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Editor's Note and Acknowledgements

VICTOR SHORT

The *American Studies Undergraduate Journal* is published annually by undergraduate students in the American Studies program at the University of Toronto. The journal is supported by the Centre for the Study of the United States (csus) at the Munk School of Global Affairs.

The 2009-2010 edition of the *American Studies Undergraduate Journal* marks the publication's third instalment in its current format. We are proud to be able to build upon these foundations in order to showcase the excellent work of undergraduate students in the American Studies program and across departments. As in the 2008-2009 edition, this year's journal emphasizes an inter-disciplinary approach to academic study of the history, culture, and politics of the United States. This is reflected in the wide range of disciplinary approaches in these essays: from a commodity-chain analysis of the "Gate Bottle" during the prohibition era, to an analysis of the historiography of the Marshall Plan from the Cold War to the contemporary era. Whether you are already enrolled in the American Studies program or a departmental interloper, we hope that the contents inside encourage you to take a look at American Studies courses offered and the excellent speaker series organized each year by the CSUS.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the ongoing support of the United States Consulate Toronto, Public Affairs Section, in the publishing of this journal. Many thanks also go out to Elspeth Brown for all of her encouragement throughout the year, and to Stella Kyriakakis for her tireless efforts in making this year's publication of truly professional quality.

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Double Consciousness in Duke Ellington's "Creole Love Call"

BRANDI HEWITT

*In syncopated time, effaced stories are recovered, different futures imagined.*¹

Jazz culture represented a liberating cultural space for African-American musicians during the 1920s. Jazz challenged the aesthetics of classical musical repertoire, and played a crucial part in the Harlem Renaissance. Duke Ellington, as well as numerous other artists, migrated to New York to participate in the Renaissance. Yet, while Harlem was comparatively liberating for African-Americans, it was also a site of identity struggle. At the beginning of the twentieth century, practically anything African-American was perceived as "primitive" by white America: from overt racist connotations of their character—uncivilized, highly sexual, childlike, and savage—to anything emblematic of Africa. Black Americans internalized this negative perception of themselves as inferior subjects. This awareness embodies what W.E.B. Du Bois calls "'double consciousness,' this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."² A new cultural movement, the "New Negro," encouraged black Americans to adopt certain aspects of white middle-class values, to celebrate African-American culture and social identity while espousing an ethos of white respectability.³ Although the "New Negro" movement insisted that an identity struggle was nearing an end, I argue this was not the case. An analysis of Ellington's "Creole Love Call" demonstrates this nuanced balancing act, illuminating the struggle embodied by African-American artists in the 1920s. I argue that Ellington does not subscribe to overtly racialized stereotypes regarding his identity; instead, he represents African-American histories of displacement and oppression. He employs "New Negro" respectability, not to assimilate into white culture, but to strategically navigate within a white dominated music industry.

Before I begin my close reading of "Creole Love Call," I want to explain how the term "New Negro" was deployed in the 1920s, and the consequences of its inherent contradictions. Alain Locke's essay, "The New Negro," published in 1926, exclaims that in the past, the attainment of a social identity was impossible:

“Little true social or self-understanding has or could come from such a situation [slavery].”⁴ Locke was very excited about the Harlem Renaissance and the emergence of the “New Negro” as an embodiment of upper-class, “American” cultural behaviour.⁵ The problematic component of the “New Negro” was that it appealed only to upper-class blacks. In John H. Adams Jr.’s essay, “Rough Sketches: A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman,” he celebrates the merits of upper-class values that many African-Americans could never have attained—or arguably wanted to attain—at the turn of the century. The following inscription appears beneath a picture of a woman named Gussie: “[a]n admirer of Fine Art, a performer on the violin and the piano, a sweet singer, a writer—mostly given to essays, a lover of good books, and a home making girl.”⁶ These social behaviours do not correspond with the lives of working class people. In Langston Hughes’ essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” he insists that the “low down” blacks comprise the majority of the African-American population in Harlem.⁷ Hughes states that the “high class Negro” should embody a “black” rather than a “white” cultural ethos.⁸ Hughes indicts upper-class blacks for promoting a “Nordicized Negro intelligentsia.”⁹ It is apparent that the “New Negro” movement was classist. Locke was writing from an upper-class perspective in conflict with the working-class African-American majority. He invited African-Americans to “recapitulate the African past,” while concurrently expressing “the old Negro has become more a myth than a man.”¹⁰ So, exactly how were African-Americans supposed to embody this seemingly contradictory identity? How did they internalize this? A close reading of Duke Ellington’s “Creole Love Call” may illumine this paradox.

“Creole Love Call” was first performed in 1927 at the Cotton Club for an all-white audience, and shortly thereafter, was recorded and broadcast on the CBC radio network. The word “Creole” in the title “Creole Love Call” was employed by songwriters to distinguish Creole music from white music, but it also signifies the experience of a double diaspora: the displacement of black Americans from Africa and from different cities within the United States. The Renaissance not only imported the musical culture from New Orleans, but drew artists from northern cities as well: for instance, Aaron Douglas migrated from Kansas, Tommy Dorsey from Pennsylvania, and Duke Ellington from Washington, D.C. The word “Creole” not only connects the piece to Louisiana, but suggests a broader diaspora as experienced by Harlem artists. This inverts the images from novels and paintings that depict the Renaissance as a conversation solely between the South and New York.¹¹ Diaspora permeated the work of African-American artists in Harlem, and specifically, Ellington’s “Creole Love Call.”

The song synthesizes classical African musical aesthetics with modern jazz. Ellington employs the call and answer motif that originated in Africa, and was later adopted into traditional spirituals and secular slave songs. He also adds the human

voice as a third “instrument.” The call and answer in this piece depends upon three instruments: clarinet, trumpet, and the female voice. This marked the first time the human voice was incorporated into a jazz ensemble.¹² Soprano Adelaide Hall’s physical presence and operatic style—her *timbre* (use of heavy vibrato), and her imposition of *trills* (descending from high notes to low ones)—would have jarred an audience’s pre-conceived notions of the way a black woman “should” sound, and the way a black musical ensemble “should” sound. White audiences expected all-male ensembles, and believed that “the primary goal of African-American music and jazz should be to get people’s feet moving.”¹³ Ellington resisted this stereotypical one-dimensional portrayal of his music, but was able to celebrate the African call and answer while re-articulating it into a unique jazz form. This politic—subscribing to the way black Americans “should” sound—embodies Du Bois’ “double consciousness.”

That is, Ellington’s song both advances and problematizes classical musical aesthetics. Ellington’s written transcription relies on standard musical notations, adopted from European musical notations. The key is written in B flat, and follows a common metrical variation 2/2. Ellington includes an introduction to the piece that is not performed in the recording. He also relies on *codas* (repeats), and *accents* (strong striking of the keys to articulate louder sounds). Ellington also augmented standard musical notations. The rhythm slows down at the half way point of the song, despite the absence of a *ritardando* (a slowing down). This is indicative of how jazz challenged metronomic classical aesthetics by allowing for improvisations that diverge from constant, marked rhythm.

This compounded artistic aesthetic—the coupling of classical and augmented forms—can be seen in the work of another African-American artist, the illustrator and muralist Aaron Douglas. Central to the concept of the “New Negro” was the “recapitulation of the African past,” coupled with the idea that one had “to smash’ all the racial, social and psychological impediments that had long obstructed black achievement.”¹⁴ How did these artists do this without subscribing to the racist connotations of primitivism? Aaron Douglas, like Ellington, aptly includes in his art the beauty of Africa’s cultural history and African-American histories of slavery while avoiding racial stereotypes.¹⁵ He draws pictures of angular silhouettes reminiscent of Egyptian paintings, and squiggly lines reminiscent of the Nile. Douglas also depicts in his illustrations modern, urban landscapes coupled with images of slavery: “African plants, the chains of slavery, the bulk of skyscrapers, or the zigzag shapes of Art Deco.”¹⁶ Like Ellington, other African-American artists resisted racial stereotypes while celebrating their history in their artistic work.

Ellington gains “respectability” as a black artist, not only because of his innovative musical achievements, but also more importantly, because of his innovative recording achievements. In the 1920s, the main economic incentive of record

companies was to accrue income by selling sheet music. Live music recordings were acknowledged by music executives as a fleeting amusement, but Ellington capitalized on this new artistic medium. When record companies, like the Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA Victor), started marketing records, they targeted middle-class, white audiences of the “better kind.”¹⁷ Ellington was the first jazz artist to record on multi-sided records, thus extending the length of compositions (previously, all songs had to play for three minutes or less). This recording achievement, in addition to marketing his music to respectable customers of the “better kind,” enabled larger bands, longer songs, and consequently, more income for both himself and his band.

Ellington produced both sheet music and live recordings, and was confident that no one could aptly imitate his arrangements or his band.¹⁸ Upon close examination of Ellington’s written transcription of “Creole Love Call” one can ascertain why he exuded such confidence. The stark differences in the song’s aural experience compared to its written transcription—specifically the elisions of musical sections like Hall’s vocal line—reveal that the written transcription does not mimic the recording. First, it is transcribed as a piano piece, so the trumpet, clarinet and vocal sections are not included. The piano arrangement sometimes mimics the clarinet and trumpet, but never the voice. Second, the recorded piece begins four bars into the transcribed piece; there is no introduction in the recorded song. Ellington includes the trumpet solo and the call and answer, but of course both are expressed by the piano. Ellington was confident no one could aptly imitate his arrangements because his sheet music did not aptly reproduce the live performance. This tactic—only transcribing fragmented, partial outlines of songs—permitted Ellington to maintain a career as a live performer for the entirety of his life. Audiences were more interested in Ellington the live performer than any *copy* of his performance.¹⁹

Ellington continuously challenged people’s “common sense” notions of the way he should sound and act. Music producer John Hammond was convinced that Ellington had “lost his origins,” and was disappointed when Ellington did not subscribe to iconic, racist-laden notions of African-American primitivism.²⁰ His music was not always premised on fast, high tempo paces, and this concerned and confounded Hammond.²¹ This “concern” embodies what Michael Omi and Howard Winant articulate as a “common sense” racial project conducted at a micro-social level.²² Ellington’s inventiveness in regards to his augmented musical forms, and his proliferation of the record as an artistic medium, perplexed those who categorized him as “primitive,” and sought to align African-American artists with pre-Modernity.

The paradox experienced by African-American artists to be both “primitive” black and “New Negro” white often culminated in failure. One record company,

Black Swan Records, while fully committed to celebrating African-American music, tried to organize production and distribution of this music along racial lines to appease mainly white markets. Black Swan commissioned African-American radio performer, singer, and actress Isabelle Washington, because she sounded “white,” while another African-American performer, Bessie Smith, was dismissed because she sounded “black.”²³ So how were these performers supposed to sound, and how was Black Swan supposed to advertise? This double identity, this “double-consciousness,” characterized not only these performers, but also black music producers in the twenties. Regardless of talent or a commitment to producing black music, Black Swan ultimately failed due to the dominating politics of economics, since other music production companies, like Columbia and Paramount, simply had more capital.²⁴

Duke Ellington’s achievements during the 1920s cannot be understated. In a time of displacement, persistent racism, and market expansion, Ellington was able to capitalize on his contested identity, while expanding upon and augmenting classical musical forms. African-American artists were struggling with ideas about their identity as perceived through the eyes of white America, while trying to carve a space for themselves in their respective artistic fields. Ellington’s deviations in his written transcription of “Creole Love Call” speak to a broader historical concern. Ralph Ellison describes “syncopated time” as one experiencing time’s “nodes”: its starts and stops, its moments where it “stands still or from which it leaps ahead.”²⁵ Perhaps Ellington was able to stand still for just long enough to embody both the past, and the possibilities of an imagined future. This new space, this node in time, this never being quite on the beat, encapsulates the ethos of jazz.

NOTES

¹ James Clifford, “Diaspora,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9:3 (August 1994): 318.

² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co, 1903), 3.

³ Alain Locke, “The New Negro, 1926,” reprinted in David Levering Lewis, ed., *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* (New York: Viking, 1994), 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶ John H. Adams, Jr., “Rough Sketches: A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman,” *The Voice of the New Negro* (August 1904): 326.

⁷ Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” *The Nation*, 23 June 1926: 92.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰ Locke, 46.

¹¹ Susan Earle, "Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond: Aaron Douglas and His Role in Art/History," *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 9-10.

¹² Luvenia A. George, "Duke Ellington the Man and His Music Source," *Music Educators Journal* 85 (May, 1999): 16.

¹³ Harvey G. Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro," *The Journal of African American History* 89 (Autumn, 2004): 303.

¹⁴ Bettye J. Gardner and Niani Kilkenny, "In Vogue: Josephine Baker and Black Culture and Identity in the Jazz Age," *The Journal of African American History* 93 (January 2008): 89.

¹⁵ Earle, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷ Cohen, 304.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 308

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 304, 308.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

²³ David Suisman, "Co-workers in the Kingdom of Culture: Black Swan Records and the Political Economy of African American Music," *The Journal of American History* 90 (March 2004): 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-26.

²⁵ Clifford, 318.

The Vixen and the Guerrilla

JEREMY ANDREWS

The Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s is popularly associated with the "free love" philosophy of hippies and flower children. Indeed, for many young women of the era, sex was no cause for embarrassment; the idea that sex was "dirty" or "forbidden" was a relic of their parents' bygone era. Sexual liberalization confronted traditional aspirations of marriage and motherhood with no-fault divorce, birth control pills, abortion, sexual experimentation, public nudity, interracial marriage, feminism, and open homosexuality. However, assessing the extent to which this new world affected the self-perception and public identity of women is problematic. Which women? Liberalization and equal rights had legitimized female individualism; a lack of consensual experience among women should be expected as a consequence. This treatment shall analyze the different experiences of three groupings of feminists—white and black; heterosexual and homosexual; anti-pornography and sex-positive—in order to argue that the only universal change introduced by the sexual revolution was the recognition of female individualism. It shall also contend that when confronted by rampant consumerism and an integrationist media, this individuality has continued to prohibit the emergence of an all-encompassing, post-equal rights feminist movement.

The Sexual Revolution existed alongside the antiwar, black civil rights, and gay liberation movements, and these upheavals became closely linked in public perception. Many framed them as counterculture movements associated with—even to blame for—an undercurrent of antiestablishment rhetoric, and a rejection of traditional institutions. Marriage was no longer the ultimate goal of a woman; as Helen Gurley Brown wrote, it was "...insurance for the worst years of your life. During your best years you don't need a husband."¹ The single lifestyle was glamorized, embodying the "unspoken fantasies of a consumer society extended to the sphere of sex."² Popular perception aside, feminists found a shared frustration in their unwanted, yet seemingly unavoidable dependence on men:

It was as if we were made of clay and man would mold us, shape us,
and bring us to life. This was the material of our childhood dreams:

"Someday my prince will come." We were always disappointed when men did not accomplish this impossible task for us.³

In response, some feminists decided that "we had to change our expectations for ourselves. There was no factual reason why we could not assert and affirm our own existence."⁴ This independence changed society's customary expectation of female behaviour. Female hostility toward the white, male-dominated culture was to be expected, as the public identity of women had previously demanded dependence—even subservience—toward men. Instead, the promise of equal rights and sexual liberation produced the classic feminist refrain "...a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle."⁵ There was an outcry against the inferiority attached to traditionally feminine activities, perceived as repetitive and lacking a tangible final product, compared to those considered traditionally male.⁶ According to Gloria Steinem, "...all [women's] problems stem from the same sex-based myths. We may appear before you as white radicals or the middle-aged, middle-class, or black soul sisters, but we are *all* sisters fighting against these outdated myths."⁷

As inclusive as Steinem may have hoped the second-wave feminist movement would be, it became obvious that its concerns were those of white, heterosexual women. Their attempt at weakening the white patriarchy could obviously count on allies among black men, but many black women lacked a sense of belonging to either the women's liberation or the civil rights movement. Racial politics could not be ignored for the sake of gender politics. How were black women expected to identify with the feminist view of black men as "fellow victims," while Eldridge Cleaver believed "...the white woman [was] the symbol of freedom and the black woman the symbol of slavery?" Or, when Stokely Carmichael is said to have declared "the only position for women... is prone?"⁸ The Sexual Revolution may have completed *de jure* individuality for black women, but its *de facto* realization depended on the civil rights movement's success. Yet black women often found themselves excluded by black men, some of whom claimed that sexually possessing a white woman meant victory. They were equally estranged from feminism by white women who refused to acknowledge the existence of this destructive, black patriarchy. These twin struggles dictated their public identity, inevitably affected their self-perception, and represented an experience alien to that of white feminists. Black women may have even arrived at feminism for different reasons than whites, for Michele Wallace reports having rejected traditional stereotypes because "...[b]eing feminine meant being white to us."⁹

The politics of sexuality could not be ignored for gender politics, either. Many involved in the liberation movement vehemently disagreed over the issue of sexual preference. Feminists like Coletta Reid claimed to have evolved toward homosexuality through reason:

Almost everything I was reading at the time led me towards lesbianism... I was choosing my own oppression to [be] with a man. If sex roles were an invention of society then women... were possible people to love, in the fullest sense of that word.¹⁰

Yet, as John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman point out, "feminists were no less likely than other Americans to view lesbians with disdain."¹¹ Homosexuality was considered completely taboo in the 1950s, and perceived as "always wrong" by over two-thirds of Americans from the early 1970s until 1990.¹² In 1970, *Time* magazine reported on the "growing skepticism about the [feminist] movement by [those] who routinely dismiss all liberationists as lesbians."¹³ Many feminists recognized the danger this "dyke-baiting" presented to their goals; in many ways it had become a method of censoring or trivializing legitimate political grievances. So while some moderates may have insisted that lesbianism was a key feminist issue, others aware of the public disapproval sought to keep the issue quiet. Radical lesbian feminists, however, proclaimed that heterosexuality was as an ideological institution that "kept women bound to men and blocked their struggle for liberation."¹⁴ This was an assertion which heterosexual feminists were understandably reluctant to accept. From 1969 to 1971, women's organizations experienced a "gay-straight" schism, with black women's organizations similarly affected. As Michele Wallace wrote of the National Black Feminist Organization, "true to women's movement form, we got bogged down in an array of ideological disputes, the primary one being lesbianism versus heterosexuality."¹⁵ As with racial divisiveness, this separation grew out of feminism's inability to agree on a broad-based ideology for the post-equal rights era. To the contrary, fully-realized individuality appeared to offer women more things on which to disagree.

Changes in female public identity and self-perception did not only vary according to race and sexual preference—attitudes toward sex also proved to be a highly contentious issue among women. American popular culture fostered behavioural stereotypes based on this attitude. Birth control pills had added even more complexity to this dissonance. Mainstream publications like the U.S. *News & World Report* bluntly inquired whether the pills' "availability to all women of childbearing age [would] lead to sexual anarchy."¹⁶ *Newsweek* asked if this "new permissiveness... is going to lead to some new moral system or... the progressive discarding of all social restraint?"¹⁷ *Playboy* clearly supported the latter, advocating what D'Emilio and Freedman have called a "philosophy of sexual libertinism [confirming] the worst predictions of nineteenth century moralists who believed... sanctioning sex without marriage would lead to unbridled promiscuity."¹⁸ Thus, public expectation during the Sexual Revolution divided women over their personal attitudes towards sex. Helen Gurley Brown echoed the *Playboy* position, urging young women to recognize their sexual power, and "reconsider the idea

that sex without marriage is dirty.”¹⁹ She certainly won converts. While roughly 70 percent of Americans believed premarital sex was wrong in 1969, this number had shrunk to 47 percent by 1973, and was less than 40 percent in 1977.²⁰

Not all women found a positive experience in this supposed sexual liberty. Dana Densmore describes her feelings of aversion toward the newly sexualized culture: “Sex is everywhere. It’s forced down our throats... It makes us look as if we’re free and active,... and people seem to believe that sexual freedom is freedom.”²¹ Feminists like Densmore subscribed to a school of thought that questioned whether sexual liberation had been mistaken for sociopolitical freedom. These young women believed promiscuity should still be frowned upon “as a matter of personal pride.”²² Others, like Meredith Tax, complained that men could now “use [a woman’s] body with their eyes... They [can] evaluate her market price... They will make her a participant in their fantasies... Any man has this power as man, the dominant sex, to dehumanize women.”²³ Protesters at the 1968 Miss America pageant in Atlantic City aptly represented this school of thought as they railed against the promotion of a “degrading mindless-boob girlie symbol.”²⁴ These women represented a feminist reaction against the Sexual Revolution. They believed that it had not changed society’s reductionist view of women; it had simply shifted the focus of their objectification from their child-bearing capacity to their sexual desirability.

Extreme differences in attitudes towards sex and sexualized popular culture fostered an ideological rift that can be characterized as “sex-positive” versus “anti-pornography.” “Sex-positive” feminists were of the *Sex and the Single Girl* tradition; they perceived themselves as liberated sexual goddesses, free from traditional expectation and insulting stereotype. They readily subscribed to the new consumer culture that catered to their desire for cosmetics and clothes. The designer of the miniskirt, Mary Quant, boldly claimed that her style was indicative of women who “wanted to go to bed with a man in the afternoon.”²⁵ These women had embraced their sexuality, and felt no shame in using it to achieve their goals. Furthermore, they refused to accept the notion that sex should have a shameful connotation. At the other end of the spectrum were “anti-pornography” feminists who believed that embracing sexuality meant succumbing to a male-oriented paradigm. *Men* wanted no-strings-attached sex; acquiescence was *not* liberation. They fought against the insidious objectification of women that saw “cigarettes, soft drinks, cars, liquor, stereos, and a host of other unerotic products become vehicles for a sexual sell.”²⁶ Also of significance was the vast gray area between these extremes, perhaps best embodied in Densmore’s “declaration of independence” from the revolution with which she could no longer identify.²⁷ Her sentiment represents a Hegelian synthesis of “sex-positive” and “anti-pornographic” trends in which Densmore’s complex centrism has resulted from being equally alienated by the rhetoric of either

extreme. Michele Wallace shares a similarly frustrating anecdote regarding her attempt to adopt a revolutionary image:

I went to school with my hair in an Afro . . . The men on the corner who had only been moderately attentive before, now began to whoop and holler as I came into view. [When] I asked someone why [they replied:] “They think you’re a whore, sugar.”²⁸

These women wanted femininity without exploitation, equality without ostracization. Yet, the media routinely ignored the nuanced complexity of female opinion, and promoted simple yet entertaining “cardboard caricatures.”²⁹ This oversight is of extreme importance. As Elana Levine has asserted, “[t]elevision of the 1970s shaped the way American culture would think and talk about sex for years to come.”³⁰ The public identity of women was thus reshaped into one of two exaggerated paradigms: asexual, anti-pornography guerrilla, or lascivious, sex-positive vixen. Feminism was reframed as the exclusive province of the former; the latter was stripped of her ideology and made an icon. These stereotypes would eventually prove more damaging than racial divisiveness and dyke-baiting to the movement’s goals.

Female self-image was quite obviously influenced by the public’s attitude toward these stereotypes. This had the effect of making a woman’s sexual attitude more important than race or sexual preference. A black woman could not choose her race; in America, her ancestry regrettably dictated a large portion of her destiny. Homosexuality was also a product of biology. True, the early women’s movement had many “stories of [women] who used it to move from life as a heterosexual to lesbianism.”³¹ However, these women likely *were* homosexuals for whom society had not previously been a place in which they could articulate their feelings. Attitude toward sex was different. Individual choice was paramount. Yet a woman’s choices were ultimately made while cognizant of the media’s tendency to “flatten [their] complex, rich, multipronged, and often contradictory movement” into these simple stereotypes.³² Perhaps most important was a clear preference for one over the other: popular culture had endorsed the vixen, and impugned the guerrilla. The vixen was a *Cosmo* girl.³³ She fit with the glamour of single life; the consumer society extended to the sphere of sex. She represented the key to a sixty billion dollar-and-growing market. Society sanctioned her concerns over economic inequality; she would *consume* more if paid more. Affluence *required* consumption. Barbara Ehrenreich went so far as to argue that consumerism lent morality to hedonism.³⁴ Sex sold, and the guerrilla was, therefore, the enemy of this profitable system. She wanted to address potentially explosive, social inequalities. She wanted to overthrow the patriarchy. She believed that “[m]arriage means rape,” and that “[l]ove has to be destroyed.”³⁵ She sounded like a Marxist. The daughters of America needed to be protected from her rhetoric because young women were

“fertile ground for the seeds of discontent.”³⁶ Media-reinforced stereotypes like these irrevocably altered the future of feminism. As Susan Douglas wrote, “possibly the most important legacy of [the] media coverage was its carving up of the women’s movement into [that which was] legitimate... and illegitimate.”³⁷

It was hard for any woman to miss the implications of this narrative. Militancy was tacitly forbidden. Consumerism’s effect on the Sexual Revolution was such that women could either accept their sexually iconic new role, or effectively declare their opposition to the American system. Choosing the former meant being pandered to like any other customer; choosing the latter could be conceived as having divorced oneself from society. A desire to conform was, therefore, understandable, given the significant pressure to adapt to the vixen archetype. Consumerism also ensured conformity was well compensated. Marginalized by these caricatures, feminists still waged a disunited campaign to raise awareness to a plethora of inequities and unfair practices. The energies of black women became focused on issues that concerned the black community; homosexual women began to identify with the nascent gay liberation movement.³⁸ Equality was unanimously advocated yet variously defined. Eric Severeid reported in 1970 that “it remains to be seen whether [feminism] will unify and remain effective, or will fragment into quarreling, doctrinal groups.”³⁹ Feminists, at least those that continue to self identify as such, must unfortunately admit that Severeid’s arrogant cynicism has proved prophetic.⁴⁰ Feminism’s chief failure has been its inability to unite a diverse group of individuals with a loosely-defined collectivist ideology. This fault is not particular to feminism either, as ideological conflicts often play a destructive role within broad-based, social movements.

In 1964, Alfred Kinsey’s successor Dr. Paul Gebhard asked in *Time* magazine: “What do you do after you show it all? I’ve talked to some of the publishers, and they are a little worried.”⁴¹ The modern ubiquity of hardcore pornography suggests that they had every reason to be. It has also ensured that the divisive “sex-positive” versus “anti-pornography” debate has remained one of feminism’s chief disconnects. The very term “sex-positive” feminism was coined in a 1981 Ellen Willis essay entitled, “Lust Horizons: Is the Women’s Movement Pro Sex?” in which Willis attacked the notion that pornography can be considered violence against women.⁴² Thus, doctrinal, “sex-positive” feminism’s origin was as a reaction against “anti-pornography” feminism. Just as second-wave feminists must be understood as products of their generation, the current feminist debate must also be framed in its contemporary context. The number of Americans who believe homosexuality is “always wrong” has fallen to 38 percent.⁴³ Candace Bushnell’s *Sex and the City*—the obvious contemporary counterpart to Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl*—has exploded in popularity among young women.⁴⁴ The “morality” of hedonistic consumer capitalism has resulted in a heavily narcissistic

culture. Sexuality has been commercialized like never before. From 1992 to 1996, revenue from X-rated video sales and rentals quadrupled. Twelve percent of the World Wide Web’s pages are devoted to pornography; 47 percent of Internet users claim to view them regularly. Adult entertainment is now a thirteen billion dollar-a-year industry.⁴⁵ Modern—or “third-wave”—feminism remains divided over its reaction to this routinization of vulgarity; to a culture in which *Playboy* has become tame; to a society in which self-absorption has become vital to the economic health of the nation.

The vixen and the guerrilla have endured as behavioural stereotypes in popular culture. Young women of today are still influenced by these narrowly-defined, cardboard caricatures, and the vixen is still clearly preferred to the guerrilla. Yet not surprisingly, modern consumer culture has readily adapted to both variants. Today, the vixen is perhaps best embodied by the cultural phenomenon of *Girls Gone Wild* (GGW), an incredibly popular brand of “utterly plotless videos, composed entirely from footage of young women flashing their breasts, their buttocks, or occasionally their genitals at the camera, and usually shrieking ‘Who!’ while they do it.”⁴⁶ As GGW vice president Bill Horn has commented, exposing oneself to GGW’s cameras has become “like a rite of passage.”⁴⁷ Yet an increased acceptance of nudity and titillation has not necessarily resulted in an increase in promiscuity. GGW model Debbie Cope details the cognitive process behind this apparent contradiction:

The body is such a beautiful thing . . . If a woman’s got a pretty body and she likes her body, let her show it off! It exudes confidence when people wear little clothes. People watch the videos and think the girls in them are real slutty, but I’m a virgin! And yeah, *Girls Gone Wild* is for guys to get off on, but the women are beautiful and it’s . . . fun! The only way I could see someone not doing this is if they were planning a career in politics.⁴⁸

Cope not only acknowledges her objectification, but justifies it as harmless entertainment, and accepts it as a necessary cost of demonstrating confidence. Sex is commodified; for sale. She wants men to want what they cannot afford. This is the logical confluence of individualism, consumerism, and sex-positive feminism: ostracization as empowerment. Through this paradigm, modern vixens are taught that femininity is inherently exploitative; acceptable only when tempered by her firm, personal prerogative. Exhibitionism is rehabilitated as a requirement of modern desirability.

If *Girls Gone Wild* is indicative of sex-positive feminism taken to its stereotypical extreme, its anti-pornographic opposite can be found in the “Riot Grrrl” subculture. Springing from the punk rock scene of Olympia, Washington, in the early 1990s, Riot Grrrls advocated the removal of any diminutive connotation

from the word “girl” by replacing the letter “i” with a growling triple “r.” As Corin Tucker of the band Sleater-Kinney explained: “One of the goals of Riot Grrrl was to invent a new language for feminism that would interest and include teenage girls so their own language would be used to describe the women’s issues we were talking about.”⁴⁹ As Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner has written, the movement “embodied cultural politics in action, with strong women giving voice to important social issues through an empowered, female-oriented community.”⁵⁰ Her concept of empowerment is clearly different from that of the *Girls Gone Wild* vixen. The Riot Grrrl is the quintessential counterculture guerrilla. Clad in baggy clothes, perhaps sporting multiple facial piercings, she is the anti-*Cosmo* girl. The most interesting thing about the modern guerrilla, however, lies in her rebellion’s potential for profit. Though closely associated with the birth of feminism’s third-wave, the Riot Grrrl phenomenon was still a product of its local punk rock music scene. In many ways it was also a commercial enterprise comprised of “[fan magazines], record labels, and bands controlled by women. . . . Most still associate the . . . movement mainly with music, and although the music entered the popular culture, it’s fair to say much of the feminist message has been lost.”⁵¹ Riot Grrrl feminism failed for lack of universal appeal, with the guerrilla image having trivialized her legitimate, political grievances. Yet, she is still pandered to like any other customer. *Dissent* can be commodified. Forever seeking new markets, consumer capitalism merely caters to the guerrilla’s angst and assimilates another demographic.

The wildly different experiences of these feminists demonstrate diverse reactions to the world created by the Sexual Revolution. Equal rights and sexual liberation had achieved societal recognition of female individuality. These achievements were, perhaps, a final victory for the goals of first-wave feminism, but they were the making of an insurmountable obstacle for its second-wave. Individuality encourages diversity of opinion; it legitimizes differences. These differences obviously lessen the ability of the movement to adequately represent the myriad interests of modern women. This is not unique to the demise of second-wave feminism; ideological conflicts routinely disrupt the appeal of broad-based, social movements. Media-influenced stereotypes also exacerbate these differences by enforcing narrowly-defined standards of behavioural expectation. Aggressive consumer capitalism worsens this disconnect by clearly favouring one stereotype over another. This further shapes the way American culture frames sexual matters, with feminism negatively reframed as a subversive ideology. If popular culture is sexually saturated, is to be anti-sex to be anti-American? The answer becomes largely irrelevant because American consumerism easily profits from both mainstream and counterculture trends anyway. In all likelihood, these factors shall continue to forbid an all-inclusive, post-equal rights feminist movement. This is because the Sexual Revolution did not revolutionize the identity of women. It recognized their diversity.

NOTES

- ¹ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, quoted in John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 306.
- ² D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 305.
- ³ Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 409.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Irina Dunn, quoted in Gloria Steinem, “Letters,” *Time* (Australian Edition), October 9, 2000.
- ⁶ Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 409.
- ⁷ Testimony of Gloria Steinem, U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, Hearings, *The “Equal Rights” Amendment*, 91st Cong., 2d sess., 1970, 335-37.
- ⁸ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, quoted in Michele Wallace, “A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood,” *The Village Voice*, July 28, 1975, 6-7; Stokely Carmichael, quoted in D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 311.
- ⁹ Wallace, “A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood.”
- ¹⁰ Coletta Reid, quoted in D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 316.
- ¹¹ D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 316.
- ¹² Tom W. Smith, “The Sexual Revolution?” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 54 (Fall 1990): 424.
- ¹³ “Women’s Lib: A Second Look,” *Time*, December 14, 1970, quoted in D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 317.
- ¹⁴ D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 317.
- ¹⁵ Wallace, “A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood.”
- ¹⁶ “The Pill: How it is Affecting U.S. Morals, Family Life,” *U.S. News & World Report*, July 11, 1966, 1.
- ¹⁷ *Newsweek* (November 13, 1967), 74-78.
- ¹⁸ D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 304.
- ¹⁹ Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, quoted in D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 304.
- ²⁰ Smith, “The Sexual Revolution?,” 422.
- ²¹ Dana Densmore, quoted in D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 312.
- ²² “The Pill,” 2.

- ²³ Meredith Tax, quoted in D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 312.
- ²⁴ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 302.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 312.
- ²⁸ Wallace, "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," 306.
- ²⁹ Susan Douglas, *Where The Girls Are: Growing Up Female With the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 306.
- ³⁰ Elana Levine, "TV and the 70s Sex Revolution," *American Sexuality Magazine*, September 11, 2007, 4.
- ³¹ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 316.
- ³² Douglas, *Where The Girls Are*, 387.
- ³³ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 303. Helen Gurley Brown "made her mark in publishing by transforming *Cosmopolitan* into a top-selling magazine."
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 305.
- ³⁵ Ti-Grace Atkinson, quoted in Douglas, *Where The Girls Are*, 393. "Atkinson became a media darling because she gave great sound bites," as evidenced by these examples.
- ³⁶ Ruth Brine, *Time*, November 21, 1969, quoted in Douglas, *Where The Girls Are*, 389.
- ³⁷ Douglas, *Where The Girls Are*, 400.
- ³⁸ Wallace, "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," 312.
- ³⁹ Eric Severeid, quoted in Douglas, *Where The Girls Are*, 386.
- ⁴⁰ Douglas, *Where The Girls Are*, 269-293. Douglas addresses the contemporary phenomenon of reluctant feminists in a chapter entitled "I'm Not a Feminist, But..."
- ⁴¹ Dr. Paul Gebhard, quoted in Ervin Drake, "The Second Sexual Revolution," *Time*, January 24, 1964, 3.
- ⁴² Ellen Willis, "Lust Horizons," *The Village Voice*, October 18, 2005.
- ⁴³ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *New Surveys on Experiences of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals, and the Public's Views Related to Sexual Orientation*. <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/3193-index.cfm>.
- ⁴⁴ Candace Bushnell, *Sex and the City* (New York: Warner Books, 1997).
- ⁴⁵ Eric Schlosser, *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market* (New York: Mariner Books, 2004). See pages 166-170 for

a discussion of the adult video market; pages 200-203 for a discussion of pornography and the internet; and pages 113-114, 267-268, and 276 for a discussion of the revenue-making capacity of the pornographic industry.

⁴⁶ Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: The Free Press, 2005), 7-8; "25 Trends that Changed America," *USA Today*, March 27, 2007. *Girls Gone Wild* was listed alongside "sexualization" as number 23 on *USA Today's* list.

⁴⁷ Bill Horn, quoted in Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 8.

⁴⁸ Debbie Cope, quoted in Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 9.

⁴⁹ Corin Tucker, quoted in Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, *The F-Word: Feminism in Jeopardy – Women, Politics, and the Future* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2004), 86.

⁵⁰ Rowe-Finkbeiner, *The F-Word*, 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

**“Well all last night,
I sat on the levee and moaned”:
Race and Gender in Kansas Joe and
Memphis Minnie’s “When the Levee Breaks”**

ARIELLE ARNOLD-LEVENE

For a three minute and eleven-second song, Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie’s “When the Levee Breaks” holds a world of information—or rather, a world of clues—about its creators, and the Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927, waiting to be mined like the “rich alluvial deposits” of the Mississippi River.¹ Recorded in New York, in 1929, this song was among the first songs that the country-blues duo recorded, with Kansas Joe on lead vocals and rhythm guitar, and Memphis Minnie on lead guitar. It is sung from the perspective of a black male levee worker about his sad, long days filled with endless work, loneliness, and perilous rushing floodwaters, who eventually resolves to “leave his baby and his happy home.”² As any “narrative” song, “When the Levee Breaks” speaks to two worlds: the world to which the song alludes in its lyrics, and the world from which the song was created. Labour, movement, and migration characterize the first “world,” while gender relations within the blues tradition and the race-record industry characterize the second “world.” The song, however, exists in one greater reality of deeply entrenched hierarchical structures of race and gender relations. The song’s lyrics, as they relate to the forced, racialized labour during the flood, and the role of the railroad in the blues, and the music, as it relates to Memphis Minnie’s “anomalous”³ position in the male-dominated country-blues scene reveals how musical form is intricately linked with social structures. One must read between the lines—lyrically and musically—to consider the song’s implicit meanings, and to decode what it does not directly say about labour relations, infrastructure, and the blues recording industry.

To use “When the Levee Breaks” as a subject of analysis, the song’s formal attributes must be outlined. The song’s tempo is quick and in a 4/4 time signature. There are two guitars, and they are tuned to open G, which is also called Spanish tuning.⁴ However, there is a capo on the third fret, which tunes the guitars up three steps to A# or Bb tuning. One of the guitar parts functions as a rhythm guitar, Kansas Joe (born Joe McCoy), plays as a constant and basic background

strumming with little variation in rhythm, and minor variation in chord progression. Memphis Minnie (born Lizzie Douglas), plays the lead guitar in a fingerpicking style, in which she plucks individual strings, as opposed to strumming. It is obvious from the distinctly male voice that song is sung by Kansas Joe, though the distinction between the players of the two different guitar parts is not so self-evident. In fact, it is only through knowing or reading about the relationship between Memphis Minnie and Kansas Joe that one becomes aware of her role as the lead guitar player who was recognized for her fingerpicking.⁵

A useful framework through which to consider “When the Levee Breaks” is what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call “racial formation” and “racial projects.” Racial formation is the “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.” Race is, thus, socially constructed through various “projects” or processes.⁶ The Mississippi River flood of 1927 was the subject of “When the Levee Breaks,” but it was also the catalyst for a multi-faceted racial project. This racial project “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed”⁷ racialized labour relations in the South through the reversion to forced slave-like labour, and in the North through the race-record producers’ influence over the recorded blues. It began to rain in the winter of 1926, and continued steadily through the spring of 1927, causing over one hundred breaks in the levee. The worst break, or crevasse, happened at Mounds Landing near Greenville, Mississippi, at the end of April 1927.⁸ The Mississippi River rushed out of its artificial barrier for four months, covering sixteen million acres in seven states, which essentially spanned the entire Delta region. The flood left six hundred thousand to one million people homeless, 90 percent of whom were black.⁹

When the flood happened, a form of slavery returned to the Delta, though the brutal labour conditions are scarcely alluded to in “When the Levee Breaks.” The levee worker in the song laments, “I works on the levee, mama, both night and day.”¹⁰ The duration of his work is not an exaggeration; white levee camp operators forced their disproportionately black workforce to work at a constant pace to try to reinforce the deteriorating levee. Levee camps were permanent fixtures along the Mississippi River, and had been since the days of slavery; levee inspectors could force planters to send their slaves to the levee if a flood seemed imminent.¹¹ After slaves were emancipated, the camps became places of employment. However, during the flood of 1927, police gathered black men from the region and from the segregated refugee camps, and, under threat of bodily harm or imprisonment, forced them to work on the levee, “both night and day.”¹² Such a blatant reversion to slave-like labour is a clear example of a racial project. As Omi and Winant argue, slavery was, and is such an entrenched part of American history, and this past tradition can take on new forms and justifications.¹³ This precedent for the organization and structure of labour in the South thus became an easy framework

for attempting to deal with a crisis. Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, however, do not refer at all to the slave-like condition of labour in the camps, aside from the gruelling duration of labour. Though it is difficult to obtain biographical information about these two musicians from the years before they became successful blues recording artists, they were neither victims of the flood, nor levee workers, nor refugees. However, through their music, and specifically through their song about the flood, they were involved in a closely connected racial project in the North.

Historians have theorized about why early recorded blues songs seldom explicitly express and decry the harsh realities of Jim Crow life in the South, and one notable theory posits that the recording industry sought to influence and regulate the blues' public image. In 1920, Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" was the first blues recording, which caused a "blues explosion" in the 1920s, and "radically expanded the race music market" beyond spirituals and gospel.¹⁴ There were a small number of white-controlled recording companies in the North, and after the 1927 flood, they were particularly interested in marketing blues songs about the greatest natural disaster the country had seen. The blues represented something new and marketable to the recording companies, as opposed to the traditional spirituals and gospel. In fact, as Davarian Baldwin notes in his book *Chicago's New Negroes*, even black, old-line Protestant churches condemned spirituals as vestiges of slavery.¹⁵ However, the blues tradition is a vestige of slavery as well. "When the Levee Breaks" comes from the context of a form of revived slavery—the forced levee labour and refugee conditions. "Vestiges of slavery" is thus clearly applicable to the blues form, as well.

Omi and Winant note that the "racial legacies of the past" continue to shape the present, and that contemporary state and society "reproduce those patterns of inequality in a new guise." Levee labour was old slavery in a new form, and spirituals may have been applicable to the old slavery, but the blues was applicable to this "new form," in whatever shape it may take. Paul and Beth Garon refer to the blues as a "technique of psychic mastery," and that "When the Levee Breaks" is not so much a cry of pain as it is an "announcement of a new beginning."¹⁶ Therefore, while there certainly was an element of white influence in the recording, it is too easy to settle on theory about why the blues does not explicitly decry the harsh realities of Jim Crow life. This theory fits too neatly into the binary of white power and black oppression, and does not account for the emotional autonomy of musical expression. It is with an expression of hope in sadness that the levee worker resolves to "leave his baby and his happy home."¹⁷

Leaving one's home in the South, whether happy or not, was a major aspect of the flood, taking place within the larger context of the Great Migration. During the migration, which began during World War I and continued through the 1930s, the south's Black population went north in droves, looking for work, or looking for

escape from Jim Crow life. Many went to Detroit looking for work at Ford, after hearing about Henry Ford's five dollar day.¹⁸ The levee worker in "When the Levee Breaks" gives no indication as to where he intends to go, or from where exactly he would be leaving. Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie were still living in the South in 1927, playing on Beale Street, a popular blues spot in Memphis, Tennessee. They were discovered in a Beale Street barbershop, and Columbia Records brought them to New York in 1929, to record their hit song about the flood. In 1930, they moved to Chicago, permanently relocating to the North.¹⁹ That they were not levee workers is the key aspect that separates them and their "world" from that of the levee worker of their song and his "world," but it is likely that the worker was also Chicago-bound, especially if he was singing the blues. Davarian Baldwin notes an important connection between the migration, Chicago, and the blues. Citing the blues legend Robert Johnson, a famous musician from the 1920s, he notes Johnson's relocation to Chicago "within the much older American mythos of the Western frontier"²⁰—a land full of possibility and freedom. Blacks had begun to settle there as freed men or fugitive slaves in the mid-nineteenth century, thus lending it a tradition of relative freedom. It was also the home of the *Chicago Defender*, the "great crusading black newspaper."²¹

However, it was not merely the possibilities of this "frontier" city that drew in black migrants; it was simply the easiest place to go. The Illinois Central Railroad (ICR) grew out of smaller railroads in the South after the civil war. By the 1880s, the ICR was aiming to become the "mainline of mid-America." By 1927, it was the one line that ran due North across the entire country, ending in Chicago, and "taking in the whole of the Delta blues country." The railroad is symbolic to the blues, as African-American music traditionally spoke of movement and escape, and the ICR was a major presence in the Delta blues country. Numerous blues scholars note that the ICR brought the blues to Chicago. However, it also nurtured blues in the Delta. The Pullman porters and "fireman" operators on the trains had a special crude, "bluesy" warble that they would play on the train's whistle as it passed through the Delta, carrying copies of the *Chicago Defender* with its numerous race-record advertisements. The ICR's presence was also felt during the flood, as it freighted in rescue boats, transported refugees, and brought reporters, and Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover in from the North to report on and assist with relief efforts. Infrastructure and movement, though symbolic to the blues and migration, was complicated by the flood.

Omi and Winant argue that racial projects are situated socio-historically. However, they are conversely situated geographically, and are mobile. "When the levee breaks, mama, you got to move," warns the levee worker in the song. One of the only places to go, ironically, was to the levee, or to the refugee and work camps (some of which were on the levee). Soldiers, plantation owners, and local Southern

whites barred reporters and northern labour agents—and anyone who might try to take away the plantation owners' desperately needed African-American workforce—from entering the camps. Plantation owners lived in dire fear of losing the sharecroppers who were their source of labour. The historian Robyn Spencer referred to the camps as “holding pens” guarded by soldiers. Though the levee worker resolved to leave, he was likely to have encountered serious difficulty in mobility during the flood crisis. Forced labour on the levee did eventually cease, though, and as David Evans notes, many black sharecroppers in the camps felt that the flood had “emancipated them from the condition of peonage.”²² Planters had lost their plantations, and the sharecroppers left in droves.²³

The racial project of the South in the Delta during the flood, which revived slavery as a trusted method to command and enslave a steady racialized workforce, was situated in the camps during the flood. After the South, the racial project no doubt remained in the general, every-day Jim Crow life, but much of the “participants” in the project took the most convenient route away from the geographical location of the flood's racial project. They moved north, to where Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie were taking part in the racial project of the recorded blues. As earlier mentioned, the ICR brought the blues to Chicago,²⁴ but it also brought the blues back to the South. The levee worker had, in theory, left his baby and his happy home, but through the blues, his happy home was preserved. While sitting and moaning on the levee during the flood, the worker is “thinking about his baby and his happy home” before he eventually resolves to leave.²⁵ The “happy home” is another key aspect of the notion of geographically situated racial formation. This notion of geography and racial formation strongly relates to the reconciling of one's roots in the South and one's life in the North.

W.E.B. Du Bois noted in his book *The Souls of Black Folks*, published in 1903, that black people were confronted with the problem of “twoness”—that they had to struggle between their black identities and their American identities.²⁶ Regional identity is just as important a struggle, for the North and the South are culturally distinct regions. The recording industry's advertising tactics contributed to the reconciliation of identities through blues and memory. Mark Dolan notes that the race-record advertisements that the *Chicago Defender* published showed the South “from afar,” depicting an idealized version of the region.²⁷ The *Chicago Defender* was a “violently anti-Southern” newspaper.²⁸ That it endorsed these advertisements that the white-controlled race-record companies produced is telling of the perceived importance to the black community of a strong sense of pride in one's roots. The author notes that music “forged a new bond among readers by presenting the South as a shared memory”²⁹ – the advertisements presented the levee worker's “happy home.” While they presented this aspect of the worker's world, they also represented the gendered aspects of the blues world of the late 1920s.

Through the shift in the race-record advertisements' focus from female to male performers by the end of the 1920s, the advertisements account for a redefinition of gender relationships in the blues, which the dual guitars in “When the Levee Breaks” characterize. In her discussion of gender as an analytical tool, Joan Scott identifies one notion of “gender” as a “constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, which were a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”³⁰ The blues scene was male-centred by the end of the 1920s, and Memphis Minnie strongly defined and solidified her position in it by both confusing and validating the perceived differences that separated “woman's” blues from “men's” blues. Mamie Smith's “Crazy Blues”, the first blues recording in 1920, is known as “classic blues,” which was decidedly different from the “country blues” that gained popularity in the mid 1920s. Classic blues had a large female presence, and they were primarily singers who performed a sort of vaudeville blues with instrumental backup. After the mid-1920s, women's place in the newly dominant country blues became uncommon. Country blues musicians were often self-accompanied male singers and guitar or harmonica players.³¹

Country blues musicians considered their form of the blues to be the “real folk blues,” and derided classic blues as inauthentic because of its vaudeville style.³² However, Charles Marcus Tribbett, in his analysis of Memphis Minnie's blues, argues that it was rather because classic blues was female-oriented that blues musicians did not consider it authentic. That ads for blues from female musicians virtually disappeared from the *Chicago Defender* by mid-decade lends credence to Tribbett's argument. The blues scene was changing, and it had been appropriated by men who were identified as true blues musicians.

The lyrics and vocals of “When the Levee Breaks” have already been discussed in this essay in reference to labour, movement, and race relations, but it is the song's musical form that speaks, or rather, plays to the notion of blues and gender because of the relationship between the two guitar parts. These two guitar parts—the strumming and the picking—are distinct yet complementary, with the picking taking a clear lead over the strumming, making it the dominant instrumental sound in the song, and equal to, if not more prominent than, the vocals. One could assume that Kansas Joe was playing the lead guitar part because of the male vocals, but most importantly because of the classic blues normal of male musicianship. However, there is no doubt Memphis Minnie was playing the lead guitar, because of her reputation as a skilled fingerpicking player. In fact, it is this style of guitar playing that gained her credibility in the classic blues scene. A frequently cited anecdote about Memphis Minnie comes from the blues musician William “Big Bill” Broonzy, who said, after another woman claimed she was Minnie, “Hell, no, that's not Memphis Minnie, because the real Memphis Minnie can pick a guitar and sing as good as any man I've ever heard. This woman plays like a woman

guitar player.”³³ Memphis Minnie thus gained credibility not just as a musician, but as a man, or rather as a woman taking on a definitively male role. Broonzy also commented on her tough character, which was evidently common knowledge; people knew not to mess with Minnie, for fear of a verbal or physical lashing.³⁴

This sort of gender identification is also closely related to gender identification and construction of male levee workers in levee camps (though not specifically during the 1927 flood). As Michael McCoyer argues in his article on black masculine identity in the levee camps, black levee workers, who were often also sharecroppers, sought to reclaim or maintain a “manly” identity in the after-hours culture of the camps. Suggesting that the sharecropping system and Jim Crow South had eroded a sense of masculine autonomy, and that these workers, in the isolation of the camps, would fight or take part in other “rough” activities to assert their masculinity.³⁵ So too did Memphis Minnie have to assert her identity in the blues scene as a “rough” woman who could hold her own, musically and physically, against the men. However, she did all of this sort of “male” gender development while also asserting and celebrating her sexuality and femininity, as lyrics to a number of her solo songs and her uninhibited performance style show. Lynn Dumenil argues that blues was a “forum in which black women could not only celebrate their sexuality but claim to control it.”³⁶ Memphis Minnie did this by “asserting her right to commodify herself”³⁷—by fusing her distinctly “male” talent with a distinctly “female” sexuality, combining aspects that characterized the two gendered worlds. In this way, gender identification was indeed “highly unstable,”³⁸ but Memphis Minnie had mastered her gender identification to fit within her social context. The musical form of the song, then, presents, like Scott’s definition of gender, “a constitutive element of the social,” and musical, “relationships between the sexes.”³⁹

Race and gender are two major aspects of study in the United States and the world because of their pervasiveness in systems of inequality. They are thus useful tools through which to analyze something expressive and cultural, like the blues. It was not until the 1960s, with the development of the New Left, and the methodology of social and cultural history’s “renewal of interest in cultural practices, in the way that people create meaning”⁴⁰ that blues scholarship really became a serious study. Looking at “When the Levee Breaks,” and its relation to the flood, labour, migration, and the blues industry, the song takes on a meaning that runs far deeper than the flood waters that washed away the homes and infrastructure of the Mississippi Delta. The song is basically the story of a man working on a levee during the flood. However, after applying these aforementioned comprehensive analytical tools, it ultimately becomes a story of American race and gender relations.

NOTES

¹ Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, “When the Levee Breaks,” Columbia Records 14439-D; Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: The Meaning of the Blues* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 233.

² Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, “When the Levee Breaks,” 3:05.

³ Charles Marcus Tribbett, “‘Everybody Wants to Buy My Kittie’: Resistance and the Articulation of the Sexual Subject in the Blues of Memphis Minnie,” *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 29 (1998): 42.

⁴ Paul and Beth Garon, *Woman With Guitar: Memphis Minnie’s Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 22.

⁵ Christopher John Farley, “Memphis Minnie and the Cutting Contest,” in *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: A Musical Journey*, eds. Peter Guralnick, et al. (New York: Amistad, 2003), 198.

⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 206.

⁹ David Evans, “Blues and Gospel Commentary on the 1927 Mississippi River Flood,” in Robert Springer, ed. *Nobody Knows Where the Blues Come From: Lyrics and History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 3.

¹⁰ Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, “When the Levee Breaks,” 1:27.

¹¹ Mikko Saikku, *This Delta, This Land: An Environmental History of the Yazoo-Mississippi Floodplain* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 143.

¹² Barry, *Rising Tide*, 195; Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, “When the Levee Breaks,” 1:27.

¹³ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 58.

¹⁴ Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 171.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁶ Garon and Garon, *Girl with Guitar*, 24.

¹⁷ Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, “When the Levee Breaks,” 3:05.

¹⁸ Henrietta Yurchenco, “Blues Fallin’ Down Like Hail’: Recorded Blues, 1920s-1940s,” *American Music* 13 (1995): 455.

¹⁹ Garon and Garon, *Girl with Guitar*, 24.

²⁰ Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, 14.

- ²¹ Mike Rowe, *Chicago Blues: The City & The Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1975).
- ²² Evans, "Blues and Gospel Commentary on the 1927 Mississippi River Flood," 10.
- ²³ Rowe, *Chicago Blues*, 26.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ²⁵ Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie, "When the Levee Breaks," 3:05.
- ²⁶ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 255.
- ²⁷ Mark D. Dolan, "Extra! *Chicago Defender* Race Records Ads Show South from Afar," *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 3 (2007): 107.
- ²⁸ Barry, *Rising Tide*, 179.
- ²⁹ Dolan, "Extra! *Chicago Defender* Race Records Ads Show South from Afar," 107.
- ³⁰ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 42.
- ³¹ Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 171; Tribbett, "Everybody Wants to Buy My Kittie," 42.
- ³² Tribbett, "Everybody Wants to Buy My Kittie," 42.
- ³³ William Broonzy and Yannick Bruynoghe, *Big Bill Blues: William Bloonzy's Story as told to Yannick Bruynoghe* (New York: Oak Publications, 1964), 138.
- ³⁴ Farley, "Memphis Minnie and the Cutting Contest," 198.
- ³⁵ Michael McCoy, "'Rough Mens' in 'The Toughest Places I Ever Seen': The Construction and Ramifications of Black Masculine Identity in the Mississippi Delta's Levee Camps, 1900-1935," *International Labor & Working-Class History* 69 (2006): 58, 59, 65.
- ³⁶ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 140.
- ³⁷ Tribbett, "Everybody Wants to Buy My Kittie," 47.
- ³⁸ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 38.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁴⁰ Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 116; Yurchenco, "Blues Fallin' Down Like Hail," 449.

The "Hip" Flask: A Historical Commodity Chain Analysis

ADAM ROGERS-GREEN

Prohibition in the United States was a period of considerable social and economic change. Despite the illegality of their products in the United States, Canadian liquor producers flourished. This can be attributed to a continental trend of increased corporate organization, as well as the overwhelmingly pro-business atmosphere of the era. In fact, even the bootleggers and gangsters who distributed the alcohol were becoming more and more organized. When the alcohol finally made its way to the consumer, it became something more than just a drink. The consumer was well aware of the rumours and legends of famous rumrunners, and the alcohol they smuggled became a symbol of excitement and danger. To violate Prohibition became a fashionable expression of individuality and modernity among urban Americans. But, for the most fashionable, to drink was not enough. It had to be a trendy drink, a drink that was genuinely imported, and not distilled in someone's bathtub. For these reasons, producers became increasingly interested in distinguishing their brand from their competitors and counterfeiters alike.

An excellent example of this phenomenon can be examined through a historical commodity chain analysis of the "Gate Bottle." Produced by Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts, this whisky vessel can be used as an avatar of commodity through an exploration of its production, distribution, and consumption. The historical commodity chain analysis, elements of which are borrowed from Ian Cook and his colleagues at the University of Birmingham, is a useful tool for understanding the interrelationship between these different actors. However, due to the relative unavailability of step-by-step information in comparison to a contemporary commodity, the historical commodity chain requires a synthesis of relevant existing primary and secondary sources. As such, the historical commodity chain also explores the causality between production, distribution, and consumption of goods, and attempts to raise as well as answer questions. This investigation will demonstrate how the producers of the Gate Bottle created a



commodity that could be successfully distributed through formal and informal channels, and why consumers fetishized it.

The Gate Bottle is a fine specimen of early 20th century commercial glasswork. The bottles were primarily amber, and were to be used for Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts' flagship brand, Canadian Club, though some were flint (clear) glass and used for gin. A whole variety of sizes were commissioned, ranging from "minis," roughly one imperial ounce, to larger forty-imperial ounce containers. The bottle is notable for its unique design. Concave in shape, it had a highly detailed pattern on the back. An image of the gates of Hiram Walker & Sons' headquarters was intricately embossed on the back of the bottle, as well as the top portion of the front, which was not covered by the label. The labels differed by brand and year. Canadian Club was by far Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts' best selling product during prohibition, and its label always featured the brand name in elegantly italicized text. The label often also portrayed an image of the company crest with *BY APPOINTMENT OF HIS MAJESTY GEORGE V* written below, and a warning to beware of counterfeiters.

An analysis of this splendid bottle's origins serves as a prime example of the increased corporate organization and industrial automation of the period. Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts commissioned an exclusive bottle mould in the latter half of the 1920s from the Dominion Glass Company. Both of these organizations are good illustrations of the business-friendly attitude of the period. The Dominion Glass Company was created in 1913, and incorporated four separate glass manufacturers, as well as the majority share of another. The lucrative merger supplied the company with plants that had been using automatic bottle-making machines since 1907, allowing them to handle greater volume.¹ Hiram Walker & Sons, the original producers of the immensely popular Canadian Club, was bought

in 1926 by business mogul Harry C. Hatch for fourteen million dollars, over half of which was for the flagship brand alone.² Hatch merged Hiram Walker & Sons with another one of his other distilleries, Gooderham & Worts, to create Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts Ltd. in 1927, in order to tackle the immensely lucrative American market.

Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts' rationale in commissioning the Dominion Glass Company for the creation of a new bottle stemmed from their need to create a method of efficient distribution. Creating a bottle mould was an expensive venture, and Hatch would not have approved it had it not been a necessity. Hatch's aspiration to take on the American market during Prohibition required unconventional supply chains, which became surprisingly well organized. While numerous routes existed, one of the least remembered today and most profitable back then was via France without crossing the Atlantic. The French island colony of St. Pierre and Miquelon in the St. Lawrence Seaway served as a major depot for smuggling during Prohibition. In 1922, France removed the ban on its colonies on importing foreign liquor, and soon after, it became a major stop on the Atlantic liquor trade route. Shipments would arrive at St. Pierre, and from there would either travel down the Eastern seaboard to the notorious "Rum Row" between Atlantic City and Boston, or toward the Bahamas, and then to Florida.³ Between 1927 and 1931, Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts shipped a total of 79,066 cases of liquor from Walkerville, Ontario (Windsor) to St. Pierre.⁴ In an effort to distance itself from the illicit activity at St. Pierre, they set up a front company, United Traders, to receive and re-sell the company's products to bootleggers. The operation was very successful, however, the perpetual loading and unloading at St. Pierre caused numerous Canadian Club bottles to break, the price of which had been significantly inflated due to Prohibition. The solution to this problem was to create a new sturdier container—the Gate Bottle.

Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts' new contract with the Dominion Glass Company, and their modern production facilities, allowed for the construction of the Gate Bottle, which was more robust, and could be shipped more easily and efficiently. Canadian Club had previously been shipped in long-necked bottles, which were far more prone to breakage. An intercompany memo from 1930 attested to this, stating that one of their biggest customers on the North Atlantic Seaboard was threatening to reduce his order if this problem was not remedied. The memo even went as far as to suggest "returning to Walkerville the St. Pierre lot of long neck Litres."⁵ This memo explicitly recommended the exclusive introduction of "the new ornamental Litres [the Gate Bottle] which appear much stronger."⁶ In addition to the tougher glass, the concave shape allowed for the bottles to hug each other in transport, reducing rattling, and the short neck reduced structural weak points. Canadian Club had been packaged in concave

bottles as early as 1922, but the Gate Bottle was an exclusive mould belonging to Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts.⁷ By 1931, Canadian Club was only shipped to St. Pierre in Gate Bottles.⁸

Another avenue of distribution was across the Detroit River and into Detroit, which was one of the “wettest” cities in America. By 1929, the illegal liquor industry was the second largest in the city next to automobile manufacturing. It is estimated that it employed 50,000 people, and was worth approximately three hundred million dollars a year.⁹ Much of the liquor that made its way into Detroit came from Canada. This trade relied heavily on the various organized crime syndicates of the city, the most notorious of which was the all-Jewish “Purple Gang,” who were suppliers for Al Capone.

The Detroit route also benefited from the introduction of the Gate Bottle. The tougher glass and compact design were equally useful for these distributors, as they frequently were involved in high-speed chases with police, and other activity unsuitable for fragile cargo. The concave shape also allowed for easier concealment on the person, particularly in one’s boot, hence the term “bootlegging.” Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts were also involved with the distribution of liquor via Detroit, and again took precautions to distance itself from doing so. Records indicate that some liquor meant for St. Pierre ended up sitting in Walkerville, and was eventually shipped across the river to Detroit.¹⁰ While the Gate Bottle may not have been explicitly designed for the benefit of organized crime, there is no doubt that the gangsters made good use of it.

Stories of bootlegging and organized crime excited the public, and contributed to the trendiness of drinking during Prohibition. The crusade for Prohibition came from a diverse array of social groups, including the KKK, women’s temperance unions, Social Christians, and progressive reformers. While much of the support for Prohibition lay in rural America, these organizations had substantial urban support, as well. These groups associated alcohol with the other modern urban vices, and directed much of their criticism toward the working class, immigrants, and Catholics.¹¹ Ironically, Prohibition seemed to make drinking more acceptable to the nation’s Protestant majority, especially in urban settings. In *Dry Manhattan*, author Michael A. Lerner argues that Prohibition made those who were indifferent to alcohol begin drinking as it was a bold, almost heroic act that required cunning and wit.¹² Individuals were able to link their own defiance of Prohibition with the stories of legendary bootleggers and crime bosses. One such bootlegger, Bill McCoy, had a direct link to Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts and the history of the Gate Bottle.

Bill McCoy was one of the most successful smugglers of the Prohibition era. He had a reputation for never tampering with his shipments, and is rumoured to be one of the legendary eponyms for the expression “The Real McCoy,” still in use

today. McCoy was the first one to discover the potential of St. Pierre for the liquor trade, a crucial factor in the creation of the Gate Bottle.¹³ McCoy’s personal influence on not only the distribution, but also the production and consumption of the Gate Bottle demonstrates just how significant a figure he was during Prohibition.

Real smugglers were not the only figures on the public’s mind. One of the 1920s most famous pieces of literature had a bootlegger as its protagonist. F. Scott Fitzgerald, a hard drinker himself, published his most famous work, *The Great Gatsby*, in 1926. Though not initially a best-seller, the novel was able to capture life and legends of the era rather accurately. The story revolves around an obsessive nouveau-riche would-be gentleman who made his fortune in the illegal liquor trade. Indeed, alcohol features prominently in the novel, and is present everywhere from the small private dinner parties to the lavish galas thrown at Gatsby’s mansion. Throughout the novel, the specifics of Gatsby’s liquor operation are never clearly addressed. However, his notoriety led many of his acquaintances to guess that he was involved in “the underground pipe line to Canada.”¹⁴ Fitzgerald also informs us that one of his closest business partners, Meyer Wolfsheim, was allegedly the one who rigged the 1919 World Series. Wolfsheim is a Jew, and his involvement in organized crime is a reminder of the link between organized crime and liquor, not unlike the Purple Gang. Fitzgerald’s literary portrayal of a different sort of liquor legend highlights yet again the influence of individuals.

The charismatic effect of these individuals, and their real or imagined significance in the underground economy, were contributing factors to the commercial success of the Gate Bottle. This idolization of the illegal liquor trade must be contextualized within the tenet of modern liberal society that life was to be lived for personal enjoyment and comfortable self-preservation. Of great contribution to this disposition was the experience of the First World War, which led many Americans to doubt the value of personal sacrifice under the pretenses of patriotism. The unprecedented increase in affluence of the post-war years also provided a tremendous amount of consumer goods, many of which were for personal enjoyment. This increase in affluence was the direct result of greater automation in the workplace, which was perceived as a threat to individualism. Americans increasingly sought new ways to reclaim their individuality during their leisure time, and drinking was a prime method. Aside from the aforementioned danger appeal of drinking, the act also had the ability to demarcate an individual from the legislated norms. The particular shape and design of the Gate Bottle made it a commodity conducive to individuality. The pint incarnation of the Gate Bottle contained a suitable quantity for one person, and was more reasonably priced than larger versions. The pint size was also the easiest, aside from the mini, to conceal on the body as it was roughly the size of traditional hip flask. In fact, the shape and design of the Gate Bottle was yet another reason for acclaim among consumers.

The intricate detail of the glasswork combined with the high quality of the whisky within made the Gate Bottle a highly sought-after commodity. As the pint-sized Gate Bottle was roughly analogous in shape to metal hip flasks, it had the potential to be used as a substitute. During Prohibition, drinking was not only a measure of individuality, but of status, as well. Drinking accessories, like hip flasks, were then symbols of both. Some silver hip flasks retailed for \$175.¹⁵ While accessible to the wealthy trendsetters of the day, this was out of reach for many middle- and working-class drinkers. However, the Gate Bottle served as a convenient substitute for status-conscious consumers. Canadian Club whisky was a premium brand during Prohibition, and while to drink it was expensive, it was not impossible for the common man. It could be used as an example of the affordable affluence of the era made possible by higher wages across society. The embossing also made it a coveted item, as the pattern was unique and elaborate. So while the majority of drinkers may not have been able to afford silver, they could much more easily afford a decorative glass replica.

Beside the status that the Gate Bottle could signify, the vessel also served as an important deterrent against counterfeiting. The Prohibition era resulted in numerous homemade liquor operations, often producing spirits of questionable quality. In some cases, ingestion could actually result in blindness or even death.¹⁶ This increased the demand for imported liquor. However, amateur distillers were still eager to exploit the seemingly insatiable business opportunity. Often using generic bottle shapes, they attempted to pass off their homemade products as real foreign whisky. The popularity of Canadian Club had become a perennial target even before Prohibition. However, the elaborate detail of the Gate Bottle essentially made it impossible to replicate. As a result, consumers knew that if they had the Gate Bottle, they had genuine Canadian Club. And if consumers were going to be paying for a status-enhancing whisky like Canadian Club, they wanted to make sure they were getting “The Real McCoy.”

Not only did consumers drink Canadian Club for status, but also because they were becoming more accustomed to identifying products by brand. The 1920s saw a dramatic increase in advertisement. Ad agencies attempted to distance themselves for the huckster image of the past, and adopted more sophisticated methods. However, advertising for alcohol during Prohibition was illegal. Despite this, liquor companies introduced new and innovative methods to establish their brand. Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts gave out “freebies,” to their biggest customers, legal or otherwise, such as playing cards, shot glasses, and poker chips. These items had Canadian Club written on them, and served to raise brand consciousness among the public. The Gate Bottle itself was an instrument of branding. The distinctive glasswork, label, and shape all helped create not only a guarantee against counterfeiting, but brand awareness. This was at a time when, as the

inaugural issue of the *New Yorker* proclaimed an “especially shaped bottle [was] almost always demanded” by consumers.¹⁷ Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts were not the only company producing bottles with embossing, and thus it was all the more important that the fine glasswork of the Gate Bottle stand out.¹⁸

All of these different facets of consumption are part of the process of how alcohol in general, and the Gate Bottle more specifically, became a commodity fetish. Karl Marx coined the term “commodity fetish” in the first volume of his seminal work, *Das Kapital*. For Marx, to fetishize a commodity was to imbue it with extraordinary qualities. It was the result of the exchange and use value of commodities, or in other words, their monetary value, and their practical or imaginary uses.¹⁹ The Gate Bottle had a high exchange value, because it contained premium liquor which was also contraband. The fact that it was illegal also contributed to its imaginary appeal. The stories of bootleggers and gangsters appealed to the public, and enhanced the experience and risk of drinking. For the public, drinking was also a status symbol, which the high quality craftsmanship of the Gate Bottle enhanced. All this made the public desire the Gate Bottle not just as a means to inebriation, but as a vessel for pleasure.

The methods of production and distribution of the Gate Bottle were major contributors to the rampant consumption of the product. While most foreign alcohol manufacturers prospered during Prohibition, the tremendous success of Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts must to be attributed to something greater. The bottle was an excellent transport vessel, either by boat, land, or even on the person, making it the product of choice for major bootleggers. In turn, the public liked to imagine a link between themselves and these legends, and greatly enjoyed the class and rebellion that the Gate Bottle embodied. In fact, the Gate Bottle was so popular that it remained in production until the 1950s, and was even briefly brought back in the 1990s in homage to one of Prohibition’s most successful commodities.

NOTES

¹ *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Glass” (by Janet Holmes), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/>.

² “Hiram & Sons, Limited” in *Business and History at Western*, <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/programs/companyinformationcanada/ccc-hiramwalker.htm>.

³ J.P. Andrieux, *Prohibition and St. Pierre* (Lincoln: W. F. Rannie, 1983), 17.

⁴ “Shipments to St. Pierre, 1931,” Vertical Cabinet “Prohibition,” Folder “St. Pierre Pool,” Canadian Club Brand Centre Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

⁵ “Intercompany Memo, 15 December 1930,” Vertical Cabinet “Prohibition,”

Folder "St. Pierre Pool," Canadian Club Brand Centre Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "Export Price List, November 1923," Vertical Cabinet "Prohibition," Folder "St. Pierre Pool," Canadian Club Brand Centre Archives, Windsor, Ontario.

⁸ "Shipments to St. Pierre, 1931."

⁹ Robert A. Rockaway, "The Notorious Purple Gang: Detroit's All Jewish Prohibition Era Mob," in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 20.1 (2001): 113-130.

¹⁰ Andrieux, *Prohibition and St. Pierre*, 38.

¹¹ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 232-234.

¹² Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 132-133.

¹³ Andrieux, *Prohibition and St. Pierre*, 14.

¹⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Penguin Books, 1926), 94.

¹⁵ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, 146.

¹⁶ Andrieux, *Prohibition and St. Pierre*, 14.

¹⁷ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, 135.

¹⁸ Andrieux, *Prohibition and St. Pierre*, 62-63.

¹⁹ Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secrets," *Das Kapital* (*Capital*), vol. 1, (London: Penguin, 1867).

Dirty Birds:

The Function of Filth as a Cultural Critique in John Waters' *Pink Flamingos*

WILLIAM MARTIN

"What's so good about bad taste?" This is the question posed by *New York Times* film critic Vincent Canby in the title of his 1975 editorial that offers an opinion of lowbrow 70s cinema suggesting the presence of a hierarchy within bad taste itself. He offers praise for Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* and Woody Allen's *Sleeper* for their mastery of raunchy humour, but suggests that in *Pink Flamingos* director John Waters "trades on the good reputation of bad taste, and then perverts it."¹ He suggests that Waters' attempt to depict "where America is at" in his films is "silly pretension," and "a stake through the heart of bad taste," which, he claims, derives its value from being "heedless."² In the original trailer for *Pink Flamingos*, a filmed collection of people's reactions after leaving the theatre, one patron remarked, "I think John Waters has his finger on the pulse of America," and another, "I think he's got his thumb securely up America's ass."³ These two reactions to Waters represent a tension of legitimacy in his work: must bad taste be merely mindless distraction hinged on shock value or can it serve a didactic purpose? John Waters himself had described *Pink Flamingos* as an "exercise in bad taste." The word "exercise" here implies this film is in no way careless, rather, a carefully planned production that is capable of producing something other than simply shock. It reveals in itself a capacity for social critique.

It is Waters' ability to infuse criticism of American society into *Pink Flamingos* that leads Canby to question the legitimacy of this sort of commentary through a medium not traditionally understood to merit such validity—the "B-Movie." *Pink Flamingos* transcends the traditional boundaries of bad taste, and contributes to the construction of filth as a category where those elements that have been casted out and relegated to the social margins by the dominance of bourgeois propriety can be located. Filth is antithetical to appropriateness, and is represented by ideas, individuals, objects, or actions labeled disgusting, disgraceful, debased, and debauched. Throughout *Pink Flamingos*, Waters uses filth to critique different manifestations of middle-class propriety, using the lens of sexual morality to contest the dominance of a perceived normality distinguishing between

the appropriate and the foul. His critique of two of these manifestations will be specifically addressed. First, through the depictions of abnormal sex acts, the film contests the limitations of normative sexuality. Second, filth, in the representations of gender performance and confusion throughout the film, questions our interpretations of gender normality. Filth consolidates different categories of the socially unacceptable by creating a space for their existence, and a base from which filth can launch a campaign for social critique of social norms. I argue that such criticism reveals a structural weakness in the very foundations of bourgeois propriety, which when deconstructed reveals an underlying obsession and dependence on filth as a socializing category. However, a deconstructive analysis must also call into question Waters' own ability to truly redeem filth as it affects class formation by defining the appropriate boundaries of social critique and display.

I guess there's just two types of people Miss Sandstone, my kind of people and assholes.

—Connie Marble: "Class Critique" in *Pink Flamingos*

Before closer examination of the text, the function of filth and class in *Pink Flamingos* requires some discussion to demonstrate how Waters' criticism is framed in exposing the general invalidity of class distinction throughout the film. Class is ubiquitous in *Pink Flamingos*. The opening shot depicts a hideous pink trailer that is inhabited by the "filthiest person alive," the grotesque drag queen Divine, and her dysfunctional family. Their squalid living conditions and white trash aesthetic explicitly beckons the label of lower-class. The plot of the film concerns Divine attempting to protect her title from Connie and Raymond Marble, "two jealous perverts" seeking to prove they are, indeed, filthier than Divine.⁴ The Marbles represent the anxieties of bourgeoisie society, signified by artwork in their home, pretensions in their manner of dress, and most importantly, the presence and mistreatment of their servant Channing. The Marbles, however, attempt to defy traditional middle-class norms of propriety, by doing everything in their power to be filthier than Divine, but failing in their distinctly inauthentic and perfunctory exploits. It is this depiction of perverse tendencies, or pretensions to perversion among the bourgeoisie that allows *Pink Flamingos* to powerfully critique the very basis for class distinction by revealing a certain poverty of authenticity within middle-class normality.

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital draws attention to the perception of superiority behind class distinction used to enforce what becomes defined as normal in a given social context. Cultural capital is the set of knowledge, experience, and education that allows a person to succeed in society above others that do not share those perceived advantages.⁵ In contrast to traditional economic capital, it is not directly quantifiable, but relies on more abstract criteria of status. The

criteria of cultural capital is defined by those who are able to accumulate it, primarily the middle-class. Thus, bourgeois norms of propriety emerge as a criteria for the acquisition of cultural capital. It establishes a need for adherence to middle-class normality, without it the cultural capital vital to social advancement is inaccessible. This demonstrates how the morality of this dominant group is enforced upon all of society through the structures that uphold this necessity for social distinction.

In *Pink Flamingos*, the criteria for cultural capital is inverted. Filth is something that is competed for, and infamy replaces propriety—offering an oppositional form to traditionally highbrow cultural capital. This humorous inversion satirizes social distinction by suggesting that these norms are adhered to without any critical assessment, simply in order to amass cultural capital, and to advance socially. Waters specifically criticizes the imitative quality of life that seems to emerge through uncritical adherence to this sense of propriety.

This quality of imitation perfectly illustrated by the Marbles, who, when discovering that Divine was known to be filthier, pursue a campaign of filth which feels distinctly inauthentic and artificial. Their declarations of love for each others' filth during their foot sucking fetish scene sound distinctly contrived. At one point, Connie suggests she loves Raymond more than her own filthiness, and in the next line suggests it is more vibrant than her own (dyed) red hair. The superficial Marbles seek to appear filthy in order to ascend a filth hierarchy of inverted social norms. Similarly, Raymond Marble's attempt to be publicly obscene backfires when he shakes his penis at a presumed female onlooker who proceeds to reveal her own penis, and responds in kind to Raymond who appears shocked and scandalized. This demonstrates a deceptive quality to appearance, and also suggests Raymond's relative tameness in his amateur display of filthiness. The fact that he attempts to make this display public further illustrates the Marbles obsession with being perceived as filthy, unlike Divine who simply embodies filth without appearing affected by opinion. Connie conducts her filthy lifestyle in a bureaucratic manner. Linking middle-class propriety to capitalist exploitation, the Marbles operate an underground "baby ring" of entrapped pregnant women, which is controlled by the high-powered executive Connie Marble. The imprisoned women are isolated in the basement in an attempt to quarantine filth, and preserve hygienic space in the rest of the house.⁶ The Marbles themselves do not attend to the women after capturing them; rather, Channing the servant is kept to deal with the impregnation and caretaking of the captive women in order to keep the Marbles removed from the filthy conditions, even while claiming a property of filthiness by virtue of their commodification of these women-slaves.

Channing himself illustrates the bourgeois quality of imitation in a disturbing scene when the Marbles return to find him acting out their exaggerated personas for his own pleasure. Dressed in Connie's clothing, complete with a blue

mop to enact the character of Raymond, Channing quotes filthy lines from the Marbles' earlier sexual encounter. Given the inauthentic performance of Connie and Raymond's filthiness, this then becomes an imitation of an imitation of filth. This demonstrates how an authentic concept like filth, through successive imitation, is degenerated to the level of simulated reality. It operates in a manner not unlike the concept of simulacrum proposed by Jean Baudrillard: what is authentic and original is counterfeited, and the imitation is then repeatedly reproduced, degrading the value of the real, and elevating the simulation until it is stripped of all reality.⁷ The scene has the powerful effect of revealing the spurious performance of filth by the Marbles, where the Marbles experience their own inauthenticity by viewing Channing's imitation. This portrayal of the Marbles and Channing can be understood as Waters' commentary on an uncritical and imitative quality that emerges through the adherence to bourgeois propriety for the accumulation of cultural capital. More broadly, the inversion of cultural capital could be understood as Waters' critique of the distinction between high and low culture within society.

The representation of the Marbles as "perverse bourgeoisie" has significant implications. Depicting the Marbles in this manner draws attention to an important relationship between filth and middle-class normality. The examination of the very structure of these middle-class norms seems to indicate the centrality of filth to their own existence. Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction appears as a valid introduction to this type of critical analysis of middle-class normality. In general, deconstruction demonstrates how locating meaning in a given structure is undermined after internal tensions are revealed within the foundations of the structure itself.⁹ Importantly, these internal issues often regard the assumptions within a certain structure that forces to the margins those aspects that are most central to the construction of meaning for that structure. In this sense, deconstruction can operate in two ways when analyzing *Pink Flamingos*. First, in its ability to show the centrality of filth to the very definition of middle-class norms of sexual conduct. Second, in demonstrating the difficulty of redeeming filth for John Waters, when his very critique of middle-class normality, through filth, reveals the inseparable attachments to those middle-class norms through which filth is defined.

If this concept is applied to the film, the Marbles' representation as a perverse bourgeoisie can be understood as a symbolic exaggeration of a bourgeois fascination with filth, which suggests its very centrality to their own definition of normality. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White discuss this obsession amongst the "high" dominant classes of Renaissance Europe with the filthiness of the lower-class. It is driven partially by fear, but also by fascination.¹⁰ They offer a structural argument suggesting that "what is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central."¹¹ This is a clear articulation of

how Derrida's concept of deconstruction can be applied to filth, and its centrality to the shaping of a middle-class normality. In other words, the very objectives of bourgeois propriety, to cleanse themselves of filth, to stay completely separated from filth, to define their values in opposition to what is filthy, reveals this dependence on a construction of filth for the very existence of these norms.

Chickens and Eggs:

Pink Flamingos' contestation of middle class norms of sexuality

Filth, then, forms the basis for Waters' broad criticism of middle-class normality, but more specifically, Waters uses filth through the specific lens of sexual morality to form a more concentrated critique of middle-class norms of sexuality and gender.

But before Waters' critique of sexual morality can be fully understood, an example will help to illustrate the type of middle-class norms that manifested itself in the cultural climate in which *Pink Flamingos* emerged. One clear articulation of this bourgeois sense of propriety in 1970s America was the States' attempt to define obscenity is the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Miller v. California* (1973). The case involved defendant Marvin Miller, a purveyor of pornography from California, who was convicted for sending explicit pornographic brochures to the address of a public restaurant that had not requested these materials. The details of the case are largely irrelevant, but when the case reached the Supreme Court the important question had become grounded on whether the first amendment protected obscene materials; the court ruled 5-4 that it did not.¹⁴ This resulted in the establishment of what became known as the Miller test, which became the Supreme Court's precedent for what kind of expression would be considered obscene and unprotected by the first amendment. It contained the following three criteria: a) Whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; b) whether the work depicts/describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct or excretory functions specifically defined by applicable state law; and c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

Of course, there are some immediate issues with a test of this nature in its discussion of a concept like "contemporary community standards" and "patently offensive." What emerged was not an accommodation of variability in "community standards," but rather an elite bourgeois definition about what is to be considered patently offensive. Likewise with the definition of what constitutes holding literary, artistic, political, and scientific value. This returns to the concept of cultural capital, and its use by the bourgeoisie to institute a recognizable definition of "high" and "low" culture. Richard Randall, a scholar writing shortly after the case in 1974,

suggested that the ruling did not clarify if these “community standards” were based on local communities, or on a national community. He suggests that without pertaining to any definition of “local” standards, these ideas inevitably become standards determined by and for a national elite. Specifically, Randall presents this as a conflict between a national “elite-cosmopolitanism” against anti-obscenity activist “local-popular” values.¹⁵ However, this application of an elite standard through the Supreme Court ruling to address the problem of “community standards” was not necessarily a direct call to an essential, and universally understood, moral foundation within American society. Rather, the nationalization of such standards become based on a “common denominator” of approved content, which will either contribute to the “liberalization of popular attitudes,” or lead to “further popular alienation” as different interests conflict over the governing scale of “community standards.” Randall contends that the ruling was largely pragmatic in specifically ignoring the most extreme opinion on both sides of the spectrum: those who wanted stricter (often local) definitions of obscenity, and those, like Waters, that sought to push the limitations of obscene.¹⁶

Laura Wackwitz has analyzed the Miller ruling in order to examine the concept of “direct effects, [and the] transmission model of communication,” which she argues informed the Supreme Court’s opinion on the case. This model states that communication moves in one direction from the source the receiver. She suggests this model informed the majority of the Burger court by encoding obscene material as text that could only be read in one way—to satisfy inadmissible obscenity—thereby leading to a “legislation of morality.”¹⁷ Wackwitz cites Stuart Hall’s *Encoding/Decoding* to demonstrate a more nuanced model of communication, whereby the messages themselves are transformed in the exchange between sender and receiver, and detailing the possibility for polysemous messages that are not readily reducible within a bourgeois dichotomy of permissible/obscene, productive/wasteful, hygienic/filthy.¹⁸ On the contrary, Wackwitz argues that the Supreme Court upheld a view that expression could be definitively obscene in that it would affect all people the same way, a generalization for the sake of the legislation of morality, and a goal that Wackwitz suggests was on the agenda of the Burger court.¹⁹

In the years following the Miller decision, restriction was tightened on what the court was able to deem obscene material. More consistently, the court ruling employed a strict interpretation of the Miller test, and resulted in the closing of adult movie parlours and bookshops. Local ordinances that used zoning techniques to remove these establishments were more often upheld, and appeals to the first amendment more often dismissed.²⁰ The case gives a good indication of certain aspects of a conservative milieu that emerged during the Nixon era of the early 1970s. The Miller ruling can be understood as an example of the way in

which institutions that represent bourgeois norms’ accommodations of sexual conduct, such as the Supreme Court, are able to enforce their dominance in society. It is from within this cultural climate that *Pink Flamingos* emerged in a forceful manner, using depictions of abnormal sexual acts in a vitriolic criticism of these norms, and the institutions that uphold them.

In *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse proposes the validity of perversion as a tactic for dismantling hegemonic bourgeoisie and capitalistic principles. For Marcuse, an act of perversion treats sexuality “as an end in itself,” rather than as a means for the reproduction of social conditions under acceptable heterosexual copulation. It was, in part, a defiance of the “performance principle” which dominates social behaviour through adherence to dictated norms.²¹ In *Pink Flamingos*, Waters uses this technique of depicting abnormal sexuality as a means to challenge the dominant norms of sexual conduct. The basic principle is subversion through transgression, and *Pink Flamingos* is overflowing with abnormal, transgressive sex acts.

It is important to define what is considered a sexual act. Given Divine’s claim “blood makes me come,” the depiction of abnormal sexuality in this film is likely to go beyond typical sex acts like intercourse and oral sex.²² Take, for example, the explicit depiction of (near) bestiality when Crackers has intercourse with a woman mediated by two distraught chickens in his shed beside the trailer. Other depictions of abnormal sexuality go beyond acts between two people, as Divine tends to seek pleasure through consumption. Her eating of dog excrement, and the feasting on human flesh at her birthday party represent, in the most visceral way, Waters’ case for an “exercise in bad taste.” The extreme and exaggerated nature of these acts can be understood as a hyperbolic. They enhance Waters’ critique that uses these abnormal sex acts to contest what is conceived of as a normal sex act.

Why, I’m all dressed up and ready to fall in love.

—Divine: the contestation of gender norms in *Pink Flamingos*

Before Waters’ critique of middle-class norms of gender can be understood, an example illustrating how these gender norms were articulated in the 1970s culture that *Pink Flamingos* sought to satirize would be helpful. Advertisements from this period in the 1970s can illustrate an attempt to uphold gender normality in society through these media representations. Take, for example, an advertisement from Jean Kilbourne’s 1979 documentary about women in advertising, *Killing Us Softly*. This ad from the early 70s is for the birth control pill Ovulem 21, with a caption reading “Ovulem 21: Works the Way a Woman Thinks, In Weekdays not Cycle Days.”²³ Underneath the image is a picture of a woman with seven thought bubbles coming from her head, within each is a day of the week, and the specific cleaning task which that woman must presumably perform on those days. This

presents an understanding of gender as a biological binary that necessitates the formation of a gender identity that is defined in opposition to the other sex. Here the woman is represented as pure and clean, her role as a woman is to maintain a hygienic house.

Elana Levine has written extensively on women in 1970s advertising, and demonstrated this explicit connection between femininity and purity through hygiene as a common theme. In one article she specifically focuses on the marketing of “feminine products” in the early 1970s, in particular, vaginal deodorant sprays and douches.²⁴ These products were marketed on the principle that simply having a vagina did not make you feminine, one needed to purchase and use products designed to purify anatomy in order to ensure femininity. These advertisements suggested that by purchasing these products “the more girl parts can become socially legitimized and accepted.”²⁵ These ads present an image of gender normality that requires the female body to be kept completely sanitary, continuing a trope that connects the image of women with a sense of purity. Not only did these advertisements attempt to capitalize on women’s insecurities about abnormality, they also had a profound ability to suggest that gender was a biological definition which required rigidly defined gender roles. Both these hygiene ads and the ad for Ovulem 21 present a clear representation of gender norms that require an explicit separation of the sexes in society. This rigid separation is upheld by defining gender normality as the performance of these roles. The ads reify those gender roles by tying the female role to notions of purity and cleanliness of the body achieved through hygiene and a well-kept home. These kinds of advertisements display clearly the middle-class construction of gender normality that Waters vehemently contests in *Pink Flamingos*.

Waters’ critique of gender norms in *Pink Flamingos* is centered on the character of Divine or Babs Johnson. As a transvestite, she engages in a performance of the opposite gender that is highly exaggerated and camp. The over-the-top performance of femininity embodied by Divine can be observed in many aspects of her character, for example the gaudy dresses she wears, the constant coiffing of her hair, the contrived manner of her walk, and her hammed up performance as the matriarch of the trailer.²⁶ Divine’s exaggerated performance mocks the notion of gender through approaching it as a constructed social category that requires rigidly defined gender roles to be performed in order to be normal. This position is reminiscent of philosopher Judith Butler who has worked extensively on the topic of gender as a societal construction. Butler posited that gender categories emerged as a requirement of the heterosexual matrix that enforces “heterosexual melancholy” in order to maintain stable gender roles.²⁷ Divine’s performance of the female seeks to affirm this understanding of gender as constructed, and more importantly, serves

to satirize any attempt to insist on a biological division of gender or normative gender roles.

Waters’ use of the Divine character can also be understood as critiquing gender through the concept of “genderfuck.” “Genderfuck” is understood as the process of deliberately manipulating or “fucking with” traditional gender roles, in order to demonstrate these roles as societal constructions, not as a biological reality.²⁸ It is often characterized through the presentation of a body that retains aspects of both genders, one common example being a transvestite with breasts and a beard. The Cockettes, a group of psychedelic performance artists active in the gay art scene of late 60s and early 70s, can help to clarify the function of this concept. John Waters summarizes their performance: “They were the first bearded drag queens [...] gender confusion that was the whole point, you could not tell if it was men or women, gay or straight, it was complete sexual anarchy which was always a wonderful thing.”²⁹ The Cockettes were ripe with images of “genderfucking.” Performers seldom came on in full drag with images that combined beards and penises, with breasts, makeup, and dresses. Mike Kelley argues that Divine, who herself had joined The Cockettes in the early 70s, is a prime example of “genderfucking.” Kelley explains that, although Divine was not bearded, this gender slippage is possible because Divine is the “figure of the grotesque ‘drag queen’ who could never be mistaken for a woman.” Divine’s absurd hairline and exaggerated fake breasts are two examples of this inauthentic costume. This performance of “genderfuck” by The Cockettes and Divine in the 1970s was a clear criticism of those same narrow norms of gender that had become integral to middle-class propriety and normalcy.

Divine’s performance of gender is also importantly a filthy performance. She shoves meat between her legs that she proceeds to cook and feed to her family. She consumes dog feces and human flesh. She performs oral sex on her son. The “taste of hot, freshly killed blood” brings her to orgasm. As she suggests herself when asked if she was a lesbian: she has “done it all.”³⁰ The significance of this filthy performance is the connection of filth and femininity. In the earlier examples of 1970s advertisements, the female gender role was constantly characterized with cleanliness and purity. Divine performs as a female, but completely filthy, and free of any of the cleanly characteristics that had traditionally defined the female role. Waters’ use of Divine as embodying filthy, “genderfucked” femininity can be understood as a critique of the kind of characteristics that became associated with females through the social construction of gender roles, which themselves are an integral part of middle-class norms of societal conduct.

To conclude, I would like to return to Derrida’s concept of deconstruction, and its dual application to Waters’ critique of middle-class propriety in American society. First, deconstruction functions in favour of Waters’ critique

by demonstrating the centrality of filth to the very construction of bourgeois norms of what is morally admissible. This can be understood in his critique of sexual normality. This fear or obsession with what is filthy or obscene is essential to the Supreme Court's attempt to define a concept like obscenity, essentially their attempt to legislate these middle-class norms of propriety. Or, in his criticism of gender, where the objective of keeping the female role separated from what is filthy, ignores how vital filth is to the construction of the feminine as clean, hygienic, and pure to begin with. In short, deconstruction in Waters' criticism of middle-class norms of propriety demonstrates how "filth," and that which has been actively marginalized for it, is, in fact, integral to the very enactment of those norms. This is an assumption that is largely ignored by those who have dictated these norms. However, deconstruction in its second application can also reveal an assumption or absence in Waters' criticism. The question is no longer that posed by Canby: is filth a viable category to use for social criticism? The question is: can Waters successfully redeem filth as a category that encompasses what society has suppressed to the margins? It appears the assumption or absence in Waters' criticism is that his critique is still mired in the language of these bourgeois norms. He cannot present abnormal sexuality without referring to what has been defined as normal sexuality. He cannot present gender as socially constructed without referring to the popular understanding that it is a biological category. While the film successfully refutes Canby's claim that filth cannot be used for the higher purpose of criticizing society, this problem does question the capacity to use filth for anything but deconstructive critique. In short, filth might be a homogenizing category that acts as a haven incorporating what is marginalized by society, but that haven still must exist within the society that has marginalized it.

NOTES

¹ Vincent Canby, "What's So Good About Bad Taste," *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1975.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Pink Flamingos*, directed by John Waters, DVD (New Line Cinema, 1972).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 54-55.

⁶ Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Post-war Suburbs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 35.

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 16.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, "A Letter to a Japanese Friend," *Derrida and Difference*, eds. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰ William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson, eds., *Filth: Dirt Disgust and Modern Life* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 16.

¹¹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1986), 45.

¹² Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, 35.

¹³ Waters, *Pink Flamingos*.

¹⁴ *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15 (1973).

¹⁵ Richard S. Randall, "Obscenity: Denationalization and the Conflict of Cosmopolitan and Local-Popular Values," *Policy Studies Journal* 4:2 (Winter 1975): 155.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Laura Wackwitz, "Burger on Miller: Obscene Effects and the Filth of a Nation," *Journal of Communication* 52 (January 2002): 197.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

²¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 45-46.

²² Waters, *Pink Flamingos*.

²³ *Killing Us Softly*, presented by Jean Kilbourne, DVD (1979).

²⁴ Elana Levine, "Having a Female Body Doesn't Make You Feminine: Feminine Hygiene Advertising and 1970," *Velvet Light Trap* 50 (Fall 2002): 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Waters, *Pink Flamingos*.

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 70.

²⁸ Elaine J. Lawless, "Claiming Inversion: Lesbian Constructions of Female Identity as Claims for Authority," *The Journal of American Folklore* 111 (Winter 1998): 5.

²⁹ *The Cockettes*, directed by Billy Weber and David Weissman, DVD (New Line Cinema: 2002).

³⁰ Waters, *Pink Flamingos*.

The Prints and the Planter: Printed Materials' Contribution to Knowledge Transfer of Rice Milling in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century South Carolina

KENNETH DAVY

The success of South Carolina as a rice producer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was, in a large part, determined by the ability of its colonists to bring or acquire agricultural knowledge. South Carolina was successful because it became the largest single producer of rice in the Americas, and the largest supplier to Europe during this period. Much credit for this success must be given to the British colonists-turned-planters, who obtained information from local and overseas printed material about rice milling technology, and used this information as a model, or inspiration, to improve the technology. I will examine how various government, business, scientific, and personal source printed materials conveyed information on rice mill mechanization—mechanization that, in turn, stimulated and supported the spread of innovation and economic competition. I will also demonstrate how the printed materials revealed through this examination redefined mills from a production tool to an object of status among planters.

Evidence of knowledge brought over from the Old World¹ and information exchanged between colonists that existed in printed materials were critical components of the Columbian exchange. Much of this knowledge was available through different types of media that planters were able to use to extract information to assist them in the advancement of rice milling. Printed materials captured the information exchange, added to the body of knowledge, and provided significant capacity for innovation for rice milling technology. Because of this knowledge transfer milling evolved from technology that used simple, slave-operated tools to complex, expensive mechanical machines, the technological evolution allowed extreme wealth to flourish among the planters and stratified colonial society along economic lines.

When Europeans colonized America, they brought with them knowledge of printing and printed materials. Printed material was an effective method of

knowledge transfer because of the forms it took, such as the government documents, books, newspapers, business letters, and personal correspondence. These printed materials connected planters with local and overseas agencies, which stored and provided knowledge in critical areas of agriculture, technology, and finance. For South Carolina, printed materials directed how the colony would evolve. For example, on written orders from the colony's proprietors, Captain Henry Brayne established the colony of South Carolina in 1670, and brought in supplies from Virginia, including an overseer and black slave, thus securing the course of the colony.² These orders originated in England, where "improvement-minded promoters foresaw rice fitting the profile of a new crop that promised to strengthen England's economy."³ The slave system proved highly successful for this vision in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but was not fully responsible for the quantity of rice exported from the colony, which grew from 10,407 pounds in 1698, to 76,265,700 pounds in 1774,⁴ and nearly two million pounds in 1850.⁵ This tremendous growth, as recorded in colonial government documents, was possible as planters sought knowledge in the one area they had very limited or no experience initially—rice milling.⁶ Judith Carney argues that African slaves from western Africa were the technology experts in the early decades.⁷ Their expertise lay in their ability to hoist a wooden pestle, and pound the grain carefully in a hollowed-out tree, which acted as a mortar to remove the outer husk and inner covering (see Figure 1).⁸ For this type of rice production process, knowledge was transferred by observation from slave to master in the first decades; however, planters quickly realized that they could not keep up with desired rice processing volumes by milling "a few pecks at a time...pounding the rice they grew."⁹ Planters early in the colonial process began a search for better rice milling technologies resulting in a shift from the manual to a mechanized form of operation. The challenge was to find a system of mechanization that would incorporate the African technique to remove the husk from the grain, which if too roughly pounded or ground would shatter, lose significant value, and be classified as a poor grade of product.¹⁰ Planters relied on technical and non-technical knowledge found in printed materials to facilitate their needs. The transition from hand pounding of the rice by slaves using wooden mortars and pestles, to the use of animals or water wheels to drive a mechanical system that raised and lowered a pestle took approximately until 1750.¹¹ Planters continually searched for improvements and innovations on the mechanical systems of mills, including the implementation of the first steam-powered mill (by millwright Jonathan Lucas Jr. in 1817)¹² until the 1860s, when Asian rice and the Civil war curbed demand for Southern rice.

As early as 1691, planters realized that a method of mechanizing the milling process would be necessary to speed up processing, and reduce the number of slaves involved. Mechanization required experimentation, and/or access to local

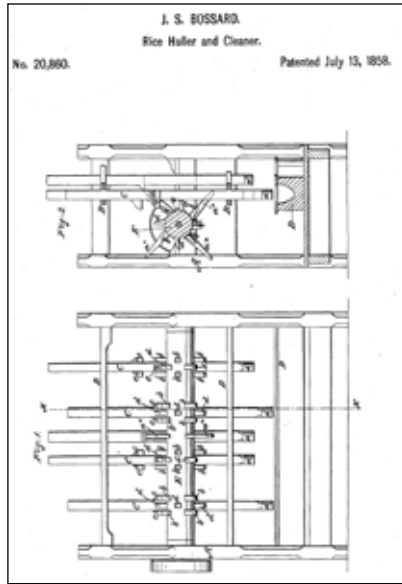


Figure 1 (left): *Pounding of Rice—African form of manual rice milling.* (Source: Judith Carney, *Black Rice*, 130.)

Figure 2 (right): *Mechanical Rice Milling Machine Patent—Externally Driven.* (Source: J.S. Bossard, 1858, *Rice Huller and Cleaner*, US Patent 20,860, issued July 13, 1858.)

and overseas sources to facilitate the necessary technological advancement. An important resource of printed material to facilitate this was the Colonial Assembly, which was located in Charleston. As Charleston was the main centre for export and the administrative hub for South Carolina, it became the central hub for the flow of legal and government documentation.¹³ For the planters, the Assembly provided a conduit for knowledge that arrived from overseas and from within the colony.

Among the first layers of colonial assembly documents were patents issued to planters for their innovations of mechanical adaptations of the milling process carried out by slaves on their plantations. Patents were issued by the government as a legal method for protecting inventions. The inventor petitioned the government with drawings or illustrations, and a detailed explanation of the design (see Figure 2).¹⁴ Government officials then determined the uniqueness of the invention, and, if it met the criteria, issued a public notation. Any patent could be inspected by anyone who requested it.

The first of South Carolina's Assembly's recorded involvement in patents was in 1691, when one was issued to Peter Jacob Guerard, who had invented the "Pendulum Engine" that removed the husk of the grain better than any "machine

previously used in the Province."¹⁵ The failure of this design is evident by a later request from the South Carolinian Assembly on behalf of colonial petitioners to the Lords of Trade in 1698.¹⁶ The Assembly requested that the Lords send a model of a rice mill for the planters' education. However, we must consider that the outcome of the request failed to produce results, as the African system of pounding rice by hand was continued up to the 1750s, when water and animal powered mills were successfully invented, and began replacing hand labour.¹⁷ Further evidence supports this as the assembly advertised a reward in 1712, to anyone who could invent a feasible mill design, and to anyone who could show, by mathematical model and construction, that contemporary mills could be improved.¹⁸

Because this initial source of knowledge transfer failed to materialize, there was a surge of innovation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by planters to develop their own designs; this is noted by the issuance of patents to different planters in 1723, 1732, 1733, 1756, and 1788.¹⁹ In the nineteenth century, the federal government took control of issuing patents to South Carolina inventors such as Jonathan Lucas Jr. and Asa Nourse.²⁰ Documentation reveals that these planters and inventors, by becoming leaders in mill and mill equipment fabrication, increased the level of knowledge transfer among other planters. While many planters were involved in this type of innovation, some inventors, like Lucas, were sought out for the knowledge they obtained—this connection is discussed later in this paper.

Government printed reports were also responsible for the exchange of information among planters. Among the best examples dealing with rice milling was the 1843 report issued by Edmund Ruffin, an agricultural and geological surveyor who traveled through South Carolina recording information for the state's Governor. In his report, Ruffin included letters supplied by planters and observations on the design of mills. Ruffin detailed a description of rice processing using a mechanized mill from start to finish after the grain has been threshed. He cited numbers of mortars and weights of pestles, the length of levers used to lift the pestles, and estimated times to pound the rice.²¹ Ruffin's report, published in Charleston, was important for planters in several ways. It informed planters on which office they could contact for information, described in detail the design of the most successful mills he visited, gave a breakdown of capacity and output, and listed successful inventors-turned-fabricators, such as Jonathan Lucas.

While reports could be extremely useful for the knowledge they imparted, a variety of other publications brought information on the latest developments to planters. The most readily available were newspapers. The first newspaper in South Carolina was the *South Carolina Gazette* established in 1731-32.²² In this and other newspapers that followed were advertisements of plantations for sale and companies that sold milling equipment. Plantation sales offered the opportunity

for planters to expand and improve their estates through the acquisition of existing equipment currently used in rice production. However, of more practical use were the advertisements by suppliers and fabricators.

Inventors of mill machines such as Jonathan Lucas, Jonathan Lucas Jr., Isaac Brigs, and William Longstreet used the power of the press to reach their clients in the latter half of the eighteenth century.²³ Others, like Grant and Simons, were general merchants who advertized mill supplies to planters along with many other goods and commodities.²⁴ While many plantations had their own blacksmiths and mechanics onsite,²⁵ print media in the form of newspapers added to the overall knowledge transfer by bringing products that were available through other sources to the attention of planters.

Newspapers also advertised or gave notice of another important resource—books. Books on agricultural practices and travelers’ journals also provided a source of knowledge, and could be purchased from merchants or bookshops. Newspaper advertisements were a printed medium informing the public that another printed medium, books, held knowledge pertinent to planters. Examples of books were John Drayton’s *A View of South Carolina as respects her Natural and Civil Concerns* (1802), and David Ramsay’s *History of South Carolina* (1809).²⁶ Drayton’s book, printed in Charleston, presented planters with detailed information on a specific mill that existed in South Carolina. Drayton outlines the flow of the rice up an elevator, through a screen (to sift out dirt), onto the grinding stones, into the mortars, struck at thirty-two to forty times per minute, then hoisted by another elevator, and sent through another screen. Drayton’s detailed process and mechanical configuration is accompanied by an illustration of his mill (see Figure 3).²⁷

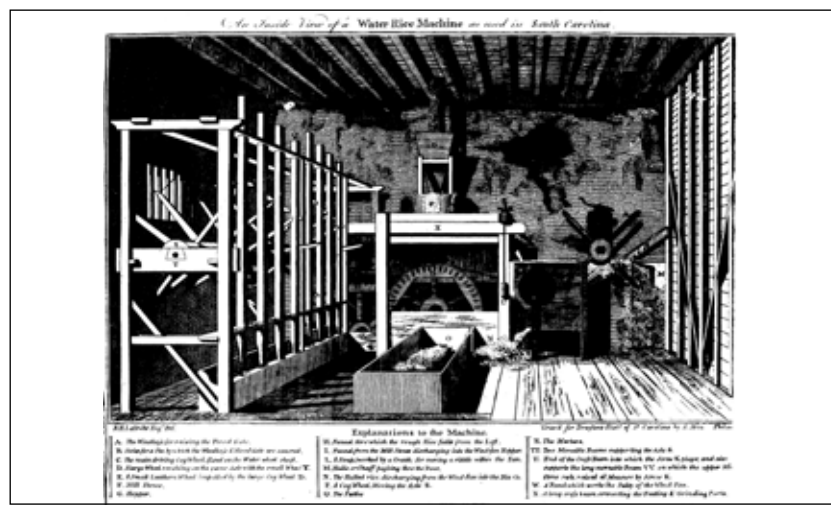


Figure 3: Water Powered Mill—Multi-Step—Loading to Bagging. (Source: John Drayton, *A View of South Carolina as respects her Natural and Civil Concerns*, 122.)

Newspapers also provided a vehicle for groups of planters to advertise their activities through membership in agricultural societies. For instance, elite South Carolina planters in Charleston formed the South Carolina Society for promoting and improving agriculture, and other rural concerns²⁸ in 1785. These leading citizens of Charleston gave public notice in the *Charleston Evening Gazette* that “a number of gentlemen met at the City-Hall [sic] for the purpose of forming a society in the state to encourage agriculture.”²⁹ From these meetings, members (such as judge Thomas Heyward) would issue an address in the newspapers regarding one or more topics on the status of agriculture in the state.³⁰ Of equal or more import was the society’s notification to the general public of rewards to be given for “the invention of machines to those only, whose machines in simplicity of construction, cheapness, and general utility, shall meet with the approbation of the society [sic].”³¹ The assumption must be made that such rewards would not be offered if no one took advantage of them. However, the success of these programs appears to be limited, as the Colonial Assembly issued only one other similar reward in 1768, to George Veitch, for the construction of the pounding mill he invented.³² The more important contribution of this type of newspaper article was its wider exposure of knowledge trickling down from the elite planters, to planters from lesser plantations, to the public at large.

We can see that newspapers and books were extremely useful for the storage and transference of knowledge. To measure how much planters accessed and used this information is challenging; however, there is evidence that planters did take and adapt information published in newspapers, journals, periodicals, and almanacs to their situation. An excellent example of this is the work of William Richardson, who in the late 1700s “copied out engineers’ tables for designing pumps, milldams, and water wheels” from local newspapers, pamphlets, and almanacs to facilitate the construction of his tidal mill.³³ Even in remote locations, inland planters who may not “have had the skills to use the specialized information necessary to build mills” adapted the information they received by using local blacksmith and carpenter tools to build a modified version of mills.³⁴

While official or commercial printed materials were an important source of information, letters and correspondence between business associates, family, or friends, provided an opportunity for knowledge transfer on a more individual and personal level. In examples from business correspondence, such as a 1793 memorandum from inventor Jonathan Lucas of South Carolina to planter Elias Ball of the Limerick Plantation, Lucas provided specifications for a mill to house the equipment he was building for Ball.³⁵ In Adam Seybert’s 1813 correspondence with planter William Lowndes, Seybert speaks of an English steam engine design that removed the salt from water for the boilers. Collecting additional information, Lowndes received a letter from inventor Benjamin Latrobe who conveyed

descriptive knowledge of the best material to use for boilers that could handle the type of water Lowndes used.³⁶ In an 1847 letter from Charles Manigault to the R. Habersham & Son Company of Savannah, Georgia, Manigault describes experiments conducted by his overseer in attaching a thresher to his water powered rice mill.³⁷ These letters reveal the complexity of technology being investigated for rice milling from Old World and local innovations and existing knowledge.

The search and implementation of knowledge gained in improving mill technology became more than just an economic consideration. From letters between family and business associates, knowledge transfer fuelled an economic and social competition among the richest planters. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Southern planters and/or their families traveled abroad to Europe as tourists, eager to see and absorb what they could of the new industrial machines. They visited the factories of Europe and reported back to the colonies via letters about the equipment that “could not but strike the imagination.”³⁸ These visits and subsequent transfer of knowledge were part of a growing interest in the industrial revolution, and reporting on what planters or their families had seen there was a subtle message of one’s wealth. The other benefit was that ideas from the Old World that could be adapted to rice milling could also enhance one’s ability to display one’s prowess by ensuring the most advanced milling technology was used.

Competition for class status had been important from the beginning of the colony. A large portion of the elite planters had emerged from the poor and middle class that were the original colonial settlers, and their meteoric rise in wealth meant that small farmers were able to climb into the class of wealthy and influential planters.³⁹ As part of this climb, planters needed to keep records, and communicate with business associates and the government. Letters reveal that being involved in mill design heightened one’s importance. This is evident in a letter from Jacob Read in 1809, which claimed that the mill he built on his plantation was made successful “by my own perseverance and Judgment, against all that of all the Machine Builders Planters, and all others” [sic].⁴⁰

A more subtle and competitive—if not arrogant—example was seen in the form of treatises on rice planting, written in 1852 by Charles Manigault, and similar documents by Robert F.W. Allston.⁴¹ Manigault’s emphasis was on the advantages of his mills over toll mills. He mentions his use of steam power for a thresher, and a large, water-powered rice mill on his plantations (items desired by other planters), and the savings these objects provided.⁴² His desire to compete with other planters for economic status was not revealed in his treatises, but the underlying current of competition was there. Manigault’s tidal mill was similar to the mill design built by Governor William Aiken, who was the second-largest rice producer in Charleston County.⁴³ Ultimately, it was the richest among planters that could afford the design and construction of the state-of-the-art mills. In 1787,

Elias Ball of England wrote to his cousin Elias Ball, at the Limerick plantation in South Carolina, that he should consider using steam for his sawmill as the cost was prohibitive for a rice mill.⁴⁴ For the richest, steam mills were the ultimate symbol of affluence, as they cost upwards of ten to twenty thousand dollars at this time, and as high as fifty thousand dollars by 1850.⁴⁵

To demonstrate the wealth of the owner, planters often gave parties for a grand opening of a new mill. Printed materials came into play with these events. Invitations were issued, and letters between planters who attended the spectacle and their families were exchanged. For example, Robert Mackay wrote to his wife in 1810 that he hosted a barbecue and dance “to witness the whole machinery in motion at once.” That same year, a Georgian planter named Mr. Main convened a large dinner party to “commemorate” the start up of his new mill.⁴⁶ These letters described mills as an object for public admiration of both the mill and owner. The event showed off the host’s connection with newer and innovative technology, and indicated that they could afford such expensive objects, thus reinforcing (or elevating) their prominent position in society. The culmination of the knowledge transfer in rice mill development surpassed the mechanical achievements and innovations as seen in printed materials. In essence, mills became a status symbol for planters.

The elevation of rice mills to an object of desire by planters was a result of a series of connected activities and innovations from which information was gained through print media. Government documents lent support in the form of technical data such as patents, which had been spurred on by a lack of knowledge. Newspapers, books, and works by agricultural societies had reached out to the general public, supplying anyone with access to the most widely circulated components of print media with a source of knowledge of existing technology. Letters between family, friends, and business sources also provided technical details, but in letters from the nineteenth century, we see the subtle addition of mills as social status objects. What a planter could afford, and what they did with the knowledge presented through different print sources, reflected on their station in society.

The printed materials in this paper represent the major forms of media that existed during eighteenth and nineteenth century South Carolina. There is no doubt that in addition to the knowledge transfer through print, the human element of verbal and observational communication was also present and important. As shown in the documents mentioned above, a planter obtained information from speaking to his peers, and by visiting sites of interest. However, print acted as a storage medium for a body of knowledge that was transportable within the colony and across the ocean. Print provided an additional safety factor in the sense that barring the destruction of the medium through some natural causes; the knowledge could be passed on from one generation to another even if the author was deceased. Of the multitude of items involved in the Columbian exchange, print

technology was critical to colonists, and it was definitely a key component for the success of planters who built the rice mills and society of South Carolina.

NOTES

¹ For this essay the Old World includes Britain, continental Europe and Africa.

² Peter H. Woods, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina, From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 20-21.

³ S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 73.

⁴ Henry C. Dethloff, "The Colonial Rice Trade," *Agricultural History* 56 (1982): 234.

⁵ United States Census Office. *The seventh census. Report of the Superintendent of the Census for December 1, 1851; to which is appended the report for December 1, 1851.* Washington, DC, 1853.

⁶ Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise*, 73.

⁷ Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise*, 82.

¹⁰ Carney, *Black Rice*, 126.

¹¹ William B. Lees, "The Historical Development of Limerick Plantation, a Tidewater Rice Plantation in Berkeley County, South Carolina, 1683-1945," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 82, No. 1 (January, 1981): 51; Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise*, 109.

¹² Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "Ante-Bellum Milling in South Carolina," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 52, No. 3 (July, 1951): 128.

¹³ Bryan F. McKown and Michael E. Stauffer, "Destroyed County Records in South Carolina, 1785-1872," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97, No. 2 (April, 1996): 155.

¹⁴ Many documents were destroyed over the years because of natural and manmade disasters. As a result, the drawings from the patents are unavailable. For a history of document destruction see McKown and Stauffer, "Destroyed County Records in South Carolina, 1785-1872"; Edmund Ruffin, *Report of the Commencement and Progress of the Agricultural Survey of South Carolina for 1843* (Columbia, 1843), Appendix D-31.

¹⁵ Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Gloucester, Mass.: 1958), 278; Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina under the Royal Government 1719-1776* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 388.

¹⁶ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 278.

¹⁷ Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise*, 110.

¹⁸ McCrady, *The History of South Carolina*, 388.

¹⁹ John Fauceraud Grimke, *The Public Laws of the State of South Carolina, from its first establishment as a British Province down to the year 1790, inclusive* (Philadelphia, 1790), ssv, slv, lxix, lxxvii.

²⁰ A search of nineteenth century US patents reveals that the number of patents for rice mill technology dropped off towards the mid-century, and more innovations were being developed in the northern States.

²¹ Ruffin, *Report of the Commencement and Progress*, Appendix A-21.

²² McCrady, *The History of South Carolina*, 147.

²³ *City Gazette and Daily Advisor* (March 2, 1796); *Augusta Chronicle* (April 5, 1788).

²⁴ *South Carolina Gazette and General Advisor* (July 29, 1784).

²⁵ Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 339.

²⁶ *City Gazette and Daily Advisor* (August 18, 1808); John Drayton, *A View of South Carolina as respects her Natural and Civil Concerns* (Charleston, 1802); David Ramsay, *History of South Carolina, from Its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808* (Trenton, 1809).

²⁷ Ruffin, *Report of the Commencement and Progress*, Appendix D-31; Drayton, *A View of South Carolina*, 122.

²⁸ *Charleston Evening Gazette* (August 26, 1785).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Letters and Observations on Agriculture, &c. etc.: addressed to, or made by The South Carolina Society for Improving Agriculture and other Rural Concerns* (Charleston, 1788), 32.

³² The Colonial Assembly rewarded Veitch with 3,500 British pounds towards the construction of his new mill design. McCrady, *The History of South Carolina*, 388.

³³ Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 338.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 339.

³⁵ Lees, "The Historical Development of Limerick Plantation," 54.

³⁶ Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 259-260.

³⁷ James M. Clifton, "The Ante-Belum Rice Planter as Revealed in the Letterbook of Charles Manigault, 1846-1848: Part I (Continued)," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 82, No. 1 (January, 1981): 54.

³⁸ Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 114-115.

³⁹ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 495.

⁴⁰ James M. Clifton, "Charles Manigault's Essay on the Economics of Milling Rice," *Agricultural History* 51 (1978): 104.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴² James M. Clifton, "Jehosee Island: The Antebellum South's Largest Rice Plantation," *Agricultural History* 59 (1985): 61.

⁴³ Lees, "The Historical Development of Limerick Plantation," 53-54.

⁴⁴ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 491; Clifton, "Jehosee Island," 61.

⁴⁵ Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 116-117.

Lightening the Man's Load:

The Narrator's Projection of those Characteristics of Which he is Ashamed onto Female and Feminized Characters in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*

EMILY DEBONO

Tim O'Brien's collection of short stories, *The Things They Carried*, begins and ends with the discussion of women, which is superficially a bizarre choice for a novel that focuses on the Vietnam War and its male soldiers. This use of women to introduce and conclude the novel seems particularly unusual as it suggests that women are a significant part of the story, which is in stark contrast to the novel's portrayal of women as being largely extraneous to the real essence of the war. However, this oddity can be explained through careful examination of O'Brien's portrayal of gender relationships, and particularly the relationships between the narrator and the women he portrays. This essay seeks to prove that O'Brien uses female or feminized characters as slates onto which he projects aspects of the narrator's character that the narrator himself is uncomfortable acknowledging. In doing so, he is able to displace certain emotions—in particular, those that he believes are incompatible with adult masculinity—onto women, in order to simultaneously clarify and condemn his own perceived weaknesses. This trend is most clearly shown in his use of women to portray his initial urge to avoid the war, his occasional enjoyment of the war, and finally, his desire to retain child-like hope.

O'Brien first uses women to relocate the shame he felt for attempting to maintain his distance from the war in his youth. In "On the Rainy River," O'Brien admits that even now he is "feeling the shame, trying to push it away,"¹ which accompanied his crisis of morality when he received his draft letter for the Vietnam War. Prior to this crisis, the narrator "assumed that the problems of killing and dying did not fall within [his] special providence,"² and as such, he intended to stay completely disconnected from the war by fleeing to Canada.

In an effort to confront his adult shame for his past self-initiated distance from the war, O'Brien condemns women for their avoidance of the war's realities.

He does this mainly through the characters of Martha, and Curt Lemon's sister. Martha is described as "belong[ing] to another world, which was not quite real, and...a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey, a poet, and a virgin and uninvolved,"³ much in the same way that the narrator describes himself as he was before he received the draft letter in "On the Rainy River." Additionally, just as the narrator never truly engaged in thought of the war except as he would engage in "any abstract endeavour,"⁴ Martha "...had never mentioned the war, except to say, Jimmy, take care of yourself. She wasn't involved."⁵ The parallel between the two characters is intensified by the fact that Martha is a writer herself.⁶ However, despite Martha's real remoteness from the war, she is indirectly blamed for Lavender's death. When Lavender dies, the narrator suggests that Cross believes it was "...because [Cross] loved her so much,"⁷ and he later burns her pictures and letters as a means of absolving himself. However, Cross also "...realized it was only a gesture. Stupid, he thought... You couldn't burn the blame."⁸ By saying this while burning reminders of Martha, the narrator is suggesting that the blame lies not with the Vietnamese soldiers or with the horror of war itself, but with Martha.

This same kind of condemnation of females that are portrayed as external to the war is reinforced with the character of Curt Lemon's sister. Lemon's sister is repeatedly referred to as a "dumb cooze"⁹ because she does not respond to Rat Kiley's "beautiful fuckin' letter"¹⁰ about her brother's death. However, there is once again a parallel between Lemon's sister's hesitation to respond to this letter and the narrator's initial reaction to do "nothing... [and] wait"¹¹ when he receives his draft notice. Here, there is a similarity in that both characters believe that the only way to react to the devastation of the war is to ignore it. O'Brien's exploration of the possibility of going to Canada to dodge the reality of the war is described as one of his most troubling memories, and in condemning Lemon's sister for ignoring the reality of war, he is better able to confront their shared weakness.¹²

The narrator's distaste for his own failure to meet the war bravely is further reflected in the story "The Man I Killed." In this story, the narrator describes the Vietnamese man he killed as being strikingly similar to himself as he is characterized in "On the Rainy River." However, when describing the man he killed, O'Brien says "his eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's, and at school the boys sometimes teased him about how pretty he was, the arched eyebrows and long shapely fingers, and on the playground they mimicked a woman's walk."¹³ Through the feminized Vietnamese man, O'Brien is feminizing his own history in an effort to distance himself from the painful reality that this man's beliefs and ideals once belonged to him. O'Brien also positions this feminine man as the enemy, which suggests a clear condemnation of the feminized aspects of himself as they are represented in the man he killed. Thus, in denouncing a man very similar to a past form of himself, and in reproaching Lemon's sister and Martha for their insistence

on escaping the reality of war, O'Brien is able to externalize his own shame for desiring escape from the war as expressed in "On the Rainy River."

One woman in particular is used to convey another part of the narrator that O'Brien finds it difficult to acknowledge: the part of himself that loved the war. In "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," Mary Anne is initially portrayed as "this cute blonde—just a kid, just barely out of high school."¹⁴ However, as Rat points out, Mary Anne was "like [O'Brien] and [Rat]. A girl, that's the only difference,"¹⁵ and she, like the narrator, succumbs to the thrill of war to the point of cruelty. O'Brien describes Mary Anne as "lost inside herself,"¹⁶ and parallels her emotions by describing the feeling within himself as follows: "the darkness squeezes you inside yourself, you get cut off from the outside world, the imagination takes over."¹⁷ The analogy between the two is furthered when O'Brien says that he "was part of the night. [He] was the land itself,"¹⁸ and describes Mary Anne as "part of the land."¹⁹ Mary Anne also explains the thrill of being "full of electricity and...glowing in the dark,"²⁰ with O'Brien similarly speaking of "danger [having] a way of bringing you fully awake. It makes things vivid."²¹ An additional way that the two are connected is in their association with tribal imagery, as Mary Anne is related to tribal music, and O'Brien expresses a desire to remain "part of a tribe" through continued warfare.²² In these parallels, Mary Anne and O'Brien seem to clearly share an understanding of the thrills of combat.

The major difference, however, is the way that O'Brien suggests that this thrill is dealt with, and using this difference, he creates a monster out of the woman, which allows him to denounce the violent thrill that he is ashamed to have also sought. O'Brien suggests that for Mary Anne, "Vietnam has the effect of a powerful drug,"²³ which turned her into a sort of animal, "ready for the kill,"²⁴ while he explicitly states that his own flirtation with adrenaline concluded with him feeling "a human closeness" for Jorgensen.²⁵ By juxtaposing his own shameful, but *human*, desire to hurt others with the more violent, animalistic desire that he projects onto Mary Anne, O'Brien is able to focus criticism onto Mary Anne while still acknowledging his own undesirable traits. This allows him to simultaneously confront and hide from his discomfort with his own faults.

Finally, O'Brien makes use of young female characters to displace his own longing to have faith and hope, which is a desire that he rejects because it may be understood as infantile and thus antithetical to masculinity. O'Brien uses the characters of Linda, his daughter Kathleen, and a dancing girl in a Vietnamese village to embody his desire to be able to simply move on from the war. When he describes his movie date with Linda, his childhood girlfriend, O'Brien shows her perpetual cheerfulness by saying that: "in the dim gray light [Linda] seemed to be smiling at the screen. There were little crinkles at her eyes, her lips open, and gently curving at the corners. I couldn't understand it. There was nothing to smile

at."²⁶ Even after she dies, Linda says "Timmy, stop crying. It doesn't matter,"²⁷ to remind O'Brien, who calls the childhood version of himself "Timmy," that after tragedy befalls him he must continue to go on as happily as he can. Linda explicitly embodies his emotional need to simply believe that he can go on contentedly, as the narrator acknowledges that part of the reason that he continues to narrativize Linda is to "save Timmy's life with a story."²⁸ He describes Timmy as thinking: "I'm young and happy. I'll never die."²⁹ Thus, in saving Timmy through reinvigorating Linda, O'Brien is trying to retain the part of himself that will be eternally happy and hopeful, and he uses Linda as a vessel through which to save Timmy in order to distance himself from his own desire to hold characteristics that might be seen as incompatible with adult masculinity.

O'Brien also exposes his desire to retain childlike positivity and resilience through his daughter Kathleen, and a dancing Vietnamese girl in a village. Kathleen often suggests that O'Brien is unusual or absurd by making statements such as: "some dumb thing happens a long time ago and [he] can't ever forget it."³⁰ O'Brien also tells Kathleen that she is "absolutely right"³¹; that he writes war stories because he is unable to move on from the past, which signifies that O'Brien acknowledges a certain astuteness in her character despite the fact that he seems unable to live according to her standards of normalcy. To build on this motif of the young girl as the bastion of resilience and hope, O'Brien presents a Vietnamese girl who "danced with her eyes half closed, her feet bare...[and] took tiny steps in the dirt in front of her house, sometimes making a slow twirl, sometimes smiling to herself."³² The soldiers all question why she dances when her family and her village were just destroyed, and Dobbins insists that "she just liked to dance,"³³ which reinforces the image of young female buoyancy as is also displayed by Kathleen and Linda.

However, like O'Brien's invention of a life for the Vietnamese man in "The Man I Killed," O'Brien's use of women is rather problematic. He comments that the Linda in his novel is "not the embodied Linda; she's mostly made up, with a new identity and a new name, like the man who never was. Her real name doesn't matter."³⁴ By taking the view that he can manipulate Linda to suit his needs, and that her real identity is meaningless, he is taking away her sense of humanity, individuality, and agency. Although he only explicitly states his indifference towards the female characters' real and complex lives in the context of Linda, he treats all the women in *The Things They Carried* in this manner. Lemon's sister is another example of O'Brien's insistent portrayal of women as beings who rely on men for their identities, as she remains nameless throughout the narrative, and is only identifiable by her relationship to Lemon.

Ultimately, O'Brien's use of feminine characters is extremely problematic as it portrays women as only holding those characteristics which men find undesirable

or inappropriate in themselves. Additionally, O'Brien's narrativization of women as relatively one-dimensional characters with the specific goal of clarifying emotions in the male narrator perpetuates the notion that a woman's existence is predicated on her relationship to men, and in this way, precludes women from being understood as complex individuals with agency.

NOTES

¹ Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Broadway, 1998), 39.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

²² *Ibid.*, 109-12, 192.

²³ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

³² *Ibid.*, 135.

³³ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 245.

The Marshall Plan Historiography: Shedding Light on American Cold War Foreign Policy Objectives in Europe

OLIVER SPENCER

Historians tend to view the European Recovery Program (hereafter Marshall Plan) either as a solely economic element of American foreign policy, or from the perspective of the recipient countries, domestic economic restructuring after the destruction of the Second World War.¹ What is often overlooked, however, is the position of the Marshall Plan *vis-à-vis* wider American Cold War foreign policy objectives. In particular, placing the Marshall Plan alongside policies such as the “containment” strategy espoused by George Kennan allows for a better understanding of why the Marshall Plan took the distinct shape and form that it did.

Additionally, the Cold War is often viewed primarily through the lens of competing ideology—the inevitable conflict of capitalism and communism. This view ignores the *realpolitik* and geopolitical nature of many developments during the Cold War. Noted historian Ronald Pruessen has argued that the absence of the Cold War’s ideological context would not have fundamentally altered American policy towards the Soviet Union and Europe. Such was the decisiveness of these realist considerations.² Thus, a study of the Marshall Plan in relation to American foreign policy objectives must distinguish between the “national interest” and the Cold War imperatives informing policy. The geopolitical situation of an increasingly polarised Europe formed the *raison d’être* for the development of Cold War tensions.

Trends in Cold War Historiography

The developments in the historiography of this period will form the crux of this essay. The apportioning of blame for the outbreak of the Cold War has been a hotly contested aspect of the historiography of the Cold War, with some historians viewing the Marshall Plan as an American defensive measure to assuage aggressive Soviet expansionism, while others have viewed it as an imperialistic and expansionist policy on the part of the United States.³ Orthodox historians view

the Cold War as a direct product of Soviet aggression and expansionism after the Second World War. The actions of the United States were seen as legitimate and defensive, protecting the democracies of Western Europe from a Soviet threat.

Revisionist historians, on the other hand, began a critique of American foreign policy by focusing on the economic and political hegemony of the United States, and how it asserted itself in an almost imperial manner in shaping the economic direction of Western European countries. Revisionist historians claimed that orthodox historians had not fully appreciated Soviet insecurities; failed to comprehend Soviet weaknesses; ignored America's own expansionist tendencies; and did not appreciate the role of the United States in bringing about the end of the Grand Alliance in the aftermath of the war.⁴

During the last two decades of the Cold War, a new school of thought (post-revisionism) emerged which modified both the orthodox and revisionist positions, and posited the view that both superpowers were responsible for the Cold War. This essay does not seek to defend the Marshall Plan from revisionist attacks, or to denigrate it to mere American imperialism. Rather, the changing historiography of the plan will be used to further interrogate the foreign policy objectives of the Truman administration. One interesting idea to emerge out of the revisionist school is the concept that the United States created an "empire by invitation."⁵ This thesis held that much like the Soviet Union, the United States created a buffer zone of economic and political "satellites" in Western Europe, but crucially that these same states wanted more involvement from the United States to guarantee their prosperity and security. Drawing from literature on America as an "informal" empire, the view that the United States was thus more expansionist and more assertive in its post-war foreign policy than was the Soviet Union, will be considered and challenged.⁶

Countering this claim, Kathleen Burk has highlighted an "altruistic strain" in American political culture, best exemplified by the program of Marshall Aid.⁷ The inference here is that American policy-makers acted with a large degree of good will towards Europe, and sought to aid their wartime allies (and Germany) in reconstructing their economies and infrastructures in the post-war climate. This argument from altruism refutes counter arguments of a disposition towards imperialist expansionism on the part of American decision-makers. This essay will attempt to highlight both of these tendencies within American foreign policy during the early Cold War period. The historiography of the Marshall Plan is used to elucidate something resembling what John Lewis Gaddis describes as a "grand strategy" that governed the process as a whole. The interpretative framework of the Cold War will thus be presented as featuring the Marshall Plan as a multi-faceted policy, incorporating economic, political, diplomatic, and psychological elements.⁸

The Marshall Plan: Helping Europe?

In a study of the Marshall Plan it is a useful starting point to briefly consider the stated functions of the policy. Economic assistance, in the sum of thirteen billion dollars, was given to the countries of Western Europe by the United States in order to reinstate the "confidence of the European people in the economic future of their own countries and of Europe as a whole."⁹ A confident, secure Europe would secure an Open Door for American economic interests, while also ensuring peace and stability needed for the post-war global trade system. As Kathleen Burk notes, the belief in Washington during the launch of the Marshall Plan was that broader American foreign policy goals such as peace, security, and stability in Europe could be achieved through economic instruments such as the Marshall Plan.¹⁰

While the countries of the Soviet bloc were also invited to participate in the program, Stalin would clearly not tolerate the required concessions towards a capitalist-oriented economy needed to obtain Marshall Aid. American policy-makers knew that the countries of Eastern Europe would not be able to agree to the Marshall Plan, but viewed the Soviet Union's captivation of the region's political economic relations as the principal hindrance to their fair deal to all countries of Europe. George Marshall decreed that the policy was "directed not against any ideology or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos."¹¹ However, in terms of old-fashioned power politics and the geopolitical flashpoint of Europe, the United States was guilty of causing intrigue between Moscow and the emerging satellites in Eastern Europe. Kennedy-Pipe and Cox have argued that it was this very behaviour of the United States as *agent provocateur* that necessitated Stalin's ruthless tightening of his grip on the satellites.¹² Despite this, it was patently clear to those in Washington that much of the Soviet strength in the region came from the "economic dislocation" of Europe, and that they had to act in such a manner to help their wartime allies.¹³ The act of apportioning blame for the division of Europe does not fully illuminate the dire economic situation of Europe, nor the increasing anti-communist rhetoric in the United States. The Marshall Plan was announced in the wake of George Kennan's *Long Telegram*, which warned of the inherent expansionist tendencies of the Kremlin. Kennan was an influential figure in Washington, and his articulation of a doctrine of "containment" in the anonymous "X Article" focused American objectives on minimizing Soviet influence in Europe.

This returns the historian to a discussion of how American policymakers viewed Europe, what were the perceived foreign policy objectives in the region, and how American objectives would in-turn affect Soviet intentions *vis-à-vis* Europe. Europe-firsters predominated in the State Department after the Second World War, unsurprising considering the heavy American involvement in Europe during the war. There is a broad consensus among historians that the future of Europe

was understood as being of primary importance to the future of the United States. Indeed, Ronald Pruessen has commented on the “visibly impressive concentration” of American attention on Europe.¹⁴ Unlike after the First World War, where no one state was able to dominate the European heartland, it became the policy of the United States to act in such a way as to guarantee just this.¹⁵ In this respect, policymakers in Washington shared the same considerations as British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, who had in mind Halford Mackinder’s “World Island” thesis when contemplating European policy. This theory held that whosoever held power over the Eurasian land mass would inevitably seize control of the World Island, and this would lead to global hegemony through geographic domination.¹⁶

Returning to the issue of American policy objectives and formulations, it was vitally important for the buttressing of Soviet power in Europe to strengthen the states of Western Europe as a buffer to Soviet influence. In this respect, Cox and Kennedy-Pipe concur that it was expedient for the United States to pursue such a policy as the best way of ensuring the Soviet threat would be minimized.¹⁷ While often viewed from a perspective of American interference, a counterfactual approach can aid an acknowledgement of the necessity of American involvement. If the United States had not offered the Marshall Plan to Europe, then Moscow would have provided an alternative, and the economic revival of Europe could have been undertaken along communist lines. The presence of communist ministers in the French government, and the strong position of communists in Italy, are indicative to the scope by which the Soviet Union could have increased its influence in Western Europe.¹⁸

This section has attempted to highlight American objectives for post-war Europe, and how these sat alongside the presence of the hostile Soviet Union. The Marshall Plan has been shown to be a policy directed at helping the Western European states recover their prosperity and security, which would have had a positive impact on both the security and prosperity of the United States. While this may have been an accurate description, viewing the Marshall Plan through the narrow lens of American help and European recovery obscures the effect this policy had on the division of Europe, and the embedding of Cold War tensions.

The Marshall Plan: Dividing Europe?

An Iron Curtain has descended across the continent of Europe, claimed the former premier Winston Churchill in a speech in Fulton, Missouri, on March 5th, 1946. If he was correct that Europe had been divided by 1946, it is, therefore, not feasible to suggest that the Marshall Plan was an imperialistic arm of American foreign policy designed to divide Europe. Alan Milward, however, is a proponent of the revisionist school, and argues that the United States sought to create in Western Europe “political and economic satellites” in order to maintain the balance of power

on the continent.¹⁹ While it is accepted that the United States sought a resurgent Europe to counter Soviet expansionist tendencies, there is less agreement on the level of “national interest” in Washington that such a policy would promote. In other words, the argument now takes two forms; one side supporting the view that the United States merely behaved within the framework of a great power, while the other attacked American “imperialism,” and sought to predominantly blame the United States for the division of Europe.

The Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe had begun in earnest when the Red Army had liberated these states from Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Stalin had made it clear during the Tehran Conference, as well as the subsequent conferences at Yalta and Potsdam, that it was imperative that these areas were in the Soviet sphere of influence. Stalin had also promised to hold free and fair elections in Poland at Yalta, but later reneged on this. The Soviet takeover was completed during 1947-48, revealing the extent of Soviet force in securing Czechoslovakia after communist success in elections, and eventual 1948 *coup d'état*. It is problematic to attribute responsibility for creating an “Iron Curtain” to the United States, even if the view is accepted that the United States did intentionally offer Marshall Aid to the eastern bloc countries to cause intrigue. Instead, the dogmatic pursuit by both superpowers of economic systems incumbent, in part, on their respective ideologies led to a series of events which culminated in a division of Europe lasting for over forty years. The revitalisation of Western European economies, the union of the Anglo-American zones of occupation in Germany, and the subsequent introduction of a new currency, no doubt sent stark signals to the Soviet Union as to the intentions of the United States in Europe.

The increasing involvement of the United States in the affairs of Europe can be seen as a type of “continental commitment,” whereby before the end of the decade, the United States had become a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) tied to the defence of Western Europe. Diane Kunz has noted the transformation of American involvement in Europe after the Marshall Plan from a role of economic assistance to a role of military defence.²⁰ Orthodox Cold War historians subscribe to the view that the United States wanted only the security of Europe to prevent another war, and to enable its economy to continue functioning successfully. However, Geir Lundestad has argued that an “empire by invitation” reflects the relationship between the United States and Europe after 1945.²¹ This view presupposes that the United States was more expansionist in its foreign policy than the Soviet Union. The drive of American capitalists to penetrate new markets has been viewed as a major determinant of the American involvement in Europe after 1945. American actions could not be constituted as “imperialist” because the respective European countries were often just as interested in incorporating American financial and military investment into

their political economy, and to strengthen Atlantic ties.²² Regardless of the arguments supporting either a 'continental commitment' or an 'empire by invitation,' it is clear that American involvement in Europe was multi-faceted and moreover that the Marshall Plan cannot be considered in isolation from these other factors.

This section has dealt with the attacks of revisionist historians that the Marshall Plan was an instrument of American imperialism. While it is something of a truism to note Milward's comment that "the idea that the United States sought no extra political gain in return for Marshall Aid is nonsense," the level of what the United States expected in return is an issue of historical debate.²³ The fundamental American foreign policy objectives of securing a stable, prosperous Europe did precipitate close American involvement within the economic affairs of Europe. However, the argument that America sought something resembling satellite states for itself in Europe is flawed in the sense that dividing Europe into spheres of influence was a means to an end of peace and stability, not an end in itself. Acting as a great power, the United States sought to maintain the balance of power in Europe, the division of Europe into Eastern and Western blocs being an unfortunate side effect of such superpower behaviour that has defined the history of global *realpolitik*.

While by 1949 the United States might have pursued a series of policies (not limited to the Marshall Plan) which had resulted in such a sharp division in Europe between capitalist and communist geopolitical blocs, it would be an oversight to attribute the development of this arrangement solely to imperialistic overtones of the Marshall Plan. As political scientist Marc Trachtenberg notes, such a bloc system took half a decade to manifest itself into its Cold War form, and cannot be explained simply through an American motivation to divide Europe.²⁴ Furthermore, the notion that the decisive split between Eastern and Western Europe occurred solely because of American actions does not allow any agency to be attributed to the Soviet Union, and the actions of its own leaders defending their perceived interests in the years immediately following the war.²⁵

Remarks and Conclusions

When Kennan's conception of the doctrine of "containment" is considered, the Marshall Plan can be viewed as one part of a "grand strategy" of American foreign policy to promote its national interest and economic prosperity. After the Second World War, the United States saw its former ally the Soviet Union as a threat to both of these objectives, and sought a reorientation of policy to counter this threat. The warning by Kennan of an inherently expansionist Soviet Union suffering from a "neurotic view of world affairs" only strengthened the resolve of the United States to secure Western European integration and economic restructuring in an attempt to buttress against any Soviet advance. Kennan conceived of "containment"

as being an "adroit and vigilant application of counterforce along a series of shifting geographical and political points."²⁶ In this respect, policymakers in Washington saw the implementation of the Marshall Plan as an economic application of counterforce. To this end, the purpose of American involvement in Europe was not an imperial project of forcing political and economic influence, but integral to a Cold War rhetoric and geopolitical strategic doctrine that demanded the United States keep Western Europe free from communism and respective Soviet power.

This essay has sought to posit two interrelated claims: firstly, that the United States did conduct its foreign policy towards Europe under an "altruistic strain" towards the continent; and, secondly that the United States was successful in forming an "empire by invitation" in Western Europe. These claims have been explained with constant reference to the Marshall Plan, the policy that sought to reshape the post-war European economic climate to prevent the Soviet sphere of influence stretching beyond its satellites in Eastern Europe.

With reference to the assertion of an "altruistic strain," American foreign policy objectives towards Europe in the immediate post-war world have been established. The Marshall Plan represented one instrument in the fight to contain communism, and protect the states of Western Europe from falling under its influence. The United States recognised the need for the security of Western Europe and to ensure its resurgence as an economic powerhouse. These objectives would be of great benefit to the United States in consolidating its position as the most powerful nation on earth. Therefore, this unique position of the United States, coupled with the extraordinary benefits of pursuing a policy of economic assistance to Western Europe, allowed for a degree of altruism and goodwill in American foreign policy.

The notion that the United States created an "empire by invitation" in Western Europe as a result of the Marshall Plan remains a contested issue. This revisionist approach to early Cold War history has come with many flaws, not least that it can paint American policy as the determining force of the events of 1945-49, rather than a factor informing the contested development of such events. It is difficult to rationalise the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe, the Berlin Blockade, and the formation of Cominform, as being reducible to a reaction on the part of the Soviet Union to counter an American imperialist agenda. It is important to acknowledge that both superpowers acted in an assertive, expansionist fashion that ensured the inevitable division of Europe by virtue of an Iron Curtain. By way of conclusion, the assertion of Cox and Kennedy-Pipe that the Marshall Plan was not "quite what it seemed," and that it caused the division of Europe can be called into question.²⁷ Ultimately, it is more appropriate to view the Marshall Plan as a pragmatic acknowledgement of divisions in Europe that were already taking place, and that the Marshall Plan drew attention to and modified these divisions rather than directly causing them.²⁸

NOTES

- ¹ Kathleen Burk, "The Marshall Plan: Filling In Some of the Blanks," *Contemporary European History* 10 (2001): 271.
- ² Ronald W. Pruessen, "The Objectives of American Foreign Policy and the Nature of the Cold War," in *Reflections on the Cold War: A Quarter Century of American Foreign Policy*, eds. Lynn H. Miller and Ronald W. Pruessen (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 48.
- ³ Alan S. Milward, "The Reconstruction of Western Europe," in *The Cold War in Europe: Era of a Divided Continent*, ed. Charles S. Maier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 242.
- ⁴ Michael Cox and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "The Tragedy of American Diplomacy? Rethinking the Marshall Plan," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (2005): 98.
- ⁵ Geir Lundestad, "Empire By Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23 (1986).
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 243.
- ⁷ Burk, "The Marshall Plan," 268.
- ⁸ Melvyn P. Leffler, "The United States and the Strategic Dimension of the Marshall Plan," *Diplomatic History* 12 (1988): 277.
- ⁹ Address by Secretary of State George C. Marshall on the Marshall Plan as a European Initiative to Economic Recovery, in *Dynamics of World Power: Documentary History of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1945-1973, Vol 1, Western Europe*, ed. A.M. Schlesinger (New York: Chelsea House, 1973), 53.
- ¹⁰ Burk, "The Marshall Plan: Filling in Some of the Blanks," 272.
- ¹¹ Address by Secretary of State George C. Marshall, 53.
- ¹² John B. Bonds, "Looking for Love (or Tragedy) in All the Wrong Places," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (2005): 152.
- ¹³ Leffler, "The United States and the Strategic Dimension of the Marshall Plan," 287.
- ¹⁴ Pruessen, "The Objectives of American Foreign Policy," 29.
- ¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, "Spheres of Influence: The United States and Europe, 1945-1949," in *The Cold War in Europe: Era of a Divided Continent*, 110.
- ¹⁶ Anne Deighton, "Entente Neo-Coloniale?: Ernest Bevin and the Proposals For an Anglo-French Third World Power, 1945-1949," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17 (2006): 845.
- ¹⁷ Cox and Kennedy-Pipe, "The Tragedy of American Diplomacy," 111.
- ¹⁸ Leffler, "The United States and the Strategic Dimension of the Marshall Plan," 280.
- ¹⁹ Alan S. Milward, "The Reconstruction of Western Europe," 242.
- ²⁰ Diane B. Kunz, "The Marshall Plan Reconsidered: A Complex of Motives," *Foreign Affairs* 76:3 (1997): 162.
- ²¹ Geir Lundestad, "Empire By Invitation."
- ²² *Ibid.*, 269.
- ²³ Milward, "The Reconstruction of Western Europe," 262.
- ²⁴ Marc Trachtenberg, "The Marshall Plan as Tragedy," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (2005): 140.
- ²⁵ Günther Bischof, "The Advent of Neo-Revisionism?" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (2005): 149.
- ²⁶ George Frost Kennan, "'X' Article (Sources of Soviet Conduct)," *Foreign Affairs* 25 (1947): 862.
- ²⁷ Cox and Kennedy-Pipe, "The Tragedy of American Diplomacy? Rethinking the Marshall Plan," 109.
- ²⁸ C.S. Maier, "The Marshall Plan and the Division of Europe," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (2005).

Of Pirates and Merchant Ships: Framing the Taking of the *Maersk Alabama* for an American Audience

JORDAN HALE

In the early hours of April 8, 2009, four pirates boarded and subsequently hijacked the American container ship MV *Maersk Alabama* in the Indian Ocean, approximately two hundred and fifty nautical miles off the coast of Somalia. Armed with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons, the pirates demanded a ransom of two million US dollars from the ship's owner, Danish shipping company AP Moller-Maersk Group, for the safe return of the ship and her crew. Though the crew of twenty eventually regained control of the vessel, the *Alabama's* captain, Richard Phillips, had turned himself over to the pirates in exchange for a guarantee that his crew would not be harmed. For five days, Phillips was held hostage aboard one of the ship's enclosed lifeboats as the American naval destroyer USS *Bainbridge* closed in on their position. This dramatic standoff dominated the American press over the Easter holiday weekend as news agencies delivered live coverage of the Pentagon's frequent press conferences, the latest still images from an aerial drone hovering above the lifeboat, expert testimony from maritime security experts, and emotional interviews with Phillips' relatives and neighbours in Vermont. On the morning of April 13, after receiving presidential authorization to use lethal force, Navy SEAL snipers stationed aboard the *Bainbridge* shot and killed three of the men holding the captain hostage, allowing US forces to rescue Phillips, and take the fourth pirate into custody. The *Wall Street Journal* theorized that President Barack Obama's directive was provoked in part by the constant stream of media coverage over the duration of the crisis: "[w]ith all the world watching, the US Navy couldn't afford to be long stymied by sea-faring kidnapers."¹

The attack on the *Alabama* marked the first successful act of piracy on a US-flagged merchant vessel since the Barbary wars nearly two centuries earlier. It provided American news outlets with a compelling narrative of a national security crisis, and the opportunity to construct Captain Phillips as an American hero. I argue that the hijacking of the *Maersk Alabama* presented a challenge to



In a still frame from video taken by the Scan Eagle unmanned aerial vehicle, a 28-foot lifeboat from the US-flagged container ship *Maersk Alabama* is seen in the Indian Ocean (US Navy 2009, http://www.navy.mil/view_single.asp?id=70450)

the American media to interpret and represent to its audience—due to the overlapping geographies of American geopolitical military power—Somalia as the preeminent “failed state,” and the sheer vastness of maritime space in shaping the logistics of economic and security movements at sea. Media responses to piracy off the Horn of Africa were confronted with assembling a permissible narrative out of these conflicting geographies of state and non-state power under a comprehensive framework that could explain this apparent unbalance of power between pirate and global hegemony. An investigation into the American media's reporting of the *Maersk Alabama* incident provides a glimpse into this epistemological exercise; namely, the process of presenting a political geography of Somalia so as to explain the capacity for pirates to subvert ambiguous laws of international waters and render multi-national anti-piracy efforts spearheaded by the US Navy ineffective. I posit that the contradictory arrangements of power that emerge through these narratives are what prevents their reconciliation under a unified geopolitical theory, and this complexity thereby limits the scope and critical depth of journalistic accounts.

Maritime Piracy: Reporting the Facts

In this paper I examine the discursive construction of Somalia in piracy-related articles published by several American newspapers and the Reuters newswire during the months of April and May 2009, a span that encompasses extensive reporting on the *Alabama* incident. I have juxtaposed this body of coverage with that published in the London-based maritime trade journal *Lloyd's List*, which

provides a comparatively deterritorialized focus on the global actions of stakeholders in international shipping. On the morning of April 8, the Reuters newsroom in Copenhagen published the following full-text article to their newswire, less than three hours after the attack on the *Alabama* was carried out:

Denmark's A.P. Moller-Maersk said on Wednesday its ship *Maersk Alabama* had been attacked by pirates about 500 kilometres off the coast of Somalia and was probably hijacked. Maersk said in a statement the ship was sailing under a U.S. flag and had a crew of 20.¹

As this incident marked the first time a pirate attack would receive such widespread media attention in America, no discursive structures as yet existed to aid in the explanation of such narratives to a dominant public. This skeletal narrative acted as the basis for Reuters' subsequent updates throughout the first day, incorporating further information as it became available—the extent of this early press coverage was limited to basic details such as the name, registry, and basic manifest of the vessel. As news releases issued by Maersk, the White House, and US naval commanders provided updates on the hostage situation, and presented potential scenarios for its resolution, the American press supplemented their ongoing monitoring of the event with broader examinations into the political economy of maritime piracy. Given the relative dearth of media coverage of past hijackings, it was necessary for news outlets to establish the discursive framework upon which claims addressing the growing problem of Somali piracy could be supported. Newspapers and wire services used statements made in press releases as the starting points for overviews of hijacking practices, ransom negotiations, and counter-piracy initiatives, often drawing upon the expertise of industry and military representatives. Conversely, *Lloyd's List* did not undertake these same broad thematic surveys, as their commitment to comprehensive reporting of maritime risks made discussions of piracy quite familiar to its audience. The many factors that influence supply chain management decisions within maritime trade encourage the consistent publishing of highly detailed piracy reports in *Lloyd's List*.

Over the course of the five-day standoff aboard the *Alabama's* lifeboat an expanding body of news articles formed the foundations of a new, popular geopolitical discourse on Somali piracy, connecting the wave of recent incidents with broader political, economic, and security concerns. In contrast to investigations published as feature-length editorials or in academic journals, which tend to deliver more comprehensive and critical analysis, daily newspapers address complex issues through numerous short articles on discrete themes. As the articles in my study approached the topic of piracy from different perspectives, the geographic extent of their analysis varied considerably. The narrow scope of coverage mandated by the newspaper format thereby produced multiple geographic imaginaries through which Somalia is represented in the press. As newspaper articles can be considered

individually or in aggregate, I found it challenging to comment generally on how popular knowledge of Somalia was constructed by the media. However, I did note several patterns in the way in which particular thematic geographies were established and maintained in the discursive space of newspapers. I observed four distinct spatialities employed in the news to present Somalia in a wider context, each with its own ways of establishing geographic reference—these emerged to describe the *location of attacks*, the flows of *global trade*, *conflict*, and *security* in the region, and finally, the *juridical bounding of territorial spaces*.

Bounding the Problem of Piracy

In order to effectively construct pirate attacks as a growing problem in the press, incidents were described in a manner that reflected their *concentration* in a particular region, as well as the *expanding range* of hijackings and attempts. Expressing the location of events at sea is not as simple as locating them on land due to a comparative lack of familiar points of reference: pirate attacks were typically described in nautical miles away from the coastline, noting others that may have happened nearby. In early 2009, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) issued a warning urging mariners and ship-owners to stay at least two hundred nm away from the coastline of Somalia unless calling in a Somali port—only days before the hijacking of the *Alabama*, the United States Maritime Administration (MARAD) issued their own warning to American-flagged vessels, strongly recommending that they not come within six hundred nm of the Horn of Africa.³ As naval patrols operating in the region as part of the US Army's Operation Enduring Freedom: Horn of Africa and the European Union's Operation Atalanta anti-piracy initiatives, the relative location of their ships was sometimes included in reports. When hijackings were successful, as was the case with the *Alabama*, the distance of patrol ships dispatched to a seized vessel was expressed not just in linear units, but also in the time required for ships to intercept an attack in progress. As military ships could potentially take days to arrive, the introduction of this discomfiting measurement into "breaking news" updates effectively served to convey the geography of the waters involved. Many sources reported that as a direct result of the bounding of "no-go" areas and the coverage of military patrols, pirates began to launch attacks from motherships at increasing distances from the coast, and as far south as the Seychelles. Increasing investment in anti-piracy efforts merely expanded the geographic area in which pirates operate, and the number of successful hijackings executed at these distances demonstrates that they are quite adept at maintaining control over such a wide extent. The urgency of the IMO warning becomes clear when it is represented on a map: nearly the entire Gulf of Aden falls within two hundred nautical miles of the Horn of Africa coastline, indicating that pirates are exercising substantial control of one of the world's most important shipping lanes.

The Waters of Globalization

A significant proportion of attacks were carried out in the heavily-trafficked Gulf of Aden, a narrow body of water nestled between the Somali and Arabian peninsulas that forms an outlet into the Indian Ocean, and represents a chokepoint for trade routed via the Suez Canal. Its importance for global trade is often depicted in the press with a series of statistics: one Reuters article states that over thirty-three thousand cargo ships transit the gulf annually, accounting for over fifty percent of global shipping by gross tonnage; the *Wall Street Journal* adds that twelve percent of the world's oil is transported through it via tankers.⁴ The Gulf of Aden is regularly traversed by both small local charters and the high-capacity routes of the world's largest shipping lines, which deliver the majority of the manufactured goods arriving in Europe from Asia—collectively, the ships found in the waters around Somalia handle the full range of cargoes, including bulk grains, chemicals (including petroleum), and all forms of containerized goods. The constant stream of ship traffic in the region contributed to the emergence of a pirate economy in Somalia, given the quantity and variety of potential targets—an industry executive quoted in *Lloyd's List* explains that pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden often have the option of a number of targets when carrying out an attack, though slow-moving bulk carriers are typically the easiest to board and seize.⁵ Though discussion of insurance and routing costs typically takes place exclusively in trade publications such as *Lloyd's List*, the scale of the economic impacts associated with the heightened risk of piracy around Somalia was significant enough to gain numerous mentions in the American press. Many steamship lines have diverted their Europe-Asia routes around the Cape of Good Hope as the risk of attack has left crews uncomfortable near Somalia, and substantially raised insurance rates for shippers. This drastic change in routing added approximately two weeks to each voyage, as ships were forced to decrease their speed to counteract the substantial increase in fuel costs, throwing off just-in-time production systems reliant on these routes. While global shippers are able to reroute to avoid travel in this region, those handling goods bound for East Africa do not have the same freedom to change course. The fear of pirate attacks is, therefore, unavoidable for those vessels like the *Maersk Alabama* that handle the shipment of humanitarian cargoes to East Africa.⁶

Regional Politics of Conflict and Security

It is uncommon that African nations are constructed in the press as anything other than troubled, as orientalist discourses of inferiority and tribal savagery still linger in the media landscape to a considerable extent. As their strategic importance waned in the post-Cold War era, the developed world distanced itself from most of Africa, typically engaging in diplomacy only during humanitarian emergencies.⁷ Consequently, most African nations only appear in the Western press during times

of national crisis or outbreaks of violence, leaving the alarming headlines and images from these events to solidify into the public consciousness as the primary associations with these places. Struggles with famine, genocide, poverty, and civil war have made a number of adjacent countries in East Africa into front page news in the West, and these difficult histories continue to be raised in current media coverage. Catherine Besteman's research into the representation of Somalia in the American press in the early 1990s dissected the narrative tropes commonly found in print, revealing strong tendencies to oversimplify the Somali political system, maximizing its deviance from liberal democratic ideals.⁸ While a large number of reports referred to the pirates as "lawless," engaging popular literary constructions of buccaneers familiar to many readers, a significant minority of reports connected this to the actual condition of lawlessness on the ground, resulting from the long-term absence of centralized authority. Political analysts have frequently labelled Somalia a "failed state" in that the recognized, transitional government has been unable to assert control over its territory, and cannot deliver any protections to its citizens.

The country has been without a central government since the collapse of the Siad Barre dictatorship in 1991, which was followed by an extended period of anarchy and clan-based civil war. The territorial state is currently fragmented into regions under the *de facto* governance of tribal warlords, but their claims to autonomy are not internationally recognized as their "disruption of the unity and territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."⁹ Somalia currently lacks a police force or coast guard, leaving it vulnerable to both internal conflict and external incursions. To preserve their authority and economic interests, mercenary groups have emerged to provide security in the self-declared republics of Harardhere and Puntland, regions identified as hotspots for pirate activity. A number of pirate groups have adopted official-sounding names such as the Somali Marines and the National Volunteer Coast Guard, taking advantage of the absence of state-run equivalents.

Somalia's proximity to the Middle East and lack of control over its territorial borders has additionally raised international suspicion that it is acting as a "safe haven" for terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, prompting the United States to extend the zone covered under Operation Enduring Freedom to include the Horn of Africa region, where they now administer anti-piracy naval patrols. Though Somalia has never been considered a primary target for US intervention in the War on Terror, changes to American security policy after 9/11 now consider sabotage of US-bound cargo flows or transport infrastructure to be a terrorist act, thereby encompassing acts of piracy. The attack on the *Maersk Alabama* was undertaken for economic gains, not political motives, as is generally the case with piracy in Somalia.¹⁰ However, this redefinition of violence against a sovereign

state (including nationally-flagged ships in international waters) has been used to promote changes in foreign policy in concert with a grand strategy of American predominance in world affairs.¹¹ The amassing of the American military in the maritime spaces of an area of strategic concern reflects that the geographies of violence associated with this new world order are less defined by the boundaries of the state.¹²

The Ambiguous Laws of International Waters

Modern notions of sovereignty and citizenship are tied to the concept of the territorial border, within which states have the ability to patrol and punish activities according to their definitions of criminality. However, no such universal understanding exists with regard to maritime geographies: who is responsible for defining and policing criminal activities at sea, and to what nation's laws are perpetrators held accountable? Not only are the laws of international waters unfamiliar within much of the public sphere, but no consistent interpretation or application of these laws exists between signatory nations. For centuries, ships have flown under the flags of their nations as "islands of territoriality", and acts of violence have been responded to in kind by the navies of targeted nations.¹³ However, the ascent of least-cost global shipping has seen the rise of "flags of convenience," in which ship-owners maintain registries in nations with lax labour and taxation laws to take advantage of related cost savings.¹⁴ These nations typically have little interest or capability in initiating a naval response over the seizure of a ship flying one of their flags, therefore, crews must wait for ransoms to be paid before they are released, sometimes taking months or years. Similar questions of ownership are provoked by the transnational nature of supply chain logistics—whose responsibility is a ship owned by one company headquartered in Europe, flying a South American flag, piloted by an American, crewed by Filipinos, en route to Egypt from the Middle East?

The Critical Geopolitics of Somali Piracy

At the convergence of all of these geographies is the troubled state of Somalia, and the stigmatization associated with decades of conflict and exploitation. As illustrated by the multiple, discursive geographies simultaneously deployed to locate the nation in a global media environment, it is very challenging to reconcile the myriad theories accounting for an explosion in pirate attacks with the interests of the many groups and institutions involved. That said, given the transnational nature of the major narratives underpinning this analysis, it is critical to consider what other nations consider to be at stake in these waters, and how they have come to wield influence in this realm. I propose that the media has been unable to establish a unified discourse through which to engage the problem of Somali maritime

piracy because of the nature of power in the multiple, geographic framings of the situation that have emerged. Despite the efforts of a number of the world's most powerful states to combat the scourge of pirate attacks off the coast of East Africa, it can be difficult to conceptualize and communicate how a small group of Somali citizens has managed to assert control over such a large area. It is also very challenging to declare exactly what is at stake for the nations involved, what solutions should be undertaken, and who should be involved in their implementation—this uncertainty is reflected in the press.

The Global Superpower and the Collapsed State

An editorial in the April 11th issue of the *Wall Street Journal* illustrated American anxiety over the paradoxical display of power and weakness playing out off the coast of Africa:

In one of its more overstretched spins on a news event involving the U.S. military, the *New York Times*' front page yesterday opined that the hostage stand-off with the Somali pirates 'showed the limits of the world's most powerful military.' What it has, in fact, showed so far is the apparently still-needed distinction between the behaviour of the civilized world and of barbarism.¹⁵

This article, and many others like it in my study, build their arguments around discussions of when "civilized" societies can justify the use of violence. It is important to note that these questions are not only raised in editorials, but in the context of daily reporting, reflecting the rhetoric deployed by Pentagon staffers at press conferences in days following the *Alabama* hijacking. It is essential to consider how these discourses originated, and how they have been manipulated and sustained over time to ultimately be used in the justification of violence.¹⁶

The US-led humanitarian intervention of 1992-93 culminated in the infamous Black Hawk Down firefight, which led to the deaths of eighteen US soldiers and hundreds of Somalis, and forced the American government to significantly re-evaluate its strategies surrounding its involvement in foreign aid initiatives. This incident is a potent reminder that failed states—and associated non-state actors—are far from benign actors in foreign affairs, and have the potential to exact substantial influence over the actions of world superpowers.¹⁷ Initial reports from Reuters on the hijacking of the *Alabama* invoked the memory of Black Hawk Down, describing the present situation as "another foreign policy problem in a place most Americans would rather forget".¹⁸ Nearly two decades later, the asymmetric standoff over the *Alabama* again found a concentration of American military power prepared to fire at a Somali militia, held in suspense by the rules of engagement and the legacy of the Mogadishu massacre.

Over a decade since Black Hawk Down, and longer since the United States and Soviet Union respectively buttressed the state through Cold War strategic alliances, Somalia is interpreted through these media narratives as a continuing thorn in the side of American military hegemony—that is, the ability to be understood as undefeatable. The clan-based system that has existed in Somalia for centuries developed in the context of a pastoralist society, and remains incongruent with the centralized state structure imposed during the transition to postcolonial independence. While the people of Somalia share an ethnic and religious heritage, it is the clan, not the nation-state or Islam, which society has traditionally organized itself around. A number of anthropologists have highlighted the unsuitability of this form of government for the Somali people as a major factor in the collapse of the state, and argue that a continued lack of attention to this fact (through the production of knowledge in the press and insufficient research in foreign policy planning) is perpetuating conflict in the country.¹⁹ The failure of the democratic experiment runs in opposition of the American “civilizing mission” to spread the ideals of liberal democracy, perpetuates “primitive” stereotyping of the Somali peoples, and contributes to the country being perceived of as a significant threat to the security of other nations. America has been involved in the construction of Somalia as a threat (in part through the media), and now maintains a significant presence surrounding Somalia allowing it to monitor this threat.

The rescue of Richard Phillips from the lifeboat of the *Alabama* provided the opportunity for America to perform a heroic role for a global audience, a narrative that was reinforced by the presidential authorization to use lethal force. As of the time of this writing, Somali pirates have never taken the life of a hostage, and apart from the use of weapons to gain control of a vessel, apparently treat their captives very well—a fact acknowledged by the American press. The decision to kill three pirates with synchronized sniper bullets in an act of “surgical warfare” represents an act of escalation by American forces, one that could jeopardize the safety of other hostages, and incite further violence, as well as being an option available only to the world’s most sophisticated military.²⁰ The location of both the hijacking and the assassinations prompt further theoretical questions into the relationship between terrorism and state violence in international waters.

Proposing Solutions Within Complicated Geographies

Over the course of the American hostage crisis, and into the following months, many solutions were proposed in the press, including some promoting the long-term humanitarian plans of advanced nations, and a number promoting the arming of seafarers (a solution largely rejected by the industry). Given the mandate of its publication, a greatly diverse body of solutions was debated in the pages of *Lloyd’s List*. However, discussion of counter-piracy strategies in the news was

usually accompanied by acknowledgement of the difficulty of international law in accommodating solutions, and very rarely included African perspectives.

One of the widely recognized challenges associated with combating Somali maritime piracy stems from the difficulty in reconciling the laws of international waters with those of littoral states. Under the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS, 1982), coastal nations are held responsible for the safety of their territorial waters (extending twelve nm from shore), regardless of whether or not they are able to provide such assurance. The navies and coast guards of other nations are not permitted to traverse these limits without permission, even for the purpose of investigating criminal acts, though pirates may be apprehended by any nation in international waters under the “universal crime” of piracy.²¹ As no state authority exists to police Somali territorial waters, pirates frequently carry out attacks outside their limits, piloting hijacked ships back to anchorages along the coast to await ransom payment. At the request of the UN, Somalia’s interim government has allowed naval patrols to pursue ships into territorial waters to stop acts of piracy in progress—these patrols are manned by nations with vested economic interests in efficient export-oriented maritime trade through the region, including those involved in the controversial fisheries industries of the west Indian Ocean. When pirates are captured in international waters, they can be prosecuted in any jurisdiction, though convictions are often difficult under these circumstances due to a lack of evidence—pirates are often set free to attack again, a practice referred to as “catch and release.” The European Union has established an arrangement with Kenyan judicial authorities to prosecute pirates captured in the waters off East Africa, an agreement that the United States has indicated it would like to enter into.²² Despite considerable support for these initiatives from EU member states, representatives for Kenya’s legal system have expressed concern that it cannot handle such a volume of cases on an ongoing basis.²³ While the establishment of an international criminal court analogous to the war crimes tribunal has been raised as a possibility, it will require the revisitation of the laws of international waters by the IMO, which are not recognized by the state of Somalia. Establishing an agreeable solution raises complicated questions into what constitutes consent by the fractured Somali state, given that the word of the head of government carries little to no weight in the north, where piracy is rooted.

Conclusion

The case of maritime piracy in Somalia illustrates the conceptual weakness of discourses concerning American geopolitical power often undergirding news media reports on global security issues. While the media has framed these complications through the legacy of US-Somalia relations, and that country’s status as a preeminent, perhaps irredeemable, “failed state,” such narratives fail to provide a

comprehensive account of these events. Somali pirates have repeatedly managed to subvert superior military power, exploiting their strategic position to take advantage of its proximity to vital systems flows and jurisdictional ambiguity in international waters. As a result, they have managed to gain *de facto* control over a significant maritime area for their operations, raising critical questions about the linkage between territory, sovereignty, the land, and the sea. Due to the geopolitical and theoretical difficulty of reconciling these narratives, newspaper press coverage has thereby generated a simplified version of the events surrounding the capture of the *Maersk Alabama*, and the military intervention in rescuing Captain Phillips. However, the complications that have given rise to this simplified media geography will likewise affect the conception of an effective end to piracy.

NOTES

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- ² Reuters, "Maersk Says its Ship Probably Seized by Pirates" (April 8, 2009).
- ³ US Maritime Administration, "Maritime Advisory 2009-04" (April 7, 2009).
- ⁴ Reuters, "Anti-Piracy Shipping Pact Gets U.S. Boost," (September 16, 2009); Chip Cummins and Peter Spiegel, "Pirates Hold U.S. Captain as Freed Ship Departs," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 10, 2009).
- ⁵ David Osler, "Alabama Attack: Crew Blame Master," *Lloyd's List* (December 4, 2009).
- ⁶ Chip Cummins, Louise Radnofsky, and Philip Shishkin, "U.S. Cargo Ship Repels Pirates — Crew Regains Control in Drama Off Coast of Somalia; Captain Held By Hijackers," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 9, 2009).
- ⁷ Virginia Luling, "Come Back Somalia? Questioning a Collapsed State," *Third World Quarterly* 18 (2009): 287; Ken Menkhaus, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004), 249.
- ⁸ Catherine Besteman, "Representing Violence and 'othering' Somalia," *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996): 120-133.
- ⁹ Quoted in William Reno, "Somalia and Survival in the Shadow of the Global Economy," Working Paper 100, Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford (2003), 3.
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- ¹¹ Colin Dueck, "Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy, 2000-2004," *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004): 511-535.
- ¹² Simon Dalby, "Recontextualizing Violence, Power and Nature: The Next Twenty Years of Critical Geopolitics?" *Political Geography*, in press.
- ¹³ Murphy, *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money*, 12.
- ¹⁴ Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).
- ¹⁵ *The Wall Street Journal*, "The Barbarian Coast: Civility is Not Weakness" (April 11, 2009).
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- ¹⁷ Walter S. Clarke and Robert Gosende, "Somalia: Can a Collapsed State Reconstitute Itself?" in *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, ed. Robert I Rotberg (Washington: Brookings, 2003), 145.
- ¹⁸ Reuters, "Pirates Defy U.S. Navy Off Somalia, French Free Yacht," (April 8, 2009).
- ¹⁹ Luling, "Come Back Somalia?"; Ismail I. Ahmed and Reginald Herbold Green, "The Heritage of War and State Collapse in Somalia and Somaliland: Local-Level Effects, External Interventions and Reconstruction," *Third World Quarterly* 20 (1999): 114-115.
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- ²¹ Murphy, *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money*, 12.
- ²² Sarah Childress, "Case in Kenya Tests New Push to Prosecute Sea Attacks," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 10, 2009).
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Reconsidering Invisibility: Contrasting Narrative Perspectives in *Native Speaker* and *The Human Stain*

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Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* both use the trope of invisibility to explore the tension between individual identity and race identity, or between what Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain* defines as the "I" of the individual and the "we" of race identity.¹ Continuing in the tradition of Ralph Waldo Ellison's *Invisible Man*, both books present race identity as having the potential to eclipse and obscure personal identity, rendering individuality invisible. Henry Park and Coleman Silk, the main characters in these respective books, are acutely aware of this dynamic, and manipulate it to their perceived advantage, although doing so in opposing ways. Henry, a spy, cultivates and exploits his invisibility in order to appear unassuming to his targets, while Coleman passes as a Jewish man in order to surpass the limits of racial identity, and achieve a greater visibility for himself as an individual. They have contrived to place themselves at opposite ends of an invisibility/visibility spectrum, choosing either a complete association with or dissociation from racial identity. However, while Park ends up striving for greater visibility and obtains it through a self-revelatory first person narrative, Coleman's desire for visibility is undermined by a third person narrative, which emphasizes the inscrutability of the individual. It does this by both explicitly questioning our ability to know others, and by ironically having the narrator Nathan Zuckerman imagine in comic detail the inner lives of characters he knows very little about.

Practically speaking, Henry's job as a spy requires him to conceal his individual identity. At one point, Hoagland reminds him: "Just stay in the background. Be unapparent and flat. Speak enough so they can hear your voice and come to trust it, but no more, and no one will think twice about who you are. The key is to make them think just once. No more, no less."² In order for Henry to be thought of "just once" he must hide behind his racial identity. Alluding to *Invisible Man*'s opening line "I am an invisible man," Henry says: "And yet you may know me. I

am an amiable man."³ Henry assumes the stereotype of an "amiable" Korean man, someone with, as Jack speculates, "a keen sense of accommodation," and understanding of "respect and distance and separateness."⁴

Furthermore, Henry's effectiveness as a spy depends on his willingness to fulfill this stereotype of the accommodating, reticent Korean man. Henry says that Hoagland bemoaned the fact that Americans generally made the worst spies. Even with methodical training they were inclined to run off at the mouth, make unnecessary displays of themselves... "an off-color anecdote, a laugh in the wrong place. They felt the subcutaneous aching to let everyone know they were a spook, they couldn't help it, it was like some charge or vanity of the culture, à la James Bond and Maxwell Smart."⁵ As a spy Henry is absorbed within a racial identity, both because his job demands self-concealment, and because in order to be the humble, unassuming spy that Glimmer & Co. desires, he must adhere to the stereotype of the humble, unassuming Korean man.

A new model for existing as a self-assertive Korean man in American culture is revealed to Henry in John Kwang, who is running to be mayor of New York. He says, "Before I knew of him, I had never even conceived of someone like him. A Korean man, of his age, as part of the vernacular. Not just a respectable grocer or dry cleaner or doctor, but a larger public figure who was willing to speak and act outside the tight sphere of his family."⁶ Henry relates how Kwang once spoke of New York as "[t]he place... where no one can define you if you possess enough will."⁷ Kwang is able to assert himself beyond the limits of his racial identity, and as a politician, to make himself visible in the public sphere. In his campaign he transcends racial boundaries by seeking support from diverse populations, and in his speeches he implores his followers to see beyond race to the individual:

Think of this, my friends: when a Korean merchant haunts an old black gentleman strolling through the aisles of his grocery store, does he hold even the smallest hope that the man will not steal from him? Or when a group of black girls takes turns spitting in the face and hair of the new student from Korea, as happened to my friend's daughter, whose muck of hate do they ball up on their tongues? Who is the girl the girls are seeing? Who is the man who appears to be stealing?⁸

By asking who is "the girl" and "the man," Kwang disregards the race of these individuals, and asks his audience to consider them on an even plane.

Kwang's example inspires Henry to emerge from his cultivated invisibility, and quit his job as a spy. Henry reflects "...what I saw in him I had not thought to seek, but will search out now for the long remainder of my days."⁹ When Jack tries to convince him to remain a spy after the Kwang case is completed, Henry responds, "It doesn't matter to me anymore. Listen, Jack. This is my mind finally

speaking.”¹⁰ This is a pivotal moment of self-assertion within the story, though the greatest act of self-assertion is the telling of the story itself. As in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the first person narration is a tool which helps the protagonist achieve greater visibility. Henry provides the reader with an account of his individual experience through “these lyrical modes” of narrative, which contrast with the impersonal, objective reports that he had been writing as a spy.¹¹ Christian Moraru observes that Henry uses the narrative as means of self-expression, just as Walt Whitman, who Lee quotes for his epigraph, uses poetry to “sing myself.”¹² Henry often self-consciously echoes Whitman, “We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of our hearts at once furious and sad. For only you could grant me these lyrical modes. I call them back to you.”¹³ Henry calls back to Whitman who in *Song of Myself* sounds his “barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world,” and calls to future generations: “I stop somewhere waiting for you.” Whitman’s “lyrical modes” are particularly suitable to Henry, because like the Korean-American they “contain multitudes,” and are inclusive of them.¹⁴

However, as Henry makes clear, these “lyrical modes” have been granted, borrowed from an American vernacular, which complicates Henry’s act of self-assertion as the voice he is speaking with is not entirely his own. This does not negate the fact that the “lyrical modes” allow him to be more visible as an individual, but it does suggest that no “self” exists entirely on its own, that is, able to speak a language entirely of its own. Furthermore, by transforming what is set up as a piece of genre fiction, a spy novel, into a more personal narrative, Lee defies broad genre expectations in the same way broad race expectations are defied within the book. In the novel there are no adopted narrative modes which limit self-expression.

In Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*, Coleman Silk’s extreme efforts to increase his visibility as an individual are undermined by a third person narrative perspective, which demonstrates that everyone is subject to the flawed, generalizing perception of others, and that it is impossible to control one’s individual image absolutely. Coleman’s passing is often described as an act of extreme individualism, rather than a pragmatic social deception. While it is mentioned that Coleman’s position as Dean of Athena College would probably have been out of reach to him as a black man, Coleman’s decision to pass is described less as a functional means to an end, and more as an idealistic quest for complete individualism, and as such, it is tragically flawed.

According to Nathan, who interpolates Coleman’s motivations based on his interactions with him, and an account of his life provided by his sister Ernestine, Coleman envisioned himself as “the greatest of the great pioneers of the I.”¹⁵ Coleman had “grasped intuitively” that “[y]ou can’t let the big they impose its bigotry on you anymore than you can let the little they become a we and impose its ethics on you. Not the tyranny of the we and its we-talk and everything that the we

wants to pile on your head.”¹⁶ All Coleman had wanted “...from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white – just on his own and free.”¹⁷ Coleman resists the “we” of race identity, not because he does not want to be black, but because he does not want blackness to define him. However, upon being violently removed from a white brothel where he was exposed as a black man, he imagines his father’s voice admonishing him for his individualism and hubris:

*Look at where he was now...And how? Why? Because of his credo, because of his insolent, arrogant “I am not one of you, I can’t bear you, I am not part of your Negro we” credo. The great heroic struggle against their we – and look what he now looked like! The passionate struggle for precious singularity, his revolt of one against the Negro fate – and just look where the great defiant one has ended up!...A world of love, that’s what you had, and instead you forsake it for this! The tragic, reckless thing you’ve done! And not just to yourself – to us all. To Ernestine. To Walt. To Mother. To me.*¹⁸

This passage suggests the folly of Coleman’s decision to abandon his race identity. In order to maintain his image as a white man, Coleman must disassociate himself from his family, and hide them to his wife and children. As the last two lines of the passage emphasize, the “we” which Coleman has abandoned, the “us all,” is, in fact, Ernestine, Walt, his Mother and Father, rather than just some abstract race identity.

Furthermore, his passing is described in the terms of tragedy, of a hopeless struggle of an individual against greater forces, which in this case are the greater forces not only of race identity, but of the perception of others in general. Coleman’s effort to avoid designation by others at all costs is described as ill-conceived, “tragic,” and “reckless” here, and as naïve and foolish elsewhere. Ernestine comments, “One can only do so much to control one’s life.”¹⁹ Faunia too, seems aware that we are inevitably marked by others: “All she was saying about the stain was that it was inescapable.”²⁰

Though Coleman avoids being designated as a black man, he cannot evade designation by others all together. Instead of being labelled “black,” he is labelled a racist by the faculty of Athena College after he inadvertently refers to some absent black students as “spooks.” Coleman’s individual identity disappears under this new designation: “No motive for the perpetrator is necessary, no logic or rationale is required. Only a label is required. The label is the motive. The label is the evidence. The label is the logic. Why did Coleman Silk do this? Because he is an x, because he is a y, because he is both.”²¹

Coleman’s belief in the visibility of the individual is undermined by this scandal, which despite his best efforts, causes his identity to be obscured by a

label that has been assigned to him by others. Breaking from his narrative Nathan speculates on the elusive condition of visibility:

*Because we don't know, do we? Everyone knows... How what happens the way it does? What underlies the anarchy of the train of events, the uncertainties, the mishaps, the disunity, the shocking irregularities that define human affairs...What we know is that, in an unclichéed way, nobody knows anything. You can't know anything. The things you know you don't know. Intention? Motive? Consequence? Meaning? All that we don't know is astonishing.*²²

As a narrator, Nathan is aware that his ability to know and accurately represent Coleman is at best limited: "Faunia alone knew how Coleman Silk had come about being himself. How do I know that she knew? I don't. I couldn't know that either. I can't know. Now that they're dead, nobody can know. For better or worse I can only do what everyone does who thinks that they know. I imagine. I am forced to imagine." Nathan knows that he "cannot make him fully visible. There is a blank. That's all I can say. They are together a pair of blanks."²³

The third person narration shows Nathan's efforts to make characters that are relatively unknown to him visible as individuals. His failure to do this in a convincing way demonstrates how elusive visibility can be, regardless of race. His portrayals of other characters, especially Delphine Roux and Les Farley, must rely on broad generalizations about French intellectuals and Vietnam veterans for their construction. The narrator's imaginative liberties become most evident when he makes omniscient leaps into the psyches of distant characters, like Les's Vietnam flashbacks, or Delphine's moment of indignation over the use of a cell phone at a Jackson Pollock exhibit. He would have no way of knowing the characters this well, and so has to invent their inner lives.

In this way, Les and Delphine are misrepresented and made invisible by the labels assigned to them by others, again suggesting that visibility is a nearly impossible condition to achieve. Nathan's portrayals of the two characters are reductive: for Les, everything stems from his experience in Vietnam, and Nathan himself says that "everything Delphine Roux does must have virtue as its explanation."²⁴ Perhaps, as Nathan suggests, Faunia knew and understood Coleman as an individual, and perhaps if Coleman had published his first person memoir "Spooks," he could have achieved greater visibility on his own terms. However, as the third person narration demonstrates, the large scale visibility that Coleman was trying to achieve by passing (passing what? As what?) was impossible; the individual is never fully visible, never fully free from generalizing labels in the eyes of others.

It is in the arena of other people's perspectives, in the arena of the third person perspective, that the condition of invisibility/visibility is constructed. In

reality, our perceptions of others are not based on self-revelatory autobiography, as the kind of visibility offered by first person narration is practically impossible. While Lee, as in Ellison, is able to construct visibility through first person narration, Roth's portrayal of a character striving for visibility from a third person perspective demonstrates how elusive visibility is when it is left to the perspective of others.

NOTES

¹ Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 108.

² Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (Toronto: Riverhead Books, 1996), 44.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 172-73.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁴ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1992), 76.

¹⁵ Roth, *The Human Stain*, 108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 337.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 242.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

²² *Ibid.*, 209.

²³ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

