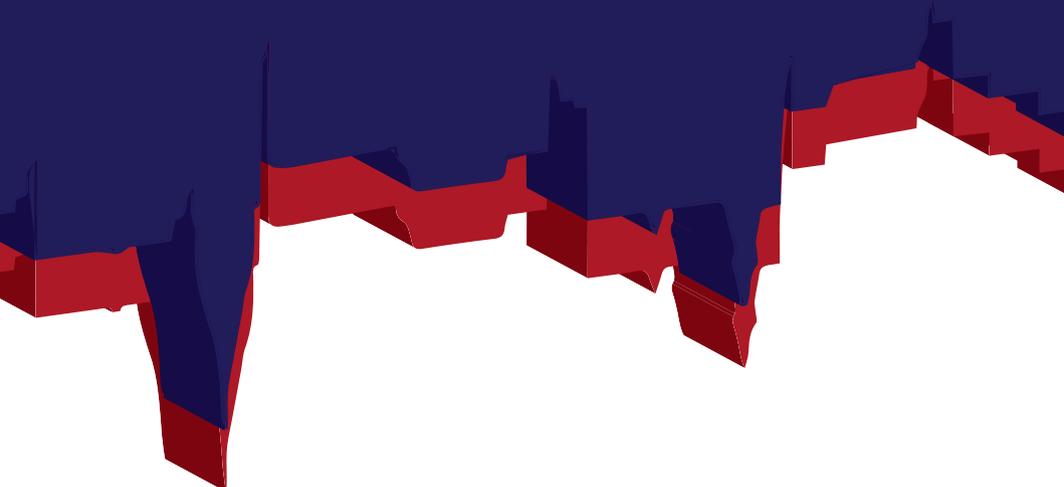


2013-2014  
volume no. 9

# UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES

*CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF THE UNITED STATES*



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OF  
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AFFAIRS



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF  
THE UNITED STATES

2013-2014  
volume no. 9

# **UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES**

*CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF THE UNITED STATES*

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Adena Ali  
Stephanie Ma

*Assistant Editors*

Haley O'Shaughnessy  
Kelly Rahardja  
Nazli Sadr  
Sam Tanenbaum

*Graphic Designer*

Heather Wimmi

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## *EDITORS' MESSAGE*

Over the past eight years, the Undergraduate Journal of American Studies, presented by the Centre for the Study of the United States, has proudly represented the University of Toronto's academically diverse student body. Through thought-provoking pieces, it has provided readers with insight and knowledge of both timely and timeless issues pertaining to the United States of America. Volume nine is no exception. After receiving an unprecedented number of submissions this year, we have managed to capture the darker side of America, while maintaining the journal's standard of unique and intriguing writing.

First and foremost, it is thanks to the undergraduate students for all their efforts in doing the research and writing. We thank every student for their hard work as well as the courage to submit their writing for publication. The result is a compilation in this journal of what we feel to be remarkable essays for publication.

Also, thank you to our team of assistant editors — Haley, Nazli, Sam, and Kelly — for your patience, ideas, and analytical contributions to the process of discussing, selecting, and editing. Your optimistic, humorous, and energetic attitudes mean a lot to us, and we are grateful for the time and effort you have gifted this project with.

A great big thanks goes to our designer, Heather Wimmi, for putting up with all of the trials and triumphs, and the willingness to help us out. Without you, this project would not have been possible to put it all together into something we can be proud of. Thank you for your designs, your work, and your enthusiasm.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the expertise and support from the Centre for the Study of the United States, namely Stella Kyriakakis. Your presence and help gave us the confidence to take charge. The result is a journal that we are truly excited about. Thank you.

Adena Ali and Stephanie Ma  
*Co-Editors*

## *DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE*

It is both an honour and a privilege to add some opening comments to this journal. There are at least three reasons for this. First, the articles are genuinely interesting: they cover a great range of topics. Second, they all reflect a sharp and learned understanding of the United States. Third, they are a direct outgrowth of our program in American Studies.

I would like to extend my thanks to every author and to the editorial team. I know from experience that editing a journal can be both thankless and very rewarding. Every reader of a journal is indebted to the editors. On their behalf, I would like to thank Adena Ali and Stephanie Ma.

The Centre for the Study of the United States is our country's preeminent place for making sense of our Southern neighbour. It is also a meeting place where scholars in fields as diverse as political science, economics, cinema studies, women and gender studies, history, and many others come together over a shared intellectual interest in the United States. The result of this is well worth noting: we host dozens of public lectures and events each year. We furnish a complete undergraduate program in American Studies. We act as a touchstone for graduate students whose focus is the United States. As important as all of this, we help bring to fruition an undergraduate student journal in American Studies, and one which routinely reflects the interdisciplinary, dynamic, scholarly and relevant nature of our Centre. So, it is my great honour to include my comments in this volume, and to commend to all of you each and every one of its articles.

Peter Loewen, PhD

*Assistant Professor | Department of Political Science (UTM)*

*Director | Centre for the Study of the United States and American Studies Program | Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto*

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CLEVELAND, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1969

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## Exclus

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This photograph and other pages are the first to be publis the killings.

This particular picture sh bodies of South Vietnamese ci cludes women and children. killed raises one of the most n fions of the war in Vietnam.



# SOMETHING IN ME HAD DIED

THE MY LAI MASSACRE AND AMERICA'S WAR IN VIETNAM

Misha Boutillier

At the start of the 1960s, the United States was full of optimism and confidence in its ability to effect good in the world. "Let every nation know..." said John F. Kennedy in his 1961 inaugural address, "that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty." But by the end of the decade, the U.S. was locked in a hopeless war in Vietnam. Moreover, the revelation that Lieutenant William Calley and his men had brutally massacred several hundred Vietnamese civilians of the small village of My Lai on March 16, 1968 produced shock across America. Indeed, the My Lai massacre, its subsequent cover-up, and the public reaction revealed a fundamental disconnect between Americans' understanding of their war aims and modus operandi in South Vietnam and the unpleasant realities of the way the war was actually being waged — a disconnect that most Americans were unable to bridge. The massacre reflected a U.S. military culture that prized unquestioning obedience over following the laws of war and had allowed frustration to translate into dehumanization and abuse of Vietnamese civilians. However, full investigation of these issues was neither politically convenient for President Richard Nixon and conservatives nor palatable for the majority of Americans.

In order to understand the context of the My Lai massacre, it is first necessary to consider how the U.S. became involved in the Vietnam War and the ideology that underlay U.S. intervention. During the Cold War period, U.S. policy towards the Third World was influenced by 19th century ideas of emancipation and guidance that had originally been developed in response to Reconstruction. Together, these ideas dictated that the U.S. had

a duty to bring the Vietnamese out of their peasant society into modernity by playing a strong guiding role in the affairs of this politically immature people. Guided by this belief in state building, American policymakers believed that they could craft South Vietnam into both a model of successful capitalist development and a U.S. ally in the Cold War strategy of containment.<sup>2</sup> This led the U.S. to put massive effort into a state building program in southern Vietnam. Nevertheless, when it became clear that this program failed to create a stable and self-reliant regime, the U.S. pursued large-scale military intervention rather than abandon its position. Even though senior policymakers knew that the U.S. had tried and failed to build a new state in southern Vietnam, they continued to justify the war on the grounds of defending “South Vietnam” and its people against Communist aggression.<sup>3</sup> Reflecting this widespread view, the *New Yorker* noted after the massacre, “Our original purpose in going into Vietnam...was to save the South Vietnamese people from coercion.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, American intervention in Vietnam was presented as a way to protect the Vietnamese from violence.

The causes of the My Lai massacre can be assessed at multiple levels of analysis. Certainly, the role of the individual was very important. The responsible officer, Lieutenant William Calley, was by most accounts an incompetent leader incapable of handling the stresses of command. General Westmoreland, the top commander in Vietnam at the time of My Lai, admitted that in retrospect it would have been preferable to suffer an officer shortage rather than have unqualified candidates like Calley — a man who, according to Army investigator William Wilson, was described by his own troops as not “officer material.”<sup>5</sup> Poor intelligence also played a role. As the Peers Commission noted, the planners of the My Lai operation assumed that the area was inhabited by strong enemy forces, not non-combatants. This misunderstanding filtered down the chain of command, such that ordinary soldiers were given the impression that they would face “strong resistance” by Viet Cong fighters and their civilian sympathizers at the village.<sup>6</sup> These false expectations further contributed to the massacre.

However, it is clear that the combination of an incapable lieutenant and an intelligence failure alone could not produce a massacre on the scale of My Lai. It is necessary to consider the underlying causes of the massacre, causes that were not specific to a single individual or operation but were representative of the experience of American soldiers in Vietnam. Indeed, it was a military culture that neglected the laws of war in favour of blind obedience and responded to the frustrations of guerrilla warfare with brutal

tactics, racist dehumanization of the enemy, and neglect of the combatant/non-combatant distinction that ultimately produced the massacre.

At least, according to the official statements, the U.S. Army in Vietnam was doing a commendable job of ensuring the laws of war were followed. “One innocent civilian killed...is too many,” General Westmoreland told the press in 1966, and he insisted that instruction in the laws of war was a mandatory part of basic training.<sup>7</sup> Cards distributed by the Army urged soldiers to defeat the Viet Cong by showing “understanding, and generosity” to civilians to win their hearts and minds, warning them that mistreating captives was a punishable crime.<sup>8</sup> At least on paper, the Army appeared to have integrated the protection of civilians into its training.

Regardless, in the case of the 11th Brigade of the Americal Division, such training was neglected and heavy emphasis was instead placed upon unquestioning obedience. Herbert L. Carter of Charlie Company remembered that during training his instructor merely told him to guard a prisoner. His instructor did not mention the laws of war regarding captives, and implied with a laugh that “you do what you want to do with them actually.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the Peers Commission noted that because the 11th Brigade’s deployment was accelerated, training in the laws of war and on identifying “illegal” orders was neglected.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Paul Meadlo, who confessed to killing civilians at My Lai, emphasized the centrality of unquestioning obedience in the U.S. military’s ethos. As he related, “It’s not your right to refuse [any] order,” and noted that he feared being shot or jailed if he ever disobeyed an order.<sup>11</sup> During his court-martial, Calley himself noted that while he could not remember the substance of training in the laws of war, he was instructed that “all orders are to be presumed legal and...to be obeyed.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, obedience to commands clearly trumped the rules of war.

Protecting Vietnamese civilians from violence and avoiding abusing them was a central goal of both U.S. political and military leaders. In 1966 President Johnson declared, “I want to leave the footprints of America in Vietnam,” and the U.S. military intervention was justified as a protection of the South Vietnamese state and people against communist aggression.<sup>13</sup> U.S. army manuals reflected this, emphasizing that U.S. troops were there to protect the Vietnamese people against the Viet Cong, and urging troops to “Join with the people!” and “make personal friends with them.”<sup>14</sup> Westmoreland repeatedly emphasized the great care taken by U.S. forces to protect civilians, contrasting this with the communist guerrillas who endangered civilians by wearing civilian clothes and infiltrating into the local populace.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike communists, the public was told, American troops behaved honourably.

However, as with the issue of training in the laws of war, the reality was otherwise. Fighting the elusive Viet Cong was intensely frustrating for U.S. soldiers. Because the enemy was disguised as civilians, the combatant/non-combatant line blurred so that it was easy for soldiers to label all inhabitants of My Lai as “communists or sympathizers or Viet Cong.”<sup>16</sup> Also, soldiers were often killed or injured in booby traps, raising their fears and leaving them “unhappy” because there was no enemy to shoot back at. As the Peers Commission noted, booby traps “tended to create hatred and frustration against the unseen enemy.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, despite the Army’s urgings to befriend the populace, for most American troops Vietnam was an alien environment with a people who spoke an alien language. As soldier Michael Bernhardt explained, these developments led to the prevalence of a “dink complex” among U.S. troops. Soldiers dehumanized the Vietnamese, speaking of them as “gooks” or “dinks.” Unable to take out their grief and rage on the elusive Viet Cong, they expressed their emotions by abusing defenseless civilians with impunity.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, as Ronald D. Grzesik of Calley’s platoon reported, there was a string of human rights abuses that began with questioning civilians, continued with beating and killing one civilian, and culminated in the wholesale massacre at My Lai.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, My Lai cannot be seen as an isolated incident.

Moreover, the tactics used by senior commanders reinforced the racism and brutality to which soldiers had become accustomed. For instance, starting in 1966 Westmoreland launched search and destroy operations designed to separate the insurgency from the peasantry, operations that sent U.S. troops into villages to drive out the Viet Cong. Thinking that the village was the key to Viet Cong resistance, commanders leveled villages and swelled cities and resettlement camps with millions of peasant refugees.<sup>20</sup> During the Tet Offensive that happened shortly before My Lai, one U.S. officer called in an artillery strike to level a village seized by guerrillas, explaining, “We had to destroy it, in order to save it.”<sup>21</sup> The employment of such strategies by senior commanders was inevitably reflected in the behaviour of their subordinates.

Looking at the My Lai massacre itself, the influence of the neglect of the laws of war in favour of unquestioning obedience and the frustrations from guerrilla war can be clearly seen. The leaders of Task Force Barker planned a “search and destroy” operation that failed to take steps to reduce civilian casualties and aimed to destroy villages.<sup>22</sup> Heartbroken and angry

over the loss of their comrades to seemingly faceless enemies, troops were promised by Captain Medina a chance to take out their frustrations on the enemy in the My Lai operation. Reflecting the dehumanization of the enemy as well as the blurring of the combatant/non-combatant distinction, Medina’s orders called for the destruction of the village. While the soldiers interviewed disagreed as to whether Medina actually ordered civilians to be killed and whether or not he participated in atrocities, it is clear that his instructions gave many soldiers the impression that everyone in the village was an enemy and should be killed.<sup>23</sup> Also, it is certain that Calley chose to interpret Medina’s orders as a direction to kill everyone in the village. As he brazenly insisted, “I did not sit down and think in terms of men, women and children. They were all classified the same...as enemy soldiers.”<sup>24</sup> The troops were thus primed to totally destroy the village and brutalize its inhabitants, who were presumed to be enemy combatants or sympathizers.

The conduct of Calley’s troops during the massacre testifies to both their brutalization and acceptance of unquestioning obedience. As Calley directed his troops to commit the massacre, some troops willingly participated, seizing an opportunity to take their frustration out on defenseless villagers by raping and/or killing them.<sup>25</sup> Though many soldiers were appalled and refused to participate, not one member of Calley’s unit took any positive action to stop the massacre. Indeed, the only U.S. soldier to actively resist the massacre, Hugh Thompson Jr., was a helicopter pilot not under Calley’s command.<sup>26</sup> This demonstrates the total triumph of unquestioning obedience over following the laws of war in Calley’s unit of the army.

The massacre was soon followed by an official cover-up. Thompson reported the massacre to his chaplain soon after it occurred, and both men submitted protests through official channels.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the Viet Cong made use of the massacre in propaganda that labeled U.S. soldiers as “pirates” who “drink our people’s blood.”<sup>28</sup> Colonel Oran Henderson, the commander of the operation, insisted that although the accusation “was not treated lightly,” he did not find evidence of a massacre. However, by his own admission he asked soldiers about atrocities in a public setting where they would be intimidated to speak out, as opposed to approaching individual soldiers privately.<sup>29</sup> Frankly, it is hard to take Henderson’s claim seriously.

The cover-up reflected a desire not just to avoid implicating Calley’s superiors, but also to keep more unsavoury aspects of the Vietnam War under the rug. Of course, the possibility that the investigation would implicate Calley’s superiors turned out to be well-founded. After all, Medina

was accused of directly ordering massacres by two soldiers, and the whistleblower Ronald Ridenhour suggested that Medina was ordered to kill civilians by Henderson or even higher-ranking commanders.<sup>30</sup> In addition, an investigation would expose that the operation itself was not only a military failure, but also illegal because it ordered the total destruction of villages, as the Peers Commission eventually determined.<sup>31</sup> However, there were also fears of wider political fallout. The admission of this massacre might cause other soldiers to come forward and claim that similar massacres had occurred, while threatening to demoralize troops and make the U.S. war effort in Vietnam appear hypocritical.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, its revelation would be damaging to both the U.S. military and the U.S. war in Vietnam.

When the My Lai massacre was made known to senior decision-makers by Ridenhour's letter and eventually to the broader public, the most common response was shock. Indeed, the initial response of Ridenhour, the army investigator Wilson, and Westmoreland himself to finding out about the massacre was shock and disbelief.<sup>33</sup> This shock was echoed in liberal publications like the *New Yorker* and *Commonweal*, and although the conservative *National Review* tried to downplay the massacre it could not help but acknowledge the media firestorm My Lai created.<sup>34</sup> It would indeed be difficult to minimize the fallout of My Lai.

However, alongside the initial shock went a tendency shared by many groups to brush the incident under the rug. Of course, there was political motivation behind part of this effort. For instance, President Richard Nixon was caught in a very difficult political situation from 1969-1971. The morale and combat capability of U.S. forces in Vietnam was plummeting, and Nixon knew that My Lai had the potential to increase this trend. Moreover, Nixon felt besieged by the antiwar movement, writing in his diary about the need to “[keep] the doves at bay.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Nixon criticized the antiwar movement for using My Lai as political fodder to undermine his efforts to maintain domestic support for the war, and Westmoreland had to threaten to personally object to a cover-up in order to prevent Nixon's administration from whitewashing the affair.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, the loyal conservatives at the *National Review* backed Nixon, blaming the liberal media for “atrocities against human reason.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, Nixon and his allies were desperate to minimize My Lai's impact.

Still, reticence to honestly examine My Lai was by no means limited to Nixon and conservatives. For instance, Wilson, who was genuinely horrified by the massacre and clearly conducted a thorough investigation, nonethe-

less was so spiritually sickened by My Lai that he never spoke about it.<sup>38</sup> Many veterans, like Lewis B. Puller Jr., were upset that the incident was making U.S. troops look like “bloodthirsty killers,” and argued that it should be de-emphasized.<sup>39</sup> Most of the people of Meadlo's Indiana town refused to blame Meadlo for the massacre, excusing him because he was only following orders as he had been trained to do.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, the *New Yorker* protested the “new, craven logic that finds such atrocities to be the way of the world.”<sup>41</sup> However, while Peter Steinfels in *Commonweal* labeled My Lai a “cancer in the conscience of America,” as he admitted, the majority of Americans were inclined to come up with mitigating factors to excuse the massacre, so that it became “not a big deal” in the public consciousness.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, the vehemence of liberal protests only spoke to the silence of the bulk of Americans on this issue.

In retrospect, it is easy to understand why public reaction to My Lai was muted and there was little honest examination. Certainly, many people felt sympathy for ordinary soldiers and even Calley, suspecting that they were just following orders and had been placed in a very difficult situation. Likewise, others were rightly concerned lest the massacre besmirch the good name of all Vietnam veterans. However, at a deeper level, reticence to fully address the implications of the massacre reflects the fact that to do so would have been too disturbing. Americans had been raised on a narrative of the heroic role their country had played in recent history. World War II was portrayed as the “good war” against fascism, and the Cold War was seen as a valiant struggle in which Americans sacrificed their blood and treasure to protect people of developing countries against the communist menace.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the idea that U.S. troops would commit such massacres was obviously horrifying. As Wilson, a decorated WWII paratrooper wrote, “Something in me had died” when Meadlo confessed to the My Lai massacre.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, having an open public discussion on the massacre would have exposed not only the dysfunctional military culture in Vietnam, but also the hard fact that the U.S. mission in Vietnam had failed in its aims and was hurting the very people it intended to help.

In conclusion, the My Lai massacre, the initial cover-up, and the public reaction reflected a fundamental gap between the U.S. perception of its aims and actions in Vietnam, and the disappointing realities of the way the war was actually being waged. On the one hand, much of the American public and military leaders like Westmoreland prided themselves on the justness of their cause and the lengths to which troops had gone to protect civilians.

On the other hand, the U.S. military culture in Vietnam actually supported unquestioning obedience, arrogant racism toward South Vietnamese, disregard for the combatant/non-combatant distinction, and military operations that destroyed the livelihood of the South Vietnamese peasantry. It was these attitudes, combined with an incapable junior officer and a faulty operational plan, which culminated in the My Lai massacre. Army officers participated in an initial cover-up in order to prevent unpleasant realities about the war from becoming public knowledge. However, even when the massacre was finally made public, save for liberal publications and the antiwar movement, the public reaction was generally reticent. Clearly, for the American public the deeper implications of My Lai were too painful to bear.

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*A SELF-LOADING PROPHECY*

Emmett Choi

Among the world's wealthiest nations, only in the United States has gun violence become an intrinsic part of daily life, with its threatening aura transcending class, age, race, and location. It has embodied in the forms of suburban mass shootings by mentally ill young men and accidental discharges by children of gun-owning parents, to name only a couple recurring cases. Why does America remain truly exceptional in its frequency of homicides and suicides by firearms? The answer derives from the manipulation of the Constitution by private industry. A nation whose people were given the right to bear arms have had their right degraded into a consumerist obligation. This commodification of firearms coupled with a culture of paranoia and distrust of both government and fellow man create and maintain an irrational hero complex among citizens, in which the struggle for more security only makes them feel more insecure. All of this is embodied by a recent advertisement for the Remington M1911 R1 handgun. After first explaining the public and private factors, it will be demonstrated how both the gun itself and the features of its advertisement serve to exemplify American gun culture in a single image.

Any account of American gun ownership and violence must first recognize the importance of both the Second Amendment and the nation's constitutionalism in general. Despite the protests of gun control advocates, the Second Amendment does indeed allow for *individuals* to keep and bear arms, and for those arms to be of *military* grade. This is affirmed both by a precise reading of the text and by various Supreme Court rulings. In the 2008 case *District of Columbia v. Heller*, where a police officer challenged the capital city's ban on handguns, the Supreme Court clarified why the Second Amendment is aimed at individual rights. The majority's opinion

stated that the phrase “A well regulated militia”, at the time of its writing, referred to all able-bodied males, and contemporarily would of course be extended to all citizens.<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying that the phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear arms” refers to all individuals, and indeed this second phrase in fact reinforces the notion that a “militia” is simply the people in aggregate, and not necessarily an organized, trained unit of paramilitary troops.<sup>2</sup> There remains the question of which kind of arms the people can keep and bear. Seeing as the objective of the amendment is for the people to not only defend their own homes and families but to deter tyrannical government and protect the country as a whole from foreign invasion,<sup>3</sup> it should be understood that military grade arms are indeed constitutional, so long as they can be kept and borne by an individual. That is to say that one can keep and bear an assault rifle but not a fighter jet. This is well-illustrated by Charles Cooke of the *National Review*, who says, “the...question is not to compare the personal weapons that the citizenry owned at the time of the Founding with the more powerful personal weapons available to the citizenry now, but to compare what personal weapons the citizenry had access to at the Founding with what personal weapons the military owned at the time of the Founding.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the Second Amendment allows individual citizens the right to be armed like individual soldiers. On paper, this is dangerous enough, but in practice, its irresponsibility and unwarranted trust in the American people’s maturity and discretion regarding firearms has played a huge role in creating American gun culture and its daily tragedies.

Despite the Second Amendment’s intention, for the longest time gun owners largely owned them for recreational purposes.<sup>5</sup> In recent decades however, the image of the firearm has been transformed from that of a hunting or target shooting tool to that of a personal defence weapon every American needs to own. The timing of this transition coincides with the Reagan administration’s implicitly racist policies towards the crack epidemic and the urban violence of the 1980s and 1990s, and can be seen clearly in the NRA’s ad campaigns of the era. From the 1920s to 1970s, the NRA focused its ads on the hunting and target shooting demographic, with posters featuring almost exclusively bolt-action rifles.<sup>6</sup> In the 1980s, the NRA shifted its focus toward newly gentrifying whites returning to the city who were weary of urban black and Hispanic criminals. The ads of the NRA and gun manufacturers now focused on handguns with the intent of their being defensive weapons for use both at home and in the streets. It was suggested that the solution to gun violence was to have a better armed citizenry.

Parallel campaigns of attack ads were also aimed at politicians who favour stricter gun control, painting them as unpatriotic and representative of what the Founding Fathers feared most: a tyrannical government.

The politicization and commodification of the Second Amendment have thus led to a firearms industrial complex which arguably is a direct consequence to the postwar militarism of the military industrial complex. In his Farewell address, President Eisenhower, referring to American foreign and military policy, pleaded with Americans to “avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect.”<sup>7</sup> It is apparent that in domestic social affairs, the United States has become a nation whose citizens tend to fear and hate rather than trust and respect one another. Despite the irrationality and danger of gun ownership, some 80 million Americans own over 300 million firearms, mostly with self-defence and family safety as motives.<sup>8</sup> However, there is no credible evidence that more private guns actually increase public safety. For the years 2005-2010, the FBI found that there was an average of 213 justifiable homicides by firearm per year.<sup>9</sup> This is to say that roughly one in every 375,586 gun-owning Americans actually uses one of their guns in self-defence in a given year. In fact, a legally owned gun in an American household is twelve times more likely to be used — deliberately or accidentally — to kill a family member than an intruder.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these realities and ever-mounting public support for stricter gun control, the gun industry enjoys annual revenue of over \$6 billion a year and employs nearly 210,000 people.<sup>11</sup> It also generates \$9.8 billion in wages and \$5.1 billion in taxes.<sup>12</sup> This can be explained largely by the effectiveness of advertising like that designed for Remington’s M1911 R1 handgun. The M1911 personifies everything about American gun culture we have so far discussed. It was a standard issue sidearm for every branch of the US military from 1911 to the mid-1990s, and is still used by some units and law enforcement agencies.<sup>13</sup> It is thus a military grade weapon available for civilian use, acceptable as outlined by the Second Amendment. It is also a handgun, easily kept and borne, concealable on one’s person, and optimal for self-defence. The diction of the ad reminds the viewer of the M1911’s proven legacy of efficacious violence, stating, “For more than 100 years, it’s defended freedom, served justice, protected families and dominated competition.” But most prominent and important is the leading line at the top of the image: “Walk softly. You know the rest.” Indeed, any American consumer does know the rest. As an owner of an M1911 or any other gun, you become

a potential hero with multiple burdens on your shoulders. You are at once a defender of yourself, your family, your community, your nation, the constitution, and thus freedom itself. You are expected to be responsible and to exercise discretion in using your gun. Though we all know these expectations, to say the least, are lofty.

The combination of liberal gun rights and a highly effective firearms industrial complex have expanded American gun culture to its current state, where even lawful gun owners are a danger to themselves and those around them. Gun ownership at first was a reasonable curb against an historically proven threat of oppressive government. It has since become an irrational response to an ever less frequent problem: violent crime. Gun owners perceive gun ownership as akin to wearing a seatbelt in a car. In reality, it is more analogous to driving under the influence.

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from <http://www.vpc.org/studies/cashandcarry.pdf>



# MEGADEATHS

*THE MECHANICAL LOGIC OF DETERRENCE IN STANLEY KUBRICK'S "DR. STRANGELOVE"*

Ronald Clarke

When Stanley Kubrick first sat down to write what would eventually become *Dr. Strangelove or, How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, it was his intention to take the subject matter of nuclear war and strategic fail-safes as seriously as the threat of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) itself. The more he developed his ideas around the logic of these themes, the more he considered them to be inherently ridiculous and decided to change his film into a satire.<sup>1</sup> The film was made at the height of Cold War anxieties when the possibility of imminent nuclear annihilation was a genuine and constant concern in the minds of American citizens and leaders alike. The development of nuclear stockpiles after the second World War and the cold logic of deterrence had changed the entire nature of modern warfare as well as the demeanour of the nation. *Dr. Strangelove* speaks directly to these civil anxieties as well as to the fierce anticommunist paranoia which dominates military strategic thought. Kubrick asserts that the development of technology compromises the value of individual human lives in an era when entire populations could be wiped out at the push of a button. The value of women, in particular, is shown to be distorted in a military industrial complex overwhelmed by aggressive masculinity. The film is a satiric attack on the male dominated Cold War military logic behind Mutually Assured Destruction as a deterrence to the use of nuclear weapons which dehumanizes the very life it claims to defend.

In 1945, the full implications of how these new weapons would change warfare has not fully penetrated the military's strategic thinking. Many military leaders saw the weapons as a mere expansion of their existing conventional arsenal, and they were to be used for tactical effect. President Truman, however, did not view them as a quantitative value in the nature of their strategy. He saw it as a qualitative shift<sup>2</sup> in the nature of warfare itself. With the development of these weapons, wars could no longer be seen as "frequent but survivable,"<sup>3</sup> but rather as existential threats to every nation in the world. Truman set the national security policy that the President alone

could authorize the use of nuclear weapons. The plot of *Dr. Strangelove* depicts how Cold War military logic could lead to a calculated violation of this founding principle regarding presidential authority over the use of nuclear weapons. During the Eisenhower years, the stockpiling of nuclear weapons were seen as a relatively cheap way to counter the Soviet Union's insurmountable superiority of conventional forces. As a result, the United States enjoyed nuclear superiority over the Russians throughout the 1950s and 1960s. To ensure the fullest efficiency of their arsenal, Eisenhower created the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP)<sup>4</sup>, which organized the control over nuclear weapons into a streamlined operational framework. The Eisenhower administration also introduced their policy of "Massive Retaliation"<sup>5</sup> in the event of a Soviet nuclear strike on the U.S. This well publicized policy, in which the U.S. would unmercifully unleash its full nuclear arsenal in the event of even a single strike, laid the groundwork for the Cold War rule of MAD. As such, both superpowers officially adopted a "No First Strike" policy, as mentioned by President Muffley in the film. The assurance of an overwhelming retaliatory series of strikes in the event of a single attack forms the basis of deterrence theory. It is on this theory that leaders of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. gambled the lives of every person on the planet.

Deterrence theory, and the resulting nuclear policies it influenced, would inevitably prove to either save us all or seal our collective doom. The means by which American leaders sought to protect their citizens might also be the cause of their demise. *Strangelove* is a film which plays with this ironic apocalyptic uncertainty. The eponymous Dr. Strangelove (who ultimately serves as the moral centre of the film) defines deterrence as "the art of producing in the mind of the enemy the fear to attack." It is important to note how *Strangelove* refers to a single "enemy." Deterrence, as it was known in the early 1960s, was built upon the bipolar structure of two nuclear armed adversaries. Deterrence can only function if each superpower can insure the destruction of the other. Dr. Willie Curtis identified two fundamental assumptions of MAD which, if broken, would rupture its stability. The first assumption which must be held by leaders of both sides is that "both powers could inflict unacceptable levels of destruction to the other."<sup>6</sup> It is not only necessary to be able to inflict such damage, but it is also imperative that a country is known to be willing to use such force, otherwise the system breaks. A country, however, must not be seen as being eager to use nuclear weapons, otherwise it may provoke a first strike from the threatened nation.<sup>7</sup> They must be insistent they they would only use nuclear weapons if abso-

lutely necessary, revealing the logic behind the "No First Strike" policy. The second assumption Dr. Curtis identifies is that both U.S. and Soviet leaders are rational decision makers.<sup>8</sup> In *Dr. Strangelove*, the second assumption is broken when General Ripper's anticommunist paranoia overcomes his rationality. The resulting global nuclear holocaust pokes a vulnerability in the soundness of deterrence logic. *Strangelove* shows how when the logic of fail-safe deterrence strategies are taken to their extremes, the security of the world is put in jeopardy. Within the film's diegesis, the U.S. adopts a strategy where, in the event of their command structure being damaged as a result of a Soviet attack, lower echelon commanders will be able to order retaliatory nuclear strikes on their own authority. While it has never been confirmed that this strategy was ever a part of U.S. policy, this approach nearly proved to be disastrous during the Cuban missile crisis when Russian commanders on the ground in Cuba were given the authority to use nuclear weapons if the Americans invaded<sup>9</sup>. The Russian strategy of deterrence in *Strangelove* was the development of a Doomsday Device which would cover the globe in a life-eradicating shroud of radioactivity for 100 years. The Doomsday machine is MAD distilled to its purest essence. The machine, and only the machine, can guarantee that all life on earth would be destroyed if the Soviet Union is ever hit a single time. It is the ultimate weapon of deterrence, neutralizing the effectiveness of all other weaponry and ensuring their dominance. In the game of deterrence theory, it is a checkmate move. The idea of creating such a machine is fundamentally insane, but it is built from the prevailing logic of the time.

The fear of global nuclear annihilation reached its peak during the aforementioned Cuban Missile Crisis, which occurred a mere two years before the film was released. Kubrick may have gotten a laugh out of brinkmanship, but for many living in the shadow of those 13 terrifying days it was no laughing matter. Citizens were terrified by civil defence alerts and nuclear tests.<sup>10</sup> The attitude of the country had changed; many had adopted a survivalist mentality brought about by their apocalyptic imagination. Those people who were actively taking steps to outlive a potential nuclear war, known as "Survivalists," would argue that the distinction of this kind of war is that only the intelligent and the prepared<sup>11</sup> would live to see it through. People installed bunkers and fall out shelters in their backyards, and stockpiled non-perishable food goods in case they could not emerge for years. They attempted, in vain, to act on their belief that a nuclear war is something you could prepare for and would even want to survive. *Strangelove* was

released in 1964, which was also an important election year. Anxieties over nuclear annihilation were exploited for political advantage. The Republican candidate, Barry Goldwater, was frequently attacked for embracing nuclear escalation<sup>12</sup>. Goldwater's campaign slogan of "In Your Heart You Know He's Right," was wryly countered with the response slogan "In Your Guts You Know He's Nuts." The Johnson campaign released the infamous "Daisy" television ad, in which an innocent flower plucking little girl is blown up by a hydrogen bomb, followed by the ominous voiceover declaring "These are the stakes!" Goldwater, however, was hardly the first politician to state his willingness to use nuclear weapons. Any politician who took a stance of anything short of threatening nuclear war was pejoratively labelled a "moderate."<sup>13</sup> Kubrick wanted to address these fears, but not fan them. He wisely inserted a disclaimer at the beginning of *Strangelove*, reassuring the audience that "It is the stated position of the U.S. Air Force that their safeguards would prevent the occurrence of such events as are depicted in this film." The people were afraid of the nuclear power of the Soviet Union, but they were also afraid of the spread of communism. General Ripper and his unfounded obsession with the "fluoridation of water" represents how anti-communist paranoia mixed with a dangerous nuclear armament could bring the world to the brink of destruction. Fear of nuclear inferiority drove the superpowers to produce far more nuclear weapons than were conceivably necessary. In *Strangelove*, the Russian Ambassador reveals that they created the Doomsday Machine out of fear that the Americans already had one, and aimed to prevent a "Doomsday Gap." At the end of the film, General Turgidson immediately jumps on board Strangelove's post-war plan of living in mine shafts and enslaving women for fear the Russian's would do it, creating a "Mine Shaft Gap." This fear of being at any disadvantage inspired much of the thinking at the time. Even as the world was coming to an end, the Americans and the Russians could not stop their petty rivalry, suggesting that the Cold War would persist even after nuclear war. After the Doomsday device is activated and the world is destroyed, all that remains are the cold warriors themselves. Dr. Strangelove, with his immutable zero-sum Cold War logic is unshackled from the restraints of considering humanity, and he assumes a role of primacy in the new world order of mine shafts and machines.

The emergence of machines overtaking the role of humanity is a frequent theme of *Dr. Strangelove*. With such high stakes being put in the hands of computers and computer-like people, the value of individual people is seen as being irrelevant, or even outdated. Most blatantly, the new nature

of warfare is highlighted. The importance of conventional human forces in military conflicts are comparatively minor when put in the context of MAD. *Strangelove* came out during the Vietnam war, yet that conflict was not even mentioned. The soldiers and commanders are portrayed as being prone to error and easily manipulated by the chain of command and flaws of perception. The hydrogen bombs, however, do exactly what they're supposed to do: wipe out millions of people. General Turgidson thinks of life in terms of "Megadeaths." He argues in favour of full commitment, dooming millions, and against taking a risk in the hopes of avoiding any deaths. Hence, he tells the President that he must choose "between two admittedly regrettable, but nevertheless, distinguishable post-war environments. One, where you got 20 million people killed, and the other where you got 150 million people killed." In deterrence, human consideration can be seen as a liability. The Doomsday Machine is the "ultimate relinquishing of human control to safeguarded machines."<sup>14</sup> It's automated response rules out human meddling and it loses it's checkmate power if a human had to activate it, since, as the Russian Ambassador put it, "it is not a thing a sane man would do." Strangelove himself is the embodiment of the dehumanization of life. He is both physically and mentally the composite of humanity and machinery.<sup>15</sup> He represses his true impulses, as expressed by his independently minded hand, in favour of his mechanized logic. Thus, he is unfazed by his failure to prevent countless deaths, and can only be ecstatic at the possibilities his mind produces. His chillingly rational post-war plan of using computers to decide who dies and who lives in the mine shaft sex dungeons is fully embraced by the powerful men motivated by their primitive human impulses toward self-preservation and sexual domination over women. It is no coincidence that, at the end of the film, the world is almost saved by, of all things, a mechanical failure.

Kubrick does not offer any alternative solutions to the problems presented by the logical follies of deterrence and MAD. It is a case where, as *Time* magazine quipped, the "madness is the message."<sup>16</sup> The film hopes to prove that the atomic establishment, considered sacrosanct as the last defence of America in the nuclear age, had become irrational in it's intense reliance on rationality and could not be taken seriously. Through its satire, the film suggests that the people "owed reverence to no fixed authority, and that authority could even be disputed."<sup>17</sup> *Dr. Strangelove* is a highly sophisticated piece of social criticism which nihilistically portrays the logic of nuclear deterrence as dehumanizing to leaders and the public alike, and as

something which should be resisted if at all possible. The film ultimately attempts to show that MAD might best be the most appropriately conceived acronym in military history.

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from <http://copiousnotes.bloginky.com/2014/06/17/summer-classic-dr-strangelove-2/>



# VIOLENCE IN RURAL OIL BOOMTOWNS

David Cosolo

In the United States, the resource extraction industry has historically been associated with dramatic exploration, boom-bust cycles, and the lure of profit. The nature of the industry often results in the creation of *boomtowns* that experience sudden population and demographic changes. Violence often ensues in oil boomtowns in particular, as newcomers are not as “connected” to the region, and put a strain on the already low social services. Williston, North Dakota, located in the heart of the Bakken formation, is a 21st century boomtown, as new technologies have made this oil play economically viable. Though social ills associated with resource extraction occur elsewhere in the United States, including in the Appalachia region, Williston is a unique case study as its “boom” began in the midst of the Great Recession. Domestic disturbances, murder, prostitution, and crime have drastically risen in this town, as oil companies and migrant workers arrive in droves. Violence in the oil boomtown ultimately arises as a result of people’s relationship, or lack thereof, with the surrounding community. Newcomers are not invested in the town, its people, or even in the environment in which they are damaging, as their sole purpose in the region is for employment and monetary gain.

According to Covey and Menard, a boomtown is a formerly small or rural town that experiences significant population growth in a short period of time and subsequent social and economic challenges, as workers migrate for jobs.<sup>1</sup> The existence of resource boomtowns in North America is not a new phenomenon. Past examples include the California and Klondike gold rushes of the mid to late 1800s, the East Texas oil boom in the 1930s, and modern resource towns in Wyoming and Colorado.<sup>2</sup> One of the distinguishing features of resource booms, as opposed to manufacturing or real estate booms, is that they occur in sparsely populated areas, “far removed from

the main lines of transportation and communication.”<sup>3</sup> An oil boom, which is a specific type of resource boom, also has unique economic factors. Oil field work is typically more labour and capital intensive, and production is fast paced as a result of property laws and the physics of oil extraction.<sup>4</sup> Though there is debate over the value of population growth that quantifies a boomtown, the distinguishing feature is actually the characteristics of migrants.<sup>5</sup> Oil field labour typically attracts “young, single men who could bear up under grueling labour conditions that...allowed them to enjoy much higher wages than was otherwise available.”<sup>6</sup> In early boomtowns, these young workers often acquired a “rough and ready reputation,” however, the stereotype continues to exist today.<sup>7</sup>

Since the days of the “Wild West” and the advance of settlements along the American frontier, resource boomtowns have been associated with crime and deviance. Saloons, bar fights, and duels have all been romanticized in film depictions of this era. Historically, rates of violence, including homicide rates, in U.S. resource boomtowns have been much higher than in other western towns.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, researchers at the University of Montana found that between 1997 and 2008 two to three times as many registered sex offenders flocked to oil and gas boomtowns than counties dependent on recreation or agriculture in western Wyoming.<sup>9</sup> Ruddell believes that the resource boomtown will naturally have a much higher crime rate because it acquires an influx of young men with few ties to the community, as opposed to established families.<sup>10</sup> As residence time is often positively correlated with community involvement, low levels of community integration could result in greater fear of crime.<sup>11</sup> Long-time residents, who encounter significant community and social change, may experience this anxiety or perceived fear of crime more intensely than newcomers. Increased crime could also arise as a result of increased reporting by citizens, particularly established residents, as there are more strangers in town than before the boom.<sup>12</sup> Empirical evidence thus indicates that western resource boomtowns do exhibit greater levels of crime than regions that do not rely on resource extraction.

Williston is located in the heart of the Bakken formation and close to both the Montana and Canadian borders. The Bakken play has only recently become economically viable thanks to new technologies, including horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking. Skilled workers, oil hands, drill rigs, and general labourers have flocked to North Dakota and Williston in particular to take advantage of the boom; Williston’s population has tripled in the past decade alone.<sup>13</sup> Since 2008, the state has had

the lowest unemployment rate in the nation; as of October 2013, it sits at 2.7 percent.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, North Dakota now accounts for over 11 percent of U.S. crude oil production, making it the second largest oil producing state behind Texas.<sup>15</sup>

Though North Dakota has undergone oil booms before, Brown believes that the Bakken boom has “radically changed the subtext of the Dakota frontier from the Bitter Past That Was to the Better Future That May Yet Be.”<sup>16</sup> In the face of stagnant wages, decreased upward mobility, and slimmer job prospects since the Great Recession, this oil boom has been a boon for the state and its citizens. Fracking technology, which involves the fracturing of shale rock at depth using highly pressurized water, has allowed tight oil and gas plays across the U.S., including those in Pennsylvania and Texas, to become economically profitable. Thanks to this surprising turnaround, the energy industry has become the “shining star” of the American economy in the post-recession era. E.J. Schultz calls Williston “the town the recession forgot” and argues that it is a “living, breathing example of just how bad the economy is everywhere else.”<sup>17</sup> People from across the country are moving to Williston to work not only in the oil fields, but also in other service jobs, including McDonald’s, which offered a \$300.00 signing bonus as an incentive.<sup>18</sup> Although the town is booming economically, social challenges have arisen due to the population surge and service shortages.

Just as studies of previous boomtowns have indicated an increase in crime and deviance, Williston is also experiencing a recent surge in crime. As oil field labour tends to attract young men, there are a disproportionate number of men migrating to both the town and the state. In fact, in the three counties where the oil boom is centred, 2011 census data indicate that there are more than 1.6 young single men for every young single woman.<sup>19</sup> This demographic challenge poses a threat to the social fabric of Williston, as women have expressed fear and discomfort in their daily routine. Both police and prosecutors note that there has been a marked increase in crimes against women, including instances of domestic and sexual assaults.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, this population boom is resulting in severe housing shortages, as some migrants are resorting to sleeping in their cars, while locals struggle with higher monthly rent costs.<sup>21</sup> One partial solution to this issue has been the establishment of temporary “man camps” in Williston, although this only serves the need of the single male oil field worker. Living conditions are still a concern for migrant women and families as well as long-term, pre-boom residents.

Aside from the demographic challenges, the population surge has also impacted law enforcement. A study by North Dakota State University analyzed how the oil boom was affecting the work of police officers in western North Dakota. Common issues include difficulty in reaching emergencies and 911 calls (due to endless construction, out-of-date maps, and backed up roads); a high turnover rate among young officers; an increase in domestic disturbances (housing shortages force many people to live in close and cramped quarters); and the high rate of bar fights, domestic violence, and drinking and driving.<sup>22</sup> Bars and strip clubs provide the sole method of entertainment in Williston. Even popular chains such as Target or Starbucks are not investing in the town, as there is currently a service-industry labour shortage because most labourers are working in the oil fields.<sup>23</sup> Violence is exacerbated as a result of the lack of investment in the town: migrant workers are making significant money in the region yet investing it out of state or back home. Thus, social services, including housing, health care, and public schools, are not being improved for the long term, and crime continues to escalate.

This narrative has occurred before in the U.S., and the destructive end result is currently playing out in the coalfields of Appalachia. When coalmines close, they leave behind a desolate landscape and forlorn former employees, as seen in *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*.<sup>24</sup> Because tight oil has been deemed “cleaner” than coal, the Bakken has become the new domestic extractive hotspot: as one industry collapses, another begins. Though the West Virginia coalmines supported generations of jobs and employment, and the Bakken has been very short term in comparison, both regions have been shaped by the extraction industry.

From a macro perspective, energy companies arrive, strip the region of its resources, and leave once said resource has been depleted. This is paralleled on a micro level in a boomtown like Williston, where oil workers come in, strip the town of its resources (such as housing and healthcare) and leave once they have made enough money. In both scenarios, there is little to no investment or money spent in the either the town or the region. Southern West Virginia has already experienced this phenomenon, while Williston is currently experiencing it. Though towns and regions have provided for energy companies and their employees, these energy companies have not provided the town with self-sustaining infrastructure, such as transit, hospitals, or schools. Violence thus exists as a result of this destructive, almost

parasitic, relationship between people, or corporations, and the land, or resource belts, in which they operate.

Historical examples of this relationship in the U.S. include settlers taking land from natives in the West, agricultural companies exploiting seasonal workers in Immokalee, Florida, or steel manufacturers closing factories in Pittsburgh. Violence occurs when people do not have a deeper connection to the land. In the above examples, companies are in particular regions to harvest a crop, extract a resource, or manufacture a good, but rarely are they more deeply invested in the city or town. In the case of Williston, oil workers are not connected to the larger community, to their neighbours, or even to the environment in which they work; they too are there solely for employment and monetary reasons. Therefore, it is regions like these that are susceptible to violence. Boomtowns like Williston are further inclined to experience crime, as workers do not envision themselves staying in town for the long term. Rather, they are there for the lure of quick money and an immediate job.

Violence in the rural oil boomtown arises as a result of the relationship, or the lack thereof, between people and the land/setting they are a part of. Using Williston, ND, as a case study, violence is seen in increased homicide rates, domestic disturbances, and sexual assaults. A lack of investment by both newcomers and their employers – oil companies – systematically breeds violence, as the town is stripped of its social services, infrastructure, and natural resources. This energy boom has allowed North Dakota to thrive in today’s postindustrial economy and has sparked promise of a new relationship between its inhabitants and the resource extraction industry. North Dakotans have been here in the past, but the oil bubble always burst too quickly. This time, locals believe the boom will be different. After all, “This is the boom being managed by local people certain they know how to look after their interests and safeguard the land they live on. This is the Big One that North Dakota has been waiting for more than a century.”<sup>25</sup>

#### Notes

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from [http://media.thinkadvisor.com/advisorene/article/2013/03/26/Oil\\_Derrick\\_MI.jpg](http://media.thinkadvisor.com/advisorene/article/2013/03/26/Oil_Derrick_MI.jpg)



government's tax revenue increased from \$13 million to \$50 million. The revenue the federal government received from the income tax increased from \$13 million to \$50 million, in one year.<sup>9</sup>

The 1943 *Current Tax Payment Act* introduced the withholding system to collect the income tax.<sup>10</sup> Previously, individuals paid their income tax for the year through quarterly installments paid over following year.<sup>11</sup> Because of the immediate need for money for the war, however, the Treasury Department implemented the withholding system for income tax.<sup>12</sup> This allowed the government to receive its money faster it also removed the individual responsibility of citizens to plan ahead and save for the quarterly payments.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, withholding made the income tax "hidden" and "routine".<sup>14</sup>

The Treasury Department, with the help of the Office of War Information, undertook a massive advertising campaign, in an attempt to explain and legitimize the tax to the public.<sup>15</sup> The campaign justified the tax by connecting it to the war effort; taxes were needed to "beat the Axis".<sup>16</sup> The sacrifice of paying income taxes was compared to the greater sacrifice of American soldiers.<sup>17</sup> Despite the compulsory nature of the income tax, propaganda portrayed the income tax as something individuals chose willingly.<sup>18</sup> The payment of the income tax was portrayed as a civic duty. The Treasury Board utilized some of the emerging forms of media to get these messages across.

In the early 1940s, roughly 80 million Americans, two-thirds of the population, went to the movie theater at least once a week.<sup>19</sup> Hoping to reach this audience, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau asked Walt Disney to create a short film explaining the income tax.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of the film was to justify the expansion of the tax base, by showing that the money generated from the income tax would go towards funding the war effort. Additionally, the withholding system had not yet been implemented for the tax. The Treasury Department hoped to encourage Americans to pay their installments before the due date, allowing the government to receive tax funds sooner. Morgenthau believed that the best way to achieve acceptance of the tax was to utilize popular culture. He privately remarked that "if we can get people to pay taxes with that God-awful Mickey Mouse, we will have arrived socially".<sup>21</sup>

*The New Spirit* was completed early in 1942. In the short film, a radio convinces Donald Duck to pay his taxes. Donald then runs all the way from Hollywood to Washington, D.C., eager to get his tax dollars to the government. The film depicts how tax dollars fund the production of planes, tanks and ships, which are eventually seen destroying their counterparts from the

Axis. The film ends with the Star Spangled Banner shown in a sunset, as the narrator explains that "taxes will keep democracy on the march".<sup>22</sup>

*The New Spirit* had four significant messages. First, it showed that income taxes were used to fund production for the war effort. The radio informs Donald, "Your country needs taxes for guns. Taxes for ships. Taxes for democracy. Taxes to beat the Axis".<sup>23</sup> The Roosevelt administration stated that revenue collected from increased income taxes would not go towards New Deal programs.<sup>24</sup> This statement was intended to remove the possibility of political opposition to New Deal programs would affect the popularity of the tax. While Americans disagreed about the New Deal programs, there was significantly less opposition to funding the war effort.<sup>25</sup>

*The New Spirit* connected the payment of taxes with one's civic duty. "Are you a patriotic American? Eager to do your part", the radio questions Donald.<sup>26</sup> Going even further, the radio says that paying your taxes is "your privilege. Not just your duty. But your privilege."<sup>27</sup> In this way, the income tax was portrayed as something Americans must proudly do as good citizens.

*The New Spirit* tried to draw on and promote the spirit of a unified citizenry working together for the common good. By paying taxes, people can "show the world that this Yankee-Doodle spirit is ours, its yours, its mine."<sup>28</sup> "This is our fight", the narrator continues, "The fight for freedom: freedom of speech, of worship, freedom from want and fear."<sup>29</sup> *The New Spirit* posited that Americans were "united again"<sup>30</sup> in their fight for freedom, for which taxes were a vital component.

Finally, *The New Spirit* tried to portray the process of filing one's income tax return as something easy to complete. While Donald has gathered various tools to file his tax return, including a bottle of aspirin, the radio tells Donald that filling out the tax form is "simple".<sup>31</sup> All Donald needs is writing utensils and the form itself.

*The New Spirit* premiered in theaters in the spring of 1942.<sup>32</sup> By April, 32 million Americans had viewed it in over 12,000 theaters.<sup>33</sup> According to a Gallup poll, 37% of viewers said the film increased their willingness to pay the income tax.<sup>34</sup> Because of its success, the Treasury Department commissioned a follow-up film in 1943.<sup>35</sup>

The income tax significantly affected the lives of Americans during the war. While the withholding system attempted to hide the tax, Americans could not help but notice that their net wages had fallen and had to budget accordingly. The term "Take-home pay" was introduced into the American vocabulary.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, despite *The New Spirit's* assurance of its simplic-

ity, the process of completing and filing tax returns confused the majority of Americans.<sup>37</sup>

The income tax also altered the relationship between Americans and their federal government. The federal government's role in the everyday lives of Americans expanded and Americans increasingly became more aware of what was happening in Washington.<sup>38</sup> Through the withholding system, the federal government became directly involved in transactions between individuals and their employers. The federal government's spending as a percent of GDP rose dramatically, while the combined spending of individual states declined.<sup>39</sup> In *The New Spirit*, Donald runs to Washington and not his state government.<sup>40</sup> Americans increasingly looked to Washington and not their local or state governments for assistance.

Finally, scholars have noted that war often redefines a country and what it means to be a citizen of a country.<sup>41</sup> War also unites citizens under a common cause.<sup>42</sup> The income tax did both these things. As the sacrifice of paying taxes was compared to the sacrifice of the soldiers, paying income taxes became an accepted part of one's civic duty.<sup>43</sup> The tax redefined what it meant to be an American citizen and united taxpayers to soldiers, both sacrificing for a common goal. During the war, Americans were overwhelmingly willing to pay their taxes. Ninety percent believed the taxes was "fair"<sup>44</sup> and there was very little worry about tax evasion.<sup>45</sup>

*The New Spirit* and similar propaganda legitimized the new income-tax system for Americans. The payment of the income tax was tied to the war effort and portrayed as a civic duty. While the war sold the tax<sup>46</sup>, the end of the war did not bring an end to the income tax system. The income tax remains a "mass tax" and is still viewed as an element of what it means to be a citizen.<sup>47</sup> The withholding system continues to be an accepted part of American life and the federal government continues to collect a significant percent of GDP in taxes.<sup>48</sup> This revenue is used to maintain high levels of funding for the military and various social programs. The consensus that paying taxes is worthwhile, which existed during the war and which films like *The New Spirit* helped to foster, has been diminished, however. While Americans continue to accept they have to pay taxes, they are unhappy with the income tax rate<sup>49</sup> and increasingly skeptical of the federal government's power.<sup>50</sup> Creating a broad-based consensus among citizens on the proper role for the federal government and the levels of taxation and spending continues to be a challenge for modern day American policymakers and legislators.

## Notes

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5. Jones, Buffalo Law Review, 719.
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7. Bank et al, 97.
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25. A Gallup poll from the time shows that 97% of Americans supported the country's involvement in WWII. See Moore, David W., Support for War on Terrorism Rivals Support for WWII, GALLUP (2001).
26. Disney, 1:17.
27. Disney, 2:02.
28. Disney, 0:41.
29. Disney, 6:44.
30. Disney, 1:00.
31. Disney, 2:55.
32. Jones, Buffalo Law Review, 717.
33. Jones, Buffalo Law Review, 717.
34. Jones, Buffalo Law Review, 717.
35. Walt Disney Studios, *The Spirit of '43*, Internet Archives: WWII Archive, (1943).
36. Jones, Buffalo Law Review, 730.
37. Bank et al, 98.
38. Irvin Berlin's *I Paid My Income Tax Today*, a song commissioned by the Treasury Department in 1941, also alluded to this greater connection between Americans and their federal government. Before paying income taxes, Berlin claimed that "I never cared what Congress spent. But now I'll watch over ev'ry cent. Examine ev'ry bill they pay. They'll have to let me have my say." See Robertson, Dick, *I Paid My Income Tax Today*, Internet Archives (1942).
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Loller, Travis, AP, *Many Illegal Immigrants Pay Up at Tax Time*, USA Today, (April, 2008) and Kasperkevic, Jana, *Illegal Immigrants: We Do Pay Taxes, And the Government Knows Exactly Who We Are*, Business Insider, (March 16, 2012).

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-1wr8la0NNzA/Ur\\_ypCbK7QI/AAAAAAAAAqt8/3EM5jzwE5Qg/s1600/1942+TAX-ES+AXIS.png](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-1wr8la0NNzA/Ur_ypCbK7QI/AAAAAAAAAqt8/3EM5jzwE5Qg/s1600/1942+TAX-ES+AXIS.png)



# SURVIVAL OF THE SLICKEST

*AUTOMOBILE ADVERTISING IN 1950S AMERICA*

Murad Hemmadi

According to Pierre Martineau the automobile, “tells us who we are and what we think we want to be. It is a portable symbol of our personality and our position, the clearest way we have of telling people of our exact position.”<sup>1</sup> The analysis of Martineau, director of market research for the *Chicago Tribune*, is an apt reflection of the way cars were viewed in the 1950s, a decade marked by extravagance and constant change in the world of automobile design and sales. The automobile advertising of the decade, too, reflects Martineau’s sentiments, emphasizing form and status over performance and practicality. Indeed, the difference between the advertising strategies used by independent automakers, as exemplified by Nash Motors, and those used by the Big Three automobile manufacturers (Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors) in the 1950s reflects both the disparity in size between the two types of companies and, more generally, the way in which American consumers saw automobiles as key indicators of position and lifestyle.<sup>2</sup>

If automobiles were a reflection of how Americans perceived themselves and their society, then advertisements were the means by which the public and automakers communicated what it was they saw. Rob Schorman calls the automotive and advertising industries, “almost inseparable partners in creating modern American consumer culture,” and indeed much of the automobile advertising of the 1950s reflects prevailing societal concerns and priorities — modernity, progress, size, and status.<sup>3</sup> The ubiquity of the advertising though, was driven by an entirely capitalistic concern — from the 1920s onwards, automobile advertising was designed not to convince people to buy a car, or even to buy a *specific* car, but to convince them to replace their current car with a newer, more ‘advanced’ model, in order

to sustain sales and profits in a market which by the 1950s seemed close to saturation.<sup>4</sup>

What did American consumers want from their automobiles in the 1950s? General Motors (GM) CEO Alfred P. Sloan decided in the aftermath of World War II that the answer was, “styling first, automatic transmissions second, and high-compression engines third.”<sup>5</sup> These priorities can be seen reflected in ads for GM’s two signature brands, Cadillac and Chevrolet. Though they operated in very different categories — Chevrolet was the car of blue-collar workers and young families, Cadillac the choice of the rich — the two brands’ ads in the August 15, 1955 issue of *LIFE* magazine together encompass Sloan’s three priorities. The Cadillac ad boasts of ‘styling the whole world admires,’ while the Chevrolet ad, buried 40 pages further into the issue than its more prestigious counterpart, highlights the car’s engine and transmission.<sup>6</sup>

Both of these advertisements also emphasize the model year, 1955. This was part of the system known as planned obsolescence, in which rapid changes in styling and minor changes in performance were used to persuade consumers to trade for newer, more ‘advanced’ models.<sup>7</sup> Planned obsolescence was at its peak in the 1950s, and aesthetic change was key to the success of this economic and consumer practice. Karal Ann Marling points out that such superficial differences led to an frenzy of automobile purchases that, “showed that the public was moved largely by aesthetic and imagistic considerations, and [made] General Motors ... the first corporation to earn a billion dollars in a single year by catering to such appetites.”<sup>8</sup> Superficial modifications also included changes to size; a 1953 Chrysler ad highlighting the, “new low look! New long look! New lovely look!” is indicative of this trend, as are the changes in dimensions between the 1946 and 1959 Chevrolet’s, with the new model 13 inches longer, seven inches wider and 10 inches lower than its ancestor.<sup>9</sup> With more space came new gadgets and amenities, some of which became standard offerings. Air-conditioning was one such add-on, which went from, “a luxury at the beginning of the decade” to standard on the 1955 model of even a small, independent automaker like Nash.<sup>10</sup>

The target audience of the automobile advertising of the 1950s varied by class but was almost uniform in gender. The car of the 1950s, which Marling describes as, “a chorus girl coming, a fighter plane going” was unabashedly marketed to men and designed for them.<sup>11</sup> Where allowances were made for the preferences and choices of women, they came in the form of automakers

emphasizing, “the fashion and beauty of their cars by comparing them to the latest in women’s fashions.”<sup>12</sup> Women did appear in many 1950s automobile ads, but usually as props to which the cars advertised could be compared. The 1955 Cadillac ad that uses an extravagantly-dressed woman essentially as a clotheshorse and the blushing bride of Chrysler’s 1957 ad who, like the car, “honors and obeys you,” are two instances of this trend.<sup>13</sup> Some advertisements broke from this fashion-and-fidelity stereotype, notably a 1959 ad which seems to suggest, with the young woman lying on the grass picking at a typewriter in front of a Chevy, that the, “style, room, comfort and performance” of the car in question were designed at least partly with a female operator in mind.<sup>14</sup> But for the most part 1950s automobile advertising catered heavily to the bread-winning, decision-making man of the house, the man who Cadillac promised in 1957 to give a, “new outlook when he first views the world through the windshield of his own Cadillac car.”<sup>15</sup>

The automobile advertisements of the 1950s by and large were what Schorman calls ‘atmospheric advertisements,’ relying on visual and indirect appeals based on associations with luxury, social status, and a glamorous lifestyle.<sup>16</sup> The Cadillac ads of 1955, which share a basic design structure and theme, are one campaign that fits this ‘atmospheric’ mold. The ads all feature rich and successful-looking subjects, usually couples, in social settings, with comparisons drawn implicitly between the status of the people in the advertisements’ pictures and the vehicle being promoted.<sup>17</sup>

Status was key to the role of automobiles in 1950s America; owning a car did not itself confer status as it perhaps did before World War II. By 1959, over two-thirds of American families owned an automobile.<sup>18</sup> Distinction came rather from *what* car a family owned. Cadillac ads understandably emphasized this factor, since Cadillacs were positioned as the car of the wealthy. The 1953 ad that used precious stones by famed New York jeweler Harry Winston to pick out the signature Cadillac ‘V’ denote opulence and status, while the evidently-wealthy couple in a 1954 ad for the same brand — the wife wearing what appears to be a diamond tiara — it is suggested, almost certain to own a Cadillac because, “the vast majority of outstanding people at outstanding events arrive ... in Cadillacs.”<sup>19</sup> Automakers were keen to ensure that their products also seem accessible, since the intent was to cause consumers to trade up for a more expensive car to show off newfound wealth or status, rather than to drive away customers who could not conceive of owning a luxury vehicle. Accordingly, the Cadillac was, “portrayed as the everyman’s luxury car, exclusive but within the reach of nearly every-

one in an era of rising income.” The well-dressed man and woman in a 1955 ad who have apparently decided to see if, “this will be the year” they buy a Cadillac are meant to represent every ambitious, aspiring young couple who dreamt of owning a top-of-the-line automobile.<sup>20</sup>

Automobiles were aspirational devices, objects of desire. But in the 1950s, they were also equalizers, as automakers created models that met middle-class price points while including features that had previously been the preserve of upper-class models.<sup>21</sup> The couple washing their Bel Air Sport Coupe could be as proud of their Chevy, GM’s advertising suggested, as the sophisticates standing poolside in a 1956 ad were of their Cadillacs.<sup>22</sup> The sociologist David Gartman, in his polemic against ‘Fordist society,’ suggests that this equalizing factor was artificial and self-serving. Real class divisions and differences existed in the 1950s, but “an America in which the working man’s Chevrolet closely resembled the rich man’s Cadillac was a society that could unabashedly call itself ‘classless.’”<sup>23</sup> Whether real or artificial, the aspirational and equalizing effects of automobile ownership were key to most automobile advertising by major automakers in the 1950s.

Nash Motors, an independent automaker, took a markedly different tack in its publicity campaigns. Nash favoured the ‘reason-why’ advertisement, enumerating the practical qualities and capabilities of its vehicles where brands like Cadillac or Chrysler focused solely on the lifestyle and status associations of their cars. A 1950 ad in *LIFE* for the Nash Airflyte showed three different Nash models, a rarity at a time when most magazine automobile advertising focused on a single model of a single brand. The ad boasts of fuel economy and automatic transmissions, hardly the sexiest or most emotionally appealing of characteristics.<sup>24</sup> Even when attempts were made at ‘atmospheric’ advertisements, the goal appears to have been explaining the qualities of the car, rather than letting suggestion and style dictate the viewer’s opinion. Witness the 1956 ad in which Nash calls its Ambassador model, “too hot to hold ‘til ’57,” but then goes onto emphasize the roominess of the interior and strength of the body rather than the sexiness implied by the word ‘hot.’<sup>25</sup> The 1950 and 1956 ads also exhibit a difference that separated the corporate culture — and therefore the advertising strategy — of Nash from the major automakers. Nash seems to have no room for planned or design obsolescence, emphasizing instead its signature unit-body design that it claims leads to a car body that, “stays new years longer.”<sup>26</sup>

Nash’s insistence on the longevity of its cars is understandable given the costs associated with creating and promoting new models. Gartman sug-

gests that, “a major body change could cost \$200 million, while an off-year face-lift could run up a \$50-million bill.”<sup>27</sup> When, in response to the apparent saturation of the market, the Big Three automakers shortened the cycle on major body-changes from three years to two, independent automakers like Nash were financially unable to compete. The emphasis on the modern-ness of its cars was therefore an attempt to preserve their competitiveness against the constantly-changing models of major manufacturers.

Development costs were not the only area in which independent automakers like Nash faced significant disadvantages. Nash arguably suffered because of its advertising style, losing market share and profits at least partly by using a ‘reasons-why’ strategy while the major automakers were gaining in production numbers and share with their ‘atmospheric’ and aspirational ads.<sup>28</sup> But Nash also struggled in the competition for consumers’ attention because of a low volume of advertising. The company’s \$10 million outlay on ads in 1953 would have been good enough to rank on the *Advertising Age* list of the nation’s top hundred largest national advertisers, which Martin Mayer referred to in *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.*<sup>29</sup> But that advertising budget is tiny compared to the \$162 million Mayer says General Motors spent on advertising just three years later.<sup>30</sup> Despite spending far less in total on advertising than its Big Three competitors, Nash actually spent more per car sold — \$19.50 per car to six dollars for Chevrolet and eight dollars for Chrysler-brand Plymouth.<sup>31</sup> Financial constraints also meant that Nash and other independent automakers could not develop expensive technology themselves, being forced instead to buy engines and transmissions from General Motors.<sup>32</sup> Thus when Nash advertised its ‘blazing V-8 power’ in 1956, it was really advertising GM’s engine-building achievements.<sup>33</sup>

Following the lifting of Korean War-price controls in 1953, the major Detroit automakers engaged in a game of market brinkmanship, attempting to build market share and exploit their untapped manufacturing capacity.<sup>34</sup> That alone was enough to drop the market share of independent automakers to 4.4 per cent from just over 10 per cent at the start of the decade.<sup>35</sup> The 1975 report of civil servants Stanley E. Boyle and Thomas F. Hogarty suggests that a further factor was in effect: price collusion between the major automakers.<sup>36</sup> Independent automakers were thus undercut not just by lower volumes and higher relative costs, but also by the intentional collective action of their larger rivals.

In 1958, the style-first, planned obsolescence-driven model of automobile manufacturing and advertising came to a crashing halt. Only a total of

4.3 million American automobiles were sold, against a high of 7.9 million in 1955.<sup>37</sup> Two major cultural factors appear to have precipitated this collapse in sales. The first was the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik. Space and the unspecified ‘future’ were key influences and tropes in American automobile design and advertising. Chrysler in particular emphasized that it was the ‘Year-Ahead Car,’ the ‘Forward Look.’<sup>38</sup> The fins that were arguably the most emblematic stylistic feature of 1950s automobiles were inspired by the aesthetic of rocketry and planes.<sup>39</sup> But the Soviet satellite launch was a jarring recall to reality, a fillip to the technological superiority that the U.S. had supposedly established in consumer goods, as exhibited in the infamous ‘kitchen debate.’<sup>40</sup> Sputnik, according to Marling, “made everybody queasy about fiddling with annual model changes, color charts, and cosmetic engineering while the enemy was investing in serious rocketry.”<sup>41</sup> The failure of the Edsel, Ford’s greatest hope for the 1958 model year, contributed to this downturn in interest in aesthetics.

The second factor was more consumer-driven, and Nash-successor American Motors was able to show, as chronicler Charles K. Hyde suggests that, “given the choice, many consumers preferred smaller automobiles.”<sup>42</sup> It seems that car-buyers simply got tired of the one-huge-size-fits-all automobile offerings from earlier in the decade. Bill Tara, a GM advertising agent, ascribed the desire for smaller cars to, “consumer attempts to find automotive individuality.”<sup>43</sup> It had not always been so; Nash’s attempts to emphasize individuality by promoting the ‘continental look’ of its Pinin Farina (of Ferrari fame) – designed 1952 Golden Airflyte met with reduced sales.<sup>44</sup> Still, by 1958 consumers were looking for individuality, not just vacuous style, and the existing offerings of Big Three and independent automakers alike were failing to meet those requirements. The era of style- and aspiration-based advertisements had drawn to a close, though Madison Avenue would continue play a vital role in the American economy in other sectors.

Thus automobile advertising in the 1950s provides a compelling perspective from which to view American consumer culture in the era. The automobile was the central show the post-war culture of consumption, and the annual model change wrought by planned obsolescence was its main storyline. “However monotonous life was on the job or in the suburbs, Americans could always count on the fall introduction of new models” — and their attendant advertising — “to generate some excitement.”<sup>45</sup>

## Notes

1. Quoted in Karal Ann Marling, “*Autoeroticism: America’s Love Affair with the Car in the Television Age*,” in *As Seen on TV: the Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 136–137.
2. The Big Three US automakers are Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors, though only the first and last of these will be addressed here.
3. Rob Schorman, “*This Astounding Car for \$1,500’: The Year Automobile Advertising Came of Age*,” *Enterprise Society* 11(3) (2010): 469. doi: 10.1093/es/khp108
4. Pamela Walker Laird, “*The Car without a Single Weakness’: Early Automobile Advertising*,” *Technology and Culture* 37(4) (October, 1996): 807. <http://jstor.org/stable/3107098>; J. Ronald Oakley, *God’s Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Dembner Books, 1986), 239.
5. David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 122.
6. Cadillac, Advertisement, *Life* 39(7) (August 15, 1955): 78.; Chevrolet. Advertisement, *Life* 39(7) (August 15, 1955): 117.
7. Oakley, *God’s Country*, 240.
8. Marling, “Autoeroticism,” 144–145.
9. The Chrysler ad is also notable for being one of the few in this era published in black and white. A plurality of magazine advertising for automobile was in colour during this period; Chrysler Corporation. Advertisement, *National Geographic* 97(3) (March 1950); David Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 154.
10. Oakley, *God’s Country*, 240; Nash Motors, Advertisement, *Life* 38(25) (June 20, 1955): 5.
11. Marling, “Autoeroticism,” 141.
12. Gartman, *Auto Opium*, 166.
13. Cadillac. Advertisement, August 15, 1955; Chevrolet. Advertisement, *Life* 39(7) (August 15, 1955): 117.
14. Chevrolet, Advertisement, *Life* 46(10) (March 9, 1959): 25.
15. Cadillac, Advertisement, *National Geographic* 111(4) (April 1957).
16. Schorman, “*This Astounding Car for \$1,500*,” 473.
17. Cadillac, Advertisement, *National Geographic* 107(2) (February 1955).; Cadillac, Advertisement, *Life* 38(9) (February 28, 1955): 12.; Cadillac, Advertisement, *Life* 38(26) (June 27, 1955): 10; Cadillac, Advertisement, August 15, 1955.

18. Gartman, Auto Opium, 170.
19. Cadillac, Advertisement, Life 34(13) (March 30, 1953): 11.; Cadillac, Advertisement, Life 37(12) (September 20, 1954): 124.
20. Cadillac, Advertisement, February 1955.
21. Gartman, Auto Opium, 156.
22. Chevrolet, Advertisement, National Geographic 112(2) (August 1957); Cadillac, Advertisement, Life 40(22) (May 28, 1956): 98.
23. Gartman, Auto Opium, 156–157.
24. Nash Motors, Advertisement, Life 28(21) (May 22, 1950): 59. <http://www.oldcaradvertising.com/Nash%20Ads/1950/1950%20Nash%20Ad-05.jpg>
25. Nash Motors, Advertisement, Life 40(22) (May 28, 1956): 91.
26. Charles K. Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers: Nash, Hudson, and American Motors* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 252; Nash Motors, Advertisement, May 22, 1950.
27. Gartman, Auto Opium, 142.
28. For falling Nash outputs, see Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers*, 65; For rising Big Three market share, see Oakley, *God's Country*, 240.
29. "Television-Radio: Small Nash Cut to Local AM-TV Ads," *The Billboard* 65(15) (April 11, 1953): 3. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040188323?accountid=14771>; Martin Mayer, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.* (New York: Cardinal Giant, 1959), 25.
30. Myer, *Madison Avenue*, 26.
31. Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers*, 97.
32. Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers*, 87–88.
33. Nash Motors, Advertisement, Life 40(25) (June 18, 1956): 134.
34. Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers*, 96–97
35. Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers*, 85–86.
36. Stanley E. Boyle & Thomas F. Hogarty, "Pricing Behaviour in the American Automobile Industry, 1957–71," *The Journal of Industrial Economics*, 24(2) (December 1975): 81–95.
37. Oakley, *God's Country*, 239–241.
38. Chrysler Corporation, Advertisement, Life 40(12) (March 19, 1956): 172.; Chrysler Corporation, Advertisement. Life 40(22) (May 28, 1956): 64.; Chrysler Corporation, Advertisement, Life 38(16) (April 18, 1955): 172–173.
39. Gartman, Auto Opium, 159.
40. Gartman, Auto Opium, 138.

41. Marling, "Autoeroticism," 133.
42. Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers*, 254.
43. Gartman, Auto Opium, 172.
44. Nash Motors, Advertisement, Life 33(5) (August 4, 1952): 41; Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers*, 83.
45. Gartman, Auto Opium, 157

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from <http://www.oldcaradvertising.com/Nash%20Ads/1952/1952%20Nash%20Ad-05.jpg>



# MY BODY IS A CAGE

*THE PRISON AND ITS EFFECTS ON  
AFRICAN-AMERICANS*

Dahlia James

Albert Einstein once said that, “the environment is everything that isn’t me.”<sup>1</sup> While one may not readily contest the scientific validity of this statement, Einstein was mistaken when it comes to the social binary between humans and the environment. Indeed, the two are inseparable. A defining characteristic of space is that one’s environment is inherently social — humans shape the various geographies that surround them, and likewise, those geographies shape humans. The reality of geographical relationships is twofold — they can wield both a positive and negative influence over peoples’ lives. However, some are inherently negative and induce violence on the humans that regularly come into contact with said geography. In many cases, the most destructive form of this violence is structural violence, which constitutes a form of harm that restricts its victims from exercising their own agency within society, such as racism. It is often inescapable, as it is embedded in a nation’s societal institutions. A prime example of a violent geography is the prison, as it occupies both a physical and social space that separates it from the rest of society in order to cleanse said society of impurities. In attempting to do so, the prison perpetuates the negative connotation of its inmates, and thereby, commits structural violence. Accordingly, the American prison is a geography that is both a product and producer of structural violence due to its systematic racism. It affects all African-Americans: those that have been prisoners, the families and communities of prisoners, as well as African-Americans at-large.

The American prison is produced by structural violence in two ways:

firstly, through the state-sanctioned racial bias against African Americans, and secondly, through the economic benefit that the prison yields at the expense of individuals susceptible to its grasp. This population demographic being overwhelmingly comprised of African Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The state-sponsored 'War on Drugs' has been the most salient reason for the racial bias that has resulted in an overwhelming percentage of incarceration of the African American population. The 'War', announced in 1982 by President Ronald Reagan, was purportedly meant to combat the use of crack-cocaine<sup>3</sup>, and decrease drug use among American youth by shifting the government's attention from white-collar crime to street crime; it involved a massive increase in law enforcement budgets.<sup>4</sup> Despite its public rhetoric, the 'War' was yet another attempt (albeit an effective one) to continue the pattern of institutionalized racism against African Americans, following the historical footsteps of slavery, Jim Crow, and the urban ghetto.<sup>5</sup> It intended to sensationalize the use of illicit street drugs among African Americans<sup>6</sup>, and accordingly, react with punitive measures for crimes that were in fact more rampant among white people.<sup>7</sup>

Over the last thirty years, as politicians ingratiated themselves with the votes of working-class whites, whose economic status was insecure and felt threatened by how racial reforms would affect them, the most potent remnant of the 'War' has been mass incarceration of African Americans.<sup>8</sup> The forced segregation of African Americans into the prison and out of society's way was a governmental creation – the allocation of funding for housing of the urban poor was radically transformed. Finances that had once been used for public housing was redirected to prison construction<sup>9</sup>, and President Clinton made it easier for federally subsidized housing projects to reject anyone with a criminal history with his "One Strike and You're Out" Initiative.<sup>10</sup> This substantially changed the geographical position of many African Americans by allowing the prison to be the only space that they were permitted within society. In this vein, the prison is the new provider of American public housing.

Furthermore, the racial bias of mass incarceration is even more forceful when conceiving of the prison as a "judicial ghetto", according to Loïc Wacquant.<sup>11</sup> The urban ghetto is now rendered obsolete – the 1960s marked a shift of the economy from urban and industrial to suburban and service-based, thereby qualifying the ghetto workforce as unnecessary.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the state was coerced to dismantle the legal machinery of caste exclusion, but it emerged with a new face as the prison.<sup>13</sup> Wacquant outlines four elements

that the ghetto and prison share: "stigma, constraint, territorial confinement, and institutional encasement."<sup>14</sup> With this guideline, the parallels between the ghetto and prison are clear; both serve as a reserved space, which serves to confine a legally denigrated population that develops its own institutions and identity based on the framework of broader society.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, like the ghetto, the prison cleanses society of the temporary imperfection of its crime-committing members<sup>16</sup>, in both a physical and social capacity. The former functions to create a tangible separation between those members and broader society, while the latter functions to 'heal' the wrongdoers of their destructive behavior. Also, it attempts to serve as a frightful deterrent for those who may engage in such behavior in the future.

An additional way in which structural violence produces the American prison is via the economic incentives that the prison holds for the state at the expense of African Americans. While African Americans are not the only group of individuals who are susceptible to the encroachment of the prison system, they comprise an overwhelming percentage of those incarcerated.<sup>17</sup>

The prison is a means of solving economic problems. Ruth Wilson Gilmore provides an effective analysis in the article "Globalization and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian Militarism." by examination of California's prison system. A few examples elucidate how the prison served as a remedy for the nation's economic woes as military Keynesianism came to an end. An abundance of vacant land in the 1980s and 1990s provided space for prison infrastructure<sup>18</sup>, which allowed the prison to flourish. Also, the prison was one space that could garner public support for public spending in the wake of a tax revolt. "The prison fix"<sup>19</sup> allowed for the post-Keynesian government to persuade voters of the importance of taxation and the public debt in order to curb crime.<sup>20</sup> "The prison fix" also applies to the prison as a place of employment – benefiting the nation's economy as a fix for surplus labor by requiring employees, such as prison guards and construction workers.<sup>21</sup> Through this ideology or system, the success of incarcerating prisoners is conducive to the economic success of the nation.

Also, the prison functions as a space to store those of the African American working-class who can only get menial jobs.<sup>22</sup> The prison shares this economic dimension with other "peculiar institutions"<sup>23</sup> or racial caste systems, such as Jim Crow and slavery. While a chief difference between the prison institution and past racial caste systems is that the former does not function as a positive economic mission of recruiting and disciplining

the workforce,<sup>24</sup> the prison is increasingly closer to mirroring previous forms of slavery. Amidst growing financial and political pressure, there is interest in introducing mass unskilled work in private enterprises within American prisons – doing so would lower America’s incarceration costs and impose on inmates the workfare requirements necessary to citizenship that are imposed upon the un-incarcerated poor.<sup>25</sup> This behavior allows for the reconciliation between inequality and capitalism by filtering those on the periphery into a separate space. For a variety of reasons, most notably how often parole violations are invoked, it is extremely difficult to stay out of prison once you have already been incarcerated.<sup>26</sup> As a result, the prison will remain as a fix, and the vicious cycle of incarceration and economic benefit will continue for African-Americans and the nation (or government – whichever word you would prefer), respectively. The American prison produces violence in two ways. Firstly, by inflicting it on the individual that it housed, and secondly, by inflicting it on entire communities that have connection to the individual incarcerated. The suffering is not restricted to the prison confines; the effects of incarceration are disastrous even when the individual is physically exonerated and attempts to re-enter the social compact. It induces “civic death”, a forceful example of structural violence as it deprives the individual from engaging in various societal activities within the nation that any ‘regular’ citizen possesses the rights to exercise.<sup>27</sup> “Civic death” manifests itself in various ways. The individual is denied “cultural capital” by being barred from certain access to education.<sup>28</sup> The individual is excluded from multiple forms of social redistribution and public aid<sup>29</sup> – housing discrimination against people branded as felons or as well as suspected criminals is legal, while individuals with drug-related felony convictions are permanently barred by-law from receiving federally funded public assistance.<sup>30</sup> Political participation is severely hindered as thirty-nine states forbid convicts on probation from exercising their political rights, which has resulted in the inability of nearly 4 million Americans to cast a ballot.<sup>31</sup> Any sort of economic accumulation is curbed when considering the employment and debt ramifications. Nearly every state allows for private employers to discriminate on the basis of past criminal convictions, yet all states require parolees to “maintain gainful employment.”<sup>32</sup> To make matters worse, African American ex-offenders are the most disadvantaged of the job market.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, as mandated by every state, newly released prisoners are required to make payments to a slew of justice department agencies, and since most ex-offenders are unable to pay them, they have

their paychecks seized.<sup>34</sup> All of these factors greatly debilitate both the physical and mental well being of the ex-offender; in fact, all are strongly associated with depression and violence, especially among men.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the worst part of leaving the prison compound is the likelihood of returning and belonging in perpetuity to the vicious expanse of incarceration in/over a period of three years, 68% of released prisoners are found to be rearrested at least once for a new offense.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, this evidence shows that social exoneration does not follow physical exoneration – even when released from the system’s formal control, the body is forever tied to the stigma of criminality that the prison imposes on it.

The prison’s effect does not stop at the individual; it pervades the lives of entire communities that have any connection to an ex-offender. The aforementioned examples destroy families because without housing, people can lose their children. Without employment, a parent is unable to support the family and stand as a positive role model for his or her children. <sup>38</sup> With time limits on food provisions (such as the five-year limit of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Family Program)<sup>39</sup>, a pregnant mother will be unable to provide for her unborn child.<sup>40</sup> As bad as these forms of discrimination are, they are not the only mechanisms of exclusion.<sup>41</sup> They are accompanied by the shame and stigma that remains in perpetuity. Studies have found that the biggest problems facing African American families and communities today are the severe distrust, alienation, and emotional distress created by mass incarceration.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the prison produces an intense feeling of shame and self-hate. It leads communities and families to both lie about and neglect speaking of the incarceration experience because they are painfully aware of the stereotypes of criminals.<sup>43</sup> This silence that the prison induces is perhaps the most devastating form of this structural violence – it results in a repression of public thought, which makes the attempt at an antidote through collective action nearly impossible.<sup>44</sup>

The American prison is a violent geography as a result of the racism that it is both caused by and creates. The prison is produced through the state-sanctioned racism that is institutionalized against African Americans, and through the economic advantages that the prison offers the state at the expense of destitute African Americans. Likewise, the prison creates violence by destroying both the African American body that is entangled in its grip, as well as the communities and families that have a connection to that body. Ultimately, the prison’s forces are inescapable, regardless of one African American’s connection to it; all African Americans are affected by

the prison. The stigma of criminality that the prison imposes on the African American body leads to “self-stigmatizing”, a common practice that occurs when a severely stigmatized group embraces their stigma.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, a vicious cycle is bred: as the persona of criminality continues to be acted out, society continues to respond with the contempt that forms the pathways to the prison. No matter one’s proximity to it, the prison is an American geography that can now be warranted as a violent socio-spatial device that has fundamentally altered the landscape of American society.

### Notes

1. <http://quotes.lifehack.org/by-author/albert-einstein>
2. Ruth Wilson Gilmore. “Globalization and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian Militarism.” *Race and Class* 40(2/3) (September 1998): 184.
3. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 51. This was due to the decline in legitimate employment opportunities among inner-city residents.
4. Alexander, 49.
5. Alexander, 48-52.
6. Alexander, 50. This was central to the Reagan administration’s extensive media offensive to justify the War on Drugs.
7. Alexander, 7. Surveys find that whites, particularly white youth, are more likely to engage in drug crime than people of color.
8. Alexander, 55.
9. Alexander, 57.
10. Alexander.
11. Loïc Wacquant, “The new ‘peculiar institution’: On the prison as surrogate ghetto”, *Theoretical Criminology* 4(3) (2000): 382.
12. Loïc Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the ‘race question’ in the US” *New Left Review* 13 (January-February 2002): 48.
13. Wacquant, “The new ‘peculiar institution’”, 383.
14. Ibid.
15. Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration”, 49.
16. Alexander, 6-8.
17. Gilmore, 180-181.
18. Gilmore, 183.
19. Gilmore.
20. Gilmore, 184-185.
21. Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration”, 53.
22. Wacquant, “The new ‘peculiar institution’”, 378.
23. Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration”, 53.
24. Wacquant, “The new peculiar institution’”, 385.
25. Gilmore, 185.
26. Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration”, 57.
27. Wacquant.
28. Wacquant.
29. Alexander, 144, 157.
30. Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration”, 58.
31. Alexander, 148-149.
32. Alexander, 151.
33. Alexander, 154-155.
34. Alexander, 149.
35. Alexander, 94.
36. Alexander, 146.
37. Alexander, 148-149.
38. Alexander, 157.
39. Alexander, 158.
40. Alexander, 161.
41. Alexander, 164-165.
42. Alexander, 168.
43. Alexander, 169.
44. Alexander, 171.

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- IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from [http://americanassembly.org/sites/americanassembly.org/files/prisoners\\_0.jpg](http://americanassembly.org/sites/americanassembly.org/files/prisoners_0.jpg)



# REDEFINING THE AMERICAN FAMILY

Shefali Kumar

The American family structure has undergone an overwhelming transformation throughout the recent decades. The classic nuclear family structure we witnessed on television as children like *Leave It To Beaver*, *Everybody Loves Raymond* and even *The Simpsons*, has had to adapt to significant cultural changes throughout American society, including divorce, single-parent families, teenage pregnancy, same-sex marriage, adoption, intermarriages, blended families and stay-at-home fathers among many. This transformation has resulted in a cultural conflict between the ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ notions of a family.<sup>1</sup> Sociologist James Davison Hunter defines this cultural conflict as a “[...] political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.”<sup>2</sup> This cultural conflict can be witnessed on popular American television a show, which mirror our day-to-day experiences and highlights the diversity of American families in the twenty-first century. Consider ABC’s hit comedy series *Modern Family* that revolves around three families who are interrelated through Jay Pritchett, head of the non-conformist family, and his son Mitchell Pritchett and daughter Claire Dunphy. *Modern Family* uses a comedic approach, which is highlighted through the plot, dialogue between characters and the character’s roles themselves, to address the evolution of the American family in the twenty-first century.

Consider the Pritchett-Tucker family that includes same-sex partners Mitchell Pritchett and Cameron Tucker and their adopted Vietnamese daughter Lily Pritchett-Tucker. Mitchell and Cameron’s same-sex relationship highlights one aspect of the significant cultural change the American family structure has undergone in recent decades. According to the 2000 U.S.

Census Bureau, the number of gay and lesbian families in the United States totaled 601,208 compared to 145,130 gay and lesbian families in 1990.<sup>3</sup> The six-fold increase in gay and lesbian families has generated a cultural conflict between the ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ notions of a family. The progressives redefinition of marriage to include same-sex marriages threatens the ‘traditional’ institution of marriage. The cultural conflict between the traditionalists and progressives has captured nationwide attention. Consider the November 2008 California state elections in which the state of California passed Proposition 8 — a law which proposed to eliminate same-sex couples right to marriage in order to protect traditional marriage. Proposition 8 was, however, repealed on February 7, 2012 because it unconstitutional and violated the *Equal Protection Clause*.<sup>4</sup> In the 2012 president election, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney stringently opposed same-sex marriage, stating that the institution of marriage should be between a man and a woman. However, Romney stated that although “[...] [he’s] opposed to same-sex marriage, [he’s] also opposed [to] unjust discrimination against anyone, for racial or religious reasons, or for **sexual preference**.”<sup>5</sup> These cases highlight America’s gradual acceptance of same-sex marriages and as a result, acceptance of the evolving family structure in the United States. While *Modern Family* itself does not directly address the social or political issues surrounding same-sex marriage, the presence of homosexual characters and same-sex relationships like Mitchell’s and Cameron’s relationship, decreases prejudices among viewers of the program.<sup>6</sup>

The intermarriage of Jay Pritchett and his Columbian trophy wife Gloria Pritchett further highlights the significant cultural change the ‘traditional’ American family structure has undergone in the twenty-first century. Prior to 1967, many states had enacted anti-miscegenation laws; laws which enforced racial segregation and criminalized interracial marriage.<sup>7</sup> Since the 1967 Supreme Court decision declaring anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional, the rate of interracial marriages in the United States has surged.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the acceptance of interracial remarriages has grown considerably in the last few decades.<sup>9</sup> The inclusion of Gloria’s Hispanic background in *Modern Family* exemplifies the increase and influence of the Hispanic population on American culture. According to a survey conducted by Cornell University, the number of interracial marriages involving whites, blacks and Hispanics each year in the United States has jumped tenfold since the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> The blending of cultures, as witnessed on *Modern Family* can, to an extent, threaten America’s traditional notion of a family. In the episode

*Undeck the Halls*, Jay Pritchett introduces the Pritchett’s Christmas traditions to Gloria and his stepson Manny Delgado, which includes watching *Miracle of 34th Street*, a classic Christmas film. However, Gloria and Manny insist on incorporating their own Columbian traditions into Jay’s holiday traditions. Ignorant of Columbian Christmas traditions, Jay dismisses Gloria and Manny’s traditions as exemplified by the following comedic dialogue between Jay and his son Mitchell:

*Mitchell*: Still keeping traditions alive, huh?

*Jay*: Someone has to. I got two Columbians at home trying to turn Christmas into Cinco de Mayo.

*Mitchell*: You know that’s Mexican right?

*Jay*: Ahh. Burrito, burr-righto.<sup>11</sup>

However, at the end of the episode we witness Jay warm up and even enjoy Gloria and Manny’s Columbian Christmas traditions. *Undeck the Halls* adeptly exemplifies society’s gradual acceptance and absorbance of foreign cultures into America’s melting pot.

The ‘traditional’ American family structure has undergone an overwhelming transformation in the last decade. It has had to adapt to significant cultural changes in American society which, as a result, has created a cultural war between traditionalists and progressives over the definition of family. One can witness this cultural conflict being played on television shows like *Modern Family*, which uses the plot and dialogue between characters to highlight the evolving nature of the American family structure and shift our thinking as a nation.

#### Notes

1. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 42.
2. Ibid., 42.
3. Sana Loue, *Sexualities and identities of minority women* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 92.
4. “*Equal Protection: An Overview*,” Cornell University Law School, last modified August 19, 2010, [http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/equal\\_protection](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/equal_protection).

5. Brian Montopoli, "Mitt Romney pledges opposition to gay marriage," CBS News, last modified August 4, 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mitt-romney-pledges-opposition-to-gay-marriage/>.
6. Brian Stelter, "Gay on TV: It's All in the Family," NYTimes.com, last modified May 8, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/09/business/media/gay-on-tv-its-all-in-the-family.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/09/business/media/gay-on-tv-its-all-in-the-family.html?_r=0).
7. Ashley Hayes, "Study: Interracial marriage, acceptance growing," CNN.com, last modified February 16, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/16/us/interracial-marriage/>.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Susan Lang, "Interracial relationships are on the increase in U.S., but decline with age, Cornell study finds," Chronicle Online, last modified November 2, 2005, <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2005/11/interracial-relationships-are-increase-decline-age>.
11. Modern Family, "Undeck the Halls," directed by Randall Einhorn, written by Dan O'Shannon, ABC, December 9, 2009.

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from <http://images7.alphacoders.com/347/347616.jpg>



# STAR WARS

## *A PHANTOM MENACE*

Robert K. Mason

For much of the Cold War, nuclear deterrence was the primary element of American and Soviet defense strategy. However, on March 23, 1983, Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as “Star Wars”, which called for a shift away from deterrence as the sole guarantor of security. While Reagan’s goal was a peaceful end to mutually assured destruction, he sought to achieve this peace through a position of American superiority. Star Wars was a phantom threat in that there was little real prospect of the program fundamentally upsetting the nuclear balance. Even if an adequate defense against ICBMs were constructed, no theoretical or historical evidence suggests that such a technological advancement would have ended the strategic arms race or reduced mutual suspicion between the Soviet Union and the United States. On the contrary, the Star Wars announcement was a genuine menace to global stability because it signaled a major shift in America’s Cold War outlook and strategy. As such, the Star Wars announcement inevitably alarmed the Soviet Union and thereby increased the likelihood of nuclear war. This tension culminated in the Soviet war scare a few months after Reagan’s announcement during a NATO exercise, and lingered as an impediment to nuclear arms reduction. While Reagan envisioned Star Wars as a way to peacefully switch from a perpetually precarious policy of nuclear deterrence to a strategy of secure nuclear defense, Star Wars in fact did more to undermine international stability than to strengthen it.

For the better part of a decade prior to Reagan’s presidency, tension between the superpowers had been eased through a conscious effort at compromise and permanent nuclear parity. This strategy was dubbed *détente* by primary architects Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. They believed that the only realistic approach to international relations was to recognize that the Soviet Union would inevitably be a part of the international system

for the foreseeable future. Therefore it had to be dealt with on equal terms in order to ensure stability and a mutually advantageous balance of power. Kissinger emphasized that securing a genuine balance of power was a “permanent undertaking, not an exertion that has a foreseeable end.”<sup>1</sup> Thus in the 1970s, the United States was focused on negotiating and maintaining a delicate military balance despite whatever technological advances or international crises arose.

The primary focus of détente negotiations was ultimately nuclear weapons. Under détente, nuclear weapons were regarded as a useful guarantor of stability. One of détente’s crowning achievements was a treaty which banned virtually all anti-ballistic missile systems (ABMs) in order to ensure that both sides would maintain the capacity to use their ICBMs. The logic behind the ABM Treaty became known as mutually assured destruction (MAD), which argued that the only realistic way to prevent nuclear war was to ensure that a credible second-strike capability existed on each side to serve as a deterrent against a first strike. MAD was so integral to the détente system that Nixon rejected a proposal by Leonid Brezhnev for a treaty on the nonuse of nuclear weapons, believing “that the practical effect of such a treaty would be to prevent, or at least to inhibit, us from using nuclear weapons in defense of our allies or of our own vital interests.”<sup>2</sup> Nuclear weapons were so central to the détente conception of stability that any attempt to reduce their effectiveness as a deterrent was rejected by the United States. Détente effectively reduced tensions for most of the 1970s.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, détente fell out of favour and the newly elected president, Ronald Reagan, sought an alternative strategy with which to approach the Cold War. In his first press conference as president, Reagan declared that “so far détente’s been a one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its own aims.”<sup>3</sup> He added that it was a misguided approach because the Soviets “reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat.”<sup>4</sup> Reagan began his Presidency with a deep distrust of the Soviet Union, which related closely to his distrust of MAD. In Reagan’s view, an opponent capable of lying and cheating could not prudently be entrusted with the power to essentially destroy the United States in less than an hour. Moreover, in relying on retaliation as the only form of defense, MAD could not offer an attacked nation any prospect of victory or of healing, but only of vengeance through increased death and destruction. Reagan believed that it was “better to save lives than to avenge them,”<sup>5</sup> and his National Security Advisor, Robert “Bud” McFarlane,

seemingly offered Reagan a way to do so. Concerned that the USSR was developing ICBMs at a faster rate than the United States, “McFarlane, by his own account, came to believe that the solution was to stop competing with the Soviets on their terms and to move into the arena of high technology.”<sup>6</sup> While McFarlane saw such a shift partly as an expenditure that the Soviets would have difficulty matching or alternatively as a bargaining chip to be traded for future concessions on ICBMs, Reagan fully embraced the idea of strategic defense and saw it as a preferable alternative approach to MAD. Although Reagan saw strategic defense in a more positive light, McFarlane envisioned it as primarily a challenge to the Soviet Union.

In retrospect it is clear that Star Wars was mostly a phantom threat to the Soviet Union because the technological advancements required to make it successful did not exist when it was announced. It would also likely remain either prohibitively expensive or physically impossible. Scientists presented several criticisms; an expensive space-based system could be easily overwhelmed by a large number of relatively cheap Soviet decoy missiles, diffusion in the atmosphere would render lasers ineffective from space, and there were legitimate concerns that such a system could be disabled or destroyed more cheaply than it could be built.<sup>7</sup> Soviet countermeasures could include hardening their ICBMs to withstand lasers or deploying space mines to eliminate a defense system with conventional or nuclear explosives. While space-based laser systems were not the only technology discussed in the Strategic Defense Initiative, other systems were equally implausible to the point that most scientists who studied all of the options shared the view that they did “not now know how to build an effective nationwide strategic defense.”<sup>8</sup>

Reagan’s conception of strategic defense was so far removed from scientific reality that it has even been argued that the entire Strategic Defense Initiative “may have been a tremendously elaborate hoax”<sup>9</sup> to intimidate the Soviet Union. If intimidation was in fact the goal, the initiative was a success. The Soviets believed Reagan’s speech most likely signaled a major technological breakthrough and estimated that a space-based strategic defense system could be deployed in eight to ten years.<sup>10</sup> In retrospect, it is clear that Star Wars was mostly a phantom threat, and as such should be judged not by its technological plausibility but rather in terms of the shift in American foreign policy strategy that it signaled, and the impact that this signal had on international relations.

While Reagan's intentions were peaceful, the defensive strategy that he proposed was a menace to peace; it would inevitably be insufficient in an all-out nuclear attack and if completed, it would increase the likelihood of war by potentially creating a false sense of security. Even if perfect strategic defense against ICBMs were scientifically possible, it would not make nuclear weapons irrelevant. A number of prominent national security experts noted that Star Wars, "ambitious as it is, offers no prospect for a leak-proof defense against strategic ballistic missiles alone, and it entirely excludes from its range any effort to limit the effectiveness of other systems – bomber aircraft, cruise missiles and smuggled warheads."<sup>11</sup> In other words, even if Reagan's massive investment in Star Wars produced a perfect space-based anti-ballistic missile system it would not be a decisive advantage in a nuclear war.

In 1983, effective technological delivery alternatives to ICBMs already existed and presumably would be the focus of Soviet military spending by the time the United States could develop and deploy Star Wars. For example, some submarines were already equipped with as many as 160 nuclear warheads, each of which could cause more devastation than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>12</sup> The existence of alternate delivery systems virtually ensured that no defensive system would make nuclear weapons irrelevant. If Reagan truly believed that a space-based anti-ICBM system could render nuclear weapons 'impotent and obsolete' he was being dangerously naïve. Even with peaceful intentions, this belief would constitute "a major danger in encouraging the illusion that limited or controlled nuclear war can be waged free from the grim realities of a MAD world."<sup>13</sup> The false sense of security that Star Wars could plausibly create in an American president increased the likelihood that a future crisis would lead to nuclear war by means of alternative delivery systems.

Many Americans acknowledged that Star Wars would be resisted by the Soviet Union and would ultimately do nothing more than stimulate a different kind of arms race. Experts warned that "any prospect of a significantly improved American defense is absolutely certain to stimulate the most energetic Soviet efforts to ensure the continued ability of Soviet warheads to get through."<sup>14</sup> The likely Soviet response was even formally revealed to the administration in 1983 when "a CIA-led interagency intelligence report estimated that the Soviets could not attempt to match SDI, but warned that they would likely attempt to foil it with countermeasures."<sup>15</sup> Thus Reagan should have been aware that Star Wars alone would not end the nuclear standoff

with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless he framed his grab at vast technological superiority as an effort designed to create lasting peace.

The Soviet Union's difficulty in fully financing a qualitative escalation of the arms race placed an additional strain on the Soviet Union and was therefore viewed by the United States as reason in itself to pursue Star Wars. Regardless of Reagan's rhetoric or perhaps his willful ignorance, the Strategic Defense Initiative as envisioned was not a panacea for the strategic arms race, and was known by the Reagan administration to be a military escalation that the Soviet Union would have difficulty matching. By pursuing Star Wars regardless of the likely Soviet inability to match it, the Reagan administration risked either upsetting the nuclear balance or provoking a new kind of arms race, in either case jeopardizing stability rather than improving it.

Ultimately, Star Wars was insufficient to secure Reagan's dream of escaping the logic of MAD. Reagan's hope for a technological 'silver bullet' was an implausible solution to the Cold War nuclear standoff, which was predicated on ideological suspicion. As with any technological advancement by a rival power, Star Wars was simply the latest episode of a cyclical arms race trap in which "The fear that the balance may be upset by advances made by the other side is in turn used to justify the R & D efforts of each of the superpowers; and these efforts provide the basis for the technological advances that are so much feared."<sup>16</sup> Just as the Strategic Defense Initiative was triggered by McFarlane's fear of Soviet ICBM production advancements, Star Wars in turn provoked fear that was likely to induce technological advancements on the Soviet side. Indeed, the next steps in this cycle were already being imagined.

An expert on laser technology claimed that if lasers in space were developed to the point that they could use a directed energy burst to destroy missiles, the same technology could be adapted for use against cities.<sup>17</sup> Thus it was likely that the first element of the Soviet Union's reaction to a successful space laser would be to develop one of its own. Rather than provide an escape to MAD, "if lasers...capable of operating from satellites downward through the atmosphere, could be upgraded to permit them to attack ICBM silos, a new first-strike capability would have been created. The strategic implications of a first strike that could be carried out at the speed of light would be profoundly destabilizing."<sup>18</sup> While the idea of a Star Wars 'death star,' or offensive component was somewhat speculative, Star Wars itself was merely hypothetical, and an inevitable consequence of Star Wars would be some sort of Soviet response.

The three main options for the Soviet Union in such a scenario would be to accept American hegemony, destroy Star Wars and revert to the previous MAD status quo or develop a Soviet Star Wars system and participate in a new form of MAD by laser. Since the first option was obviously intolerable, it was inevitable that the American Star Wars initiative would be met by a renewal of the decades long race for technological parity.

Surprisingly, Reagan freely offered the Soviet Union this parity by declaring that he would share the ‘secret’ of Star Wars once it was developed, further demonstrating his flawed conception that Star Wars would be a final solution to the problem of MAD. The Soviet Union had every reason to be skeptical of Reagan’s offer, and as a result, Reagan’s gesture did little to ease Soviet tension. Critics of Star Wars noted that Reagan’s offer was unrealistic because as with any defensive system, Star Wars would inevitably “be an imperfect complex of technological and operational capabilities, full understanding of which would at once enable any adversary to improve his own methods of penetration. To share this kind of secret is to destroy its own effectiveness.”<sup>19</sup> Even if the ‘secret’ were shared, there was no guarantee that it would permanently end mutual suspicion between the superpowers, and historical precedent suggested that an arms race would simply spread into the realm of ‘defensive’ weapons.

The Soviet Union was skeptical of Reagan’s offer because the United States had not shared the nuclear secret with the Soviet Union when the two nations had been allies in the Second World War. Ever since the war, they had been in constant competition for the latest edge in military technology. Moreover, “the Soviet Union funded its own colossal, rigidly secret SDI-like programs for almost a quarter of a century”<sup>20</sup> and could not imagine such sensitive information being freely shared, let alone fully shared in a sincere collaboration. What the United States would have actually done with a hypothetical Star Wars ‘secret’ cannot be known for certain, but in the midst of the Cold War the Soviet Union had every reason to be skeptical of Reagan’s sincerity and the weight that it would carry with future administrations. Thus Reagan’s offer to share hypothetical future military technology was met with suspicion and did little to quell the heightened tensions that the Star Wars announcement had created.

Reagan’s history of anti-Soviet rhetoric further contributed to Soviet suspicion about the true nature of Star Wars, and increased the prospect of nuclear war. Admittedly, the speech announcing the Strategic Defense Initiative was markedly positive and peaceful in tone, if not in substance.

Reagan spoke of “achieving a truly lasting stability” and publicly called on scientists to “turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.”<sup>21</sup> However, Reagan’s past public statements had been much more inflammatory and instilled fear in the Soviet Union that he was erratic and capable of launching a first strike.

Just two weeks prior to the Star Wars announcement, Reagan had labeled the Soviet Union an “evil empire” and had characterized the Cold War as a “struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”<sup>22</sup> Taken together, Reagan’s ‘Evil Empire’ speech and his Star Wars announcement demonstrated to the Soviet Union that Reagan above all else was determined to prevent a nuclear attack on the United States and to roll back the Soviet Union’s influence. To Reagan, a strategic defense initiative had the potential to ensure the former, while also potentially putting enough strain on the Soviet military budget to contribute to the latter. To the Soviet Union however, Star Wars and the rhetoric that surrounded it could reasonably be interpreted as signifying a determination to gain nuclear supremacy over the Soviet Union and use either direct force or the threat of force to secure global hegemony. Star Wars destabilized the international system by making plausible such an interpretation of Reagan’s motives.

As it turned out, many Soviet observers did indeed interpret Star Wars as a direct threat to the Soviet Union’s vital interests. The immediate Soviet panic that Star Wars caused was in itself a genuine menace to international peace and stability. Star Wars was seen as coinciding “with the hegemonistic philosophy of the trigger-happy warriors craving to aim their ray guns at the entire globe with themselves ducking retaliation under an antimissile shield.”<sup>23</sup> Reagan’s shift toward nuclear defense threatened to undermine the only Soviet defense that existed; deterrence through MAD. The President’s announcement of a strategic defense initiative raised the possibility that in future the Soviet Union would neither be able to attack nor defend against the United States, and that their chief rival would be able to launch a first strike with little or no retaliation possible.

Although the Soviets did not know how far along American scientists were in developing such technology, the fact that it was being openly pursued sent an ominous signal. Yuri Andropov concluded that Reagan was “inventing new plans on how to unleash a nuclear war in the best way, with the hope of winning it” and characterized Star Wars as a “bid to disarm the Soviet Union in the face of the US nuclear threat.”<sup>24</sup> An immediate first

strike by the Soviet Union in response to this initiative would have been an overreaction and as such did not occur. However, the fact that Star Wars was perceived by the Soviet Union as an attempt to secure a first-strike capability raised tensions within the Soviet Union, creating a panicky nuclear power and by extension a menace to international stability.

Beyond provoking suspicions and raising tensions, Star Wars also created concrete incentives for a Soviet first strike. Just as a successful missile defense could contribute to a false sense of security on the American side, it could also lead to a false sense of insecurity on the part of the Soviets. If at some point in the future Star Wars was completed and the Soviets were not given the full 'secret', which they assumed they would not be, then they would be forced to conclude that their vast arsenal of ICBMs had become obsolete. While it was quite probable that a very small number of usable nuclear weapons would be an effective deterrent for either side, the Soviets had always strove for nuclear parity. Even though Star Wars would almost certainly leave the Soviet Union with a sufficient nuclear deterrent, they would have a much smaller attack capability than the United States. Given their history of demanding parity, the Soviet Union would probably believe, however irrationally, that a lack of parity would be an American advantage. Thus, as one observer noted, "the temptation to use offensive ICBMs before they can be destroyed by defenses may be a powerful inducement to strike first."<sup>25</sup>

The fact that Star Wars increased the prospect of a Soviet first strike is not merely theoretical, but was in fact discussed by Soviet officials. After the Cold War, "Hungary's last communist foreign minister, Gyula Horn, assured *der Spiegel* that yes, some Soviet marshals had indeed advocated an attack 'before the imperialists gained superiority in every sphere.'"<sup>26</sup> The Soviets even warned the United States of this possibility, circulating a report in Washington "that the deployment of space-based anti-missile systems would increase the incentive for pre-emptive first strikes."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment in the United States drew the same conclusion, warning "that the development of the proposed 'umbrella' would make a preemptive strike more attractive to the Soviets."<sup>28</sup> While the completion of Star Wars was at most a distant threat, the specter of an American first-strike capability created some incentive for the Soviet Union to strike at some point prior to this eventuality. The fact that some Soviet marshals actually advocated this course of action demonstrated the extent to which Star Wars destabilized the international order.

As a result of these new Soviet incentives and perceived American intentions, the menace of Star Wars increased the chance of a crisis developing into nuclear war, and within a year of the Star Wars announcement the first such crisis occurred. The Soviet Union was concerned about American intentions to the point that a major NATO exercise, codenamed ABLE ARCHER 83, was believed to be a prelude to war. On November 2, 1983, NATO undertook a full simulation of a nuclear launch in order to test their capabilities. The Star Wars announcement, and the rhetoric that surrounded it, suggested to the Soviet Union that Reagan was capable of pursuing a first strike. The Soviets therefore responded to the American exercise by putting their own forces on full alert. If the Soviet Union had been waiting for an opportunity to make use of their ICBMs before Star Wars became operational, ABLE ARCHER was their first chance to justify doing so. The escalation to war was only defused by double agent Oleg Gordievsky, whose "timely warning to the West kept things from getting out of hand." Gordievsky characterized the crisis as the closest the superpowers had come to nuclear war since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.<sup>30</sup> The Star Wars announcement created an environment of panic and fear that contributed to the Soviet response to ABLE ARCHER. Star Wars increased the chance of war in crises such as ABLE ARCHER because it led the Soviet Union to believe that Reagan was capable of launching a first strike and that their ability to engage in nuclear war on equal terms could be erased in the near future.

Ultimately, Reagan's commitment to strategic defense also prevented him from stabilizing the world by eliminating nuclear weapons. At the Reykjavik summit, the two superpowers came close to fulfilling Reagan's purported dream of ridding the world of nuclear weapons, and would have succeeded had Reagan been willing to confine Star Wars research to laboratories. Mikhail Gorbachev argued that if the United States and the Soviet Union "were going to agree to deep reductions in nuclear weapons, and the U.S. side wanted... to conduct all sorts of research that would go against the ABM Treaty, and put weapons in space and build a large scale defense system, then this was unacceptable. But if the U.S. agreed to confine this work to laboratories, the Soviet side would sign."<sup>31</sup> Reagan's refusal to confine Star Wars research to laboratories signaled to Gorbachev that his commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons was secondary to his commitment to Star Wars itself. It was a testament to Reagan's suspicion of the Soviet Union that despite his good relationship with Gorbachev he prioritized

nuclear defense over a treaty that aimed to make nuclear defense unnecessary. Thus Star Wars actually worked against Reagan's goal of ending MAD. It also decreased stability by turning a chance for what amounted to a Cold War peace treaty into another reason for the Soviet Union to suspect ulterior motives in Star Wars. Reagan himself had acknowledged the possibility that if the Soviets had a Star Wars monopoly they could "blackmail us to our knees."<sup>32</sup> It would not have been unreasonable for Gorbachev to have parallel suspicions, and interpret Reagan's refusal to hold back on this initiative as a menacing signal. At the very least, Star Wars prevented the conclusion of an agreement that would have pursued an end to nuclear weapons. The fact that Star Wars was the issue that killed the treaty could only have added to Soviet apprehension about the program. Either way, Star Wars did more to destabilize the Cold War standoff than it did to resolve it.

The goal of Star Wars was purportedly to end MAD in order to make the world a safer place, but ironically it ensured the continuance of MAD and served only to destabilize the international system. Star Wars was scientifically misguided and was therefore more of a phantom threat than a realistic possibility. However, it was a genuine menace to international stability insofar as it distorted the costs of nuclear war. Moreover, the shift in American nuclear intentions that Star Wars signified caused genuine tension in the Soviet Union, and created incentives for a Soviet first strike. These incentives and the environment of panic created by Star Wars contributed to the rapid escalation of the ABLE ARCHER crisis. Ironically, by preventing a successful conclusion to the Reykjavik talks Star Wars actually ensured that nuclear weapons would neither become impotent nor obsolete for the foreseeable future. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the impetus for Star Wars collapsed with it. However, the necessity and utility of MAD in the post-Cold War nuclear era is questionable, and as technology advances Star Wars may yet be pulled out of the ash heap of history, dusted off, and once again pursued.

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from <http://ronaldreaganinspace.tumblr.com/image/30544617855>



# THE TEARS OF TERROR

HOW A LATE NIGHT COMEDY SHOW JUSTIFIED THE  
WAR ON TERROR

Haley O'Shaughnessy

Six days after 9/11, anchor macho-man Dan Rather cried on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. The reporter became the reported as his Cronkite notions of journalistic integrity and objectivity conflicted with the slogan, “America Fights Back.”<sup>1</sup> From Rather’s perspective, to be the unquestioning journalist was not only apt self-censorship, but also patriotic; to ask the tough questions would be to go against the Commander-in-Chief. Inadvertently, Rather’s tears infused nationalism with patriotism; by using outward emotion, he expressed the domestic vulnerability that was at the root of American national identity.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the fall of “Fortress America” renewed a sense of national insecurity and enabled chauvinistic rhetoric to rationalize the war on terror.

Immediately after the events of September 11, 2001, there was no place for comedy. Hypersensitive concerns for respect and propriety made laughter seem inappropriate, if not impossible. Therefore, when *The Late Show* saw its return, everything from its guests, to its opening credits, to David Letterman’s monologue was under tight consideration. Uncharacteristically, Letterman began the show sitting at his desk to explain that what lied between a joke and a tragedy was an enigma:

*If we are going to continue to do shows I just need to hear myself talk for a couple of minutes...I'm sorry but I just have to go through this, the reason we were attached, the reason these people are dead...as I understand it and my understanding of this is vague at best, another smaller group of people*

*stole some airplanes and crashed them into buildings and we are told that they are zealots fueled by religious fervor. And if you live to be 1000 years old, will that make any sense to you? Will that make any goddamn sense? (Emphasis added)*<sup>3</sup>

The power of Letterman's position as an uncertain, average American was its absurd dichotomy: his focus on the propriety of comedy overshadowed the abject intelligence failure that was 9/11 for the Department of Defense.

Upon welcoming Dan Rather to the program, the man sought to reconcile his public image as an objective journalist with his self-defined responsibilities as a patriot. In his futile attempt, he expressed a contradictory position by involving the need to take orders from the President. When David Letterman asked him why there had not been a strike already, Rather answered with jingoistic jargon: "George Bush is the President," he stated, "he makes the decisions and you know as just one American, wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the oxymoronic demonstration of a patriotic journalist was striking: although he favoured an attack against Saddam Hussein and all others who were a "part of this hate America thing," he refused to wear a flag pin on air, citing the need to be independent.<sup>5</sup> In this nationalistic context, although patriotism and journalism were evidently incompatible, his flip-flopping was an honest account of most 9/11 American newsrooms. He and the majority of American journalists fruitlessly reconciled their position by becoming the uncritical mouthpiece of the administration.

Despite his struggle over the objective role of journalism, Rather, with his great-man Giuliani characterization of George W. Bush, seemed clear about the responsibility of citizens in wartime: to remain loyal and get in line against the non-western enemy. As the good-versus-evil stance and dehumanizing binary constructs became commonplace throughout the interview — with Rather defining the terrorists as irrational, jealous losers against American superiority at one point — it was apparent a unified American front was desired. Did all of America agree with this call for unity? The presence of an antiwar movement after 9/11 suggests otherwise. Moreover, why in a democracy should unity be valued? Theoretically, in a democracy the people are supposed to determine policies and different perspectives will invariably result. From this standpoint, it is difficult to imagine that unity cannot mean anything else but conformity and the acceptance of authority.

In his articulation of American mentality post-9/11, Rather problematically framed the position of citizens within a military hierarchy. When he cited his limited military experience as a private to explain his unquestioning posture as a citizen, he defied traditional military-civil relations. From a constitutional position, the military is to remain distinct and subordinate to elected officials. Therefore, Rather's spatial establishment of the everyday citizen within the military was troublesome at best, as it not only placed the citizen in a subsidiary position, but it also put the military within the democratic realm of war policymaking. Consequently, Rather's recognition of military expertise from the likes of Donald Rumsfeld and his condemnation surrounding the United Nations mandate in the Gulf War inverted civil-military relations, as the military under his model would receive unprecedented and unfettered war power.

Rather's patriotic and subservient reaction should not be surprising; 9/11 was impactful because it attacked the domestic vulnerability behind postwar "Fortress America." Since World War II, the sentiment of geographical invulnerability was central to U.S. identity. With the War of 1812 marking the last foreign invasion, Pearl Harbour stood in the American collective memory as the last moment of vulnerability.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, however, the idea of an impenetrable nation enabled postwar America to scale its anxiety and Red scare fears within its borders. In turn, the national identity around an abstract Red threat became gendered, racially segregated, and domestically intimate.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the danger of a communist neighbour characterizes America's domestic dependence on the 'other' being the opposing force to their identity.

Hence, this interview shows how the September 11 attacks were the realization of a domestic insecurity already present in the post-war American conscious. Rather's explanation of the terrorist "working in the shadows" utilized and enforced this vulnerability. Additionally, with his deceptive idea of sleeper cells and an unconfirmed story of terrorists celebrating across the Brooklyn Bridge, he rescaled this fear of terrorism domestically.<sup>8</sup> Rather's fictional notions of an evil villain out to get America exemplifies how American national identity solidified against a new unknown: terrorists.

Within this intimate nationalism, Dan Rather's emotional intelligence allowed the tears of a journalist to rationalize a war on terror. Although he was initially able to recompose himself when he narrated the scene at Ground Zero, he then had an intense outburst when he quoted four lines from "America the Beautiful":

*O Beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears!*

Letterman's act to comfort him when he reached for Rather's hand truly demonstrated the force of American mythology toward liberalism and liberal ideals: the concept of an infinite patriot dream broke a man whose job was to maintain equanimity and masculinity. The intense applause from the audience confirms this unconventional male-to-male embrace as appropriate precisely because of the circumstance. Certainly, the audience's response to the break from traditional masculinity makes it identifiable to the public as it reinforces the mythical notion of an unparalleled time for America.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Dan Rather's tears reinvigorated American nationalism and its cause for war.

A forever changed America: that was the shortsighted and imprudent rhetoric behind Dan Rather's late night comedy appearance. Dan Rather valorized and imagined a unified American front for war, and his 9/11 stories of bravery and camaraderie, although were newsworthy, became self-serving jargon. By infusing patriotism into nationalism with his call for a submissive America, he inadvertently made dissent un-American and placed the 'terrorist' as the new opposing force to American national identity. Ultimately, long after this interview, the reimagining and replaying of 9/11 undercut discontent, deflated economic uncertainty, and subverted critical thinking about the war on terror.

#### Notes

1. This was the CBS Evening News slogan during 9/11, which Dan Rather hosted. See Silvio Waisbord, "Journalism, Risk, and Patriotism," in *Journalism after September 11*, edited by Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 200.  
To understand the manifestations of American national identity, it is vital to distinguish "American nationalism" from "patriotism." American nationalism is an imagined and exclusionary concept, often validated by historical mythologies of individualism and liberty. Patriotism connotes pride and love for country. When coupled, an individual's love for country is dependent upon their support for nationalistic actions against 'others.' As the *Late Show* demonstrates, this infusion makes

dissent intolerable.

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5. Silvio Waisbord, "Journalism, Risk, and Patriotism," 202.
6. Deborah Cowen, "From American lebensraum to the American living room: class, sexuality, and the scaled production of 'domestic' intimacy," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22 (2004): 757, 10.1068/d19s.
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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from <http://www.sfgate.com/news/slideshow/David-Letterman-through-the-years-83230/photo-6115163.php>



# THE NEW AMERICAN DREAM

CELEBRITY CULTURE AND THE 1970S

Mallory Starkman

America in the 1970s witnessed social changes, economic instability, and dissatisfaction with the government. The previous decade saw the height of the civil rights movement in which people came together to form a united identity to campaign and protest for their collective rights. However, the 1970s saw the break from collective group ambitions and rather a focus on the individual needs and wants. As Sam Binkley describes in *Getting Loose*, consumption and lifestyle emerged in the 1970s as the central way in which people imagined themselves to be the agents of their own lives<sup>1</sup>. No longer were Americans thinking in terms of the group, but in terms of 'me.' As an offshoot of this new focus on the individual was the growth of celebrity culture.

The rise of celebrity culture in America in the 1970s was the result of the social changes affecting the country. In understanding how celebrity culture grew, we will begin with a review of social critics Tom Wolfe and Christopher Lasch, and what they witnessed during the 1970s. Both of these writers were concerned with the deterioration of the existing social order. We will then turn our attention to the magazine launches of the 1970s and how they catered to the new American culture, *People*, being the most important for this study. *People* was not the only magazine during the 1970s to focus on celebrities, but it was instantly the most successful, and remains the most profitable American magazine<sup>2</sup>. In analyzing volumes of the magazine from the 1970s we see emerging social trends, such as the acceptability of divorce and drug culture. We will look at the new celebrity heiresses, Patti Hearst

and Gloria Vanderbilt, who defy the long-conveyed message that hard work will make you prosperous. And finally we will look at the politicized star, Jane Fonda, who defied the government but remained a glamorous image to aspire to. The socio-cultural changes of the 1970s gave rise to the celebrity culture which resonates in our present day.

To be clear, celebrity culture did not begin in the 1970s in America, rather the 1970s saw the boom in celebrity status designation and the widespread emergence of celebrity journalism. Gossip surrounding the elite had long permeated popular culture, but not to the same extent as the 1970s. The 1910s sold the promise of upward social mobility into the middle class, through movie magazines. At this point, most Americans were still working in physical labour intensive jobs, such as farming in rural settings and factory work in the cities. These magazines (*e.g. Photoplay and Motion Picture*) featured rags-to-riches stories about stars like Charlie Chaplin and Elise Ferguson. The stories emphasized Charlie Chaplin's upbringing under an alcoholic father and a mentally ill mother, but through hard work he made it big as a movie star. The stories of Elise Ferguson demonstrated that through her determination to succeed in the industry coupled with hard work, she had achieved stardom<sup>3</sup>. The 1910s celebrity story emphasized a strong work ethic as a means to mobilization. The 1950s saw the Hollywood-created build-up of two female superstars: Marilyn Monroe and Grace Kelly. The appeal of both of these women was directed at a male audience, though Grace Kelly was featured in multiple women's magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal, Mademoiselle, Good Housekeeping, Vogue, Cosmopolitan, and Women's Home Companion*. These publications emphasized, through the use of quotes of her on-screen costars, her ladylike qualities. Additionally, there was an emphasis on her family's adherence to traditional American values. On the other hand, the articles in which Marilyn Monroe was featured tended to focus disproportionately on her personal relationships. Her marriage to Joe DiMaggio, their Korean tour, their divorce, and her subsequent relationships all contributed to her status as a provocative sex symbol<sup>4</sup>. The celebrity as a role model, sex-symbol and example of the attaining of the American Dream had long existed in American culture, but with the cultural changes of the 1970s, the culture of celebrity changed as well.

The term the 'Me' decade was coined by Tom Wolfe in 1976, when he wrote an article, "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening in America" in *New York*, August 23, 1976. The article pointed out that newer

religions such as, Scientology, Arica, and Synanon – all of which emphasize the perfecting of the individual human psyche and achieving one's potential – clashed with traditional American religion, namely Protestantism and Catholicism, both of which focus on belief in God's commandments. He also reported the reputation he felt America was garnering abroad. On a tour to Italy he was frequently asked by students if it were true that in America, "people actually left home, and lived communally according to their own rules and created their own dress styles and vocabulary and had free sex and took dope."<sup>5</sup> These questions, and the ways in which they were asked, showed Wolfe that the rest of the world viewed America as a rebellious selfish country. In the article, Wolfe said, "The old alchemical dream was changing base metals into gold. The new alchemical dream is: changing one's personality—remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one's very *self*... and observing, studying, and doting on it (Me!)." This statement condemns Americans in response to their increasing time consumption of leisure activities such as exercise (for the sake of aesthetics) and self-improvement religions.

These views were echoed by historian Christopher Lasch's book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, which commented on the changes in the attitudes towards lifestyle in the 1970s. In terms of the emergence of celebrity, he saw narcissists dividing the world into two binaries: rich and famous, and average. Narcissists greatly admire a hero or outstanding individual. The narcissist's fascination with celebrities is the result of a need to model one's behaviour on another person's, as they lack the confidence in their own abilities<sup>6</sup>. Lasch was deeply concerned about the decline of the nuclear family. He criticizes the father and mother, the former for being absent in the child's development, and the latter for overcompensating for the father's absence and believing her child deserves the best of the best. This causes her to arrange every detail of his life, which in turn undermines the child's initiative so that he is unable to think for himself<sup>7</sup>. Lasch felt the deterioration of marriage was responsible for the deterioration of care for children. He saw propaganda on behalf of divorce as a cause for its growing incidence<sup>8</sup>. As we will explore, celebrity divorces were widely reported by magazines in the 1970s, and as he asserts in *The Culture of Narcissism*, the narcissists were emulating celebrity behaviour as a way of feeling like a superior individual.

This growth of youth narcissism can be seen through the results of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test. In 1950, only 12% of respondents replied "Yes" to the statement "I am an important person."

But by the end of the 1980s, approximately 80% had responded, “Yes” to this question<sup>9</sup>. The economic downturn of the 1970s coupled with the War in Vietnam led Americans to question the American dream. Losses after the 1968 Tet Offensive called into question American assumptions, many of which that had been taken for granted, such as the government as a trustworthy institution and that chastity, marriage and monogamy were ideal<sup>10</sup>. No longer were the former institutions admirable, as they had failed the people in the 1970s. The authority then becomes the individual. Climbing divorce rates, a relaxation in sexual morals, and the changing career objectives for women were symptomatic of the emergence of individualism<sup>11</sup>. However, inspiration must be drawn from some source. In lieu of the government whom the public distrusted, and the white-collar worker who was unemployed because of the failing economy, the thriving celebrity served as a model one could aspire to.

The success of a personality as celebrity is dependent on their identification with the desires of their audience. Most celebrity stories contain a combination of the following factors: adversity, crisis, talent, big break, a great rivalry, outrageous behaviour and the underdog comes out on top<sup>12</sup>. While the audience loves stories with happy endings, they also take pleasure from the misfortune of others. Increasing numbers of photographs were being published in which the dark side of fame emerged. In 1962, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton were photographed kissing on a yacht, though both were married to other people at the time. Celebrity culture in the 1970s reflected and reinforced this growing disillusionment. The term ‘paparazzi’ became a part of mainstream vocabulary following the 1960 film *La Dolce Vita*, which focused on the hedonistic life of the celebrity photographer<sup>13</sup>. No longer was the celebrity perfect; the barrier between the private and public life became harder to maintain. Rather than avoiding this new ambushing photographer, some celebrities embraced this new ‘celebrity journalism’ and were able to profit from it.

The celebrity journalism that emerged in the 1970s was among the biggest indicators of this rise in celebrity culture. The list of magazines launched in the 1970s is demonstrative of the selfish interests of Americans that Lasch and Wolfe discuss in their respective works. In 1970 the magazine *Dog Fancy* was launched, dedicated to dogs and their owners. The magazine marketed goods and services intended for one’s canine. The next year magazines such as, *Travel and Leisure*, *European Car*, *Dirt Bike* and *Natural Health & Fitness* were launched. In 1974 the initial publications of

*People*, *Vegetarian Times*, and *Cruising World* were released. In 1975 *Yoga Journal* and *Soap Opera Digest* were launched. The following year saw the launch of *Wine Spectator*. 1977 saw the launches of *Us Weekly*, *Deer & Deer Hunting*, and *Equus*. 1978 saw the launches of *Food & Wine*, *Art & Antiques*, and *Working Mother*. And finally in the last year of the decade the magazines *Boating World*, *Computer Shopper*, and *Photo Techniques* were launched. As demonstrated by this brief list, magazines were catering to niche markets and individual hobbies and interests. *Yoga Journal*, *Vegetarian Times* and *Natural Health & Fitness* all catered towards people with an interest in a healthy lifestyle. *Computer Shopper* and *Dirt Bike* revolved around people purchasing items that were non-necessities in their everyday life. *Photo Techniques* and *Art & Antiques* catered to specific hobbies that were previously thought to be of high culture. With the exception of *Working Mother*, which focused on guidance for women to balance her work-life and home-life, none of these magazines pertain to traditional American values such as family. As Binkley mentioned, child rearing became less important to Americans in the 1970s<sup>14</sup>. The one magazine geared towards parenting was about balancing raising children with paid work outside of the home. The production and circulation of these magazines allowed people to experience the daily flow of events under the novel experience of expert advice on diet, relationships, home furnishings, gardening and travel<sup>15</sup>.

For the purposes of this study, we will focus on *People* as it focused on celebrity content. Though *Us Weekly* did as well, it was not able to captivate the audience *People* had monopolized. Another magazine, *National Enquirer*, launched in 1926 was a tabloid magazine. Its original content focused on gore and violence. In the 1960s it moved towards the occult, UFOs and human-interest stories, but an even more noticeable shift towards celebrities is seen in this magazine, as well as others, following the launch of *People*<sup>16</sup>. Richard Stolley, the original editor-in-chief, quickly devised a formula for a best-selling cover story. The name and face of the cover had to be recognizable to 80% of the American public. In his philosophy, “young is better than old, pretty is better than ugly,” and, “rich was better than poor.”<sup>17</sup> In explaining the magazine’s success he says, “This was the beginning of the ‘Me’ Decade... We found out that people in the news were quite willing to talk to us about themselves. They’d talk about a lot of personal things—their sex lives, their money, their families, religion.”<sup>18</sup> Unlike the *National Enquirer*, which took on an aggressive model of collecting photographs through paparazzi, the success of *Us Weekly* and *People* was due in part

to the compliance of the celebrity in the respective articles. Articles commonly included pictures inside the celebrity's home or a walk-through of the celebrity's routine day<sup>19</sup>. The audience then felt closer to the celebrity and therefore privileged. The notion of getting closer to the rich and famous was advertised through the headlines and cover photos of magazines like *People*.

The heiress as a glamorous, wealthy icon emerged as a public celebrity in the 1970s. Patty Hearst, the American newspaper heiress rose to fame at the age of 19 when she joined the Symbionese Liberation Army, which had kidnapped her, then taking part in a bank robbery. Following her capture her defense claimed that she had been brainwashed by her kidnappers and that she was innocent. Hearst was imprisoned for 2 years before President Carter commuted her sentence in 1979. Unlike actors and musicians who can affect the ways in which we perceive them through their roles or music, celebrities such as Patty Hearst are subject to the media's construction of her image<sup>20</sup>. In our present day, the notion of "personality celebrities" such as the Kardashians, and the famous heiress celebrity like Paris Hilton, is quite common. But in the 1970s, Patty Hearst as a celebrity because she was a wealthy heiress, was a new concept. Patty's celebrity status emerged at a time prior to the system of public relations and well-constructed publicity stunts. However, for observer Christopher Lasch, the abduction of Patty Hearst by the Symbionese Liberation Army was a ploy to achieve celebrity status at the cost of rational self-interest and personal safety<sup>21</sup>. Patty maintained celebrity status, with *People* publishing an article about her love life and the fiancé she planned to marry, while incarcerated<sup>22</sup>.

The 1970s was a tough decade for the American economy. Stagflation, the high unemployment rate with high inflation, the oil crisis, and increased costs of living, ended the postwar decades in which upward mobilization of the succeeding generation guaranteed increased material rewards<sup>23</sup>. The traditional avenues of determination and hard work no longer appeared as the answer for success and wealth. Another example of a famous, highly publicized woman who did not earn her wealth, but was born into it, was Gloria Vanderbilt. Gloria, whose father had died before her second birthday, inherited \$4 million. In the first issue of *People*, an article was published about the writer's interview with Gloria Vanderbilt in which she discussed the vocational design work she chose to do, despite having enough money to never work a day in her life. The article also noted her husband, Wyatt Cooper, as her fourth. Cooper is also interviewed in the article in which he says, "She's a self-involved person, as I am too," he muses, "but much

less adaptable," when asked about their lifestyle<sup>24</sup>. Though such a response may seem like a snide remark, he was in fact complimenting his wife. This comment shows how the elite were speaking openly about their self-indulged ways, since society seemed to be self-indulging. The comment made self-involvement more acceptable since wealthy heiress Gloria Vanderbilt was self-involved as per her husband.

The aspiration for wealth is further seen through the January 1976 headline of *People* magazine: The \$6 Million Dollar Couple, which featured Farrah Fawcett and Lee Majors. Though this refers to the hit ABC television series, the article inside the magazine alluded to the fact that both of these individuals were independently wealthy<sup>25</sup>. The following year, the couple was given the coveted cover spot again with an image of them jogging together, smiling. The cover read: Farrah & Lee & Everybody's Doing It. Stars Join the Jogging Craze. The article, which continued from the headline, read: "Acting from a variety of more complicated motives — vanity, sanity, even higher consciousness — media stars of every stripe are now falling for the jogging craze... One of Hollywood's more athletic couples, Farrah is a devoted tennis player, Lee plays racquet-ball and touch football, and they started jogging together several years ago. Unlike some stars, they never got hooked on a particular time of day, and when busy schedules make it impossible for them to run together, the Majorses do it separately. Says Farrah: "It's part of my life—like brushing my teeth."<sup>26</sup> The exercise routines of celebrities made it into the magazine and the readership bought into it. The public saw this beautiful, glamorous, wealthy couple getting a second cover spot in *People* magazine because they jogged regularly. As Richard Stolley said, this was the 'Me' decade and celebrities were open to talking about themselves and their personal lives. This article about the exercise habits of a celebrity couple, was deemed significant enough to be featured on the cover of *People*. Americans bought into the couple's daily life, as they appeared lived a glamorous, wealthy life, physical exercise being a component.

The social changes that occurred during the 1970s were made normative practice by celebrities. The divorce rates, that grew increasingly high during this decade, were made normative practice by celebrities. Just two years following the jogging article about the celebrity couple, another article was featured in an August 1979 publication titled, *Why Farrah Split: The Rumors of Romeo are Wrong, Snaps Farrah Fawcett: It Is Liberation That Made Her Drop Her Majors*. The explanation Farrah offered to the magazine

in her personal interview sounded similar to the reasons cited by women who got divorced from their husbands returning from war. “When Lee married me, he married a very compliant person who just wanted to cook his meals, clean his house and be dependent,” she says sadly. “I still like to cook his meals and clean his house, but I’m not dependent anymore.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, when POWs returned home from Vietnam, 30% of their marriages dissolved, as wives were reluctant to give up their independence they had gained in the household in the absence of their husbands<sup>28</sup>. When one of the most famous, wealthy, beautiful television actresses spoke publically about her separation, for which she described as personal liberation, divorce became more acceptable, as the woman of envy was getting a divorce. Celebrity divorces emphasized a general sense of unhappiness, that even in the most celebrated marriages it was acceptable to admit one was unhappy<sup>29</sup>.

Farrah Fawcett was not the only celebrity to be in the midst of a very public divorce; musical duo Sonny and Cher famously split in 1972. In 1975, Cher graced the cover of *People* magazine for the first of 13 times to date<sup>30</sup>. Fresh from her split from Sonny Bono, Cher graced the cover with the subtitle under her name, “New show, new man and she’s soared.” This headline was deliberately placed to entice the audience to read about the pop-star and her newly liberated life now that she had divorced her husband and was seemingly thriving. “I always signed everything Sonny told me to sign,” she says, and only after their break did she realize “that Sonny and our attorney seemed to own the company, and I was just an employee. It even said that I was allowed two weeks’ paid vacation! So they’re suing for \$700,000 in gigs I didn’t perform.” In turn, says Cher, “I’m suing for half the company.”<sup>31</sup> It is significant to note that Cher’s only complaint of the divorce is financial, and not emotional. Her comments portray her divorce as an inconvenience because of the difficulties she encounters to obtain millions she believes she is entitled to. For Cher, the divorce was not sad, but a matter of securing excessive finances. It is important to note that while the respective divorces of Farrah Fawcett and Lee Majors, and Sonny and Cher, may have been upsetting, they were not portrayed in the magazines as tragic, rather, the newly single celebrity reveled in their freedom<sup>32</sup>. Unlike other American women, Cher and Farrah would not incur financial hardships (in terms of supporting themselves or children) by divorcing their husbands. Hollywood represented a unique opportunity for women of upward social mobility, independent of their husbands<sup>33</sup>.

Another shift in attitudes, as apparent by media reports, was towards recreational drug use. In 1971, Jane Fonda was arrested at the American-Canadian border when she was caught smuggling 105 vials of capsules when re-entering the United States. She was photographed handcuffed, however this image was not hidden from the media. In 1974 *Movieland and TV Time* ran a story on David Carradine’s arrest for trespassing, malicious mischief, and attempted burglary. The article also covered regretful tales from his childhood and his use of the recreational drug LSD. The following year, another magazine, *Photoplay*, published an article about Jack Nicholson in which he was very forthcoming about his use of marijuana, cocaine and LSD<sup>34</sup>. All three of these cases demonstrate America’s changing attitudes towards recreational drug use, as the celebrities were not private about their encounters with drugs, and their careers as actors were not ruined as a result of these news publications.

Jane Fonda, the daughter of esteemed Broadway and Hollywood actor, Henry Fonda, rose to prominence following the debut of the 1967 film, *Barbarella*, in which she emerged as a sex symbol<sup>35</sup>. Fonda was one of the most highly publicized starlets of the 1970s, mostly because of her strong anti-war demonstrations and political activism. In 1972, one year following the drug scandal, Jane took a trip to Hanoi, which was widely reported by various media outlets. The reasons she gave for wanting to visit Hanoi included observing the war firsthand and carrying mail, over 200 letters, for American POWs<sup>36</sup>. She photographed the bomb damage done to the dikes in the Red River in the hopes that the publicized photographs would ignite an international and domestic outcry for the White house to abandon the bombings<sup>37</sup>. Jane Fonda’s career in the 1970s was not simply of political activism, but she also starred in 7 films in which she carefully picked to star in as it would portray her as an enlightened, independent radical woman<sup>38</sup>. By the end of the decade, Jane Fonda had established herself as a prominent American celebrity personality, aside from the model/actress she was already known for. She released a workout video, which became quite popular, and established her as an authority of lifestyle/exercise<sup>39</sup>. As demonstrated by Jane Fonda, the political activism of a celebrity could help gain notoriety for various causes.

The glamourization of politics of Jane Fonda and her anti-war antics trickled down into the personal lives of politicians. As Lasch asserted in 1978, bureaucracy is one of the social influences encouraging narcissism<sup>40</sup>. The scandals in the personal lives of politicians increasingly appeared in

local papers. In 1976, the *Washington Post* published a story on Representative Wayne Hays of Ohio who divorced his wife of 38 years, married his district office secretary, all while carrying on a secret affair with mistress with an additional woman, a clerk on the Oversight Subcommittee of the House Administration Council, Elizabeth Ray. Ray, who informed the *Washington Post* of the affair, then called a press conference in which she exposed the affair for all reporters to publicize. Shortly after she appeared in a topless feature of *Playboy*, “The Girls of Washington.”<sup>41</sup> At the cost of her dignity and the political careers of Hays and herself, Ray sold out in search for publicity and fame, which she achieved. Another woman, Judith Campbell, held a press conference in 1975 exposing her affair with JFK. Rumours of President Kennedy’s infidelities had always been in the backdrop but it was never publically confirmed in the media until this point<sup>42</sup>. Whereas with Elizabeth Ray, who could have been partially motivated by destroying the political career of Rep. Hays, Campbell’s decision to go public with her affair was purely for her own pleasure, since Kennedy had been assassinated for nearly 12 years. The glamour of the star amidst a scandal, as exemplified by Jane Fonda, appeared admirable to women outside of Hollywood.

The 1970s was not the height of celebrity culture, but rather the beginning of culture we recognize today. The change in attitudes in which the individual became more important than the group, as noted by Lasch and Wolfe, set the stage for the admiration of particular individuals whom others could admire and aspire to. Dissatisfaction with the American government, as a result of the Vietnam War, and disillusionment with the American Dream because of the economic downturn of the decade, led people to search elsewhere for inspiration: the celebrity. *People* magazine capitalized on these feelings and fortified celebrity journalism, which captivated readers across America. The talentless heiress became a celebrity, the actress became an activist and the glamour girl became the authority on fitness and marriage. Since these celebrities were wealthier than the rest of the country, and idolized for it, their publicized attitudes towards divorce, personal relationships, drugs, and social mores were in turn imitated by Americans. The celebrity of the 1970s became the new American Dream.

## Notes

1. Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 8.
2. David E. Sumner, *The Magazine Century: American Magazines Since 1900*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 164.
3. Karen Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream: Stardom and Social Mobility*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 38-39.
4. Thomas Harris, “*The Building of Popular Images: Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe*,” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire* ed. Christine Gledhill, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 42-43.
5. Ibid.
6. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1979), 84.
7. Ibid, 173.
8. Ibid, 188-189.
9. Jake Halpern, *Fame Junkies: The Truth Behind America’s Favorite Addiction*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 35.
10. Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream*, 151.
11. Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 62.
12. Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 68.
13. Sternheimer, *Celebrity and Culture and the American Dream*, 153.
14. Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 62.
15. Ibid, 101-102
16. Gamson, *Claims to Fame*, 43.
17. Sumner, *The Magazine Century*, 166.
18. Ibid, 165.
19. David P. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 108.
20. Ibid, 16.
21. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 84.
22. Nancy Faber, “*Patty in Love*,” *People*, November 6, 1978, 28.
23. Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 47.
24. Lee Wohlfer, “*A Vanderbilt and the Man She Relies On*,” *People*, March 4, 1974, 61.
25. Lois Armstrong, “*Super-Powered Love*,” *People*, January 19, 1976, 21.
26. “*Jogging for Joy*,” *People*, July 4, 1977, 16.
27. Sue Reilly, “*Why Farrah Split*,” *People*, August 20, 1979, 81.

28. Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline*, 1968-1980, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 58.
29. Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream*, 170.
30. Sumner, *The Magazine Century*, 167.
31. Barbara Wilkins, *The Lone Star*, *People*, February 10, 1975, 25.
32. Sternheimer, *Celebrity Culture and the American Dream*, 171.
33. Ibid, 4.
34. Ibid, 179-181.
35. Tessa Perkins, "The Politics of Jane Fonda", in *Stardom: Industry of Desire* ed. Christine Gledhill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 241.
36. Mary Hershberger, *Jane Fonda's War: A Political Biography of an Antiwar Icon*, 80.
37. Ibid, 82.
38. Perkins, "The Politics of Jane Fonda", 247
39. Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 80.
40. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 47.
41. Gail Collins, *Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity and American Politics*, (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1998), 197-198.
42. Ibid, 205.

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IMAGE: Photo/Image taken from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2450531/Photo-exhibition-captures-glitzy-glamor-1970s-Hollywood.html>

