reputation. However, this burst of commemoration was short-lived. The last actual appearance of his work in the United States for nearly twenty years came in 1913 in Buffalo, New York.

The centenary celebration of Whistler's birth in 1933 prompted a re-evaluation of his reputation and stature, with recurring showings of his work. A significant occasion that gave extra attention to his mother portrait among the American public was its inclusion in the traveling exhibition *What Is Modern Painting?* organized by Alfred Barr in 1933 for the Museum of Modern Art. *The Arrangement in Grey and Black* was loaned by the Louvre, and during the exhibition's half-year run an estimated 2 million viewers across the country were able to behold the famed mother portrait. Amid the remembrance and praise of his most famous painting, Whistler's reputation and reproductions of his work expanded, partially because of articles written on almost every aspect of his career. Stories of the vitriolic "Whistler versus Ruskin" libel suit and the artist's well-placed verbal barbs emanated in periodicals. Once again Whistler was a "hot" news item attracting attention among readers and viewers.

Well apart from his contentious life, Whistler's portrait of his mother gained importance as an image with iconic appeal among Americans during the Depression. It represented for a large segment of the public an object of art and one of mystery at the same time. The mother portrait's arrival and departure alone became the subject of news. When the painting was shown at the Modern in 1934, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's mother posed in front of it for a photo which then appeared in newspapers. Moreover, the painting astonished the American public when they learned that the French Government insured the painting in 1933 for a value of \$500,000 for the tour, and also that it had originally been purchased for only \$800 in 1891. Such an increase in monetary value awed Americans and further broadened their interest in the distinguished portrait. Subsequently, among the general public Whistler's original title disappeared and it was simply dubbed "Whistler's Mother."

Moreover, a resurgence of realism in the United States produced a consummate milieu for a revival of Whistler's art, stimulated through President Roosevelt's response to unemployment with the Works Progress Administration. Many artists were employed to paint murals, paintings, and posters that celebrated American identity and civic life, for post offices, schools, trains, buses, air terminals, and housing projects. The works included illustrations of American nationalism, the work ethic, freedom, pre-

industrial landscapes, and midwestern community life, by regionalist painters such as Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood.

As with Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, Whistler's Mother when seen as illustration evokes a homey Puritan tradition, in a pious mother likeness with caricature charm. It had appeal within the growing Protestant fundamentalism throughout the Midwest and South, suggesting the sovereignty of religion in rural America, as does John Steuart Curry's 1928 *Baptism in Kansas*. On the other hand, for the millions of recent immigrant, urban families it bore the dignified, modest image of old-world motherhood. For both, the Depression and war years brought emphasis to the importance of family. And as a picture, Whistler's Mother emanates a sensibility akin to Norman Rockwell's illustrations of American family life in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

The celebration of Mother's Day and the U.S. Postal Service also contributed to this painting's becoming an American icon. For the twentieth anniversary of Mother's Day as an official holiday, the Piedmont Chapter of the American War Mothers submitted a request on January 26, 1934, to President Roosevelt requesting that a stamp be issued. Mrs. William E. Ochiltree, National President of the AWM, claimed, "The granting of Mother's Day Stamp would not only express a loving remembrance of home and its queen, but it would give expression to the fact that Mother has always been a co-partner in our American life." News of the government's intent to publish a commemorative stamp prompted Earl F. Wood of Pomfret, Connecticut, to write Postmaster-General Thomas J. Farley inquiring if "a most suitable picture for the stamp [would] be the well known Whistler's Mother? Should we not do well to recognize this great American artist through circulating one of his greatest works and at the same time honor the mothers of America?" This recommendation took hold, and an estimated 250 million stamps were printed and made available to the American public on May 3, 1934. The stamp was promoted:

As a means of stimulating interest in the forthcoming issue of the Mothers' commemorative postage stamp, the Postmaster, has had a supply of placards printed containing a reproduction of Whistler's portrait of his mother, that is the central design of the stamp, placed on display in post office lobbies, as well as in clubs and hotels. (Archives of United States Postal Museum)

Furthermore, the Post Office used mimeograph, radio, and other means to promote the sale of the Whistler stamp, as well as to advocate the importance of Mother's Day. The simple act of using a modified version of Whistler's portrait for the stamp's composition, and its massive distribution, turned an image that was never intended to be a cliché into a stereotype of motherhood in the United States. No longer was the image identified with high art, but instead a mass-produced item available to anyone for three cents.

The arts community was outraged by what they perceived as a mutilation of the original portrait. To make a more mass-appealing and sentimental

image, the Postal design's revisions included cutting the mother's figure off at the knees, removing background designs, printing it in the color purple, and adding a pot of carnations. Numerous protests appeared in the *Art Digest* of May 1934, as well as national newspapers (Archives of the United States Postal Museum). Notwithstanding the critical outcry, the stamp contributed to the popularization of the painting. That stamp honoring the mothers of America, along with the original painting, now conveyed messages of devotion, pity, and patriotic value.

The Whistler stamp illustrates a curious coopting, for an idealization of motherhood. The original painting served as a point of departure for the stamp's image. The designer cropped the picture so as to gain access to the face and to close the distance. The added bouquet of carnations was to soften the austere space, as well as to invoke the Mother's Day custom in which mothers wore carnations; in the stamp they appear as if they were on a windowsill. Ironically, the very fact that Whistler's original composition was a tonal composition of blacks, grays, and white contributed to its mass distribution and reproduction. The work could readily be reproduced in magazines and newspapers in black and white and, despite the limitations of tabloid mechanical reproduction, the readers saw it pretty much as if they were actually seeing the museum painting. Because color technology was still in its infancy, its reproduction in black and white did not lessen its pictorial essence.

Subsequently the painting became an open subject for use in popular culture. Reproductions began appearing in elementary school textbooks, scout materials, and cartoons, as testimonies to being a good child. Cartoonists also steadily employed this image in humorous caricatures, and it continually underwent endless modification in books, cards, posters, and other items.

The painting's name went even further afield. During World War II a light bomber, the Douglas A-26 "Invader," was called "Whistler's Mother." It was used in attacks for bombing, strafing, and launching rockets. Silver models of "Whistler's Mother—A-26 Invader" can be purchased today on the Internet for \$135.00. The visage took a different turn in 1945 when Disney Studios appropriated Whistler's Mother for comedy in a Donald Duck cartoon, *Don's Whistling Mother*. Since then Warner Brothers' Wile E. Coyote and numerous other cartoon characters have donned the guise for fun. Actual mothers and even President Reagan have been dressed and posed in it for social and political comment (Tedeschi 137, 133).

The uses of Whistler's Mother curiously presage adaptations in Pop Art, which emerged in the 1960s from such artists as Andy Warhol, Larry Rivers, and Roy Lichtenstein, who elevated banal everyday objects into icons in their art. Instantly these artists melded high art with popular culture by taking prevalent objects from advertising and real life—Coke bottles, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis, and newspaper comics. These icons are favored details in the endless symbiosis of modern culture that provides an illusion of social

stability during relentless change. They represent a type of fusion of materiality and cultural meaning through the praxis of design and advertising.

After over 100 years, Whistler's Mother continues to be appropriated by popular culture, in derivations ranging from Looney Tunes kitchen canisters to versions on websites, to *New Yorker* cartoons such as Edward Sorel's menace-in-wait on the Mother's Day Cover of May 13, 1996. The plot of the 1997 film *Bean*, a slapstick comedy, revolves around the painting. Yet contemporary artists have also continued to respond to this work, as did Dean Brown with his 1983 color photograph *Barbie as Whistler's Mother*.

As with the *Mona Lisa*, the gaze of Whistler's mother is enigmatic—in the composition Anna Whistler appears cool and aloof, locked in a moment of deep reflection that the viewer cannot penetrate. She personifies in this composition a reserved old lady: her gaunt profile is austere, and accepting of her role as mother and widow. One might question whether this is a relevant image of motherhood in the twenty-first century; perhaps is it now merely a comfortable popular culture logo. Will it remain an icon as the youth culture persists in gathering momentum, and as mothers and grandmothers over the past decades have transcended the stereotyped role of “good mother” and taken on multiple identities? Will it maintain its power as a historical icon because we as a society continue being comfortable with nostalgic clichés of past values? Perhaps it will persist, because some icons come to make classic statements about a particular aspect of American culture, and they remain viable from one generation to the next.

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# Oprah Winfrey

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*R. Mark Hall*

All but the most reclusive Americans—indeed, citizens of the world—are familiar with television’s most successful talk-show host, Oprah Winfrey. As an American icon, she is associated with some of the most dominant values and ideas in contemporary American popular culture. Among these, Winfrey represents a version of the American Dream narrative made famous in the rags-to-riches dime novels of nineteenth-century Unitarian minister and writer Horatio Alger. The American Dream, according to Alger’s formulation, is available to anyone, no matter how disadvantaged or powerless, no matter how modest one’s origins. If one perseveres, if one always does right and does one’s best, then, through honesty, hard work, and determination, one can overcome any obstacles along the way and triumph over them to build one’s own American Dream against the odds. Winfrey’s personal legend, constructed and retold over the course of her long career, is a contemporary Horatio Alger progress narrative, or bootstraps myth, of upward transformation from humble beginnings against difficult odds, to extraordinary success through individual strength of mind and hard work.

The Queen of Talk TV was born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, the illegitimate child of Vernita Lee and Vernon Winfrey, in 1954. When her mother migrated to Milwaukee, Winfrey was left in the care of her grandparents. Though uneducated herself, Winfrey’s grandmother, a strict disciplinarian, taught her granddaughter to read the Bible and to write by the time she was 3. As a young girl, Winfrey performed recitations at Sunday school. At 6, she left her grandparents’ farm to live with her mother. Winfrey excelled in school, skipping ahead from kindergarten to first grade, and again from second to third grade. Shuttled back and forth between her mother in Milwaukee and her father in Nashville, at age 9, Winfrey was raped by a 19-year-old cousin; and until age 14 she was sexually abused by close male relatives and family friends. The abuse ended after Winfrey’s mother attempted to place her daughter, who had become an uncontrollable delinquent, in a juvenile detention home. Turned away because the home was full, Winfrey was sent, instead, to live permanently with her father in Nashville. There she gave

birth to a premature son, who died not long after birth. Afterwards, under her father's guidance, Winfrey became an honor student again. She graduated from East Nashville High School with a scholarship for her speaking ability to East Tennessee State. While a 16-year-old senior in high school, Winfrey began her broadcasting career by reading the news at WVOL radio for \$100 a week. So began Oprah Winfrey's rise to celebrity.

Winfrey's life story reflects the idea, highly valued in American culture and made famous by Alger's novels, that material success results from dogged individual determination. This theme of transformation is fundamental to any understanding of Winfrey as an American icon. With a wide array of public images, Winfrey embodies the protean nature of the American icon. She is malleable and open to multiple interpretations. Winfrey's persistence and longtime success both result from and reflect her adaptability. In fact, change is a major theme on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which has itself undergone major transformations from time to time. For example, in 1996 Winfrey restructured her show, moving away from the tell-all, knock-down-drag-out daytime talk format of such competitors as Jerry Springer. She sought to reinvent *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which she labeled "change your life TV," so that it would be more inspirational. In keeping with this theme came "Oprah's Angel Network," Winfrey's national effort to encourage viewers to make charitable contributions and do volunteer work.

After restructuring, doing well by doing good—another Horatio Alger trademark—became an enduring theme on the show, woven into the program's fabric of entertainment, self-improvement, and social reform. Winfrey's celebrity thus combines with the ideologies of self-improvement and cultural uplift to promote the American ideal of upward transformation. From the Greek word for "image," an *icon* has, as its core, a visual representation, and media images of Winfrey reflect the American ideology of rags-to-riches-and-recognition. For example, in 1997 Winfrey appeared on the cover of *LIFE* magazine. In a smart red suit, she smiles broadly, looking directly at readers, holding an antique leather-bound volume with pages edged in gold. The title announces, "The secret INNER LIFE of America's most powerful woman: OPRAH Between the Covers." Like so many other accounts of Winfrey's life, this one expands the legend of this American icon. The article's title presents the major themes of her Cinderella fairy tale: secrets, intimacy, power, and education.

Turning to the story inside, however, one is confronted with a very different figure from the confident, relaxed, happy, successful adult Winfrey on the cover. Filling the entire left-hand page is a stark black and white kindergarten class photo of Winfrey, grim-faced, staring blankly at the camera. Opposite, against a black background, is a quotation from her interview with *LIFE*. Winfrey's words offer a personal revelation, perhaps the single most distinguishing feature in the creation of this American icon, and the hallmark of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*: "No one ever told me I was loved. Ever, ever, ever. Reading and being able to be a *smart girl* was my only sense of value,





Oprah Winfrey presenting an award during the 76th Annual Academy Awards, February 29, 2004. Courtesy of Photofest.

and it was the only time I felt loved” (Johnson 45). The *LIFE* article illustrates that, in a sense, Oprah is herself a book. Put another way, her life is a carefully crafted story. Her progress narrative is told and retold in popular newspaper and magazine articles, television shows such as Winfrey’s *Arts and Entertainment Biography*, and biographies such as Norman King’s *Everybody Loves Oprah! Her Remarkable Life Story* and Nellie Bly’s *Oprah! Up Close and Down Home*. As Winfrey has gradually revealed her life story on her show and in the popular media, fans have learned, over time, how education and hard work have led to her enormous fame and fortune.

As a poor African American girl growing up in the South during the Civil Rights era, among the obstacles Winfrey faced were her race and gender. Yet, at age 19, she became the youngest person and the first African American woman to anchor the news at

Nashville’s WTVF-TV. As the first black billionaire in the United States and the first African American woman to join the *Forbes* list of the world’s richest people, Oprah represents the possibility of overcoming the double jeopardy of being black and female in a country whose history is plagued by discrimination against both. Winfrey is associated not only with the theme of triumph over adversity, but also with the prevailing concerns in the United States of racial and gender equality. Winfrey’s life story is extraordinary, both for the proliferation of obstacles set against her and for her soaring achievement. For some, such a story provokes hope and optimism. At the same time, this American icon, like others, simultaneously incites the opposite reaction. Winfrey may also be seen as a potentially detrimental stereotype of African American women as invulnerable, indefatigable, persevering, and enduring against great odds without negative consequences. The American myth of the tough, strong black woman able to withstand any abuse and conquer any obstacle sets an impossible standard that may lead ordinary women to take on overwhelming responsibilities, to ignore the physical and emotional costs, never seeking or receiving assistance.

Winfrey also represents media imperialism and commercial domination, communicating widely, not only across the United States, but across the globe. She is mistress of all she surveys. Host of the highest-rated talk show in television history, with an estimated 30 million viewers each week in the United States, and broadcast internationally in more than 100 countries, Winfrey also established and now owns its production company, Harpo

["Oprah" spelled backwards] Studios. She is creator of *Dr. Phil*, the successful spin-off of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and co-founder of the cable television network Oxygen Media. Winfrey's dominion extends to film, as both actor and producer, with her best-known role as Sofia in Steven Spielberg's 1985 *The Color Purple*, for which she received an Academy Award nomination. As founder and editorial director of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, Winfrey is a major player in print media. According to her Web site, Winfrey's electronic presence is also vast, with Oprah.com averaging 3 million users each month. As the most important celebrity entrepreneur of our time, communicating extensively and marketing her fame in diverse media, Oprah stands for the American regard for the power and influence of the individual.

Herein lies a paradox in the iconography of Oprah Winfrey. On the one hand, her global influence via nearly every available medium is unparalleled. On the other, Winfrey simultaneously represents the ordinary, constructing the impression, highly valued in American culture, of "just folks." Winfrey is at once a larger-than-life celebrity and a regular gal. Anyone who has struggled to lose weight can relate to the Oprah who, in 1988, pulled a little red wagon filled with sixty-seven pounds of fat onto the stage of her talk show and proudly showed off her size-10 Calvin Klein jeans. From the early days of her talk show, Winfrey capitalized on her singular ability to coax ordinary folk to share their own traumas and tribulations—just as Winfrey herself does. Regular folk identify with the Winfrey who proclaimed, "Free speech not only lives, it rocks," after jurors rejected a multimillion-dollar defamation lawsuit by Texas cattlemen, prompted by Winfrey's caution during an episode of her show against the threat of mad cow disease. To critics, the accusation that Winfrey's remarks led to a cattle market plunge that caused \$11 million in losses underscores the danger of placing too much power and influence with the individual, who may use that authority irresponsibly. For fans, Winfrey's story is emblematic of the American desire to see the little girl or guy triumph, David-over-Goliath fashion.

Likewise, in 2005, Winfrey reminded the world of the paradox of her celebrity-ordinariness. Thanks to rapid-fire, round-the-world Internet news and Web logs, the story of Oprah snubbed by upscale Paris boutique, Hermes, rose immediately to the status of myth, with multiple contradictory versions quickly circling the globe. The incident draws attention to the fact that Winfrey is not "just folks," attempting to dash into the Hermes shop on Faubourg Saint-Honore, a street lined with famous designer shops frequented by wealthy tourists and the well-to-do. At the same time, the story reminds us of the possibility that any African American may find herself similarly unwelcome in a tony boutique. The Hermes fracas brings to mind early episodes of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, long before her online Oprah Boutique, with its exclusive Oprah's Book Club Pajamas for \$64.00, in which Winfrey tackled the Klu Klux Klan or traveled to Forsyth County, Georgia to ask local citizens why, for more than seventy-five years, they refused to allow a black person to live in the county. Winfrey's studio confirmed a version of the story that

suggests a racist motive for barring her entrance: Harpo Productions compared Winfrey's experience to the film *Crash*, which explores racial tolerance in Los Angeles, tracking the heated intersections of a multi-ethnic cast of characters ("Luxury Store..."). Whatever the facts of the Hermes rebuff, anyone who has experienced racial hostility may connect with Winfrey's plight, an ordinary, everyday encounter for many Americans.

By contrast, other versions of the Hermes incident cast Winfrey as an arrogant, wild-spending celebrity diva, rudely insisting on entrance even though Hermes had closed for the evening. While fans may view Oprah as a successful American capitalist, who, through hard work, has earned the privilege to spend without guilt, to critics, Winfrey's yearly "Oprah's Favorite Things" list of high-end products such as \$312 hand-painted tea service, or a \$465 Burberry quilted jacket, reflects and promotes the message that buying more and more brings happiness. A product endorsement by a celebrity tastemaker of Oprah's status creates demand where no genuine need exists. To critics, such conspicuous consumption leads to global conformity and social alienation. It also has a detrimental effect on the environment and the world's poor.

Essential to Oprah as icon are multiple and contradictory interpretations such as these. To fans, Oprah is a sacred cow. But the very status of icon invites both adoration and satire. Artist Bruce Cegur illustrates both points of view in his digital print of Oprah as religious icon. One image, "The Crucifixion," shows Winfrey as a glowing Aunt Jemima figure hanging on a cross of steer horns. Cegur allows negative but also positive interpretations of the image as a symbol of spiritual power, community leadership, an African American woman's strength and authority. Superimposed over this figure is a wider, glowing female form, which pokes fun at Winfrey's weight-loss struggles. At the same time, Cegur suggests that this image may also represent the struggle faced by black women for respect and recognition. Beneath this figure is one the artist titles "The Last Supper," a stylized version of Leonardo Da Vinci's famous painting, lampooning Oprah, seated center, in the place of Christ, surrounded by Book Club guests and other famous women television talk show hosts. The label above reads, simply, "SYRUP," reminding us that critics view Winfrey as a gifted actor, master of the con, trafficker in base sentimentality and empty psychobabble.

However we interpret Winfrey as icon, she has perhaps influenced American popular culture most by making the personal public, by sharing the private details of her life, and, at the same time, persuading her guests to do likewise. As she has risen in popularity, Winfrey has disclosed more and more details of her life, more and more secrets. These details stress her extraordinary success against daunting barriers, while they emphasize her human frailty. As a result, viewers of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* may feel that Oprah is both television's richest entertainer and also "just like me." A 1986 *Woman's Day* article quotes Winfrey as saying, "People out there think I'm

their girlfriend; they treat me like that. It's really amazing'” (Tornabene 50). Likewise, popular biographies of Winfrey promulgate her reputation for intimacy. Bly quotes the *Washington Post*'s characterization of Winfrey's distinctive style among talk show hosts: “If Jane Pauley is the prom queen, Oprah Winfrey is the dorm counselor. . . . People want to hold Barbara Walters' hand. They want to crawl into Winfrey's lap” (52). Readers of Winfrey's biographies know, for example, the “inside” story behind the public story of Winfrey's weight loss battle. They know not only the Winfrey who dragged a load of fat across stage, but also the Winfrey who secretly binged on a package of hotdog buns bathed in syrup. This imagined intimacy is the hallmark of Winfrey's career. On her show, Winfrey enters the personal space of guests, touches them, sustains lingering eye contact, and appears to listen carefully when they speak. Such behaviors establish a sense of sympathy and sociability between Winfrey and her guests and viewers. Viewers invite Winfrey into their homes—their own private spaces—and in return she brings them the private lives, not only of her guests, but also of herself. In short, Winfrey uses intimacy strategically to attract and maintain audience interest and loyalty. Telling a secret about oneself, as Winfrey sometimes does, breeds affection and loyalty because such a revelation both reflects and engenders trust. Not only do viewers feel they can trust Winfrey because of the intimacy she constructs, but they may also feel flattered, in a sense, and therefore closer to her, because she trusts them with the details of her personal life.

In this way, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* challenges notions of what “counts” as evidence in public debates and gives voice to women whose sentiments, interests, and concerns might otherwise go ignored. Winfrey's message of individual empowerment resonates strongly with her mostly female audience. This message is one that led popular culture critic, Steven Stark, to compare Winfrey to Mr. Rogers. While acknowledging that “The mission is to sell us something, which is the goal of all commercial television: ‘I buy; therefore, I am’ is the theology of most TV,” Stark calls Winfrey “another rather old fashioned TV performer when you think about it, who, while not formally trained in religion, has turned her show into a similar kind of uplifting ministry of empowerment, in her case, for women rather than children.” While critics deride Winfrey's brand of therapeutic talk TV as treacle, the force of that sensibility is illustrated in the vehement responses to a 2000 article in the *Washington Post*. In the “Style” section, well known for its sardonic wit, staff writer Libby Copland offers a mocking critique of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in “Our Lady of Perpetual Help: In the Church of Feel-Good Pop Psychology, Spiritual Rebirth Means Starting at O.” Indeed, as an American icon, Winfrey has become an image with sacred significance. In this case, Winfrey is depicted as a satirical religious icon, with flowing white robes, a star-topped staff in hand, a twinkling halo about her head. Winfrey is the Goddess of New Age spiritualism, which takes individual empowerment as its central tenet. Surrounding “Our Lady” in monks' robes are four

self-help “experts” who once frequented her show: Gary Zukav, Dr. Phil, Suze Ormon, and Iyanla Vanzant appeared regularly to offer strategies for changing one’s life for the better.

One week after Copland’s “Our Lady” critique of Winfrey, vehement letters defending Winfrey’s aim to improve both the lives of individual viewers and the communities in which they live appeared in the Op-Ed section of the *Post*. One fiery response takes Copland’s “sarcastic Oprah-bashing” to task for ignoring Winfrey’s good works—and her ability to inspire generosity among viewers: “Your June 26 Style article charges her television show with encouraging self-absorption and simplistic guru-ism but conveniently leaves out a major theme of the Oprah show: charitable giving and volunteerism” (Summers). As Copland’s piece and the responses to it demonstrate—and as the long-time popularity of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* illustrates—there is a significant place for the sensibility Winfrey advocates on her show. She speaks to the desire for hope, optimism, and the power of positive thinking to improve one’s life, fundamental values in American culture. Winfrey’s optimism, of course, is viewed by some as naïve and self-aggrandizing, but the history and power of its appeal are essential to understanding twenty-first-century American popular culture and Oprah Winfrey as a representative icon.

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# Witch

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*Linda Badley*

The “evil” witch flying on her broomstick, black cat in tow, is as important to the American observance of Halloween as the turkey is to Thanksgiving. In Disney’s “Golden Book” versions of classic European folktales, in Disney’s *Snow White* (1937), and in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), she often upstaged the adolescent heroine—gloating over her cauldron, proffering poisoned apples, or cackling and swooping down on her victims. But by the 1960s, in the popular television sitcom *Bewitched* (1964–1972), the witch, Samantha, starred in her own suburban fairy tale, and by the 1990s her nemesis the “wicked witch” stereotype was politically incorrect or at best an anachronism. The Harry Potter phenomenon (1997–present) made witchcraft a metaphor for the sense of agency and power that comes with adolescence. So did television dramas such as WB’s *Charmed* (1998–), whose sisterly heroines cast spells to wage war on evil, and ABC’s sitcom *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996–2003), in which the plucky heroine’s talking feline familiar, played by a sardonic animatronics puppet, is named Salem. At the same time, paradoxically, the witch had become scarier than ever to one growing segment of the American population: the Christian fundamentalist right, for whom Harry Potter, Sabrina and, for that matter, Halloween alluded to or even consisted of a dangerous pagan, hence “Satanic,” ritual.

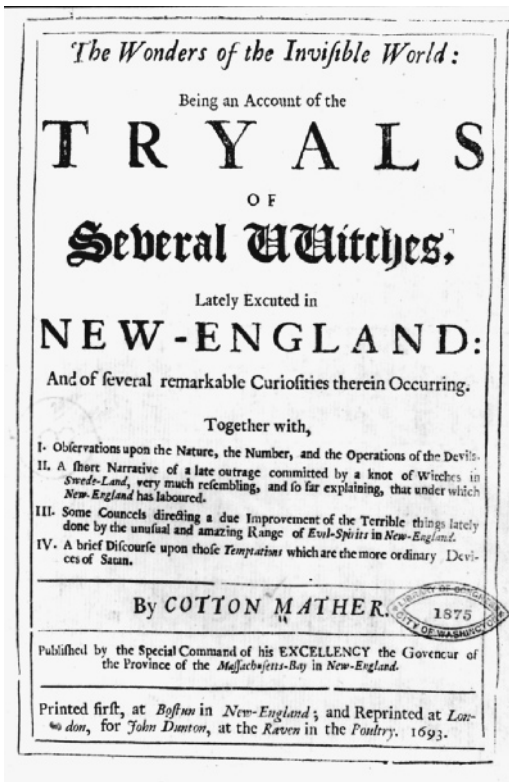
The key term in this controversy, of course, is provided by Sabrina’s Salem. Stereotypical images of the witch are often coupled with what Elizabeth Reis calls “one of America’s most shameful and tragic moments: the large-scale accusation and execution of ‘witches’ during the 1692 Salem witch trials” (xi). Even if Perry Miller had asserted in 1953, in his influential study, that the witchcraft episode was a blip on the screen of colonial history (191) as subsequent scholarship and popular culture have revealed, Salem’s witches would not have not gone away. Possibly the “single most intensively studied event in colonial North American history,” according to Bernard Rosenthal, Salem haunts discussion of the Puritan origins of American identity, has shaped our image of persecution, and has “found a city to contain its symbol” (213). The trials took place in what is now Danvers, and many accused and

accusers were from elsewhere, but the modern city of Salem, Massachusetts, claims the namesake: the witch on a broomstick is on police badges, traffic signs, tourist brochures, and the masthead of the *Salem News*. The debate represented by the episode, moreover, continues. On Essex Street one finds the Essex Institute, which houses a great range of documents pertaining to the witch trials; directly across is Crow Haven Corner, the store of Laurie Cabot, the “Official Witch of Salem” (as proclaimed in 1977 by then-Governor Michael Dukakis) and founder of the Witches’ League for Public Awareness. Cabot sells an alternative story about a coven of real witches punished for practicing an innocuous religion (Rosenthal 205).

Outside of Salem, the world associates “witch city” with the superstition, ignorance, and persecution that enlightened modern people have largely superseded. No image demonstrates this association so dramatically as the confusion of Salem, where the condemned were hanged, with the contemporary neopagan/feminist myth of the “Burning Times,” in which the European witch-hunts of the mid-fifteenth to the early eighteenth century

are imagined as a Holocaust in which 9 million witches were burned at the stake (historians’ numbers range from a few thousand to 200,000 or more [Guiley 39]).

“Salem” has become singularly mythic and highly politicized. Occurring just as the enlightenment was beginning to be felt, it was the last, the longest (from January 1692 through early May 1693), and the largest of the New England witch hunts, with 141 accused and over 50 accusers (Guiley 288–96). That most of the accused were women was not unusual, but the fact that most of their accusers were also females, most of them claiming to be “afflicted” or possessed and many of them children and servants, was. Once spent, the hysteria came to confirm an image of the original American character as “Puritan” in the most stereotypical and negative of senses, supporting the myth of founding fathers convinced of their “election”—unilateral and indomitable in a quest to seek out, name, and destroy “evil.” In the 1996 film adaptation of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, Judge Danforth (Paul Scofield) frames the issue:



Title page of *The Wonders of the Invisible World: Being an Account of the Tryals of Several Witches, Lately Executed in New-England...* by Cotton Mather, 1693. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

You must understand, sir, a person is either with this Court or against it; there be no road between. . . . This is a new time, a precise time; we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God's grace, the good folk and the evil entirely separate!

Here Danforth stands for the Puritan dream of a New Eden without the moral ambiguity of the Old World past. "Puritan" in this sense also came to mean patriarchal: the old Eve and the first witch—the first person accused of consorting with the devil—clearly had no place in this new world.

As the hysteria subsided in the fall of 1693, the Salem trials were distinguished once again by being almost immediately recanted and confessed as a sin to be expiated. On January 14, 1697, an Official Day of Humiliation was called for public apology and fasting; in 1711, authorizing restitution to victims and families, Massachusetts Bay became one of the first governments to compensate victims of its mistakes (Guiley 296). The Salem witch thus came to represent white male guilt and reparation, merging with an American Gothic literature of gloomy self-examination and confession—one haunted by the conviction that America is doomed to repeat this particular folly. From Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1851) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), we find the accused "witch" configured as the fallen woman and martyr victimized by the Puritan minister or judge. In "The Custom House" prologue, Hawthorne confesses that he is haunted by the "persecuting" figures of his first ancestors including Salem Judge John Hathorne,

who made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him. . . . As their representative, I take shame upon my self for their sakes and pray that any curse . . . may be now and henceforth removed. (8–9)

In making *The Scarlet Letter*'s Hester Prynne one of the central tragic heroines of American literature and forcing the Reverend Dimmesdale to confess his adultery and hypocrisy, Hawthorne is thought to have attempted to right the balance. His "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) is even more instructive: once Brown ventures into the woods and discovers (or dreams) a witches' meeting in which his innocent wife Faith is inducted into the devil's tribe, he becomes incapable of seeing anyone other than witches.

This association of witchcraft with hypocrisy, paranoia, and guilt returned in the 1950s with *The Crucible* (1953), in which Arthur Miller discovered in the story of Salem the seeds of the McCarthyite panic over Communist subversion. In exploring American susceptibility to community hysteria, the play brought out issues of gender and sexuality that feminists would later seize on. In Miller's account, the accusations spark from an affair between teenager Abigail Williams, Salem's Reverend Parris's niece, whose age is raised from 11 to 17, and a John Proctor much younger than his actual



61 years. The conflict between the Puritan patriarchy and unleashed adolescent female sexuality charged this already politically volatile courtroom drama. When the wife of the Putnam family, Reverend Parris's strongest supporter, accuses the sage Rebecca Nurse of murdering her unborn children, the theme of the witch as maligned healer and midwife, soon to be taken up by neopagans and feminists, was given a stage.

The next decades produced two counter-cultural movements whose contemporary importance cannot be overestimated. The first was the neopagan religious movement Wicca, or modern witchcraft, founded by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s in the United Kingdom, in which worship of nature, as figured in the goddess and the horned god her consort, was central. The other was the second-wave feminist movement, in which the witch had become highly politicized. Beginning in 1968 with the WITCH movement (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) led by Robin Morgan, and as traced by Morgan and Diane Purkiss, feminists claimed solidarity with the persecuted witches of the "Burning Times." A radical-left political movement with a hip Marxist spin, WITCH employed the stereotype for its shock value and performative potential. It also drew feminist attention to the history of the witch. According to Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, the witch craze was influenced by the rising male medical profession's desire to eliminate midwives and assume control of women's bodies. In *Gyn/Ecology*



Agnes Moorehead dressed as a traditional witch. She played Endora on the television series *Bewitched*. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

(1979), Mary Daly claimed that the dead witches of the "Burning Times" were victims of "gynocide" and a male design to cleanse the world of Hags analogous (if not equivalent) to the Holocaust's elimination of Jews. In *Beyond God the Father* (1985), Daly asserted that feminism and Christianity could never be reconciled, and the witch became the priestess of a prehistorical religion eradicated by Judeo-Christian patriarchy. (For relevant commentary, see Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 7–28.)

The witch soon became central to empowering myths within feminist literature and criticism—for example, the female Gothic tradition celebrated by Ellen Moers, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and represented in the poetry of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. Plath's suicide poems "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy" fuse the Burning Times myth with Holocaust imagery to read like self-empowering curses. (See Showalter, *Sister's Choice*, 127–44.) As

American feminism absorbed the French feminism of Hélène Cixous's unruly, laughing Medusa and the hysteric/sorceress of *The Newly Born Woman* (Cixous and Catherine Clément, 1979), Carol F. Karlsen in *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987) and others argued that the "witches" of New England were "unruly" tongued women dissatisfied with their roles.

By the late 1960s, second wave feminism's view of Salem as a battle of the sexes led, however indirectly, to three horror blockbusters. In the films *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1972), and *Carrie* (1976), female biology—specifically pregnancy and childbirth, female puberty, and menstruation—was imbued with the terror and power associated with possession and witchcraft. Protagonists Rosemary, Regan, and Carrie are demon-possessed in some sense, or literally carry the devil's spawn. They are also victims and, ultimately, heroines of a profoundly ambivalent sort. As Stephen King has admitted, his 1974 novel *Carrie* was "about how women find their own channels of power, and what men fear about women and women's sexuality.... [W]riting the book in 1973..., I was fully aware of what Women's Liberation implied for me and others of my sex" (170). The film, like the book, intimated that women inculcated under Judeo-Christian monotheism and patriarchal misogyny (however handed down by their mothers, for example *Carrie's* fanatically religious Mrs. White) in turn became avenging witches.

Finally, as the female action film emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, with the *Alien* films (1979–1997), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Terminator 2* (1991), the witch evolved from the second-wave-feminist victim-monster-heroine to the unqualified heroine and the outspoken pro-woman woman—the bitch. Celebrating Halloween, *Ms. Magazine* editor Marcia Gillespie announced in October 1999, "I want to affirm the witch in me," and criticized past stereotypes:

A woman was denounced as a witch if she didn't mind her mouth, her dress, her attitude.... Witches were said to... kill babies, enjoy sex too much or too little, steal men's potency and their power. They were spoilers, troublemakers—unnatural.... No need for pointed hats or brooms or black cats. All you need... do is be a feminist.

Affirming the witch meant reenvisioning the crone as an image of female power and creativity and the third aspect of the nature goddess, a primary icon in feminist spirituality and ecofeminism.

Once signifying a Satanic conspiracy, in popular film and television of the 1990s the coven bond, Wiccan circle, and the craft became metaphors for feminist sisterhood, lesbian feminism, and separatism. The title characters of *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987) effectively contain the devil (Jack Nicholson) and establish a matriarchy. In *Carrie 2: The Rage* (1998), Rachel is in love with her best friend, and her telepathic powers emerge as lesbian feminist rage over her friend's date rape and suicide. A goth turned riot grrrl, she emerges as a Cixousian hysteric/sorceress who avenges what men have done

to women. Young witches discovered and perfected their crafts on primetime television, in *Sabrina*, *Charmed*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In the latter show's fourth season, Willow, Buffy's brainy best friend and the cyberwitch of the team of slayers, explored her powers through a sexual relationship with Tara that culminated in orgasmic, object-moving spells and declarations of love. Despite occasional dates and boyfriends, even Sabrina's aunts were configured as lesbian parents (Projansky and Vande Berg 4).

If it was hip to be an outsider, it was cooler to be a witch. Hollywood films such as *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Practical Magic* (1996), and *The Craft* (1996) featured A-list actresses such as Michelle Pfeiffer, Susan Sarandon, Nicole Kidman, Sandra Bullock, and Neve Campbell as witches. In the Harry Potter mythos, which has been assimilated by American culture, the "craft" taught at the Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry is genderless; boys and girls alike carry wands and ride broomsticks. As in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the witch became another version of "the chosen one," the child burdened and blessed with special powers against evil. Thus integrated into the canon by way of feminism, as Purkiss concludes her study of *The Witch in History*, the witch was "no longer" frightening: she was "clean, pretty, an herbalist with a . . . career in midwifery, a feminist, sexy but nothing too kinky" (282). She had become the postfeminist, the witch contained, domesticated, and almost universally white. *Buffy* comments on this fact in "Hush," a February 2000 episode in which Willow complains that her campus Wiccan group is "Talk, all talk. Blah, blah, Gaia. Blah, blah, moon.



Susan Sarandon as Jane Spofford, Cher as Alexandra Medford, and Michelle Pfeiffer as Sukie Ridgemont in *The Witches of Eastwick*, 1987. Courtesy of Photofest.

Menstrual life-force thingy. . . . Bunch of wanna blessed be's. Nowadays every girl with a henna tattoo and a spice rack thinks she's a sister with the dark ones."

The "good" (white, liberal, Wiccan) witch, however, frightened those on the religious right, to whom she (and, increasingly, he) represented a growing threat to monotheistic orthodoxy and the patriarchal family. Besides breaking sales records and thrilling reading teachers, the Harry Potter books alarmed fundamentalist Christians. A Web site devoted to *Exposing Satanism* called the Potter books "Satan's way to undermine the family" and a move to infiltrate schools and indoctrinate children, "the oldest marketing scheme there is" ("Harry Potter").

Such "spiritual"—or sectarian, political, or gender-related—anxieties, that found a focus in witch-themed popular culture, were played on by the indie horror blockbuster *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). Oddly enough, and however briefly, at the height of the "enlightened" Buffy, Sabrina, and Harry Potter era, the Blair Witch marked the surprise return of the "evil" witch. Besides unexpectedly filling theaters and provoking literal nausea in audiences, the experimental pseudo-documentary "fragment," together with its bewildering layers of mock-documentation and Internet discussion, caused hundreds of teenagers to invade the town of Burkettsville, Maryland (population 214), in search of the film's titular character.

The Blair witch was a version of the Salem witch in another sense as well, as the victim who haunts a community and avenges her persecution over succeeding generations. In the Sci-Fi Channel mockumentary *Curse of the Blair Witch* (1999), the Salem witch trials were dramatized in a clip in which Puritan women shout at one Elizabeth Sewell, "Burn the witch!" The Project itself centered on the local legends surrounding Elly Kedward, an old woman accused in 1785 of using pins to bleed children and subsequently tried, convicted, and banished to the forest, where she is presumed to have died. The following winter, all her accusers and more than half the town's children disappear, and the township of Blair vanishes. In subsequent incidents, recurring in fifty-year cycles, an "old woman" is responsible for the deaths of numerous children and men. This legend of the hag who devours men and makes children disappear is repeated, moreover, in the feature story of protagonist Heather Donohue's ill-fated film project. Finally, there is an unstated connection between feminism, through women who use technology, and witchcraft that the film draws on for character delineation and gender-based conflict. Thus *Village Voice's* J. Hoberman notes the movie leaves "the sly suggestion that the project's real witch might be the driven director, Heather" (see also Badley).

In *The Blair Witch Project*, the evil witch stereotype that feminists had long viewed as a patriarchal plot seemed to win the power struggle. Might not her return have signaled a backlash, a reversion to monotheism and repression of the feminine? In 1999, with its spate of supernatural thrillers (*The Haunting*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Stigmata*, *Stir of Echoes*) such a conclusion seemed more

than plausible. Even so, Harry Potter ruled among the preteen crowd, and on teen-targeted television, *Sabrina*, *Charmed*, and *Buffy* still held sway. Indeed, by *Buffy*'s sixth and final seasons (2002–2003), most of the Scooby Gang and all of *Buffy*'s demonic antagonists practiced some sort of witchcraft or otherwise wielded special powers. In that season, the self-proclaimed magic “junkie” Willow abstained—until her lover Tara was killed in an episode entitled “Seeing Red”; then Willow's vengeance very nearly ended the world, until all was saved, however temporarily, by love, camaraderie, and a final episode in which individual power was given over to all the “chosen”—for example, the show's fans.

Presently, well into the twenty-first century and engulfed by conservatism—a conservatism that the TV series-to-movie remake *du jour*, *Bewitched* (2005), only confirms—the millennial hysteria seems to have abated. After their 2003 season, *Sabrina* and *Buffy* retired—amid warnings, however, from Christian media personality Steve Wohlberg that “Wicca Witchcraft is one of the fastest-growing religions with teenagers in America” (“Hour of the Witch”). As for the next witch craze, it should only be a matter of time. The sinister spirits of Salem lie within contemporary American Puritanism, and the “wicked” witch will return.

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# Tiger Woods

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*Michael K. Schoenecke*

On Sunday afternoons at professional golf tournaments, Eldrick Tont “Tiger” Woods, dressed in his lucky colors—black pants and a red Nike shirt, a lucky color in Thai culture—and a baseball cap, seems hypnotized as he walks purposefully to the first tee. His cold-steel eyes indicate that he is on a mission: win the golf tournament. Woods’s focus is so intent that he rarely acknowledges the cheering fans until he is introduced; bodyguard and caddy Steve Williams’s eyes suggest that he will pinch off the head of anyone who approaches or attempts to touch Tiger. Once on the tee and after his introduction, Woods flashes his trademark smile and mechanically prepares to hit his first shot of the day. Even when his swing was more blocked than a Stetson, crowds roared approval and admiration for Woods’s soaring drives, while competitors feared them. Since he turned pro in 1997, Woods has symbolized the historical changes that have been influencing golf since the 1930s; his appearance on the Professional Golf Association (PGA) Tour has had a major wallop on the game of golf as well as gained him international acclaim. His megacelebrity is earned. Tiger Woods, however, is an enigmatic icon, shaped for success and also contradiction by his father and the media.

Eldrick Woods seemed destined for greatness from birth; he was born on December 30, 1975, in Orange County, California, to Earl and Tida Woods. His mother created the name Eldrick by using letters from his parents’ first names. That same year Lee Elder became the first black golfer to play in the Masters in Augusta, Georgia. His father selected the unusual nickname “Tiger” to distinguish his son from everyone else; later, this moniker has come to suggest a golfer who prowls the world’s fairways and greens using his clubs like claws, and pounces on his prey, a trophy, at tournament’s end. Tiger was also named after Colonel Phong, a Vietnamese officer with whom Earl served, called “Tiger” because he was a relentless and decorated soldier.

Earl and Tida Woods early introduced their son to golf and to the media. When Tiger was two, his mother called Jim Hill, a local California television sportscaster, and invited him to watch Tiger play golf. Tiger endeared himself to Hill and audiences; in his tiny voice and childish speech he explained that

he was good at golf because of “pwactice.” In 1978 Tiger appeared on the syndicated *Mike Douglas Show* along with Bob Hope and James Stewart. Following his introduction, Tiger, toting a little golf bag made by his mother, trotted onto the stage and drove a ball into the back of the studio. After Douglas suggested that Tiger and Hope have a putting contest, Hope strode next to Tiger and asked, “You got any money?” The audience’s and guests’ laughter increased when Tiger picked up his own ball and moved it closer to the hole.

A few years later, Tiger appeared on ABC’s *That’s Incredible*, co-hosted by Fran Tarkenton; after demonstrating his golfing prowess, Tiger sidled up to Tarkenton and declared: “When I get big I’m going to beat Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson.” Again, his voice and his smile endeared him to audiences. Unbeknownst to the television audience, however, Tiger concisely and precisely identified his golfing goals, and they have not changed: to win more major tournaments—the Masters, U.S. Open, Open Championship (British), and Professional Golf Association Championship—than Nicklaus. As of June 2005, Nicklaus’ record stands at eighteen and Woods has won nine.

When Tiger was 6, his father doggedly began to make him more competitive and to hone him for tournament golf. Tiger listened to audiotapes that contained subliminal messages such as “My Will Moves Mountains!” To prepare him for potential course distractions, Earl Woods abruptly dropped golf bags and played loud music when Tiger was swinging. Like his hero Jack Nicklaus, Tiger became a mature, focused, and serious-minded golfer; and both enjoyed early success in junior golf. Woods won the Optimist International Junior World championship’s under-10 category when he was 8; he won again at ages 9, 12, and 13. Winning his first tournament, he has recounted, is still his most memorable golfing moment because he earned his first taste of victory.

Success on golf courses, as with life itself, comes from hard work and its rewards, which breed confidence. As a junior golfer, Woods won the U.S. Junior Amateur Championship in 1991, 1992, and 1993. After the 1992 championship, he acknowledged the extreme stress of the tournament; the 16-year-old, who had already experienced death threats because of his ethnicity, burst into tears: “You can’t believe just how much tension there is out there,” he said. “I’m so glad that it’s over” (“You Can’t Believe the Pressure”). In the final round of the Phoenix Open in February 1999, a man who had been aggressively heckling Tiger was wrestled to the ground by security, who discovered that he was carrying a gun; the man was arrested and later released. By not discussing his personal life or the death threats with the media, Woods kept his attention on his job, playing golf. His father hired Dr. Brunza, a psychologist, to train him to eliminate all distractions—on and off course—and enter into a trance-like state when on the golf course. As a result, when Woods plays in a tournament, he passes through crowds of people, including his mother, without apparently realizing their presence. This unique ability to focus on and visualize each shot and then to execute the



shot has provided Woods with the confidence to perform at a superior level. Woods's mental strength was intentionally crafted to imitate that of Jack Nicklaus and Ben Hogan.

In 1994, 1995, and 1996, Woods stunned the amateur golfing ranks by winning the U.S. Amateur Championships. This young golf phenom hid his



Tiger Woods, 1999. Courtesy of Photofest.

face as he wept in 1994. He had joined the ranks of Bobby Jones, Arnold Palmer, and Jack Nicklaus; he broke Nicklaus's record by being the youngest player to win the Havemeyer Trophy; more importantly to some, including his father, he was the first person of color to win. He received congratulatory letters from President Clinton and Philip H. Knight, founder of Nike, who would later sign Tiger to lucrative endorsement contracts. Having won all the major amateur championships, Tiger turned professional; however, he quit Stanford University without winning a

NCAA team championship. His teammates heard on the news that Tiger, always shy and never close to anyone but his father, would not return to Stanford.

When Tiger turned pro on August 27, 1996, he played the Milwaukee Open. Before he hit a shot as a professional, his endorsement offers and contracts paled his future golf winnings. Titleist signed Tiger for \$20 million to play its golf balls and clubs, wear its gloves, and carry its bag; Nike, Inc., known for their clever marketing and signing of appealing sports stars such as Michael Jordan, offered Woods \$40 million to wear and endorse their clothing and shoes. Prior to Tiger's contracts, Greg Norman had the richest golf contract at \$2.5 million a year with Reebok. Although some sports businesses thought that Nike had paid too much to sign Tiger, he helped double their sales by 1997 when he won the Masters and established a record of 270 for the tournament. International Management Group (IMG), known for creating the model of marketing sports stars such as Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus, courted Woods for years. As early as July 31, 1996, IMG purchased a \$475,000 house in Isleworth, Florida; this gated community provides Woods with easy access to Mark O'Meara, a close friend, as well as solitude and a sense of normality. In 2001 Woods built a \$2.5 million home in Isleworth and gave his first home to his father. By moving to Florida, Tiger escaped California's high state income tax and still had a location with a good golfing climate. Woods is the highest-paid sports figure in the world. In 2004, he earned better than \$90 million from prize money and endorsements.

Tiger Woods, with the possible exceptions of Muhammad Ali and Michael Jordan, is the most recognizable sports figure in the world. Unlike previously adored and canonized golf heroes such as Bobby Jones, Byron Nelson, Ben Hogan, Arnold Palmer, and Jack Nicklaus, Tiger's ethnic background includes Chinese, Caucasian, Thai, and African. This racial palette became significant in Woods's career because the media and businesses marketed him as a racial everyman. Most golfers, commentators, and fans have enthusiastically embraced and welcomed Woods to the professional game, where few people of color are generally seen among the galleries. Although Arnie's Army's roar was aurally distinct, Woods' raucous fans celebrate his "un-WASP-like" approach to the game. His famous fist-pumping when he holes a putt visually suggests showmanship and aggressiveness, particularly when it is directed at a fellow competitor; the fist-pumping also diminishes golf's "gentlemanly" tradition. Nevertheless, Woods has played himself into the hearts and minds of young, middle-class white males as well as women who relish Woods' on-course brashness.

A tiger conjures up images of strength and daring; Tiger plays golf that way. Although he generally swings a club at 125–135 miles per hour, at the 1997 Masters, he swung his driver at 180 miles per hour on the first tee; the average golfer swings between 75–90 miles per hour, and the average professional male golfer between 110–125 miles per hour. In 2005, Tiger's drives average better than 305 yards, which are 20 yards longer than the average tour player's. Possessing the short game of a locksmith, along with imagination and the skill to execute shots from what seem to be impossible lies and locations, Tiger saves par and thrills his galleries.

Long, towering drives combined with an expert marksmanship from his short irons make Woods an exciting, dominating, and intimidating figure on the golf course—but not a predictable one. At times, Tiger crushes his opponents—competitors and the golf course. In June 2000, the 100th U.S. Open was held at Pebble Beach Golf Links, a course Tiger considers the best American golf course. The world saw Tiger at his best at Pebble—and his worst. He demolished the field; he had a ten-stroke lead at the end of three rounds and won by fifteen strokes, the largest margin of victory in the history of the majors. He did not miss a putt under six feet; he excelled with his short game. However, even though his father and Dr. Brunza had trained Tiger to maintain focus on the golf course, he can be as foulmouthed and as petulant as a child. On Saturday at the eighteenth tee, Woods hit his ball into the Pacific and called himself a "fucking prick." The microphones on the tee broadcast the words live to the television public, while the camera captured an angry, tantrum-driven Woods slamming his driver into the ground in frustration. Although some critics claimed that he was merely demonstrating that he cares about his game, others argued that Woods lacked the class of Jack Nicklaus as well as professionalism and respect for the game.

Woods's bad temper has created instances where he violates the codes and traditions of the game he loves. At the ninth hole of the 2005 U.S. Open at Pinehurst number 2, Woods three-putted when he missed a nine-foot par

putt; reacting in anger and frustration, he raked the green with his putter and created a swathe of approximately three feet; even Johnny Miller, NBC's golf color commentator, was dismayed by Woods' behavior. By intentionally damaging and not repairing the green, Woods clearly showed disrespect for the game and his fellow competitors. If they have a similar putt, they cannot repair the "raised grass." Whereas Woods' supporters are attracted to his passion for the game, sometimes his fervor and behavior become destructive to it. Still, he is distinctive because the fans do not know how he will respond to bad luck. The media, too, capture and heighten the drama of Tiger the entertainer's improbable recovery shots and his spontaneous excitement.

Woods's approach has influenced the golf world in a big way. Since Woods turned professional, he has unleashed a tidal wave of more than \$1.5 billion washing over the golf world. Ticket sales shot up, TV ratings jumped, interest in the game increased, and the spirits of tournament directors soared as they anticipated a spillover boom to events in which Woods does not play. People who don't play golf are paying attention to the sport. At the 1997 PGA Championship, a college-age spectator wearing a Columbia University shirt asked: "I'm in a pool. Can you tell me the names of four players beside Tiger I should pick?" Golf galleries have changed; when Tiger plays in televised tournaments, ratings go up significantly. Dede Patterson, tournament director of the Buick Classic in suburban New York, where advance sales are sometimes up as much as 35 percent when Tiger plays, said, "Tiger introduced golf to a new audience." Many of the young people who want to be like Tiger, however, have been and remain unable to pay green fees or purchase golf equipment.

Prior to Woods' arrival on the PGA tour, many critics complained that the golfers were indistinguishable either by their dress or their play. The game needed someone exciting. Woods's attire reflects his personality, and he ranks among the most fashionable tour players, along with Sergio Garcia, Jesper Parnevik, and Ian Poulter. Although he has not distanced himself sartorially as much as he has on the scorecard, he has turned the fairways into runways. His hand-sewn pants have knife-edge creases; a snow white, neatly folded golf glove hangs from his rear pocket. He wears black Nike golf shoes with the Nike swoosh on the outside of each heel. His mock turtlenecks are reminiscent of the restrained, elegant, gentlemanly pursuit golf was back in the 1920s and 1930s when male golfers wore knickers, dress shirts, and ties. In fact, country clubs, municipal and resort courses, which required collars on all shirts, now allow golfers to play in mock turtle necks; business professionals often slip on these same turtlenecks rather than the traditional shirt and tie when going to work or to church. Woods plays the game sublimely in his work uniform, and he looks every part the winner at the end of a tournament.

Just as his name, clothing, and tiger club-head cover are distinctive, so are his sense of style and his physique. Golf does not demand athleticism, but Tiger, at six feet two inches and 190 pounds, is an athlete of classical proportions. His upper body is V-shaped; lifting weights and swinging clubs have

built his arms to Popeye-like proportions. Even in high school he would get up around 5:00 A.M. to work out at the gym for one hour before going to the practice tee and green and then to school. As a professional, Woods cuts a fine, distinctive figure that differentiates him from and intimidates his PGA competitors; prior to his arrival on the tour, the majority of golfers did not lift weights or hone stonelike bodies. However, once they noticed he had been developing, shaping, and strengthening his physique, the PGA professionals started visiting the tour's training facilities or jogging before or after a round of golf. Physical conditioning has also caught on with public school and collegiate golf programs.

Because Woods has been followed by the media like a star athlete, his personal life has provided fans with glamor, romance, and also suspense. Although Woods had several woman companions in high school and college, golf and his father did not allow him to develop potential marital relationships. In 2001 Jesper Parnevik and his wife and their children traveled on the PGA tour; the family brought an entourage of eight helpers that included a 21-year-old nanny named Elin Nordegren. She had previously worked as a model—once she posed for swimwear photographs—and spoke perfect English. Tiger and Elin met at the Open Championship at Royal Lytham and St. Annes. When he asked her for a date, she did not accept immediately. Later, they lived together for several years, and in 2005 they married. Golfers such as Jack Nicklaus claim that marriage can detract from one's performance on the course, because the golfers prefer to be at home with their families rather than pounding balls on practice ranges thousands of miles away. As a result, while home fires and desires burn brightly, competitive fires slowly become glowing coals.

Tiger Woods's golfing achievements are remarkable and unparalleled. In 1999 he founded the Tiger Woods Foundation, with World Challenge as one of the principal fundraisers. A small field of tour players attends, plays a tournament, and conducts clinics. The foundation and tournament present Woods as a philanthropist; when he turned professional he said he would help the young and the disadvantaged. Woods gives about twenty to twenty-five days a year of his time to his foundation, but very little of his own money. He does donate his potential winnings from the World Challenge; if he wins, he would give approximately \$600,000, which is approximately 5 percent of his total income.

Woods's insistence on his individuality has distanced him from minority politics. In his appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 1997, after he had won the Masters and gained celebrity status, Oprah asked him if it bothered him to be called African American, and he replied that it did. He indicated that as a child he coined the term "Cablinasian," which combines the words Caucasian, black, and Asian. Woods angered many black viewers when he thus deemphasized their ethnic heritage. Fairly or not, Woods's disinterest in minority identification has been blamed for his failure to encourage more active minority participation in golf. Although he has expanded interest in it,

the game is expensive; and no program has afforded poor children the means and equipment to play. Moreover, as a minority role model, Woods is questionable. There are fewer black players on tour now than in the 1970s when Lee Elder, Charlie Sifford, and Calvin Peete played. In fact, because Woods says he is not black, there are none.

Woods is exciting and invigorating as a golfer. He seldom speaks to his fans, and certainly, with good reason, does not like to be touched by them. With his fame, money, good looks, media attention, and beautiful wife, Woods seems to have achieved the American Dream. He did it, too, with hard work; he has earned his riches. If the ancient Greeks had played golf rather than wrestling and running, the classical athlete in stone statues might resemble Woods. When he arrives at the first tee, he is picture-perfect. When he hits the ball, the gallery hears the loud crack and can watch the ball sail for better than 300 yards; he then gives his driver to Steve Williams, and they walk down the fairway. Thousands of fans stumble along to catch a glimpse of him or to overhear him talk with Williams. As they do, they are caught up in curiosity and suspense about the man whose talent, style, and personality have not only triumphed in a tradition-laden game but also cast its future into uncertainty. For the “racial everyman” success story with which Woods and the media gave democratic popularity to golf has its contradiction in Woods’s aloof individualism and lack of social outreach. Although Woods formed his strategies on models of earlier golfers, he also broke conventions they upheld of restraint and respect; so the game’s balance of sociability and competition has a doubtful future. Much depends upon Woods himself, in possibilities suggesting the power of an enigmatic, complex icon.

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# Wright Brothers

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*Roger B. Rollin*

It is the single most famous photograph of the twentieth century and arguably the most important. It shows two brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, bicycle builders from Dayton, Ohio, and their new flying machine. Orville is at the controls of the Wright Flyer, lying prone on the biplane's lower wing, a man in a dark suit, his feet towards us, his head not visible. Just a few paces from the machine's right wingtips, also wearing a dark suit as well as a billed cap, is Wilbur, his legs apart, his arms akimbo, as if in wonderment at what he is witnessing. This delicate and beautiful machine made of spruce and ash, covered with muslin, held together with piano wire, and powered by a hand-made twelve-horsepower gasoline engine, is *flying!* Flying under its own power. Flying under human control. *This has never happened before in the history of the world.* The date is December 17, 1903. The place is the wind-swept sand dunes of Kill Devil Hills, Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The time is approximately 10:37 A.M. And the world has been forever changed.

The quality of the photograph is amazingly good for 1903 or for any time, and this in itself is a small miracle that complements the great one. With superior clarity and fidelity it shows a sizable flying machine, with a more than 40-foot wingspan and 21-foot fuselage, three or so feet off the ground, airborne more than a yard before reaching the end of the launching track that has guided its takeoff.

The excellent quality of the photograph is extraordinary because the Wright Brothers, superb technical types though they were, were not professional photographers. The camera's shutter was actually tripped by an amateur, a member of the Kill Devil Hills lifesaving station, one John Daniels. Mr. Daniels did very well indeed. He had, after all, only one chance. In his excitement he might have taken the photograph too soon, while the Flyer was still on its trolley, careening down the launching track. Or he might have taken it too late, when the aeroplane had flown out of the frame. The total timespan of the flight was only twelve seconds, but Daniels caught the aircraft one to two seconds into that flight. Perfect! The camera probably belonged to the brothers and had been positioned by them: over the course of the years

they had spent experimenting with flight they exercised firm control over everything. But professional lifesaver John Daniels is chiefly responsible for *the* iconic photograph of the twentieth century.

It is iconic, first of all, because of its timing. The twentieth century was only in its fourth year. Wireless telegraphy, the automobile, the electric light, the telephone, the motion picture, and the phonograph had already been invented, though, except for the telegraph, they were not yet in widespread use. In themselves these marvelous inventions did not lend themselves to visual representation. The horseless carriage would not really become an American icon until the advent of Mr. Ford's Model T. Motion pictures create icons (Charlie Chaplin, Marilyn Monroe), but a motion picture camera or screen is not in itself iconic. (The great movie palaces of cinema's Golden Age, the twenties and thirties, would eventually become themselves iconic, but by then the century was well advanced.) We have no special image of the electric light, the telephone, or the phonograph that is etched in the collective sensibility of the twentieth century. (The image of the terrier listening to a Victrola and hearing "His master's voice" is an advertiser's contrivance that would eventually become iconic, like more than a few Madison Avenue creations later on in the century.)

Secondly, the first flight photo is iconic because of its historicity. It is the first-ever photograph to capture a profoundly world-changing event in real time and space, as that event is actually happening. Thanks to John Daniels we are, so to speak, present at creation. True, this single photograph is not proof positive that manned, controlled, powered flight had actually taken place: the Wright Flyer might have ignominiously nosed over in the next second. But we know from eyewitness accounts of the three flights that followed, each of longer duration and greater distance than the last that, by early afternoon on December 17, 1903, the bold aviators from Dayton, Ohio had accomplished what none of their many predecessors—most of them more distinguished and better financed—had been able to accomplish: human flight by means of a viable, self-propelled, controllable machine.

Thirdly, the photograph is iconic because of its aesthetic quality. Its sheer beauty is partly due to someone's prescient positioning and focusing of the camera as well as the serendipitous timing of John Daniels. But what artist could have imagined the slightly low left wing of the Flyer, indicating a less-than-perfect takeoff? The aircraft's instability—like bicycles, flying machines are inherently unstable and must be controlled—is emphasized by the line of the horizon, which bisects the photograph with eye-pleasing, realistic unevenness. The Atlantic Ocean may be the most distant part of that horizon line—it is difficult to tell—but whether it is or not, the grey December sky is there, the Flyer lifting into it, suggesting an infinity of possibilities.

Moreover, subsequent artists would not find it easy to effectively capture in oils or watercolors, pen or ink, the thrilling whirl of an airplane propeller. But the photograph gets just right the blur of those two slender spruce props,

scientifically designed and hand-made by the brothers. The engine, handmade by another meagerly educated Dayton boy, Charlie Taylor, the Wrights' assistant, is barely visible, but the whirling chains and pulleys linking that twelve-horsepower marvel to those beautiful wooden propellers, convey the sense that, yes, there is here sufficient controlled power to lift a skinny, middle-aged man into the air and carry him 120 feet. By the fourth and final flight of that day the craft would cover an incredible 852 feet.

There is also a kind of artlessness about the photograph that, for all its beauty and its magic, grounds it in reality. Note the crude wooden bench in the foreground. It looks handmade. Beneath the seat is what appears to be a large metal clamp. But why is it sitting there, occupying almost the dead center of the foreground? Perhaps it was used to steady the lower right wing against the powerful gusts coming off the

ocean. But if that were the case one would think it would be located up at the head of the launching track, which here is out of the frame. Finally, adding to the photograph's verisimilitude is the still life in the right foreground: a shovel; a tin can (of oil?) with a handle sticking out of it; a curlicue of wire which may or may not be attached to a mysterious small box with what looks like a large u-bolt protruding from it; a carelessly dropped piece of board. These objects tell the careful viewer: "All this is real." Thus, an almost metaphysical moment is grounded in real space, real time. Only since the invention of photography in the nineteenth century could icons, which are in essence religious, be captured in the here and now.

As wonderful as the machine upon which the photograph is focused are the brothers themselves, even though they may initially appear to be mere supporting players in this historic tableau. Soon they would recognize that for reasons of safety, comfort, and more precise control both airman and passenger needed to be seated in the airplane. But here, as in their earlier man-carrying gliders, the pilot is prone. Orville's body is fully extended, almost as



Wright Brothers airplane in flight, 1910. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



if he were a part of the wing's curvature, head down, "streamlined." Which is how thirty-three years later Siegel and Schuster would imagine their Man of Steel arcing his way through the air.

And Wilbur! His stance is dancer-like, feet apart, arms slightly outspread, his jacket billowing. Has he positioned himself there, at the end of the launch track (which the supporting dolly has already reached, ahead of the airplane) so as to get the best view when the Flyer takes to the air—if the Flyer takes to the air? Or, as is more likely, given their previous practice, has he been running alongside the aircraft, steadying the lower right wing tip with his left hand, until he feels the machine lifting off, at which moment he pulls up and is caught in the dynamic posture depicted in the photograph? There seems to be more apprehension than triumph in his body language. After all, in their first attempt earlier that morning he had crashed, slightly damaging the aircraft. As the recruited photographer, John Daniels, later recalled, before Orville's attempt, the brothers "shook hands and we couldn't help notice how they held on to each others' hand . . . like two folks parting who weren't sure they'd ever see each other again" (Grant 26).



The Wright Brothers at the International Aviation Tournament, Belmont Park, Long Island, NY, October 1910. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

(In 2003, the year of the centennial of flight, the Jet Engine Division of General Electric would create a masterpiece of the genre of the television commercial. In grainy black and white, December 17, 1903, is recreated. We view a group of spectators, including a non-historical female figure, present to observe the First Flight. Suddenly a mighty wind sends hats and umbrellas flying and causes a horse to rear up in panic. The reason is that, atop the Wright Flyer sits, anachronistically, a mighty GE jet engine. It sends the fragile biplane roaring off into the sky as a small boy tosses his cap into the air in celebration. The contrast between that jubilant boy-actor and the apprehensive Wilbur Wright of the 1903 photograph could not be more pointed: in hindsight the success of December 17, 1903 was assured; on December 17, 1903 it was not.)

Finally, the photograph of the First Flight is iconic for its multiple levels and its multiple significances. At its most fundamental level it is of course a historical document, one of the earlier photographic records of man's efforts to fly. Though not the earliest: we have, for example, snapshots of some of the Wright Brothers' own experiments with

man-carrying gliders as well as photographic records of such ill-fated attempts at powered, controlled flight as that of the distinguished Samuel Langley's "Aerodrome."

At another level the photograph is symbolic, for it requires no stretch of the imagination, only a sense of history, to see how it can represent an array of powerful human themes. Most obviously it incarnates mankind's ancient dream of conquering the air. Moreover, as the Industrial Revolution is coming to a close, the photograph is a triumphant validation of science and technology. In retrospect it represents the crowning achievement of the Age of Progress that will end in the horrors of the Great War. And it signals the true dawning of a new century and a new world. Not the least symbolic value of this photograph is its significance as a victory of the human spirit, a tribute to mankind's potential for vision, daring, and courage. At the sociocultural level the depiction of the two brothers demonstrates the uncommonness of the Common Man. Even the theme patriotic is implicit here: The United States of America beats the world into the air!

Few of these themes found expression in the mass media of the new century, which for the most part ignored or distorted or discounted the achievement of December 17, 1903. But as the century rumbled on, the significance of what had happened that winter day at Kill Devil Hills gradually dawned on the collective consciousness, and thus an understanding of and appreciation for the Wright Brothers' achievement grew.

Wilbur and Orville themselves, however, achieved the status of icons first in France, not in their own country. It was partly their own fault. Raised in a strict Protestant household that practiced Christian humility, they were also by nature modest men of few words. Self-celebration, even when justifiable, was alien to them. Consequently they were reluctant to give interviews and they were less than assiduous about correcting the distortions and downright fictions that the newspapers and magazines of the day perpetrated about them and their craft. Being stiffly upright and rigorously honest themselves, they were quite naturally offended by the doubts expressed by some journalists that they had actually accomplished powered, controlled flight.

Moreover, although the Wrights were shrewd and fairly successful businessmen, they were still small businessmen from a small town in Ohio. They soon became obsessive about safeguarding the patents to the Flyer, which by 1905 had been improved to the point where it was no longer an experimental but a practical aircraft. They even refused to give aerial demonstrations without orders for their flying machine. Finally, however, they had to succumb to the pressure of the reported achievements of French aviators like Alberto Santos-Dumont and the Voisin brothers. Thus it was that on August 8, 1908, Wilbur demonstrated the superiority of the Wright Brothers' new Type A aircraft in a flight near Le Mans, France, a flight so technologically advanced compared to those of his Continental competitors that it made him the toast of Europe. Soon he and Orville were not only world famous but found themselves surrounded by, in Wilbur's words, "Princes & millionaires . . . as thick

as fleas” (Grant 33). Every newspaper and popular periodical featured photographs of the two American inventor-aviators.

But these first true iconic figures of the new century did not look much like heroes. They were slender, ascetic-looking men, invariably dressed in sober dark suits, and wearing homburgs, or on some occasions, in Wilbur’s case, a workman’s flat cap. Both the brothers had strong noses and chins and generally regular features. Wilbur was clean-shaven while Orville sported a rather fashionable mustache. Wilbur’s male-pattern balding was more advanced than his younger brother’s. While not unattractive men, neither would have been likely to have been asked to pose for the popular Arrow Collar advertisements of the era, nor is there any record of the new moving picture industry clamoring for them to star in some fictionalized aerial film adventure.

But their eyes! In twin portraits made just two years after their first flights Wilbur and Orville Wright look out at the camera, unsmiling but clear-eyed, their native intelligence manifest in their gaze. Now, more than one hundred years after their historic, heroic achievement, we understand that these taciturn midwesterners were not merely lucky—they were certifiable geniuses. Though neither ever attended college, they were careful researchers, learned scholars in the new field of aeronautics, insightful theorists, and brilliant, methodical experimenters. They were also highly skilled craftsmen and self-taught engineers. The simple fact is that they succeeded brilliantly where better educated, more sophisticated, better financed inventors had totally failed.

Nor were these American icons intellectual heroes only. They were fit, strong men, dogged and almost tireless. They were abstemious in their conduct and athletic in their physical coordination. Most importantly, Wilbur and Orville Wright were, to put it most simply, incredibly brave. Though never foolhardy, they literally risked life and limb when they went up in, first, their man-carrying gliders, and then in the Flyer. They were adventurers. They were the first human beings to experience first-hand the perils of continuous powered locomotion through three dimensions in a heavier-than-air craft. In 1908, while demonstrating the Wright Military Flyer to the U.S. Army, an equipment failure caused Orville to crash, leaving him with broken ribs, a fractured thigh, and severe lacerations of the scalp; his passenger, Lt. Thomas Selfridge, died, the first person to perish in a powered flying machine. We now have a phrase for what the Wright Brothers possessed in abundance—the right stuff. In the third decade of the new century, another aviator, Charles Augustus Lindbergh, would also demonstrate that he had the Right Stuff. It would make him too an American icon.

## AFTERWORD

On December 17, 2003, 15,000 people gathered in the Wright Brothers National Memorial Park, as did millions more around the world via radio and television, to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of powered,

controlled flight and to do homage to that event's icons—the brothers Wright and their amazing flying machine. By that date Wilbur had been dead for ninety-one years, Orville fifty-five years, and the original Wright Flyer, heavily restored, was established in a place of honor in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. The centerpiece of the celebration was a meticulously accurate flying replica of the brothers' fabled aircraft. At approximately 8:45 A.M. the rains came, with a vengeance. Within an hour most of the aviation enthusiasts present were soaked to the skin, but they didn't appear to mind. When the precise historical moment, 10:37 A.M., arrived, the rains had become torrential and the Flyer replica had to remain in its display hanger. But its engine was started up and the crowd cheered. They cheered again when, in the early afternoon, an attempt was made to fly the replica. However the winds were insufficient and the Flyer failed to get airborne. Still the crowd cheered—not only for the valiant attempt by these spiritual descendants of the Wright Brothers, but for those two magnificent men and their flying machine that had so profoundly changed the world a hundred years earlier.

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# Zipper

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## *Robert Friedel*

The zipper was invented, in its first, primitive form, in the early 1890s, in the United States. It was promoted primarily as a shoe fastener, replacing laces or buckles. This early slide fastener (to use its technical name) worked very poorly indeed, and sold even less well. From this inauspicious beginning, the zipper, over the course of the next century, was to become one of the most ubiquitous mechanical technologies of modern life. In so doing, it also took on a host of meanings and associations, many of which had iconic value, as the commonplace little fastener came to stand for a host of fundamental relationships—separations and joinings, opening and closings, and, above all, sex.

Toward the end of one of the great satirical novels of the twentieth century, Aldous Huxley's 1932 *Brave New World*, Mustapha Mond, one of the world's "controllers," confronts the savage, John, and tries to explain why Shakespeare and the Bible and other classics must be kept locked away in this world 600 years into the future:

"God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice. Our civilization has chosen machinery and medicine and happiness. That's why I have to keep these books locked up in the safe. They're smut. People would be shocked if . . ."

The Savage interrupted him. "But isn't it *natural* to feel there's a God?"

"You might as well ask if it's natural to do up one's trousers with zippers," said the Controller sarcastically. (159)

In fact, to Huxley, there was nothing at all natural about zippers—they still were not widely available in ordinary garments in the early 1930s—and that is just why they are such a powerful, yet subtle, symbol throughout his novel. The great irony, of course, is that in the years since *Brave New World* was published, the zipper has become such a universal part of daily life that it does seem almost natural. The symbolism loses much of its power by the ubiquity of the symbol—how many of today's readers really notice Huxley's zippers?

To Huxley, zippers bring together two essential ingredients of his nightmare world of the future—sex and machines. In this future, human beings are condemned to lives of meaningless contentment, kept that way by artificial pleasures such as “feelies,” (the next logical step after “movies”) and “soma,” a drug that effectively and universally banishes anxiety and concern. An essential part of this mechanization of life is divorcing procreation from sex. The former is now the province of factories, in which human beings are created in test tubes. The latter is thus converted into yet another tool of enforced contentment, and garments are supplied with zippers to enhance the message that sex is easy and uncomplicated (Hazlitt 215–16). Throughout the novel are references to zipping and unzipping and to garments that seem particularly characterized by their zippers (“zippicamiknicks” and “zippyjamas”). This satire is perhaps the earliest iconic use of zippers in English, certainly in a work by a distinguished writer. The combined themes that moved Huxley to this usage—sex and machinery—became central to much of the use of zipper imagery in the remainder of the twentieth century.



Your classic zipper. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

The literary uses of the zipper in this connection did not, of course, cease with Huxley. Particularly striking was the persistence of the combination of sexuality with machinery that was so central to the zipper’s place in *Brave New World*. The best modern example is probably the following scene in Tom Robbins’s 1984 satire *Jitterbug Perfume*, in which the somewhat randy and loony Wiggs Dannyboy is seducing the (relatively) innocent Priscilla:

Ahh, I do love zippers. Zippers remind me o’ crocodiles, lobsters, and Aztec serpents. I wish me tweeds had more than the single fly. . . . Zippers are primal and modern at the very same time. On the one hand, your zipper is primitive and reptilian, on the other, mechanical and slick. A zipper is where the Industrial Revolution meets the Cobra Cult, don’t you think? Ahh. Little alligators of ecstasy, that’s what zippers are. Sexy, too. Now your button, a button is prim and persnickety. There’s somethin’ Victorian about a row o’ buttons. But a zipper, why a zipper is the very snake at the gate of Eden, waitin’ to escort a true believer into the Garden.

At the same time that Dannyboy is waxing so poetic, he is struggling with Priscilla’s dress, “to part the teeth of the Talon that ran down the length of her green knit back.” It doesn’t budge, however, until Priscilla finally loosens it herself: “And with one smooth stroke, she separated the interlocking

tracks, the 'gator yawned, and, lo, there she sat in her underwear." Even in such a scene of seduction, the zipper's mechanical nature—here represented by its resistance to working—is never far away (272–75).

The zipper has remained a tool and symbol of seduction, not only in literature but in other cultural expressions, such as cartoons, motion pictures, and song. One early and notable example of the latter appeared in the Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart musical *Pal Joey*, in 1940. Here, seasoned newspaper reporter Melba Snyder interviews the scrapping and somewhat phony crooner Joey Evans, and she describes with gusto one of her more successful past interviews, with the great stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, while pantomiming a striptease herself, singing a song punctuated with the word "zip." With remarkable speed, the zipper established itself as the instrument for allure and seduction, whether private or public.

As with so much else in American culture, perhaps the most powerful and evocative venue for the use of the zipper as sexual sign was in motion pictures. By the 1940s, Hollywood had recognized the dramatic uses of the novel fastener, which was particularly important in an age when the explicit depiction of the bare body or of sexual contact was censored. *Gilda*, a 1946 film starring George Macready, Glen Ford, and Rita Hayworth, is a prime example. In one scene of this somewhat convoluted movie set in Argentina, Hayworth repeats her complaint to her new husband, Macready (who is a Nazi agent) that zippers are always giving her trouble, and she asks for help getting undressed. In this simple act, the movie exploits both the mechanical nature of the zipper (with its occasional difficulties, especially for the non-mechanical female) and the potential that even a balky zipper always presents of a quick and complete disrobing. Later in *Gilda*, Hayworth begins the motions of a striptease in Macready's club, to the dismay of Ford, who is now her protector. The last straw in her performance, before Ford intervenes, is the moment she again asks for help with her zipper. The zipper is an instrument both of seduction and subjugation. With its ease of opening and its relatively public accessibility, it offers opportunities for attracting sexual advances, but at the same time its mechanical nature makes the zipper a masculine intrusion—even weapon—in the intimate environment of a woman's clothing. The women who wrote and produced *Gilda*, like the woman who starred in it, probably had some sense of how their use of the zipper, still novel enough to titillate their audience, conveyed these mixed messages (Michaels 244–52).

So tightly bound was the zipper's sexual image that it became one of the most readily understood and powerful metaphors for sexuality, especially for an uninhibited and promiscuous sexuality. Perhaps the ultimate expression of that power, and one of the most memorable evocations of zippers in modern fiction, was in Erica Jong's 1974 novel *Fear of Flying*. Unquestionably the image that stuck in reader's minds, even many years after encountering the book, was that of the "zipless fuck." In a book that claimed to break new ground in giving free expression to women's feelings about sex, this fantasy of

“ziplessness” was the one that seemed to speak to universal desires. Jong’s heroine Isadora explains, “It was a platonic ideal. Zipless because when you came together zippers fell away like rose petals, underwear blew off in one breath like dandelion fluff.” This ideal was sex without guilt, without consequences, without games of power or love: “The zipless fuck is the purest thing there is. And it is rarer than the unicorn.” “Ziplessness” had nothing to do literally with zippers; it was rather a symbol of dispensing with the barriers and complications that men and women set up between themselves. Jong represents the zipper itself as a complication, rather than an invitation or simplification of sex. In so doing, she in a sense turns the zipper’s usual literary role on its head, but by doing so, she is able to suggest how truly extraordinary “ziplessness” would be if it were ever achieved. Jong also provided a much more enduring symbol than she could have with “buttonless,” “snapless,” or any alternative (11, 14).

In the second half of the twentieth century, a man who might earlier have been accused of “chasing skirts,” was instead said to have a “fast zipper.” The zipper became a visual metaphor as well, with cartoonists making ready and early use of it to suggest sexual opportunity. One of the most notorious record album covers of the 1960s was designed by Andy Warhol for the Rolling Stones’ *Sticky Fingers*, on which a real zipper opened to reveal Mick Jagger’s underwear. When *Time* magazine (July 11, 1969) featured a story on the “Sexual Revolution,” a zipper was the prominent symbol on its cover. The visual message was often a direct one, when uninhibited fashion designers made zippers prominent, frontal elements of a woman’s dress. Elsa Schiaparelli’s 1935 gowns, initiating this trend, were festooned with brightly colored plastic zippers. This was to a degree a logical step for a flamboyant designer already famous for putting outrageous buttons in the oddest places, but the large, showy (and typically superfluous) zippers still caused a great stir. Any modern reader will be familiar with any number of other means in which the zipper is used to speak about or signal sexual possibilities or activity.

The mechanical character of the zipper is the other fundamental aspect of its image, and of the uses to which it is put in literature and art. To one degree, its technology is even more intrinsic to the device than its sexuality, for the slide fastener was, after all, designed from the first to be a mechanical closure. The zipper is the first machine that any of us encounters on a regular basis in our daily lives, and this familiarity carries with it messages both good and ill. On the positive side, it is the machinery of the zipper that is at the heart of its utility. All of the promotions of the fastener rest eventually on the convenience and ease of opening and closing with a mechanism, rather than by hand manipulation of buttons or ties. In this sense, the zipper is very much part of that great trend in Western civilization in which, to use the term of the Swiss architectural critic Siegfried Giedion, “mechanization takes command.” With its meshing scoops, pulled together by a (hopefully) smoothly running guide, the zipper fits comfortably into the most general image of the machine, that of meshing gears. The zipper is thus, to borrow



another phrase from another notable technological critic, Lewis Mumford, a perfect representative of “paleotechnic” culture—the phase in material development characterized by metals and mechanisms.

The negative messages conveyed by the zipper’s mechanical nature are more complex and ambiguous. On one level, the intrusion of a machine, however small and harmless, into the intimate realms of dressing and undressing, is to some, like Aldous Huxley, an unwelcome event. It can be seen to represent the greater threat posed by the intrusion of modern technology in all realms of human life, from daily routine to lovemaking, to government. The capacity of the zipper to convey this kind of image has diminished since the 1930s, for its ubiquity necessarily dulls whatever threat it may seem to imply. And yet, a closer reading of later allusions to the zipper, in high literature and low, suggests another aspect of the sometimes tortured relationship between human beings and their machines: the ever-present threat of failure.

The earlier depictions of the zipper spoke of the ease of its working, the cleverness of its mechanism, and the convenience it afforded; but once the device had become commonplace, attention was more likely to be drawn to its unreliability. An important aspect of the threat that machines pose to human beings lies in their treachery. By refusing to work as they promise and are designed to do, machines become demons that betray human trust. The scene described above from *Jitterbug Perfume* is an excellent example of this demonic side of the zipper, when Dannyboy “couldn’t budge the damn thing.” Such scenes and characterizations of zippers can be found in a great range of post-World War literary settings. The popular critic and essayist Cleveland Amory, writing in one of his last *Saturday Review* columns, provided a good example:

Toward the zipper we harbor—and harboring is one of the things we do best—nothing but ill will. The fact is that, over a lifetime of trying to make the damn things work, we have at last reached the inescapable conclusion, which should have been obvious from the first, that they don’t.

From the 1930s, the zipper was seen as one of the defining elements of modernity. When the readers of London’s *Daily Express* late in the decade were asked to name the inventions that seemed most distinctive of the twentieth century, the zipper was named by more respondents than anything else. This perception was reflected also in cartoons of the period: the appearance of a zipper on a mummy or a churchman’s gown seemed the height of unlikely anachronism, an intrusion of the most obviously modern into the ancient or traditional. In the years after World War II, the zipper naturally lost some of its power to convey this idea of the up-to-date, but it acquired other meanings in specific contexts, demonstrating powerfully the plasticity of the messages that an artifact can be used to convey.

One of the more curious, yet widely recognized, messages that zippers came to be used to deliver in the postwar years was that of generational and

cultural rebellion. While the zippered jacket had been introduced as early as the late 1920s, as a relatively expensive article of sports clothing, in the 1930s it was wedded to an old American tradition of leather jackets. This style was further influenced by military usage, especially for pilots and parachutists during the war years, so that by the late 1940s the zippered leather jacket was readily available, and was associated with sporting and other outdoors activities that exposed the wearer to wind and weather. One of these activities was motorcycling, and when Hollywood celebrated the anti-establishment nature of this alternative form of transportation—noisy, powerful, exposed to the elements and thus the province of uninhibited young men (and their “molls”)—in the 1953 movie *The Wild One*, the “biker jacket” became one of the decade’s most evocative symbols of youthful rebellion. Marlon Brando’s jacket did not simply use zippers to fasten, but long, prominent zippers in the sleeves emphasized the vulgar, brash, alienated culture that he (and his motorcycle) represented. The prominent metallic gleam of the zippers (and the accenting metal studs) reinforced the message of brash, unrestrained machinery (and sexuality) in the service of rebellion.

More broadly, the zipper came with increasing frequency to be used as a general sign of opening and closing, of joining and separating. Its message could be conveyed verbally or visually. A noisy young child told to “zip it up” understood the demand to keep his mouth shut. A sandwich bag with a “Ziploc” seal was one that could be opened and closed with ease. Cartoonists used zippers to play with the idea of firm closure, quick closure, and even unlikely closure. The zipper became an icon, in the sense of being a distinctive image that could be conjured up in a wide variety of forms to convey its message. A classic puzzle in which square pieces are moved around in a frame can use the zipper as its basic image, for everyone knows and appreciates what it should look like in its proper form. Jewelry in the form of necklaces, earrings, and tie clasps can feature the slide of a zipper as central pieces, for it possesses an elegant symmetry in metal, which is appreciated only by taking it out of its functional context. Instructions to tear an envelope open will often be accompanied—or completely conveyed—by zipper imagery, for it is international and wordless. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, the zipper had become as universally understood and used a sign as industrialized culture had yet generated. If the meanings of this icon seemed to shift and turn, that was perhaps simply the ultimate indication that the device itself had achieved some kind of significant transcendence over its normally mundane utility.

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MICHAEL PROKOPOW holds a Ph.D. in American history from Harvard University. Currently he is a professor of history at Ryerson University in Toronto where he teaches courses in North American material culture and in design history and theory. He is also the curator at the Design Exchange, Canada's only design center and museum of post-1945 design. He is (slowly) working on a book on the meanings of domestic style in North America in the period between 1945 and 1970. He has never met a thrift store he did not like.

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beaches, and across bridges. It would comfort his very liver to know what Mark Twain and Robert Louis Stevenson chatted about while sitting together on a bench in Washington Square, New York City, one sunny afternoon in April 1888, but no one knows. Laura gardens enthusiastically, and is, believe it or not, learning to read hands. They are lucky enough to be able to see a tiny bit of the Golden Gate Bridge from their bedroom window.

RICHARD SANZENBACHER is Professor of Humanities at Embry-Riddle University. He has written a textbook, *Connecting the Pieces: The ART of Composing*. He has made many presentations at professional meetings on various aspects of animal culture and is currently working on a monograph on the dog in popular culture.

MICHAEL K. SCHOENECKE teaches film studies at Texas Tech University. He also serves as Executive Director for the Popular Culture Association and the American Culture Association. He has published on such diverse topics as Jack London, architecture, popular music, sports, and film. After shooting back-to-back 78s in a USGA Amateur Qualifier, he decided to spend more time researching the game's rich history.

SHARON SCOTT combines visual art with political research to examine systems of power. Funded by a grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women, she has been collaborating with Zapatista dollmakers in Chiapas, Mexico. Her continued interest in rebel communities has recently spawned an art installation project for Belfast, Ireland. Exhibiting internationally in museums and nontraditional venues, Scott persistently challenges social, aesthetic, and geographic borders. She has curated at the Woodruff Art Center, written for *Atlanta Magazine*, and researched for ABC Discovery News. She is pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Louisville and plans to have the spaceship ready by June.

BARRETT SHAW has a Ph.D. in English and American literature from the University of Louisville and has worked in newspapers, magazines, and book publishing and as a freelancer in all aspects of print publication from writing and editing to design and production. During her stint as editor of a national magazine for thoroughbred trainers, a story she assigned and edited won the Eclipse Award for best magazine article on racing. Though horse-crazed since childhood, she wasn't able to get her first till she was past 40 and has been with her current equine partner, Bogi, for eleven years. She's working on a memoir of sorts of her experiences with horses, tentatively titled "How to Fall Off a Horse."

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CLAUDE J. SMITH, long-term member of Popular Culture Association in the South, has presented over twenty papers at its annual conventions and has published several articles, primarily about films and one about the radio show *Car Talk*. Just retired from Florida Community College, where he made numerous television productions, he has made twenty-five trips to London for theater exploration, sings with the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus, and appeared in John Sayles' *Sunshine State*. A current passion is collecting CDs by lesser known but worthy classical composers and improving his taste in fine wine.

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IRA WELLS grew up in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, and completed his undergraduate work at the University of Calgary in 2003. He is currently a doctoral student in the Department of English at the University of Toronto. His academic interests focus on representations of masculinity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American texts, and particularly in the works of Melville, Faulkner, and Cormac McCarthy. He is also an accomplished squash player.

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