Gadflies and Zip Guns:
Mass Culture Criticism and Juvenile Delinquent Texts in America, 1945–1960

by

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ABSTRACT
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This study considers the analyses of diverse social and cultural critics in America in the late 1940s and 1950s. In particular, it examines their mostly jaundiced view of what they called mass culture and its related expressions. But where these intellectuals approached contemporary life with variations of skepticism and dread, this study argues that they suffered a myopia that inhibited their ability to see the so-called culture industries of postwar America as dynamic and engaging, not dominating and demeaning. To contextualize that skewed perspective, this study examines the postwar paperback industry and reconfiguring film business before delving into a specific form of mass culture, the juvenile delinquent text. The 1950s was a period of great concern about the status of teenagers within larger society. This anxiety gave birth to sociological studies offering diverse theories and true crime accounts of alienated and barbaric teenagers threatening civic virtue and the nation's future. More importantly, it also spawned waves of novels and films devoted to both sympathetic accounts of juvenile delinquents and sensationalist tales that exploited the public's fears and fascination. This study uses these texts to examine three topics that also worried intellectuals of the period—urban decline and suburban migration; a reconfiguration of masculinity; and the morality of a society predicated on consumption—and finds considerable overlap in the questions and analyses each pursued. Apart from making the case for widespread circulation of critical ideas in 1950s America, it argues for considerable ideological unsettledness and suggests an

unacknowledged conversation of sorts between producers of mass culture and the intellectuals who treated such forms as evidence of dissenting art's fatal decline. The stratification and segregation employed by cultural critics of the 1950s serves as a warning to contemporary scholars about the dangers in privileging high over low.

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CHAPTER 1
The Popular Intellectual:
Theory and Method for Examining the Juvenile Delinquent Genre

In the film *Pleasantville* (1998), two American teenagers from the late 1990s are magically transported into a 1950s sitcom and experience a literal black-and-white world. What initially seems idyllic—perpetually warm and sunny weather, suburban neighbourliness—is soon revealed to be suffocating conformity. The price of happiness and material comfort, the teens learn, is forfeiture of personal autonomy. The presence of these foreigners soon contaminates the town, demonstrated by the gradual introduction of colours that break down the stark existence. From that diversity of colour, the mental chains are loosed, and the town of Pleasantville achieves actual freedom. Eden, it seems, might not live up to its billing.[1] *Pleasantville* illustrates well the persistent popular reputation of the decade. Historical interpretation of the 1950s may waver between the idyllic and oppressive, but dominating conformity still holds sway in the popular mind. The film's presentation of bland perfection, dulling the mind and spirit even as it rewards the body, owes much to a wide spectrum of critical interpretation from the time. From Frankfurt School Marxists to consensus liberals and conservative traditionalists, postwar life may have been materially prosperous, but it impoverished individual liberty and creativity.

This study critiques contemporary interpretations, chiefly those of postwar intellectuals, of 1950s America as unrelentingly conformist. To do so, it takes its cues from a largely untapped set of cultural documents of the period: pulp novels, exploitation films, and crime magazines. What these texts reveal is a rich vein of popular dissent from

[1] *Pleasantville*, dir. Gary Ross (New Line, 1998).

conformity. Topics such as homosexuality, infidelity, miscegenation, illicit drug use and addiction, and youth running amok suggest a large segment of society that found such deviancy alluring, if only vicariously so. Exploring the content and circumstances of one particular genre—the juvenile delinquent novel and film—and the circumstances of their production, distribution, and consumption allows entry into what Joel Foreman has called "the Other Fifties."[2] In doing so, this study seeks to expose the biases and limitations that compromised the analysis of contemporary intellectual elites who saw a cancerous and possibly pre-totalitarian conformity in American life. Because their analysis rested on a belief that commercial art—mass produced and mass distributed for mass consumption—could not generate meaningful social critique, they could not appreciate that texts produced from a distinctly capitalist space at times complemented their other judgments of postwar mass society.[3] A fundamental misperception about the nature of capitalism—that it seeks homogeneous consumption, the nature of its production determines its consumption, and its effects necessarily mystify and pacify—led them to miss how market logic and socio-economic conditions encouraged perceptive publishers, writers, and moviemakers to pursue consumers who sought out art and entertainment guided by the premise that something was amiss in America. Even as postwar intellectuals bemoaned standardization and a bland and coarsened culture, there were, all along, allies in the margins providing texts that defied the consensus ideal, that there was a dialogue,

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[2] Joel Foreman, ed. *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[3] I mostly use the term mass society and mass culture, as opposed to popular culture, throughout this study because these were the common and decidedly pejorative terms used by critics of the period. I agree with Raymond Williams' assertion in 1958 that "there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses," but adherence to historical context encourages using the preferred terminology of the time. Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary," in *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. Ben Highmore (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 98.

however unspoken and unheard, taking place.

Several intertwined arguments are pursued in this study. First, it argues that the exuberant expansion and adoption of the consumer economy in the postwar period was distressing to intellectuals of varying ideological stripes largely because it compromised, if not outright bypassed their role as cultural arbiters. The untutored were granted access to the garden of cultural delights without properly earning the privilege, which intellectuals largely regarded as evidence of social decline. The effects of mass culture were not agreed upon, but the tendency leaned towards the apocalyptic—totalitarianism or barbarianism. Within postwar society, intellectuals tended to see the working and expanding middle classes as the weak link. There were several problems with this view. The passive nature of interpretation of mass-produced culture, discussed later in this chapter, was one key mistake. Another was the perception that the culture industries (as Marxists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer called that sector of the economy) were domineering, hostile to creativity, and appealed to undiscerning audiences. This was a strikingly ill-considered view. Whether speaking of television, movies, publishing (books, comics, magazines), or sports, the postwar period was marked by considerable disruption to conventional thinking, and that within this unsettledness, such diversity and creativity reshaped content, style, mode of delivery, and audiences. One of the ambitions of this study is to demonstrate that contemporary intellectual perceptions of 1950s popular culture failed to appreciate such vitality, and, by inference, that this has had a skewing effect on the historical view of the period (i.e., that the conformity question, confirmed or rejected, shades consideration of the priod).

A second argument concerns the validity as historical evidence of the very materials that intellectuals of the period disparaged. The 1950s were the golden era of the

paperback original (i.e., books first released in softcover) and the exploitation film, two mediums that, then and since, have frequently been dismissed as formulaic, cheaply constructed, lacking substance, and in every other way inferior to "serious" works validated by critical authorities. This dissertation does not seek to defend these works on aesthetic grounds, not because it is a losing proposition, but because it is an irrelevant question. As will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, using aesthetics to dismiss or accept historical evidence is a poor standard. It leads historians into the same trap that befell contemporary intellectuals—a hierarchy of subjective interests that transform personal and group taste into a false premise of objectivity. Scholars do a disservice to historical inquiry by rejecting evidence on the basis of taste. Instead, a governing principle of this study is that all cultural texts are grounded ideologically and historically by the hopes, fears, and interests of their producers and consumers. This study regards the production and consumption of books and movies as about more than just entertainment, but also intellectual discourse. It therefore expands immensely the kinds of evidence available to those pursuing cultural historical argument.

A third argument, closely connected to the second, is that analyzing disparaged cultural texts provides us with another perspective as to how intellectual discourse was circulated in the postwar period, but also the nature of that discourse. Intellectual discussion should not be considered the exclusive realm of academic and literary journals, prestigious newspapers, and scholarly books. Instead, this dissertation posits that we can diversify our definition of intellectual history—both the materials and historical actors involved in that branch of inquiry—by being more open to how and where intellectual discourse takes place. Indeed, one of the claims made in this study is that the books and movies sneered at by scholars of the period were, at times,

sympathetic to other critiques of postwar society, which suggests that formal intellectuals and other citizens were both being exposed to similar arguments. This complicates considerably the argument for postwar conformity and the critic's self-perceived separation from society. But it also suggests to intellectual and cultural historians alike how porous the border actually is between their specialties. An intellectual history of Cold War America certainly includes David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), but also EC Comics' *Shock Suspenstories* (1952–55) or the film *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957); it includes Dwight Macdonald and C. Wright Mills arguing about the nature of postwar life, but also paperback readers on the train or teenagers at the drive-in. Overarching to these arguments is encouragement to think widely and appreciate the materials of leisure in an intellectual historical context. The point is not to mandate that popular cultural texts be part of any intellectual history, only that they be considered fairly.

In some respects, the choice of cultural materials in this study is not especially significant to its proposed arguments. That is, I suspect an analysis of, say, science fiction or westerns from the period would support the argument for cultural diversity and intellectual discourse. However, there is particular value in focusing on juvenile delinquent novels and films and crime magazines. As discussed in much greater depth in Chapter 5, the delinquent genre is deeply tied to the period under examination. Whereas science fiction or westerns as genres existed and prospered before and after the 1950s, the delinquent genre emerged shortly after World War II, grew in intensity throughout the 1950s, and then mostly faded away by the early 1960s. The reason for all this is not hard to appreciate. American society faced waves of panic on the subject of juvenile delinquency during the same period, and the genre had a symbiotic relationship with

actual social discord, nourishing and being nourished by the panic. So, the use of juvenile delinquent tales has particular appeal because they were so clearly historically bounded. The genre also holds some appeal because, as James Gilbert argued in his still-standard history of the delinquency panic, *A Cycle of Outrage* (1986), concerns about the expanding consumer culture were at the heart of the fear.[4] And so delinquency, mass culture, and intellectual critique crisscross enticingly well for this kind of inquiry. What this also means, however, is that it must be made clear that this dissertation is not about the postwar juvenile delinquency panic. It does not seek to interrogate why (or whether) teenagers rebelled against adult society or otherwise renovate Gilbert's well-constructed house. Delinquency is merely a well-positioned entry point to examine the intersection of cultural and intellectual history in early Cold War America.

The balance of this introductory chapter turns to the theory and methodology that guide this study, an expression of the historical argument of this dissertation in the context of those theoretical underpinnings, and concludes with a discussion of the dissertation's architecture and summary of individual chapters.

Situating this study's methodology is of value because the greater contribution of the dissertation is, in fact, methodological, as opposed to something more conventionally historiographical (i.e., interpretative). This should not be taken to mean that this work does not contribute to the historiography of postwar America. In its examination of the publishing and movie industries, and its use of juvenile delinquent texts to consider questions of gender, space, and consumption, it encourages a narrative of American life that is more self-critical and supportive of diverse perspectives than normally considered.

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[4] James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

If not as outwardly tumultuous as the decades that immediately bracket the 1950s, this study puts forward an argument that subsurface currents of criticism and dissent within mass cultural texts of the period complicate the decade's comparative tranquil reputation. However, this dissertation is better considered as a more wide-ranging case study, one that seeks to demonstrate the profit and sensibility in marrying intellectual historical inquiry—i.e., historical argument rooted in the ideas and texts of acknowledged critical thinkers and scholars—with popular cultural history. As mentioned above, one of the broader goals here is to encourage interrogation of disciplinary divisions. In discussing the theory and methodology that this study employs, the implicit argument is that historians benefit from treating popular culture not as distinct from intellectual history or as some diminished form, but as another forum for intellectual expression. More so, and especially important, the same kinds of questions and concerns of formal intellectuals might also find expression in the realm of the popular. Considered from this perspective, this dissertation offers itself as an example of how scholars might blend intellectual and popular cultural history.

Cultural work, historian George Lipsitz has suggested, tends to be more fragmentary, less given to consensus than other fields of historical inquiry and argument. Cultural history relies on "sources that did not intend to become sources, on evidence that does not announce itself as important, on information that becomes evidence only after the fact. These sources do not speak *for* themselves or even *about* themselves, but they reveal complex dimensions of human experience when interpreted properly." Because of these challenges, cultural historians use various theories as aids to where and how to look

for evidence of the past.[5] To interpret this period's novels and films, this study relies greatly on the theoretical propositions of Antonio Gramsci and especially scholars who have since developed and applied his ideas.

An Italian Communist agitator and philosopher, Gramsci was imprisoned in 1926 by his country's Fascist government. While in prison, he sketched out in notebooks a critique of orthodox Marxism and the nature of power in the twentieth-century state. While his work was never fully developed into a unified theory (his health quickly failed while in prison, and he died in 1937, a few years after his release), the surviving notebooks contained persuasive arguments concerning how capitalism had managed to ride through its supposed fatal contradictions identified by Marx. The interest here is not to go into an in-depth examination of the Gramscian critique, but rather to highlight two key concepts, hegemony and common sense, as they relate to this study on postwar American popular culture and its intellectual critics.

In the years following the Russian Revolution, Marxists looked for answers as to why the expected cascade of proletarian revolutions in the West had failed to occur. Gramsci believed that part of the answer lay in the success of the ruling class to build and maintain consent in civil society around the principles of capitalism. Marxists, he believed, placed too much emphasis on economic determinism, where components of the superstructure (e.g., government and church institutions) merely reacted to the dictates of the economic base. Gramsci argued that the base did not direct political decision making, but rather established the contours or conditions in which decisions could be considered

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[5] George Lipsitz, "Cultural Theory, Dialogue, and American Cultural History," in *A Companion to American Cultural History*, ed. Karen Halttunen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 266–67. Emphasis in original.

and made. The base nurtured an environment friendly to capitalist production, but did not control the actions of everything within that environment. Such a mechanical understanding of society, he said, could not adequately explain political and social crises and realignments, and so a more dynamic understanding, one that realized the superstructure to be more than reflexive, was required. In orthodox Marxism, objective material conditions were the basis for shaping the social experience, but this worked as a prognostic tool only if human beings were passive and easily abstracted. Gramsci sought to establish intellectual and social space where human will could maneuver and resist power.[6] In doing so, Gramsci placed human subjectivity at the centre of history.

The central pillar of Gramsci's understanding of how power is gained and maintained in modern societies is found in his expression of hegemony. In the most general sense, hegemony refers to the means by which authority is validated. Hegemony concerns the legitimacy of wielding state power, but Gramsci's intent went well beyond legal consecration. His conception had two related definitions. The first refers to a consensual means of political authority (as contrasted with overt domination), where society functions in a fairly peaceful manner and the vast majority of citizens recognize the government as legitimate. The second and far more interesting component concerns what might be called consciousness development, where a class identity goes beyond its economic underpinning toward what Walter Adamson described as "a common

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[6] Matt Perry, *Marxism and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 74; Antonio Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 189–91; Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (June 1986): 413–14, 422; and Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1, 77.

intellectual and moral awareness, a common culture."[7] In stressing that there is a cultural, intellectual, and moral component to the perceived legitimacy of a ruling group, Gramsci meant that material power alone is insufficient. Rather, hegemonic power requires normalizing the moral and political values of the mass of society in ways sympathetic to the ruling group. In short, for hegemony to be achieved, the worldview of rulers and citizens must be sufficiently in agreement.[8]

This is not to suggest that ideological accord is a simple matter. Achieving hegemony requires constant effort to turn a group's political and economic interests into social and cultural leadership, too. In this, the state must function as an educator. The components of the superstructure are too varied to be allowed to ideologically develop of their own accord, and so the civil sphere must be molded to support the interests of the base. This is not about brainwashing, but about exercising influence and authority to normalize what is considered acceptable conduct and belief. It means convincing others that the values of the ruling group should be shared by society at large, and that antithetical values should be marginalized or penalized.[9]

A concept related to hegemony is the historic bloc, the term Gramsci gave to

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[7] Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 170–71. For a more expansive set of definitions of hegemony, see Chris Rojek, *Stuart Hall* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2003), 114–15.

[8] Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 3; and Benedetto Fontana, "Power and Democracy: Gramsci and Hegemony in America," in *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture, and Social Theory*, ed. Joseph Francese (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 84–85.

[9] Shane Gunster, *Capitalizing on Culture: Critical Theory for Cultural Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 210; T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1985): 577; and Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 247. Gramsci claimed that every state is ethical inasmuch as it seeks to educate its citizens to adopt a morality that supports the base, which is to say it supports the interests of the ruling classes. Schools are one means of doing this, the justice system is another, offering, respectively, rewards and punishment. However, there are countless other organizations that work to the same end, which is establishing hegemony (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 258).

these alliances of interest. Society was certainly splintered upon any number of axes—e.g., race, class, sex, region, occupation, or religion—but for socio-political purposes combinations of groups come together as a historic bloc. The qualifier "historic" is significant, for the bloc is not a permanent condition, but one dependent upon immediate social conditions and interests. Inherent in this understanding is that the historic bloc is unstable, existing only to the extent that the necessary historic conditions are present to sustain it. When we speak of historic blocs, we must be mindful that we are discussing not just the constituent parts, but the historical context in which they came together.[10]

Hegemonies emerge from historic blocs, but not all historic blocs become hegemonic. Any historic bloc is hegemonic within itself—the members of the coalition share enough commonalities to maintain an alliance—but its relationship with other social groups or blocs is not necessarily hegemonic. A historic bloc becomes a hegemonic bloc only when it can express the diverse values of its constituent parts as a single vision in a manner sufficient to seize power and then impress and normalize its values upon the greater society. Hegemony becomes the means by which the economically powerful unify society to maintain legitimacy. That is the whole point of hegemony—to turn heterogeneity into homogeneity.[11]

Hegemony is not achieved by the simple imposition of one group's values on others. That would turn it into the kind of mechanical process that Gramsci rejected in

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[10] Martyn L. Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 62–63; and Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," 424–25.

[11] Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 177–78; Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979), 195; Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: ElecBook, 1999), 27; and Esteve Morera, *Gramsci's Historicism: A Realist Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 173.

orthodox Marxism. Instead, it is something built up, constructed amidst various struggles and shaped by participants and circumstance. While successful hegemonic efforts do not just coerce and bully, but bicker and barter to incorporate partners' perspectives into the whole, there is an interest by those same partners to not cede too much power and self-interest. That is, even within the hegemonic bloc the various partners do not abandon their own identities and interests, but work to expand influence (or forestall decline) within. That it operates on such a vast scale results in spaces that allow dissenting positions to emerge and possibly challenge. Thus hegemony is in a constant state of recreation. This perspective encourages us to be skeptical of appearances of social stability. Whether considering groups outside the hegemonic bloc or junior members within, maneuvering and negotiating is always ongoing, affecting the combination and influence of the hegemonic bloc.[12]

Despite this appreciation of internal politicking, Raymond Williams reminds us that hegemony is a totalizing operation. It involves an all-encompassing set of practices and expectations and perspectives—in essence, the construction of lived reality. This is what makes so difficult overcoming hegemonic historic blocs.[13] Arguing against the dominant thinking during a given hegemonic period can seem less ideological debate than denying established truth. Indeed, this is the significance of ideology and common sense within Gramscian analysis.

Unlike the orthodox Marxist treatment of ideology as false consciousness,

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[12] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 57–59; Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 71; Steve Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3–4, 45–46; Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 174; and Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 571–72.

[13] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 412–14.

Gramsci described it as the terrain "on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle." It is the battleground where the struggle over ideas develops consciousness.[14] Ideology, in Gramsci's conception, is made up of two distinct parts—philosophy and common sense. The former term is more familiar when considering ideology—a coherent and considered set of political, economic, and/or social ideals. Of much greater interest here is the latter component. Gramsci wrote of common sense:

> Every social stratum has its own "common sense" which is ultimately the most widespread conception of life and morals. … Common sense is not something rigid and static; rather, it changes continuously, enriched by scientific notions and philosophical opinions which have entered into common usage. "Common sense" is the folklore of "philosophy" and stands midway between real "folklore" (that is, as it is understood) and the philosophy, the science, the economics of the scholars. "Common sense" creates the folklore of the future, that is, a more or less rigidified phase of a certain time and place.[15]

Unlike philosophy, common sense is unsystematic and frequently self-contradictory. Instead, it emerges as accumulated tradition, and so lacks the organization and institutions to arrange and formalize it to minimize contradictions. While common sense has the reputation of being neutral, time-tested truth, it is very much a form of ideology.[16]

To challenge existing hegemony must mean transforming the ideological landscape to create a new worldview that unifies disparate groups and generates a new historic bloc. Gramsci called this transformation "intellectual and moral reform." The

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[14] Gramsci quoted in Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," 185.
[15] Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," 431; Gramsci quoted in Guido Liguori, "Common Sense in Gramsci," in *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture, and Social Theory*, ed. Joseph Francese (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 124.
[16] Jones, *Antonio Gramsci*, 54; Perry, *Marxism and History*, 77; and Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," 431.

importance of common sense in all this is for its role in shaping people's consciousness. Overcoming its non-ideological surface is one of the challenges for the more coherent philosophies. It is this standard perception of common sense as a counter to ideology that makes it so important in the struggle to assert or resist hegemony. Building alliances is one front, but transforming common sense by making it in accordance with the dominant bloc's ideology has powerful implications for resistance or maintenance.[17]

Gramsci argued that common sense is tied to an inability to recognize one's historical position vis-á-vis the greater world. This ignorance leads to a misapprehension about the supposed universal and benign nature of common sense, let alone its claim to be proven truth. Gramscian common sense works in practical ways that emphasize judgment and action. But it is also fundamentally conservative and resistant to innovation. Common sense is not a means of proving theory, but once a theory achieves the status of common sense, it becomes axiomatic.[18]

If common sense cannot be eliminated, it can and must be transformed. Gramsci explained this point:

> [P]hilosophy means, rather specifically, a conception of the world with salient individual traits. Common sense is the conception of the world that is most widespread among the popular masses in a historical period. One wants to change common sense and create a "new common sense"—hence the need to take the "simple" into account.[19]

For both dominant and marginalized groups, the struggle to transform and normalize common sense to their interests becomes a core battleground and one in constant motion.

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[17] Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," 191; Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," 431; and Jones, *Antonio Gramsci*, 54, 69.
[18] David, *Understanding Stuart Hall*, 82; and Antonio A. Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Graziella Di Mauro with Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 139.
[19] Gramsci quoted in Liguori, "Common Sense in Gramsci," 131.

This leads to the role of intellectuals in social struggle. Gramsci claimed that formal intellectuals do not stand apart from their society, but are part of a "collective intellectual," which is to say part of an intellectual social structure that services that structure. Every social group produces intellectuals who "give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields."[20] Gramsci rejected the idea that philosophy is the province of the specialist and separate from civil society. Instead, philosophy is intimately and historically bound to lived life and practical activity:

> There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded. … Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a "philosopher," an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.

If practical activity is philosophical activity, then everyone must be a philosopher. "[O]ne cannot talk of non intellectuals," Gramsci wrote, "because they do not exist. ... There is no human activity that excludes intellectual intervention."[21]

The idea of a formal intellectual, then, is a social construct. Formal philosophers differ from average citizens only in the degree of coherence and systemization of their thinking. But as users of language, common sense, and culture, Gramsci argued, all people are philosophers. As such, Matt Perry wrote, "philosophy moved forward not through the brilliant insight of individuals but via the wide diffusion of a critical

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[20] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 5–7; and Jones, *Antonio Gramsci*, 82.
[21] Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 321; Perry, *Marxism and History*, 74; and Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci*, 141–42.

awareness that could become the basis of political action." Ideological domination by successive hegemonic blocs has obscured this point, and so the average person is often unaware of the ideological significance of his or her actions or beliefs. Nevertheless, these beliefs and actions have transformative potential. Overcoming this perceived passivity requires developing self-awareness, of fighting through the contradictions of common sense versus experience.[22]

For the historian, these concepts hold great value, not least because Gramsci's interpretation of power is so rooted in a historicization of social forces. Gramsci's historicism is not a theory of history per se, but rather a set of principles to guide research. Gramsci was not interested in history as a succession of events or generalized descriptions, but of specific events that held resonance towards particular problems. Esteve Morera explained that Gramsci's understanding of history was not the collision of two billiard balls, but instead plate tectonics, where two conflicting forces abrade constantly, occasionally resulting in an earthquake. It is these more subtle forces that we cannot appreciate until after the earthquake. This perspective, indeed, speaks to one of the aims of this study, to demonstrate how intellectuals missed a notable strain of dissent running within popular culture. Where mass cultural critics saw pacified consumers, this study suggests that going under the surface reveals significant ideological tectonic movement.[23] The greater point of Gramsci's historicism is that we can only describe social phenomena once we can appreciate their consequences.

Marxist theorist Stuart Hall stated that Gramsci provides the historian a

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[22] Perry, *Marxism and History*, 75–76; Jones, *Antonio Gramsci*, 81–2; and Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," 432.
[23] Morera, *Gramsci's Historicism*, 74, 80, 128.

framework for asking useful questions, to help us pay attention to what is distinct and significant about specific moments. We need to appreciate that every crisis is reconstitution, that any destruction also involves reconstruction of social forces. Gramsci treated ideology as something that absorbs disparate subjects, identities, projects, aspirations, and posited that it creates a unity of sorts from these differences. Yet, the work is never complete, never permanent, because historical circumstances evolve and the interests of social groups are never fully satisfied or pacified.[24] All of this is to say that Gramsci understood history and ideology to be messy and that purist models necessarily fail. This study certainly appreciates a messy view of postwar culture.

How do we apply these Gramscian principles to the study of popular culture? The work of Hall, the foremost proponent of Gramscian analysis, is especially instructive on this question. We make a deep error when we treat culture as whole and coherent, as either entirely corrupt or purely authentic. We must reject the seduction of authenticity, for all cultural forms are tangles of origins, intents, and contradictions. Popular culture cannot simply be that which "the people" do or believe, for essentializing culture dehistoricizes difference, obscuring the dynamics of power. Instead, Hall argued for multiaccentuality, of socially derived readings to reframe popular culture from a simple us-versus-them binary to one of endless contestation, of creation and recreation. This necessarily historicizes any analysis. Hall's definition of "popular" refers to those practices of marginalized groups in a particular period vis-à-vis the dominant culture. Thus it looks to the processes by which dominance and subordination are articulated. It also means accepting that dominance and subordination are circumstantial categories—

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[24] From Stuart Hall's postscript, "Gramsci and Us," in Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 131–36.

i.e., large numbers of people are never fully in either the hegemonic or marginal groups. Furthermore, we need to be cognizant that these categories are always in flux—cultural forms can shift from popular to non-popular and vice versa. What matters is not some intrinsic value permanently embedded upon a cultural text, but the struggle of social relations as played out via such items and practices. All questions about cultural items are therefore "historically provisional." Popular culture must be regarded dynamically, as the playing out of a historical process. Ideas are expressed, then gather strength or recede. They are transformed, absorbed, or go into hibernation. This is why, in the Gramscian reading, transforming common sense is so important.[25] It is this keen emphasis on popular cultural historicization that makes this analytical approach so persuasive.

Another Gramscian scholar, Tony Bennett, expanded on the implications of treating culture as an activity, as contestation, rather than a more benign object. Understanding the hegemonic dynamic of consensus, of persuasion, of absorption and transformation, Bennett argued that there is no easy boundary between dominant bourgeois culture and an oppositional popular culture. There is certainly dominance in the hegemonic sense, but no purity. Instead, the nature of hegemonic struggle insists that popular culture is one where the dominant bloc seeks to maintain and expand its power just as oppositional groups seek to confound it. Bennett likened dominant culture to a magnetic pole within a cultural field, where oppositional cultures may seek to disentangle themselves, to find an autonomous space, but can never truly do so. This stance also does well to historicize "the people" and their culture, and to make the point that nothing is

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[25] Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1998), 447–49; Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," *Social Justice* 20, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1993): 108, 111; and James Procter, *Stuart Hall* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 29–30.

static. Even in opposing dominant values, oppositional groups are transformed and unlikely to return to some former state. There is no golden age to be recaptured, for "[w]hat was popular yesterday *cannot* be popular today for the people today do not *want* to be what they were yesterday."[26]

While treating culture as part of a power struggle, we must never forget that the advantage lies with the dominant historic bloc. As Richard Butsch and T.J. Jackson Lears each contended, leisure is not free expression but rather activity constrained by tradition, structure, hegemony. Consumers do not create the products, and so their actions are constrained by a playground established by the culture industry. "Just as access to the means of production shapes the organization of production," Butsch wrote, "access to the means of consumption shapes leisure. People's leisure choices are constrained by the skills, knowledge, space, equipment available to them." This is a valuable reminder that while the Gramscian perspective emphasizes contestation, the struggle never occurs on a balanced field. Resources—material, social, or intellectual—do matter in how people participate in cultural activities.[27] Yet, Lears offered, it is that "commercial orientation" that undercuts the managerial inclinations of the producers. Controlling consumers' use is often at odds with profit interest, and producers will usually pick the latter over the former. Consumers, too, bring more than just a capacity to cope with capitalism; they bring to the experience "historically conditioned prejudices, fantasies, inhibitions,

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[26] Tony Bennett, " Popular Culture and 'The Turn to Gramsci'," in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, ed. Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), xiii–xvi; and Tony Bennett, "The Politics of 'The Popular' and Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, ed. Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), 18–19. Emphasis in original.

[27] Richard Butsch, "Leisure and Hegemony in America," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure Into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 7–8.

ideologies, archetypes." [28] Nevertheless, any inquiry into popular culture must acknowledge that the dominant side is always favoured.

How does the Gramscian perspective inform this study of postwar American culture? Lears pointed out that even as Gramsci made Marxism less rigid, his value was not limited to Marxist analysis. Gramsci, he noted,

> can aid intellectual historians trying to understand how ideas reinforce or undermine existing social structures and social historians seeking to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the power wielded by dominant groups and the relative cultural autonomy of subordinate groups whom they victimize.

Coercion and consent coexist, but that which predominates is dependent on historical circumstances. What Gramsci offers is less a history of constant struggle between oppressor and oppressed than how oppressors avoid open conflict and rebellion. His work provides a means of understanding how ideas function in society, how inequalities are maintained or challenged.[29] To this end, Lears explored the question of postwar America as a Gramscian hegemonic moment.

In the late 1940s, Lears argued, most American intellectuals saw their nation as "a democratic polity of competing interest groups, an extraordinarily fluid social structure, an emergent cultural consensus based on the spread of affluence and the promise of upward mobility." Indeed, there was a belief that America had solved the contradictions

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[28] T.J. Jackson Lears, "Making Fun of Popular Culture," *American Historical Review* 97 (December 1992): 1424–26. Compare this cautionary with the more far more upbeat and simplistic position espoused by John Fiske, who, while accepting the Gramscian principle of cultural struggle, nevertheless treats popular culture as the act of subverting commercial culture meant to dominate. The essence of popular culture, he writes, is "[u]sing *their* products for *our* purposes." Furthermore, when members of the dominant group participate in popular culture, they cede any social authority. That is, popular culture trumps social dominance. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989; reprint, London: Routledge, 1990), 34–35, 41. Emphasis in original.

[29] Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 568, 572

of capitalism and that the vast majority were its beneficiaries. However, these same intellectuals also saw homogeneity as the rule of American society. A perception that the faceless manager and bureaucratic method now dominated had sapped both individual and national purpose. Thus a notion of aimlessness guided the emerging mass culture critique. Where intellectuals saw prosperity and homogeneity, they also saw as its consequence conformity and purposelessness.[30]

But if we limit ourselves to the words of intellectuals, "we are stuck with a narrow, apolitical frame of reference as well as a monolithic conception of postwar consumer culture." Even in a rather homogeneous society, Lears said, some groups had greater power than others, allowing them to set the terms of debate and normalize some ideas. Lears wished to put forth an interpretation that acknowledged power relations, especially considering corporate influence, but not one that reduced people to a passive mass. To this end, Lears employed hegemony to argue that postwar America was dominated by a historical bloc of a "new class" managers, administrators, academics, technicians, and journalists who "manipulated symbols rather than made things." However, this was not a proper class, but instead a coalition of interested professionals with common interests, experiences, and worldviews. They tended to be rootless but affluent employees of large corporations who embraced the consumer ideal. They also believed in a benign version of an American Way of Life and saw their own perspective as in sync with America's and the free world's. Lears' point was that these values were hegemonic—naturalized and morally tinted—and projected onto a large swath of citizens

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[30] T.J. Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 38–41, 44.

who did not share nor could achieve them.[31]

The latter part of Lears' essay speaks more to the aims of this dissertation. The assumption that the United States homogeneously embraced consumer culture, he posited, obscured a variety of subcultural currents. There was, for example, notable friction between groups within the historic bloc, such as that between technocrats and the literati, the former driven by expertise and power, the latter by taste and style.[32] The root of their conflict was, appropriately, in the historical conditions. The postwar liberal hegemony was guided by the principle of promoting individualism, and greater dispersal of the wealth of the nation was regarded as the best means of ensuring liberal values and national strength. To this end, there was a brokered peace between capital and labour, with government serving as manager, marshaling experts to keep social peace and promote economic progress. Most intellectuals of the period supported this strategy. It was an especially urgent task in the context of the nation's new status as world power, opposing Soviet Communism, which represented American fears of a mass society.

Yet, the sand in the joints was that economic growth and individualism coalesced around personal consumption. Freedom in postwar society meant opportunity to buy the many goods that America produced. There were two problems with this from the perspective of intellectual critics. First, the quality of the cultural goods—cheap, standardized, sensationalized—that people bought demonstrated a debasement of art and morality. Second, consumption was perceived as conducted via herd mentality, suggestive of a mass mind, not individuality. Thus the postwar consumer economy had

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[31] Lears, "A Matter of Taste," 48–51. Also see Alan Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 66.
[32] Lears, "A Matter of Taste," 52–53.

worrying moral, even existential dimensions in the minds of these critics. Could America be counted upon to remain committed to individualism? Could a society dedicated to passive consumption of the lowest order muster the necessary will to stand up against Communism? As Andrew Ross observed, at the moment when huge swaths of intellectuals "chose the West" (in Dwight Macdonald's phrase) by allying themselves with power rather than dissent, they appointed themselves "cultural deputies" to elevate some practices as conducive to America's health and exclude or marginalize others.[33] The problem is that other segments of this coalition—publishers, moviemakers, distributers and retailers of mass-produced cultural goods, and their consumers—resisted the idea that their tastes needed such guidance. If the dominant ideology was one of consensus liberalism, steady economic growth, and opposing Communism, consumption and consumers represented a fault line in the postwar liberal hegemonic bloc.

Attention will now shift from explicit examination of Gramscian principles to separate but related questions about what happens when people engage in popular cultural consumption. While this discussion explores questions related to readers and texts and how meaning is created or denied, this study as a whole does not seek to better understand whether contemporary readers were more inclined to dominant interpretations or what kinds of resistant readings were generated. When considering juvenile delinquent texts, the aim is to examine the ideological discourse that could reasonably have been gained from a reading or viewing, what ideas the authors seemingly drew from. It is more about what ideas were plausibly in circulation, not the varieties of domination of or

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[33] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 55–56. Also see Paul Buhle, "The 1950s and 1960s: Open and Hidden Relations," *Prospects* 20 (1995): 468–69.

resistance by readers; it seeks to demonstrate a dynamic intellectual discourse in play within the postwar popular culture, not the degree of accord with dominant ideology or criticism. Nevertheless, the discussion of readers and meaning in this chapter is meant to put forth an argument that readers, then or now, are not passive, that intellectual discourse is always occurring within popular cultural consumption. As such, it serves the larger interest of rebutting the assumptions of postwar mass cultural critics.

This question of popular cultural consumption is especially important because a key set of source material for this study is books and films that were treated by cultural critics of the period as especially odious, and that aesthetic assessment carried with it something equally damning about its consumers. Consistent with Gramsci's argument that all people are intellectuals and that all activity is intellectual activity, one of the premises of this dissertation is that such dismissal on aesthetic grounds offers little of value in assessing the cultural or intellectual worth of such texts. If we leave aesthetics aside—demeaning books and movies for being formulaic or sensationalist—and instead approach them as being intellectually informed, they become valuable historical evidence. There are two matters related to popular cultural consumption to be dealt with here. The first concerns stratification—what can be considered the high-low cultural division—and the second with what happens when we consume popular culture. Together, the intention is to demonstrate that scholars impair themselves by treating both audiences as subservient to the text and its crass author and "low culture" texts as inferior works that do not merit scholarly value.

Both Paul DiMaggio and Lawrence Levine have demonstrated that the high-low distinction was something created by social and political needs, not some objective aesthetic standard. DiMaggio wrote of a conscious effort by late nineteenth-century

Boston elites to separate themselves from the masses via a form of cultural entrepreneurship (building organizations), classification (defining high and low), and framing (establishing etiquettes governing audiences and art). This was not about educating ideas of taste to the masses, but of segregation. Similarly, Levine examined the processes by which the works of William Shakespeare left the realm of common people's entertainment to become the province of elite culture. Before the twentieth century, Shakespeare's plays were staged in the same environment as that of magicians, acrobats, comedians, and minstrels. Performances were rowdy and participatory, with audiences yelling their opinions of the narrative. Since, however, Shakespeare has been transformed into something to be revered by restrained audiences. Levine argued that the creation of cultural order was about establishing a "true" culture separate from the marketplace, an admission that, whatever other benefits capitalism might provide, culture was an area that required shielding. For both DiMaggio and Levine, the creation of a stratified culture was to serve defensive and segregationist social purposes.[34]

The traditional historical privileging of institutional power and high culture, Nan Enstad has posited, reinforces this artificial binary. Levine, too, was troubled by the employment of contemporary aesthetic standards, rather than historical analysis, to assess cultural worth, for it invariably resulted in the most subjective and skewed considerations. Historicizing culture means accepting standards as in flux. Furthermore,

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[34] Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 374–77, 393; Lawrence W. Levine, "William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 157–97; and Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Enstad wrote, while recent scholarship has helped ease the stigma somewhat from popular culture, the qualifier "popular" makes implicit the high-low binary, generating an unspoken bias and providing a convenient excuse for dismissing popular culture altogether. Yet, she argued, the term has real value inasmuch that it reminds us of the vast terrain of cultural activity outside the elite, and that under capitalism creativity, autonomy, and commercial interests are bound up together, providing complexity and messiness to discourse.[35]

Some scholars have urged us to be cognizant of the social, even moral, character of genres, for they are produced, distributed, and consumed with different ascribed traits. Clive Bloom, for example, argued that where "serious art" (high culture) demands respect for its legitimacy, pulp (low culture) needs to be illicit to maintain its status. It is that very absence of respectability that makes pulp appealing. Thus, Bloom did not seek to validate pulp in a manner that expanded the canon and negated distinction, for that would erase pulp's essence. Where art thrives on hierarchy, especially to elevate the author above social confinements, pulp is notable, and thus unsettling to highbrow critics, for its rejection of hierarchies and for stripping production of any mystique. Pulp emphasizes a basic truth of the novel—it is a commodity and authorship is a form of labour (in some cases, anonymous labour). Pulp's threat is to those who seek to separate art from capitalism's commodification process, and in that rests its chief distinction from more critically favoured literature.[36] To Bloom, the social character associated with types of texts should aid scholarly assessments, not in some kind of lazy, hierarchical sense of

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[35] Nan Enstad, "Popular Culture," in *A Companion to American Cultural History*, ed. Karen Halttunen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 356–58, 368–69; and Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 7–8.

[36] Clive Bloom, *Cult Fiction: Popular Reading and Pulp Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 3, 12–13, 38, 40, 151.

aesthetic "good" or "bad," but that not all texts are produced, distributed, or consumed with identical intent.

According to Bloom, pulp, as a form of popular art, actively seeks the outskirts of respectability, for the pleasure in its reading comes from the opportunity to transgress in one's head. The essence of the form is its contradictoriness, "the embodiment of capitalism aestheticized, consumerized and internalized." It is simultaneously liberating and oppressive, a rejection of bourgeois respectability, while embracing the entrepreneurial spirit and individualism of capitalism. Bloom rejected the idea that pulp was either "mindless slavery" or "a revolution in advanced taste," but rather "a style of negotiation and rapprochement in *democratic* mass experience."[37]

Where Bloom saw anarchistic play in pulp, John G. Cawelti looked to formula fiction and found a desire for order. Like Bloom, Cawelti understood the primary function of genre fiction to be entertainment and pleasure. Formulas, he said, work by satisfying escape fantasies, which, to be successful, require one foot in social reality. They provide satisfaction by generating tension and insecurity, yet assurance that everything works out for the best. "Serious" literature accepts the messiness and injustice of the real world, whereas formula fiction relies on idealized types without ambiguities.[38]

While seeking to satisfy a desire for order may suggest a simplistic strategy of

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[37] Bloom, *Cult Fiction*, 12–16, 133–34. Emphasis in original.

[38] John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 2, 6, 13, 16, 18. George Lipsitz made a similar point, arguing that escapism fails if it serves merely as distraction. If the fictional world is too foreign from reality, it will fail to tap into our need to escape to it; but if it is too much like reality, it will hardly prove much of an escape. The tension, he said, rests on helping free us from our sense of confinement in the real world versus establishing a scenario that provokes our imagination to execute the escape. George Lipsitz, "No Way Out: Dialogue and Negotiation in Reel America," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 164.

domination by the producer, one of singular interpretation, Cawelti suggested that formulas succeed by appealing to multiple needs, that its multiplicity creates desired unity. More so, for a formula to succeed—for it to become a formula—it must be part of a shared cultural fantasy, tied to present needs and anxieties; hence, it is historically grounded. This suggests that the development of any formula must be audience driven.[39]

John Fiske saw distinctions in how scholars treat high-low distinctions and the consumption of each. There is an unspoken and unjustified bias, Fiske wrote, that only high cultural consumption demands discriminating taste. Popular discrimination certainly exists, but it differs from critical discrimination, as the former rests on questions of production and function, while the latter looks to questions of quality and aesthetics. Art defined by aesthetics is treated as self-contained, intrinsic to the object, and so only the worthy may appreciate it. Popular culture, on the other hand, is functional, and so those texts' that fulfill their role—generally, to produce pleasure—establish their worth. Their value is understood through social interaction. That these works must also appeal to a wide audience to be commercially successful encourage a polysemic nature.[40]

Critical dismissal of popular texts, Fiske claimed, normally relies on three criteria: 1) conventionality and the conditions of mass production; 2) superficiality and predictability; and 3) ease of consumption. Failing these tests may invalidate their worth as high culture, but they ease their use as popular texts. For example, conventional narratives allow readers to "write ahead," to predict what will happen and then compare the results. Conventionality allows readers to feel they know the characters even better

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[39] Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, 30, 34.
[40] John Fiske, "Popular Discrimination," in *Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. Raidford Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 103–06.

than the author, something unavailable in high cultural texts. Popular readership requires a particular competence that allows the reader to fill in the gaps. In this, readers share a competence with producers in understanding the contours of a genre. This sense of being peers of sorts is what allows readers to treat both producers and texts with a certain disrespect and manipulate the work as they see fit. The highbrow's reverence for the artist creates a more segregated relationship, one that encourages expert interpreters and adherence to formalism. This distinction, then, is such that the highbrow cannot respect the popular text, its creator, or its supporters.[41]

Popular texts, Fiske posited, should be sufficiently "producerly." Fiske borrowed this idea from Roland Barthes' distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" texts. Readerly texts seek out passive yet disciplined readers who accept meanings as already present. These are closed texts and are rather easy to consume. Writerly texts demand the active participation of readers to rewrite and construct meanings as they read. A producerly text, Fiske stated, is a popular writerly text, one that employs common language. Stripped down, producerly texts reveal the limitations in controlling reader interpretations. Thus, in analyzing popular texts, we need to keep an eye on how dominant ideologies work within them, but also how people can read against these to see the contradictions and gaps that allow evasion, but also to assess why people might find such texts appealing.[42]

Hall addressed this question of communication and ideology in "Encoding, Decoding," asserting that, far from a simple process, communication is a "complex structure in dominance." At any given point in an act of communication—say, a

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[41] Fiske, "Popular Discrimination," 108–09, 112; and Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 123.
[42] Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 99–101, 109–10, 115–18.

television broadcast—meaning is produced or reproduced, for the act of decoding a message also means encoding it. That is, communication is a constant cycle of interpretation and generation of meaning by participants. In communication, as in capitalism, "consumption determines production just as production determines consumption." In this model, meaning does not stop at any given point in the circuit, and so a "true" meaning cannot be confidently discerned. Despite the shared activity, encoding and decoding are not symmetrical processes because the social positions of the participants are not equal. What this leads to is the idea that, just as there is no true meaning, there is no "real" in language, for all is articulation and interpretation. The text does not contain an intrinsic meaning placed by the author. Rather, reading releases the "signifying potential" of the text. What makes this important is that when considering preferred or dominant meanings, we appreciate that it is not a one-way process ending with a passive audience. Meaning is plural because the audience does not act to uncover a true meaning, but rather creates its own meanings from the available material and its own experiences and interests. This is how audiences become creators.[43]

Achieving a "proper" decoding—i.e., one where the reader's interpretation is in accord with the producer's—requires close preparation by the producer. In one scenario, which Hall labels the "dominant-hegemonic position," the receiver decodes and recodes the message using the preferred means used to encode it. That is, the reader understands and accepts the author's intent. Social difference and consciousness between producer and consumer, however, can result in contrary interpretations. These might range from an understanding of the intended meaning but nevertheless a different ("negotiated")

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[43] Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader, 2nd ed*, ed. John Storey (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 508–11; and Procter, *Stuart Hall*, 61, 64–.66.

conclusion, to one utterly oppositional, where the author's desired meaning is completely unappreciated in favour of an interpretation wholly dissimilar and unintended.[44]

"Encoding/Decoding" incorporates ideas of the media's role in ideological reproduction, of the consensual nature of the strategy, and of contestation—all consistent with a Gramscian conception of power. The media in this interpretation is not a simple carrier of ideology—a propaganda tool—but rather a site where producers and receivers each seek to create meaning from texts. Hall did not see encoding/decoding as a process that possesses an end or a unity. Meaning is too polysemic, too tied to context and social distinction, and so it is a perpetually contested activity. The encoding/decoding model suggests that even a determined culture industry can never actually eradicate contrary readings. Still, we must be aware that the dominant culture holds the advantage that its messages will usually be decoded in preferred ways. Hegemony makes such a decoding seem natural (i.e., non-ideological) and so audiences are less inclined to consider contrary interpretations.[45]

Literary theorist Stanley Fish saw less struggle within the reading process. Literature, Fish argued, is fundamentally an open category, one decided upon from reader to reader. This is not to suggest that the reader is fully autonomous and individualized. Rather, each reader is influenced by particular communities (e.g., social peers, professions, philosophical groupings) and their assumptions about literature. Interpretation and meaning, then, are not dictated by the text, its author, or the free will of the reader, but via a form of collective action that is only as strong as each reader's

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[44] Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 514–17; and Procter, *Stuart Hall*, 67, 70. When Hall discussed the three hypothetical readings of a message—dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional—he referred to them as a continuum, rather than static points, and social readings, rather than those of individuals.
[45] Procter, *Stuart Hall*, 72; Rojek, *Stuart Hall*, 116; and Gunster, *Capitalizing on Culture*, 203–5.

willingness to adhere to these assumptions. What this suggests is that interpretation is not connected to the stability of the text, but rather the values of particular communities of readers. Thus, there is no single "correct" reading of a text, only varying "ways of reading" that are connected to community values. The implication of this, Fish stated, is that rather than ascribe authority to particular figures—the text, the author, the reader—we should consider that these figures are all "products of interpretation."[46]

Disagreements over interpretation are something that cannot be settled, Fish claimed, for we cannot look to the text as arbiter of truth when the text is the object of disagreement. However, this does not mean that there are an unlimited number of interpretative strategies. Any new interpretations of a text only make sense in the context of previous interpretations—that is the standard by which an interpretation is new—which means that there is always a dependency on earlier efforts. Fish argued for a persuasion model of interpretation, one where all biases are embraced to dominate and determine the persuasiveness of the interpretation. This is not about jettisoning criticality, only assumptions of the text's objectivity. All of this helps us understand previous interpretations as based not on a lack of knowledge or skill, but derived through being part of a particular literary culture. The persuasion model also elevates the importance of the reader, who no longer seeks to be worthy of the text, but is, in fact, crucial to its production in the first place.[47]

Two studies in particular serve as valuable guides for approaching benighted

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[46] Stanley Fish, "Introduction, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Interpretation," in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 11, 15–17.

[47] Stanley Fish, "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?" and "Demonstration vs. Persuasion: Two Models of Critical Activity," in *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 350, 365–68.

literature, especially with regards to how readers have used such texts. In *Mechanic Accents*, a study of nineteenth-century American dime novels, Michael Denning worked from a Gramscian perspective and treated books not as pleasurable subversion or vehicles for order, but rather arenas of cultural struggle amidst capitalist expansion, industrialization, and urbanization, and what this meant for labourers. These cheaply produced and mass-distributed novels were neither examples of social control nor authentic representations of working-class culture. They were, instead, contradictory expressions of morality tinged with "accents" and "disguises" used to communicate with working-class readers. The genres, conventions, stock characters, and language all betrayed a specific social reality that bled into the fictional world.[48]

In reading such books historically, Denning wrote, we have to be sensitive to contradiction, for the nature of the struggle meant that such works were multiaccentual. If we search for a singular voice and intent, we bury the tension. Some elements, he argued, came from the "dominant genteel culture," while others from the emerging oppositional one. Both sets were fought over, reinterpreted, subverted, co-opted. To apprehend how these books communicated ideology, Denning suggested reading allegorically. Reading in a "novelistic" fashion involves taking the characters as individuals, with thoughts and motivations as if part of the real world. Reading allegorically, however, treats the contents not as representative of the real but as representative microcosm. Characters are read as representing specific types and traits. Denning suggested that within the nineteenth-century dime novels, there was a single, master narrative that shaped readings of the individual books, one of "an artisanal variant of republican ideology" that dealt

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[48] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: New York: Verso, 1987), 3–4, 66, 81, 83.

with class and the nature of the republic going forward. These novels played off this narrative in employing characters and situations. They did not offer "true representations" of workers, but rather explored instabilities and uncertainties in the cities, of aspiring artisans, outlaw life, romantic struggle, and achievement. Reading such fiction was leisure, but also a means of assessing social reality, especially social change.[49]

Janice Radway's ethnography of female romance readers, like Denning's historical study, keyed on conflict in the act of reading a genre and format that met with disapproval from cultural authorities. Radway's aims were to apply Fish's concept of interpretive communities to better understand how social and material circumstances prepared readers. When examined from the perspective of readers, romance reading functioned as a form of "mild protest" against institutions that failed to satisfy the women's emotional needs. It was a way of asserting a temporary autonomy to address self-interests. Yet, from a feminist perspective, reading patriarchal narratives was counterproductive because it directed energy away from potential socially productive activity that more directly addressed their frustration. Furthermore, Radway acknowledged the power of the publisher in this process, for control of the machinery of production and distribution of the books significantly influenced their consumption.[50]

The larger point, however, is that scholars must be wary of looking at mass-produced culture and assume that its significance is plain to see, rather than consider that consumers are capable of modifying or using them in unconsidered ways.

Commodities like mass-produced literary texts are selected,

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[49] Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 72–73, 79–81, 83.

[50] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 5–11, 19–20, 53–54, 90, 101, 104, 213; and Susan Purdie, "Janice Radway, Reading the Romance," in *Reading into Cultural Studies*, ed. Martin Barker and Anne Beezer (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 151–54.

> purchased, constructed, and used by real people with previously existing needs, desires, intentions, and interpretive strategies. By reinstating those active individuals and their creative, constructive activities at the heart of our interpretive enterprise, we avoid blinding ourselves to the fact that the essentially human practice of making meaning goes on even in a world increasingly dominated by things and by consumption.

Radway argued that even though producers of mass art hold considerable ideological power, it has its limits, and those who are dissatisfied can still use those materials for their own ends. This kind of dissent, she conceded, is "minimal," but nevertheless a "legitimate form of protest." "[R]omance reading," she concluded, "is a profoundly conflicted activity centered upon a profoundly conflicted form."[51]

Another study merits mention for informing this dissertation's approach, for it focuses on how hegemonic postwar liberalism was produced and distributed, and how historians might approach such materials. Wendy Kozol's study of 1950s American society as depicted in *Life* magazine considers how the news media regulated the relationship between state and civil society. This was not necessarily one of explicitly parroting the government line, but of reinforcing the "ideological field" that naturalized that perspective. News stories and photos did not so much reflect reality as they constructed a value-laden narrative for their readers. A preferred national identity was promoted, for example, by using photos of white people to illustrate middle-class family ideals, whereas Hispanics were used to depict poverty or illiteracy. Likewise, the working class were identified as a class, but the middle class were upgraded to "American." Consumption and domesticity were represented in ways that the magazine's preferred readers would endorse. By contrast, a photo of angry, striking workers might not serve

[51] Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 14, 20, 221–22.

working-class needs, but could speak to middle-class anxieties about disorder. Rather than employ overt political or social arguments, *Life* built an ideological framework for an imagined community of white, middle-class families.[52]

Life's master narrative sought to merge domestic and capitalist values. The contradiction in such a narrative, Kozol argued, was that consumption alone could not address concurrent alienation and dissatisfactions. Consumption fractured and isolated families and other relationships, and so the promised satisfaction and unity was always out of reach. *Life*'s narrative was also problematic because it promoted a white, middle-class, suburban ideal that could not be matched by a much more complex and varied society of competing interests. Even as this narrative sought to reassure, it excluded vast numbers who could not achieve this recipe for happiness for reasons of sex, race, class, or religion, among others. Thus, reading *Life*, like reading delinquent novels or watching delinquent movies, must be done with an eye to the context of postwar life to appreciate the contradictions between narrative and lived reality.[53]

Susan Douglas offered a series of valuable critiques and warnings to those engaged in questions of readers and reading. Among her observations were that available evidence is always greater for producers of texts rather than consumers, and so there is a danger in reading too much into limited evidence for reader experiences, leading to simplistic binaries of resistance or passivity. To counter this temptation, she recommended scholars to be aware of contradiction and fragmentation in the reading experience, that readers more often engaged in Hall's negotiated readings. Douglas also

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[52] Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 10–14, 22, 95.
[53] Kozol, *Life's America*, 49, 184–85.

urged attention to the production side of the equation, for even if we reject the notion of domination, producers do matter, as they employ varied strategies for appealing to readers. And even if we reject technological determinism, we must be aware of how technological change alters the production, distribution, and consumption of texts.[54]

John Clarke concurred with many of Douglas' cautions in his critique of sanguine interpretations of popular culture, what he called the cultural populist position. First, populists too readily separate the cultural from the economic, all but awarding autonomy to the former, which obscures questions of how items are produced, distributed, and consumed, how censorship might be employed, and who is allowed to participate. Second, the polysemiotic proposition needs to be tempered by awareness of the power in the culture industry to constrain interpretation. Third, populists too often underestimate the power of the dominant reading. The dominant reading is not all-powerful, but it is deservedly called dominant. Fourth, subversive readings require substantial resources to sustain them. Contrary interpretation alone is just positional (as Radway put it, "passive dissent"); to be meaningful requires a "culture of difference" (i.e., something collective and motivating). And fifth, non-dominant readings are not necessarily counter-hegemonic, and so caution needs to be applied in asserting resistance. Clarke advised that popular culture needs to be approached as a "field of conflict" that always benefits the dominant position because it establishes the structures for reproduction of its values.[55]

The approach taken in this dissertation towards juvenile delinquent fiction and films of the postwar period is mindful of Douglas' and Clarke's cautions concerning the

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[54] Susan Douglas, "Notes Toward a History of Media Audiences," *Radical History Review* 54 (Fall 1992): 131–35.

[55] John Clarke, "Pessimism versus Populism: The Problematic Politics of Popular Culture," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure Into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 39–42.

temptation to award greater autonomy to audiences. While one of the core goals of this study is to demonstrate that the cultural (and therefore ideological) options in this period, in both content and form, were much more diverse and available than normally considered, and that scholars are therefore advised to consider consensus and conformity with much more caution, the intent here is not to reject entirely that common conception of the period. Even as the Gramscian concept of hegemony carries with it the idea of maneuverability for dissenting views within the dominant cultural terrain, we can never ignore that hegemonic dominance is powerful. It sets the playing field in favour of the ruling historic bloc; it defines orthodoxy and heresy. This was especially true in 1950s America, when formal and informal censorship forced a servicing of the liberal consensus. Kozol's study of *Life* is especially useful for approaching the question of how postwar liberal values were communicated in the media and how certain archetypes were emphasized and others excluded or defined to serve hegemonic needs.

Yet, denying any kind audience power runs counter to the key Gramscian principle of contestation, the ubiquity of ideology and intellectuals, and the connection to social location. The active polysemic perspective must be kept in mind. We cannot be certain what meanings were being generated by producers or consumers, but we can approach the texts historically and allegorically, as Denning and Kozol suggested. That is, we can examine the movies and books within the larger historical environment in which they were produced and consumed to consider an array of plausible interpretations. And we can be mindful that, as Fish and Hall argued, social community influences how producers and consumers create meaning. This study does not pursue an argument about how the juvenile delinquent genre provided a space for resistance against postwar liberal hegemony (although that possibility is certainly not discounted). As Douglas advised, the

evidence is stronger on the production side, and so any argument about resistance would be too speculative for comfort. Instead, the interest here is akin to George Lipsitz' assertion about popular culture:

> Cultural forms create conditions of possibility, they expand the present by informing it with memories of the past and hopes for the future; but they also engender accommodation with prevailing power realities, separating art from life, and internalizing the dominant culture's norms and values as necessary and inevitable.[56]

In a study pushing against the conformity narrative of postwar America, establishing that there were cultural spaces readily available to harbour dissenting ideas is sufficient.

Focusing attention on the juvenile delinquency genre is especially beneficial to this perspective because, by its very nature, it operated in an environment of deviancy and rebellion. Even though the end result of these books and movies was, as a rule, to show the futility or wrongheadedness of delinquent behaviour, they set up scenarios where readers could consider unwritten alternatives. Fiske's suggestion about producerly texts and Bloom's claim that pulp is anarchic are instructive on this point. These texts tended towards the formulaic, playing on established tropes to tell familiar stories, and so they relied on audiences to negotiate the gaps, to insert their own experiences, fears, and hopes when generating interpretation. In a genre that asked readers to consider the possibilities of deviancy, the polysemic potential was especially rich.

It is impossible to assert that the nature of these kinds of works were either anarchic (Bloom) or conservative (Cawelti), a means of offering freedom in the illicit or a way of finding comfort and order. The polysemic nature of interpretation makes that kind

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[56] George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 16.

of determination far out of reach. At best, one can say that the packaging and promise of such books and movies put one foot in the anarchic camp, while the formulaic nature of genre fiction leaned to conservative comfort. Yet, as Radway asserted, within the text there is enough room and contradiction to allow for concurrent resistant and dominant readings. This is what makes these cultural sources so rich to mine—they encourage scholars to ponder the implications of such seemingly confusing possibilities.

The historicity of the high-low culture division is a recurring conflict in this study's overarching narrative, driven by the high culture critique of the growing prevalence of the low. No position is taken in this study in terms of the aesthetics of the books and movies considered, on their own terms or judged against high cultural standards. Nor is there an interest in demonizing the high or seeking to merge high and low into a single cultural category. Instead, there is value in heeding the advice of Nick Couldry, who stated that cultural inquiry needs to be more expansive, citing, for example, a need to embrace the culture of the so-called middlebrow rather than emphasize more flamboyant subversive actions, elite cultural experiences, or the cultures of business and labour. Cultural studies, he said, does not benefit from "favouritism" toward the extremes, for it results in a skewed picture. The mundane middle, in other words, is also valuable.[57]

There is also much merit in Holt Parker's critique of cultural scholars who concern themselves overly with matters of popular authenticity, production, consumption, function, or aesthetics. Instead, Parker suggested that popular cultural inquiry should be guided more by issues of authority. Akin to Bloom's definition of pulp as something

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[57] Nick Couldry, *Inside Culture: Re-Imagining the Method of Cultural Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 3, 59.

essentially illicit, Parker argued that popular culture is that which is denied respect from the gatekeepers of high culture. That is, Parker promoted a more Weberian approach to popular cultural consumption that relies on status and social judgment. The value of this, Parker claimed, is that it allows us to avoid the lures of class or other monolithic groupings, and, like Couldry's claim, allows in cultural texts and behaviours, like the so-called middlebrow, that are not obviously matters of struggle yet do not fit the high culture model. Still, this view carries some risk. For the purposes of analysis, we have to acknowledge the normalizing power and practice of cultural authorities to legitimize and condemn, but we must also be careful that our recognition not affirm and reinforce this type of stratification.[58]

The main point to be made in this study in this regard is to advocate for the historical value of such sources, but, more so, that we should not ghettoize popular culture vis-à-vis highbrow and intellectual sources—as if popular culture can only speak to the less serious—but to consider how they all operate to circulate common ideas and concerns. If we accept Gramsci's argument that all people are intellectuals and that culture is the main arena for such ideological discourse, then popular culture and intellectual history merit consideration in concert, not isolation.

This dissertation can be considered to be divided into two sections, the first being foundational and contextual, the second being case studies that rely on the first's historical grounding and the methodological guidance described in this chapter. The first section, covering Chapters 2 through 5, establishes the mass cultural critique in postwar

[58] Holt N. Parker, "Toward a Definition of Popular Culture," *History and Theory* 50 (May 2011): 156–69. An additional problem with Parker's litmus test is that even within popular cultural audience communities there can be intense gatekeeping behaviour. Ceding that role exclusively to high culture defenders would elide significant status divisions with popular culture audiences that do not rely on elite judgement. However, such nuances go beyond the aims of this study.

America, the emergence of the paperback industry, the upheaval and realignment of the movie industry, and the 1950s juvenile delinquency panic from the perspective of both critics and fictionalized portrayals. The second section, encompassing Chapters Six through Eight, builds off this context and melds contemporary intellectual analysis with juvenile delinquent novels and movies on the subjects of the urban decay/suburban flight narrative, masculinity, and the Fordist model of American consumer capitalism that predominated in the postwar period.

Chapter 2 considers an intellectual assessment of postwar life, whether critics believed America to be a mass society, and the implications for the future of the nation. Three schools of thought are considered—mostly Marxist radicals, conservatives, and liberals—with distinctions between the groups highlighted, but greater interest paid to their commonalities. An argument is made that mass culture critics generally expressed wariness or even anxiety about non-elite presence in the cultural sphere. They regarded this presence as passive, degrading "true" art, and possibly leading America to a totalitarian fate. More importantly, what these critics shared was a status myopia that inhibited their ability to make an evenhanded assessment of mass culture. They naturalized their own elite, modernist tastes as cultural ideals and expressed disappointment as commercial forms gained influence. Furthermore, as writers their identification was with producers, whereas the masses were, for the most part, consumers. By so privileging high cultural production, they could only be contemptuous of mass cultural products and those whose participation was limited to consumption. In fact, what they were responding to was the eclipse of their status as arbiters of taste amidst a diversifying cultural sphere in terms of style, theme, production, and consumption. Stuck in a hierarchical conception of culture that was increasingly ignored

by growing numbers of active cultural consumers, they saw homogeneity, moral decline, and a civilization at risk.

Chapter 3 traces the growth of the American paperback industry in the 1940s and 1950s, from its beginnings as a means of affordable reprints to becoming a vehicle for original and deviant fiction. The chapter seeks to demonstrate three themes related to the larger aims of this dissertation. First, following Susan Douglas' guidance, it argues that technological change and innovative thinking altered the production and distribution of books to include bookstores to bus depots, airports, magazine stands, and drug stores. This exposed millions of Americans to reading and book ownership. Second, contrary to claims of critics who regarded paperback authors as servile hacks who produced standardized trash, the paperback provided opportunities to writers who explored a wide range of styles and themes. Rather than debase literature, these writers diversified and enriched the literary landscape. And third, critics of the paperback may have focused their attacks on aesthetic grounds and/or the malignant influence of the market, but the greater basis of their complaints was that the innovative means of production and distribution and what it unleashed for authors and readers reduced their authority as cultural gatekeepers. An additional aim of this chapter, as well as the one that follows it, is to historically contextualize the popular cultural evidence used in the case study chapters (6, 7, and 8). This is intended to aid the reader in appreciating the environment in which these materials were produced, circulated, and consumed.

Chapter 4 examines institutional changes in the postwar period related to another of the chief sources for this study, motion pictures. Unlike much contemporary critical assessment of movies as creatively stagnant due to authoritarian, factory-like production, this chapter argues that the movie industry was, in fact, in a constant state of change since

the mid-1930s due to a number of external challenges. These included consumer demands for more films, which spawned the B movie; anti-trust suits brought by the federal government, which eventually broke up the oligopoly of the major studios; the growth of television and the suburbs, which altered the leisure practices of adults to the chagrin of Hollywood; and the dual rise of drive-in theatres and teenagers with disposable income, which provided opportunities for ambitious filmmakers to pursue a previously ignored consumer market. This chapter also seeks to rebut the common criticism of the B movie/exploitation film as inferior to its big-budget sibling. The exploitation film created and utilized alternate means of relating motion picture narratives. Furthermore, its perceived inferior status granted producers much more freedom to experiment with technique and explore subject matter that the large studios shied away for economic reasons. The goal of Chapters 3 and 4, then, is to rebut the common criticism against both paperbacks and exploitation movies as benighted forms. Both were, to the contrary, especially dynamic mediums that benefited from institutional instability in the postwar period.

Chapter 5 considers the postwar juvenile delinquency panic from both the perspective of intellectuals and moral guardians, and the creation and development of the juvenile delinquent genre in paperback and celluloid form. The aim is to properly historicize the delinquent texts by providing an overview of the varied and often contradictory discourse on delinquency as a sociological and civic concern, and then assess how the entertainment industries seized upon the issue and exploited it for profit. While the genre began with mostly sincere efforts to appreciate the delinquency problem, these served to legitimize adult fears, feeding off of and into sociological examinations of the issue. Growing interest spawned imitators who produced youth-gone-wild

exploitation novels and films that worked and reworked the now-established tropes of the genre. Yet, these sensationalist and formulaic accounts were instrumental in defusing the real world panic, transforming terrifying youthful deviancy into a more harmless stage of life to be outgrown. That is, the cultural profit seekers did not invent the delinquency genre, but they exploited it for all it was worth, and in so doing helped defang the issue.

With this historical context established, the dissertation turns to the second section, which examines juvenile delinquency novels, movies, and true crime stories as vehicles for discourse on other postwar concerns.[59] Chapter 6 examines one of the key themes in postwar America, the twin narratives of urban decay and the suburban frontier. In the 1940s and 1950s, America experienced a dramatic internal migration, with millions of blacks and Hispanics moving to large industrial cities, and even greater numbers of whites leaving those cities for new suburban communities. Contemporary interpretations of these developments took on a moralistic tone, whether to suggest that the city had become a site of decay and sin and the suburbs an opportunity to start over and build a better and modern America; or that the city nurtured a vital diversity that the suburbs never could, and that this population shift represented a fundamental betrayal of American values that had dire consequences for the nation. This chapter considers the conversations that were conducted during the postwar period, in literary journals, popular magazines, and juvenile delinquent novels and films, and treats the many positions as

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[59] A note on the selection of juvenile delinquent materials: Identification of potentially promising novels and films relied on a survey of secondary sources on juvenile delinquency and paperbacks and movies from the era. Roughly seventy-five of the most commonly cited novels and sixty films were selected for examination. Additionally, Ken Smith's *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945–1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999) was used to identify the most promising educational films for study. Copies of novels and films were either purchased from collectors or, if the public domain, accessed on Internet sites such as archive.org. For true crime magazine articles, the collection of antiquarian Patterson Smith was accessed, with attention to stories about juvenile delinquents.

grounded in the morality of escape. Whether discussing the physical migration of whites from the city to suburbia or their escape from social obligation, the unifying question of the narrative of urban decline and suburban emergence was how to understand the morality of flight. Where intellectuals were far more confident in their criticism, almost exclusively in favour of urban life and condemnation of supposed suburban sterility, the authors of delinquency fiction were more ambivalent, finding either sense or cowardice in leaving the city, but also no utopia in suburbia.[60]

Chapter 7 considers the question of gender roles in postwar America, where women were once again determined to be best suited/limited to domestic tasks, while men had their expected roles redefined, including greater participation in the household, a nurturing approach to childrearing, and acquiescence to more bureaucratic and group-oriented labour. The assessments of critics expressed frustration at the apparent converging gender roles, some blaming predatory women, others modernity, others yet the postwar economy. While there was less agreement amongst intellectuals that women were seizing male traits and influence, a more shared concern was that men were becoming feminized or neutered. This supposed lack of gender distinction and loss of traditional masculinity was treated as a looming national threat. Juvenile delinquent novels and films were more apt to explore the question of masculinity in terms of a general gender disorder, with female delinquents seizing male subjectivity and leaving

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[60] While this dissertation subscribes to a Gramscian conception of intellectuals—i.e., that all who produce and consume cultural texts are participating in intellectual discourse and are therefore intellectuals—for the sake of clarity, it uses a terminology that seemingly maintains a privileging of formal intellectuals. Those writers who engaged in pointed socio-cultural critique, whether in scholarly or public media, are labeled here as intellectuals. Fiction writers and moviemakers are treated as intellectuals in the context of the discussion in the dissertation, but are identified by their conventional titles. The rationale guiding this decision was that lacking distinction would have generated confusion in the reader in appreciating the approach and possible intent of each figure cited.

males passive and prone. Unlike the intellectual assessments that saw compromised masculinity as connected to the tyranny of the group (an ideological feminine space), delinquent stories were more varied. Some treated masculinity as best secured from within the group, that, indeed, isolation most threatened masculinity; other accounts expressed a more distinctly liberal perspective of fighting against the mass. Despite widespread evidence that most men in postwar America willingly sacrificed traditional ideas of masculinity in favour of domestic comfort and security, these popular cultural texts suggest that there was still a market for materials that explored gender tension.

Chapter 8 focuses on two specific subgenres of the delinquency story, hot rods and drug addiction, as a means of looking at Fordist consumer capitalism. By mid-century, profound socio-economic changes transformed American life, including greater regulated labour, normalized government participation in the economy and in the lives of citizens, and a vast ethic of consumption. Corporate liberalism, or Fordism, rested on a belief that high levels of production and consumption was a permanent condition and capable of solving any social problem. More significantly, perception of widespread affluence altered the role of consumption from an expression of luxury to one of individual identity and status. However, to intellectual critics, this new society of consumption generated its own anxieties connected to affluence, taste, and frayed social ties. Of even greater concern was that reliance on consumption exposed the nation's moral character and productive capacity to the uncertain tastes of the untutored. Two types of juvenile delinquent sub-genres, the drug story and the hot rod story, are examined for their didactic qualities in this context. Where the drug story illustrated how consumption for pleasure could go horribly awry, violating community standards and the individual's productive capabilities, the hot rod story normalized the social role of the

automobile while reinforcing the importance of subscribing to group norms, especially as expressions of state power. Unlike the texts examined in Chapters 7 and 8, where authors and filmmakers demonstrated critical consideration of postwar life, the books and films here were more clearly expressions of the postwar liberal hegemony, particularly of the importance of the individual subjecting himself to state regulation and expertise.

Chapter 9 serves as a brief conclusion and summary of the study. It considers essays by scholars Leerom Medovoi and Joan Shelley Rubin concerning critics of mass cultural texts in the 1950s. Both accounts demonstrate the conflicted relationship between modernist critics and works of fiction that gained a mass audience. In so doing, they illustrate critics' suspicion of the mass—production, distribution, and audience—and anxiety over their declining influence. The conclusion also offers considerations about the role of popular culture within intellectual history.

This dissertation, then, is a study of how ideas circulated in a time when scholarly and public intellectuals despaired at both the growing presence of masses in the cultural sphere and the alleged stunted intelligence and curiosity of the average American. It asserts a greater dynamism of discourse in a wider range of media than was granted by the intellectuals of the period. It also suggests a more expansive, more inclusive perspective to intellectual inquiry, to treat mass-distributed and -consumed texts not as occupying the lower rungs of a vertical schema, but as part of a vast horizontal continuum. Tastes were certainly stratified and even segregated, but the concerns found common expression amongst diverse authors, mediums, and audiences. It was in these unacknowledged conversations of accord and dissent that the postwar liberal hegemony was repeatedly formed, eroded, and re-formed.

CHAPTER 2
The Worrying Herd: Postwar Critics of Mass Culture

A spectre was haunting postwar American intellectuals—the spectre of mass society. Sociologists, literary scholars, political scientists, and historians who surveyed postwar America, and sought to assess the character of an increasingly mass society, saw a threat. If Americans as a whole embraced the pleasures of postwar life, with its general rising standard of living, ample leisure time, and new products and services to service "the good life," a large swath of intellectual critics, from conservative to liberal to radical, looked at these developments with apprehension, distress, even horror.

Despite fully blooming at mid-century, the roots of the anxiety stretched back some five decades, when a growing working and middle class began to make their presence felt in the market for leisure and other cultural products. New entertainment technology—notably motion pictures, radio, and the phonograph—drew millions of people into an emerging commercial leisure industry. They were participating in a new and profound shared experience and grew more aware of the wider world because of it. The middle class also came to be defined by its management role in the growing bureaucracy of the private and public sphere, while the working class expanded beyond the factories and farms into the service sector. In the interwar period, particularly in Europe, the new phenomenon of mass politics, driven by the passions and grievances of these same newly aware masses, replaced old elites and institutions. Communism in the Soviet Union, Fascism in Italy, and Nazism in Germany all represented entirely novel forms of social organization and politics that were as hostile to liberal democracy (individualism) as they were to monarchy (aristocracy). Instead, the people, organized and guided by communications technology and techniques, were to work as one to accomplish great deeds. Mass politics was as much about creating the future as it was

about settling scores for past wrongs. The experience of the Second World War and epic homicidal spasms in Germany and the Soviet Union, however, suggested that the intimate social and political participation of the masses had apocalyptic consequences. As the American people continued along the twin paths of consumption and a bureaucratically managed society, and mass communications left fewer and fewer untouched by remote voices, wary intellectuals wondered whether the United States was fated to become an equally dystopian mass society.

This chapter's aim is to establish the contours of the mass culture debate, from the 1940s to the early 1960s, after which the topic largely disappeared from the pages of intellectual journals. The goal here is not an exhaustive survey, but to draw attention to the striking overlap of assumptions and concerns from those who considered the question. Certainly, there was disagreement amongst these intellectuals. Radicals—generally Marxists of some stripe, but not exclusively so—saw mass society and mass culture not as a perversion of liberal democracy, but rather the natural evolution of capitalist domination, just another illusion of freedom to mask the theft of human autonomy. The conservative (or aristocratic) critique saw mass culture as the result of too much freedom, for in allowing those on the bottom to have too much say in the cultural and political life of a nation, the net result was a lowered standard for all. Patrick Brantlinger used the term "negative classicism" to describe such pessimistic accounts. That is to say, most harshly critical accounts of mass culture assumed the existence of a superior past "classical" culture, and so unfavourable comparisons were expressed as "negative classicism." "Very little has been written about mass culture, the masses, or the mass media," he wrote, "that has not been colored by apocalyptic assumptions. ... Unless it is rooted in an analysis of specific artifacts or media, the phrase 'mass culture' usually

needs to be understood as an apocalyptic idea, behind which lies a concern for the preservation of civilization as a whole." This apocalyptic dread tended to bind the conservative and radical critiques.[1] The liberal position was less pessimistic than these other two, asserting that mass impulses did exist within the opportunities granted by modern life, but rejected the virtual enslavement seen by radicals or corrosive freedom asserted by conservatives. Liberals advocated adherence to a technocratic pluralism, a rational expertise that encouraged communities of difference to minimize conflict was the best defense against destructive mass impulses. Even within these groups, of course, there were differences of emphases and proposed responses.[2]

More important for the ambitions of this chapter, and this study overall, was the remarkable degree of commonality between these critics. Their analyses borrowed from the various interpretative camps, distinguished by their degree of pessimism and/or whether more freedom or less was the way forward (or whether the way forward was to go backward to pre-twentieth-century conditions). The positions shared by mass culture critics included, very briefly: a self-identification with high culture that compromised their ability to see the growing commercial forms of culture as anything but debased and

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[1] Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 9, 17–18, 23. Also see Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3–14.

[2] For a discussion of the domination/freedom interpretations, see William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 21–38; and Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 19, 55. On an overview of the use of the term "mass," see Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, "Mass Society, Mass Culture, and Mass Communication: The Meaning of Mass," *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009): 998–1024, esp. 1001–04, 1014–16; Lou Anne Bulik, *Mass Culture Criticism and Dissent: An American Socialist Magazine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Paul R. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and John Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics: The Mass Culture Critique Among Left Intellectuals in America, 1939–1964," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2007). For a critique of the pessimistic (as well as the more positive populist) interpretations of popular culture, see John Clarke, "Pessimism versus Populism: The Problematic Politics of Popular Culture," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure Into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 28–46, esp. 31, 35–40.

threatening to individual autonomy and civilization; an emphasis on the conditions of production of these cultural texts, which was used to justify their fear and contempt; and a deeply productivist skewing that emphasized the dire fate of the artist or creator, rather than consider the discernment of the consumer. Their shared values and insularity, even as they proclaimed a stance of critical individuality, prompted art critic and contemporary Harold Rosenberg to wryly declare them a "herd of independent minds."[3] Generating their own feedback loop, these intellectuals failed to sincerely explore the postwar American society they professed to be assessing. There was certainly an irony in their "little mass" group mindset, but it spoke to an unnecessary and unfortunate separation between high cultural intellectualism and the popular culture of non-elites. Establishing the nature of that gap is the aim of this chapter.[4]

For many Marxist intellectuals, the 1930s was a period of trauma that demanded reconsideration of key assumptions. The rise of nakedly racist National Socialism in Germany and, earlier, Fascism in Italy, along with the harsh authoritarian nature of Stalinism, suggested that Marx's prediction of the working class as history's liberator had landed wide of the mark. Nor had the global economic depression triggered a cascade of proletarian revolt. Instead, the masses in Britain, America, and Canada mostly placed their faith in the on-going experiments of welfare state capitalism. They also enjoyed the bounties of consumer capitalism, indulging in ever-growing mass media entertainment in the form of Hollywood movies and radio programs, as well as spin-off enterprises like magazines devoted to celebrities. Why had the masses not fulfilled their historic duty?

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[3] Harold Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," *Commentary* 6 (1948): 244–52.

[4] The range of intellectuals chosen for discussion in this chapter is, of course, not all-encompassing. While those considered here have been selected for their contributions to contemporary discussion and present analytical value, some figures or texts that might seem pertinent in this chapter were omitted because they were deemed more useful to later chapters.

This practical question led to a vast re-evaluation of Marxism by its own adherents, sending them into the realm of culture to explain this political conundrum.

The most significant Marxist text from this period, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), came from two exiled German scholars, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. Both men, along with, notably, Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcuse, were members of the Institute for Social Research at Goethe University in Frankfurt (regularly shortened to the "Frankfurt school"), where they pursued a neo-Marxist holistic analysis called critical theory. After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, these men left Germany and settled in the United States later in the decade, where much of the work considered here was written. In the book's preface, Horkheimer and Adorno explained that their aim was to root out what they saw as the paradox of a general rising standard of living, yet declining personal freedom; of greater circulating information, yet deepening ignorance. In doing so, they went deeper than the orthodox Marxian emphasis on capitalist economic relations, and instead traced the source of the present social domination to the Enlightenment and the principle of reason itself.[5]

"Enlightenment," they began, "understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity." This was the fundamental irony of the Enlightenment—a philosophy that sought human liberation from myth and superstition via reason and scientific inquiry had instead provided the means for ever more complex and encompassing domination. In embracing scientific inquiry, they argued, human beings had rejected distinction and purpose in favour of

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[5] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and translated by Edmund Jephcott (1947; reprint, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), xiv–xvii.

formula and abstraction. Truth was reduced to quantification, debasing the unique beauty of the world through measurement and comparison. Abstraction, they argued, was "the instrument of enlightenment," part of a quest for "liquidation" of individual into "herd." Nature, with its inherent distinctions, must be dominated to assert human superiority. This principle of brutal abstraction grounded the Marxist interpretation of capitalism, with its emphasis on commodification, elevation of exchange value, standardization, and transformation of the worker into just another piece of controllable machinery. The significance of what Horkheimer and Adorno argued was that it rejected Marx's dialectical trajectory whereby one set of historical contradictory social relations gives way to another, eventually culminating in a liberating end to history. In Horkheimer and Adorno's model, scientific discovery and applied reason—rationalization—was a dark spiral downward, swallowing up the ruling class as much as it did the masses. The totalitarianism of the age, then, was not a historical aberration but the logical result of Enlightenment rationalization, for, in J.M. Bernstein's phrase, "it continued reason's work of domination through integration and unification."[6]

Horkheimer and Adorno turned to entertainment and leisure to explore the ramifications of abstraction, for it was in life outside the workplace that rationalization had most clearly expanded in the twentieth century. What they labeled the culture industry represented the spread of capitalist rationalization, a means of more fully

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[6] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1–22; and J.M. Bernstein, "Introduction," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* by Theodor W. Adorno (London: New York: Routledge, 2001), 4. Ironically, as Martin Jay observed, this reinterpretation of Western history indicted Marx as an Enlightenment conspirator who, in placing labour at the core of human natural identity and purpose, reified "nature as a field for human exploitation." Marx's vision did not offer liberation, but ever more sophisticated repressive labour. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (London: Heinemann, 1973), 259.

exercising the domination and abstraction of the factory floor on the lives of people.[7] Contrary to conservative accusations that a breakdown of traditional authority (e.g., religion, elites, family) had led to cultural and social chaos, Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the culture industry was "infecting everything with sameness." Those in charge of cultural production and distribution made sure that nothing was created and marketed that did not fit preset standards. Standardization determined classifications, genres, and where and how material was distributed. This necessarily debased quality in favour of quantification, whereby cultural product and audience alike were manufactured and marketed solely via the economic dimension. Modifications (e.g., romance, mystery, comedy) were not true innovation or creativity, but rather additions that reinforced the formula. The mass media was not merely a business in search of profit, but also a means of dispensing ideology. The demon of modern society was "integration"—that is, the individual was integrated/swallowed into the mass—and the culture industry was bound up in that same logic of economics, politics, and bureaucracy. The processes of rationalization, division of labour, abstraction, and administration went into the creation of every cultural product. Within this web, so, too, was the consumer integrated.[8]

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[7] An earlier exploration of this question by Adorno used the phrase "mass culture" to describe this process, but they did not wish to give the impression that what they were describing was somehow an authentic culture emerging from the masses. Culture industry better reflected their argument that this was a top-down process. Still, the term industry should not be taken literally, but rather in the sense of standardization and homogenization, of an attitude towards culture production. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: New York: Routledge, 2001), 61 [originally written in 1942, but not published until 1981 in *Gesammelte Schriften* 3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 299–335]; and Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: New York: Routledge, 2001), 98–100 [originally published in Theodor W. Adorno, *Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967)].

[8] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94. The question of integration and totalization was a significant break from orthodox Marxism, for it rejected Marx's more mechanical relationship between production and social power. Instead, as Eugene Lunn wrote, they saw the "specter of an interlocking and monolithic 'system.'" Where Marx saw historical change emerging from inherent contradiction in the structures of domination, Horkheimer and Adorno saw liberation leading to conformity and

The totalizing effect of the culture industry filtered all perceptions of reality. But, more than just skewing reality on film, for example, the perception of reality was reframed by that film. In a kind of feedback loop, then, the technology and techniques of film reinforced the principles of domination by "[t]he withering of imagination and spontaneity in the consumer." The very point of a movie was to deny its audience freedom of imagination and to continue this aim even after the film ended.[9] The effect of administered entertainment was to convince the consumer to demand more of the same sameness, providing the culture industry with the fig leaf of honourably satisfying the customer's preferences. In this way, "industry bows to the vote it has itself rigged." In a memorable phrase, they explained that the "machine is rotating on the spot"—the logic of capitalist supply and demand had eliminated meaningful choice.[10] What was being produced was less movies or magazines than obedient "pseudo-individuals."

In an earlier treatment of the subject, "The Schema of Mass Culture" (1942), Adorno stated that the content of mass culture was intended to promote harmony, to better integrate the individual into the totalizing nature of late capitalism, and so entertainment was limited to a "surrogate of shocks and sensations"—enough to titillate

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psychological domination. The "near total elimination of an integrated and autonomous bourgeois subjectivity" had been harmonized by the structures and logic of rationalization and abstraction, establishing a society of anonymity and loss of personhood. See Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 231–33. For a key example of the conservative perception of social chaos, see José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 25th Anniversary Edition (1932; New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1957).

[9] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 99–100.

[10] Ibid., 106. Lewis Mumford, too, came to the conclusion that the machinery of mass production and consumption was operating independently of human control, that, indeed, human beings were being driven by "a terrible new burden: the duty to constantly consume": "We not merely encourage people to share the new-found powers that the machine has opened up: we insist that they do so, with increasingly less respect for their needs and tastes and preferences, simply because we have found no spell for turning the machine off." Lewis Mumford, "Standardization and Choice [1952]," in *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922–1972* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 301–03.

and distract, but not produce critical reflection.[11] This lack of conflict was a notable component, for Horkheimer and Adorno saw the purpose of genuine art—i.e., Modernist art—as offering the audience a means of resisting the social order. The danger of mass culture was that it promoted logic and harmony, that it helped unify the individual and society, all of which reinforced obedience. Modernist art, on the other hand, emphasized discord and rejected unity, providing space for critical reflection on and rejection of bourgeois society.[12] The aim of such literature, historian Eugene Lunn stated, was to demonstrate "self-estrangement, suffering, and impotence" at the hands of an oppressive society. This was accomplished via disjointed narration with multiple voices, demonstrations of how objects dominated dependent characters, and, more generally, by emphasizing how individual subjectivity was eroded. This was a notable distinction from more aristocratic critics of mass culture, who venerated high culture as a reflection of their more generalized elitism. Lunn argued that the charge of cultural elitism against Horkheimer and Adorno only had merit if removed from the overall context of their discussion. One should never forget that within critical theory, all culture, high and low (along with all other components of society), was necessarily tied to everything else. For Adorno, high art was to be valued only for its resistant and/or emancipatory value. That is, as Bernstein put it, Adorno's concern was for "salvaging those elements most under threat from enlightened reason: sensuous particularity, rational ends, a substantial notion

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[11] Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," 69.

[12] See Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 178; and John Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History* (Melbourne, AU: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39. Patrick Brantlinger argued that Adorno treated high culture as a shield against the social incursion of mass culture. True art was pure negativity, a critique of all that exists. Culture came to occupy the same function as proletariat, both "everything and nothing, the solution and yet also the problem of history." Culture was an agent of domination, yet the last refuge of where freedom might hide and be nurtured. Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses*, 227, 233–34.

of individuality, and authentic happiness."[13]

The standardization of culture also served more practical purposes. Leisure time was important for labourers seeking relief from the alienating experience of work, yet the structure and purpose of the culture industry was to reproduce what the worker yearned to escape during his/her private time. The "incurable sickness of all entertainment" was that it reinforced what the consumer wanted to forget—the absence of freedom on the factory floor led only to an absence of freedom within the worker's own mind and back again. In promising escape but delivering further ensnarement, the culture industry cheated the consumer. The culture industry not only failed to own up to its fraud, it taught the consumer to accept it for what it was, to make no demands besides more of the same: "Entertainment fosters the resignation which seeks to forget itself in entertainment." If the content of leisure precluded any semblance of autonomy in the consumer, neither was there a meaningful option for opting out. Non-participation risked ostracism, loneliness.[14]

Culture was therefore a means of tamping down both revolutionary and barbaric instincts in consumers, but, even worse, it also established the terms by which life under capitalism could be lived. "Existence in late capitalism," they wrote, "is a permanent rite of initiation. Everyone must show that they identify wholeheartedly with the power

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[13] Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism*, 272; Eugene Lunn, "The Frankfort School in the Development of the Mass Culture Debate," in *The Aesthetics of the Critical Theorists: Studies on Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas*, ed. Ronald Roblin (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1990), 29; and Bernstein, "Introduction," 21. Also see Shane Gunster, *Capitalizing on Culture: Critical Theory for Cultural Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 175; and H. Stuart Hughes, *The Sea Change: The Migration of Social Thought, 1930–1965* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 138.

[14] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 109, 113; and Theodor W. Adorno, "Free Time," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: New York: Routledge, 2001), 190–92 [originally published in Theodor W. Adorno, "Freizeit," *Stickworte* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1969)]. On the inescapable quality of mass culture, also see Theodor W. Adorno, "Theory of Pseudo-Culture," trans. Deborah Cook, *Telos* 95 (Spring 1993): 15–38, esp. 20–22 [originally published as "Theoric der Halbbildung" in 1959]. Like a disease set loose amongst the unimmunized, what Adorno now called pseudo-culture had free rein across even rural areas, where the residents were especially unprepared for its psychological effects.

which beats them." Returning to the question in the mid-1960s, Adorno remained convinced that what the culture industry offered was "neither guides for a blissful life, nor a new art of moral responsibility, but rather exhortations to toe the line, behind which stand the most powerful interests. The consensus which it propagates strengthens blind, opaque authority."[15]

The assessment of American society at mid-century, then, was unrelentingly bleak. Bourgeois individualism existed in name only, as the ideology of domination unleashed by the Enlightenment had meshed with technological advances to create a "black-hole … of capitalist culture" from which nothing could escape its pull. Distinctions merged, reality and fiction became interchangeable, and work and leisure reflected and reinforced each other. Life in a mass society, Shane Gunster described, did not misrepresent the truth so much as eliminate the ability to conceive of anything different. This placed reality and mass culture "in a parasitic circle of repetition that leads to the continual strengthening of each other."[16]

Literary scholar Irving Howe, one of the core so-called New York Intellectuals—a group of East Coast, mostly Jewish, political and cultural essayists who clustered primarily around *Partisan Review*, but also *Commentary* and *Dissent*, in the 1940s and 1950s—was one of the few of that group whose anti-Stalinism did not also mean turning from socialism altogether. He was also one of the few who returned to the subject of

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[15] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 123–24; and Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," 105.

[16] Andreas Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 22; Shane Gunster, "Revisiting the Culture Industry Thesis: Mass Culture and the Commodity Form," *Cultural Critique* 45 (Spring 2000): 45; and Gunster, *Capitalizing on Culture*, 259. Robert W. Witkin echoed this suggestion, asserting that Adorno and Horkheimer were not arguing for some kind of "crude propagandist" position, but rather something more seductively transformative. Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 14.

mass culture in the postwar period, covering, like Horkheimer and Adorno, issues such as alienation, artificiality, and the connection between mass culture and capitalist exploitation.

In "Notes on Mass Culture" (1948), Howe set up the difficulty of understanding the phenomenon. It took an intellectual, he said, to properly analyze mass culture—those "pseudo-cultural amusements" consumed by an "anonymous audience"—yet elites were hostile towards the form. Somehow, he suggested, the critic must become a part of the mass audience, to identify with its reaction, but also retain critical distance. Despite the snobbishness that Howe's position seemed to betray, prejudging mass culture as false and inferior, and the audience as lacking critical skills, he stood apart from his peers, who were allergic to the idea of becoming like the mass audience.[17]

Mass culture, Howe asserted, was a phenomenon related to both urbanization and industrialization, and reflected how labourers structured leisure into their work day. It was meant to bring harmony to the labourer, who sought to avoid "terrible dualities" of

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[17] Irving Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," *Politics* 5 (Spring 1948): 120. *Commentary* editor Robert Warshow, too, found mass culture a difficult subject to assess because the critic "lives within the mass culture, he meets experience through the mass culture, the words and ideas that come to him most easily, most 'naturally,' are the words and ideas of mass culture." Accordingly, they had to somehow remove themselves from the form. Quoted in Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 45.

Horkheimer and Adorno eschewed serious consideration of any kind of audience research. Their position, however, was that they were interested in the "objective reality" of cultural products rather than audience reactions. As their colleague Leo Lowenthal argued, audience research is flawed because it incorrectly assumes that consumers have meaningful choice. It is more productive to investigate those institutions and techniques that are used to create taste in audiences. Having concluded that the commodity form was the problem, examination of actual audience reaction would be superfluous. As well, it needs to be remembered that Horkheimer and Adorno were engaged in theoretical work, not empirical research, so any descriptions were limited to idealized types. See Leo Lowenthal, "Historical Perspectives of Popular Culture [1950]," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (1957; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1964), 56; Phil Slater, *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School: A Marxist Perspective* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, Henley and Boston, 1977), 123; and Gunster, "Revisiting the Culture Industry Thesis," 65. Nevertheless, writing in such bold and generalized binary strokes without offering evidence to support their position requires a certain leap of faith from their reader, an odd demand for professed objective inquiry. For more on this critique, see Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, 39–50.

work life and leisure life. Leisure had to provide relief, yet not so much as to make work feel unbearable; it must amuse but provide no actual insight. "Mass culture," he claimed, "is thus oriented towards a central aspect of industrial society: the depersonalization of the individual. On the one hand, it diverts the worker from his disturbing reduction to semi-robot status by arranging 'relaxing' amusements for him. … On the other hand, mass culture reinforces those emotional attitudes that seem inseparable from existence in modern society-—passivity and boredom."[18] Mass culture was counter-revolutionary.

The cinema experience, he said, rarely produced "heights of consciousness" like "a genuine work of dramatic art" could. This degree of blending, he suggested, where mass culture and actual lived experience had a symbiotic relationship, had compromised understanding what real life could and should be. The point of mass culture was not to inspire but to blend, to offer mutual support between labour and leisure. "The movies," he wrote, "help us remain at peace with ourselves by helping us suppress ourselves." Mass culture, thus, demanded passivity from the audience. True art demanded sincere conversation with the audience, but mass culture precluded this, "for its end is already present in the beginning." Where art was expansive, drawing from dream and experience alike and demonstrating the connection and flow between the two, mass culture necessarily sought to "cage the unconscious." It could never fully succeed in this aim, but it was often able to "dissociate conscious from unconscious life." The implication of establishing mass culture as narcotic and counter-revolutionary, historian John Gillooly pointed out, was to make art a means of subversion.[19]

There were many similarities between Howe's interpretation of mass culture and

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[18] To this end, Howe quoted approvingly from Adorno's essay, "On Popular Music" (1941), which emphasized the endless and mechanical cycle of novelty and boredom in popular music, where "[t]he composition hears for the listener." Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," 120.

[19] Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," 121; and Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 132.

Horkheimer and Adorno's view of the culture industry. For one, they both saw mass culture as meshing with reality, making the two inseparable and indistinguishable.[20] As Howe argued that the audience sought anonymity in the crowd, so, too, did Horkheimer and Adorno emphasize that the audience were of a group mind. And all three saw a connection between the logic of labour and the leisure pursued by workers. Yet Howe never descended into the type of pessimism that characterized the Frankfurt scholars. According to his biographer Gerald Sorin, Howe maintained a certain faith in the average person, for abandoning the masses as hopelessly pacified meant abandoning hope for socialism. In this, he retained enough of an orthodox Marxist position concerning the role of the proletariat as history's liberator, something the German scholars had jettisoned.[21]

The issue of intellectuals in a mass society was raised in Howe's most influential essay, "The Age of Conformity" (1954). All around him, he saw a world disinterested in intellectual exercise. Where intellectuals once understood their role as struggling against society, now they drifted "into the world of government bureaucracy and public committees; into the constantly growing industries of pseudo-culture; into the adult education business, which subsists on regulated culture-anxiety." To Howe, the position of an intellectual was necessarily one of opposition; by becoming "institutionalized," they were, by definition, no longer intellectuals. They still possessed the skills of an intellectual, but were functionally neutered. This position harkened to Adorno and Horkheimer's argument that the culture industry took genuine culture and eviscerated it,

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[20] Milton Klonsky similarly argued that the point of mass art was to blur and confuse the difference between reality and image. Milton Klonsky, "Along the Midway of Mass Culture," *Partisan Review* 16, no. 4 (April 1949): 355.

[21] See Gerald Sorin, *Irving Howe: A Life of Passionate Dissent* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 150–51; and Bulik, *Mass Culture Criticism and Dissent*, 88–90. See Howe's contribution to the *Partisan Review*'s "Our Culture and Our Country" symposium in 1952 for his enduring faith in Marxism (*contra* the liberalism of most of his colleagues) and belief that the masses were not hopelessly lost. "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 3," *Partisan Review* 19, no. 5 (1952): 577–81.

then sold its commodified shell to audiences.[22]

Cultural conformity, too, distressed Howe. The avant-garde, he stated, was obsolete or irrelevant. What did that say for the future of American culture? In the late 1930s in the pages of *Partisan Review*, he said, the avant-garde expanded beyond art and into the political, offering valuable melded critiques of art and society. That pristine moment had passed, with radical politics now dead in the ground and a literary avant-garde more nostalgia than ardent spirit. Today, he lamented, writers were all too often forced to write for commercial magazines such as *The New Yorker* (or worse!).[23] What was especially urgent, Howe argued, was that writers had to realize that they were engaged in "an unpleasant necessity," not "a desirable virtue." "Much has been written about the improvement of cultural standards in America," he cautioned, "though a major piece of evidence—the wide circulation of paper-bound books—is still an unweighed and unanalyzed quantity. The basic relations of cultural power remain unchanged, however: the middlebrows continue to dominate." This was the world to which the intellectual was consigning himself—becoming a faux-sophisticate middlebrow.[24]

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[22] Irving Howe, "This Age of Conformity," *Partisan Review* 21 (1954): 10–13; and Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals & Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 280. Howe, in fact, willingly "institutionalized" himself by writing for *Time* in the 1940s, and then, in 1953, by accepting a position at Brandeis University. Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe,* 2nd. ed (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 83; and Edward Alexander, *Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 67–68, 76.

[23] Howe, "This Age of Conformity," 29–30. As Daniel Bell explained it years later, "You had been writing for a sophisticated audience, and you could be bright, sparkling, and witty with all your allusions. Would you be writing the same for these [mainstream] magazines? If you're writing the same and they appreciate it, what's so special about you? If you write down, isn't this dreadful, because you're denaturing your thought." Gradually, material necessity led to defections, and to their amazement, these writers found that the abyss did not stare back at them when they published in *Esquire.* Quoted in Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 310.

[24] Howe, "This Age of Conformity," 31–32; and Timothy Shakesby, "Redeeming America: Politics, Culture and the Intellectual in the USA, with Special Reference to the 'New York Intellectuals'," (PhD diss., King's College, 1996), 116. Howe's biographer Edward Alexander credited this essay with much of the long-lasting negative view of the 1950s, even though it was more polemic that actual analysis. Howe later came to regret his critique because it inspired lazy attacks on conformity. Alexander, *Irving Howe*, 88, 91.

In "Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction" (1959), Howe examined the challenge of literature within

> a relatively comfortable, half-welfare and half-garrison society in which the population grows passive, indifferent, and atomized; in which traditional loyalties, ties, and associations become lax or dissolve entirely; in which coherent publics based on definite interests and opinions gradually fall apart; and in which man becomes a consumer, himself mass-produced like the products, diversions, and values that he absorbs.

Howe cited the worrying characteristics of American mass society, including an erosion of traditional sources of authority and ritual, generalized passivity, manufactured opinion, and a decline in material need without a concurrent rise in happiness.[25]

The unenviable challenge to writers was "to give shape to a world increasingly shapeless and an experience increasingly fluid; how to reclaim the central assumption of the novel that telling relationships can be discovered between a style of social behaviour and a code of moral judgment, or if that proves impossible, to find ways of imaginatively projecting the code in its own right." Mass society was a trap, offering no place of refuge for the independent mind or rebel. Life in mass society, Howe feared, was leading "toward a quiet desert of moderation," where docility replaced the moral and spiritual wanderlust that had previously dominated Western civilization, that "the 'aura of the human' will be replaced by the nihilism of satiety." For the artist, high culture would be anachronistic and eventually obsolete. Thus, by the end of the decade, Howe had grown more pessimistic, regarding American life as a comfortable prison, with nothing to nurture the critical mind.[26]

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[25] Irving Howe, "Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction," *Partisan Review*, 26, no. 3 (Summer 1959): 426–28.

[26] Ibid., 428, 436. And yet, by the late 1960s, Howe remarked that "what a little earlier had been called a

American philosopher and sociologist Lewis Mumford's "Post-Historic Man" (1956) was an exceedingly gloomy forecast of an American society that would "continue along anti-organic, anti-historic lines ever more exclusively," by which he meant capitalism, science and technology, bureaucracy, and totalitarianism. These components were driven to bind themselves ever more into a closed system of "deliberately depersonalized intelligence." Older, more humane and organic ways of living would be ploughed under. Under this cold and mechanical society, "a new creature, post-historic man, would come into existence." In such a society, human beings could only survive by becoming more machinelike themselves. The "artist and the poet, the saint and the peasant" would, in one fashion or another, be eliminated, for the search into man's deeper nature would not be required in a mechanical society.[27]

In a passage that carried echoes of Horkheimer and Adorno and the scientific domination over nature, Mumford wrote:

> The post-historic process began innocently by eliminating fallible human impulses from science: it will end by eliminating human nature itself from the whole world of reality. In post-historic culture life itself is reduced to predictable, mechanically conditioned and controlled motion, with every incalculable—that is, every creative—element removed.

Where older human cultures sought harmony with nature, now "nature becomes so much dead material, to be broken down, resynthesized, and replaced by a machine-made equivalent. So, too, with the human personality: one part of it, the rational intelligence, is

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crucial problem of the modern era" was largely abandoned. This was due, he surmised, to the fact that critics offered no solutions and soon became weary of what amounted to "adding grisly instances." Other reasons included growing examples of quality television and movies that undercut pronouncements of gloom, and a growing decline in radical thought and interest in such questions. Irving Howe, "The New York Intellectuals: A Chronicle and a Critique," *Commentary* (October 1968): 35–36.

[27] Lewis Mumford, "Post-Historic Man [1956]," in *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922–1972* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 376–77.

inflated to superhuman dimensions: every other part is deflated or displaced." The end result of this was undoubtedly uniformity: "the environment as a whole becomes as uniform and as undeviating as a concrete superhighway, in order to subserve the uniform functioning of a uniform mass of human units."[28]

The post-historic man would reduce all activity to work, albeit unrewarding work, for the spiritual aspect of work would be banished. The human element would be replaced with the mechanical technique. Even leisure activity would be "regularized," for it must further the mission of eliminating individuality, "to depersonalize the worker, conditioning and adjusting him so as to fit into the impersonal processes of production and administration." In American society, power and order, pushed to its natural conclusion, must lead to its "self-destructive inversion: disorganization, violence, mental aberration, subjective chaos."[29]

While this essay showed considerable sympathy with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—domination, alienation, administration, elimination of individuality, standardization, and an unrelenting pessimism—the root cause for Mumford was human subservience to technology and an abandonment of a more organic way of life. Horkheimer and Adorno saw a similar process at work, but they never abandoned the Marxian precept that the logic of economic exploitation drove the process of social domination. The other key distinction was that the Frankfurt scholars kept a glimmer of hope (albeit one more theoretical than actual) in Modernist art, where the mind might find refuge; Mumford saw only genocide, total war, and spiritual evisceration.

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[28] Ibid., 379–81. Mark Greif also saw common angst between Mumford and the Frankfurt scholars. Comparing *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with Mumford's *Condition of Man* (1944), Greif observed that the three believed "that progress, as proven by a universal history of human development, might contain within itself the antiprogressive domination that would undo human liberation." Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man*, 57–58.

[29] Mumford, "Post-Historic Man," 382–84.

Sociologist C. Mills Wright did not consider himself a Marxist, believing the political indifference expressed by people at mid-century a confounding element to Marxian assumptions about human nature and conflict. Yet neither was he a liberal, for he found that it had been reduced to a courtier's language, a hollow rhetoric of administration. Still, he acknowledged, socialism and liberalism both had once offered valuable social perspectives. Liberalism asserted that freedom and reason were central to individual happiness, while Marxism provided intellectual ballast to human historical agency. Only a few decades ago, both ideologies represented optimism and the virtue of reason, yet liberalism had given way to a tragic view of life and Marxism to harsh bureaucracy.[30] He saw the intellectual as culpable in this retreat, embracing "middle-brow and mass culture," as well a simplistic anti-Stalinism that had neutered debate and reduced ideals to slogans.[31] It was in this seeming collapse of the Enlightenment's two great ideologies that one finds Mills' critique of mass society, as well as its sympathy with the non-orthodox Marxism of the Frankfurt scholars and Irving Howe.

The United States, Mills said, was neither a mass society nor "a community of publics," for these were two extreme and theoretical forms. Social reality was always more of a mélange. To understand the differences of these two extremes required an appreciation of four elements: 1) "the ratio of the givers of opinion to its receivers"; 2)

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[30] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), xx, 147–48, 326; C. Wright Mills, "Culture and Politics: The Fourth Epoch," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 194 [originally published in "Culture and Politics: The Fourth Epoch," *The Listener*, 61, no. 1563 (12 March 1959): 449–451]; and C. Wright Mills, "Liberal Values in the Modern World," in *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 189 [originally published as "Liberal Values in the Modern World: The Relevance of 19th Century Liberalism Today," *Anvil and Student Partisan* (Winter 1952): 4–7]. Also see C. Wright Mills, "On Knowledge and Power," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 126. Originally published in "On Knowledge and Power," *Dissent* 2 (Summer 1955): 201–212.

[31] Mills, *White Collar*, 156; and Kevin Mattson, *Intellectuals In Action: The Origins of the New Left And Radical Liberalism*, 1945–1970 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 2002), 33.

the organization of communication, especially the degree of free exchange; 3) the degree of influence that public opinion shapes decisions; and 4) the degree of autonomy the public possesses from authority. In the public model—liberal democracy—there was free exchange of ideas and effective checks on authority that assured individual autonomy. In the mass model—totalitarianism—communication was strictly limited to a centralized source that used its power to control opinion and action.[32] The danger in America was that the mass model was supplanting the public one. There were four reasons for this: 1) the rise of centralized bureaucracies at the expense of smaller, voluntary associations that traditionally served as intermediate powers between state and family; 2) the use of mass media by large and remote institutions to validate their power at the expense of the individual; 3) the decline of independent, middle-class entrepreneurs at the expense of dependent white-collar employees, reflecting a shift to corporate power; and 4) the growing predominance of the metropolis, which had facilitated the segregation of people into narrow routines and locales, limiting contact save for "fractional" interactions (e.g., interacting with a car mechanic solely on the subject of one's car).[33]

These components related to a greater issue, that of rationality without reason. Working the same ground explored by Horkheimer and Adorno, Mills assessed the

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[32] C. Wright Mills, "Mass Society and Liberal Education," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 107. Originally published as "Mass Society and Liberal Education," *Notes and Essays on Education for Adults* 9 (June 1954): 1–17. Also see C. Wright Mills, "Mass Media and Public Opinion," in *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 583–84. Originally titled "The Sociology of Mass Media and Public Opinion," this 1950 paper was intended for publication in the Russian journal *Amerika*, but publication was prohibited by Soviet authorities.

[33] Mills, "Mass Society and Liberal Education," 112–16. Also C. Wright Mills, "Are We Losing Our Sense of Belonging?" in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90–91. Originally published as "Are We Losing Our Sense of Belonging?" *Food for Thought* (September/October 1954): 11–16. William Kornhauser also identified the loss of "intermediate relations" as a key characteristic in the development of a mass society, emphasizing that elites and non-elites are left (dangerously) exposed, and can only relate via centralized media and state structures. Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, 75–78.

expansion of bureaucratic structures into all areas of life: "Rationally organized social arrangements are not necessarily a means of increased freedom—for the individual or for the society. In fact, often they are a means of tyranny and manipulation, a means of expropriating the very chance to reason, the very capacity to act as a free man." The United States, he said, was an overdeveloped nation, by which he meant that the citizen was now subservient to industrial and commercial structures, expected to consume at unnecessarily high levels to keep production levels equally high. Labour and leisure were each highly organized to fulfill this demand, something that represented "the collapse of the expectations of the Enlightenment, that reason and freedom would come to prevail as paramount forces in human history."[34]

Like the other radicals discussed to this point, Mills saw leisure bound up in the routines of work. What he found curious was that even as the number of hours at work decreased, and time available for leisure increased, the amount of happiness produced had not grown. The problem was that just as the "machinery of production" had made work unsatisfying, the "machinery of amusement" had done the same to private time. "The mass production of distraction," he said, had come to dominate, allowing no respite from the hollowness of work.[35] Focusing on the white-collar worker, a figure peculiar to the twentieth century and quickly becoming the postwar archetypal identity, Mills asserted that these individuals were fragmented and segregated in the workplace, subject to large and remote authorities. "The white-collar man is the hero as victim, the small creature who is acted upon but who does not act, who works along unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking loud, never talking back, never taking a stand."

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[34] Mills, "Culture and Politics," 195–200.

[35] C. Wright Mills, "The Unity of Work and Leisure," in *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 349. Originally published as "The Unity of Work and Leisure," *Journal of the National Association of Deans of Women* (January 1954): 58– 61.

The "malaise of our time" was due to longings for the politics and economy of past centuries that no longer existed, yet neither was there hope for rebellion. The vacuum of morality had left the mass of white-collar workers impotent and confused.[36]

An entirely depersonalized management took on a greater role as administration was enlarged and centralized. As Mills put it, "management is not a Who but a series of Theys and even Its." Management was an office, a notice on a bulletin board, a voice on a loudspeaker, "the centralized say-so." Like the wage labourer who did not own the machinery and was, in fact, controlled by it, the white-collar worker did not own his workplace, but rather was dominated by it. The characteristics of the endangered species of entrepreneur were absorbed by this new abstract body. A remote and spooky bureaucracy sets the pace and discipline of work.[37]

The shift to a life revolving around "mass leisure" was a psychological one, where the work ethic has been replaced by a leisure ethic, and an "almost absolute split" between work time and leisure time. Modern leisure, governed by mass communication and engineered in the same way as any other factory product, did not recreate joy or provide relaxation as it once did. Leisure was now merely a passive diversion from the oppression of work. Instead of pursuing genuine art, an effort that required privacy and contemplation as a means of expressing individuality, most Americans were drawn to "the jabbering, aimless, light-witted heroes of popular culture … the cheerful illiterates at whose easy, empty chatter we chuckle." Those who enjoyed mass entertainment were bored in their work lives, and so manically pursued leisure via "*ersatz* diversion," even though it could never offer satisfaction. This pendulum of boredom and restlessness

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[36] Mills, *White Collar*, xii, xvi.
[37] Ibid., 80, 108–09.

eroded the sense of self and confined people to a market-assigned mass identity. The mass citizen was smug, misreading activity for meaningful existence, but was, in fact, insecure and impotent.[38]

In his discussion of what he called the "cultural apparatus," Mills exhibited the clearest parallel yet with the Frankfurt scholars and their notion of a culture industry. The emergence of the cultural apparatus was related to two twentieth-century developments. The first was an economic shift in emphasis from production to distribution, which Mills said was linked to "the struggle for existence [and] the panic for status." The other development was the absorption of art, science, and learning as junior partners in the centralized capitalist state.[39] Prior to this, the arts were dominated by craftsmanship, which Mills claimed was characterized by the autonomous and wholistic labour of the artisan, who merged labour and leisure, and possessed a creative need exclusive to the market. Mills cited the 1920s as the key period when distribution (later known as merchandising) replaced production as the driving force of the American economy, but it was in the current postwar period that the distribution economy spread "like a noxious weed" to dominate consumers and producers alike. Capitalist production, Mills stated, had already eroded the autonomy and respectability of labour, but, under the guidance of the logic of distribution, it had reached new depths of irrationality. The public space was reduced to "a great sales room, a network of public rackets, and a continuous fashion show."[40]

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[38] Mills, *White Collar*, xvi–xvii, 236–38; Mills, "The Unity of Work and Leisure," 350.; and Mills, "Mass Society and Liberal Education," 117.

[39] C. Wright Mills, "The Man in the Middle," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 173. Originally published in "The Man in the Middle: The Designer," *Industrial Design* 5 (November 1958): 72–76.

[40] Mills, "The Man in the Middle," 178, 181–82. For a discussion of Mills' rather nostalgic interpretation of America's past, see Daniel Geary, *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social*

Those who worked in the cultural apparatus were allowed neither autonomy nor personal vision for their work. Instead, they were reduced to "filling an order" as determined by "an adroit formula" when required, then sitting idle as their labour was turned over to another link in the production chain. The effect was an ever more narrow and standardized output. In this way, the mass media was a leveling machine, for it treated all equally and sought universal appeal. It was "a kind of scheme for pre-scheduled, mass emotions." This was an especially disturbing facet of the cultural apparatus, for Mills argued that people could not understand the larger context of their lives without the media. The arts—mass arts, public arts, design arts—were all part of the necessary interplay of symbol and reality. The means of assessing reality was never unfiltered or direct, but rather relied on the products of the cultural apparatus. This was no minor power:

> it conquers nature and remakes the environment; it defines the changing nature of man, and grasps the drift of world affairs; it revivifies old aspirations and shapes new ones. It creates models of character and styles of feeling, nuances of mood and vocabularies of motive. It serves decision-makers, revealing and obscuring the consequences of their decisions. It turns power into authority and debunks authority as mere coercion. It modifies the work men do and provides the tools with which they do it; it fills up their leisure, with nonsense and with pleasure.

The cultural apparatus, in short, established the space and limits of truth and morality. However, in America the cultural apparatus was part of the capitalist enterprise, and so it was subservient to the profit motive. This was what explained the "scope, confusion, banalization, excitement, [and] sterility" of American culture. While Mills made clear

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Thought (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 126–28. Chapter 4, more generally, provides both background and contemporary reception of *White Collar*, and the book's efforts to expression Mills' fears about apathy and alienation.

that he was not arguing for some kind of mechanical relationship where the media could implant ideology in a passive audience—the media, he said, both encouraged and reinforced pre-existing impulses—it was nonetheless worrying, for the dominance of commercial culture, having absorbed the nation's intellectuals, artists, and scientists, had led to "confusion, banality, excitement, sterility."[41]

Like other critics of the period, Mills was short on solutions. Amidst a logic of rationality without reason, he saw two unsettling scenarios emerging. One was that society would continue to drift along aimlessly and grow more passive and atrophied; the other was that history would be made by elites who lacked any sense of responsibility for the consequences of their myopia. He urged intellectuals and artists to stay engaged in politics and promote genuine individualism. The mass was on the rise, and so keeping a "disciplined and informed mind" was especially critical. Yet, non-conformity amongst intellectuals, he believed, was no longer an expected trait, nor was there a desire to try to understand the nature of American life. How any of this might translate into action, however, was unstated.[42]

Despite a denial of any sympathy to Marxism, Mills shared considerable common territory with both Irving Howe and the Frankfurt scholars, chiefly in his assertion that the nature of modern life was a widespread domination that compromised the individual, cleaved work from leisure, and exalted bureaucratic rationalization. John Gillooly offered a particularly insightful observation about Mills and the Frankfurt interpretation. Gillooly argued that Mills differed from the Germans in resisting the notion of any kind of "mass

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[41] Mills, *White Collar*, 150–51, 333–34, 339–40; Mills, "The Man in the Middle," 175–76; and Mills, "The Cultural Apparatus," 209. See also "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 2," *Partisan Review* 19, no. 4 (1952): 447.

[42] Mills, "Culture and Politics," 201; "Mass Society and Liberal Education," 117; and "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 2," 448.

mind," for Mills (like Howe) believed that the public still possessed critical skills, lacking only meaningful and available comparisons to measure against the shoddy mass media content. Yet, far more intriguing, by seeing the cultural apparatus as a mediator of social change—the only means of understanding social reality for its consumers—Gillooly saw Mills as "turning the Frankfurt project on its head." Where the Frankfurt scholars looked to high culture as the last stand against total commodification, Mills saw the potential for social transformation in mass culture. Where Adorno saw modernist art as the source of a critical capacity, and therefore the slim site of political resistance, Mills claimed that no work of art, mass or modern, was free of capitalism's influence due to mass media mediation. Mills saw no reason to search for an independent site in which the artist to exist and resist, for there was none. The modernist dream of artistic independence was long gone. In this respect, Gillooly posited, "Mills was even more Frankfurtian than the Frankfurt School itself," for he saw "social reality as a totalized and—at least temporarily—closed system." By accepting the logic of Frankfurt and its ultimate conclusion, Mills saw that the only possible way out was through that very same culture industry.[43] In a practical sense, however, who knew what that might mean?

Despite coming from a variety of intellectual perspectives, the radicals discussed shared a number of key positions with regards to mass society at mid-century. First, they saw the fundamental nature of mass society as one of domination, whereby the autonomy of the individual was under constant attack, whether at work, rest, or play. Options were being closed off, as the false liberty of the marketplace and relentless process of administration steered the individual towards a more neutered life that precluded meaningful refuge or rebellion.

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[43] Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 244, 260–63.

Second, true culture—born of the autonomous individual mind and body—was succumbing to a commercialized form informed by the logic of the factory model—standardized, rigidly controlled, rationalized labour—but buttressed with the power of the mass media and modern distribution methods. The profit motive served to isolate or, worse, co-opt the genuine artist, leaving the fraud to a consuming public that either did not know or did not care that they were being sold a sham.

Third, this was no conspiracy of shadowy figures manipulating the masses. Rather, it was the perverted application of reason—rationalization and abstraction—used to dominate. This was no simple ideological matter, but rather a sweeping restructuring of human consciousness that molded producers and consumers, ruling and subservient classes alike. Everyone succumbed to such a degree that they had become segregated and alienated from themselves and those around them. Not even the exploiters of labour and consumption possessed meaningful autonomy. Mass culture was, in fact, truly totalizing.

Fourth, these individuals were, for the most part, extremely pessimistic for the prospects of a future that guaranteed the primacy of the individual. The future might mean fascism, passivity, or total war, but it was unlikely to include the fundamental optimism of, say, orthodox Marxism, where the seeds of liberation were germinating within capitalism.

Fifth and related to the immediate above point, there was little offered by way of solution. These figures all sought some type of liberated, unalienated individual who was reconnected to nature. What this actually meant in practical terms was ambiguous to the point of irrelevance. Preservation of modernist art or maintaining a critical and individualist stance may have held some logical and theoretical value, but more practically it was a dead end. Understanding why the walls were closing in was a small

comfort if one was doomed to be crushed. Another group of cultural critics, those with a conservative bent, understood and appreciated this angst.

In 1939, art critic Clement Greenberg, a member of the aforementioned New York Intellectuals, produced a landmark essay in the coming battle over the meaning of art and culture in the twentieth century. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" was theoretical and polemical, an analysis of current events and an anxious warning about the future. Greenberg foretold the disillusionment of the American left politically in the immediate postwar period, and identified culture as the remaining battleground for the radical intellectual. Notably, he identified the threat as coming from below. He saw that the masses' tastes might yet corrupt and overcome the avant-garde—the most cutting edge of modernist art, and the last bastion of the artist's independence. This may seem in accord with the Frankfurt interpretation, but its emphasis was on misapplied freedom below, not domination from above. Despite overlapping observations and fretting, that key distinction separated the conservative and radical interpretations.

The avant-garde was a product of bourgeois society and an approach toward art blessed with a previously unknown degree of historical consciousness. Unlike earlier romantic or utopian forms, the avant-garde "soberly examined in the terms of history and of cause and effect the antecedents, justifications and functions of the forms that lie at the heart of every society. Thus our present bourgeois social order was shown to be, not an eternal, 'natural' condition of life, but simply the latest term in a succession of social orders."[44] The avant-garde was a part of bourgeois society, yet also somehow estranged from it. This was due to capitalism's growing contradictions over individual freedom,

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[44] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 4. Originally published in *Partisan Review* 6, no. 5 (1939): 34–49.

where only a self-conscious and abstract art that necessarily alienated the bourgeoisie could still, in fact, represent bourgeois ideals. To truly maintain and express individuality, the avant-garde artist had to retire from the public to concentrate, a purity encapsulated by the idea of "art for art's sake." It was only by following his own muse, by rejecting social pressures, that the artist could generate significant and socially beneficial art.[45]

Even though the avant-garde was an expression of the bourgeois ruling class, it had, quite tragically, been abandoned. What had happened? Greenberg explained that the existence of an avant-garde normally meant the existence of a rearguard, to which he applied the German word *kitsch*. Greenberg explained that kitsch was those art forms that were imitative, commercial, vulgar, alluring:

> Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time.[46]

The rise of kitsch was due to the urbanization of the masses and the establishment of universal literacy in western nations in the nineteenth century. The masses, flooding in from the countryside and abandoning traditional folk culture, demanded something new and distracting. The market lent itself to the creation of a new commodity: fake culture.[47] Kitsch, then, was dependent on industrialization, a culture of the factory system of production and distribution. Kitsch was also a chameleon, able to mask its insincerity and

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[45] T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (September 1982): 144; Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 184; and Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 91.
[46] Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," 146; and Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 10.
[47] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 9–10.

fool its consumers when required. Greenberg cited *The New Yorker* as high-class kitsch, seemingly a periodical of avant-garde writing but in actuality diluted and fully commercialized.

The profitability of kitsch was the great problem, its great threat. The masses provided a huge market for kitsch, for the affluence and size of the masses was ever growing, and they had an insatiable appetite for baubles to distract and shams to convince themselves that they had achieved elevated tastes. For the artist and writer, the lure of riches to be gained from producing kitsch threatened the existence of high culture. Indeed, in Greenberg's time, he saw high modernism and kitsch become ever less distinct from each another. This blurring never elevated mass culture, but it did compromise true art. Kitsch was certainly appalling, but it was also addictive, and this fueled an anxiety that high modernism had to change, to become even more distant and marginal, to shrink in appeal just to survive.[48]

Kitsch succeeded because it required no critic to understand it, nor even an audience to appreciate it. It was near universal and immediate. As Andrew Ross asserted, "kitsch already *contains* our response to it. Avant-garde art, by contrast, *contains* only its own response to itself—the 'imitation of imitating' which Greenberg designates as the essential component of abstract formalism. Because kitsch structurally contains some possible part of us, kitsch cannot be 'contained,' as a mass epidemic could be contained by quarantine or by administering the correct antidote or vaccine, whether social or medicinal." It was this quality, that kitsch was already a part of us, that made it so dangerous as propaganda.[49] Where the avant-garde was "too innocent" to serve as

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[48] Ibid., 11–12; and William M. Chace, *Lionel Trilling: Criticism and Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), 57.

[49] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989),

propaganda—that is, it always stayed several arms lengths from its audience, allergic to easy understanding or practical application—kitsch was eminently "pliable." As a form that utilized mass distribution and was built to appeal widely, kitsch was ideal for use by dictators, thus making it a vehicle for totalitarianism.[50]

What did this mean for the future? "If the public was naturally inclined to kitsch," Paul Gorman wrote, "while modernism was the only source of transcendent values and cultural 'movement,' where could the twain meet? In the scenario that Greenberg presented, the prospects for revolutionary change in fact looked better without the masses' involvement." Some kind of universal mass culture was long the goal of the left—an end to divisions—but now the masses and their culture were a threat to the true culture that represented freedom. Thus the role of intellectual and artist was to further remove themselves from society, to both protect themselves from being consumed by kitsch and to do what they could to promote true culture. This necessarily meant withdrawing from politics, especially the kind of political infusion of culture that movements like the Popular Front of the 1930s demanded.[51]

Greenberg, then, served as a key figure in what came to be the conservative postwar mass culture critique. Despite sharing many common elements with the radicals—the debasement of true culture, the role of industrial capitalism, and pessimism for the future—it differed in significant ways. First, there was no sense in Greenberg's

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44. Emphasis in original. Paul Gorman observed that where Dwight Macdonald, Greenberg's cantankerous contemporary, saw the common man as powerless against the power of mass cultural oppression, Greenberg, even more pessimistically, saw kitsch's success not as some form of conditioning, but as emerging from human nature. This was no trickery; the masses chose kitsch in an expression of free will. In this respect, Greenberg was in accord with Horkheimer and Adorno. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth-Century America*, 154.

[50] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 19.

[51] Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, 156; Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 27; and Neil Jumonville, ed., *The New York Intellectuals Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 143–44.

interpretation that mass culture was tied to the alienation of the worker, that this was a totalizing experience. Despite Greenberg's Marxian pedigree, his interpretation was not one of domination and pacification, but of the introduction of the masses to the market and their ill-informed choices having dire consequences for genuine art. Second, like the earlier critique of the conservative Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who regarded the influence of the masses on both culture and politics to be an unambiguous disaster for Western civilization, Greenberg's concern about the health of high modernism was based on his belief that it represented the best of civilization.[52] While Greenberg, like Horkheimer and Adorno, valued high modernism for its discordant and contradictory nature, he chose not to tie it to larger, more integrated social questions. Greenberg's rather uncritical stance towards the avant-garde placed him much closer to the classical liberal Ortega y Gasset than the more penetrating analyses of Horkheimer, Adorno, or Mills. And third, where the radicals never lost sight that mass culture was fundamentally a political struggle, Greenberg preached a withdrawal by the enlightened few from that arena. The masses had polluted so much of society that it was best for the talented to take refuge.

In April 1952, Bernard Iddings Bell, an Episcopal priest, delivered a series of lectures at Ohio Weslyan University that were reprinted that same year as *Crowd Culture: An Examination of the American Way of Life*. Bell surveyed America and found

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[52] Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses*, 188–97; and Lang and Engel Lang, "Mass Society, Mass Culture, and Mass Communication," 1015. The essence of Ortega y Gasset's critique was that Western civilization relied on a meritocracy, whereby the talented minority both ruled and were responsible for the material benefits of the vast masses. However, the great advances of the nineteenth century—liberal democracy, industrialization, and scientific breakthroughs—had encouraged the masses to think that their increasing life of comfort was somehow natural, and that they deserved full participation in political and cultural life. Lacking ability, intelligence, and moral strength, the masses were neither equipped to lead nor able to see their deficiencies. The end result, he feared, was "hyperdemocracy," the reign of the barbarians and end of civilization. See Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, *passim*, but esp. 52–60, 67;

it driven by vulgarity and immediate and surface enjoyment. The American way of life was driven by the "false assumption" that the "Common Man," however competent at his work, possessed the critical insight to be a leader in any way: "This Common Man, usually well intentioned and well heeled, has not in fact learned how to handle his new freedom and his new wealth with expertness, with suavity. … He has much curious and useful knowledge but very little wisdom." Building a society around the values of the common man, he scolded, had lowered America's ideals. As George Nash explained in his history of postwar conservative intellectuals, Bell saw this as a failure of ideas and morals, not of material conditions. Belief mattered, for everything follows from ideas, and America had been led astray by the idea that the masses should shape the character of the nation.[53]

The character of the nation was hubris, myopic ignorance, and moral rot. Certainly, there was material wealth, yet the accumulation of riches brought with it an unwanted corruption that corroded the spirit and institutions of democracy. Boredom and superficiality, the hallmarks of the Common Man, had come to define the American character. The result was a homogenous, monotonous culture. Neither geography, class, nor occupation were sufficiently distinct in contemporary America: "There is among us no peculiarly bourgeois culture; everyone is bourgeois. There is no proletarian culture as distinct from middle-class culture; the two have become indistinguishable."[54] This was the nature of mass society: the indistinct blob of the Common Man.

The nature of America's mass culture was based on:

(1) an overestimate of the value of possessions, comforts

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[53] Bernard Iddings Bell, *Crowd Culture: An Examination of the American Way of Life* (1952; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books For Libraries Press, 1970), 127; and George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (1976; 30th anniversary edition, Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2006), 82.
[54] Iddings Bell, *Crowd Culture*, 14–15, 22.

> and amusements; (2) an aggrandizement of sensory appetite, particularly that of sex, out of all ratio to real importance; (3) a notion that the only way to judge the morality of word or act is by whether one can get away with it; (4) a conceit that to wise-crack is as effective as to be wise; and (5) a conviction that it is clever to get something for nothing, to obtain reward without labor. These are not the ethical bases on which America was built nor those on which any nation can long be maintained, but they are the impressions hammered home to children by life around them; and there is little the schools can do to correct them.

Widespread affluence had led to a society that pursued material wealth for no higher reason than greed and vanity. If people were well washed and dressed, they were also "pathetically unsure just what [they were] washed and dressed up for." This brought Bell to an especially worrying conclusion: "our crowd-mindedness renders us suggestible, manipulatable, easy meat for almost any propagandist who is willing to flatter, to encourage animality, to promise ease and opulence with a minimum of labor expended to get them, and freedom from responsibility."[55] The road to tyranny was paved with flattery.

Bell was unambiguously contemptuous of the types of entertainment that had come to dominate American society. In a desire to escape the monotony of daily life, the Common Man sought refuge in cheap sentimentality, in romance, and in "[r]ealism of the most violent and sordid kind." "Our popular literature," he added, "reveals that our fellow citizens desire to escape from life as it is lived among us into a dream world of brutality and carnality, desire it with a passionate intensity which makes them buy in large quantity fiction much of which is worse than disreputable." While the producers of such entertainment justified their choices (albeit apologetically) as following the dictates of the

[55] Ibid., 41, 44, 78.

market, Bell asserted that what people purchased was what producers dictated. Passivity, spectatorship, and vicarious emotion defined the entertainment of the Common Man.[56]

While Americans recognized and deplored such conditions in totalitarian regimes, they failed "to notice the extent to which we too have committed ourselves to the collectivist heresy, the extent to which deviation from mass standards is gladly tolerated only in matters which are deemed of no importance." The implications of this blindness were significant. A democracy that had lost its way, that had lost its spiritual foundation in favour of material indulgence, could not prevail against totalitarianism. In lowering its standards to elevate the mass, America was becoming more like its totalitarian enemies.[57]

Bell placed his faith in a "critical minority," a democratic elite who could arrest the contamination of the masses and lead an effort to produce a more spiritually enlightened nation better equipped to preserve freedom. These "skilled diagnosticians, well versed in the history of man and ready to examine contemporary behavior patterns in the light of what that history reveals" would combat the vulgarity of immediate desire in favour of the measured reflection of the long-term good. The patriot, he said, must place his own personal interests and safety aside for the sake of fighting against the threat to the republic. "If we are to rescue America from Americans, we shall have to raise up a new generation which will live less immaturely. This can happen only if Demos recovers from his present self-applauding jamboree, only if once more he comes to know the comparative values of human living as the race has learned them down the millennia."[58]

Bell anticipated and brushed aside criticism about advocating for an elite to preserve democracy. This would not be an elite born to privilege, the kind who resisted

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[56] Ibid., 28, 30, 32, 34.
[57] Ibid., 131, 134.
[58] Ibid., 15–16, 46, 135.

the talents of those who had the misfortune of coming from the lower classes. Instead, this would be an elite specific to democracy, whose membership was earned through both ability and intelligence, and a commitment "to guide the Common Man into a life more and more sane and rich and satisfying." All societies produced elites, and raising the worthy from the masses rather than celebrate their oafish brethren for their very commonness was a moral imperative. "[W]e must be rebels," he urged, "not because we hate the Common Man but because we love him deeply. This is our reasonable service, our religious duty."[59]

Bell was an unambiguous conservative in the mass culture debate, one of very few who did not come from a Marxian or lapsed Marxian perspective. What had happened to America was not a matter of material conditions or the inevitability of modernity, but a choice to elevate the vulgar and unworthy in politics, aesthetics, and morality. What he shared with the other conservatives was a belief in the separation between high and low, to quarantine the latter and preserve a meritocratic elite. He believed in democracy, but he was also a believer in gatekeepers. Like most critics of mass society who held some longing for the nineteenth century, Bell's ideal was in the pre-Jacksonian republic, where aristocrats dominated and acted as guides. Where Bell stood apart from the others considered here was his claim that where things went awry was the secularization of American society. But, like other conservatives, he agreed that too much freedom, not too little, was the vice of American mass society.

Dwight Macdonald is a more challenging figure to classify in the postwar mass culture debate. Part of the problem lies in the fact that Macdonald possessed a restless mind and conscience, and so his analyses of a given topic were always injected with

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[59] Ibid., 136–39, 155.

instability. Irving Howe referred to Macdonald as having a "table-hopping mind," while C. Wright Mills regarded him as the "Peter Pan of the Left." Historian Richard Pells wrote that Macdonald was "an eccentric subject to no ideological classification, a dissident unconcerned about influencing those in power, an agnostic who ultimately denied the claims of all political systems." His biographer, Michael Wreszin, stated that Macdonald considered himself a "conservative anarchist," something meant to encapsulate both a radical individualism and a rejection of Marxism. Indeed, T.S. Eliot, firmly in the aristocratic camp on the mass culture question, found his own conservatism and Macdonald's anarchism sharing much in common on aesthetic matters.[60] Macdonald further complicated the question by writing three separate essays on mass culture, each making significant revisions so that, depending on which version one examines, a case can be made for Macdonald as radical, conservative, or liberal. (This grand sweep in Macdonald's thinking also demonstrates more generally the considerable overlap between the camps.) As will be detailed below, what remained consistent throughout was Macdonald's adherence to cultural hierarchy and a belief that the participation of the masses in the marketplace was threatening to consume and corrupt true art like a malignant ooze.

In his first concerted effort at assessing mass culture, "A Theory of Popular Culture" (1944), Macdonald stated that for roughly a century Western culture had been divided between "traditional" art, or "High Culture," and "Popular Culture," which was "wholesale for the mass market." Popular culture was something distinct from folk

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[60] Howe quoted in Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Critical American: The Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984), 2; Mills quoted in Mattson, *Intellectuals In Action*, 50; Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 175; and Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 321.

culture, which Macdonald said was "spontaneous, autochthonous expression, shaped by the people themselves, pretty much without benefit of High Culture, to satisfy their own needs." The spread of democracy and universal literacy, he argued, had shattered the monopoly that elites once held over art. Capitalism rushed into an untapped market of "the newly awakened masses," and mass production and distribution technologies emerged to fully exploit it. Popular culture was "manufactured by technicians hired by the ruling class and working within the framework of High Culture" to manipulate the cultural hunger of the masses so as to provide a steady profit. Mass culture was evidence of capitalism's exploitative essence, not proof of a "harmonious commonwealth."[61]

Before popular culture's arrival, high culture was able to exist to satisfy an "enlightened minority," but now it was forced to compete. Popular culture may have begun as "an instrument of social domination," disposing of authentic folk culture, but, like an infection, it had grown and now assaulted the culture of the elites. "[T]he death struggles of High Culture are more protracted," he railed, "but they are taking place." Culture, Macdonald posited, worked like currency, specifically like Gresham's Law.[62] Bad culture was easier to enjoy and to manufacture (which were both qualities that kept it from being good culture), and so it absorbed more and more consumers. What Macdonald labeled as Academicism was that form of popular culture that was a "spurious" form of high culture—seemingly authentic but mass produced and cheaper

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[61] Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Popular Culture," *Politics* 1 (February 1944): 20.

[62] Gresham's Law, attributed to Sir Thomas Gresham (1519–1579), is often expressed as "bad money drives out good." This principle can be expressed thusly: If a gold coin has an established value based on a belief that it is pure gold, a person who can manufacture and distribute gold coins that are, say, 98% pure by mixing it with a metal worth less than gold can realize an immediate profit. The "bad money" will have a purchasing power identical to that of the "good money," yet cost the original holder less to acquire. To those with pure coins, there is an incentive to hold on to them and instead spend only debased coins. The bad money will have achieved an undeserved inflated value, while the good money will actually lose its worth if circulated. As this pattern repeats, fewer and fewer pure coins will be circulated, replaced by the bad ones. This pattern will continue, as 98% purity becomes 96% and so on, as even worse money drives out the bad.

(think, again, of the much-derided *New Yorker* magazine). The danger was that popular culture would eclipse high culture.[63]

At its best, high culture was a form that refused to compromise or compete. It self-segregated, and in doing so pushed society to new heights. Popular culture, however, stole from and diluted high culture. More so, it was ravenously integrationist, absorbing producer, consumer, politics, and economics into "the official culture-structure." "The serious critic, writer and artist in America may thus ignore Popular Culture," Macdonald warned, "but it does not ignore him. So also with those interested in political change. The masses are exploited culturally as well as economically, and we must look to Popular Culture for some clue as to the kind of response we may expect to socialist ideas. The deadening and warping effect of long exposure to movies, pulp magazines and radio can hardly be overestimated."[64]

Popular culture was fundamentally a political problem, one tied to class exploitation. Macdonald laid down his gauntlet: "Either the exploitation or the democracy must be removed if culture is to recover its health." Given Macdonald's democratic convictions, he believed that the rebellious masses had not yet rebelled enough, just as popular culture had not achieved folk cultural authenticity. Citing Leon Trotsky, Macdonald suggested that the aim of mass culture should not be to vulgarize high culture, but rather to establish an entirely new "human culture," one that could supersede the culture of any one class. The way forward was to dispense with both hierarchical divisions and the vulgar. John Gillooly found Macdonald's analysis difficult to accept on face value. Macdonald blamed the damage caused to high culture as related to

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[63] Macdonald, "A Theory of Popular Culture," 21.

[64] Ibid., 21–22. Macdonald unsubtly explained here that the Nazis called this integration "coordination," thereby establishing the totalitarian danger within mass culture.

exploitation of the masses, which is to say that if the masses were not exploited, high culture would be safe from harm. Yet, when Macdonald invoked Gresham's Law, the mere ability to produce mass cultural artifacts, irrespective of exploitation, was harmful because so many would willingly choose mass culture over true art. This latter position suggests that when Macdonald revised his thesis a decade later, turning more conservative, the shift was not as significant as what might initially appear.[65]

By the 1950s, Macdonald, disillusioned and frustrated by politics, concentrated instead on aesthetic matters, away from liberation towards the preservation of real art from the mass.[66] In this first revision of his theory, "A Theory of Mass Culture" (1953), Macdonald repeated his claim of a bifurcated Western culture, although he now dropped the word popular in favour of mass. This change, he explained, was warranted because mass culture, "like chewing gum," was manufactured for mass consumption. However, as Gillooly observed, "The shift in terminology between the titles was more than nominal. On the one hand, the term 'mass' was intended to suggest that the culture in question was not really popular; it was neither actively produced by the 'people,' nor an authentic expression of their cultural needs."[67]

Macdonald repeated his assertion that mass culture was born of democracy and

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[65] Ibid., 23; and Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 115–16.

[66] Macdonald was an extreme example of what happened to many New York Intellectuals who, before World War II, considered themselves Marxists of some stripe. While Macdonald was never a proper Marxist, he did see in socialism a means of a mass politics that preserved the integrity of the individual. However, the experience of war and totalitarianism quashed his optimism for the fate of the individual in mass politics, and he gave up on the idea of radical change in the political sphere. With a heavy sigh, he decided that the West provided more hope than Communism for individual autonomy. "Most of us have made a 'lesser evil' choice," Macdonald conceded. "And since the imperfect democracy of the West is clearly a lesser evil than the perfected tyranny of the Communists, we have chosen the West." Quoted in Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 182. Also see Thomas Steven Edwards, "The Pursuit of the Ideal: Mass Culture and Mass Politics in the Works of Dwight Macdonald," (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 1989), 2, 4–5; and Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 185.

[67] Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," *Diogenes* 3 (Summer 1953): 1; and Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 213.

universal literacy, ending the cultural monopoly of the elites. Where he previously used the term infection, now he invoked "parasitic" and "cancerous growth" to describe mass culture's relationship with high culture. Borrowing from Clement Greenberg, he asserted that kitsch took from high culture but gave nothing back. Eventually, kitsch developed enough of a heritage of its own so that nothing remained of its high culture roots.[68]

The upper classes launched kitsch because it was easy to manufacture and distribute, playing into the "crude tastes of the masses," and facilitated political domination. But, oblivious to the dangers, now their own culture was threatened. Where practitioners of high culture once had the option of ignoring "the mob," now they had to actively compete with mass culture or be absorbed by it. And that was largely the problem. If there were clear boundaries, where elites had their high culture and masses had their kitsch, there would be no conflict. But that boundary was ever more blurred.[69]

Until around 1930, Macdonald claimed, high culture dealt with mass culture in two ways. The first was "Avantgardism," which was self-segregation, a refusal to compete with any other form. The second was "academicism," which was a cheaper, superficial high culture, or "kitsch for the elite." Since 1930, mass culture had absorbed elements of old high culture, academicism, and the avant-garde, bleaching out complexity and complication. In a memorable phrase, Macdonald charged that "[t]here is slowly emerging a tepid, flaccid Middlebrow Culture [academicism] that threatens to engulf everything in its spreading ooze." This was not improving mass culture; it was debasing the high. "There is nothing more vulgar," he sniffed, "than sophisticated *kitsch*."[70]

From here, Macdonald turned to an analysis that paralleled that of the Frankfurt

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[68] Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," 2.
[69] Ibid., 4–5.
[70] Ibid., 6–7.

scholars and Mills. The director of a movie, like the editor of a mass-circulation magazine, must subscribe to a predetermined formula not unlike that of a factory manager. He could not be a true artist, able to pursue his own vision, because he was manufacturing a product intended to appeal to a mass audience. Even if some movies could be considered impressive, they could never be art: "Unity is essential in art; it cannot be achieved by a production-line of specialists, however competent." The (dis)organization of human beings into masses necessarily destroyed an essential human quality. Mass society, he declared, was "a large quantity of people unable to express themselves as human beings because they are related to one another neither as individuals nor as members of communities—indeed they are not related *to each other* at all but only to some thing distant, abstract, non-human." This could be a sporting event, the factory floor, or a political rally.[71]

Macdonald cited Ortega y Gasset and Eliot, each of whom saw the liberation of the masses as the cause of both totalitarianism and billboards, and so advocated reestablishing old class divisions and reinstalling elite control of culture. Marxists and liberals, on the other hand, saw the masses as "intrinsically healthy but the dupes and victims of cultural exploitation." In this latter reading, the masses would gladly appreciate real art if they were only provided the good instead of the debased. Both interpretations, Macdonald said, were false, and for much the same reason. The conservatives saw mass culture as an authentic expression of the people, while liberals thought that it could be authentic expression. Where they both erred, he asserted, was in equating "the people" with "the masses"; they were two distinct things, for the masses were not autonomous. Still, the conservative solution had a greater claim of historical

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[71] Ibid., 8–9, 14. Emphasis in original.

legitimacy than the Marxist dream of a classless society. Almost without exception, he said, great cultures were elite cultures, and so he urged a cultural elite to reassert itself through the avant-garde.[72] In arguing this point, Macdonald reversed his position from 1944, when he rejected the re-assertion of aristocratic stratification in favour of a new "human culture." Instead, elitism became the required means of saving true culture.

Yet, pessimist as he was, he said that it seemed unlikely that a restoration of a cultural aristocracy could be achieved, for he saw mass culture as a merciless machine. Bringing to mind Adorno and Horkheimer, Macdonald wrote that "[t]he masses, debauched by several generations of this sort of thing, in turn come to demand trivial and comfortable cultural products." Whatever domination may have been occurring, it was important to realize that the masses demanded the drug that pacified them. At this point, assessing who controlled the machine was a fool's errand. "The engine is reciprocating," he said, "and shows no signs of running down."[73] All that was left was for the few remaining authentic artists, folk and avant-garde alike, to steel themselves and hold out for as long as they could.

Despite this common ground with Horkheimer and Adorno—the connections between political and economic domination and the false nature of mass culture—it is vital to appreciate that Macdonald's turn away from the political, treating high culture as somehow outside politics, was something the Frankfurt scholars never could allow. Macdonald (and Greenberg) were, according to Bart Beaty, "privileging … aesthetics as a priority above political improvement and progressive social change," the key distinction

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[72] Ibid., 13, 15.

[73] Ibid., 16–17. The reciprocating engine immediately calls forth Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that the "machine is rotating on the spot," a belief that human will was subservient to a logic and process that was now self-governing. The other thing to take away from the reciprocating engine analogy is that there was no longer any reason to explore blame—i.e., that this was no longer a practical political argument. In doing so, he divorced himself from any left position regarding mass culture.

that confirmed their conservative instincts, even as they were in sympathy with more radical analyses.[74]

Another decade brought further revision and reportage on the sorry state of culture in America. In "Masscult & Midcult" (1960), Macdonald renamed mass culture as "Masscult" "since it really isn't culture at all." It was bad in an entirely new manner—it was a priori bad: "It is not just unsuccessful art. It is non-art. It is even anti-art." It offered "neither an emotional catharsis nor an aesthetic experience." It did not even offer entertainment, only distraction. It asked nothing and gave nothing save for the cheap thrill or sedation of a drug. Neither audience nor creator merited respect, for both were utter fakes. The difference was not one of popularity—that is, quantity—but of quality.[75]

Macdonald rejected the excuses of the "Lords of Masscult," the producers who claimed that they were helpless agents of the public's desires. His counter consisted of two points. First, those same products had conditioned the masses, so free will was absent in their demands. Second, the mass culture producers genuinely endorsed their work. Hiding behind the claim of simply responding to what the public wants, thus, was a

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[74] Bart Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 62; and Edwards, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 174. John Gillooly stated that Macdonald and Howe had only read a few of Adorno's essays that had been published in English, but may have been familiar with the German works via their German-speaking colleagues. Clement Greenberg, however, did read German. Michael Wreszin claims that Macdonald was not especially influenced by the Frankfurt scholars. His opinions about mass culture had largely been shaped during his college days at Yale, and apart from some Marxist overtones in "A Theory of Popular Culture," he resisted that perspective. Fundamentally, Wreszin said, Macdonald did not see much revolutionary potential in the working class. Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 92; and Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, 289, 325–26. Irving Howe and liberal sociologist Edward Shils, however, saw Macdonald and the Frankfurt School as mutually supportive. Howe, "The New York Intellectuals," 35; and Edward Shils, "Daydreams and Nightmares: Reflections on the Criticism of Mass Culture," *The Sewanee Review* 65, no. 4 (October–December 1957): 596.

[75] Dwight Macdonald, "Masscult & Midcult," in *Against the American Grain* (New York: Random House, 1962), 3–5, 7. Originally published in *Partisan Review* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1960): 203–33 and 27, no. 4 (Fall 1960): 589–631.

distortion of the chain of events and interests.[76]

To those who called this position "undemocratic and snobbish," Macdonald explained that his critics misunderstood who and what they were defending. Mass culture, he said, did not represent the "Common Man." It was not in any way populist. The mass man, he explained, was not any real person, but a theoretical position, a horrible idealized state that people were being pushed towards. To actually become a mass man required the complete eradication of all individuality and autonomy. To criticize mass culture, he said, was to attack a malignancy on free will and expression.[77]

Returning to the theme of blurring, Macdonald claimed that mass culture's challenge was that it forced high culture to compete for an audience, unlike folk culture, where each satisfied the interests of their audience. More particularly, the danger to high culture was not from mass culture per se, but from midcult, that "intermediate form" that was essentially mass culture—"the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity"—yet masqueraded as high culture. Mass culture, he said, was obvious about its nature—it would do anything to please. But midcult simulated high culture and seemed to be as demanding as true art, yet in fact was a debased form. Midcult was not an elevation of basic mass culture but a corruption of high culture. Midcult was the close cousin of academicism, a kitsch for the elite. But where academicism was opposed to the avant-garde, midcult adapted and exploited the efforts of avant-garde artists. It was this absorption of the avant-garde that made midcult such a threat. Midcult was superficial psychoanalysis in popular magazines. It was Hollywood movies that were not terrible, but neither were they good. It was popular writer Vance Packard cribbing the work of

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[76] Both the term "Lords of Masscult" and later "Lords of Kitsch" were replacements for "ruling class." This distinction blurred the class criticism that was especially obvious in the initial essay. Ibid., 10–11.
[77] Ibid., 11.

sociologists and reframing it in moralistic terms for a wider audience. It was Bauhaus modernism refashioned for vacuum cleaners, toasters, and supermarkets.[78]

The avant-garde was gone and there were no successors. It served only to feed the midcult parasite. Macdonald took minor comfort that, despite the mass culture flood, there would always be a few islands of refuge; yet, he lamented, "islands are not continents." His proposed solution was to reaffirm the distinction between art and mass culture. This was not, he said, about excluding the masses from the good life ("Marxist melodrama," he snorted), but an acknowledgement that only a small percentage would ever care about the importance of art. Let the masses have mass culture and let the elites have high culture. The important thing was to keep high culture from being preyed upon and compromised by midcult. This was a compromise that acknowledged the already heavily segmented American audience, which, he said, should be segregated. Encouraging this division of the audience, he hoped, would weaken mass culture's influence. A vibrant American culture depended on saving high culture from "not only from the Masscult depths but also from the agreeable ooze of the Midcult swamp."[79] Christopher Brookeman pointed to this compromise as evidence that Macdonald had finally embraced pluralism, retreating from conservatism just as he had retreated from radicalism. From a call for a revolutionary new "human culture," then aristocratic hierarchy, Macdonald had converted to liberal conflict management.[80]

Because Macdonald was the most outspoken and well-known American critic of mass culture, he attracted considerable response from other intellectuals of the time.

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[78] Ibid., 34, 37–38, 50–51, 54. For examples of commercialized modernism, see Lesley Jackson, *Contemporary: Architecture and Interiors of the 1950s* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1994), 143–73 and *passim*.

[79] Macdonald, "Masscult & Midcult," 70, 72–74.

[80] Christopher Brookeman, *American Culture and Society Since the 1930s* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1984), 53. Also see Edwards, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 132; and Andrew Ross, *No Respect*, 52–53.

Historian D.W. Brogan, for example, agreed that mass culture was "shallow, evasive, often bad in its own terms," but averred that Macdonald had a poor understanding of history, for high culture had never been popular in any sense. Why would it be threatened now? Brogan argued that Macdonald's criticism was overly pessimistic because he assumed a binary option of high culture or mass culture, the stars or the gutter. There would always be audiences for all forms of culture, so the hysteria was unwarranted.[81] Harold Rosenberg, a persistent critic of Macdonald, found "something annoying about the mentality of those who keep handling the goods while denying any appetite for them." What vexed Rosenberg was the claims of intellectuals who said they were just assessing mass culture. He rejected this, suggesting that anyone who would delve that deeply must actually have some affection for it. Furthermore, the very act of analyzing kitsch granted it an intellectual dimension that assisted in eroding the barrier between true art and mass culture. If the interest were actually high culture, why not spend time and energy analyzing it? Worse yet was that the criticism of kitsch never went beyond kitsch criticism, for it ignored fundamental questions of aesthetics as one would apply to any work of art, but instead employed mere social criticism.[82]

It may also seem difficult to square Macdonald's cultural elitism with his egalitarian politics, yet, like the radicals, both were born of a concern for the fate of the individual in a complex and mass society. Mass culture, like mass politics, was about the

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[81] D.W. Brogan, "The Problem of High Culture and Mass Culture," *Diogenes* 5 (1954): 4–5. Further to this point regarding Macdonald's historical ignorance, Andreas Huyssen explained, the autonomy of high culture was due to it breaking free from church and state control and re-organizing itself to the logic of the market. "From its beginnings," Huyssen wrote, "the autonomy of art has been related dialectically to the commodity form." Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse," 17.

[82] Harold Rosenberg, "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism," in *The Tradition of the New* (1959; reprint, Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1982), 259–62 [originally published in *Dissent* 5, no. 1 (January 1958): 14–19]; and Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, 327. Another of Macdonald's biographers, Stephen J. Whitfield, pointed out that for all his complaining about mass culture as a threat to high culture, Macdonald wrote surprisingly little about high culture. Whitfield, *A Critical American*, 97.

loss of individual identity—what it meant to be human—and so mass culture was totalitarianism by other means. Just as mass politics gutted individual rights and responsibilities in the political sphere, mass culture did the same for art and culture. His opposition was to mass as a concept, not to any particular people, just as his support of elite culture was tied to his belief that elite was synonymous with individualism, not to a sympathy for the dominant class of society. While this distinction makes some sense, it is compromised when actually applied to Macdonald himself, an individual who was always averse to theory and the abstract, preferring empirical data applied to specific moral questions. Thus the difficulty of capturing Dwight Macdonald.

The conservative position can be summarized, however loosely, with three inter-connected points. First, there was a sense of society going awry since literacy and urbanization brought the masses into the cultural marketplace. While figures like Greenberg, Bell, and Macdonald were unreserved supporters of democracy in the political sense, they believed that cultural democracy was misplaced. The tastes of the masses were unrefined, and catering to that large group, however profitable, had dire consequences for individualism and Western civilization. More crudely put, it was not a case of the masses having too little freedom (i.e., they were dominated), but too much.

Second, conservatives lacked a totalizing framework like that of the radicals, who saw work, leisure, politics, and economics all bound in the same logic of domination and massification. The conservatives had few qualms about separating these social elements in terms of causes (although Macdonald flitted in and out on this question), but the effects of a debased culture were wide-ranging. Because of this compartmentalization, high culture was not subjected to critical analysis. It existed as an unchallengeable ideal, the greatness of civilization threatened by the low.

Third and most important, the conservative position was backward looking, particularly in its solution. There was a time, somewhere in the past, when culture was made by true artists for audiences with discriminating tastes, and contemplating such works elevated civilization. The goal was to somehow return to that time, when people understood their place in the cultural hierarchy and allowed the proper order of things to proceed unobstructed. Cultural segregation, they argued, was the means of securing political liberty.

The liberal contribution to the mass culture debate is harder to grasp and assess, largely because it was a topic that liberals mostly avoided. Representative of this mood was *Partisan Review*'s 1952 symposium, "Our Country and Our Culture," where dozens of invited intellectuals were asked to comment on the state of American culture.[83] The vast majority of participants, many of them former radicals and critics of American life, lined up behind the status quo of liberal anti-communism and technocracy. The outsiders, many attached to prominent academic institutions, were now insiders. The stakes were too high in the Cold War, for Stalinism was believed to be a dire threat to freedom everywhere. So they planted their flag with the West and mostly refrained from criticism outside their academic specialties.[84] Which is to say that they retreated from political criticism. The liberal position rested on the principles of individualism, consensus (minimization and management of conflict), and especially pluralism (encouragement and protection of difference). Postwar liberals saw these principles as the best means of stemming the danger of mass society, as exemplified by the Soviet Union. Unlike radicals and conservatives, generally speaking, liberals did not believe that the United

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[83] "Our Culture and Our Country," *Partisan Review* 19, nos. 3–5 (1952): 282–326, 420–50, 562–97.

[84] See, for example, Bulik, *Mass Culture Criticism and Dissent*, 93–100; Kevin Mattson, *When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Postwar Liberalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 84–85; and Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 198, 203.

States was a mass society, but they did see risks. In promoting liberalism and a culture of difference, i.e., the status quo, they argued that radical or conservative critiques were unwarranted and unnecessarily disruptive.

Unlike most of the New York Intellectuals, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. never had a radical past from which he was fleeing or revising. As he fell in with the clique, it was because they had moved towards his position, for Schlesinger had no romantic illusions about revolution or perfection. Rather, he found the liberalism of Franklin Roosevelt appealing in its rationalism and desire to solve immediate problems. Where some, like Dwight Macdonald, regarded American liberalism as the lesser of two evils, Schlesinger never had to hold his nose.[85]

"Western man in the middle of the twentieth century," he began his seminal work of postwar liberalism, *The Vital Center* (1949), "is tense, uncertain, adrift. We look upon our epoch as a time of troubles, an age of anxiety."[86] Modern life was a bewildering and anxious complexity. The only real question of the day was how to respond to this, by either embracing liberal democracy (i.e., pluralism) or fleeing to totalitarianism (i.e., mass society). Totalitarianism was the choice of the weak-minded and lonely, for the totalitarian state's power to invade all aspects of its citizens' lives was its appeal. The absolute discipline that eradicated individuality was desired by its members because individual responsibility was terrifying. Those who could not bear confronting their limitations turned to an ideology and movement that eradicated humility and doubt, rewarded arrogance and ruthlessness, and promised greatness. All that was required was rejection of one's own individuality. Totalitarianism was not the inevitable result of

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[85] Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 180–82.
[86] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1949; reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), 1.

human society, but a perversion of the transition from pre-modern stagnancy to modern complexity. The reason for turning to totalitarianism was located in the psyche of each individual, not in some larger external influence. The totalitarian option, Schlesinger warned, "signifies an internal crisis for democratic man. There is a Hitler, a Stalin in every breast."[87]

The alternative to totalitarianism was liberalism. Schlesinger dismissed out of hand conservatism (i.e., business interests and plutocrats) as having abandoned the dynamic spark of capitalism that had promoted the necessary intellectual freedom that built American power. He did not believe American businessmen would lead the country to fascism, but he doubted they had the moral character to save themselves from the totalitarian threat. Neither did Schlesinger think much of the progressives, whom he charged with holding a naïvely optimistic and trusting view of human nature, and an unreasonable belief in inevitable progress towards freedom. Power corrupted, and the progressive's inability to realize this only empowered totalitarians.[88] Instead, liberalism possessed an "empirical temper" that stood apart from the "millennial nostalgia" that tainted both the American right and European left. Liberalism meant facing up to anxiety and complexity, to tension and conflict, and accepting them as facts of life, then pursuing rational solutions to immediate problems. It represented "a belief in the integrity of the individual, in the limited state, in due process of law, in empiricism and gradualism."

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[87] Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, xiii–xiv, 53–56, 250; and Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 223. This emphasis on individual psychology and the potential monster within anticipated Hannah Arendt's own thesis of the totalitarian man as an atomized and traumatized figure unable to accept the responsibilities of freedom and diversity. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 305–40. William Kornhauser, too, argued that the mass man was a psychologically damaged individual who relied on both the group and the domineering leader for assurance. Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, 107–13.

[88] Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, 27–49; and Robert Booth Fowler, *Believing Skeptics: American Political Intellectuals, 1945–1964* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 61.

Human beings had much potential—to reason, to loyalty, to virtue, but also to ego and corruption—and so pluralist democracy offered freedom but demanded accountability to limit the application of power. Stephen P. Depoe argued that while his endorsement of pluralism was within the postwar liberal orthodoxy, Schlesinger's belief in endless struggle within modern life and against the impulse of the mass was out of step with the arc of American politics in the 1950s, as liberals and conservatives generally set aside differences in favour of the core goals of anti-communism and economic growth.[89] A self-described realist, Schlesinger was also a rather morose liberal.

Just as political pluralism provided a necessary dispersion of power to protect individual autonomy, cultural pluralism stood as a bulwark against mass culture. Standardization, Schlesinger said, had raised consumption levels, but it had "cut the umbilical cord too early," leading to a stunted cultural consumer untutored in higher appreciation. "We have made culture available to all at the expense of making much of it the expression of a common fantasy rather than of a common experience. We desperately need a rich emotional life, reflecting actual relations between the individual and the community." The mass media was a problem, as its quest for greater audience sizes came at the expense of diversity by seeking an ever lower common denominator. "The only answer to mass culture," he suggested in the "Our Culture and Our Country" symposium, "lies in the affirmation of America, not as a uniform society, but as a various and pluralistic society, made up of many groups with diverse interests. The immediate problem is to conserve cultural pluralism in face of the threat of the mass media." What was required was "the Intellectual as Gadfly": "In a time when a society is threatened by

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[89] Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, xvi, 156, 170–71; and Stephen P. Depoe, *Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and the Ideological History of American Liberalism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 7, 32–33.

sharp internal conflict," he urged, "there is a powerful case for the unifying voice and the healing personality. But in a time when society is threatened by homogenization, there is a powerful case for the grouch and the grumbler, the sourpuss and the curmudgeon, the nonconstructive critic, the voice of dissent and the voice of protest."[90] Active pluralism could keep the mass impulse at bay.[91]

By 1960, however, he believed a more activist state with regards to culture was necessary. In "Notes on a National Cultural Policy," Schlesinger sought a technocratic solution to the mass culture "problem." He chastised those who moaned and wrung their hands over the state of American culture. Yes, it could be discouraging and the signs pointed ever downward, but there were steps that could be taken. Regarding television, he asserted that government had an obligation to serve public taste rather than private profit. Establishment and enforcement of standards for the sake of national culture was mandatory. "In the end," he concluded, "the vitality of a culture will depend on the creativity of the individual and the sensibility of the audience, and these conditions depend on factors of which the state itself is only a surface expression."[92] This faith in rationalism, the state, and experts put Schlesinger at odds with radicals who saw all three of these elements as key components in the pacification of the masses. To the radicals, the liberal belief that technocrats could alleviate the worst instincts of the audience and the business community was evidence of shallow thinking. Schlesinger's position also

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[90] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Highbrow in American Politics [1953]," in *The Politics of Hope* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), 235–36.

[91] Ibid., 228, 235–36; "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 3," 592; and Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, 253. Sociologist Daniel Bell reinforced this position of the liberal critic: "A society is most vigorous, and appealing when both partisan and critic are legitimate voices in the permanent dialogue that is the testing of ideas and experience. One can be a critic of one's country without being an enemy of its promise." Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1960), 16.

[92] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Notes on a National Cultural Policy [1960]," in *The Politics of Hope* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), 254–55, 261.

demonstrated a fundamental faith not shared by radicals or conservatives that mass culture could be sufficiently contained, even beaten back with sufficient effort.

Schlesinger also stood apart from conservative critics who argued that the expansion of democracy was responsible for the mass culture that threatened true art. Mass culture, Schlesinger said, was not the result of democracy, but rather a threat to it, for the monolith of the mass was at odds with pluralism. In Schlesinger's assessment, the difference between mass culture and cultural pluralism was not a matter of aesthetics, as conservatives argued, but whether diversity was being satisfied.[93]

When David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* was released in 1950, its audience was mostly limited to academics, but only three years later an abridged copy sold in vast numbers, seemingly touching a national nerve concerning anxieties about prosperity and status. With its historical periodization defined by production and consumption, individualism and the group, the book's implications were sufficiently ambiguous to offer either comfort or despair to any number of viewpoints on the mass culture debate, then and later, thus serving as an unintended pluralism itself.[94]

Riesman presented a post-Marxian model of Western civilization that rejected the importance of material resources and labour in favour of factors such as leisure, consumption, social values, and character formulation. In doing so, his attention normalized the middle class rather than the working class.[95] *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman

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[93] Gillooly, "Between Culture and Politics," 276–77; and Mattson, *When America Was Great*, 98.

[94] Todd Gitlin, "Introduction," in David Riesman with Nathan Glazer and Denney Reuel, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950; reprint, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii; and Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 4. On Riesman's ambiguity, see Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 123; and Paul A. Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 107.

[95] Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, 240. Irving Howe criticized Riesman's work on this very point, for it suggested that America was a classless society. It also encouraged historical distortion by looking to the past explicitly via the concerns of the present (e.g., leisure, consumption, taste). Sorin, *Irving Howe*, 142.

stated, was about social character, and how region, history, and peer groups shaped behaviour. What he was discussing, he emphasized, was not actual people, but character types and dominant ways of behaviour in a society or situation. Much as with Horkheimer, Adorno, Mills, and Macdonald, who spoke only of theoretical extremes, Riesman's caution was often ignored by critics and supporters alike.

Riesman argued that Western life had been impacted by two major social revolutions in the past four centuries. Until the Renaissance, European society was tradition-directed, which was to say conformist and stable to the point of stagnation. Growing mobility, accumulation of capital, and technological development helped spur what Riesman termed an inner-directed society. New experiences and discoveries and a growing population due to increased abundance spurred a more individualist outlook, as traditional elites were forced to accept a more open society. Where the tradition-directed individual looked to culture and community to guide his behaviour, the inner-directed person followed personal ambition and individual morality. Abundance led to greater leisure, bureaucracy, and racial/national mixing, and the psychology of scarcity gave way to one that accepted waste and surplus as normal. What Riesman was describing, of course, was the ideal bourgeois liberal democracy.[96]

Riesman believed that the present period marked yet another major social transformation, which he called other-directedness. The other-directed personality was marked by sensitivity toward the expectations and preferences of others rather than individual drives. Other-directed people, he said, constantly looked to their contemporaries for social cues. It was not a conscious choice, but rather learned behaviour. This produced a kind of conformity that may seem a throwback to tradition-

[96] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 8–17, 24–25.

directed societies, but was in fact more cosmopolitan and exceptionally situational and impermanent. The urban, white-collar worker—the bureaucrat or service industry worker—best exhibited this behaviour. While not yet the predominant American character, other-directedness was the direction in which society was evolving.[97]

Where the inner-directed individual saw labour in terms of technology and intellectual processes, the other-directed person's labour, like his life, was dominated by human relations. In an other-directed society, material abundance grew noticeably via technological advances. People still worked, but what people produced was less a tangible thing, but personality itself. Being able to both read other personalities and properly control one's own became a key determiner of success, for manipulation, not coercion, became the most effective application of power. Leisure and consumption became vital sites of status and identity formation. Learning to become a consumer replaced etiquette training, as being able to read minute shifts in fashion were key to maintaining standing within the group. The peer group took on new levels of importance, establishing rules of conduct, seeking to level status within, and shaming those who exhibited vanity or individuality: "Before the peer-group jury there is no privilege against self-incrimination."[98]

The mass media played a significant role in an other-directed society, but most critics, Riesman claimed, attributed too much power to it and/or simplified its function. The modern media was a remarkable means of communication over vast spaces and audiences, but there was no evidence that its messages ever reached its target audience, or that the audience received the message "correctly." Riesman was leery of conspiratorial

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[97] Ibid., 19–25.
[98] Ibid., 46, 72–76, 111, 159–60.

theories of media manipulation; if anything, he took a neutral stance: "The probabilities are that the media, in their direct, message-bearing impact, are likely to do less either to help or hurt the audience than the controllers of the media and their critics like to think."[99]

More important, Riesman said, was the peer group, which acted as interpreter for the members of the group, but then also fed that interpretation back to the media, turning the relationship into something much more dynamic than what most mass culture critics granted. This give-and-take relationship, Riesman suggested, promoted tolerance and diversity, for the large media corporation could not take the chance to offend or alienate, but it also helped promote and reinforce the group-centred culture of its audience. Furthermore, the controllers of the media were part of society, and hence subject to the same pressures as everyone else. Pluralism, then, was built into the commercial media.[100]

Pushing back even harder against those who treated the media with great disdain, Riesman suggested that mass media entertainment might actually contribute to ideas of and conditions for autonomy. In offering diverse perspectives, movies or television programs introduced new subject matter that the peer-group must evaluate, which potentially offered alternatives to consider, possibly even to allow the individual to escape. Furthermore, the man whose work life was consumed by other-directed activities might seek entirely inner-directed leisure activities. Indeed, Riesman hoped that the other-directed personality might discover how much unnecessary effort was spent in

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[99] Ibid., *The Lonely Crowd*, 90, 205.

[100] Ibid., lxii–lxiii, 80, 84, 189, 192. Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton also argued that the mass media avoided antagonizing its audience, but that the greater effect was to reinforce the status quo. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action [1948]," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (1957; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1964), 460.

trying to fit in, that their individualized interests and values had worth.[101] Here, then, was both the caution against conformity, to seek a more measured, more balanced life, and a suggestion that the mass media might play a constructive role in this quest. In this stance, Riesman's perspective was entirely liberal.

What did this mean for mass culture? In his contribution to *Partisan Review*'s "Our Culture and Our Country" symposium, Riesman questioned whether the term was even relevant, for he saw enough stratification by class and taste (even amongst intellectuals) to suggest that "class-mass culture" might be more appropriate. Audiences remained diverse and capable of equally diverse interpretations. "Conformity there surely is," he advised, "but we cannot assume its existence from the standardization of the commodities themselves (in many areas a steadily diminishing standardization) without knowledge of how individuals and groups *interpret* the commodities and endow them with meanings." Indeed, he suggested in *The Lonely Crowd* that other-directed conformity was exhibited mostly in the better-educated segment of society, not the supposed dupes on the lower rungs.[102]

Still, Riesman's analysis and reluctance to mourn the passing of the inner-directed era or celebrate the emerging other-directed one invited criticism and jaundiced interpretation of his intentions. Harold Rosenberg, for example, saw in Riesman's analysis (as well as that of liberal critics like William Whyte and Vance Packard) a "deepening process of dehumanization" and "sinister overtones of a developing totalitarianism from which there is no escape." Riesman, he said, interpreted the shift to consumerism as part of a "flattening of personality" that brought about "the injurious

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[101] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 294, 307.
[102] Ibid., 153; and "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 1," *Partisan Review* 19, no. 3 (1952): 311. Emphasis in original.

realities of its normal everyday life."[103] Much later on, Timothy Shakesby saw Riesman's work as a dire extension of the Frankfurt School's examination of how mass culture was a threat to individuality:

> In Riesman's work, the "other-directed" personality had no vision of the future, and no grasp on the past, since the power of the peer group sank its members into an eternal present. A culture upon which other-directed personalities had left a dominant mark threatened to be a culture without serious traditions, and without a serious sense of its own fate. It was a culture without history.[104]

Timothy Melley offered a similarly alarmist interpretation, suggesting that Riesman saw individual autonomy as going into eclipse and that other-directedness was a "national crisis of agency." In Melley's reading of Riesman, while inner-directed people were inspired by the best of society, other-directed people emulated the most common. Other-directedness was a race to the bottom.[105]

While Riesman was concerned about conformity, it is a mistake to treat him as a mass culture pessimist. He was dubious whether mass culture even existed, but he also saw opportunities within a culture of abundance that did not exist in scarcity. He saw great potential in the flexibility of other-directedness and the tolerance that it offered. Eugene Lunn argued that Riesman saw a society of consumption as offering potential for

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[103] Harold Rosenberg, "The Orgamerican Phantasy," in *The Tradition of the New* (1959; reprint, Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1982), 273–74.

[104] Shakesby, "Redeeming America," 147–49. Robert W. Witkin pointed out that Adorno was also quite familiar with Riesman's inner- and other-directed models. Witkin saw Riesman's work as more "pragmatic and less intellectually encumbered" than Adorno's own effort, but nevertheless complementary. In Witkin's description, Riesman's inner-directed person was able to maintain distance from his social structure, which afforded him maneuverability. Consumerism, however, undermined individuality, for consumption was guided by the behaviour of others whom the individual compared to himself. The goal in consumption was to neither generate envy in others nor self-loathing in oneself. When Adorno criticized pseudo-culture, the other-directed person was his model. Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture*, 17–21.

[105] Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 50.

"cultural and psychological self-cultivation." It was in the diversity of consumption—cultural pluralism—that virtue was located. Still, Lunn found that Riesman's "bland embrace of the pluralist defense of technocratic democracy" ignored the foundational question of the basis for this new society of leisure. The unwillingness to consider "the realities of economic concentration and ideological constraints in cultural *production*," Lunn said, left a large hole in the liberals' analysis. The key point here is that Riesman rejected models that emphasized a totalizing force that left consumers corrupting dopes or passive dupes. His pluralism was rooted in skepticism, and if labeling him an optimist goes too far, certainly calling him a mass culture pessimist is also misplaced. In this more neutral, detached stance, Riesman stood apart even from most of his liberal colleagues.[106]

To consensus liberals, the problem with the mass culture debate had less to do with mass culture's supposed malignancy than with the tone and assumptions of the critics, left and right. When Edward Shils wrote about mass culture, it was not as an affirmative theorist, but as one who despaired at the debate. The desire to minimize conflict is what drew Shils to take aim at the mass culture pessimists.[107]

"[T]here is a feeling of consternation and bewilderment, deliberate complacency, guilty enthusiasm and apologetic curiosity about the phenomenon of mass culture," Shils began his review of Bernard Rosenberg's and David Manning White's landmark anthology, *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (1957). Most critics of mass culture, he argued, were either non-orthodox Marxists (e.g., the Frankfurt scholars) or no

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[106] Eugene Lunn, "Beyond 'Mass Culture': The Lonely Crowd, the Uses of Literacy, and the Postwar Era," *Theory and Society* 19, no. 1 (February 1990): 78–80 [emphasis in original]; and Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures*, 127–34.

[107] Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang found Shils' attack on the mass culture critics "mildly puzzling" in its vehemence. They attributed the reason (or at least partially so) to the dominance of consensus liberalism and sense of unity. After two decades of depression and war, the critique on American society during a period of success and tranquility just felt wrong-headed. Lang and Engel Lang, "Mass Society, Mass Culture, and Mass Communication," 1001.

longer considered themselves Marxists (e.g., Greenberg, Macdonald), yet "Marxism has left a formative imprint on their thought about mass culture. Their earlier economic criticism of capitalistic society has been transformed into a moral and cultural criticism of the large scale industrial society." Where they once declared capitalist society oppressive and exclusionary to the many—something difficult to argue in the postwar economic boom—they now argued that the cultural life of that same majority was vulgar, numbing, and uninspiring. Once, economic structures were seen as the great evil that held back the lives of the masses, but now the aesthetic qualities of society were to blame. This, Shils argued, was the "indissoluble residue of their Marxism."[108] Both former Marxists and non-orthodox Marxists merged in their rejection of the masses as a positive force:

> Now they are affronted by the waywardness of the mass of the population in whom they once thought they found the chief agent and the greatest beneficiary of progress. That section of the population from which they expected heroic action on behalf of great far-distant goals has turned out to be interested in wasting its time in self-indulgent and foolish pleasures. … Those classes from whom intellectuals expected a heroic awareness of grandiose events and an eagerness to participate in them, concern themselves at best with the routine philistine life of bourgeois politics, and often not even with that. Instead of high aspirations they immerse themselves in their immediate situations or in cultural creations which are either only slight extensions of their private situations or else wholly unrealistic dream-worlds. Those from whom it was believed a hitherto hidden appreciation of the sublime and the beautiful would emerge are, on the contrary, attracted by the trivial, the sensational, and the gruesome.

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[108] Shils, "Daydreams and Nightmares," 588–90. Shils treated Macdonald as both a former Marxist and an ally of the Frankfurt interpretation. He was not alone in this. Rosenberg, in his introductory essay to *Mass Culture*, slotted Macdonald and Greenberg with radicals like Irving Howe, revealing the confusing and/or overlapping terrain in the debate. Bernard Rosenberg, "Mass Culture in America," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, eds. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (1957; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1964), 3–4.

The obsession with mass culture, Shils argued, was akin to a spurned lover who once saw only beauty but now only blemishes, yet the ardor still burned.[109]

Where these critical evaluations of mass culture went awry, Shils suggested, was that they rested on a golden-age view of past societies. The modern man was contrasted with his equivalent of past eras and always found wanting, doomed by "romanticism dressed up in the language of sociology, psychoanalysis and existentialism." In their analysis of contemporary man, these critics constructed a figure of utter alienation, spiritually barren, depersonalized and transmogrified into machine. So disillusioned, the modern man could find only temporary relief in the narcotic of the cinema, dance hall, or television set. It was the obsession with the infinite horizon of human perfection, as well as an inbred aversion to the present society, that kept these critics from realizing cultural gains for society as a whole. In a much-quoted passage, Shils stated, "The root of the trouble lies not in mass culture but in the intellectuals themselves. The seduction and corruption of intellectuals are not new, although it is true that mass culture is a new opportunity for such degradation. Intellectuals are not required to read comic strips and then to blame others for doing so."[110]

The anxiety of the pessimists—that high culture and/or civilization was in danger—was unwarranted. The prime beneficiaries of modern life were the middle and lower classes who enjoyed greater leisure time, less physically demanding work, rising

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[109] Ibid., 591, 593. Lazarsfeld and Merton made a similar suggestion in a 1948 essay, where they suggested fears of mass culture were tied to a sense of betrayal. After having advocated to better the lives of workers, those same workers responded by listening to the radio and going to the movies. Lazarsfeld and Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," 460. One New York Intellectual, Alfred Kazin, conceded that Shils was correct, stating "the ex-Marxists adore the subject, 'mass culture,' because it gives them a chance to show that the people were wrong, not themselves." Quoted in Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 156.

[110] Shils, "Daydreams and Nightmares," 596–97, 606.

affluence, increased literacy, and tolerance for more hedonistic impulses. This only seemed alarming because in the past superior culture was so clearly predominate. There would always be the temptation for the talented to pursue commercialized culture, yet all around there was evidence of individuals resisting temptation and nobly pursuing lives as scholars, artists, scientists, and educators. Commercial culture simply did not necessarily assault the superior by depriving it of an audience, especially when there were still ample non-commercial venues that promoted the superior, and even these had become institutionalized.[111]

The nature of mass society, Shils argued, was not alienation from society, but integration of the previously excluded and uncultured. Modernization was about people from the margins relocating toward the centre in full participation.[112] Shils asserted that "[a]n important feature of that society is the diminished sacredness of authority, the reduction in the awe it evokes and in the charisma attributed to it. ... tradition continues to exert influence, but it becomes more open to divergent interpretations, and these frequently lead to divergent courses of action." This "dispersion of charisma from center outward" had meant an expansion of individuality. This individuality, he argued, was defined by openness to new experiences and sensitivity to others. In short, "Mass society has liberated the cognitive, appreciative, and moral capacities of individuals."[113]

Shils' pluralism, however, betrayed some sympathy to Macdonald's own perspective. Shils saw three levels of quality, measured by aesthetic, intellectual, and moral standards: superior or refined culture; mediocre culture; and brutal culture.

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[111] Edward Shils, "Mass Society and Its Culture," *Daedalus* 89, no. 2 (Spring 1960): 293–93, 304–07. Reprinted in Norman Jacobs, ed. *Culture For the Millions? Mass Media in Modern Society* (1971; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 1–27. Conservatives like José Ortega y Gasset or Bernard Iddings Bell would not have disputed this point, only its social implications.

[112] Ibid., 288. Integration, of course, is precisely what the Frankfurt scholars saw as the source of alienation.

[113] Ibid., 289–90.

Superior culture did not refer to social status of either producer or consumer, but "only to their truth and beauty" (i.e., an objective and intrinsic quality). Mediocre culture was less original than and more imitative of superior culture, regardless of creator aims. It might also include newer genres that had not yet reached the status of superior culture. Brutal culture was defined by the most elementary of expression, minimal symbolism, and little depth, subtlety, or sensitivity. It might include forms found in superior or mediocre culture (e.g., music, novels, visual arts), but also included spectacles and games found only in the brutal form. Unlike the pessimists, Shils did not condemn mediocre or brutal culture. The mediocre was not subtle or profound, but it was spontaneous and honest, often fun and earnestly moral. Brutal culture (which he acknowledged as kitsch) was ridiculous, "[y]et it represents aesthetic sensibility and aesthetic aspiration, untutored, rude, and deformed." The brutal represented an awakening in a part of society that had previously no such expression or production. This was no endorsement of brutal culture, but a positing, perhaps, of an evolutionary model, as well as a chiding critics of kitsch for expecting too much, too soon from the masses.[114]

Eugene Lunn characterized Shils (along with fellow liberal Daniel Bell) as a "Mandarin optimist" for his hopes that eventually the high culture advocates would become less antagonistic and more willing to educate and elevate the masses. Yet, in Lunn's view, cultural pluralists like Shils asserted "a functionally conservative defense of consumer culture," one that denied both media manipulation and consumer passivity. Despite his rather snide dismissal of mass culture critics, Shils nevertheless shared a

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[114] Ibid., 291–92, 294. Shils was not the only figure arguing for patience. Poet Louise Bogan argued the same point in asserting "first, that 'mass' or 'vulgar' influences are only partially debasing, since they have in them elements of healthy coarse vigor without which any culture becomes either arid or effete; and second, that a continual seeping down and through the culture at large, from 'high' formal levels is, at present, an active tendency." "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 3," 563–64.

belief in a hierarchy of culture, and one where value was intrinsic to the item itself. The point of Shils' pluralist stance was to reject the pessimism of the critics. Yes, he said, the mediocre and brutal could be quite awful, but it could potentially improve. Yes, the taste of the working class was often wretched, but they were new to cultural consumption, and with help from their social betters they, too, could improve. It was a patronizing pluralism. High culture was in no immediate danger any more than it ever had been, and so accepting cultural differences was a sensible response.[115]

If Arthur Schlesinger was a self-described liberal realist and David Riesman and Edward Shils were somewhat optimistic pluralists, then journalist Vance Packard was the consensus liberal as pessimist. Like Dwight Macdonald and Irving Howe, Packard was troubled by the state of postwar American life, regarding it as too held under the sway of unnecessary consumption and a congealing social stratification. Despite surface similarities with radicals, Packard did not see this as the true nature of American society, and unlike the conservatives would have, he did not see cultural hierarchies and segregation as a positive development. His vision of a simpler America unmarred by conflict and manipulation, then, separated him from other critics of postwar life.[116]

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[115] Lunn, "Beyond 'Mass Culture'," 63; and Shils, "Mass Society and Its Culture," 293–98. Prominent liberal intellectual Lionel Trilling, too, advised caution and hope: "Although mass culture is no doubt a very considerable threat to high culture, there is a countervailing condition in the class I have been describing. As for mass culture itself, one never knows, of course, what may happen in any kind of cultural situation. It is possible that mass culture, if it is not fixed and made static, might become a better thing than it now is, that it might at tract genius and discover that it has an inherent law of development." "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 1," 322. A few years later, Arnold Hauser argued that "[t]he products of mass culture not only ruin people's taste, make them unwilling to think for themselves, educate them in conformity," but also exposed audiences to a world they had never seen before. The masses never had pristine tastes to be corrupted in the first place, so Hauser counseled patience. Producers of mass culture were not "devilish" conspirators seeking to dull consumers' minds, they only sought to make a profit. In time, mass tastes might improve, and producers would respond in kind. Arnold Hauser, "Popular Art and Folk Art," *Dissent* 5 (Summer 1958): 231–32.

[116] The other prominent liberal pessimist of the period was William H. Whyte, Jr., whose book *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956) detailed the perverting of individualism and "scientism" (that is, rationalization) in the workplace. The intent of managers, Whyte argued, was

In *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), Packard accused the advertising industry of diabolical manipulation, of using advanced psychological techniques to peer into citizens' brains and implant desires to consume products that they did not actually need. Prior to Packard, the more common opinion of advertising was that it was an "endless con, all half-truths and hyperbole and outright lies."[117] Packard changed all that. Contemporary advertising, he charged, sought to "channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences. Typically these efforts take place beneath our level of awareness; so that the appeals which move us are often, in a sense, 'hidden.' The result is that many of us are being influenced and manipulated, far more than we realize, in the patterns of our everyday lives." Big Brother made his money on Madison Avenue.[118]

Like Mills, Packard argued that America had shifted from being "maker-minded to market-minded," which necessarily meant that consumption drove the economy. Despite the rising standard of living for so many, Packard worried about what was required to keep this kind economy running. His investigation revealed to him that manufacturers and retailers were being advised by experts in psychology to become "merchants of discontent" who practiced sophisticated methods of stimulating wants.[119]

Using motivational research, marketers pursued deceptive investigations of people's deepest levels of consciousness—where the subject was unaware of their

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utopian, seeking to create a perfectly efficient workforce, but the result was to stifle creativity and erode individualism. There was a certain overlap between Whyte and Mills, but Whyte saw the problem not as total but political, a misapplication of power that worked counter to the goals of all involved. He believed that participants only seemed to conform, that they were only playing a role so as to rise within the corporate structure. As such, he urged a sensible and reasoned rebellion to restore individuality and creativity, to change the corporation from within.

[117] Mark Crispin Miller, "Introduction," in Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957; reprint, New York: Ig Publishing, 2007), 11–12.

[118] Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, 31–32.

[119] Ibid., 42–44.

feelings, yet led by them—and turned this information into more effective techniques to encourage consumption. Packard quoted a consultant who stated that the aim was to "create an illogical situation" by developing an emotional bond between the consumer and a product that was largely identical to any number of competitors' products. The goal was to guide the consumer into seeing distinction in an identical group.[120]

Even as individual autonomy was being compromised by an alliance of psychologists, advertisers, and manufacturers, Packard saw American society being restructured on the basis of consumption. Where society had once been broken down into classes based on wealth—i.e., their producing power—Packard highlighted the work of socio-anthropologist Lloyd Warner, who reclassified American life into six classes based on consumption and sociability. Appealing to status consciousness, of moving up (and avoiding moving down) based on taste, was an effective means of influencing consumption habits.[121] However, with so much manipulation going on, was taste genuine, or was it being manufactured?

Packard concluded that the advertising techniques and precepts of the consumer economy were fundamentally immoral. What was moral about probing into the deepest desires and fears, as well as sense of charity and fair play, to encourage people to spend more? What was moral about promoting an attitude of wastefulness to encourage unnecessary purchases? This problem, Packard stated, spoke to a "larger moral problem of working out a spiritually tolerable relationship between a free people and an economy capable of greater and greater productivity." The American economy, he said, was

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[120] Ibid., 47–61, 66.

[121] Ibid., 119–24. Earlier yet, Russell Lynes saw a similar shift in distinction from production to consumption, with concomitant status anxiety over what purchasing habits said to one's peers. See Russell Lynes, "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," *Harper's* 198 (February 1949): 19–28 and Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* (New York: Harper, 1954).

fundamentally sound and did not require such deviousness to function. The "right to privacy in our minds," regardless of whether that privacy promotes rational or irrational behaviour, was paramount.[122]

Despite considerable popularity with the general public, Packard won little support amongst the intelligentsia. Dwight Macdonald, for example, consigned Packard to middlebrow hell for "summarizing the more sensational findings of the academic sociologists, garnishing the results with solemn moralizing, and serving it up under catchy titles." According to Packard's biographer Daniel Horowitz, the New York Intellectuals used "the language of purity and danger to separate themselves from Packard." His sentimentality for small-town life and virtues set him apart from the skepticism, cosmopolitanism, and urbanism of the Intellectuals. They were gatekeepers and he was a barbarian. Still, there was some irony in Packard's work being declared kitsch scholarship, for Packard, too, was critiquing mass culture's spread and influence.[123]

Timothy Melley (among others) pointed to Packard's concern about the eclipsing of individual will, that mysterious figures were engaging social engineering without the public being aware of what was happening to them. Indeed, Melley compared Packard's work to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's *Masters of Deceit* (1958), which sought to describe the malevolence of Communism upon American life. According to Melley, both Hoover and Packard treated social control and ideology as "a mysterious and magical process, activated instantaneously and capable of utterly disabling rational self-control." Instead of complexity and competing influences at work, "a simple mechanism" turned

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[122] Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, 233–40.
[123] Macdonald, "Masscult & Midcult," 54; and Daniel Horowitz, *Vance Packard & American Social Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 195–97.

people into automatons.[124] Where Hoover saw a foreign ideology and government at work, Packard identified the totalitarian impulse as coming from the business community.

According to Horowitz, Packard was troubled by the shift from a producer psychology to a consumer one. He saw the shift to an economy driven by consumption as compromising a society of merit, of individualism, and of nonconformity. He believed that it encouraged an indulgent life that weakened national purpose, that it hindered the sense of community he saw in earlier times. Like the conservatives and liberals, Packard saw the problem as rooted in affluence not scarcity, meaning that these were moral problems, not material ones. As such, these were not structural issues but problems that could be solved by political will and individual resistance.[125]

Packard's account was striking for the degree of overlap with both radical and conservative critics, demonstrating the cross-pollination of the mass culture debate. Like the radicals, he saw a manipulation that compromised individuality, as marketing strategies sought to capture a large swath of the buying public and bring them under a preferred model of consumption. Seeing a widespread consumer culture that invited the average person to become a "dictator of taste" also fit with the conservative narrative. But Packard was undeniably a liberal, for he saw nothing fundamentally wrong with the "real America." What was required was for people to assert their rights to privacy and to rediscover an earlier civic-minded spirit that respected difference and rewarded initiative.

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[124] Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy*, 2–5. For more on Packard and the threat to the individual from commercial interests, see Charles R. Acland, *Swift Viewing: The Popular Life of Subliminal Influence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 106–07; Horowitz, *Vance Packard & American Social Criticism*, 93–95; and Nicolas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 201.

[125] Horowitz, *Vance Packard & American Social Criticism*, 93–95; and Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939–1979* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 111–20.

If his solution seemed more wishful than truly prescriptive, that, too, fit well within the mass culture debate.

The liberal position, then, rejected the radical and conservative arguments that America was, or was quickly approaching, mass society status. Mass culture was a possibility, but not an inevitable reaction to modern life (industrialization, mass communication and participation, complexity). The means of avoiding massification, to liberals, was not in a revolutionary change or a retreat into past hierarchies, but a commitment to dominant values of pluralism, individualism, and consensus. The pleasures of modern life—freedom, leisure, consumer goods, participation—were secured by pluralism, which dispersed power through institutions or communities of difference, and a technocratic elite whose expertise helped minimize conflict through rational applications of power. Modern society meant opportunity for those who chose to take advantage, and while this might lead to conformity or aesthetically poor choices on the part of non-elites, the evidence was unpersuasive that civilization or high culture was being threatened. At the very least, the discussion not need be so antagonistic and hysterical. The exception to this guardedly sanguine view was Packard, whose analysis was closer to the pessimistic critics, even though Packard's solution and understanding of the nature of the American character placed him with the liberals. Yet, as Mills argued, liberal pluralism, with its belief in a "vital centre" and an "end of ideology"—that is, the end of grand, mobilizing ideologies that saw progress through conflict—along with a limited political imagination that saw no option between Communism and liberalism, created a consensus that allowed no viable opposition, and was far less diverse and

accommodating than it saw itself to be.[126] While this was partly due to Cold War anxiety, of maintaining unity against Stalinism, it also spoke to an unstated uncertainty, even mistrust, of the common man. As Schlesinger argued, there was a Hitler or a Stalin within everyone, and it was necessary to keep that monster chained and buried. Pluralism and consensus were the vehicle for stifling the totalitarian within.

In a derisive essay entitled "The Herd of Independent Minds" (1948), Harold Rosenberg took aim at his fellow intellectuals who fretted about mass culture. In making a fetish of the small audience (i.e., their own peers) as evidence of genuine worth, these figures wrapped themselves up in the garb of the alienated artist. "Nothing could be more vulgar," he said, "in the literal meaning of the term, than whining about separation from the mass. That being oneself and not others should be deplored as a condition of misery is the most unambiguous sign of the triumph in the individual of the ideology of mass culture over spiritual independence. It is a renunciation of everything that has been gained during the past centuries through the liberation of mankind from the authoritarian community." The low-circulation literary magazine in which these individuals published, Rosenberg said, did not avoid being mass culture because it sought to speak to other high-minded writers. Those who argued against mass culture only served to position themselves in "small-mass perspectives." American intellectuals were resistant to facing up to this, as they carried a nostalgia for esoteric art and elite virtue: "As individuals they see themselves in terms of what they have in common with others; in the mass they sense themselves despondently as individuals. Thus they cannot act creatively either for the

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[126] See Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 18–19. K.A. Cuordileone similarly argued that a Manichean quality, of Western goodness versus Soviet evil, inhibited self-criticism of liberalism's own shortcomings. K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 33. On the liberal hostility to ideology, see Bell, *The End of Ideology*, especially "America as a Mass Society" (21–36) and "The End of Ideology in the West" (369–78); and Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 108–09.

individual or for the mass."[127] The act of calling for or elaborating a common experience necessarily entailed a mass cultural impulse; calling for "how it really is" was merely a call for a "better" mass culture.

Later evaluations of these critics continued this line of criticism. Richard Kostelanetz, for example, argued that the New York Intellectuals took the form of a "mob posture," whereby they were "an embattled minority … the last independents, even while screaming in chorus." Only they were qualified to evaluate each other, and even the most ardent of opponents within the group would band together to stamp out the critical outsider. This insularity, Kostelanetz argued, deeply compromised the quality of their analysis, making it less "intellectual history" than the "social history of 'intellectuals,' in addition to an awful lot of journalistic make-work."[128]

Grant Webster concurred, arguing that as individuals they seemed incapable of thinking of themselves as anything but an extension of the group, that their personal opinion was that they were obliged to speak for those of their generation or "some other impressive but fictitious entity." Even though the Intellectuals self-identified as avant-garde individualists, they never demonstrated a clear understanding of what that meant, nor did they apply the principles to their own lives. Their championing of the avant-garde reflected more a hostility toward the masses than appreciation of what avant-garde might mean. The appeal of the avant-garde was both its exclusivity and self-professed vanguard status. The irony of this was that the work they exalted was now distinctly derrière-garde, having made its greatest impact decades prior, while their favoured authors—Eliot, Pound, Joyce—were political conservatives. Quite bluntly, the New York Intellectuals

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[127] Ibid., 245, 248.
[128] Richard Kostelanetz, *The End of Intelligent Writing: Literary Politics in America* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974), 46–51.

were fundamentally conservative because they did not promote anything new. They sought to make avant-garde into orthodoxy.[129]

The point of citing this criticism is not to suggest hypocrisy or question the intellect of the mass culture critics. Rather, it is to argue that these intelllectuals suffered a profound myopia that limited their ability to make a more dispassionate assessment of what they regarded as mass culture. Despite self-identification with individuality and critical evaluation, their criticism rested as much on their own status as high-culture intellectuals, of confirming their belonging to that group and, necessarily, who did not belong. If the concept of a mass society or its cultural byproducts were a threat, it was as a threat to their privileged status. This is not to dismiss out of hand the many varieties of their critique of mass society, but to highlight how their analysis was engineered to arrive at a prescribed endpoint—confirming the validity of the radical or conservative or pluralist position, their status as spokespersons for that position, and their superiority to the mass.[130] As a group, critics may have rejected mass culture a priori as debased, but what was actually being rejected was what it represented—the eclipse of elite cultural guardians and interpreters.[131] An ignorance of the new forms and/or a belief that the new

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[129] Grant Webster, *The Republic of Letters: A History of Postwar American Literary* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 225–44. See also James Burkhart Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968), 282; and Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 82.

[130] Henry Rabassiere observed in 1956 that hostility to mass culture had itself become a mass cultural fad: "Conformism has come around full circle: one dares no longer be 'conformist,' enjoy any product of the entertainment industry, see differences between the two major parties, admit opinions which might be shared by the multitude. Those who cannot possibly be radicals of the left develop at least a radical or 'new' conservatism; these non-conformists in reverse usually get along fine with the older variety of non-conformists in forward gear. In friendly competition, the two élites are trying to outdo each other at deriding the 'mass.'" Henry Rabassiere, "Some Aspects of Mass Culture," *Dissent* 3 (Summer 1956): 331.

[131] Neil Jumonville made the point that losing their status as interpreters made mass culture suspect to intellectuals. Art was supposed to be difficult, and so the average person required an expert for advice and explanation. Removing the expert from equation necessarily meant that mass culture was not art.

forms encouraged a cultural democracy that limited the need for authorities meant that the postwar commercial culture was a strange and hostile land to intellectuals who planted their flag with high modernism. That they refused to treat mass culture as possessing political and aesthetic value—that high culture was the lone domain of serious intellectual work and popular culture an intellectual desert—is one of the key planks to take forward into subsequent chapters.

Another notable common element among the radical and conservative critics was the significance of the conditions of production. True art, they argued, required autonomous individuality, an artist freed from entanglements, especially that of the market. Like Marx's concept of the commodity fetish, whereby the long chain of exploited labour was forever baked into every commodity, so too was the cultural product permanently corrupted by the circumstances of its manufacture. Formula, division of labour, and advertising all damned and doomed the mass cultural item in the eyes of critics. Meaning and value, in this view, were embedded within the artifact at the moment of its creation, through the means of creation, not via the active process of interpretation and interaction between author, text, and audience. This excessive bias towards conception and the birthing process justified rejecting the baby.

A final point of commonality among the intellectuals cited here (although less so amongst the liberals because they were less likely to discuss it) was a hierarchy of production over consumption. Mass society was seen, in part, as one where the consumer identity had supplanted the producer (or was in the process of doing so), for joining the market was one means of denoting the arrival of the middle and lower classes. Serving this new and large market required the kind of debased production that so vexed critics,

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Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 183.

for the sheer numbers involved necessitated mass production and distribution techniques. Consumption was treated as either a passive activity or an unleashing of untutored poor taste. What else could explain such awful choices? As argued above, the circumstances of production meant that consumption of those artifacts was a harmful activity. From the perspective of critics, accepting simplistic and mechanical explanations for consumption allowed them to turn the real focus of the mass culture critique to its impact on producers (which is to say, fellow elites). That was the dynamic being altered by mass culture, and decidedly for the worse. One can speculate, too, that this emphasis on the impact on creators had self-serving motivations, too, for these intellectuals were not just champions of high culture artists. Their primary identity, after all, was as producers of works of criticism and scholarship. Mass culture was perceived as a threat to these true artists and the true intellectuals. The consumer was more vessel than genuine participant in this process. Thus the emphasis in the many variations of the mass culture critique were largely productivist.[132] By not appreciating the "life" of a cultural item after it had left its maker's hands, these critics necessarily rigged the analysis to show the damage done to artists like themselves and their circle.

The mass culture critique, then, was limited by practitioners who shared an interest in elevating themselves and their work over what they understood to be competition, and so, contrary to their assertions, they did not investigate sincerely

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[132] In the editorial introduction to *Partisan Review*'s "Our Culture and Our Country," it was stated that "mass culture not only weakens the position of the artist and the intellectual profoundly by separating him from his natural audience, but it also removes the mass of people from the kind of art which might express their human and aesthetic needs." It was telling that mass culture's primary impact was on the artist and intellectual, with the consumer consigned to also-ran status. And again, in the list of questions posed to the participants, question two begins, "Must the American intellectual and writer adapt himself to mass culture? If he must, what forms can his adaptation take?" Even amongst a mostly liberal group who sought to downplay mass culture's impact, that impact, seemingly, was largely to be felt on themselves. "Our Culture and Our Country, Part 1," 285.

popular culture or its consumers. In doing so, they prevented themselves from seeing a far more varied and dynamic cultural life occurring on the streets, in the suburbs, the schools, and the movie theatres.

CHAPTER 3
The Denatured Critic: The Paperback and the Assault on Cultural Hierarchy

> The success of the cheap paperbound book is the most dramatic influence upon book publishing since the invention of printing. It is the paperback book that has made book publishing and authorship stable, profitable, and altogether desirable enterprises.
>
> Ralph Daigh, editorial director, Gold Medal Books[1]

> The book trade denatures novels in an effort to sell more of them, and publishers excuse themselves on the grounds that they cannot give the people "better" than the people want. Publishers simplify their wares, invest them with palatable attitudes, and make them easily digestible; then they advertise them as vital and life-giving. But they cannot have it both ways; a novel's vitality lies in its being complex enough to approximate life.
>
> Albert Van Nostrand, *The Denatured Novel*[2]

Marketing a profitable paperback book had never been a problem of content until a profitable paperback could be marketed. The difficulty had always been a matter of distribution and retailers. However much nineteenth-century guardians of virtue hectored at the moral erosion embedded within dime novels, the greater threat to those softcover publishers was always copyright laws and postal rates whose fluctuation determined profitability or bankruptcy. It was not until 1939 that an entirely novel and stable approach to distribution and sales was devised. Pocket Books began shipping paperback reprints by truck to over one hundred thousand comic book and magazine retailers throughout the nation. Marketing on such a vast scale, even on the slimmest of profit margins, established the long-sought foundation for softcover books.

Yet, what was a technical question related to manufacture and distribution unleashed changes in readership numbers and composition, which in turn dramatically

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[1] Ralph Daigh, *Maybe You Should Write a Book* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), 15.
[2] Albert V. Van Nostrand, *The Denatured Novel* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 202.

influenced content. Just as urbanization and universal education brought large numbers into the market economy, and thereby helped drive changes in cultural content, expanding the retail locations for books and bringing the masses into that particular market elasticized the roster of published writers and diversified the content available. And, just as so-called mass culture attracted the philippics of intellectuals, so too, specifically, did the paperback. As with other forms of mass culture, the paperback was said to debase tastes, elevate marketing over creativity, encourage formula and conformity, and, in general, diminish "true" literature.

This chapter traces the rise of the paperback in the 1940s and 1950s with an eye toward critics of the form. Of especial interest is the interplay between distribution techniques with production and content. If critics found the content of most paperbacks appalling, many named as root cause the distribution techniques that empowered the masses—the non-reader, they harrumphed—and their uncultured and untutored interests. It was the opening of a Pandora's box, where publishers' development of an untapped market led to the alienation of the novel itself. Less acknowledged was that the paperback opened the door for a wide array of new writers and, more so, greater opportunities to earn a living as a writer. Even less acknowledged than that was that this new era of publishing weakened the influence of cultural gatekeepers ever more. What this chapter seeks to demonstrate, then, is both the expansion of readership and authorship in the first two decades of the modern paperback, but also the anxiety produced in critics because the format admitted entry into the world of readers the decidedly non-elite. And, most important of all, this chapter aims to highlight how this cultural expansion and refocus, in an era noted for conformity, was driven by a dynamic capitalist pursuit of new markets.

The earliest American paperbound books were from the Boston Society for the

Diffusion of Knowledge in 1829, spurring numerous entrants in the paperback trade. There was considerable competition by the 1840s, as a wide variety of publishers released paperbacks, such as Park Benjamin's fifty-page, 5" x 8.5" pamphlet novels. By 1845, however, the market was flooded and new postal regulations made mailing softcover books less profitable. Generally speaking, the ebb and flow of nineteenth-century softcover publishing was dependent upon contemporary postal regulations. Whenever rates were lowered for books, the market grew; when rates were raised, profitability was compromised and publishers went bankrupt. The first dime novels—one-hundred-page, 4" x 6" pamphlets—appeared during the Civil War for soldiers' consumption. Beadle and Adams published four million dime novels by 1865, with individual titles selling between 35,000 and 80,000 copies. Another successful format was the "cheap library," which were 8" x 11" pamphlets of sixteen or thirty-two pages that sold for a nickel or a dime.[3]

As in the next century, methods of distribution and production technology were key. At an 1855 celebration of the Association of New York Publishers to honour their most popular writers, for example, the publishers credited rising sales not to popular fiction, expansion of schooling/literacy, a maturing economy, or even the skill of the authors being feted, but the industrialization of printing. It was a technology-driven boom, they said. By the 1870s, a new rotary press made softcover production even cheaper. Concurrent to this, the American News Company, founded in 1864 and holding a near monopoly until 1904, ensured a reliable form of distribution of printed works.

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[3] Piet Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks: A Visual History of the Paperback*, trans. Josh Pachter (London: Virgin Books, 1981), 5, 13; Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (July 1954): 211–12; and Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: New York: Verso, 1987), 11–12, 19.

Weak copyright protection further assisted the entry of new publishers in search of material to market. This lasted until the early 1890s, when a new copyright law killed many smaller firms. Other developments, such as railroad distribution, artificial lighting, and affordable eyeglasses both facilitated and encouraged reading among non-elites.[4]

The capitalization of publishing introduced the concept of the hack writer, one who was capable of following orders and writing quickly and steadily. Cheap fiction publishers competed for the services of the hacks. Because the industry did not publicize its writers, but instead trademarked characters, writers could be replaced easily enough without confusing the audience. The very concept struck against that of the independent and inspired writer. The purpose of publication to that point was to promote an idealized and supposedly natural relationship between author and reader, where the author's intent was privileged. In late nineteenth-century America, however, the editor as intermediary became the key figure, the person said to understand readers' needs and purposes, and then massage that kind of book from authors. The eventual shift from author to reader, producer to consumer, then, was evident if embryonic in the nineteenth century.[5]

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the dime novel begat the pulp magazine, a genre of exotic and crime adventure tales. By the 1920s and 1930s, some publishers experimented with mail-order paperback pulp reprints. Another significant effort was Bonibooks, which had stiff paper covers, were well produced, consisted of reprints, and enjoyed high editorial standards. At fifty cents, however, they were not a

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[4] Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 19, 39–40; Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 13; Ronald J. Zboray, "Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation," in *Reading in America: Literature & Social History*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 180–95; and Hayden Carruth, "The Phenomenon of the Paperback," *Perspectives USA* 15 (Spring 1956): 194.

[5] Janice Radway, *A Feeling For Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 132–36; and Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 19–20.

commercial success in the weak economy of the 1930s. In 1932–33, the National Home Library Foundation in Washington, DC, released the Jacket Library, consisting of fifteen titles of classics and light classics, and in 1937 Mercury Publications established American Mercury Books. Modern Age Books, also dating from 1937, released Blue Seal Books, Gold Seal Books, and Red Seal Books, which eventually merged as Seal Books. Hardcover publishers A.L. Burt and Grosset and Dunlap also experimented with reprints in this period, before Pocket Books arrived on the scene.[6]

The launch of the Book of the Month Club in 1926 was notable for prefacing some of the critical anxiety that paperbacks generated a few decades later. Like the paperbacks to come, the success of the Book of the Month Club was in its production, distribution, and marketing techniques. Its success was shocking, Janice Radway claimed, because it

> posed a significant threat to the essential concepts and forms structuring the bourgeois literary realm, including those defining the book, the author, the reader, and the proper relations among them. More fundamentally, [founder Harry] Scherman's strategies threatened to rework the very notion of culture itself as a thing autonomous and transcendent, set apart and timeless, defined by its very difference and distance from the market. Scherman's distribution operation, as its much-imitated name suggests, instead envisioned culture as a material, time-bound commodity, topical, ephemeral, and, above all, destined for circulation.[7]

Scherman understood that possessing "important" books provided cultural reassurance to a growing middle class who sought validation. The Club's success lay in solving the problem of marketing a product widely without harming its perceived

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[6] Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 15–17; Carruth, "The Phenomenon of the Paperback," 195; and The Reminiscences of Leon Shimkin and Freeman Lewis (28 December 1955), 6, in the Columbia Center for Oral History Collection.

[7] Radway, *A Feeling For Books*, 128.

exclusive value. It was a conflict between new means of production and consumption versus older principles of artistic creation. As Radway argued, the purpose of the Club (beyond economic) was to convert culture into an accessible and affordable form. The referees that the Club employed assured members that they were receiving genuine culture and all the connotations of upward mobility they believed culture embodied.[8]

Critics believed that the marketing and distribution of these books, Radway wrote, "threatened to obliterate the fundamental distinction that underwrote this entire system of privilege, that is, the distinction between the material and immaterial, between the particularities of the body and the universality of the intellect, in short between the natural and the cultural." Making culture something both discounted and publicly marketed devalued its greater significance. Anyone with the funds—limited funds, no less—could counterfeit themselves as a person of means and respect. The Book of the Month Club exposed cultural authority as a social relationship, and traumatized critics who realized that a notable segment of the population had found alternate means of seeking literature, enlightenment, and status. At the same time, these critics could not identify with the population whose interests they claimed to speak for and defend. They relied on that difference and perceived superiority. Thus they demonized both the middle class and the institutions that sought to peddle fraudulent cultural competence.[9]

What these precursors suggest is that well before the advent of mass cultural production of softcover books, the driving forces—print technology and distribution—and critical hostility to market forces that compromised elite cultural authority were in place. At heart, the question revolved around who deserved to publish, read, and consider

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[8] Ibid.,168, 173.
[9] Ibid., 244–46, 258–59.

books. Technological development and business innovation, to the critics' dismay, was expanding that pool indiscriminately.

Inspired by the success of paperback operations in Europe (notably Penguin), Pocket Books was begun in 1939 by Robert Fair de Graff, along with Richard L. Simon, M. Lincoln Schuster, and Leon Shimkin of Simon & Schuster. Skeptics within the publishing industry did not think that Americans were sufficiently interested in reading to generate the raw sales to make a profit on 25-cent reprint books. De Graff convinced wary authors and publishers to take a lower royalty rate and reduced discounts to wholesalers and retailers. Using a cheaper gluing process in the binding and increasing print runs over that of hardcovers (tens of thousands versus thousands) reduced production costs. These concessions allowed Pocket Books to charge 25 cents for a book yet still achieve profit margins of as little as a half penny per book.[10] Such a methodology required selling books on a scale never before seen.

In its first year, Pocket Books shipped 1.5 million copies of thirty-four titles. At first, the company pursued traditional bookstores and department stores, but then expanded to newsstands owned by distributor American News Company, variety stores, and mail-order businesses. A key development in paperback publishing occurred in 1941, when Pocket Books received sales orders from four independent wholesale distributors (IDs). By the end of the year, some seven hundred IDs were distributing Pocket Books novels to one hundred thousand retailers. The use of magazine distribution was faster and more flexible than usual book distribution, but much more importantly it put Pocket

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[10] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 12–13, 31–33, 49–40; Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 215; and Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 20. For the early years of Pocket Books more generally, see Freeman Lewis, *A Brief History of Pocket Books, 1939–1967* (New York: Pocket Books, 1967).

Books on the magazine stands.[11] After Pocket Books' switched to IDs, ANC retaliated by asking pulp publisher Joseph Myers to start a line of books, Avon, for it to distribute. Initial Avon printings in 1942 were 50,000 copies per title, doubling by the mid-1940s. Any title that failed to sell 50,000 copies was quickly dropped from the Avon catalogue. Popular Library and Dell Books joined the field in 1942 and 1943, respectively. In 1945, these four companies printed 83 million copies of 112 titles. None of these immediate followers of Pocket Books pursued highbrow or "literary" books.[12]

The emergence of the paperback book was due to three inter-related factors: 1) high-speed presses that reduced manufacturing costs when printed in bulk; 2) a large catalogue of available books whose reprint rights could be purchased quite modestly; and 3) the use of a distribution and retail system employed by magazines rather than the standard bookstore model. All three components provided both the means and incentive for new publishers to enter the field and pursue—create, in fact—a previously ignored market, that of the consumer who regarded reading as a disposable and casual luxury.[13]

Although clearly important, the least interesting of these elements was the technological changes. One was the development of machines that could manufacture paper in huge rolls rather than sheets. Others included the high-speed rotary press, the creation of the perfect binding technique (i.e., using glue rather than sewing), development of linotype typesetting to replace that done by hand, and the establishment

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[11] Thomas L. Bonn, *Under Cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass-Market Paperbacks* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 36–41; Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 213; and Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 47.

[12] Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 213; Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 48–50, 93–95; Walter Albert, "Avon Books, 1941–Present," in *Mass Market Publishing in America*, ed. Allen Billy Crider (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), 18–19; and Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 31.

[13] Robert W. Frase, "Economic Trends in Trade Book Publishing," in Harold K. Guinzburg, Robert W. Frase, and Theodore Waller. *Books and the Mass Market* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1953), 32; and Clarence Petersen, *The Bantam Story: Thirty Years of Paperback Publishing* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 2.

of a flexible but durable laminated cover to better preserve the jacket. Without those improvements in means, publishers could not have lowered production costs sufficiently to market 25-cent books at a time when a hardcover book sold for $3.[14]

Up until the late 1940s, when the wealth potential of the reprint edition became impossible to ignore, the copyright holders of original works looked at these new editions as a risk-free means of extra cash from an otherwise dead title. The financial gamble rested entirely with the reprinter. The standard reprint contract paid to the copyright holder 1¢ per copy sold (this was normally the hardcover, or trade, publisher, which then arranged a split of some kind with the author). This rate covered the first 150,000 copies sold, after which a modest increase, perhaps to 1.4¢ or 1.5¢, was enacted on subsequent sales. The distributor usually received 4¢ per book and the retailer 5.5¢. This left 14.5¢ of each sale for the publisher, much of which was consumed by printing costs, specialized display racks for retailers, and in-house costs like the cover art. This meant that the reprint publisher's profit was often no greater than a penny (4%) per copy. Even selling out an initial print run of 150,000 copies resulted in only a $1,500 profit. The danger of poor title selection was evident in those early years, but so was the importance of cheap and available source material.[15]

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[14] Freeman Lewis, "Mass Market Paperbacks," in *What Happens in Book Publishing, 2nd ed.*, ed. Chandler B. Grannis (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), 379–81; Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 215–16; Shimkin and Lewis, 7; and Carruth, "The Phenomenon of the Paperback," 198.

[15] Frase, "Economic Trends in Trade Book Publishing," 32; Carruth, "The Phenomenon of the Paperback," 200; Frank Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Background* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1958), 101; and J.K. Lasser, "Lessons From the Paper Covers," *Bantam Book News Bulletin*, January 1951, New American Library Archive; MSS 070; Box 86; Folder 2808; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

Despite the seemingly slender profit margins, the reprint was a feast compared to the hardcover book. In 1951, the costs that went into $3 hardcover were broken down thusly: distribution, 42%; manufacturing, 23%; author royalties, 10.8%; editorial expenses, 12.3%; promotion, 10%; and warehousing, 2.3%. This left the publisher with a profit of .4% on each book sold. As discussed below, the relative absence of editorial, and to a lesser degree promotional, costs aided the reprinter greatly. See Frase, "Economic Trends in Trade Book Publishing," 28.

Distribution was the true key to the modern paperback's success. In the US, the dispersal of the reading public made it hard for bookshops to serve a large population profitably.[16] In eschewing the traditional bookstore methodology in favour of mimicking magazine distribution and retailing strategy, the paperback reached a wider customer base, and in embracing the idea of the short shelf life/high turnover, it both kept production high and created the impression of a vibrant trade. Pocket Books executive Leon Shimkin explained that the paperback would have foundered if not for the idea to bypass the bookstores in favour of magazine outlets:

> It called for the acceptance of a basic concept that what we were dealing with here was a hybrid. It was a book-magazine. It had the content of a book, the price of a magazine, the paper cover of a magazine. That led us, after much experimentation, to the logical adaptation of the distribution through the machinery available for delivering magazines.[17]

The distribution structure for magazines worked as follows. After a book was printed, it was shipped out by national distributors to the hundreds of regional and local wholesalers throughout the country. The wholesalers were responsible for delivering bundles of material—magazines, comics, paperbacks—to the retailers, who displayed the books on specially designed racks. These materials were sold on consignment to the retailer, and so unsold copies could be returned to the wholesaler. Neither wholesaler nor retailer had much, if any, say in what they received from the distributor, an issue of great concern when critics sought to locate blame for morally objectionable content.[18]

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[16] Carruth, "The Phenomenon of the Paperback," 196.
[17] Shimkin and Lewis, 11; and Lewis, "Mass Market Paperbacks," 382.
[18] Thomas L. Bonn, *Heavy Traffic & High Culture: New American Library as Literary Gatekeeper in the Paperback Revolution* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 169–70; Lewis, "Mass Market Paperbacks," 381; and House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 82d Cong., 2d sess., 1952, H. Rept. 2510, 18.

J.K. Lasser wrote in a trade magazine article that the paperback business was "a self-service operation, operating through retailers who neither know nor care about the product they are selling. All they seek is a satisfactory return for the space given the racks and books." Visibility on the racks might last less than month as new titles were constantly introduced, with only bestsellers expected to persist over a month. Vigilance over access to the racks was a vital ongoing concern for all publishers and distributors. For example, a 28 August 1953 temporary restraining order in a lawsuit between Avon and Dell, Popular Library, and Standard Circulation Service enjoined Avon from removing the plaintiff's books from the display racks, covering them up, or any other act that hindered their competitors' promotion of their own product. One strategy to dominate the racks was to produce a great number of different titles to flood the space with variety. This, however, might result in heavy returns that could cripple a smaller imprint. The other strategy was to offer fewer titles, but of higher quality, more attractive design, and stronger promotion. Unmistakably, the paperback racks were a key front in the constant war for the customer's quarter.[19]

While hardcover publishers had little use for middlemen and jobbers (the industry term for paperback wholesalers), the paperback producers deeply relied on them, for the paperback trade was an endless cycle of stocking and discarding. To draw in new readers, paperback publishers needed to know what sold and why, which required a feedback

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For a contemporary look at the importance of the racks for retailers, see A.K. Taylor, "Do Racks Pay Off?" *Newsdealer*, June 1948, New American Library Archive; MSS 070; Box 86; Folder 2808; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. By taking on paperbacks, sales could increase, it suggested, by over 40%, making the choice to invest a sensible one.

[19] Bonn, *Heavy Traffic & High Culture*, 169–70, 175–76; Lasser, "Lessons From the Paper Covers"; and "Temporary Restraining Order, Avon Publishing vs. Dell Publishing, Popular Library, and Standard Circulation Service, 28 August 1953" New American Library Archive; MSS 070; Box 86; Folder 2804; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. Also see Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 215–17.

system that did not exist in hardcover publishing. This emphasis on statistics-driven book knowledge bothered some hardcover publishers, critics, and even authors because it had the potential to displace their own intuitive views on tastes and tactics.[20]

Taking stock of the paperback industry in 1955, Shimkin observed that the significance of the new method of distribution rested on reversing the terms of commerce. When the industry relied on the dedicated bookstore, the premise was that people came to the books. There were a limited number of venues for those who wanted to buy a book, meaning they had to be sought out. What the magazine distribution system did was bring the books to the customers. By expanding the book to the bus depot, newsstand, or drug store, publishers offered their product to those who might not otherwise (or, in the case of small-town residents, be able) set foot in a bookstore.[21]

One undesirable effect of the magazine distribution system was periodic overproduction. Pocket Books executive Freeman Lewis explained:

> The magazine distributing system is one that is not based upon making a business profit because of the sale of goods. The sale of goods is a device for carrying advertising. Consequently, their interest is in the maximum sale, for the purpose of getting an advertising rate, not for the purpose of making a profit on the turnover of the specific goods. So from a magazine point of view, to have a sell-out is doing a very bad sales job, because had they had more out, they might have reached a higher total, and had a better figure for advertising.[22]

To those trained in the magazine distribution business, the natural impulse was to release more books than could ever be sold. The result, Shimkin said, was that overproduction resulted in periodic "congestion of the pipeline"—thousands of unsold

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[20] Lasser, "Lessons From the Paper Covers"; and Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 103.
[21] Shimkin and Lewis, 16; Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 215–16; and Lewis, "Mass Market Paperbacks," 381. Lewis cheekily referred to this process as "the customer is always wrong."
[22] Shimkin and Lewis, 19. Also see Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 216.

books—that would slow the entire distribution system until the glut worked itself out.[23] The problem rested on a fundamental distinction between magazines and books. Magazines had a built-in lifespan stamped right on the cover—the publication date. When the next issue was printed and distributed, the one on the stands was pulled and destroyed. Books, however, had no preset lifespan, and so unsold books would accumulate until the retailer, lacking space and desiring brisker sales, returned them to the wholesaler. The wholesaler, finding itself with a warehouse filling up with returned product, either returned the books to the publisher or destroyed them. This kind of congestion in a business built on single-penny profit margins could be lethal.[24] By the mid-1950s, Lewis explained, the paperback industry came to be dominated by "book men" rather than "magazine men," which meant closer attention to release schedules so as to better regulate the pipeline. Publishers came to realize that they were competing not just with other publishers for rack space, but with their own titles. Books had to prove their worth quickly or be replaced lest they compromise the entire line.[25]

The other key event in terms of distribution was the fate of American News Company. In 1945, ANC had roughly 400 warehouses, but by 1955 it was down to 35. What had happened to this distributor, dominant for almost a century? In 1952, the Justice Department brought an anti-trust suit against ANC over its subsidiary, Union News Company. UNC operated its own newsstands, and while numbering only 1,200 of the nation's 100,000 retail outlets, it was the largest retailer in terms of gross sales because it controlled outlets at key locations, such as bus terminals, airports, subways, hotels, and office buildings. The suit charged that this arrangement was a conspiracy to

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[23] In 1954, for example, overproduction by Pocket Books led to millions of unsold and unwanted books buried in an abandoned canal near Buffalo, New York. Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America*, 17.
[24] Shimkin and Lewis, 19–20. Also see Lasser, "Lessons From the Paper Covers."
[25] Shimkin and Lewis, 30; and Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America*, 254.

deny fair competition, as demonstrated by UNC's refusal to stock magazines not distributed by ANC. In 1955, UNC agreed to sell magazines based on its own independent interests. A wounded ANC quickly lost clients to other distributors and in August 1955 folded altogether. The independents who scooped up former ANC clients formed the Council for Independent Distribution (CID) in 1955, becoming a de facto monopoly like ANC once was, albeit a short-lived one. By the late 1950s, two developments thwarted this new monopoly. The first was the emergence of the "paperback jobber," who selectively sold titles to outlets that were displeased with CID service. The second was bookstore chains, which finally embraced the paperback and bought directly from publishers in sufficient volume to receive greater discounts.[26]

In the mid-to-late 1940s, freed of wartime rationing, the number of titles in print and publishers expanded, and sales continued to grow, from 95 million copies in 1947, 147 million copies in 1948, 184 million in 1949, 200 million in 1950, and 292 million in 1953. While publishers still successfully marketed softcover reprint editions that achieved commercial success and critical approval, some also embraced the notorious pulp methods of the past. Old pulp magazine stories were repackaged in paperback form, but what incited the ire of so many critics was the use of realistic painted covers that emphasized considerable female flesh, giving the books a tawdry reputation. As Frank L. Schick put it, "Between 1947 and 1949, the three S's of sex, sadism, and the smoking gun seemed to dominate and to force quality books pretty much into the background."

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[26] Roger H. Smith, *Paperback Parnassus: The Birth, the Development, the Pending Crisis of the Modern American Paperbound Book* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976), 17–19; Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1998), 125–26; House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 20–21; and Frank L. Schick, "Paperback Publishing," *Library Trends* 7, no. 1 (Summer 1958): 102.

Whether or not the book featured sex, the covers promised it.[27]

In his history of "the lurid years of paperbacks," Geoffrey O'Brien explained the function of the book cover:

> The covers were designed to leap at the eye of someone who was casually passing a newsstand or soda-fountain bookrack. Once the potential buyer had gotten close enough to pick up the book, the copy took over. The gaudy colors and flagrant lasciviousness of the covers aimed only at projecting visibility among the dozens of other similar covers all crying for attention. Indeed, to fully appreciate the aesthetics of an old paperback cover, it should be contemplated from a distance of twenty to thirty feet.[28]

Lee Server captured well the nature of these covers: "garish oils on canvas, a dreamlike, exaggerated realism, the depicted scene an overheated, pheromone-charged moment from the enclosed narrative. With their typically lurid hues and tawdry views of modern urban life, the covers looked like freeze-frames from some lost Cinecolor B-movie."[29] For example, according to O'Brien, in-house artist Rudolph Belarski "provided for Popular Library a series of covers notable for a realism utterly divorced from reality, in which women of unlikely proportions and oddly glowing flesh were featured as either perpetrators or victims."[30] Popular Library editions employed "flamboyant lettering," with ample searing reds and greens in the covers, and characters painted in "almost

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[27] Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 126–31, 147; Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 213; Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981), 38; LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 307; Beth Luey, "The Organization of the Book Publishing Industry," in *The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America. A History of the Book in America, Volume 5.*, ed. David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin, and Michael Schudson (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 45; and Bonn, *Heavy Traffic & High Culture*, 181.

[28] O'Brien, *Hardboiled America*, 39.

[29] Lee Server, *Over My Dead Body: The Sensational Age of the American Paperback: 1945–1955* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), 57; and O'Brien, *Hardboiled America*, 38–39.

[30] O'Brien, *Hardboiled America*, 56.

unbelievably provocative positions."[31] In a business where shelf life was brief, competition fierce, and advertising and reviews non-existent, paperback publishers saw the cover as most important lure for persuading casual consumers to pick their book rather than that of a competitor.

In mass market publishing, Thomas Bonn explained, the release of a novel began with "cover conferences" held some six-to-eight months before publication. The cover, in fact, could better predict sales than the inside content. George Delacorte, founder of Dell Books, stated, "If you've got a lousy book that you're stuck with, you hire your best artist to put the finest cover on it, have your best blurb writer give it the greatest blurb, and you won't lose *too* much money." The rule of thumb, then, was that the worst books had the best covers. Beyond the potential customer, the covers were also aimed at impressing the retailer in charge of stocking the racks and who might recommend a title.[32]

Authors were rarely shown the covers of their books before release to avoid fights over promotion. One notable instance was the considerable internal discussion and acrimony between New American Library (NAL)/Signet and J.D. Salinger over the cover for *Catcher in the Rye*, as the author did not want the protagonist depicted because he is not described physically in the book.[33] Another incident reveals the friction between authors and publisher when it came to the cover-as-promotion. In 1958, William R. Cox signed with NAL/Signet to publish his new novel. After *Hell To Pay* was released, Cox wrote to editor Marc Jaffe with his opinion about the book's cover:

> There are several ways of looking at the problem of the cover of *Hell to Pay*. If you take the position that the 25¢

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[31] Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 52.
[32] Bonn, *Under Cover*, 17–18; Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 3; Richard J. Crohn, "Good Reading for the Millions," in *The Wonderful World of Books*, ed. Alfred Stefferud (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), 204.
[33] Bonn, *Heavy Traffic & High Culture*, 190–92.

> book is like a magazine, lives so briefly as to scarcely be noted, sells because the cover is right in contrasting colors and juiced-up blurb, then this cover is right. Not exceptional, because many other houses have that idea and do likewise, but good enough to sell the book in a mediocre way.
>
> As art it is execrable. …
>
> It is in horrible taste and that has nothing to do with it.
>
> It has a blurb which does not say that it is the story of Tom Kincaid and the mobs except as an after-thought, in red letters, sort of thrown away.
>
> If you ask if I like it? I hate it.
>
> However, selling is the business of your house, and thanks for letting me see it and I could be all wrong.[34]

The exchange reveals the mild frustration of an author who submitted to editorial dictates that were rooted not in the content of his novel but how to promote it via both its title and the cover art. But he also acknowledged that compromises were expected when it came to making a work stand out amongst the crowd on the racks. Whatever freedoms he may have held as a writer, marketing was not one of them.[35]

The heavy turnover of novels inspired a number of predictable cons related to covers. One tactic emerged from the retail end of the trade. Due to the costs of returning whole books, a common practice was for the retailer to tear off and return the cover, which was taken to mean that the rest of the book would be destroyed, and so receive credit for the full return. This inspired a trade in counterfeit covers that were manufactured solely to be returned.[36] The quick turnaround for new releases could also benefit publishers. New covers of previously issued editions might provide a more

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[34] "William R. Cox to Marc Jaffe, 9 June 1958," New American Library Archive; MSS 070; Box 31; Folder 416; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[35] *Hell to Pay*'s cover can be found at http://29.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_ljwnd6mvx11qzezj5o1_400.jpg (29 August 2014). Because of the nature of the artwork, Cox' novel often gets lumped in with juvenile delinquent books of the era despite being in no way of the genre. See, for example, *Bad Seed*, a collection postcards from juvenile delinquent literature: https://www.flickr.com/photos/56781833@N06/11074187793/ (29 August 2014).

[36] Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 104.

contemporary look, or appeal to an alternative audience by seeming a different genre.[37] With a new cover and title, an old book could pass itself off as fresh. As an example of this, Willard Weiner's 1944 novel, *Four Boys and a Gun*, an urban realist drama of slum violence, was reprinted by Avon in 1951 under the slightly modified title *Four Boys, a Girl and a Gun*. Riding on the success of Irving Shulman's archetypal urban juvenile delinquent novel *The Amboy Dukes* (1946) and Hal Ellson's *Duke* (1949), and the emerging moral panic of delinquency, the back cover announced that this was "A Vivid and Powerful Picture of Juvenile Delinquency." (It was not.) Avon released the book again in 1957, amidst a tidal wave of juvenile delinquent novels and films, but with a new cover and title, *The Young Killers*, but maintaining the earlier edition's back cover text.[38]

A suggestive cover and title change could also wholly mask a novel's subject matter. In 1948, Lenard Kaufman published a novel entitled *The Lower Part of the Sky*. Avon republished it as *Juvenile Delinquents* in 1952, with two additional printings in 1953 and 1955, suggesting that it sold several hundred thousand copies. The cover on the Avon edition featured a young woman in rolled-up jeans, reclining on a tenement stoop and cigarette in her hand, while three young men surround and stare at her. The back cover promised the reader "an authentic 'inside' story that needs to be told—the story behind tomorrow's headlines." If that were not convincing enough, the 1955 edition sported an endorsement and introduction from Irving Schulman. But the contents were anything but a juvenile delinquent story. Briefly, it related the story of four young boys, aged ten to twelve, who bully an even younger boy. One of the four falls from a tree and

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[37] Bonn, *Heavy Traffic & High Culture*, 186.

[38] The 1957 edition, it should be noted, printed in small type at the bottom of the front cover the original title and publisher. The 1951 and 1957 Avon edition covers can be found, respectively, at https://c2.staticflickr.com/6/5502/11489373553_bcd5dfb150_z.jpg and http://www.goodgirlart.com/images/young.jpg (29 August 1951).

is killed. Bitter, the remaining three come to believe that if they could kill God they could live forever. They hitch a ride on a truck driving out to the countryside where they find a house on a hill. Being so close to the sky, they conclude that it must be God's house, and murder the old man within. Several years later, the boys are now full-fledged criminals. They rob a bank and are cornered by the police. During the ensuing shootout, two of the boys, believing they cannot be killed, run and catch a moving train, the bullets having no effect. The third of their group is incredulous and slow to follow. He misses the train and is cut down by the gunfire. Whatever merits this novel may possess, a story about young boys believing they killed God to become immortal themselves (and seemingly did, as long as they continued to believe) was well outside the conventions of emerging juvenile delinquent genre. That Kaufman's novel sold well enough to merit second and third printings may have been a testament to his ability and word-of-mouth recommendations, or to the effectiveness of Avon's marketing staff.

In the wake of the Gathings Committee investigations into pornography in 1952–53 and pressure from retailers fearing morality-driven boycotts, self-censorship emerged within the industry, with less flesh and less provocative blurbs. Styles shifted to photography and simple sketches. Geoffrey O'Brien lamented the change:

> Cover art ultimately became a kind of logo, an attractive label design. Gone forever was the cinematic palpability which gave one the illusion of peeping through a window at an actual scene. Along with respectability had come sophistication. There was also a new obligatory sense of responsibility .... It was all very tasteful, very levelheaded, and rather dull. The wild books had been thoroughly domesticated.[39]

The most significant development in the history of the modern paperback—

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[39] Schreuders, *The Book of Paperbacks*, 108–09; O'Brien, *Hardboiled America*, 45.

outside the original Pocket Books experiment—was, again, due to the economics of distribution. Fawcett Publishing began in the 1920s when Wilford H. Fawcett launched his first magazine and then established a distribution business to improve sales of his publications. Fawcett slowly built a magazine empire out of a keen understanding of mass tastes, publishing *True Confessions*, *Mechanix Illustrated*, *Motion Picture*, *True*, and *Woman's Day*. Fawcett broke into the paperback distribution business in 1945, signing a ten-year contract with Bantam and NAL. One of the terms of the deal precluded Fawcett from entering the paperback reprint publication business. After a few years of seeing the money to be made in paperback publishing, Ralph Daigh, Fawcett's editorial director, decided the company had to break into the business. In mid-1949, he enlisted editor Jim Bishop to initiate the company's own line, Gold Medal Books. To get around the no-reprint clause, Gold Medal published only original works, a move that broke open the publishing industry. Original paperbacks were not Fawcett's invention. Beadle's books, for example, were initiated in the nineteenth century, and even in the 1940s a few small publishers released softcover-only editions, but they were digest-sized (i.e., more like magazines than proper books). Fawcett's distribution power alone made its entry a notable development, but producing books that were the same size as the reprint editions meant that they would be sitting in the same racks as, and directly competing with, other paperbacks. And Fawcett could operate without any reliance on hardcover publishers.[40]

When Fawcett announced its venture in late 1949, it did not generate much excitement within the industry, but from the start Gold Medal's sales were strong. In 1950, the company released 35 titles, growing to 66 in 1951, 220 in 1952, and 225 in

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[40] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States. Volume 4* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1981), 386–87; and George W. Van Devender, "Fawcett Books, 1950–Present," in *Mass Market Publishing in America*, ed. Allen Billy Crider (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), 115.

1953, many, according to Daigh, going through three or four printings. The first 78 Gold Medal books totaled a combined 29 million copies, which grew to 43 million in 1952. Those initial 29 million copies were not immediately considered significant by observers because in the early 1950s annual paperback sales regularly broke 200 million. What was notable was that Gold Medal's biggest sellers were from unknown writers. Louis L 'Amour (westerns) or John D. MacDonald and Richard S. Prather (mysteries) eventually became "name" authors, but in those early years their success came as unknowns on the Gold Medal imprint. Where the reprinters often borrowed from the hardcover publishers' own star system (i.e., generated sales based on the name familiarity of an author), Gold Medal depended on its covers, word-of-mouth recommendations, and especially the reputation of the line as a whole for providing dark, gripping, and often taboo tales. Gold Medal's success was built by brand recognition and customer loyalty.[41]

Gold Medal also broke new ground in its contracts with authors. The standard Gold Medal contract paid authors $2,000 advances against penny royalties on initial printings of 200,000. This was even more significant than it first appears, as Gold Medal paid its author royalties based on the number of copies printed, not sold. If a book went into additional printings, the author immediately received further payment even if the first printing did not sell out. As Gold Medal's success grew, its royalty rates became more flexible, higher if sales were expected to be high and lower if sales expectations were more pessimistic.[42]

Rival publishers initially believed that most authors would reject being published

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[41] Bill Crider, "Paperback Originals," *Paperback Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 3, 5; Server, *Over My Dead Body*, 32; Van Devender, "Fawcett Books, 1950–Present," 115; "25 Cent Originals," *Newsweek* 38 (20 August 1951): 92; and Malcolm Cowley, "Hardbacks or Paperbacks?" in *The Literary Situation* (New York: Viking, 1954), 155.

[42] Crider, "Paperback Originals," 3; Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 387; and Daigh, *Maybe You Should Write a Book*, 25.

in paperback only, and so were caught surprised at the company's immediate success. Soon enough, a "spirited debate," according to *Publisher's Weekly*, broke out between Fawcett and other publishers. At the time, Freeman Lewis argued that "successful authors are not interested in original publishing at 25 cents," and that the available works to Gold Medal were "mostly rejects, or sub-standard books by usually competent writers." Rivals also pointed out that authors could not receive hardcover royalties without hardcover editions, and likely had no chance of selling movie adaptation rights. Fawcett responded that its books were as good as any other company's, and that many of their authors had previously published in hardcover form and had sold movie rights. Moreover, their authors were paid more quickly than those under contract with hardcover firms.[43]

The dismissive argument was soon enough replaced by tension and panic as authors found that they could make more by publishing with Gold Medal than hardcover and reprint royalties combined. Perhaps as much as anything, rivals' irritation stemmed from Gold Medal violating what had been a gentleman's agreement within the industry, whereby paperback reprinters did not deal directly with authors, but instead with the hardcover publisher, or, with the publisher's knowledge, the author's agent. Gold Medal broke this protocol when it started publishing original works and necessarily dealt directly with authors. Gold Medal also allowed its authors to maintain all rights except first publication rights, meaning that authors could sell subsidiary rights elsewhere. (In the case of John D. MacDonald, he later made a deal to sell his reprint rights to a hardcover publisher, thereby receiving author royalties for both editions and sharing them with neither publisher.) In the end, one hardcover editor conceded, "There is no other choice for a writer who will do three books a year." Yet the editor still grumbled: "But he

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[43] Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 387; and Crider, "Paperback Originals," 4.

cannot have both critical acclaim as a serious writer and security."[44]

Gold Medal's editorial policy was author-friendly, asking writers to come in and work hands-on with editors rather than receive by mail returned manuscripts with suggested rewrites.[45] A 1951 profile mentioned that Gold Medal received roughly 350 manuscripts each month. The editors then worked to clean up the accepted works to get them under 70,000 words. Still, despite Gold Medal's relatively high level of success, W.C. Lengel, former editor-in-chief of Fawcett's Crest and Gold Medal imprints, admitted, "Buying an unpublished book for reprint is like playing poker in the dark—without a deck of cards."[46]

In an industry that thrived on imitating past success, Gold Medal inspired dozens of other paperback original publishers into the game, which expanded the number of authors and genres in print. By 1955, a full third of all paperbacks were of the original variety. The other notable effects were that authors used the paperback original option as a threat to demand better rates from hardcover publishers, and that mass market publishers began amassing a stable of authors whom they would try to license out to hardcover publishers.[47] The genteel hardcover publishers had been served notice that they were no longer the gatekeepers of literature. Gold Medal was just the beginning.

In the early 1950s, a recent Columbia College graduate named Jason Epstein became an editor at Doubleday, where he realized that there was an untapped market for

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[44] Daigh, *Maybe You Should Write a Book*, 26; Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America*, 88; and Bonn, *Heavy Traffic & High Culture*, 18, 20–21.

A 1951 *Newsweek* story entitled "25 Cent Originals" cited the success of Gold Medal, but described the company as publishing books of "shocked revelations on such subjects as nymphomania, prostitution, dope, homosexuality, vice, along with standard Westerns and mysteries, all with appropriately undraped jackets." "25 Cent Originals," 92; and Bonn, *Under Cover*, 50.

[45] Tebbel, A History of Book Publishing in the United States, 387.

[46] "25 Cent Originals," 93; and Daigh, *Maybe You Should Write a Book*, 39.

[47] Bonn, *Under Cover*, 50; and Bill Pronzini, "Popular Library, 1942–Present," in *Mass Market Publishing in America*, ed. Allen Billy Crider (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), 237.

specialty titles that could be sold not only in drugstores but also on college campuses. In 1952, he launched the Anchor Books imprint, which specialized in high-culture works that were published in smaller 20,000-copy editions, and printed on a higher-quality paper and with non-glossy covers. While not quite the success story of Gold Medal, the first four Anchor titles all sold at least 10,000 copies in their first two weeks of release. Prior to Anchor, efforts to publish softcover highbrow works had failed, but the large postwar college population changed the size of the potential audience. The success of Anchor Books also helped counter, at least somewhat, the reputation of paperbacks as necessarily trashy.[48]

Also in 1952, Ian Ballantine left Bantam to start his own Ballantine Books. He offered $5,000 advances and 8% royalties to authors (twice that of other publishers), and sought out partners to put out simultaneous hard and softcover editions. By using the same printing plates, he argued, costs could be sufficiently cut. Although he found little interest in his plan, he was notable for being the first mass market publisher to issue his own simultaneous hardcover editions. The "Ballantine Plan" represented the wheel coming full circle, as the paperback now threatened to become the primary edition that would help pay for the hardcover version. *New York Times Book Review* editor David Dempsey mused, "Quite possibly the time will come when most trade [i.e., hardcover] books will be sold in paper covers—to the dismay of the book clubs and the dealers."[49]

In the 1950s, the paperback went from a lucrative bonus for hardcover publishers to a somewhat resented necessity. Sales figures provide an indication of the paperback's

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[48] Smith, *Paperback Parnassus*, 78; Schick, "Paperback Publishing," 99; Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 350; and Richard Kostelanetz, *The End of Intelligent Writing: Literary Politics in America* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974), 54.

[49] Bill Crider, "Ballantine Books, 1952–Present," in *Mass Market Publishing in America*, ed. Allen Billy Crider (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), 30; Bonn, *Under Cover*, 50; and David Dempsey, "The Revolution in Books," *Atlantic Monthly* 191 (1953): 77.

emerging dominance over its hardcover forebear. In 1952, the total number of paperbacks sold (originals and reprints) was between 250 million and 270 million, roughly 50% more copies purchased than hardcovers. Soon after, the number sold reached to around 285–290 million, and in 1959 the total value of paperback sales exceeded hardcovers for the first time. The number of titles also grew, from around 1000 per year at the start of the decade, to around 1500 by 1956–57.[50]

Critic Malcolm Cowley wrote in 1954 that the hardcover industry was in "a mild but prolonged crisis" due to production costs and distribution weaknesses. The public was buying more fiction than ever, but preferred the cheaper and more available paperback. Where reprint royalties were initially seen as a risk-free bonus, now they took on a greater required component for profitability.[51] This, observers understood, had great implications for the direction and autonomy of the original hardcover publishers. In a 1952 lecture at the University of Illinois, Robert W. Frase discussed the economic factors impacting American publishing. The break-even mark for hardcovers, he claimed, was between 7,000 and 10,000 copies (Frank Schick claimed this number was between 5,000 and 8,000, while Freeman Lewis stated it was 8,000). In 1951, there were 2,286 new hardcover titles released, selling an average of 4,375 copies. Even increasing sales by 50% only achieved an average of 6,500 copies. Roger Straus, co-founder of trade publisher Farrar, Straus, conceded that "the difference between profit and loss for trade operations is the subsidiary income flow [i.e., selling reprint rights]."[52]

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[50] Lewis, "Mass Market Paperbacks," 381; Luey, "The Organization of the Book Publishing Industry," 45; J. Ronald Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Debner Books, 1990), 257; Dempsey, "The Revolution in Books," 75; Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America*, 92–94; Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 213; and Leo Gurko, *Heroes, Highbrows, and the Popular Mind* (1953; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books For Libraries Press, 1971), 141.

[51] Cowley, "Hardbacks or Paperbacks?", 115–16; and Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 145.

[52] Frase, "Economic Trends in Trade Book Publishing," 26–27; Shimkin and Lewis, 46–47; Schick, *The*

As of 1953, hardcover publishers were losing up to five cents per copy of the average trade book, hoping for a blockbuster that might achieve bestseller status and lead to book club and reprint sales. Sometimes all three of these things were required to cover up for all the other weak sellers on a publisher's roster. However, the Book of the Month Club had lost almost half its membership since 1947—900,000 down to 500,000—and Hollywood's postwar slump had compromised the purchase of adaptation rights. In 1953, there were 1,200 reprint titles published versus 64 book club titles. Only one in five new titles had their reprint rights sold. All of this, a 1953 *Fortune* article argued, created "unhealthy" business practices for book publishing. One hardcover insider admitted that every editor grudgingly evaluated new manuscripts with an eye toward reprint possibilities. Some reprint publishers, went the industry rumours, "planted" new manuscripts with trade publishers just to get the reprint rights. On occasion, trade publishers even explored the reprint rights before deciding to buy a manuscript, something that Bennett Cerf of Random House called "deplorable," but admitted, "We all do it. We shouldn't, but we do." The reliance on the sale of reprint rights meant that the hardcover publishers were becoming subservient to "a mass market over which it exerts no creative leadership."[53]

The *Fortune* article concluded that the traditional publishing system (unkindly described as "old and gently bred," clearly something ill-suited for the modern age) was faced with having to consider the tastes of a wide swath of potential customers when

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Paperbound Book in America, 100; and Luey, "The Organization of the Book Publishing Industry," 45.

[53] "The Boom in Paper-Bound Books," *Fortune* (September 1953): 125, 144; Crohn, "Good Reading for the Millions," 207; and Bonn, *Under Cover*, 59. The claim that the viability of reprint rights sales drove hardcover publishers' manuscript decisions was a common one, especially amongst critics. However, Eleanor Blum's 1959 study of five thousand titles in print concluded that familiarity between authors and publishers was a greater determining factor than the possibility of selling reprint rights. Eleanor Blum, "Paperback Book Publishing: A Survey of Content," *Journalism Quarterly* 36 (Fall 1959): 447–49.

selecting and editing books. This was, to some publishers and editors, "a threat to their independent judgment." One publisher stated, "I would rather run the market than have the market run me. Once in a while the mass market will go for a book I publish and that's all to the good. That's how we make our money. But I wouldn't want to publish for it all the time. If money was all I wanted out of this business, I'd find an easier way to make it." Most hardcover publishers' lists reflected the ideals and tastes of the person in charge—that was, in fact, the whole point of being a publisher. The problem was that more and more of the publishing business was now necessarily focused on those aspects exclusive to their original passions. Unsurprisingly, Kurt Enoch, co-founder of the major softcover NAL, took the opposite position, arguing that having more publishers satisfied diversity and countered conformist impulses. The paperback's volume, he said, served the interests of democracy by representing a wide range of views and tastes.[54]

The hardcover publisher was not the only figure seen as losing independence. Writing in 1945, sociologist C. Wright Mills lamented the decline of the writer as an "independent craftsman." The writer was increasingly just a hired gun whose content was dictated by others. Even the decision whether his work would ever reach the reading public was out of his hands, but rather controlled by non-writers. The availability of so many freelance writers worsened the state for each, for the competition for work only lessened their autonomy. "They find themselves in the predicament of the Hollywood writer: the sense of independent craftsmanship they would put into their work is bent to the ends of a mass appeal to a mass market." The writer was reduced to a machine of sorts, writing what he was told to write or not at all. Even the author's superior, the editor, was caught up in this depersonalization, for the editor was also just a link in the

[54] "The Boom in Paper-Bound Books," 123; and Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book," 222–23.

business chain, following a formula foisted upon him. Mills acknowledged that writers had always made concessions to one degree or another to satisfy the tastes and/or limitations of their reader, but the success of the mass-distributed paperback indicated "a more cautious and standardized product." Fewer publishers, he feared, would be able to resist those manuscripts that had mass appeal.[55]

Almost a decade later, Alan Dutscher echoed Mills' charges. Authors rarely had the freedom to write the book they wanted, for they were subservient to their agent and publisher. For decades, he said, newspapers and magazines had "exhibited the characteristically totalitarian monolithicism of thought, concentration of control, and artistic as well as ideational vacua." It was only the relatively limited profitability of the book industry that had kept it free from this malignant influence. However, the success of paperbacks now meant that those same forces that drove consolidation in other industries had attached themselves to book publishing, "with disastrous results whose effects on the personnel of publishing are of significance only insofar as they signal the death of free expression in America."[56]

Malcolm Cowley, too, despaired for the fate of the author in the age of the paperback. In "Cheap Books for the Millions" (1955), Cowley considered the impact of the paperback and its reliance on the mass audience. Writing and reading, he feared, had

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[55] C. Wright Mills, "The Powerless People: The Role of the Intellectual in Society," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17 [originally published in *Politics*, 1, no. 3 (April 1944): 68–72]. Mills repeated this claim six years later in *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 150–51.

[56] Alan Dutscher, "The Book Business in America," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (1957; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1964), 134–35, 139.

Critical concern for compromised authorial freedom may have spoken more to their own situation than others. As Hugh Wilford explained, in this period commercial publishers found that highbrow material had a market, and so funded specialty literary journals to serve as laboratories of a sort. By 1960, the low-circulation magazine that was home to so many of America's intellectuals was almost entirely reliant on institutional sponsorship, impinging on their autonomy. Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 19–20.

lost a certain mystique. Authors wrote solely to be published and paid, and readers read without any sense of connection to a work, without any sense that the subject matter had been conceived with them in mind. "This lack of participation is a weakness of the pocket-size books as a class: they don't arouse in authors or publishers the sense of their being read and liked or disliked that is felt in the case of hard-cover books."[57] This was a rather odd criticism for a couple reasons. First, it rejected a fairly standard assumption about the nature of mass culture, that what was produced was done with a specific audience in mind, that nothing was left to chance, and that satisfying/pacifying the audience was the entire purpose of culture production. The second curiosity was that Cowley seemed to suggest that the publishers were wholly ignorant of their audiences, that publishing was simply throwing straws to the wind. In fact, if publishers did not control their authors' work to the same degree that radical and conservative mass cultural critics alike claimed, they were certainly not unaware of what types of books were popular and deliberately pursued works that fit those categories.

It was a common assertion, then, that mass production compromised the individual author, but how much truth was there to it? The paperback, with its mass readership, Clive Bloom argued, "confirmed that literature from the eighteenth century onwards was always essentially a commodity at the heart of which lay an unresolvable ambivalence over the nature of creativity, authorship, imagination and genius." The postwar paperback boom emphasized that authorship was just labour in another form, ripping the veil off the act of writing. Critics did not see this as "a refertilizing of the literary imagination from below," but instead as decadence. Former pulp author

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[57] Malcolm Cowley, "Cheap Books for the Millions," in *The Literary Situation* (New York: Viking, 1954), 110–11.

Mackinley Kantor said that there were three types of pulp writers: 1) professionals capable of speed and quantity, but rarely generating a large income; 2) young writers on the way up and seeing the pulps as a means to an end, an apprenticeship of sorts, but intending to eventually leave the pulps for more personal writing; and 3) once-successful legitimate writers who had slid backward. There were also marginal writers who earned just enough to keep going. These were the ones cited by dismissive critics. For others yet, it was simply satisfying to churn out novels, without expectations of celebrity or wealth. For all, it was an opportunity to write and to publish.[58]

Jim Thompson was one of those writers who was on his way up. Between September 1952 and March 1954, Thompson published twelve novels of nihilistic noir, almost all with Lion Books and most of which became his best-known works.[59] Lion was a second-tier original paperback publisher, still showing its pulp antecedent traits. Editors at these types of companies treated paperback originals like soliciting magazine articles—they developed a premise and springboard plot, then found an author to write it. Thompson's initial Lion books came from commissions and publisher synopses. Arnold Hano of Lion explained:

> We started a line of paperback originals. That way we could get young writers and new writers to do things for us. [Editor] Jim Bryans suggested that we write synopses of books that we thought would have the substance we were looking for, and all we had to do was find a writer who could do that kind of book. Bryans was very good at this. He would take classics, he would take *Oedipus Rex*, he would take *Hamlet*, he would take *Macbeth*, and we would turn them into modern suspense novels, in synopsis form. These weren't lengthy synopses, probably two-thirds of a

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[58] Clive Bloom, *Cult Fiction: Popular Reading and Pulp Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 23–24, 47; Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 21–22; and Server, *Over My Dead Body*, 35.

[59] Robert Polito, *Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 338–40.

page.[60]

Thompson was frustrated by the sensationalism employed by Lion, as well as the editorial pruning to fit preset page lengths, but he also knew that Lion provided a freedom to let him write the way he preferred. Thompson's signature novel, *The Killer Inside Me* (1952), was born from a Lion folder of synopses, the premise being a New York City cop who becomes involved with a prostitute and kills her. Thompson and Hano agreed to a forty-to-fifty-page sample draft plus an outline for the rest before they decided whether to go forward. Thompson returned in two weeks with roughly half the completed book, which he had transformed into the story of a sociopathic, small-town Texas deputy who masks his violent tendencies by seeming simpleminded. Soon enough, Lion let Thompson work without provided synopses.[61]

After Lion folded in 1957, Thompson moved to NAL. He found the experience there frustrating because NAL's editors wanted to mold him into a successful crime formula writer rather than encourage and challenge him. NAL's Marc Jaffe sought to persuade Thompson to move from serial killers to a series character, like a cop or a lawyer; Thompson fought this. After Thompson submitted *The Getaway* (1958), Jaffe replied with a letter of concern about a lack of "higher moral values" (Jaffe's phrase) in the sample chapters and about the criminal not properly paying for his crime. NAL had expected a caper novel but received one with a surreal cannibalistic ending. Thompson, however, refused to change the ending. NAL relented, but still fretted about the perceived immorality of the ending, so the in-house dopesheet (a single-page project summary) stressed that while the criminals were not captured by the police, they suffered in a hell of

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[60] Ibid., 340–41. Freeman Lewis regarded Lion's roster as "pulp, comic, girlie-book people." Shimkin and Lewis, 13–14. For a summary history of Lion, see Lance C. Casebeer, "Lion Publications, 1949–1957," in *Mass Market Publishing in America*, ed. Allen Billy Crider (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), 163–66.

[61] Polito, *Savage Art*, 342–44.

their own making. Thompson may have had to fight for his independence, but he carved out a niche for himself within the original paperback noir genre.[62]

Between 1959 and 1964, noted science fiction author Robert Silverberg (writing as Don Elliott) published around 150 softcore novels for Nightstand Books. Silverberg was twenty-four years old in 1958 and had already established himself as a successful writer, but a distribution crisis that hit the magazine business that year all but killed the science fiction market, leaving only the giants of the field still able to find regular publishing opportunities. Silverberg had been living fairly comfortably on his publishing income, but was suddenly scrambling. He was put in touch with William L. Hamling, publisher of *Rogue*, a competitor of *Playboy*. Hamling had begun Nightstand Books, a publisher of erotic novels, and offered Silverberg $600 per 50,000-word novel at a rate of one per month. Silverberg claimed that the line of books was an immediate hit—"It was impossible to reprint them fast enough"—and so Hamling offered him a $200 raise per book and asked whether two books a month was feasible. Silverberg agreed because he was an extremely fast writer, capable of producing a 50,000-word manuscript in six days, which left him time for other projects. Silverberg became adept at establishing his own formula, using a what he called a system of modules with pre-written scenes that could be recycled, modified, and plugged in where necessary, which allowed him to produce material in a timely manner. Sales continued to grow and Silverberg was given another raise, so that his erotic fiction was paying him $1000 a week. By 1962, Silverberg was publishing three Nightstand novels a month[63]

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[62] Ibid., 415–24.

[63] Robert Silverberg, "Those Good Old Soft-Core Days," in Don Elliott, *Gang Girl / Sex Bum* (1959, 1963; reprint, Eureka, CA: Stark House Press, 2011), 8–14. Michael Hemmingson wrote that as the market for erotica improved, the basic rate rose to $1000 per book, with reliable and popular authors receiving $1500. Michael Hemmingson, "Sin, Softcore and Silverberg," in Don Elliott, *Gang Girl / Sex Bum* (1959,

While reluctant to reveal identities, Silverberg claimed that Nightstand employed a number of writers who went on to successful and respected careers (as well as rumours that there was one already-successful writer moonlighting). The experience was invaluable, he said, for learning the discipline of structure, writing efficiently, and, because he was hiding behind a pseudonym, letting his imagination have free rein. Writing for Nightstand was gratifying, he added, because the high sales suggested that the books were appreciated by the buyers, "that they filled a need, that somebody appreciated them a whole lot."[64]

> I felt absolutely unabashed about what I was doing. Writing was my job and I was working hard and telling crisp, exciting stories. What difference did it make, really, that they were stories about people caught in tense sexual situations instead of people exploring the slime-pits of Aldebaran IX? I experienced the joy—and there is one, believe me—of working hard and steadily, long hours sitting at a typing table under the summer sun, creating scenes of erotic tension as fast as my fingers could move.[65]

In her book on the homosexual genre of paperback originals, Susan Stryker stated that the softcover book was the ideal medium for communicating taboo subject matter that would never pass the censors of movies, radio, or hardcover publishing. Geoffrey O'Brien concurred:

> The paperbacks provide just such a stew of high and low, vigorous and decayed; they are the common ground of Shakespeare and Irving Shulman and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, of *Light in August* and *Lust Party*, indiscriminately mingled and mated. In short, they partake of the characteristic American atmosphere. It is useless to speak

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1963; reprint, Eureka, CA: Stark House Press, 2011), 227. Writer Harlan Ellison was an editor for Nightstand during this time and confirmed Silverberg's description. See Harlan Ellison, "Doing it for a Buck," in *Getting in the Wind* (New York: Kick Books, 2012), ix–xii; Harlan Ellison, "Inescapable Cemeteries," in *Pulling a Train* (New York: Kick Books, 2012), xi–xvii.

[64] Silverberg, "Those Good Old Soft-Core Days,", 14–16.

[65] Ibid., 12.

> of "high art," "personal art," "folk art," "commercial art," or "exploitation"; in the living situation, they all float about in the same pond.

O'Brien suggested that the "democratic mood" of the paperback was because the early era, still establishing itself within the industry, was rather "anarchic," encouraging considerable freedom of movement and improvisation. It was a movement with little conscious leadership.[66]

If critics considered the paperback author as diminished, the new reader was not far behind. Malcolm Cowley described a fieldtrip looking for paperbacks at a Chicago Walgreen's drugstore. His observations of the customers captured well the suspicion and contempt for this new class of reader who regarded books as just another commodity:

> A broad-beamed housewife, her head wrapped in a soiled babushka, had been bustling among the kitchenware. Now, with her purchase under her arm, she passed the book racks, examined the Sartre, rejected it, and instead picked out a Mickey Spillane, *The Big Kill*. It had taken her less time to buy a book than to buy a saucepan. I looked again at the collection as a whole and decided that it was curiously appropriate to the city and the neighborhood. It was rich, random, gaudy, vital, corrupt, and at the same time innocent; it put culture at the disposal of the plain man, even the poorest, for less than the price of a bar whisky; it was impersonal, friendly, egalitarian, and it proclaimed as dogma its lack of discrimination. "Here we are," the books in the big racks seemed to be saying, "the mud and sapphires of our time, and for one or two pieces of silver you can take your pick of us. If you are fooled into reading Sartre by a naked woman on the cover, you have no right to complain. No clerk is helping you to choose and no one is holding you back; here everyone starts even. But hurry, hurry, before we are bought by others or returned to the publisher.[67]

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[66] Susan Stryker, *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001); and O'Brien, *Hardboiled America*, 13, 15–16.
[67] Cowley, "Cheap Books for the Millions," 98–99.

These kinds of readers, he suggested, were fundamentally magazine readers whose fancies were either for magazines or a paperback (but rarely both). If any one form had suffered of late, he said, it was the pulp magazines whose readership had defected to the paperback.[68]

Yet, all was not lost. There were still bookstores and there were people purchasing hardcover books via book clubs. These Midwesterners were a "limited, but prosperous, alert, and well-educated body of readers." They were the middlebrows scorned by critics like Dwight Macdonald, but Cowley did not share the contempt. These readers sought to remain aware of literary trends and were fairly open-minded about unconventional styles. Their value, he hoped, was in being somewhat of a vanguard for the masses. The bookstore still played a key role, both in serving as a meeting place for committed readers and to ensure that homogenization did not swamp American culture. The bookstore offered personal contact for readers—"something entirely lacking at the newsstands"—and a place for "quiet voices pleading for permanence, variety, personality, discrimination." The sadness, to Cowley, was that these voices were such a minority.[69]

Cowley also wondered when paperback readers found the time to read. Possibly they did not, that the books were cheap enough to be forgotten after the moment of impulsive purchase had passed (hardcover books, on the other hand, were a costly enough investment that demanded fulfillment). More likely paperbacks stole time from other leisure time like listening to the radio, watching television, going to the movies, or drinking in a bar. For the true book lover, none of these choices consoled.[70]

Bennett Cerf, president of Random House, countered that critics were too critical

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[68] Ibid., 105.
[69] Ibid., 101–02.
[70] Ibid., 105–06.

of what people were reading instead of celebrating the act itself. Reading, he said, was as addictive and enjoyable as the reader wanted it to be. Books were entirely responsive to the reader's needs and routines. Reading was an act that strengthened the brain, but the effort had to be done voluntarily and with pleasure as the goal:

> Reading can only be fun if you expect it to be. ... if you take up a book in a grim spirit of self-improvement, swearing to read so many pages before you let yourself do something you like, if you concentrate on books somebody tells you you "ought" to read, the chances are you won't have fun. But if you put down a book you don't like and try another till you find one that means something to you, and then relax with it, you will almost certainly have a good time—and if you become, as a result of reading, better, wiser, kinder, or more gentle, you won't have suffered during the process.[71]

This was, to be sure, a minority view, and one influenced, no doubt, by Cerf's position as a book publisher.

Congressional investigators were certainly not as sanguine as Cerf. In 1952, the Gathings Committee, fuelled by concerns over the nation's moral health, spent the year determining the extent of immoral, obscene, and/or violent literature (books, magazines, and comics) available, and effectiveness of existing laws in controlling the problem. The committee stated that the greatest impediments to enforcing existing laws were finding agreement on the meaning of "obscene" and inconsistent court judgments. While acknowledging that not all "pocket-size books are evil and their creators reprehensible," the report nevertheless claimed that paperbacks (along with magazines and comics) contained some of "the most offensive infractions of the moral code." After that acknowledgement, the report swung its sword broadly:

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[71] Bennett Cerf, "It's Fun to Read," in *The Wonderful World of Books*, ed. Alfred Stefferud (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), 25–26.

> The so-called pocket-size books, which originally started out as cheap reprints of standard works, have largely degenerated into media for the dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion, and degeneracy. The exaltation of passion above principle and the identification of lust with love are so prevalent that the casual reader of such "literature" might easily conclude that all married persons are habitually adulterous and all teen-agers completely devoid of any sex inhibitions.

Some of these books were not only "filled with sordid, filthy statements based upon sexual deviations and perversions probably before unfamiliar to the type of reader who now buys them," they might advocate the horrors of polygamy, homosexuality "and other sexual aberrations," or narcotic use. Grumbling at the "parasites on the free-press privilege, who thrive on the profits derived from the exploitation of current pornographic materials," the committee stated that "concerted action" by private organizations, secular and sectarian, was required.[72]

Of the committee's findings, historian and *Harper's* columnist Bernard DeVoto sniffed, "This report is so ineptly written that in some places I cannot make out what the Committee is trying to say." The report, he wrote, created "an embarrassing dilemma": either the committee was ignorant or it was engaging in "intolerable misrepresentations." However incompetent the writing of these books, were they really harmful to America? This, DeVoto said, was never demonstrated. He further mocked the committee's preoccupation with the paperback format. The offence, seemingly, was not that the obscenity was offered for a quarter, but the implications of that price was that too many people, including children, had access to such filth. DeVoto pointed out that most of these twenty-five-cent monstrosities were reprints of more expensive hardcover edition.

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[72] House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 1–3, 14–16.

If a two-bit book should be banned, would that not mean that the more expensive editions should also be subject to the censors?[73] "It is not true," DeVoto argued, "that today's magazines and paper-backs are the filthiest literature ever known in history. It is not true that cheap reprints are seriously menacing our social structure. It is not true that they are doing irreparable damage. Such statements are mendacious, ignorant, preposterous, and more dangerous in themselves than the sum total of obscenity printed since Gutenberg." The committee report, he claimed, was all speculation, filled with hypothetical dangers because it could find no concrete evidence. It was nothing but shock because crusades against obscene art were always based on shock. DeVoto believed that no actions would result from this investigation, but that, he said, was not the point. It did not change the fact that elected representatives could casually and without consequence speak of censorship. The danger, he warned, was what might happen next time.[74]

And, indeed, the following year and in the wake of yet another Congressional investigation of mass culture (this time comic books threatened the nation's moral health), Devoto restated his opposition to the moral guardians' calls for censorship. He asserted that "[t]ripe always has been the basis of the publishing business." At worst, he suggested, the kind of literature that gave the scolds such fits prevented boredom and encouraged daydreaming, and at best perhaps it encouraged the reader to seek something better for their reading habits. He was dubious about the latter possibility and, indeed, scoffed at publishers who claimed that they were promoting some kind of uplifting cultural revolution. Just take your money and shut up, DeVoto advised. Looking at Gold Medal's original paperbacks, he said, "I have a tough and persisting mind but I have yet

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[73] Bernard DeVoto, "The Case of the Censorious Congressmen," *Harper's* 206 (April 1953): 42–44.
[74] Ibid., 44–45.

to find one that I could finish. What Gold Medal has proved is that we didn't know how lousy novels could be."[75]

The critics' contention that the supposed lowbrow novels dominated the racks did have some support. A 1958 study of book retailers in Jayton, Illinois (pop. 24,000 in 1955), found eight sites to purchase paperbacks, one of which was a dedicated bookstore, while half were drugstores. The owner of the drugstore with the largest selection was ignorant of his paperback stock, treating the books as lures for other merchandise. Jayton's vendors carried 293 separate paperback titles, with 115 (39%) deemed to be of high quality; four fifths of these were at the bookstore and almost none at the drugstores. Most of the non-quality books were westerns, mysteries, "rental romances," adventure tales, and other formula fiction that drew the critics' withering glare. "There is little that is shockingly bad in this collection of materials that were being sold to high-school students," the study's authors wrote, "but also there is little that is good enough to raise the reading level of young people above that represented by the magazines they could always buy at the drugstore counter." Furthermore, there was little evidence that reading choices were being altered, to the good or ill. They concluded that paperback defenders were justified in saying that there were many quality titles available at an affordable price, but the naysayers were also correct in stating that these quality books were not available in places most frequently trafficked.[76]

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[75] Bernard DeVoto, "Culture at Two Bits," *Harper's* 209 (October 1954): 8–13. Journalist James Rorty also addressed the heavy hand of censorship. Protecting the young and innocent from the worst publications might be an honourable goal, but such efforts were rarely nuanced and both quality works and adult audiences would suffer from the crude zealousness of censorious pressure groups. If allowed to continue, Rorty concluded, these trends would be "disastrous, for the inexpensive book, more than other modern instruments of mass communication, is today an outpost of freedom in our democratic culture." James Rorty, "The Harassed Pocket-Book Publishers," *The Antioch Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1955): 411–27 (quote is on p. 427).

[76] Lester Asheim and Robert Underbrink, "A Hard Look at Soft Covers," *The Library Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (January 1958): 20–25.

Eleanor Blum's analysis of close to five thousand titles in print in 1955 found that fiction represented only about 14% of new titles in 1955 but made up 75% of all paperbacks in print. Over half of the fiction titles were considered "light reading, designed to provide escape rather than to provoke thought." Around four hundred novels were part of category known in trade jargon as "the sexies." One editor explained: "They sell well. They're created (sometimes reprinted) especially for newsstands. They range in quality from incompetent, through professionally hack, to downright esoteric. The thing they have in common (there are exceptions) is a kind of empty-headedness—their only *raison d'etre* is commercial." Most original paperback fiction, Blum concluded, was diversionary entertainment. Of the originals in print in 1955, 23% were mysteries, 38% were westerns, and 45% was science fiction. These made up only 15% of the non-originals, and most of these were "sexies." Despite the dominance of the sub-respectable paperbacks, Blum contended that quality literature could make economic sense only when the market was underexploited.[77]

The more persistent criticism of paperbacks was tied to distribution. More specifically, the distribution method brought the book into contact with the masses, and this relationship created a feedback loop that expanded the influence of pornography and narrowed that of the literary. For example, the Gathings Committee received a statement from NAL's Victor Weybright, who struck a defensive posture at his company being prominently featured in a list of objectionable material. Weybright emphasized that NAL published the same books that appeared in bookstores and libraries in hardcover form, and that if there were a content problem, it existed in the more expensive editions as well as the paperback. The committee responded that, yes, it was aware that the same

[77] Blum, "Paperback Book Publishing," 450–53.

pornography was also available in hardcover, but that Weybright's defense largely missed the point of critics' concerns. It was the fact that paperbacks, affordably priced and available in over one hundred thousand locations, made them accessible to juvenile readers in ways that the more expensive hardcovers were not. "Pornographic literature is to be condemned whether it exists in hard-cover books or other form," the committee argued, "but it becomes a menace to the morals of the youth of the Nation when it can be purchased at such low prices at any newsstands by adults and juveniles alike."[78] In other words, it was the consumer who ultimately shaped the content and it was the consumer who needed to be protected from his poor choices.

In 1953, David Dempsey assessed the state of paperback publishing, during which he declared that until World War II, those Americans who bought books were "a fairly cohesive and civilized community, operating from a common set of literary values." However, the community of readers had been "invaded by a multitude of people [with a] frantic appetite for books in paper covers." The paperback, he allowed, was well suited to the "marsupial habits of a nation that does much of its reading on the jump," and was easy to buy, especially for those who lived far from a bookstore or were scared of entering one. Nevertheless, the quality of the most paperbacks was appalling: "Their product is a highly competitive and indiscriminate melange of serious literature and trash, of self-help and pseudo science, of sex and inspiration—never before has American publishing put forth such a nicely homogenized product, with the cream of letters so palatably disseminated in the total output."[79]

The paperback reader possessed "a kind of healthy ignorance," oblivious to what

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[78] House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 115–16.
[79] Dempsey, "The Revolution in Books," 75.

is good or bad, and so was open to everything. Dempsey regarded this as fundamentally democratic, for any author might be appreciated with the right audience. "The author can hardly be blamed for cutting his cloth to fit the reprint pattern, since it may mean the difference between eating and starving." He quoted one unidentified author as saying, "I would rather be the author of a live book being read by millions than the author of a relatively dead one being read by thousands."[80] But what kind of book was driving this resurgence? "It is when we approach fiction that we meet the Mr. Hyde to the industry's Dr. Jekyll. The thinly disguised bid for the semipornographic trade is evident to anyone who has studied the lurid cover illustrations and come-on nature of the blurbs." One reprint publisher told Dempsey, "You can't sell 'em if you don't get 'em up," which was more likely with "salacious" covers and "provocative" titles. This factor had moved the publishing business away from editors and towards local distributors. The effect had been "a curious monotony." "The sordid and sadistic, acting under a sort of Gresham's law of literary taste, threaten to drive out the civilized and virtuous—at least from the reprint racks—leaving the American people (who know better) and the Europeans (who cannot judge fairly) with the impression that we are a nation of sex-starved idiots." And yet, despite deep misgivings about the high degree of tripe sold on newsstands, he defaulted to a liberal faith in plurality. If enduring "the horrendous [Mickey] Spillane" was the price of also making available and affordable E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, he accepted it as an overall bargain.[81] That he could cite Gresham's Law yet also hope for the survival of high culture captured well the liberal dilemma of embracing the untutored.

Frank L. Schick, too, sought out the reason why the material on the racks was of

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[80] Ibid., 76.
[81] Ibid., 76–77.

lesser quality. Part of the problem was that neither distributors nor retailers were especially qualified to determine good books from bad, but rather were driven by what sold, not the opinions of moral and literary experts. That placed the problem at the collective door of the consumers:

> The public's demand for more good and the rejection of poor titles can be gradually accomplished through the influence of good homes, constructive examples of leisure time use by parents, and enlightened education in schools and churches which will bring about a change in reading habits. By and large it would appear that paperback publishing has done more good than harm, that it has brought books into towns and hamlets where none had ever been sold before and that, if overproduction and competition do not run riot, the paperback boom will stay with us for years to come.[82]

Like Dempsey, Schick, too, defaulted to a liberal faith in pluralism as the principle that, with time, would elevate the good over the bad.

Liberal hopes and dreams were nowhere to be found in *The Denatured Novel* (1960), literary scholar Albert Van Nostrand's indictment against the publishing industry. The emphasis on distribution and sales, he claimed, had alienated the novel from its true essence as artistic expression. Americans had always regarded the novel as something to be rationalized, he said, to edify in some way, whether on ethical or educational grounds. Otherwise it was considered an immoral and wasteful use of one's time. It was this premise that starkly divided novels between serious and popular/commercial, where the latter were a priori derogatory. The problem, Van Nostrand asserted, was that these distinctions never considered the nature of the novel itself; it was the author's intentions and the public's tastes that classified a work. No one could say what made a novel, in and of itself, a serious or popular work. The implication of this was that the buying public

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[82] Schick, "Paperback Publishing," 103.

made a book worse if too many of them purchased it. Or, put another way, exclusivity was the hallmark of serious work and availability the calling card of trash.[83]

The publisher was faced with a dilemma. Books had to be treated as commodities for the sake of profit, yet also as something moral and edifying. The effect, he said, denatured the novel, for the essence of the novel must be more than utilitarian. Fiction was not simply used for profit and instruction, but was valued just as art: "It is everyone's continuing preoccupation. Being small and fallible, every human being compensates with fiction, inventing a world that will acknowledge him according to his own desires. He spends his life keeping that world in repair." When fiction was simplified and tidied to become more popular or commercial, it was denatured. The original was massaged into something familiar. Success in such stylizing led to imitation and created formulas. In this way, the publishing industry's economic needs modified literary theory.[84]

As bad as the book trade was in general, the emergence of the paperback exasperated the problem. It seemed geared toward shredding any essence to the novel as creative act. Its affordability, disposability, and convenience all emphasized its nature as a commodity. If anything, the publishers had worked to make the paperback something to not be read. These books were like the magazines with which they were distributed and displayed on the racks. They fundamentally catered to the magazine reader.[85]

The problem with all this, Von Nostrand said, was that seeking to sell in the millions instead of thousands hindered the individuality of the book: "It is the problem of resisting the compromise of mere public acceptance, the compromise of conformity and therefore mediocrity." Working on the principles of the magazine industry meant regular

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[83] Van Nostrand, *The Denatured Novel*, 29–31.
[84] Ibid., 33–34, 39, 51.
[85] Ibid., 133, 136.

replacement of stock, and so weak sellers were not allowed to survive. This made the predictable book all the more valuable, for proven sales success was the only true sought-after trait. New books had to stand out yet fit in with the others. The reprint publisher's expertise in sales gave it such a strong voice in the decision whether to publish a new work that, in effect, the hardcover publisher became the reprinter. The lack of original material coming from the trade publishers had forced reprinters to become original publishers in their own right. This had helped cut the costs of acquiring desirable reprint rights (competition for ever-scarce resources had raised their costs) and given the reprinter even more control over the process. This model was successful at generating large volume sales, but not a large number of true readers, for the "instant fiction" of the paperback was something to entertain, not to be contemplated. Success, in the end, debased reading and so the novel.[86]

In sum, then:

> The book trade denatures novels in an effort to sell more of them, and publishers excuse themselves on the grounds that they cannot give the people "better" than the people want. Publishers simplify their wares, invest them with palatable attitudes, and make them easily digestible; then they advertise them as vital and life-giving. But they cannot have it both ways; a novel's vitality lies in its being complex enough to approximate life.

Modern publishing, he lamented, had ceded editorial authority to the distributor, who, in turn, was beholden to the mythical man on the street.[87] Theodor Adorno and Dwight Macdonald both would have recognized their own assertions that the machinery and logic of production had wrested control from its nominal masters, and that art suffered for the

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[86] Ibid., 137–41, 144. Van Nostrand's critique echoed Bernard DeVoto's own "Law of the Degradation of Consumers' Goods," which ran, "Making goods for use degenerates into making goods for sale and ends up as making goods for replacement." DeVoto, "Culture at Two Bits," 13.

[87] Van Nostrand, *The Denatured Novel*, 202, 214.

change.

What the initial two decades of the paperback industry in American publishing demonstrated was the gulf that existed between publishers, distributors, authors, and readers on one side, and literary and other critics on the other. The means of distribution for paperbacks meant that the gatekeeping role of critics was marginalized. Literary scholar Leerom Medovoi has observed

> The vast expansion of book readership enabled by paperback print capitalism thus led to a perceptible decline in cultural authority by the traditional arbiters of literary merit. Literary intellectuals already concerned about their "age of conformity" therefore found themselves particularly anxious over what they perceived as a tendency toward literary conformity, driven by the paperback's massification of literature.[88]

One can sympathize with the critic's distaste for the aesthetics of the new styles, be it the cover and/or the contents, yet still conclude that their perceived decline in literary artistry was actually an invigoration of the medium.

More important, especially in the scope of this study and contrary to the claims of so many mass culture critics of the period, this process cannot credibly be described as having been driven by dictatorial production processes that neutered authorial creativity and imposed the results on a passive audience. Nor could the paperbacks of this period be persuasively argued as uniform. Certainly, there were genres that encouraged formula and the industry was given to trends of cover design and topicality, but the paperback business in its first two decades is better appreciated as driven by the anarchy of the market. That is, this was an economy with no clear driving force or control beyond the ability of the publishers to release a steady flow of books and the readers' interest in

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[88] Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 80.

buying them. Possibilities rather than protocols reigned. It was the innovation in technique—the magazine distribution model applied to books—that altered the book publishing methodology by increasing not just the size but nature of the reading public. This was a group of readers for whom critics did not speak, of whom the critics were wary, and so the critics were largely bypassed in the author-reader relationship. Indeed, the buying public took on the role of critic, however indirectly and awkwardly, by assisting paperback publishers decide what genres and trends were worth pursuing/exploiting. This is not to idealize or romanticize the period as one of perfect balance between authorial freedom and reader choice, but it bears stressing that the turmoil that accompanied both paperback reprints and then paperback originals introduced a great degree of pluralism to publishing—albeit at the cost of the expert critic's authority. Within that space created by the anarchy of the paperback market was an opportunity for exploration of taboo subject matter and social criticism that was otherwise diluted, if not precluded, by the dominant conventions of the era.

CHAPTER 4
The Other Hollywood: B-Movies and Exploitation Films

In the wake of a series of rapid and powerful body blows, the American movie industry entered the 1950s in, if not crisis, a deep quandary about its future. The emergence of television as a rival suitor for Americans' eyes, the court-ordered end of a lucrative oligopoly, and rising labour costs signaled the end of Hollywood's seeming limitless profitability and centrality as the nation's cultural dispenser. The problem of the so-called "lost audience" and how to get it back was a persistent concern in the postwar period. Conventional thinking settled on producing big-budget blockbusters, yet successful as many of these may have been, they did little to stem the prevailing sense that movies were in eclipse. The problem was not primarily one of production, but of what kinds of audiences to pursue and how to deliver films to them. It was not the major studios in this period, but the outsider low-budget moviemakers that pioneered new distribution and exhibition strategies in pursuit of an untapped adolescent audience, and in doing so demonstrated that the movie industry could yet be profitable and culturally meaningful.

This chapter follows a similar line of argument as Chapter 3, namely that method of distribution played a dominant role in establishing audiences for cultural products, which in turn affected the content produced. That is, the distribution process was the catalyst for content, not production, however counter-intuitive that may seem. Chapter 3 focused on the development of the paperback and emphasized the role of new producers who used emerging technologies and radically different distribution methods to transform the American publishing industry. Whereas the paperback's challenge came amidst general industry stability, this chapter, which covers the heyday of Hollywood's oligopolistic studio system to the emergence of innovative intruders in the mid-1950s,

argues that this opening came about during a crisis. A government anti-monopoly law suit against the major studios and the challenge of television were confounding elements to what seemed an effective and contained economy, sparking deep turmoil and offering an opportunity for alternative approaches to the conventional practice. These challengers exploited industry blind spots with regards to distribution and audiences, and in doing so established conditions to produce novel movie narratives and aesthetics. What is more, an examination of Hollywood's low-budget, unglamourous history demonstrates that matters of distribution were the true engine of production, before and after the crisis.

This chapter begins with some postwar analyses of the movie industry machinery, highlighting their emphasis on production. The three critics—Hortense Powdermaker, Herbert Gans, and C. Wright Mills—were informed by different perspectives about autonomy and domination, but shared a belief that Hollywood was best appreciated at the production level and that this was a fairly static, if not mechanistic, process. This chapter aims to belie these assumptions by tracing the contours of the low-budget film in the movie industry, highlighting the central importance of distribution in establishing both audiences and shaping content. Even more, it seeks to demonstrate the dynamic nature of Hollywood because of constant challenges to its processes. There were periods of stability, but over the course of the roughly twenty-five years covered here, these were exceptions. In the turmoil and uncertainty, opportunities awaited for those producers and distributors not stuck in rutted thinking. In emphasizing dynamism within the movie industry, especially in the postwar period, this chapter looks to rebut assumptions of mass cultural critics (particularly the radicals and conservatives) as presented in Chapter 2. The nature of postwar mass culture was not one of domination, where producers picked and played the tune and consumers obligingly danced. Nor was the nature of production

blandly formulaic, at best derivative of the work of auteur filmmakers. Instead, there was a degree of chaos that encouraged diverse narratives and approaches that engaged ever-shifting audiences, all of which countered the crude models promoted by contemporary critics.

Anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker spent a year in Hollywood (1946–47) conducting field research and treating the movie industry like an exotic tribal people. In describing movie industry archetypes, Powdermaker's *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* (1951) offered a presentation of Hollywood as distinct from, yet part of, the rest of America. While certainly critical of the movie industry's guiding logic, her analysis lacked the snarl and abstract depiction exhibited by Theodor Adorno or Dwight Macdonald. Instead, she described a world where individual ambition and deficiencies complicated deceptively mechanistic schemes of domineering moviemaking. "Hollywood is no mirrorlike reflection of our society," she wrote, for it rejected pluralism by its conscious emphasis on particular behaviours and values, and purposeful exclusion of others. Hollywood was influential, certainly, but limited by human frailties.[1]

Like the liberal Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., she argued that modern life was defined by apprehension, be it the possibility of nuclear annihilation or the challenge of totalitarianism. Isolation and loneliness, even in crowded cities, were common traits of daily existence. The emergence of the Hollywood system, she argued, was an important counter to this. Hollywood was part of an intricate complexity of mass-communicated manipulation of emotions, stimulating desires and anxieties that could only be satisfied on the movie screen. Hollywood provided "ready-made fantasies or daydreams" that

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[1] Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory; An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie Makers* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), 10.

offered temporary escape from anxieties via vicarious experiences.[2]

Powdermaker hewed to the common critique of mass culture that it was dominated, even defined, by formula. Yet, she emphasized that this was more the ambition of movie producers, not the reality. The clash of egos in the movie business and the fickle nature of the audience compromised the dream of standardized production. Yes, the paying public may have supported the imitation (or ten) of a successful film, but it always grew weary and eventually rejected a formula.[3] Despite invoking the assembly line analogy to describe moviemaking, Powdermaker asserted that it should be treated cautiously. The process was, in fact, highly inefficient, with too many resources employed and wasted. The competing egos and artistic visions of producers, writers, director, and actors battled at every stage of the process, and were necessarily infused in the final product. "Hollywood is an industry, but daydreams are its product and these cannot be successfully produced as if they were cans of beans."[4] The uncompromising and unforgiving culture industry described by Adorno and Max Horkheimer, where the cold logic of production dominated, was muddied in Powdermaker's depiction, where individual interest and creative impulse could, and did, thwart the machinery.

Nevertheless, the machinery of Hollywood was still sufficient to compromise true, singular creativity, to take originality and reshape it into formula. And the power of the mass media encouraged passivity, whereby opinions were externally directed rather than derived from within.[5] "Hollywood," Powdermaker concluded, "represents totalitarianism." By this, she meant that the nature of the movie industry was one of manipulation and control, albeit mostly limited to economic pursuits rather than all-

[2] Ibid., 11–15.
[3] Ibid., 36–42.
[4] Ibid., 169, 288–89.
[5] Ibid., 318, 322–23.

encompassing social transformation, such as that argued by Frankfurt School theorists. Yet, Powdermaker claimed, Hollywood shared with the totalitarian states a belief that humans were passive and pliable, and that like a Hitler or Stalin believed the anxieties of the audience could be exploited and manipulated. This was not solely about money, then, and therefore not about the nature of capitalism, but the ego of Hollywood's producers and the pleasure generated from manipulating "the daydreams of men and women who sit in the darkened theater."[6]

In sum:

> Hollywood has the elaborated totalitarian elements we have described: the concept of people as property and as objects to be manipulated, highly concentrated and personalized power for power's sake, an amorality, and an atmosphere of breaks, continuous anxiety and crises. The result of this overelaboration is business inefficiency, deep frustration in human relations, and a high number of unentertaining second- and third-rate movies.

The question going forward was whether Hollywood's overlords would be willing to reconsider and embrace a democratic model rather than a totalitarian one.[7]

A decade later, sociologist Herbert Gans had no such qualms, offering an orthodox postwar liberal account of movie production that emphasized compromise, expertise, and the virtues of pluralistic balance.[8] "The Creator-Audience Relationship in the Mass Media" (1957) celebrated the free market by lauding producers' sincere efforts to serve audience interests. Gans emphasized how "prior feedback" informed the production process, arguing for active participation not passivity, from both producers

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[6] Ibid., 326–29.
[7] Ibid., 332.
[8] Herbert J. Gans, "The Creator-Audience Relationship in the Mass Media," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (1957; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1964), 315–22.

and audiences. Critics who argued in favour of passivity, he wrote, fell back to notions that either the audience accepted whatever it was presented or that the creators were hostages to consumer interests (i.e., the radical and conservative perspectives, respectively). Gans allowed a measure of truth to both positions, but ultimately found them too crude to be persuasive.

What mass cultural critics missed and moviemakers understood, Gans said, was that audiences were a collection of publics, each with their own predispositions that inclined them to respond to different aspects of the movie.[9] Market research could offer only the most superficial assessments of what audience members found appealing. Instead, moviemaking was an interactive communicative act between the filmmaker and the audience. At every stage, the filmmaker considered how the audience would respond, for the expectations of the audience were always primary. Yet, the audience was no monolith, but rather made of multiple and even contradictory elements, driven by any number of influences. The goal was to create something that would appeal broadly, even if it was unlikely that all audiences could be satisfied. The filmmaker likely had a different personal history than that of his audiences, and so had to balance his own interests with theirs. Gone awry, this led to snobbery; at its best, it created a hit movie. Success was less preordained than a gamble, and formulas only reliable until they were not. The entire process of moviemaking was largely one of insecurity-guided compromise.

What Gans offered was a neat encapsulation of the liberal view of American culture and power. Expert producers interacted respectfully with audiences for mutual

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[9] This is reminiscent of Raymond Williams' perceptive assertion in 1958 that "there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses." Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary," in *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. Ben Highmore (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 98.

satisfaction. Arrogance on the part of producers risked complete failure, and so humility was mandated. This was success via consensus. More important here, however, was that Gans treated moviemaking as an exercise in direct markets, of creators and consumers, with no consideration of any intermediate interests.

Quite to the contrary, C. Wright Mills treated the production of movies (and culture more generally) as fragmenting and domineering to producer and consumer alike. Modern consciousness and knowledge, he claimed, were filtered through a "cultural apparatus" that represented all artistic and scientific work, all intellectual inquiry and discourse, and all entertainment. "Inside this apparatus," he wrote, "standing between men and events, the images, meanings, slogans that define the world in which men live are organized and compared, maintained and revised, lost and cherished, hidden, debunked, celebrated." The key phrase here was "standing between men and events," for the cultural apparatus was not a tool of free expression but one of domination by those who held power.[10]

American capitalism dictated that the cultural apparatus brought all artistic forms under the profit motive. Worse, the American economy was driven by the "noxious weed" of distribution or merchandising. The distributor reigned over producer and consumer alike. Production capacity in the American economy far exceeded any sensible demand, and so a means was required to keep the system functioning lest it collapse amidst monopolies and accumulated surpluses. The distributor was key to keeping the

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[10] C. Wright Mills, "The Cultural Apparatus," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 203–05. Originally published in "The Cultural Apparatus," *The Listener* 61, no. 1565 (26 March 1959): 552–53, 556; and C. Wright Mills, "The Man in the Middle," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 175. Originally published as "The Man in the Middle: The Designer," *Industrial Design* 5 (November 1958): 72–76.

elements of the entire process moving by artificially stimulating demand.[11]

This ubiquitous commercialization had led to "America's cultural confusion, banality, excitement, sterility." The "cultural workman" was a servant to the logic of marketing, more superficial designer than true artist or intellectual. It was the advertiser who held the real power. Within the logic of the distribution model, the cultural workman became subservient to the expertise of the market researcher who supposedly knew the consumer better than they knew themselves. The distributor gained more input into production, the artist less. What had been lost in this turn was the value of craftsmanship, of art for its own sake, created by the craftsman for his own needs and conceived wholly in his own mind. True craftsmanship/art, Mills argued, should be the centre of human existence, not banished to the psyche's hinterlands. Consumers, too, were part of the distributor's logic, trained to respond to the latter's wants. These desires did not emerge from the consumer's own personality or body, but were instilled "by an elaborate apparatus of jingle and fashion, of persuasion and fraud." The cultural apparatus was thus an adjunct of commerce, serving fundamentally "anticultural" goals. That the practitioners of commerce employed the cultural workman to these ends turned the artist into just another pitchman.[12]

Mills' view is the most interesting of the three for the argument pursued in this chapter, for he grasped the importance of distribution in affecting production and consumption. What his perspective lacked, however, was a sense of dynamism and interaction. He treated cultural production and consumption as static and passive, where the distributor's domination was compromised only by the random tidal sway of novelty.

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[11] Mills, "The Cultural Apparatus," 206–07; and Mills, "The Man in the Middle," 177.
[12] Mills, "The Cultural Apparatus," 209; and Mills, "The Man in the Middle," 178–83.

It was an easy substitution of distributor control for producer control. What all three critics missed was how much distribution was affected by other fluctuating forces—political, economic, demographic, cultural—and so the quest for some kind of stability and dominance was always incomplete. This is where the discussion now turns, to the instability of the movie industry, from the dominance of the studio system in the 1930s, its collapse in the 1950s, and the emergence of a creative low-budget independent form.

The B movie, demeaned and dismissed as an aesthetic abomination and as rote and hack filmmaking, was the linchpin of Hollywood's studio system of the 1930s and 1940s. Originally a product of necessity brought about by the economic contraction of the Great Depression, the B movie emerged as a reliable source of income that underwrote the industry's more prestigious films and served as a training ground for emerging actors and directors. Less the inferior of the more esteemed A feature film, the B was both alternative Hollywood and its economic workhorse.

As the Depression's effects expanded and ossified, diminished attendance forced theatre owners to pursue new strategies to attract paying customers. Air conditioning, discounted matinee showings, and door prizes were all introduced in the early 1930s, but the most influential ploy was the double feature. The double bill—the pairing of two separate films on a single admission price—was initially resisted by the major studios as it required a greater supply of movies than available, especially at a time when production budgets were being constrained. Into this void emerged smaller new studios that provided the product that both exhibitor and audience demanded. By 1935, the double feature became the norm at all but the most prestigious theatres, and even the major studios began producing films for the second half of the double bill. Soon enough, the industry as a whole came to rely upon the double bill as a reliable source of income

that consolidated the power of the studio system.[13]

The studio system era in Hollywood, which ran from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, was defined by the dominance of eight vertically integrated companies that participated in a de facto oligopoly that controlled the production, distribution, and exhibition of movies in America. These eight were divided into what was known as the Big Five—Paramount, Loew's [MGM], 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros., and RKO—and the Little Three—Columbia, Universal, and United Artists. The distinction between the two rested on the extent of their control within the industry. The Big Five owned their own physical studios where they produced movies, possessed national and international distribution networks, and owned a series of theatres that exhibited their movies. The Little Three were less integrated. Columbia and Universal produced and distributed their own films, but owned no theatres. United Artists did not produce its own movies, but rather served as a major distributor and had access to Big Five theatres.

While the major studios owned some three thousand of the nation's twenty-three thousand theatres in the 1930s, these represented roughly eighty percent of all first-run theatres (i.e., movie houses that showed new releases exclusively) and many of the most luxurious second-run theatres. These cinemas served prized middle- and upper-class urban audiences and represented upwards of eighty percent of annual box office revenue. The ability to produce movies with guaranteed distribution and exhibition all but assured profitability. Controlling distribution allowed the majors to protect their shared

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[13] Arthur Lyons, *Death on the Cheap: The Lost B Movies of Film Noir* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 29; Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 321; Richard M. Hurst, *Republic Studios: Between Poverty Row and the Majors* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), 3; Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy, "The Economic Imperative: Why Was the B Movie Necessary?" in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System: An Anthology of Film History and Criticism*, ed. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 15; and Blair Davis, *The Battle for the Bs: 1950s Hollywood and the Rebirth of Low-Budget Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 3–6.

hegemony by regulating the viability of independent movie producers and the mostly post-first-run exhibitors. The studios established a pecking order of theatres to better regulate distribution scheduling and maximize profitability. As long as independent exhibitors were willing to accept the terms set out by the majors, they were allowed eventual access to popular major studio releases.[14]

All told, some four thousand movies were produced in the 1930s, a total that precluded big-budget moviemaking as the norm. Instead, the B movie—the lower-budget partner on the double bill—made up half the majors' production schedule, but even this was insufficient to address market demands. The need for new movies gave birth to a number of independent producers. Studios like Monogram, PRC, and Republic emerged in the early to mid-1930s to satisfy this demand. While they reliably produced films for the second spot on the bill, their low budgets and slender profit margins earned them the snide sobriquet Poverty Row. Still, a few gained grudging respect within the industry for their stability and general competency of output. These smaller studios lacked dedicated distribution networks and owned no theatres, so they relied on a series of independent regional distributors. Unlike the nationally distributed major studio film, the Poverty Row film was sent out in a patchwork manner, often failing to cover the entire country. But as long as demand for the double bill existed, the low-budget independent producers maintained a steady and vital presence in Hollywood's economy.[15]

The process by which Hollywood created movies began not with the actual filmmakers—the producers, writers, directors, actors, and technical personnel—but those who established and maintained the distribution networks in New York. The forecasts

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[14] Yannis Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 19, 30–33; Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 17; and Lyons, *Death on the Cheap*, 29.
[15] Lyons, *Death on the Cheap*, 30, 37, 45; and Balio, *Grand* Design, 320–25.

and analyses employed by these individuals put in motion budgets, personnel, and aesthetics well before any film was shot. Just as the studio system minimized the importance of any single studio inside the system, that same system was driven not by production of movies but by their distribution.

To the moviegoer, an A (or feature) film was the star attraction and last shown in the package. It was usually about ninety minutes long, employed more lavish or intricate sets and/or exotic locales, showcased the studio's top talent, targeted the mythical middle-class everyman, and often sought to impress the critics and win accolades for the studio. On the business end of moviemaking, however, the definition of an A film was one that was rented for a percentage of each showing's ticket sales. The breakdown ranged from 60/40 to 90/10 for the most popular films, with the greater share going to the distributor, and the producer receiving its cut from that amount. An A film was placed at the top of the bill because it was believed to have the most appeal. The greater the ticket sales generated, the more revenue would be generated for all involved, especially the distributor and producer. The revenue ceiling for an A film was limited only to the number of tickets sold, but, at the same time, it carried no revenue guarantees. No two A films ever made up a double bill, for that would split the percentage of the same ticket, thereby diminishing each film's earning power.[16]

The distribution and rent structure for the B movie was wholly dissimilar to that of the A. The B movie was rented for a flat fee, offering greater reliability to producer, distributor, and exhibitor, if not greater rewards. Not bound to ticket sales, the profitability of a B movie for producer and distributor was determined by how many

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[16] Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 8; Flynn and McCarthy, "The Economic Imperative," 17; and Lyons, *Death on the Cheap*, 30.

independent exhibitors could be persuaded to take it on. The risks here were mitigated greatly by two industry practices: block booking and blind bidding. Under block booking, a studio did not rent single films but rather packages of films made up of A's and B's. The lure of the A movie became the condition that forced exhibitors to rent major studio B's, ensuring that studios would profit from movies believed to have limited appeal. Blind bidding prevented exhibitors from knowing beforehand the specific titles they rented. No titles were listed in the rental contract, but rather categories of prices and percentages. An exhibitor might be presented with a package of four feature films at 35%, six at 30%, and ten at 25%; and ten second-bill films at $200 and ten at $100. As part of a block booking agreement, an exhibitor was required to select a certain number of A films and B films.[17]

While the B movie came to be appreciated by the studios as a source of reliable, if modest profit, as well as a means of controlling overall costs by keeping the machinery of movie production constantly running, the exhibitor also benefited from the flat-rent scheme. There was no set ceiling for the exhibitor to the B movie's profitability. Where the exhibitor's cut of the A movie never wavered, after a certain number of tickets were sold, the B movie became 100% profit. However, block booking tempered this potential windfall because the exhibitor was mandated to show the full slate of movies to fulfill the contract. To satisfy this, independent theatres changed their playbills several times a week by altering the B component. All involved understood that power lay in the hands of distributors who set the terms of exhibition.[18]

Distribution and rental schemes dictated the production budgets of both A and B

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[17] Lea Jacobs, "The B Film and the Problem of Cultural Distinction," *Screen* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 3; Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 7; Balio, *Grand Design*, 326; and Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System*, 17.

[18] Jacobs, "The B Film and the Problem of Cultural Distinction," 2, 7–8.

films. At major studios, where both types were produced, scripts were evaluated or commissioned for their perceived appeal. Stories with wide appeal were put in the A category. Those scripts with more limited appeal, such as to working-class, rural, and/or immigrant audiences, were classified as B's. The open-ended percentage rents for feature films encouraged higher production budgets ($350,000 or more) to craft films that might increase ticket sales.[19] The B movie, on the other hand, lived and died within its circumscribed budget. The advantage of the flat rent meant that even before shooting began, producers had an understanding of how much revenue the film would generate and budgeted accordingly, usually $30,000–$300,000. While major studio B's had tighter budgets, shorter shooting schedules, and used a studio's stable of character actors than its stars, the films were never produced in a shoddy manner, as the studio brand was always considered sacrosanct, even on these less prestigious films.[20]

The Poverty Row studios regularly shot films on budgets that ranged between $10,000 and $100,000, and earned profits of perhaps $2,000 a piece. Given such hairline margins, no detail was too important to overlook when it came to production costs. The B film employed less expensive former stars, rising stars, and/or never-were stars, and stock footage and modest sets were used to cut costs. Poverty Row movies also tended to be genre films so as to more easily recycle scripts. The running times were not as long as A films, as short as fifty-five minutes and rarely exceeding seventy minutes. To save money on film stock, multiple takes of a scene were rare. Retakes also added stress to already constrained time budgets. Shooting schedules were usually one to two weeks, with extremely long working days. Bad weather or illness of actors could wipe out any chance

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[19] Balio, *Grand Design*, 314.
[20] Ibid., 314–17.

at a profitable film.[21]

The rent structure, then, placed budget constraints on B-movie production, which created an aesthetic that gave the form a reputation for inferiority and formula compared to the bigger-budgeted films. Yet it is a mistake to evaluate the B movie as the stunted sibling of the A. They were simply different forms, with different needs and agendas. Those who worked on B movies were not chosen for their lack of ability, but rather their talent for efficiency and imagination. A sloppy director or self-indulgent actor could compromise a film's budget and profitability, whereas those able to work quickly, improvise on the fly, and succeed on the first take were prized. Constraints of budget and form also presented opportunities to experiment in technique and narrative. Limited time and money encouraged innovative camerawork that conveyed maximum information in a single shot. Like the pulp novel, which emphasized action over character, B movies developed a snappy narrative style for a plot. Because the B film was intended to target particular audiences, its creators were not obliged to appeal to everyone. Directors were also freer to tinker with formulas in ways that big-budget films, with much more at stake financially, were reluctant to attempt. As long as a director remained on schedule and within budget, he was normally given great latitude to interpret and experiment. Born of a corseted budget due to the mechanics of distribution and exhibition during the studio system, the B movie encouraged aesthetic and technical experimentation.[22]

The decline of the studio system began in the late 1930s, and with it the ebbing of the traditional B movie. In 1938, the United States Justice Department charged the eight

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[21] Flynn and McCarthy, "The Economic Imperative," 18–23; Balio, *Grand Design*, 320, 325; Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 3; and Hurst, *Republic Studios*, 2.

[22] Balio, *Grand Design,* 329–38; Clive T. Miller, "What's So Hot About Going to the Movies: Some Free Association on the Nature of B Movies, Trivia, and the Film Experience," in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System: An Anthology of Film History and Criticism*, ed. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 57; and Hurst, *Republic Studios,* 4.

majors with Sherman Act antitrust violations on behalf of independent theatre operators, who, while numerically dominant, were consistently outperformed by the studio-owned theatres. The suit argued that the majors' control of distribution via block booking and blind bidding prevented independent exhibitors from competing fairly. The intent was to turn American movie exhibition into a proper free market.[23]

The trial began in 1940, but lasted only three days before the parties settled out of court. In what became known as the Consent Decree, the Big Five maintained control of their theatres but made concessions in other areas. The most notable of these was to end blind bidding and instead provide exhibitors with advance screenings to assess films before they rented, and to limit block bookings to a maximum of five films. This generated an immediate two-fold effect. First, the major studios slowed their production of B movies. With blind bidding banned, producers needed to woo exhibitors into selecting their movies, and so greater emphasis was placed on a studio's most marketable stars, which meant more A films to showcase such talent. Second, the studios encouraged more independent production of both high-end A's, which they would distribute, and B's, which satisfied demand for bottom-of-the-bill films. Thus, the "prestige film" grew in importance. More importantly, major studios increasingly became primarily distributors, not producers, of new films. The number of movies produced by the major studios shrank from 358 in 1942 to 289 in 1943, and 270 in 1945. This relatively moderate erosion of the major studios' dominance shifted production away from the B and towards the higher

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[23] Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 47–48; and Lyons, *Death on the Cheap*, 37–38; and Ernest Borneman, "United States versus Hollywood: The Case Study of an Antitrust Suit [1951]," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 332.

Even though Monogram and Republic engaged in block-booking, the Poverty Row studios were omitted from the antitrust suit because they were not involved in exhibition or had colluded with the majors. Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 84.

risk A, and encouraged independent producers to take the real risk.[24]

Between 1939 and 1946, movie attendance rose considerably, due largely to internal migration from rural areas to cities to satisfy war industry labour needs. Theatres stayed open around the clock to accommodate the shift-work schedule of workers. Prestige films enjoyed longer runs than in the past, which seemingly proved that releasing a few genuine A films was a more profitable strategy than several mid-range A's and a lot of B's. Furthermore, attendance was so reliably strong that financing became much easier to arrange, thus spurring more bigger-budgeted production.[25]

Unlike other industries that braced for the dislocations of peacetime conversion, Hollywood expected good times to continue. An end to rationing and a growth in potential audience—namely, returning troops and a re-opening of the European market—suggested even greater profitability. Initially, the confidence was warranted. In 1946, weekly movie attendance reached ninety million (up from eighty million just before the war). This translated to industry profits of $122 million, almost double the previous year. What followed that high water mark, according to film historian Blair Davis, was

> one of the most precipitous collapses in the annals of American business. In quick succession, and with devastating effect, Hollywood was beset by a series of plagues almost biblical in their variety and cruel persistence. The visitations were of three kinds—economic, political, and cultural—and their cumulative effect left the lately vigorous industry prostrate.[26]

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[24] Borneman, "United States versus Hollywood," 332; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 47–50; and Janet Staiger, "Individualism versus Collectivism: The Shift to Independent Production in the US Film Industry," *Screen* 24, nos. 4/5 (1983): 70–71.

[25] Staiger, "Individualism versus Collectivism," 71; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 83; and Peter Lev, *Transforming the Screen, 1950–1959. Volume 7 of History of the American Cinema* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003), 25.

[26] Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s, rev. ed.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 16; Blair Davis, "The 1950s B-Movie: The Economics of Cultural Production," (PhD diss., McGill University, 2007), 90; James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986),

One problem was rising labour costs. In 1947, overall industry profit fell to $89 million and further still in 1949 to $37 million, due in no small part to rising production costs. In response, the studios shed contracts and other fixed costs wherever possible. A year-end summary in 1948 stated that movie producers found it more cost effective to hire talent and technicians on an as-needed basis, even if at a higher rate than normal, than maintain their services during fallow periods. In 1945, the majors had 804 actors and 490 writers under contract. This shrank to 474 and 147, respectively, in 1950, and 209 and 67 in 1955. Carpenters and other craft union employees also shifted to freelance work in this period.[27]

Attendance began to decline, but, according to Davis, it was not so much fewer people going to the movies than fewer going as frequently. Furthermore, not all films suffered equally. The high-budget films continued to do well, but the mid-budget A proved to be an increasingly losing option. The evaporation of assured profitability gave bankers pause to lend, which meant that fewer and fewer films were being released by the end of the decade.[28] But there was another reason that the major studios were hesitant to commit to more in-house production—the federal government reintroduced its antitrust suit.

The Consent Decree was a temporary measure, lasting until mid-1942, but even after its expiry the studios did not return to their old ways, at least not completely, perhaps fearing renewed prosecution or enjoying the bounty of the new status quo. With

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174–75; Lev, *Transforming the Screen, 1950–1959*, 7; and Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 105.

[27] Staiger, "Individualism versus Collectivism," 74–75; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 88, 105; and Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 26.

[28] Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 26; Staiger, "Individualism versus Collectivism," 74, 77–78; Davis, "The 1950s B-Movie," 90; and Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 45, 49–50.

the attention of war demands ebbing, the Justice Department pressed the issue again, and another anti-trust trial began in 1945. The major studios argued that because each of them owned only a small fraction of the nation's theatres, it was absurd to consider this monopoly control over the entire market. The government countered that the combined control over first-run exhibition had de facto monopoly implications on the rest of the exhibitors. No proof of conspiracy was required because the rental system precluded competition. Independent exhibitors had no recourse and could be driven out of business if they did not accede to distributor demands. If an independent second-run exhibitor dared to show an independent producer's film as a first-run picture, he risked being denied access to any film from a major studio. Which is to say that he would soon be forced out of business. The Little Three sought to be excused from the trial because they owned no theatres, but the prosecution argued that they perpetuated the monopoly by eschewing independent exhibitors for the majors' first-run theatres, and that they had received favourable terms for distribution in exchange for their compliance.[29]

After a mixed lower-court verdict and a Justice Department appeal, in 1948 the Supreme Court finally handed the government its victory in *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.* (hereafter the Paramount Decree), ending block booking and ordering the "divorcement" of studio-owned theatres. By finally ending the vertical integration model in Hollywood, severing exhibition from production and distribution, and cancelling block booking, the goal was achieved of establishing a market based on a movie-by-movie, theatre-by-theatre basis.[30]

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[29] Borneman, "United States versus Hollywood," 333–36; and Staiger, "Individualism versus Collectivism," 70–71.

[30] Lyons, *Death on the Cheap*, 38; Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 16–17; Borneman, "United States versus Hollywood," 338–41; and Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 411–12.

Independent exhibitors should have been happy with the Paramount Decree, but television's concurrent rise immediately compromised that victory. One Congressional study of movie distribution practices found that between 1948 and 1952, twenty-three percent of theatres closed in areas where television reception was strong; in areas without television, only nine percent of theatres closed. A Paramount survey in 1950 concluded that having a television in the home was linked to a 20–30% decline in movie attendance. A Warner Bros. poll the next year found only a 3–4% drop, but it was nevertheless part of a downward trend. When a television could provide entertainment in one's living room—for free, no less—why should people invest the time, money, and hassle of going to a movie theatre? Exhibitors' fears were that now that the producers/distributors were forced to engage in the free market for exhibition, renting their movies to television would be a viable option, and that in a scarcity economy for films rental prices would skyrocket.[31]

Divorcement was a slow and uneven process. The Paramount Theatre in New York City was showing non-Paramount films as early as 1951, but in the case of MGM, the sale of its Loew's theatres was not complete until 1959. A significant problem in selling off the theatre holdings was that the divestiture order exacerbated industry instability, which made theatre ownership less desirable than it once was.[32] As is, this was a period that saw a large number of theatre closures. A 1956 study found that 27% of all theatres were operating in the red and 30% were breaking even—i.e., more than half of all theatres were unprofitable. In the decade following the Paramount Decree, some

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[31] Borneman, "United States versus Hollywood," 343; Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 19; Staiger, "Individualism versus Collectivism," 75; and Peter Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 24, 211.

[32] Michael Conant, "The Impact of the *Paramount* Decrees [1960]," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 346–47; Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 149; and Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 9.

four thousand theatres closed. Michael Conant, who offered a contemporary account of the Decree's effect, speculated that the introduction of an open market to movie exhibition introduced too many theatres into the first- and second-run competition without having sufficient paying customers to support them. Distributors, too, were loath to modify years-old profitable patterns. Distributors understood that a balance of first- and second-run theatres in a region was required to maximize revenue, and so they sought to avoid disrupting established schedules. Furthermore, many of the failing theatres may have been artificially augmented by the tightly regulated pre-Decree distribution system. In short, this market correction eliminated thousands of independent exhibitors who were ostensibly the beneficiaries of the Decree.[33]

The same instability faced by exhibitors was borne by movie producers. It became apparent that the studios earned a great deal of their income from exhibition, which in turn had funded production. This loss of both revenue and guaranteed exhibition accelerated trends underway since the 1940 Consent Decree, notably more high-budget films and more independent production, but fewer films produced overall. Having lost the basis for their safe strategy of low-profit reliable B's mixed with more adventurous A's, the studios went almost wholly to the high-risk, high-reward strategy of blockbusters. The major studios released a combined 243 features in 1940, but just 116 in 1956. The B movie, already in decline since the early 1940s, sped towards extinction as its profitability could no longer be guaranteed. In 1952, both Twentieth Century Fox and Warner Bros. officially dropped the B from their production schedule, with studio head Jack Warner declaring them "a menace to the industry." The independent movie producer also went from being a viable option to a reliable component of the major studios'

[33] Conant, "The Impact of the *Paramount* Decrees," 365–67.

distribution wing. In 1946, the number of independent producers was estimated to be seventy. By 1957, that figure had risen to roughly 165, and independent productions accounted for roughly 70% of all releases by 1959.[34]

One distributor in the early 1950s claimed that in the current climate, only 20% of films, studio-produced or independent, were earning a profit. Most movies, he said, broke even; only a few truly failed. The major studios were better able to ride out this uncertainty because they still released enough movies in a year that one or two hits could compensate for several mediocre performers, plus they had their distribution arms providing revenue. An independent that released only one or two films per year was particularly vulnerable in this feast-or-famine environment. After accounting for distributor cuts, a film with a $400,000 budget required a box office take of $650,000–700,000 to break even, and a $700,000 take generally required an exceptional film.[35]

Writing in 1962, Richard Dyer MacCann asserted that, regardless of the changes in the industry since the Paramount Decree, the independent was not especially freer than in the days of the studio system. Instead, the bonds were of a different type. The degree of latitude for acceptable subject matter was still quite limited, and production costs still dictated the nature of the work. The independent movie producer found his work was an endless series of compromises. The distributor, most likely a major studio, exercised influence over the film's production, demanding assurances that it would show a profit.

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[34] Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 17–18, 25; Conant, "The Impact of the *Paramount* Decrees," 356–57, 370; Flynn and McCarthy, "The Economic Imperative," 15; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 102, 106; Mike Kaplan, "Hollywood's To 'B' Or Not To 'B'," *Variety*, 21 November 1951, 7, 20; "B's Buzzing Out of Business?" *Variety*, 26 March 1952, 3, 13; "No B's in Major Studios' Bonnet; Veering More to Major Product," *Variety*, 19 August 1953, 7, 15; "No Profit Anymore in B (For Bad) Pictures, Warner Tells Guild," *Variety*, 11 November 1953, 1; and "Films' 'Hestiest' Distrib Sked," *Variety*, 21 March 1951, 3.

[35] "Only 20% of All Films Show Profit, Making It Tough for Indies With Their Fewer Pix, ELC's MacMillen Stresses," *Variety*, 28 March 1951, 7, 15; "Gotta Be Smash Hits, Or Else," *Variety*, 30 May 1951, 3; "Indies Continue Hacking Costs," *Variety*, 5 September 1951, 66; and "1952—Big Grosses, Low Profits," *Variety*, 31 December 1952, 1.

At every stage of the process, commerce trumped art and the independent's autonomy was eroded. All the talk of opportunities for promising new filmmakers was, in MacCann's view, wishful thinking, for the nature of the business worked against the auteur.[36] The Paramount Decree may have broken the major studio oligopoly and allowed independent participation, but it did not assure fair competition.

As the major studios abandoned the B movie, the Poverty Row studios, forced to realize that their product was no longer sufficiently profitable, followed suit. Even though they had been exempted from the original Consent Decree regarding block booking, and were therefore able to continue the practice throughout the 1940s, their content began to change. Republic, for example, pursued higher budget movies in this period.[37] However, production costs, competition from television, theatre closures, and perhaps changing public tastes, away from the company's specialty of cowboy films and juvenile humour movies, were too much to overcome. By 1959, Republic was little more than a corporate name, while Monogram was consumed by its subsidiary, Allied Artists, in 1952.[38]

Hollywood's troubles were not just with television or the end of the oligopoly. The postwar period was one of a massive internal migration, away from urban centres and the crown jewel downtown theatres, to suburban locales where no theatre might yet

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[36] Richard Dyer MacCann, "Independence, with a Vengeance," *Film Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1962): 16–18; "When You Say 'Indie' Use Quotes," *Variety*, 7 April 1954, 3; "Peak Action For Indie Units," *Variety*, 26 May 1954, 7; "Realities Increasingly Plain; Few 'Independents' Really Are; Studios Make Crucial Decisions," *Variety*, 22 September 1954, 3, 59; and "Majors Wooing Indie Prods.," *Variety*, 10 December 1952, 3.

[37] Linda May Strawn, "Steve Broidy [interview]," in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System*, eds. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1975), 275; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 87, 140–41; Conant, "The Impact of the *Paramount* Decrees," 359; Kaplan, "Hollywood's To 'B' Or Not To 'B'," 7, 20; "UA, U-I, Republic Move Closer to TV in Film Co. Trend Toward Alliance," *Variety*, 30 May 1951, 1; and "Republic 'Re-Edits' and Re-Titles," *Variety*, 10 February 1954, 16.

[38] Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 88–89, 144–45; Hurst, *Republic Studios: Between Poverty Row and the Majors*, 6, 21–24; Flynn and McCarthy, "The Economic Imperative," 25; and "Divided Opinion On Old Pix As Steady TV Lure," *Variety*, 3 October 1951, 7.

exist. Richard Brandt, the head of a small theatre chain, said in 1958, "The trouble today is that so many [movie] houses are in the wrong places. This country is mis-seated, not over-seated."[39] Ned Armstrong, writing in *Variety*, described the suburban exodus as leaving the large theatres "beached in the traffic-congested, business, non-dwelling heart of the city." The theatres were now an hour or more away from the suburban communities, and city streets all but barren by seven p.m. This left once vibrant theatre districts part of "the local skidrow." A further problem was a shortage of urban parking for all the new car owners. The obvious solution, Armstrong wrote, was to close up the urban theatres and build new ones in the suburban malls that were under construction. However, as many of these theatres were family holdings with the family name on the marquee, closing them up required overcoming sentiment and ego.[40]

Journalist Fred Hift argued that the movie industry was unwilling or unable to account for population shifts that turned suburbia into a key market, and so had cost the industry millions of dollars each year in lost box office sales. Distributors largely failed to modify their approach to satisfy a population that had moved. Continued preferential treatment for the deluxe first-run downtown theatres could not be justified, yet those exhibitors resisted ceding exclusivity for first-run films. There was also the difficulty in deciding which suburban theatres would be granted first-run status, for allowing them all to be treated to new films would oversaturate an area. One observer told Hift that distribution was not as scientifically managed as one might think, that it was dominated by people whose thinking was set a decade or more in the past and they did not want to change their methods or patterns. Even being aware that inflexibility was harming

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[39] Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 212.
[40] Ned Armstrong, "Suburbia—Key To Legit Future?" *Variety*, 23 January 1952, 1, 61.

profitability might not be enough to inspire new strategies.[41]

Post-Paramount life for the movie industry, then, was an expansion and acceleration of patterns evident in the late 1940s. And yet, jaundiced views like MacCann's may have had some merit in assessing the fate of the big-budget independent producer, but missed an emerging trend that gained momentum in the middle of the 1950s. As major studios abandoned the B film, exhibitors complained about a shortage of new films (especially as they fretted about competition from television), and so new independent producers and distributors emerged to fill this need. In orphaning the B film, mainstream Hollywood allowed outsiders to explore new styles, target new demographics, and devise new distribution/promotion techniques. In the 1930s and 1940s, according to historian Thomas Doherty, Hollywood pursued a strategy of satisfying an ideal pluralist audience of whole families and people of all ages and backgrounds in the theatre. The pairing of an A film with a dissimilarly themed B was rooted in the idea of casting a wide net. The rise of television and the end of the studio system ended any chance of continuing that universalist strategy. The studios were forced to target specific groups based on income and leisure time.[42] No company was more important in taking advantage of the new environment and pioneering new methods than a bold new independent producer.

American International Pictures (AIP) was founded in 1954 by lawyer Samuel Z. Arkoff and movie industry marketer James H. Nicholson at a time when it seemed especially foolhardy to begin a new independent company.[43] But where conventional

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[41] Fred Hift, "Films' B.O. Rainbow in Suburbs," *Variety*, 1 August 1956, 1, 18.
[42] Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 2.
[43] Because a company named American Pictures already existed, Arkoff and Nicholson's venture was originally named American Releasing Corp. In 1956, American Pictures went out of business and ARC was renamed American International Pictures. For the sake of simplicity, the AIP name will be used here

wisdom saw crisis, Arkoff and Nicholson saw opportunity. Fewer movies in production, they reasoned, meant less competition. The death of the B movie created a shortage in the low-budget market, leaving surviving exhibitors in desperate need of product. A market was out there waiting to be cultivated if one were not held hostage by conventional thinking.[44]

Among Arkoff and Nicholson's most innovative techniques was placing marketing before film production. Arkoff explained that the usual order of things was that the production department arranged for a film to be made, and only after this was complete that the sales department was consulted. There was something bordering on contempt in how marketing was treated by Hollywood, as if salespeople could come up with a successful campaign for any movie. AIP posited that marketing would be much more effective if the sales department were a part of the production process, not an afterthought. Production at AIP, then, began not at the script level but with a title and a marketing plan.[45]

As Arkoff and Nicholson understood that exhibitors would not hold on to AIP's movies for a long time, relying on word of mouth to build the audience was not a viable plan. AIP needed to grab its audience right off the bat. It needed opening-weekend success. Albert Kallis, AIP's promotional artist, explained, "At AIP, the advertising always came first. What was important was the thrust, the sense of what you were selling and how it would appeal." After a title and basic promotional strategy were established,

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exclusively.

[44] Sam Arkoff with Richard Trubo, *Flying Through Hollywood By the Seat of my Pants* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992), 27–31; and Linda May Strawn, "Samuel Z. Arkoff [interview]," in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System*, eds. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1975), 258.

[45] Mark Thomas McGee, *Faster and Furiouser: The Revised and Fattened Fable of American International Pictures* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1996), 54.

the marketing team constructed rough layouts. Sensationalist promotional campaigns—posters, radio spots, publicity stunts—were devised and focus groups assembled of their target audience (high school and college students) and select exhibitors. Once satisfied with the marketing plan, AIP's executives moved ahead to commission a script and begin shooting. This was backwards from Hollywood's way, but Arkoff saw their approach as in sync with American industry—find out whether there was a market for a product, and if so deliver it. There was little point shooting a movie that the public had no interest in seeing. This "medicine-show type of promotion," Richard Staehling argued, imbued AIP with a distinctive style that was as identifiable as that of any respected auteur director.[46]

Arkoff and Nicholson were adamant that the marketing of their films must never seem like they were talking down to teenagers or solving youth problems. That the major studios did not or would not understand this was a significant reason for AIP's success in the teen market. AIP understood the value of seeming anti-establishment and on teens' side.[47] When rivals accused AIP of duplicitous advertising, Arkoff and Nicholson conceded that their ads were not always completely faithful, but they were drawing from a carnival tradition of promotion. More so, no one in the movie industry was clean and pure in treatment of audiences or exhibitors, so throwing stones was unseemly.[48] Their audiences were not complaining, which was always the final word for AIP.

According to Arkoff, AIP's guiding production principle was "Thou shalt not put too much money into any one picture. And with the money you do spend, put it on the screen; don't waste it on the egos of actors or on nonsense that might appeal to some

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[46] Strawn, "Samuel Z. Arkoff," 265–66; Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 111–13; McGee, *Faster and Furiouser*, 54; Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 38–39; and Richard Staehling, "From Rock Around the Clock to The Trip: The Truth About Teen Movies [1969]," in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System*, eds. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1975), 225.
[47] Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 108–09.
[48] Hy Hollinger, "Is Carny Come-On Necessary?" *Variety*, 5 November 1958, 15.

highbrow critics."[49] The sole aim was to produce entertaining movies for audiences and to generate enough revenue to make another movie. Their profit margins were often so slender that a string of money-losing films would have shuttered the company. That its principal executives never had illusions of creating highbrow art defused possible creative tensions. Indeed, Arkoff thought Hollywood was too populated with "arty-farties and pseudo-intellectuals" driven by ego, snobbery, and peer ranking. AIP, he said, was more honest because it never downplayed the need for a film to be profitable in order for more to be made.[50]

Unless it was someone whom Nicholson and Arkoff trusted, such as frequent collaborator Roger Corman, it was not unusual that the film's director was excluded from the planning process altogether. The aim was "to film the meat without the fat," using "ingenuity and imagination instead of money," which meant cutting costs wherever possible. AIP's methodology here was akin to the classic B-movie studios of the 1930s and 1940s. Cutting costs was achieved by reusing sets for different pictures, combining locations to limit moving equipment, or other flexible practices. For example, while filming *Girls in Prison* (1956), a storm appeared. Instead of losing the day, the storm was written into the story. More drastically, if a project were going over budget during filming, whole pages of the script would be excised. Arkoff did not believe in giving the director the power of the final cut as he believed that directors tended to love their material more than what the audience needed. AIP also preferred working with young actors because they were less ego driven and did not expect to make as much money as older, more experienced actors. Besides this, given that AIP was targeting a younger

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[49] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 1.
[50] McGee, *Faster and Furiouser*, 21; Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 3–6; Strawn, "Samuel Z. Arkoff," 260; and Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 151.

audience, casting established older actors in lead roles made little sense. Still, Nicholson and Arkoff allowed their directors creative latitude during filming—as long as the budget was not violated.[51]

In pursuing low-budget filmmaking, AIP looked less to the B movie, despite certain overlaps in technique and attitude, than its even lower-budget cousin, the exploitation film. A 1946 *Variety* description treated the latter as "films with some timely or currently controversial subject which can be exploited, capitalized on, in publicity and advertising." By the 1950s, the exploitation film had evolved into formula, defined by: 1) a controversial or bizarre subject that lent itself to wild promotion; 2) a sparse budget; and 3) a teenage target audience. If an event was sufficiently trendy or controversial, someone inevitably capitalized on the notoriety and made a quick film about it, and others just as quickly panned the result as having no merit.[52]

Like the B movie, the exploitation film had its roots in the 1930s. Occupying the fringes of Hollywood were shadowy operators who made and distributed movies that flaunted censorship boards and defied official Hollywood. Exploitation producers knew that they lacked known stars, so they resorted to sideshow come-ons and the flimsy cover of educational intent to attract viewers. Their movies were defined by taboo subject matter, especially sex and drugs; a shoestring budget, with predictably low production values and reliance on stock footage; independent distribution; low-end, seedy, or rural

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[51] Strawn, "Samuel Z. Arkoff," 266; Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 2, 43, 49–50; Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*:, 111, 115; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 157; Roger Corman with Jim Jerome, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (reprint, 1990; New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 20, 33–34; Charles Goldman, "An Interview with Roger Corman," *Film Comment* 7, no. 3 (Fall 1971): 49; and Linda May Strawn, "Roger Corman [interview]," in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System*, eds. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1975), 309.

[52] Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 2, 6–7; Eric Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 4; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 139–40; and Corman, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood*, 34.

theatres; and a very limited number of prints in circulation.[53]

Historian Eric Schaefer argued that the pre-Paramount Decree exploitation film was a valuable counterpoint to above-ground Hollywood. Whereas mainstream films pursued a more pluralist (if trending to homogeneous) mission—those things that united—the exploitation movie was steeped in socially constructed anxieties, the taboos of Judeo-Christian morality, especially sex and drugs. Exploitation films called for social and moral order by showing the perils of disorder. They were exotic, but also provincial. They emphasized truth but revealed it suggestively. They warned of the dangers of a life of pleasure, yet showed the pursuit in a titillating manner. Where mainstream Hollywood was coy, exploitation films were lewd.[54]

The traditional B movie mutated into a newer form of exploitation film, albeit with bigger budgets, higher production values, and operating more in the open. These movies were aimed almost exclusively at the teen market and, like their predecessors, the marketing promised more than the films ever delivered in terms of sex and violence. Unlike the classical exploitation film, these were more like traditional Hollywood fare, never shying away from their obvious intent to thrill. These films also sought to make money from teen-specific subjects, such as rock n roll, juvenile delinquency, hot rods, surfing, or drugs (if possible as many of these as could be jammed into a movie).[55]

If any single figure can be credited with bringing the exploitation film out of the shadows, it was independent producer Sam Katzman, whose success had always rested on his skill in identifying trends and fads that held the possibility of generating a quick profit. Richard Staehling observed that while many sought to cash in on trends within

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[53] Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!"*, 2, 4–8.
[54] Ibid., 13–14, 341–42.
[55] Schaefer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!"*, 330–31; and Flynn and McCarthy, "The Economic Imperative," 34–35.

movies, Katzman looked outside of film for trends to capitalize upon. Equally important, Katzman was, like Arkoff and Nicholson, unashamedly a businessman first, arguing that "[a] picture that makes money is a good picture—whether it is artistically good or bad." In his career, Katzman produced over one hundred movies, and claimed to have never lost money on a single one.[56]

Katzman was the first producer to see that rock n roll had great potential for drawing in teen audiences. "We got a new generation," he said in 1952, "but they got the same old glands."[57] His movie *Rock Around the Clock* (Columbia, 1956) was the first of these types of films that were marketed only to teens. Its success showed that a movie did not need to appeal to adults to be profitable. Some early rock n roll films explicitly worked on the premise of generational conflict, with the music treated as the province of the teen, something that adults could never understand.[58]

The teenage market emerged in the midst of a shrinking adult audience. One of the remarkable curiosities of the post-Paramount Decree era was how slow the movie industry was to realize and pursue teen audiences. Film historian Thomas Doherty identified two reasons for Hollywood's slow realization to engage the teen market. The first was that Hollywood's titans were stuck in a loop of trying what had always had worked—appealing to adults. They had mostly emerged from carnival roots and largely forsworn modern marketing (e.g., motivational research), and were egotistical enough to modify their assumptions. The second was that moviemakers, having more adult

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[56] Staehling, "From Rock Around the Clock to The Trip," 222; Richard Thompson, "Sam Katzman: Jungle Sam, or, the Return of 'Poetic Justice, I'd Say'," in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System*, eds. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1975), 72; and "$300,000 Picture's Gross Expectancy Sam as $1-Mil Film—Katzman," *Variety*, 1 May 1957, 17.

[57] Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 53–56.

[58] Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 146; Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Lost in the Fifties: Recovering Phantom Hollywood* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 60; and Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 57–58, 66.

sensibilities, were resistant to appealing to more juvenile tastes.[59] This undoubtedly provided the necessary gap for companies like AIP to exploit that underdeveloped market.

AIP's success in cultivating a younger audience had two components. First, the company's primaries grasped what most in the business did not appreciate, that the demographics of the audience had changed. Arkoff recalled:

> I began to see the value of aiming pictures at this teenage market, which also contained the dating crowd into their mid-twenties. I often marveled at how the studio chiefs were ignoring them. The studio chiefs apparently didn't understand that their primary audience had changed, that movies were no longer the major form of entertainment for adult Americans. To the big studios, the youth culture was an unknown entity. But I could see who was going to the movies, and it was young people.

Despite being chided by others in the industry for making movies for the immature, AIP sloughed off the criticism as it focused on its ledger. Arkoff explained, "You don't make a picture for everybody and then hope that out of that group, two or four or six million people will come. [Instead] you aim the picture to a specific audience."[60] And it was better to aim for a specific audience ignored by one's competitors.

Arkoff and Nicholson further reasoned that even as television kept adults at home, it gave teenagers a greater reason to go out and escape their parents' authority.[61] A 1952 study found that teenagers were more attracted to movies over television than adults and children. The assumed rationale for this was that movies were conducive with dating in

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[59] The former observation is rather striking given the criticism of the radical mass culture theorists, who emphasized Hollywood's factory-like and cold-blooded preparation and execution. Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 51; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 138; and Hy Hollinger, "H'Wood's 'Age of the Teens'," *Variety*, 22 August 1956, 3.

[60] Arkoff quoted in Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 107; Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 206–07; and Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 4, 58.

[61] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 30.

ways that television was not. A Gallup study found that regular movie attendance began at age 12 and remained steady until age 19, when it began to drop markedly. After that, movie attendance did not pick up again until age 35.[62] Throughout the 1950s, those aged 12–35 made up 70–80% of audiences, and yet it was not until the second half of the decade that a significant number of movies were produced specifically for the youthful market. By 1957, upwards of 70% of audiences were under the age of thirty.[63]

While the teenage audience offered much promise to producers, distributors, and exhibitors, it also represented a risk. Film industry trade paper *Variety* filed numerous stories throughout the 1950s that printed tales of teenage theatre violence. In 1952, Hy Hollinger related how assaults and vandalism were keeping away adult customers. At drive-ins, there were reported instances of stealing loudspeakers, damaging restrooms, and breaking fences and signs. Theatre operators sought to keep quiet these incidences for fear of scaring off the still-prized adult customers, even as suspects were turned over to the local police department's juvenile squad. In December 1956, *Variety* reported that a Wenatchee, WA, theatre closed permanently due to the frequency of teenage vandalism. The owner cited not just regular repair costs but business lost from adults who refused to return. Another theatre in the same town hired a special police officer on Friday nights, when teens were more prevalent in the audience. This was immediately followed up with another Hollinger piece that claimed that theatre owners were in a quandary, as their most reliable customers were also prone to rioting and destruction. One New York booker said that he would prefer to avoid teen-oriented films, but the lack of available product had forced theatres to show movies that appealed to an undesirable

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[62] "Teen-agers Best Film Audience," *Variety*, 23 April 1952, 3.
[63] Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 137; and Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 214.

crowd. More fundamentally, they had a hard time turning down paying audiences. If Hollywood produced films that appealed to a better audience, these exhibitors would gladly show them, but until then they had to take what was available.[64]

Those concerns notwithstanding, by the middle of the decade the industry came to understand that teenagers were a vital part of its survival. One distributor stated, "Right now very few pix are hitting. Those that are mostly have youthful appeal, without which any feature is hard to sell. While it's always difficult to figure what appeals to public nowadays [the] best chance is to capture fancy of younger theatregoers because oldsters just don't turn out in quantity anymore." Leonard Goldenson, president of American Broadcasting-Paramount Theaters, attributed the upturn in box office grosses to more movies aimed at the teenage audience, and credited filmmakers for having the wisdom to pursue this market by developing stories that had particular resonance with young people.[65]

There was an obvious temptation, then, to make movies that emphasized the distinctiveness of youth. The exploitation impulse led low-budget independent producers to capitalize on the nation's fears of juvenile delinquency (explored in greater detail in Chapter 5). Historian James Gilbert wrote that the movie industry's treatment was one of playing both sides of the game, claiming to be part of the fight against delinquency even as it produced and distributed films that sought to capitalize on the anxiety and curiosity. Those within the industry understood that the nation was appalled and terrified of juvenile delinquency, yet the youth themselves who made up the audience sought films

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[64] Hy Hollinger, "Kid Vandals Rile All of U.S.," *Variety*, 11 November 1953, 3, 20; "Berserk Teenagers Close Theatre," *Variety*, 12 December 1956, 3; and Hy Hollinger, "Teenage Biz Vs. Repair Bills," *Variety*, 19 December 1956, 1, 20.

[65] "Pix 'Gotta Have Youthful Appeal'," *Variety*, 7 December 1955, 9; and "More Youth Lure In Product, Biz Up: Goldenson," *Variety*, 14 November 1956, 3, 22.

that excited and spoke to their own experiences/fantasies.[66] Despite a cultivated reputation for pursuing taboo and risqué material, AIP was, in fact, rather modest in its depictions of teenage life. There was no rape or other graphic juvenile delinquent acts, just flirting and light brawling. The company never pursued potentially controversial stories until a major studio had first broken ground. Even the hot rod films contained traffic safety advice within the scripts. These films did not even show car wrecks due to the cost involved. The sound effect of an off-camera crash, followed by a shot of the end result, was cheaper and allowed the audience's imagination to fill in the blanks. As with most things about AIP, it was the hype that was more important, the suggestion of danger and the forbidden to bring in the crowd who did not especially mind that the product rarely delivered.[67]

By 1957, the low-budget exploitation film had demonstrated its value, frequently generating a greater rate of return than big-budget feature films. "The public is buying freaks," a *Variety* story stated, "pictures about normal people too often lack the offbeat excitement that sells tickets."[68] AIP's Nicholson and Arkoff claimed that the exploitation film, along with the blockbuster, was the industry's foundation. Nicholson saw the gimmick film as the vital bridge for exhibitors as they waited for the next big-budget film.[69] AIP's success, however, was not easily or immediately achieved.

In the mid-1950s, while AIP was still seeking to gain traction, Jim Nicholson spoke before members of the North Central Allied, which represented an array of theatre

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[66] Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 163, 176, 192; and Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us To Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 198.
[67] Mark Thomas McGee and R.J. Robertson, *The J.D. Films: Juvenile Delinquency in the Movies* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1982), 59–61, 139; and Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 55–56.
[68] "'Gimmicks' Did Well in 1957," *Variety*, 6 November 1957, 16.
[69] "Action-and-Horror Staple Stuff; 20,000,000 Thrill-Seekers (12 to 25) Backbone of Exploitation Pix," *Variety*, 6 March 1957, 20.

operators. In his speech, he expressed frustration with exhibitors for bemoaning a lack of films available. There were plenty of movies out there, he said. Some four hundred movies were released a year, including foreign and art films, yet only half of these garnered serious exhibition. The problem, he argued, was that exhibitors had bought into the Hollywood line that the public only wanted big-budget blockbusters. This was entirely untrue, he countered, claiming that AIP had studied returns of modestly budgeted films and found that, in fact, they did quite well with audiences. They only seemed to do poorly because distributor bookkeeping techniques made it difficult for the producer to ever realize a profit, creating the illusion that audiences were shunning the middle- and low-budget films. More pointedly, he told his audience that independent exhibitors like themselves were normally the first to turn down independently produced films. "*This*," he said, challenging the exhibitors to support independent producers and distributors, "is your Frankenstein monster." Failure to do so would, sooner or later, re-establish the old monopoly of the major studios that had so disadvantaged exhibitors before the Paramount Decree. He concluded: "All I ask is that on pictures of equal merit, you treat the independent the same as you would if the picture were released by a major distributor. Don't look at trademarks. Look at the picture. And all things being equal, give us the break. We're one of you." His words had little impact, and so AIP had to reconsider its distribution strategy.[70]

Low-budget films, like the B movies of previous decades, normally rented for a flat fee rather than a percentage. After their first four films, Nicholson and Arkoff realized that, despite their initial success, the flat-fee structure could not generate enough

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[70] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 58. Nicholson's address is reprinted in McGee, *Faster and Furiouser*, 25–28. Emphasis in original.

revenue in the long term for the company to remain viable. What they needed was a means of breaking into the percentage rental scheme without resorting to big-budget films. Their first step was to shore up both their production and distribution structures to achieve greater stability and national coverage, which allowed them to pursue a far more creative distribution strategy. Like the Poverty Row studios before them, AIP had relied on a patchwork system of regional distributors who, like so many exhibitors, agreed to work with them only when no other films were available. What AIP needed was a reliable national distribution network that would better regulate the flow of capital. Once this was established, Arkoff and Nicholson developed an innovative and much-imitated distribution technique. Rather than distribute single films, they packaged double bills for exhibitors, which they offered at a percentage rate, albeit more egalitarian than what a single major studio feature films cost. This shift was notable in a couple of ways. First, there was no difference between the top or bottom of the bill. Both films were considered to be equals. Second, both films tended to be from the same genre, unlike the traditional A-B distinction, where the genre difference was meant to entice diverse audiences. The reasoning was that their films were targeted to a single demographic anyway, so the old mix-and-match double bill made little sense. For exhibitors, they received two films for less than the price of one A, plus a built-in publicity campaign for the set. By 1958, AIP was achieving five thousand bookings per double feature. The movies opened in large markets, achieving saturation before moving on to smaller locales. Arkoff claimed that AIP's films were normally in circulation for one to two years.[71]

Another key part of AIP's distribution strategy was to pursue drive-in exhibitors.

[71] Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 126–28; Bradley James Schauer, "The Pulp Paradox: Science Fiction and the Exploitation Tradition in Hollywood, 1950–1986," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010), 123–26; Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood By the Seat of my Pants*, 34–38, 40–41; and "Don't Kill Thrill-Chill Mill," 5.

Part of this was out of desperation. Even once AIP became an established and reliable producer of profitable films, the larger downtown theatres were resistant, acceding only during dry spells. In this desperation, however, AIP found an equally shunned partner desperate for a mate.

The first drive-in opened in Camden, NJ, on 6 June 1933. Richard M. Hollingshead, Jr., the operator, claimed that the format itself was a success, but rental costs were too high. He claimed that the first film he ran cost him $400 for four days. By comparison, when it last ran in an indoor theatre, it rented for $20 a week. This limitation undoubtedly played a roll in Hollingshead's drive-in closing up only a few years later.[72] Hollingshead's experiences served as prologue for that species of exhibitors.

Into the 1940s, other drive-in operators experienced frustrations with major studios who, citing loyalty to indoor theatre exhibitors, refused to rent them any films whatsoever. A series of lawsuits throughout the decade by different drive-in owners slowly cracked open the vault. One suit brought by David E. Milgram, owner of the Boulevard Drive-in Theatre near Allentown, PA, was especially significant. After being denied film rentals by six of the majors, Milgram filed suit, seeking no damages, only rental access. He won in district court and circuit court, and in 1952 the Supreme Court denied to hear the studios' appeal. In the legal abstract, discrimination towards drive-ins was dead. However, the studios regularly denied bids by drive-in operators by citing any number of supposed deficiencies (e.g., location, length of rental period, advertising, capacity). Drive-ins won a right to bid, but not to have their bids treated seriously.[73]

Post-Paramount, most independent theatre operators still lived on post-first-run

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[72] Kerry Segrave, *Drive-In Theaters: A History From Their Inception in 1933* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1992), 9–10.
[73] Ibid., 52, 56–57.

films, and so regarded drive-ins as an obvious threat, lobbying against permit applications or even conspiring to pressure police to harass customers. They were especially disinclined to show favour to the newcomers when indoor theatres as a whole were already struggling, regardless of a lack of evidence that drive-ins were luring away theatre audiences. According to a 1950 Gallup study, one in eight movie-goers in cities of over 10,000 people saw films shown at a drive-in, but these tended to be people who were less likely to go to indoor theatres anyway. Nevertheless, the logic ran that increasing the number of exhibitors would only spread the economic pain. Conventional wisdom argued for saving the established theatres, not adding to the misery. Distributors further cited deficiencies specific to drive-ins: their operation period was seasonal, so even if their peak period did generate more revenue, their annual take was too small; their primarily suburban locations broke up established distribution maps and patterns; drive-ins could succeed with post-first-run showings, whereas theatres could not; and drive-ins necessarily excluded those customers without cars (this last objection was a principled stand against discrimination, they said). Fundamentally, theatres would suffer, distributors claimed, if drive-ins were placed on an equal footing.[74]

Despite these hindering efforts, the expansion of the drive-in option was unstoppable. The war years had stifled growth due to tire and gasoline rationing, which limited the availability of cars for leisure activities. From 1943 to 1946, there were around 100 drive-ins in America, but in 1947 this grew to 155, in 1949 it reached 820, and by 1958 there were over 4,000. Between 1946 and 1953, 4,696 indoor theatres ("hard-tops," in the industry jargon) closed and 851 new ones opened. In the same period,

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[74] Segrave, *Drive-In Theaters*, 52–56*;* "1 in 8 Pic-Goers Went to Drive-Ins in July," *Variety*, 6 September 1950, 4; and "New Ozoner Setup Rapped by ATOI," *Variety*, 15 July 1953, 3, 20.

2,976 drive-ins ("ozoners") were built and 342 closed.[75] The drive-in's relative inexpensiveness to build also held appeal. In 1950, a 500-car drive-in opened in California that cost $60,000 to build, while a 750-car drive-in in Colorado in 1947 cost $125,000. Meanwhile, a theatre in a non-metropolitan centre that held 600 people cost $95,500, while a 1,000-seat theatre cost $186,000 (plus the price of the land). Suburbanization, with its opening up of vast tracts of open land to development, aided this process considerably, along with the automobile culture that went along with suburban life.[76]

From the start, there was a perception that drive-ins attracted a different audience than indoor theatres. Initial assumptions were that drive-ins were for families and the working class. A 1949 survey of Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN, drive-ins found that 55% were families with children. One-third of patrons said they went to drive-ins exclusively in the summer, and one-half said they mostly attended drive-ins. A 1951 *Life* story credited drive-ins with luring back the "lost audience" (i.e., those over 35). Affordability and privacy were emphasized, and free playgrounds on site meant not having to hire a babysitter. Some drive-ins even offered laundry services, beauty parlours, birthday parties, circuses, and nightly contests. The accompanying photos confirmed the family-friendly nature of drive-ins: a family in a car; a young couple; a bottle-warming table for families with infants; and rides and a petting zoo for kids. Pricing was also structured to benefit the family. Charging by the car ($1.50 or $2) rather than per person allowed a family of six to more easily afford a night out at the movies when an indoor theatre might

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[75] Segrave, *Drive-In Theaters*, 33, 65; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 142; and Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 36

[76] Segrave, *Drive-In Theaters*, 48–49.

be beyond their budget.[77]

Despite these family-friendly amenities, moral scolds fretted about what were described as "passion pits." Loy Harwick, writing in the sensationalist magazine *Crime Exposé*, described "a nation-wide sex scandal involving thrill-mad teenagers and money-mad movie operators!" Harwick painted a world that parents were wholly unaware of, "one of the 'safest' of all secret places for the rawest sort of love-making." Teens sitting in convertibles ("wide as a nice big double bed") passed around a bottle from dusk 'til dawn, oblivious to the action on the screen. The perceived epidemic of illegitimate births, Harwick claimed, could be tied to the sinful drive-in. Even worse, he charged, the drive-in owners knew what was happening but did nothing because of their obsession with profits. Indeed, they facilitated the immorality by not employing flashlight-wielding ushers like the theatres (that was, in fact, part of the appeal of the drive-in for teens).[78]

Mary Morley Cohen argued that drive-ins were, in fact, significant sites of deviant behaviour, but not in the way that the alarmists believed. If a couple were seeking a site for romance, there were far more secluded places than a drive-in lot, with hundreds of surrounding cars and prowling ushers (unless the intent was, in fact, exhibitionism). Instead, Morley Cohen posited that the dangerous reputation of the drive-in was due to the informal and heterogeneous nature of its audience of children, housewives, labourers, and teenagers, and the opportunity for untoward socializing (and if that could happen, why not orgies!?). The social significance of the drive-in, she suggested, was that it challenged middle-class propriety and the myth of the homogeneous movie audience.

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[77] Ibid., 42, 80–85, 142, 44–45; "Drive-In Film Business Burns Up the Prairies," *Life* 31, no. 13 (24 September 1951): 104–08; Mary Morley Cohen, "Forgotten Audiences in the Passion Pits: Drive-in Theatres and Changing Spectator Practices in Post-War America," *Film History* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 471; and Andrew Horton, "Turning On and Tuning Out at the Drive-In: An American Phenomenon Survives and Thrives," *Journal of Popular Film* 5, nos. 3/4 (1976): 235.

[78] Loy Harwick, "The Drive-In Passion Pits," *Crime Exposé* (October 1957): 29, 54–55.

Where the indoor theatre imposed middle-class norms of consumption—quiet, private consideration, mindful of one's neighbour—the drive-in was an especially social event, with smoking, eating, talking, and making out all normal behaviour. The social nature of the drive-in also encouraged, even required, "distracted viewing," promoting diverse and superficial interpretations of the on-screen action. Indeed, appreciating the sociability of the drive-in experience meant that companies like AIP developed its films with distracted audiences in mind, creating movies that did not benefit from indoor viewings. It was all simply improper according to white, middle-class conventions. According to Lee Borrie, this was part of its appeal for teens. The drive-in served as a communal youth space in which to reject adult values, including how to watch a movie. Drive-ins, Morley Cohen concluded, were "heterotopias"—separate sites where the norms of society were temporarily jumbled, inverted, or rejected. It was this nature that so offended the moralists.[79]

Virtue and vice aside, in the mid-1950's, Nicholson and Arkoff saw the drive-in market, like the low-budget market, as bafflingly underutilized. The major studios were oblivious to contemporary audiences. The majors still believed that the summer season was incompatible with releasing new movies because it was too hot and not all theatres offered air conditioning. AIP's heads believed that teenagers were attracted to drive-ins because they were ideal romance spots and that they would watch anything as long as it was not dull. Warm weather, Arkoff and Nicholson were certain, would not dissuade teenagers from going to the drive-in. They were wholly flabbergasted by how ignorant the major studios had become regarding the nature of their business as they continued to

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[79] Morley Cohen, "Forgotten Audiences in the Passion Pits," 470–86; and Lee Borrie, "Wild Ones: Containment Culture and 1950s Youth Rebellion," (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 2007), 32, 133.

cater to an unreliable adult audience when teenagers were all but begging to be entertained, especially at sites that allowed them easy socialization.[80] AIP made sense, too, for drive-in operators who were normally relegated to third- or fourth-run movies. Here was a company that was offering first-run films, and their representatives spent considerable time wooing drive-in operators. Arkoff, with some plausibility, took credit for turning drive-ins into first-run venues once others began to imitate AIP's success.[81]

Drive-in attendance peaked in 1956, reaching 31 million per week in late August/early September, but collapsed in 1957 and 1958, signalling the end of the venue's all-too-brief golden age. Part of it was almost certainly the declining novelty of the experience. An additional factor was that the rapid growth of drive-ins, due to both their profitability and inexpensive start-up costs, created a supply greater than attendance could support, especially once audiences became more selective (which is exactly what critics earlier in the decade had predicted). Good times also blinded operators from organizing to look out for their collective interests. Because they were making money regardless of what was shown, owners were not especially concerned about the quality of their film rentals, and so they never banded together to challenge booking policies. The absence of such collective strategy and advocacy meant that drive-ins never escaped the ghetto of narrowly targeted exploitation films or fourth-run movies, which reinforced drive-ins' seedy reputation. And finally, television's popularity, unrelenting and still expanding, added the drive-in to its collection of scalps. But in the heyday of the middle of the decade, nobody seemed to notice the impending cliff.[82]

By the end of the decade, AIP was forced to alter its strategy yet again. True, the

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[80] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 41; and McGee, *Faster and Furiouser*, 150.
[81] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 59; and Strawn, "Samuel Z. Arkoff," 262.
[82] Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 37–38; Segrave, *Drive-In Theaters*, viii, ix, 37, 77; and "Drive-In Patrons Now Choosy Like Hardtops," *Variety*, 31 December 1958, 4.

company was releasing twenty movies per year, claiming an almost perfect rate of profitability. Yet, competition in the field had increased thanks to low-budget divisions in Columbia, United Artists, and Universal, and so AIP's dominance was coming to a close.[83] The company, Arkoff concluded, had spawned too many imitators, especially those promoting their own version of the teenpic double bill. There were too many grabbing a share of a fairly small pie. In 1958, AIP distributed eleven combinations (i.e., twenty-two films) but was increasingly having trouble finding exhibitors, partly because of competition from imitators. Some of these were distributed by the majors who used their influence on exhibitors. Nicholson further accused their competitors of releasing poor-quality films, which, he said, would inevitably lead to smaller audiences. "It's true that our young audiences want thrills rather than involved plots, but they can tell the difference between a quickie and a well conceived film." In showing others how to be profitable in the post-Paramount Decree era, AIP empowered the major studios, as well as other independents.[84]

An additional problem was that AIP had difficulty regularly collecting revenue from exhibitors. In some cases it was simple under-reporting of attendance. But drive-in operators, always the backbone of AIP's market, were prone to using gimmicks to promote attendance even as they reduced the gate to be shared with AIP. One example was a concession stand credit built into the ticket price, which was then deducted from the reported gate even if not everyone used the concession credit. According to Arkoff, exhibitors also rationalized and sought to rewrite agreements on the fly, arguing that AIP did not produce high-quality films so, regardless of popularity, why should they get fifty

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[83] Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, 206–07.
[84] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 86–87; McGee, *Faster and Furiouser*, 150; Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 152; and "Don't Kill Thrill-Chill Mill," *Variety*, 26 March 1958, 5.

percent of revenues?[85]

With an irregular cash flow and shrinking audience, AIP switched strategies yet again. It cut back on combination packages, reserving that method for films believed to be rather weak. Instead, AIP pursued higher-budget, higher-quality films, and fewer total releases, not out of artistic ambition, but to stand out from its immediate competitors. In short, the nature of the market demanded that AIP adopt the majors' strategy from earlier in the decade.[86]

Nevertheless, at the end of the decade *Variety* declared that while spectacular epics dominated discussion in Hollywood, the low-budget exploitation film was still a viable form. It was profitable, it kept the production machinery running, it satisfied exhibitor needs, and it was an opportunity to introduce new actors and directors.[87] A decade after the Paramount decision seemed to have killed the institutional justification for the B movie, the form mutated, took advantage of new means of exhibition and new audiences, and re-emerged as a legitimate and valuable option for the movie industry.

Return, then, to Powdermaker, Gans, and Mills from the beginning of this chapter, and more generally to the mass culture critics from Chapter 2, and their assessments of the mechanics of Hollywood. Figures like Powdermaker, Mills, Adorno, and Macdonald all put forward ideas of domination, whether from above or below, real or desired, but it is difficult to give these critiques serious credence. One can acknowledge hints and glimpses of the critiques inasmuch as the autonomy of the artist producer was constantly being challenged (or compromised, if one is so predisposed) by the

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[85] Arkoff, *Flying Through Hollywood*, 89–90; and McGee, *Faster and Furiouser*, 150.
[86] Davis, *The Battle for the Bs*, 126–28; McGee, *Faster and Furiouser*, 151. 153; "American International's 'Big Singles' While Still Double-Packaging Gore," *Variety*, 8 April 1959, 15; and "Cheap 'n' Quick No Longer Goes in Horrorifiers," *Variety*, 20 May 1959, 4.
[87] "Quiet Buzz of Persisting B's," *Variety*, 9 December 1959, 7.

distribution and exhibition systems. However, these systems themselves were in flux, responding to their own challenges from the Great Depression, the anti-trust lawsuit, the challenge of television, the emergence of drive-ins, and changing audience demographics. So, certainly, those involved on the production side were challenged by a distribution system that inserted itself in matters of budget, aesthetics, and target audiences, but the assumptions of distribution were also dealing with new challenges. If there was domination at work, it is difficult to identify who or what was doing the dominating. This may seem to lend itself to the claims of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Macdonald, that the ideology behind production operated independently of any conscious will, but the degree of fluctuation in how production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption affected each other challenges any easy model of domination. Gans' model of liberal publics, each offering checks and balances, is also overly simplistic and fails to account for the role of distribution and exhibition in shaping production. Producers were not just seeking to read and predict their audiences, but were working within ever-shifting territory that was less affected by audiences than the egos and schemes of distributors and exhibitors.

What this chapter has suggested, then, is that perspectives of the motion-picture industry that focused on producers or audiences, seeing domination or a marvelously balanced compromise, were missing the influence of distribution, including forms of exhibition, in the process. The role of distribution in film, as in publishing, had a profoundly disruptive effect that complicates any model that awards producers or consumers dominant status. Whether considering physical structures like drive-ins or schemes for bringing films to audiences (or the paperback format and its own distribution model), the role of distribution in influencing content and shaping audiences should not

be minimized. Distribution, broadly conceived as both technology and process, was the economic and social environment that shaped production and consumption. But even distribution was subject to its own pressures. In a roughly twenty-five year period, the movie industry went from grudging acceptance of the double-bill distribution scheme, with its rental mechanics that determined movie budgets, narratives, and aesthetics, to the collapse of the traditional B movie after outside challenges to that scheme; and subsequent rebirth of the low-budget form as the semi-respectable exploitation film, relying on novel distribution and exhibition methodologies. This was not an industry that operated with impunity or that easily dictated content to its audiences. To the contrary, after the 1940 Consent Decree it operated in reaction to outside forces that challenged the interests of the studio system. Too, the low-budget film, be it the derided Poverty Row B film or its successor, the sensationalist teen exploitation flick, demonstrated itself to be quite dynamic, working within the confines of budgetary limitations and the formula of genre, to establish novel aesthetics and innovative means of presenting narrative. Like the paperbacks publishers, the makers of low-budget films took advantage of their benighted status to carve out a space for alternative presentation and content. If this was mass culture, it was also far more complex, diverse, and fluid than its contemporary critics granted.

CHAPTER 5
The Weird Crowd: Postwar Teenagers and Delinquents

> For some crazy reason, the kids of today have a need to conform. You're a victim of that need, Joey. To conform, to travel in crowds, to do as the other guy does. Wear the same clothes, even cut your hair the same way, listen to the same kind of music and pretend you like it. Because if you don't, you're a square. It's as simple as that. The need to conform is the sickness of today's kids. Your tragedy is only that you got in with the wrong ones, Joey.
>
> - Jack Gerstine, *Play It Cool*[1]

> The gang here was randy and rowdy. There was a posse of teenage would-be toughs, lolling against the walls, with their thumbs stuck in their pants. … The older motorcycle gang hung out here, too. They hunched over the coffee bars, wasted time on the pin-ball machines, or strutted up and down the street. Part of the time they were cruising, part of the time they weren't, but they were always ready for something to happen. It was a weird crowd but it was young.
>
> - Bud Clifton, *The Bad Girls*[2]

There was no shortage of evidence that America's youth were a threat. Throughout the 1950s, Americans were flooded by disturbing, sobering, alarming, and almost always sensationalist (and for some, entertaining) accounts of juvenile delinquency, all of which suggested that the nation's moral integrity possessed a youthful fatal flaw, now and going forward. There were thrill-killing young romantics like Fred McManus, 19, and Diane Weggeland, 16, who in 1952 drove from Rochester, NY, to Minnesota in a stolen car in futile quest to wed, accumulating instead five murders in three separate attacks. The story repeated itself in 1958, when Charles Starkweather, 19, and his girlfriend Caril Ann Fugate, 14, went on a multi-week rampage in Nebraska and

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[1] Jack Gerstine, *Play It Cool* (New York: Ace Books, 1959), 185.
[2] Bud Clifton, *The Bad Girls* (1958; reprint, New York: Pyramid Books, 1961), 16.

Wyoming that left eleven people dead.[3]

Or perhaps it was bizarre and unprovoked acts of violence, as when seventeen-year-old Joan Marie Weirda of Detroit, along with three friends, went on a "gore spree" in 1958. After beating and robbing a middle-aged man for over two hours, Weirda decided that he reminded her of her father and carved her initials in his back with a pair of scissors. More outré yet was the story of Jack Koslow, nicknamed the "Boy Hitler of Brooklyn" because of his open admiration of and attempts to look like Adolf Hitler. Koslow led three other teenage boys on a violent "bum hunt" one night in 1954, which resulted in four teens and one adult man assaulted, and another man beaten into unconsciousness then left to drown in New York's East River.[4]

There were unsettling accounts of organized teenage crime, such as high school girl prostitution rings in rural Illinois and New York; of a "Help-Yourself-Club" in Montgomery, Alabama, where during the fall of 1956 high school students broke into and robbed over forty summer cottages; or sinister, spreading, loosely organized teenaged gangs called Pachucos, who were described as addicted to violence, drugs, sex, and a

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[3] McManus and Weggeland: "He Wanted Love," *Big Detective Cases* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1954): 28–31, 79–80; "The Kids Who Kill for 'Love'," *Confidential Detective* (October 1956): 10, 46; John Thorne, "Why McManus Killed," *World-Crime Detective* (February 1954): 38–41, 61–62; and Ray Brennan, "Lethal Spree of the Eloping Couple," *Startling Detective* (September 1953): 4–7, 51–55

Starkweather and Fugate: John Parker, "Murder Trial of the Teen-Age Gun Moll," *Crime Detective* 7, no. 6 (December 1960): 28–30; "One Life for Eleven," *Inside Detective* 36, no. 8 (August 1958): 68–69; Frankin Sharpe, "Behind Nebraska's Ten Heart-of-Hate Killings," *Official Detective Stories* 27, no. 4 (April 1958): 32; Wenzell Brown, "The End of the Line: The Cases of Caril Ann Fugate and Barbara Graham," in *Girls on the Rampage* (New York: Gold Medal Books, 1961), 159–176; and Michael Newton, *Waste Land: The Savage Odyssey Of Charles Starkweather And Caril Ann Fugate* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998).

[4] Joan Marie Weirda: *Bad Seed* 4 (1986): np.

Jack Koslow: Wenzell Brown, "Hate Calls the Tune," in *Teen-Age Terror* (New York: Gold Medal Books 1958): 145–56; Wenzell Brown, "Hate Calls the Tune," in *The Teen-Age Jungle* (Standard Magazines, 1956): 28–31, 61–62; and "Murder," in *Teen-Age Gangsters* (Chicago: Hillman Periodicals, 1957): 50–57. The Koslow crime was adapted in Vin Packer, *The Thrill Kids* (Gold Medal Books, 1955; reprint, Cincinnati: Prologue Books, 2012).

hatred of society.[5] It was not uncommon to be exposed to stories of fallen teenage girls, such as "Joyce," who was married at thirteen, working as a stripper at fourteen, and a mistress and prostitute at fifteen. Or the frequently cited tale of Joanne Barbara Scott, an addict at fourteen, soon married and pregnant after that, a runaway and prostitute, and dead of overdose at sixteen, her nude body abandoned in a trunk.[6] There were incomprehensible, random crimes, such as in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where three male youths, all aged seventeen or eighteen, clubbed to death a thirty-four year old nurse as she was walking home from work, seemingly out of boredom or social frustration; or in New York City's borough the Bronx, where seventeen-year-old Billy Blankenship, a youth with a bright future ahead of him, was shot dead by another boy after his bravery was challenged by a fellow gang member.[7]

The above sample is not intended to suggest that America was under siege by its wayward youth, but rather to give a taste of the non-fictional accounts that helped fuel the

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[5] Stanley Forbes, "What's the Matter With Our Kids?" *Front Page Detective* 13, no. 16 (August 1950): 14, 52; Allen Rankin, "The Help-Yourself-Club," *Inside Detective* 35, no. 7 (July 1957): 37–39, 78; John V. Ten Eyck, "Pachucos," *Inside Detective* 8, no. 39 (December 1954): 19–21, 91, 96; William F. York, "I, Pachuco," *True Police Cases*, 7, no. 72 (February 1955): 6–8. 73–75; Wenzell Brown, "Pachuco!" in *The Teen-Age Jungle* (Standard Magazines, 1956), 7–9, 73; Wenzell Brown, "A Cross and Three Dots," in *Teen-Age Terror* (New York: Gold Medal Books, 1958), 118–124.

[6] Joyce: Carrie W. Bradford, "Sweet 16 and Already a Wayward Queen," *True Police Cases* 11, no. 120 (February 1959): 30–33, 42–45.

Joanne Barbara Scott: "Blonde's Trunk Death Linked to Dope Ring," *Binghamton (NY) Press*, 1 March 1952; "Body of Girl Found in Trunk on Estate," *New York Times* 1 March 1952; "Bronx Seaman Held in Trunk Death Case," *New York Times* 2 March 1952; "Dope Peddler Faces Charges in Girl's Death," *Rome (NY) News-Tribune*, 3 March 1952; "Dope," *Teen-Age Gangsters* (Chicago: Hillman Periodicals, 1957): 47–49; Joachim Joesten, *Dope, Inc.* (New York: Avon Book, 1953), 5–8; Ted Gibbons, "Dope, Vice and the Underworld," *Police Dragnet Cases* 2, no. 4 (July 1956): 13–16, reprinted in David Jacobs, *Hellcats, Vixens, & Vice Dolls: Women, Crime, and Kink of the Fifties* (West Orange, NJ: Idea Men Productions, 2007), 14–15; Wenzell Brown, "The Deadly Habit," in *The Teen-Age Jungle* (Standard Magazines, 1956), 10–13, 61; and Wenzell Brown, *Monkey On My Back* (London: Elek Books, 1954), 3–8

[7] John Bartlow Martin, *Why Did They Kill?* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1953); Ruby Cameron, "Wanton Slaying of the Beautiful Nurse," *Detective World* 9, no. 8 (December 1951): 9, 11, 67; Jerry Smart, "Somebody Hates Nurses," *Inside Detective* 8, no. 24 (December 1951): 25–26, 45; and Elwin Greening, "Ann Arbor's May-September Terror," *Official Detective Stories* 20, no. 12 (December 1951): 16, 54.

Rupert Tone, "Terror is a Boy Called Tarzan," *Front Page Detective* 14, no. 17 (August 1955): 30–31, 33, 75–78; Seymour Ettman, "Teen-Age Terror," *Master Detective* 50, no. 5 (August 1955): 11, 57, 59; and "So Long, Billy," *Real Detective* 10, no. 1 (October 1955): 45, 87–88.

sense that something might be wrong with young people. Juvenile delinquency itself was not foreign territory for Americans, but the timing of this panic was unusual. In earlier times, outbreaks of supposed delinquency was tied to periods of social upheaval, particularly wars, when the attention of adults was diverted to other, more pressing matters. Without a firm disciplining hand to restrain their mischievous inclinations, the young ran amok. Or delinquency might be understood as a plague on a particular class (i.e., working class) or locale (i.e., city slums). What was unusual about the postwar delinquents, to observers, was that it emerged in a period of relative peace and obvious prosperity, and that it touched every class and neighbourhood and home. The nature of the delinquency also seemed so much more vicious, so much more intense, so much more deviant than before. The concern over wild youth was infused and augmented by the utter illogic of it all.

This chapter concludes the foundational efforts begun by Chapters 2, 3, and 4 in historicizing juvenile delinquent literature and films as texts that help illuminate several key intellectual and cultural fault lines of postwar American life. It provides an overview of the discourse that surrounded the perception of rampant juvenile delinquency in the 1950s and how the paperback and movie industries seized upon this issue to both earnestly explore the roots of delinquency as a sociological and civic concern, and, increasingly, to exploit such fears for profit. What these entertainment industries accomplished was to both legitimize the fear and ease it by turning the qualities of juvenile delinquency—rejection of adult authority and violation of social rules for the thrill of it all, to put it broadly—into qualities of youth itself. There is no reason to believe that any of this was planned behaviour, a form of purposeful social engineering via entertainment, but rather was the result of evolving markets of audiences. Put most

simply, when audiences were smaller and more adult, the treatment of the delinquent was more serious, a social problem in need of a solution. As audiences for juvenile delinquency-themed material expanded, especially to include youthful movie audiences, the presentation became more exploitative, emphasizing the thrill of delinquency itself rather than as a sociological problem. In doing so, sensationalism allayed fears that there was also an actual delinquency problem amongst America's youth.

What follows is a discussion of contemporary postwar perceptions of both the teenager, itself a recent social creation, and its doppelganger, the juvenile delinquent, identifying the key traits of each. This will prepare and lead into the main focus of the chapter, the emergence and evolution of the juvenile delinquent genre on paper and in celluloid. The intent is to demonstrate how the genre began in both media forms as sincere, mostly sympathetic efforts to understand why some youths became delinquents. Yet the subject matter proved enticing to readers and movie audiences and so the commercial potential became evident. A genre emerged, one of exploitation, sensationalism, and thrills, discarding delinquency as a real-world concern. This distinction between sincerity and exploitation should not be construed as part of a hierarchical scheme. The argument here is not that the sincere treatments were more worthwhile than the exploitative. Indeed, the contention is that the exploitation films and novels helped defuse delinquency anxiety by both treating the subject with, at best, superficial seriousness and merging its characteristics with that of the mostly upstanding teenager, allowing the juvenile delinquent to mostly fade from public concern. The popular entertainment industries certainly stoked delinquency fears, but their explicit sensationalist inclinations also helped transform and defuse the issue.

The initial stages of the postwar juvenile delinquency panic were evident before

the end of World War II. Social dislocations brought about by the needs of war were understood to be the cause for the present problem of unruly youth. The 1943 short film *Youth in Crisis* put forth the idea that children were under considerable psychological stress due to being abandoned by parents in uniform or working in the armament factories. To compensate, kids took up adult roles for which they were not prepared. An end to the war and return of adult supervision, the film predicted, would tame these feral kids.[8]

Literary scholar Leerom Medovoi expanded on this notion, arguing that war needs provided opportunities for youth of all classes to join the adult workforce. However, the independence acquired from work—a maturity not yet earned—was seen as a path to delinquency. If not work, then perhaps play led youth astray. A 1943 *Life* story on wartime delinquency posited that "[m]any specific cases can be traced directly to war excitement, to a misguided (or rather, unguided) desire on the part of underage youngsters to do something as thrilling as their big brothers in uniform." Some teens were said to have formed "Commando Gangs" that were involved in vandalism, purse-snatching, arson, and sexual assault. Girls were arrested for truancy, theft, vagrancy, drunkenness, and prostitution. The story's author lamented, "The teen-age girl with a pretty but empty head, and an uncontrolled impulse to share somehow in the excitement of the war, has become a national problem child." Writing in 1949, William Bernard traced the present juvenile delinquency problem to "certain moral hangovers from the war." The return of peace had not curbed the former Victory Girl teen prostitutes or their imitative younger sisters who continued to offer themselves to sailors. The hardened

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[8] James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 29–30; and Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 163.

criminals of 1949 were juvenile delinquents in 1943.[9]

Sensitivity to delinquency was almost certainly encouraged by a revised attitude and new emphasis toward childrearing in the postwar period, with parents adopting a more nurturing attitude and fathers particularly expected to play a more active role in their child's development. This shift was the result of current politics and demographics, as well as recent history. Historian Jessica Weiss suggested that because parents tended to be younger in the 1950s, they were flexible in terms of gender roles and receptive to arguments for a more relaxed and participatory family dynamic. Fathers were advised to develop a close relationship with their children from infancy, to participate fully in the child-rearing process so as to generate a strong bond later in life. In this, they were encouraged to replace an authoritarian father role with a masculine domesticity that encouraged fun and recreation. Historian Nicholas Sammond additionally cited sensitivity to foreign totalitarianism as both discrediting disciplinarian childrearing models and turning the family ever inward, away from public intrusion. William M. Tuttle, Jr. concurred, adding that the experiences of Depression, war, and nuclear uncertainty encouraged a more child-centred approach to parenting. Yet the same external influences that encouraged a more permissive and nurturing approach also represented a fundamental powerlessness on the part of adults to keep children from being vapourized in an atomic attack. "This," Tuttle argued, "was a prescription if not for schizophrenia, then at least for deep ambivalence about life and the future."[10]

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[9] Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 26; Roger Butterfield, "Our Kids Are in Trouble," *Life* 15, no. 25 (20 December 1943): 97–110; and William Bernard, *Jailbait! The Story of Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: Greenberg, 1949), 5, 6, 38.

[10] Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 8, 21, 46, 88–92, 97, 112; Nicolas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 195–96; and William M. Jr. Tuttle, "America's Children in an Era of War, Hot

Parents' ability to protect their children was also challenged by the ever-growing reach of mass-produced and -distributed entertainment. Lynn Spigel suggested that it was a source of anxiety for parents because new communications technologies could bypass them, reaching directly to their children. A desire to filter non-parental voices, and the awareness of being thwarted in this, quickly emerged as a common conundrum of the mass media age. Mary Louise Adams wrote of the similar challenge that the mass media represented to postwar Canadian parents. Children were regarded as a product created and developed by their parents, and so mass-distributed entertainment like comics and pulp novels were an unwanted intrusion on that authority, potentially nullifying the positive influence of parents, church, and school.[11]

But it was a battle that parents soon learned that they were poorly armed to fight. From 1945 to 1960, the number of American children under fourteen years of age ballooned from 33.5 million to 56 million. It is not surprising, then, that just as questions of family, education, and juvenile problems gained prominence as national issues, the importance of the youth market also emerged as a vital component in the American economy. Between 1944 and 1958, the average teenager's weekly income went from $2.50 to $10, be it through increased allowances or after-school jobs, and they spent this money freely. By 1959, teen spending was estimated to be $10 billion annually. By the mid-1950s, teens bought 43% of all records, 44% of cameras, 39% of radios, 9% of cars, and 53% of movie tickets.[12] This growth did not happen by accident.

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and Cold: The Holocaust, the Bomb, and Child Rearing in the 1940s," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 18, 24, 27.

[11] Lynn Spigel, "Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America," in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 191–92; and Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997), 140–41.

[12] Andrea Carosso, *Cold War Narratives: American Culture in the 1950* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 8–9;

The teen-oriented magazine *Seventeen* launched in September 1944, with an initial 400,000 copies sold; by the end of that year, its circulation was one million copies. *Seventeen* had twin ambitions: one, to prepare white, middle-class teens for their role as society's future leaders; and, two, to stimulate adolescent consumption. Teens initially lagged behind adults in the postwar spending spree because the low birth rate in the 1930s meant that there were fewer of them to partake. Furthermore, marketers had traditionally considered youth to be unreliable customers, too flighty and fad-obsessed to assess and service. *Seventeen* strove to counter this perception, and so it inspired serious statistical study of teens as a market. The magazine also helped promote the high school as the central location in teens' lives, as the locus for interaction and mutual influence, and one that offered sanctuary from adults. *Seventeen*, Kelly Schrum argued, sought to make better teenagers, not cater to them as adults. Advertisers and other mass media institutions, thus, helped create—and benefit from—this subculture.[13]

By the late 1950s, this strategy had fully succeeded—perhaps too well. According to sociologist Charles H. Brown, teen magazines had become, "for all intents and purposes, practically written by teen-agers themselves … [and] a faithful reflection of the values of teen-age culture." These magazines had a dual quality to them, confessional and "cultic." The confessional emphasized advice on sex and popularity, while the cultic revolved around music or movie idols, focusing on "the most intimate of matters to such

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Thomas Hine, *The Rise & Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Avon Books, 1999), 228; "A New, $10-Billion Power: the U.S. Teen-age Consumer," *Life* 47, no. 9 (31 August 1959): 78, 83; Richard Gehman, "That Nine Billion Dollars in Hot Little Hands," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1957, 72–78; and J. Ronald Oakley, *God's Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Debner Books, 1990), 286.

[13] Michael Barson, *Teenage Confidential: An Illustrated History of the American Teen* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 22; Palladino, *Teenagers*, 102–04; and Kelly Schrum, "'Teena Means Business': Teenage Girls' Culture and 'Seventeen' Magazine, 1944–1950," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 137, 139.

an extent as to constitute an almost morbid preoccupation." The teen magazine, Brown argued, reflected the world as it seemed to teenagers, and so appeared sinister to their parents. These magazines further contained nothing on "the goals of education, on the duties of young citizens, on science or literature, on public affairs—nothing at all to promote intellectual or spiritual growth." Instead, they indulged the adolescent's immediate self-interest.[14] In short, the teen as consumer was off its leash.

Just as teens were being courted into the consumer economy, and eagerly reciprocating, they were redefining another adult sphere: dating and sex. During the Depression, the average age of marriage soared, reflecting present social insecurity and wariness about the future. By 1939, the average age of marriage was 26.7 years for men and 23.4 years for women. What these numbers also suggested was a noticeable division between the spheres of dating and marriage, youth and adulthood, where the dating years might represent a full decade. By 1959, however, 47% of new brides were under nineteen, meaning a much shorter period of dating. The line between youth and adulthood, and the very purpose of dating, underwent a sea change. Pre-World War II teens, historian Beth Bailey explained, pursued a "promiscuous popularity," with each sex amassing as large a stable of dating partners as possible. This "competitive system of courtship" dominated college life in the 1920s. But where that version was rooted in status amongst one's peers, of balancing conformity with competition, the Depression years mutated the system into one of demonstrating viability to potential mates amidst economic precariousness. The ability to compete for the affections of many proved one's popularity, but popularity could only be maintained by dating actively and always

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[14] Charles H. Brown, "Self Portrait: The Teen-Type Magazine," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 338 (November 1961): 14–19.

pursuing more potential dates. It was a process that did not end until marriage (or an admission of social failure).[15]

This model was upended during the war and abandoned by the 1950s, replaced by "going steady," which is to say a monogamous, (possibly) non-sexual, romantic relationship. Popularity amongst one's peers was now measured by maintaining a regular partner. Going steady itself was not a new concept, for that commitment was seen as part of the process leading to marriage. By the 1950s, however, going steady did not indicate the inevitability of marriage, but was, instead, a type of "play-marriage" performed by those as young as twelve. Adults did not easily accept this new attitude, in no small part because it ran counter to their own assumptions about and experiences with dating. Adult interpretations fell to a couple inter-related issues. One was that adults assumed going steady led to a likelihood of premarital sex. Serial dating, it was argued, inhibited the step-by-step build up to intercourse because it was easier for a girl to say no to a succession of boys than to constantly refuse a steady boyfriend. Adults also tended to think that teens were foolishly throwing away their freedom. Why give up the chance to sample multiple partners while it was still possible? Furthermore, teenagers were seen as trying to change the rules of popularity by eliminating active competition. It was as if they were admitting they were failures from the outset. The perceived danger in this was that youth would never develop the necessary competitive edge to thrive as adults.[16]

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[15] Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 26–30, 42–43.

[16] Some young people cited the anxiety of the postwar period as justification for seeking a safer path, but, in fact, they likely lived more secure lives than their parents had at the same age. On the other side, Beth Bailey observed that it was curious that parents harped on security when so many had moved their families to suburbia as a way of embracing security. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 32, 34, 49–50, 52–54; and Beth Bailey, "Rebels Without a Cause? Teenagers in the 1950s," *History Today* 40 (February 1990): 29–31.

Writing in the Canadian context, Mary Louise Adams presented evidence of similar adult criticism of the new teen dating protocols. Adults feared that going steady would leave teenagers too comfortable and

Despite the perceived cowardice of postwar teen dating rituals, John Modell's description of the internal protocols suggested something far more fraught with risk. Cliques took on new importance for defining potential partners and behaviour on dates. The power of girls' gossip could be especially intimidating. The boy was required to take the lead and ask the girl out on a date, but she could say no, and this rejection would be shared with friends and spread throughout the school. Indeed, surveys showed more anxiety amongst boys than girls regarding dating and sex. And yet, going steady was desirable for the boy as it provided security for his reputation. For the girl, going steady meant removing herself from potential partners and risking sexual transgression, but she also gained emotional intimacy and peer esteem.[17]

Still, others regarded this dating etiquette as admirable preparation for marriage. Teens were taught that sex was a natural urge, but one that must be controlled until the proper situation (i.e., marriage). While some experts countered that sexual impulses could not be controlled, and so girls should stay out of situations where sex might occur, others replied that this was an opportunity for girls to learn to control their power. Thomas J. Sugrue and Wini Breines each argued that young people, particularly girls, pushed sexual boundaries in the 1950s. Sugrue claimed that teens notably liberalized dating etiquette, with the notorious "bad girls"—the ones who went "too far" with boys—pushing the edges for the good girls to follow. Breines argued that sex and glamour were used as enticements for girls to become consumers and to use sex in their self-conception.

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unable to deal with future challenges. A 1959 article in *Maclean's* by Sidney Katz, entitled "Going Steady: Is It Ruining Our Teenagers?" likened going steady to a social disease caused by welfare state policies that prized security over all else. Katz added that serial monogamy was a female invention, and that any boy who agreed to it suffered a masculinity deficiency. Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 99–101.

[17] John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920–1975* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 229, 237–38.

Popular culture was sexualized, encouraging girls to be more alluring, yet at the same time they risked respectability by pursuing it. "Girls," Breines wrote, "were both victims and agents, recipients and manipulators of inviting images and punishing advice, their growth stifled at the same time that they themselves appropriated new concepts and potentials for their own ends."[18]

Between their new and valued role in the consumer economy and assertion of adult prerogatives in sexual matters, there was ample meat to feed those who fretted about the condition of America's youth. Despite the occasional offering of something like *Life*'s tribute to "The Luckiest Generation," which extolled the optimism, worldliness, and confidence that came from living in prosperous times, more who trained their eyes on the generation coming up found too much lacking. In 1958, the reliably grouchy Dwight Macdonald wrote a two-part essay for the *New Yorker* on the teenage market. "Nationally," he declared, "they are a special-interest group, like the farm bloc or organized labor. Psychologically, they are as baffling to the lay adult as if they were in the grip of a severe neurosis. Sociologically, they form a sub-culture, like the Pueblo Indians." Teens had leveraged their economic clout into undue influence over adult life, such as having a say on the family vacation or the household's diet. Even movies were now largely reserved for the young. Marketers had foisted upon them a separate identity that overruled all other influences. "The whole business tends to make the teenagers class-conscious, so to speak; the more they find advertising directed at them qua teenagers, and the more they are polled on their peculiar tastes and interests, the more

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[18] Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 104; Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and the Bomb," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 158–59; Thomas J. Sugrue, "Reassessing the History of Postwar America," *Prospects* 20 (1995): 499; and Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 86–88.

their sense of themselves as a special group is enhanced." Macdonald denied this pan-adolescent identity: "There is no such thing as The Teenager, any more than there is The Middle-Aged Man, The Suburbanite, or The Combustion Engineer." The sinister marketers, however, had convinced the nation—including adolescents—otherwise, and the national self-conception had become less mature as a result.[19]

Grace and Fred M. Hechinger continued Macdonald's line of attack into the early 1960s. America was so enthralled with teenagers that it was becoming a "teen-age society. … American society is growing down rather than growing up." Instead of a transition period, adolescence had been turned into

> a separate way of life to be catered to, exaggerated and extended far beyond its biological duration. Eventually it became a way of life imitated by young and not-so-young adults. … Instead of giving teen-agers a sense of growing up, it created the impression that the rest of society had a duty to adjust its ways and its standards to teen-culture, without realizing that "teen-culture" is an absurd contradiction of irreconcilable terms.

The Hechingers' corrective strategy included reasserting the genuine pleasure gained from difficult accomplishment. "The mission of the adult world," they believed, "is to help teen-agers becomes adults by raising their standards and values to maturity rather than by lowering adulthood to their insecure immaturity. The task for the adult world is to make adolescence a step toward growing up, not a privilege to be exploited."[20]

More common, however, were those assessments that saw a fundamental anxiety underlying the adolescent character. Yet, the nature of that anxiety produced considerable

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[19] "The Luckiest Generation," *Life* 36, no. 1 (4 January 1954): 27–29; Dwight Macdonald, "A Caste, a Culture, a Market, Part 1," *New Yorker* (22 November 1958): 57–58, 77, 80, 82; and Dwight Macdonald, "A Caste, a Culture, a Market, Part 2," *New Yorker* (29 November 1958): 58–59, 69. It should be noted that this was a surprising assertion of pluralism given that Macdonald was especially obsessive about the threat of mass culture (see Chapter 2).

[20] Grace and Fred M. Hechinger, *Teen-age Tyranny* (New York: Morrow, 1963), x, 23, 179, 193–94.

diversity. Writing in *Look*, Thomas B. Morgan saw teens as obsessed with materialism, leisure, and security due to a larger world that seemed so insecure and conformist. Many teens felt bored and "a curious irrelevance, not about their leisure, but about their school life. They like school, but what has it got to do with the important things in life?"—which was to say, popularity, acne, leisure. When asked to cite their fears, these teens rarely mentioned the atomic bomb or the Russians but instead fretted about not fitting in. Morgan cited a recent survey that found 92% of teens believed it was important to act as others expected in terms of clothes and customs.[21]

Or perhaps it was the condition of modernity—that testing ground of one's mettle, in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s view—that ate at the self-confidence of youth. In 1957, Hermann H. Remmers and Don H. Radler released *The American Teenager*, a study of fifteen years of surveys with teenagers. The chief conclusion was that most teens were confused, afraid, and held a self-perception of insignificance, all of which had alarming consequences for a nation that had come to depend upon them. The blame was certainly their social environment: "today's teenager has spent most of his life in an emotional pressure cooker." Transportation and communication technologies had changed expectations and experiences, making the world move quicker. "Perched on this little planet that one can almost feel spinning beneath him," Remmers and Radler wrote, "today's youngsters have a precarious role to play. They must change, almost overnight, from dependent, cuddly creatures to independent young adults who share all the grown-up perplexity, face all the grown-up problems, of a frantic, kaleidoscopic world." The average teen was on the cusp of adulthood, yet buffeted by expectations and

[21] Thomas B. Morgan, "How American Teenagers Live," *Look* 21 (23 July 1957): 21–34.

responsibilities, and overwhelmed by a lack of preparation.[22]

Robert Linder's *Must You Conform?* (1956) was one of the decade's more alarmist assessments of contemporary youth. As a stage of life, he wrote, youth was properly about rebellion against conventionality, but today's teens were instead "in a condition of downright active and hostile mutiny."[23] Where teens once expressed their dissatisfaction and suffering privately in ways that encouraged self-reflection, now they banded in groups that eradicated individuality and personality, and acted impulsively and destructively. The "mass-mind" of the herd was also "a mind without subtlety, a mind without compassion, a mind, finally, uncivilized." The state of mind of the contemporary teenager, Linder argued, was almost indistinguishable from that of a psychopath:

> The psychopath is, as I have often pointed out, a rebel without a cause, hence an individual who is in a chronic state of mutiny. He strives solely for the satisfaction of his moment-to-moment desires, and since these are the satisfactions of the very earliest period of life, they are impossible to attain. … Raw need is all that drives him; raw need that originated in the cradle, prior to the formation of conscience, before the birth of all except the monomaniacal feelings, antecedent to the knowledge of the presence of others in the world, and previous to the establishment of such social inhibitors as guilt, shame, and love that is not of the self.

To Linder, this was proof that "the youth of the world today is touched with madness, literally sick with an aberrant condition of mind formerly confined to a few distressed souls but now epidemic over the earth."[24]

The cause of all this was the conditions of mass society and mass politics, which

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[22] Hermann H. Remmers and Don H. Radler, *The American Teenager* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 20, 31–32, 50.
[23] Robert Linder, "The Mutiny of the Young," in *Must You Conform?* (1956; reprint, New York: Grove Press, 1961), 5. Macdonald quoted this passage approvingly in "A Caste, a Culture, a Market, Part 2," 62.
[24] Linder, "The Mutiny of the Young," 10–11, 14–15, 17, 19.

had "ground to dust" individuality. The conversion of individuals to "Mass Men" was the great and horrible development of the age:

> The Mass Man, of course, is the psychopath *in excelsis*. A mechanized, robotized caricature of humanity, it is he who finally tears down around his own head the house of his culture. A slave in mind and body, whose life signifies no more than an instrument of his masters' power, a lost creature without separate identity in the herding collectivity, a mindless integer of the pack who wakens from his torpor only when prodded by the whip from outside or the stab of brute appetite from within, it is he who finally inherits the earth and runs it to ruin.[25]

Linder was not just describing a few bad kids or a phase of life requiring quick fixes or simple patience. Rather, delinquency was symptomatic of something much greater and deeper. People had been betrayed by "the myth of *conformity*, the big lie of *adjustment*." Embedded in each institution of society was "the rot-producing idea that the salvation of individual and of society depends upon conformity and adjustment." This was what promoted the psychopathy and produced distress and "social death." Teenagers rebelled because they were angry and frustrated at the world they had inherited, yet were repeating all the same mistakes: "They are helpless and hopeless, imprisoned by the blunders and delusions of their predecessors; and like all prisoners, they are mutineers in their hearts."[26]

In *The Vanishing Adolescent*, Edgar Z. Friendenberg saw the problem not as teenagers representing a larger human crisis, but of a profound generational divide. Teens did not by default defer to their elders, which led adults to abdicate responsibility for the behaviour of their children. In no small part, the problem was the consensus-driven

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[25] Ibid., 21–23.
[26] Ibid., 24–28. Emphasis in original.

direction of American society. Friedenberg said that a society that had no greater purpose than domestic peace would necessarily reject and fear its youth because, just as Linder argued, it was the nature of the adolescent to complain and question. Adults had come to project contemporary anxieties upon adolescents, to see in them "imaginary menaces" that must be fought. Adults further resented teenage independence, for it pushed into areas properly reserved for their elders. Teens, he said, responded to this suspicion with equal hostility, often dressing and acting provocatively, thereby confirming adult scorn. This was not to suggest that these fears were groundless, only that the response was driven more by adult anxieties than the acts themselves. The teenager, he claimed, had succeeded the Communist as the monster in the public's imagination.[27]

What these assessments of teenagers suggested, whether they suffered from unjustified overconfidence, conformism, or collective psychopathy, was that the nature of postwar adolescents was something that responsible adults should be worried about. There was an alien quality to teenagers. They were part of American (adult) society, yet they were unsettling; if not a confirmed threat, they were potentially harmful. The realization and personification of this threat was the juvenile delinquent.

For the purposes here, it is somewhat irrelevant whether there was an actual juvenile delinquency problem in the decade and a half after World War II. The perception of a delinquency crisis, and fuelling of that perception, was sufficient for all that followed. Still, those who sought to do so were able to unearth statistical evidence to confirm their impressions. The U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency in 1955, for example, heard that the number of children appearing before

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[27] Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent* (1959; reprint, New York: Dell, 1966), 32, 37, 175–80, 192–93.

the juvenile courts grew from 300,000 in 1948 to 485,000 in 1953, and only 10% of this could be attributed to the population increase of youth. In 1952, youth represented 47% of all arrests for larceny, 68% for car theft, and 85% for rape. The FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports* noted a steady increase in juvenile crime throughout the decade. In 1959, the report stated that juvenile court cases had increased 220% from 1941 to 1957. However, as Jason Barnosky cautioned, FBI statistics were unreliable, as they depended on the voluntary reporting of police departments, which, in turn, depended on citizens actually reporting crimes. Lack of standardization in recordkeeping further compromised the accuracy of the statistics. William Bernard's 1949 study, *Jailbait!*, claimed that only one count had ever been made of the number of youth in reform institutions—in Connecticut in 1942. Even though the overall numbers could not be certain, Bernard was convinced that the number of delinquents was "frighteningly large—and growing larger."[28] Perception was more important than anything else.

In a series of essays in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, investigators for the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, put the issue bluntly: "We want to impress on every parent in America that it is time to face the facts: the delinquent may be any child you know, including your own—regardless of your social position, your economic status or your good intentions. Juvenile delinquency today is everybody's problem." They further declared it to be "pure bunk" the idea that every generation ran afoul of the law. The types of crimes committed by

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[28] Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, S. Rept. 61, 5–6; Jason Barnosky, "The Violent Years: Responses to Juvenile Crime in the 1950s and the 1990s," (PhD diss., Brown University, 2004), 22, 25; and Bernard, *Jailbait!,* 3. Historian William Graebner provided evidence to indicate that in Buffalo, New York, delinquency rates declined after the war, but that this had little bearing on the city's efforts to curb the supposed epidemic. William Graebner, "The 'Containment' of Juvenile Delinquency: Social Engineering and American Youth Culture in the Postwar Era," *American Studies* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 81.

youth in the postwar period, they said, were unprecedented.[29]

One confounding element to the juvenile delinquency puzzle was a bewildering tangle of definitions. Was it an action that ended up before the courts? Was the threshold somewhere lower? Some state laws defined delinquency as incorrigible behaviour, acting outside parental control, immorality, indecency, disorderly behaviour, or sexual promiscuity. Writing in the early stages of the panic, Bernard suggested that the bare minimum definition included a youth who was "in trouble" for transgressing against society in some way. Still, he could not help but to add that the current delinquents were of a distinctly different type, "a strange, cold crew, often vicious where their predecessors were merely adventurous." Journalist Harrison Salisbury concurred that there was something unique and disturbing about the modern delinquent's conflict with society, describing it as "deep, relentless, and unending." Salisbury formulated his own domino theory in warning that a hundred thousand impressionable youth in New York City were on the verge of turning bad, drawn by the misdeeds of their peers.[30]

Despite—or, more probably, because of—a lack of agreed upon definition over what constituted delinquency, theories of its cause were never hard to find. Popular writers Dale Kramer and Madeline Karr said that no matter how much a delinquent might romanticize his experiences, he was fundamentally bored, finding neither satisfaction nor hope in school or work. Along the same lines, Bernard wrote that youthful energy had to be channeled to constructive purposes or else it risked leading to delinquency, and that

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[29] Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 1," *Saturday Evening Post* 227, no. 28 (8 January 1955): 18, 78; and Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 2," *Saturday Evening Post* 227 no. 29 (15 January 1955): 33.

[30] Bernard, *Jailbait!*, 3–4, 7; Ramona Caponegro, "Where the 'Bad' Girls Are (Contained): Representations of the 1950s Female Juvenile Delinquent in Children's Literature and Ladies' Home Journal," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 313; and Harrison Salisbury, *The Shook-up Generation* (New York: Crest Books, 1958), 17–18.

schools and parents had to play leading roles in alleviating boredom.[31]

In a decade when discourse largely eschewed questions of class, as if the nation had pleasantly settled on an uncontested white and middle-class identity, perhaps it should not surprise that when theorists of delinquency considered class, they often placed the middle class as the hub for their analysis. Albert K. Cohen's *Delinquent Boys* (1955) examined working-class juvenile delinquency, but argued that the dominance of middle-class norms fueled their deviancy. Middle-class values of personal ambition, individual responsibility and self-reliance, rationalism, courtesy, and respect for property were all heavily emphasized in the mass media as necessary qualities for material success. When the working class embraced these values but lacked the material and personal resources to enact them, they violently acted out their frustrations. Working-class kids were further disadvantaged by how they were reared. Middle-class parents, Cohen argued, instilled in their children the values necessary to succeed, and regulated friendships and activities to further these goals. Lower-class parents, however, raised their children with fewer restrictions and allowed them to follow their impulses. Delinquency was a lifestyle that was neither middle class nor working class, yet offered a means of achieving a desired status. To be a delinquent meant rejecting in its entirety middle-class values. Vandalism was not a rejection of wealth, but an attack on the key middle-class value of property. Delinquency, Cohen asserted, "expresses contempt for a way of life by making its opposite a criterion of status."[32]

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[31] Dale Kramer and Madeline Karr, *Teen-Age Gangs* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), 220–21; and Bernard, *Jailbait!*, 124.

[32] Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (New York: The Free Press, 1955), 88–102, 121–134. Edgar Z. Friedenberg concluded much the same thing as Cohen, emphasizing that lower-class youth were rebelling against the middle-class values that they were criticized for failing to achieve. Somewhat related, Harry Shulman stated that families that lacked middle-class aspirations or ideals to guide their children promoted unconventional conflict resolution, which made their children more

Of far greater concern were the baffling incidences of white, middle-class teens—the "good kids"—engaging in delinquency such as car theft or drug use. Novelist James Farrell pointed to postwar abundance, where guns, cars, and free time all provided opportunities for deviancy. Farrell was not alone in his wariness of widespread prosperity. Sociologist Ralph W. England, Jr. argued that, contrary to Cohen's trumpeting of middle-class child rearing, middle-class teens, in fact, were experiencing too many adult opportunities without adequate maturity. These teens gravitated to the privileges of adult life and bent them to their most hedonistic possibilities—drag racing or stealing cars for joyrides, for example. Harrison Salisbury, too, was bothered by delinquency in the well-to-do. Despite coming from material advantage, too many suburban middle-class teens were from "psychologically broken homes" of distant career-obsessed fathers and dominant mothers. Historians since have argued that observers at the time perceived a class-contagion element to middle-class delinquency. Historians James Gilbert and Grace Palladino each highlighted the belief that working-class kids were akin to an invading force, filling good kids with "wrong" values. The problem was less abundance or absentee parents, but a type of integration.[33]

There had long been a geographic component to delinquency theories, where the urban slums were seen as factor in turning young people bad. In Senator Estes Kefauver's

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vulnerable to alternate peer group behaviour. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 122; and Harry Shulman, *Juvenile Delinquency in American Society* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 1–2.

The liberal sociologist Daniel Bell, too, saw delinquency—at least the "organized" gang form—as one of lower-class rebellion. For middle-class teens, however, Bell claimed that the cause was not one of cultural rebellion, but of individual psychological maladjustment. Daniel Bell, "The Myth of Crime Waves: The Actual Decline of Crime in the United States," in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1960), 144.

[33] James Farrell, "What Makes Them That Way?" *Coronet* 36, no. 3 (January, 1958): 74–75; Ralph W. England, Jr., "A Theory of Middle Class Juvenile Delinquency [1960]," in *Middle Class Delinquency*, ed. Edmund W. Vaz (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 249; Salisbury, *The Shook-up Generation*, 87–94; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 18, 74–75; and Palladino, *Teenagers*, 127. See also Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 57.

introduction to Dale Kramer and Madeline Karr's *Teen-Age Gangs* (1953), he stated that the conditions that created criminals were "in the slums, where the kids don't have a place to play; in social conditions, where the young feel that society is their enemy; in economic conditions which breed hunger and despair; in lack of parental interest and supervision; and, perhaps, even in a lack of understanding on the part of some of our correctional institutions." William Alan Brooks, too, cited urban neighbourhoods as contributing to delinquent behaviour. There were three bad neighbourhoods in any city: business districts; manufacturing districts; and changing neighbourhoods. Business districts did not cater to or supervise children, thereby providing opportunities for mischief. Manufacturing districts were ugly and often attracted a criminal element to saloons and whorehouses. Areas of shifting population lacked tradition and social solidarity, encouraging antagonism on any number of fault lines.[34]

More troubling was the growing awareness that delinquency, in fact, was not confined to the slums. Clendenen and Beaser posited that the nature of the new suburban communities contributed to delinquency. The automobile, upon which suburban life relied, unmoored residents from their community. Teens had a harder time adjusting to new communities and parents had a harder time keeping track of their kids' friends, which in turn contributed to a belief that they were someone else's problem. Suburban living produced fractured and insular families, placing youth at risk for antisocial behaviour.[35]

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[34] Estes Kefauver, in Kramer and Karr, *Teen-Age Gangs*, vii–viii; and William Allan Brooks, *Girl Gangs* (New York: Padell, 1952), 107–08.

[35] Clendenen and Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 2," 70, 72. Dwight Macdonald also rejected the notion that delinquency was an urban problem, claiming that teen crime had risen 16% in communities under 25,000 residents (as opposed to an 8% rise in larger cities). It was also showing up in new housing projects, not slums, and in the suburbs it was growing faster than the teenage population. Macdonald, "A Caste, a Culture, a Market, Part 2," 67–68.

Or perhaps the true delinquents were the parents whose own irresponsible behaviour necessarily molded their children into antisocial misfits. The significance of this idea was that it cut across race, class, and community. Brooks, for example, listed five types of delinquent parents: 1) figurative runaway parents who left kids with inadequate or no supervision; 2) vicious parents who exposed kids to vice; 3) aiders and abettors who directly encouraged delinquency in their kids (e.g., encouraged truancy, rejected official outside authority, participated in vice and crime); 4) triangular parents who engaged in love affairs; and 5) inadequate parents who failed to provide adequate moral instruction. A *Life* editorial in 1954 placed responsibility at the family's doorstep, declaring that delinquency was the consequence of families that did not communicate with each other.[36] Clendenen and Beaser claimed that parents were unaware of the poor example they set for their children, and suggested that the quest for material possessions did not necessarily mean a better life.

> The truth is that we tend to be a nation that preaches one set of moral standards to our children, but upholds another set of standards as perfectly all right for adults. Cocktails and highballs are considered indispensable to almost every adult social gathering, particularly among the well-to-do. Yet we are shocked by disclosure of widespread drinking of intoxicants among imitative teen-agers.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover took a similar tact, attributing delinquency to a "lack of a sense of moral responsibility," which he placed at the feet of the family. He acknowledged that delinquency had many causes, but at root was a failure of home and community.[37]

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[36] "What To Do About Juvenile Crime [Editorial]," *Life* 36, no. 11 (15 March 1954): 24; and Brooks, *Girl Gangs*, 47–48. Brooks also provided case examples of all five types of delinquent parents.

[37] Clendenen and Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 2," 73. Hoover quoted in Senate Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, *A Compilation of Information and Suggestions Submitted to the Special Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce*

The absence of parents altogether was also regarded as significant. William Bernard related the tale of one middle-class teenage girl's descent into prostitution after her parents divorced and she was sent to live with grandparents. A lack of parental love and responsible role models, he said, put children at risk of becoming antisocial. James Farrell argued that fathers who identified so much with their work to the point of absence weakened their domestic authority. In such homes, the mother, cold and dominant, set the tone. Confused about the proper place and application of authority, boys from these homes joined gangs.[38] Journalist Benjamin Fine perceived the absence of a mother as notable, asserting that an absence of maternal bonding in the early years compromised a child's confidence and ability to trust women. Fine also believed that privileged children who turned delinquent suffered the same lack of domestic cohesiveness as poor kids, such as when a socially engaged mother pursued charity work rather than attend to her child's needs. Kramer and Karr stated that, fundamentally, delinquency was about rejection—by society and by parents. Children of the slums saw everyday the society that was rejecting them, and their own parents' social frustrations led to them rejecting their kids. When the police encountered delinquents from the upper classes, the causes were broken homes or neglect due to parents' self-involvement. Overprotection and indulgence of children could lead to delinquency, but so could underprotection.[39]

The education system, too, was targeted for blame, albeit less for causing delinquency than failing to arrest it or accentuating its effects. Albert K. Cohen charged

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Relative to the Incidence of Possible Influence Thereon of So-Called Crime Comic Books During the Five-Year Period 1945 to 1950, 81st Cong., 2d sess., 1950, Committee Print, 4.

[38] Bernard, *Jailbait!*, 14–20, 196–99; and Farrell, "What Makes Them That Way?" 76. Harry Shulman also saw dire consequences in homes with dominant mothers due to fathers at work. Physical punishment had given way to the threat of the father's hand later on or to bribery, neither of which promoted responsible children. Shulman, *Juvenile Delinquency in American Society*, 381.

[39] Benjamin Fine, *1,000,000 Delinquents* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1955), 54–68, 71, 77; and Kramer and Karr, *Teen-Age Gangs* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), 209–10.

that schools promoted middle-class standards. Teachers were likely to be middle-class and express those values. This tended to place working-class students at a disadvantage because the expectations of school did not mesh with their home or neighbourhood values. Hence, the working class tended to be classroom "failures." The working-class boy had to decide whether it was worthwhile to change his values and habits and speech for the classroom, especially when his efforts might still be scorned.[40] In a somewhat similar vein, Brooks posited that new levels of school attendance meant that teens who would not normally have been in school that late in life—i.e., the working class—were now present, and this might have inspired new levels of student hostility towards authority figures.[41] Put more succinctly, both these observations emphasized a notion that lower-class students did not belong in the same schools as their materially better-off peers, that class brought with it its own ethos that education could not overcome.

Social critic Paul Goodman argued that juvenile delinquents were those "not getting enough out of our wealth and civilization. They are not growing up to full capacity. They are failing to assimilate much of the culture." He said that this was not a social perversion on the part of youth but rather a sensible rejection of society. Human beings needed a healthy environment in order to grow up healthy. Delinquency was heartening to Goodman, for it demonstrated that human nature can perceive social miasma and reject it. The means of dissent may not have been nuanced, but they were always superior to the "apathetic, disappointed, cynical, and wasted" who conformed. The fault, Goodman said, was not inherent in technological or ecological conditions, but a failure to address the rapid change in American society. All young people were warped

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[40] Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*, 113–119.
[41] Brooks, *Girl Gangs*, 108–09.

by society, but delinquents were both made to feel shame for their background and prevented from gaining true satisfaction. Goodman wondered why those investigating comic books for the causes of delinquency never looked into the possible malignant effects of *Life*.[42]

Disparate theories notwithstanding, male delinquency, to those considering the question, was almost blasé compared to the female version. Boys' subculture, historian William Graebner explained, tended to be aggressive and dramatic, with blood rituals and expressions of athleticism and bravery—that is, they reinforced traditional masculine ideals. Their acts of delinquency were seen as public and property-oriented—e.g., assault, vandalism, robbery—and so seemed more obvious to grasp. Albert K. Cohen claimed that male delinquents were at least four times more common than female delinquents, but also acknowledged that female delinquency was less likely to come before the courts as errant girls were often released to their parents for discipline. This necessarily underreported female delinquency.[43]

And yet, the female delinquent occupied a more esteemed position in the history of America's postwar youth panic, a more confounding and worrying character whose violations of social norms were so much more severe. The female delinquent was understood as psychologically damaged, the result of a breakdown in her relationship with her parents, particularly her father. As historian Rachel Devlin explained, the female

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[42] Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (New York: Random House, 1960), 11–16, 163–64. Two decades later, historian Marty Jezer echoed Goodman's analysis, portraying postwar delinquency as evidence that the socialization of youth was going poorly, or that they were learning the underlying truth of postwar life beyond the suburban gloss. Marty Jezer, *The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945–1960* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 237.

[43] William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 69; Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*, 45; and Rachel Devlin, "Female Juvenile Delinquency and the Problem of Sexual Authority in America, 1945–1965," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 93.

delinquent was seen as stuck in a pre-Oedipal stage, unable to sexually mature due to a cruel or absent father and a mother who was dissatisfied with her husband. Her rebellion was not against society or as an expression of independence—something that could yet be rationalized as rooted in nobler ambitions, as Goodman saw delinquency—but an inchoate rage against her father. This was a key reason why the courts were less likely to intervene, preferring to let father, mother, and daughter repair the damage in the privacy of the home.[44]

A 1958 article in *Confidential Detective* asked "What Makes a Girl Delinquent?" Citing the work of Harvard law scholars Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, it was argued that female delinquents—tellingly labeled "sexual delinquents," suggesting that their crimes were committed against their own bodies—tended to be in good physical health, but more rebellious and sadistic, and likely to come from homes marked by alcoholism, emotional disturbance, criminality, and/or mental defect. The Gluecks listed predictors of delinquency: assertiveness; defiance; suspicion of others; an impulsive personality; self-centredness; easily persuaded; an addiction to danger; a father who is lax, overly strict, or erratic in discipline; and/or a neglectful mother, all leading to a child who feels unloved. The implications were clear and daunting: "Girl offenders of today are the mothers of tomorrow. Prostitutes, thieves and sadists do not make fit mothers."[45]

More recently, Leerom Medovoi suggested that two female rebel archetypes

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[44] Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 53–55, 67; Devlin, "Female Juvenile Delinquency and the Problem of Sexual Authority in America," 97–101; and Ramona Caponegro, "Where the 'Bad' Girls Are (Contained)," 318–20. Along the same lines, concerning the perceived link between unwed mothers and their own parents, see Sara B. Edlin, *The Unmarried Mother in Our Society* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Young, 1954), 93–114.

[45] "What Makes a Girl Delinquent?" *Confidential Detective* (February 1958): 8–10, 64. Also see Elizabeth McCarthy, "Fast Cars and Bullet Bras: The Image of the Female Juvenile Delinquent in 1950s America," in *It Came From the 1950s! Popular Culture, Popular Anxieties*, ed. Darryl Jones, Elizabeth McCarthy, and Bernice M. Murphy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 139–41.

existed in the 1950s, the tomboy and the bad girl. The bad girl embraced an aggressive sexualized femininity prescribed to young women, but instead of harnessing it in pursuit of a husband, she rejected domestic ambition in favour of immediate pleasure. Albert Cohen reflected the dominant thinking of the period when he argued that the status of a girl depended on her relationship with boys, which was to say that her sexuality was the key to her well being. A sexually "loose" girl might draw more male interest, but it lessened her chance for marriage. Failure to properly manage her sexuality thus sent her into the chasm of delinquency. For example, *Front Page Detective* ran a story purportedly written by Carol Ann, 16, who had been charged with auto theft. Carol Ann admitted to being a marijuana smoker for the past three years, graduating to selling and assault. She joined a youth gang, the Blazers, when she was thirteen, losing her virginity during the initiation process, and rarely sleeping at home since then. Her boyfriends in the Blazers fluctuated, dependent upon who was being sent to jail and who was being released. Yet, Carol Ann considered her age and mused whether she would stay with the Blazers or give up "this kid stuff."[46] Carol Ann was clearly not wife material.

The tomboy rejected sexualized femininity altogether, adopting what would have been treated as gender confusion by taking the male delinquent as her role model. The tomboy was the more prominent character in media focus on female delinquency. Take, for example, Harrison Salisbury's description of one female gang member, a "deb": "She was fourteen years old, five feet two and looked like an angel in black leather jacket and faded blue jeans. She carried a switchblade knife and bossed her gang like a top

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[46] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 267; Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*, 140–46; and Carol Ann, "Me? I'm a Hell Zone Deb," *Front Page Detective* 14, no. 18 (September 1955): 41–43, 70–71. See also James Farrell's composite construction of the female gang deb: "A girl of 13, in high-heeled shoes, her face grotesquely made-up, is charged with prostitution. She is a little girl play-acing the role of a woman, even of a vampire. Neglected, wanting someone to want her, knowing her family would like to be rid of her. She runs away and is caught with a boys' gang." Farrell, "What Makes Them That Way?" 76.

sergeant."[47] The female gang was an auxiliary of the male gang, aiding the boys by carrying weapons or drugs—laws at the time mandated that only a police matron could search a girl, which placed the male cop at a disadvantage—or raising money through prostitution. Their primary function in the gang, however, was providing sex and status to the gang's males. The gang girl had a reputation for harsh violence, but also served as a form of territory that male gangs fought over.[48]

Wenzell Brown's collection of true crime tales of female delinquency, *Girls on the Rampage* (1961), contributed ardently, and more than a little exploitatively, to the belief that the female delinquent was psychologically ill. Female delinquents, Brown claimed, were more likely to be self-destructive than males, for sexual delinquency was the consummate status crime, harmful to the girl, her parents, and her community. The emphasis in *Girls on the Rampage*, as well as another Brown book on the same topic, *Teen-Age Terror* (1958), was that these girls had abnormal childhoods that had damaged their personalities and led to their antisocial conduct. Brown's larger point was that female delinquents were victims needing treatment, not condemnation. To this end, he profiled (among others) a youth who grew up in privilege but of dysfunctional parents—a mother who was a stripper, a father who was alcoholic and possibly a homosexual—and so was raised by an abusive grandmother. The girl, "Shirley," cultivated violent fantasies and, as an adolescent, became maliciously promiscuous, seducing and robbing older men

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[47] Salisbury, *The Shook-up Generation*, 31. While the idea of a girl in denim pants and a leather jacket was frequently treated as evidence of gender confusion, Alan Petigny cautions us not to overstate the significance. As early as 1951, he stated, women at elite northeastern universities wore jeans, and by 1957 advertisements showed non-delinquent teens in jeans. Girls wearing jeans, he argued, were a challenge to rigid conceptions of femininity, but tight jeans were evidence of sexual delinquency. Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 189–91.

[48] See, for example, Kramer and Karr, *Teen-Age Gangs*, 216–18; Wenzell Brown, "The Debs," *The Teen-Age Jungle* (Standard Magazines, 1956): 73–74; and "The Gang Girl," *Front Page Detective* 21, no. 5 (September 1957): 56–57.

and women. It was only after she led a gang of boys to rob and assault a woman who had shown her sympathy that Shirley was apprehended. She was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic and the prognosis was that she would likely never be able to re-enter society unsupervised. Shirley, Brown said, did not become a delinquent due to sexual promiscuity. Rather, childhood trauma stunted her emotional growth and warped her sexuality. She avoided the usual fate of the female delinquent—prostitution—by turning to theft, lesbianism, and sadism.[49]

Another notable story from Brown concerned "Ruthie Earle," seventeen years old but with a lengthy criminal record. Ruthie was born in Georgia but grew up in New Jersey. While Ruthie's father was physically abusive to his wife and kids, only Ruthie seems to have developed obvious delinquent characteristics. She became a truant who felt most comfortable with life on the streets and quickly became promiscuous, a drug addict, and a petty criminal. Whether she was returned to her family, sent to Catholic school, or sentenced to reform school, she soon reverted to her criminal ways. At the end of Brown's tale, following a botched robbery and assault at a Bronx butcher shop, Ruthie was sentenced to a woman's prison. Ruthie's case was somewhat typical, Brown said, in that she came from a home ruled by a stern-to-cruel father and weak mother. The use of drugs and prevalence of prostitution eased her way into that life to compensate. Her sisters' apparent normal socialization notwithstanding, Ruthie Earle's story was yet another example of fathers failing their daughters and the wider community paying the price.[50]

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[49] Wenzell Brown, "Beatnik Babes and College Cuties," and "Sadists in Skirts: The Case of Shirley Train," in *Girls on the Rampage* (New York: Gold Medal Books, 1961), 10–11, 72–110. "Shirley Train" was a pseudonym (as were, most likely, the other names in the story), and the date of the events were not included in the text, but the inclusion of Brown's interview with Shirley suggests it occurred in the 1950s.

[50] Wenzell Brown, "Made for Trouble," *Teen-Age Terror* (New York: Gold Medal Books, 1958), 10–22.

Rachel Devlin suggested that the social construction of young women as natural sources of virtue and the seeming disparity between incidences of male and female delinquency made stories of bad girls especially attractive for the media. The female delinquent, she argued, was utterly strange and disturbing, yet also somehow indicative about something amiss in postwar life.[51]

Indeed, the overarching influence, frequently intersecting with other culprits, was the ever-expanding mass media. In his study of the 1950s juvenile delinquency panic in postwar America, James Gilbert posited that there was a widespread belief that the mass media was coming between parent and child, of "seducing the innocent child from the bosom of his or her family into the destructive and dangerous culture of the streets." Comic books, teen-directed magazines, movies, television, and rock n roll records were all cultural forms that prospered in the postwar economy because young people had disposable income and were eager to participate in the leisure economy. Delinquency and media criticism reinforced each other, reflecting a greater unsettled argument over the status of youth in American society—were they to be shielded from the uncertainties of the market or were they participants? According to Mary Louise Adams, protective efforts were predicated on the notion of teenage development as a blank slate, innocents especially susceptible to corruption. This justified protective action. The media was an outsider, one that did not coerce but enticed. How could parents protect their children from something so omnipresent and attractive?[52]

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[51] Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 55.

[52] Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 3, 23, 71, 126; and Adams, *The Trouble With Normal*, 140, 152. Also see Loren Baritz, *The Good Life: The Meaning of Success for the American Middle Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 210. John Springhill also pursued this line of inquiry, exploring the supposed mass-cultural corruption of youth and tracing its roots to the nineteenth-century fear of corruption by popular amusement. The common element of successive moral panics concerning youth, he suggested, was technological innovation that directly engaged youth. John Springhill, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral*

Almost all social workers, psychologists, sociologists, and criminologists of the period rejected the supposed direct links between mass media and delinquency, while not necessarily rejecting connections between culture and behaviour.[53] Still, social critics like Robert Lewis Shayon promoted a "pied piper" analogy in describing the relationship between television and children. He claimed that when children lacked love, they turned aggressive, something that television nurtured. "Such a child, whether he rebels openly or becomes deceptively obedient, develops a craving for violence and fantasy which drives him continually to the mass media, particularly TV. There the child finds unlimited fare but no wholesome satisfaction for an abnormal appetite." Harry Shulman wrote that the mass media had communicated society's various failures to children, but it had also

> inculcated an attitude of amused tolerance toward the criminal aspects of our national culture by heavily weighting the programs of commercial radio and television with scenes of crime, violence and sadism that tend to blunt a sense of the reality and meaning of crime. These contribute to our normlessness. The spread of juvenile delinquency into children of the middle classes and into

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Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830–1996 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

Kirsten Drotner has written that media panics, despite any surface arguments, are about modernity's "paradox of sameness and difference." That is, modernity treats the individual as the central subject, yet we are also constantly faced with the possibility of change (cultural, social, psychological), that previous habits and assumptions may not be permanent. Youth become the centre of the hysteria because when young people embrace the products of an alien new media, they assert their cultural autonomy by rejecting adult values and tastes. Media panics, Drotner said, are thus a form of social regulation, of adults seeking to maintain a status quo that youth seemingly aims to overthrow with the aid of sinister anti-culture agents. In denying the individual desires of others, these panics reveal the social/individual fault line of modernity, a contradiction that can only be expressed emotionally because it defies rational understanding. Kirsten Drotner, "Dangerous Media? Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 35, no. 3 (1999): 593–619.

[53] Even the numerous Congressional investigations into delinquency in the 1950s backed off from making a direct connection between cultural content and youth antisocial conduct. See, for example, Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, S. Rept. 1064, 9–10; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, S. Rept 2055, 1–3, 8–9, 17–19, 61–62; Senate Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce*, A Compilation of Information and Suggestions*, 20, 54, 57, 61; and Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, S. Rept. 62, 12–14, 18.

> rural regions and its very severe increase among teen-agers suggest that the influences that are injuring our national character are more than the influences of slum living: they are the influences of our national culture.[54]

With such a web of possible culprits, the suggested remedies were no less varied. William Graebner examined postwar Buffalo's efforts at combating delinquency via a televised dance program and a public school voluntary dress code. The former relied on parental authority and the latter was peer-oriented, but both were rooted in a belief that purposeful social engineering could counter unwanted aspects of youth culture. The aim, however, was not to eliminate delinquency where it existed but to contain it from infecting healthy, middle-class, white youth. These efforts, Graebner argued, reflected an entirely new sense of middle-class vulnerability to what was believed to be a social contamination confined to the lower class. Graebner said that Buffalo's social engineering efforts were paradoxical. The rhetoric behind the efforts indicated a desire for unity, homogeneity, and tolerance, but in practice the programs shied away from taking steps that might have broken down barriers of race and class. What Buffalo's social engineers pursued was division and segregation, where ideological and institutional walls were erected to separate white, middle-class kids from working-class and black kids, all under the guise of promoting democracy and egalitarianism. "The result was a system in precarious equilibrium," Graebner wrote, "held together by a tissue

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[54] Robert Lewis Shayon, *Television and Our Children* (New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1951), 34–35; and Shulman, *Juvenile Delinquency in American Society*, 767. Both Shayon and Shulman were elaborating an argument similar to that of the noted postwar anti-comic book crusader, Dr. Fredric Wertham, who saw in comics a stealth means of normalizing violence in children. See both Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Rinehart, 1954), and the recent assessment by his sympathetic critic, Bart Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

of ideology and contributing to the very problems it was supposed to be solving."[55]

Ken Smith's analysis of educational "mental hygiene" films of the postwar period presented a contemporary belief that teenagers—white and middle-class, if the characters were indicative—were ill-suited to instinctively handle modern life, and so needed guidance through any number of social dilemmas, from whether to go steady or be a show-off to driving recklessly or taking drugs. The essence of the advice contained a conundrum. As a rule, these films validated David Riesman's observation that America was becoming an other-directed society via their endorsement to fit in with one's peers—which is to say, to conform. Yet, if one's peers were pursuing, say, delinquent behaviour, the correct path was not the seeming-democratic consensus, but inner-directed virtue. These short films often presented dire consequences for poor choices, from unhappiness to ostracization, imprisonment, or death, yet how was one to know which path to take?[56]

Most strategies for countering delinquency involved reasserting adult authority over young people. Bernard, for example, promoted adult-supervised, wholesome activities that kept kids off the street. He also emphasized the importance of police officers as the front line in the fight, hoping to turn the beat cop from the figure having to arrest troubled teens into the person keeping youth from going bad in the first place. Kramer and Karr cited the social worker who had contact with and was accepted by

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[55] Graebner, "The 'Containment' of Juvenile Delinquency," 82–83; and Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, 8, 117. Lee Borrie also saw anti-delinquency strategies in terms of containment, but more directly as part of the nation's foreign policy towards Communism. Cold War containment required domestic harmony, something that teens, seeking a culturally autonomous space of their own, challenged and confounded. Lee Borrie, "Wild Ones: Containment Culture and 1950s Youth Rebellion," (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 2007).

[56] Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945–1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999). Also see the magazine *Teen Life* 1, no. 1 (September 1959), which was dedicated to providing guidance on popularity, dating, conversation, love, and sex. Popularity advice for girls, for example, emphasized Riesman's thesis, with recommendations to be available to socialize, to pursue boys' interests, and always demonstrate happiness. The advice for being a better conversationalist was equally other-directed, emphasizing making one's partner feel at ease by flattery and speaking to his interests.

gangs, a rare adult who did not reject them. Harrison Salisbury was especially obvious in his tone of possessiveness, assuming an adult obligation to "fix" youth. Salisbury maintained that delinquent gangs were a problem not due to a lack of information but a lack of collective civic will. As steps towards a solution, he suggested a variety of government programs to minimize domestic discord and encourage stable residency patterns. Like Bernard, Kramer, and Karr, his emphasis was on encouraging good behaviour rather than punishing bad.[57]

Throughout the 1950s, Congress investigated, held hearings, and issued regular reports on the possible connections between juvenile delinquency and paperbacks, magazines, comic books, television, and movies.[58] That these committees considered products of the culture industry worthy of investigation suggests that those in government saw merit in the possible connection—and, undoubtedly, their value as electioneering fuel—but nothing substantive emerged from these investigations. Quick to condemn the

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[57] Bernard, *Jailbait!*, 95, 200–01; Kramer and Karr, *Teen-Age Gangs*, 232; and Salisbury, *The Shook-up Generation*, 163, 167–68, 170–73. Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser similarly argued for government intervention, including slum clearance, public housing, anti-pornography laws. Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 5," *Saturday Evening Post* 227, no. 32 (5 February 1955): 30, 91–94. William Alan Brooks concurred, advocating public spending on services to assist families, educational policies that helped children appreciate their accomplishments, and training police officers to act more like social workers. Brooks, *Girl Gangs*, 139–140, 199–241. See also Benjamin Fine, who endorsed a wide swath of interventionist strategies in both the domestic and public/judicial spheres. Fine, *1,000,000 Delinquents*, 340–48.

[58] See, for example, Senate Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce, *A Compilation of Information and Suggestions*; House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 82d Cong., 2d sess., 1952, H. Rept. 2510; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books): Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 21–22 April and 4 June 1954; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report*, S. Rept. 1064; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report*, S. Rept. 61; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency*; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Television and Juvenile Delinquency: Report of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, S. Rept. 1466; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Obscene and Pornographic Literature and Juvenile Delinquency: Interim Report of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, S. Rept. 2381; and Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*.

"parasites on the free-press privilege," the various committee reports stepped back from pursuing censorship or meaningful regulation, instead calling for public pressure to stamp out offensive material and, especially, industry self-regulation and -censorship. While these reports provided superficial succor to those who blamed the mass media for delinquency, they concluded that the connection was not especially strong and/or that the delinquency issue was largely overblown.[59]

Paperbacks, comic books, television, and movies all took their turn being poked and prodded.[60] Of especial interest here was the 1952 House investigation of supposed pornographic materials and the 1956 Senate inquiry on movies and delinquency. The House Committee report declared:

> The so-called pocket-size books … have largely degenerated into media for the dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion, and degeneracy. The exaltation of passion above principle and the identification of lust with love are so prevalent that the casual reader of such "literature" might easily conclude that all married persons are habitually adulterous and all teen-agers completely devoid of any sex inhibitions.

While despairing the "impaired social morality" caused by war, the Committee rejected censorship as a workable solution, meekly hoping that "the pendulum [would] swing back again toward decency"—which is to say that perhaps publishers of offensive books

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[59] See Barnosky, "The Violent Years," 69–70, 75; House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 3, 5; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency*, 1–2, 23, 27, 33; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*, 66–71.

[60] House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency*; Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Television and Juvenile Delinquency*; and Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*.

and magazines would find a conscience and restrain themselves in the future.[61]

The 1956 inquiry into juvenile delinquency and the movies was similar pantomime. The committee claimed that its investigation was propelled by a large number of requests from parents to investigate the possible malign effects of movies on their children. The committee obligingly carried out its duty, even though it accepted that there was no simple deterministic relationship between movies and delinquency. Lou Greenspan, executive director of the Motion Picture Industry Council, a Hollywood advocacy organization, expressed skepticism that a movie could alter the mind or personality of a child. He countered that if kids were becoming more antisocial, the blame lay more with human civilization, with its destructive wars, rather than any movie. However, H.M. Janney, medical director of the Bureau of Prisons, said that the adolescent mind was especially impressionable, yet subjected to a "daily bombardment of vicious, gory, and sadistic material." Those from good homes could observe this material without ill effect, but those already neglected were ill-equipped to handle it without harm. The committee accepted the position of social scientists who argued that kids who were most negatively affected by harsh movies were also their most likely audience, yet acknowledged that the movie industry catered to a wide community of interests and personalities, and so had to pursue a wide swath of subject matter and presentation.[62]

In its conclusion, the committee believed that while the media had "a tremendous influence" on a child's development, the larger environment was even more influential in terms of how that child reacted to on-screen violence. As with the publishing industry, the committee recommended—or, rather, hoped for—greater self-regulation to look out

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[61] House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 3, 5, 17, 116–20.

[62] Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*, 1–3, 7–10, 12, 50.

for the best interests of the youthful audience.[63]

Miriam Linna, a chronicler of the postwar juvenile delinquency panic, stated that the 1952 pornography hearings and harassment from groups like Parent Teacher Associations may have brought unwanted pressure on publishers, but it also popularized to the nation the problem of out-of-control teens, which was good for sales. "The attempted scourge had exposed an evil that suddenly became most appealing to everybody," she wrote, "and the 1950's became a decade of teenage rampage. Literary agents pushed their clients to write about wild & crazy teenagers, and many of today's established fiction writers had their beginnings in JD material. Hollywood saw the youth market and delivered the goods."[64] The value of a good panic, in other words, could not go to waste.

This chapter turns, then, to the key media that most effectively promoted juvenile delinquent narratives, both establishing the terms for popular discussion of the issue while escalating and expanding the generated tension, but also providing the means of dissipating that tension as sincere accounts turned to sensationalist exploitation. Historian Geoffrey O'Brien observed:

> It was a curious phenomenon that seemed to creep out from under the prevailing genres of the day, creating its own audience as it went along. The juvenile-delinquency novel had one great advantage in that it could effortlessly be all things to all people: social tract directed against hoodlums, social tract directed against society, modern cowboy story, pornographic novel in which all the sex could be justified in the name of naturalism, and finally a subversive hymn of praise to the delinquents themselves.[65]

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[63] Ibid., 61–71.
[64] *Bad Seed* 1 (1984): np.
[65] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981), 131.

This is all true, but these novels (and films) also helped construct and promote the public narrative of what delinquency looked and acted like. If it was formula, it was one that was constantly expanding to allow for more diverse presentations of delinquency, to cover more settings and scenarios. From sociological to sensationalist, from slums to suburbs, from poverty-stricken minorities to materially comfortable middle-class, white teens, the juvenile delinquent genre covered a wide swath to appeal to a variety of anxieties and fantasies. But in this expansion, in attributing delinquency in some fashion to all teenagers, the genre helped transform delinquency into something more benign—basic adolescence—and neutralized the fear.

The book that initiated what became the juvenile delinquent novel was Irving Shulman's *The Amboy Dukes* (1946). Set during World War II, Shulman's story follows the exploits of the titular teenage Jewish gang in Brooklyn. The main narrative is driven by two of the Dukes, Frank Goldfarb and Benny Semmel, both 16, who accidentally kill one of their teachers. While Frank and Benny try to avoid being identified by the police, another of their gang, a violent simpleton named "Crazy" Sachs, rapes a young girl. The two stories converge at the end, with Crazy throwing Frank off a building. What was notable and influential about *The Amboy Dukes* was its focus on the teenagers, their relationships with adults and each other, and an emphasis on adolescence as something utterly foreign from adult life.

The Dukes, like the other gangs of the neighbourhood, spend their free time discussing "whores, guys who were cut up, and the dough you could make from one sweet job." They loiter on corners and heckle passersby, hang out in poolrooms, and generally wait for something exciting to happen and/or be offered part in some minor criminal caper. They are working class and highly attentive to dress and grooming.

Notably, many sport a ducktail haircut, a style later associated with 1950s rebels. "Lean or fat, tall or short, their bodies were hard, their eyes narrow and cruel, their lips thin and bitter."[66]

With the exception of an unemployed teacher working at a community centre who seeks to appeal to the boys' moral centre, the adults of the novel are either absent or antagonists. Frank rarely sees his parents because they are working in the war factories, and are annoyed with their son when they are forced to attend a meeting with his principal. Shulman described Frank's younger sister Alice, who regularly eats her meals alone: "At eleven the world still had its axis in her mother, father, and brother, and there was no counterbalance for their voluntary and involuntary neglect."[67] The murdered teacher, Bannon, is an authoritarian who is contemptuous of his students and goads Frank and Benny into the fight that leads to his death. The police, too, serve to hunt down Frank and Benny, closing in on Frank at the moment of his death. Where adults intersect with the novel's teens, it is to complicate and frustrate, not to guide or enrich their lives.

The experiences of the teens were suggestive of dysfunction. Frank is no thug—indeed, both he and Alice conduct themselves with a maturity seemingly beyond their actual age—yet he carries with him condoms and a zip gun, a crude, homemade pistol favoured by teen gang members of the period. One particularly notorious scene was set in the Dukes' clubhouse, where the gang has pooled their money to hire a prostitute, then afterwards threaten to beat her to get their money back. Equally shocking was a scene at a Dukes dance, where Crazy finds his chosen girlfriend, Fanny, 12, with a boy from another gang. Violence seems imminent, but the fight is broken up and Fanny is told to

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[66] Irving Shulman, *The Amboy Dukes* (1946; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1961), 1–2.
[67] Ibid., 154.

go into a back room and wait for Crazy. She is terrified and so is forced to go in, emerging later in a ripped dress and traumatized from the unspoken but understood rape. At that moment, Frank decides to leave the gang, realizing the immorality of its ethos.[68]

What *The Amboy Dukes* helped to do was establish certain essential elements to the postwar juvenile delinquent novel. Adolescents dressed and spoke differently than adults, and in a much crueler and cynical manner. With the possible exception of a figure to serve as a life preserver of sorts, adults were absent, negligent, or outright antagonist in the delinquent's mind. Teenagers lived in a ghetto world of crime, violence, sex, and exploitation. Most important, however, the teenager and his or her perspective predominated. This was not an adult's world inhabited by teens, but one created and dominated by adolescents and subject to their own machinations. At best, adults and teenagers co-existed in a physical space, each wary of the other. And it was this sense of distinction and rebellion that appealed to youthful readers of the time. Kurt Brokaw remembered being a youth in the early 1950s when he finally obtained a copy of what was by then a mystical text:

> [It] finally crossed my desk (squeezed inside a history text being passed around homeroom) in 1954. The word was out: this was The Hot Book. Like many classmates, I read Shulman's novel under the covers by flashlight, not daring to let my parents know I'd brought home such a book.

"One cannot underestimate the power and impact of The Amboy Dukes on a teenager in 1954," he concluded. "How could a kid even begin to acknowledge it, to respond to it, to honor it, to live it?" That it terrified teachers and parents surely validated its desirability

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[68] Ibid., 29–35, 159–88.

and significance.[69]

At the 1952 House Select Committee hearings concerning pornographic materials, the novel was singled out for being morally cancerous. One witness of note was James V. Mulholland, a judge of the Domestic Relations Court of New York City, who, after being told of *The Amboy Dukes* in connection to a sexual offense, investigated the novel further. Mulholland stated that he asked a probation officer as to his familiarity with the book and was told that, indeed, many youths who had appeared in the courthouse had read it. Mulholland went further yet and sent a copy of the novel to a psychiatrist at Kings County Hospital who dealt with adolescents. Dr. Joseph A. Manno declared that the novel was "obscene, provoking, and detrimental to the healthy emotional growth of young people. It unwisely stimulates and excites the sensual urges of young boys while they are still in the stage of increased suggestability [*sic*]." Manno concluded that anti-social behaviour could be attributed to reading Shulman's novel, and that minors should be prohibited from purchasing it. Mulholland further offered up the opinions of more medical professionals and teachers who presented a consensus opinion that the book was obscene and harmful.[70]

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[69] Kurt Brokaw, "Me, Ted and The Amboy Dukes," *Paperback Parade*, 67 (February 2007), 95, 100; and Lee Server, *Encyclopedia of Pulp Fiction Writers* (New York: Facts on File, 2002), 233.

[70] House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials, *Report of the Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials*, 107–10.

In 1949, *City Across the River* (Universal-International), Maxwell Shane's film adaptation of *The Amboy Dukes*, was released, with notable modifications. Jewish Frank Goldfarb became the more ethnically indistinct Frank Cusak, and key elements such as rape, prostitution, and smoking marijuana were excised or softened. The rape became a minor assault, and Frank's ultimate demise downgraded to a jail sentence. Nevertheless, various citizens groups still found alarming scenes of teenagers manufacturing zipguns in shop class. Also concerning was a report that claimed that a teacher asked his students what they thought the film's message was, and they responded that being a rat was dishonourable. The 1956 Senate investigation viewed *City Across the River* and accepted its "artistic excellence," yet nonetheless saw its potential for harming a youth audience. Film historians Mark Thomas McGee and R.J. Robertson acknowledged that despite various shortcomings, this was a film that emphasized a particular language and behaviour specific to teenagers, and that it took another six years before Hollywood pursued a prominent movie that focused on teenagers. Mark Thomas McGee and R.J.

Whatever the concerns of psychologists, teachers, or judges, the success of *The Amboy Dukes* opened the door, even if just a little, for other authors and publishers to pursue the delinquency theme, in effect creating a genre that focused on troubled teens with switchblades, gang rumbles, and drugs. Three years after *The Amboy Dukes* (but two years after the first Doubleday paperback edition), Hal Ellson expanded the palette of juvenile delinquent fiction with his novel *Duke* (1949), a first-person account of a black teen written in street-gang vernacular (a glossary was provided to assist the unfamiliar). Ellson worked as a recreational therapist at Bellevue Hospital in New York City, drawing from actual cases to inform his fiction. He had also previously worked in law enforcement or security in some capacity on the Brooklyn waterfront, which gave him firsthand knowledge of street crime. Ellson later told historian of pulp Lee Server,

> It was a time when the New York neighborhoods were filled with these teenage gangs. … Terrific hostility between them, lots of violence, killings. I saw all kinds of mixed up and crazy things at that job, and I took my notebook everywhere I went. I made lots of notes and a lot of the stuff in my books was just writing down what these young people said. … After *Duke* came out they'd be lined up waiting to talk to me, kids accused of a couple of murders, saying "Want to hear a good story?" I got all kinds of shocking stuff from these kids. I had earned their respect, they believed in me, and I never gave them away. If they were in serious trouble I would try to steer them to a psychiatrist I trusted, but I never gave them away.[71]

Duke follows the meandering life of the president of a teen gang, the Mighty Counts, who spends his days making decisions based on his erratic and paranoid state of mind. The novel lacks a conventional narrative, but is a series of loosely connected

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Robertson, *The J.D. Films: Juvenile Delinquency in the Movies* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1982), 16–17; and Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*, 46.

[71] *Bad Seed* 1 (1984): np; and Server, *Encyclopedia of Pulp Fiction Writers*, 89.

vignettes from his life. Among the events related, Duke sells and smokes marijuana, conducts a drive-by shooting against a rival gang after a Count has his jacket stolen, his gang begins a prostitution ring using teenage girls, he engages in an armed robbery of a drugstore, and the novel concludes with a rumble with yet another gang.[72] Duke lives with his mother, alcoholic stepfather, and brother. His real father is still alive, but left the family long ago. Duke's older brother believes in playing by the rules and encourages Duke to change his ways. Duke snickers at this, asserting that his brother is naive if he thinks white people will just let a black person gain anything through honest work. No, Duke says, one has to get organized and take what is required.[73]

What *Duke* added to the delinquent novel archetype, then, was both a sense of purposeless to juvenile delinquents' lives, yet also codes of behaviour that revolved around gang violence, drugs, crime, and territorial defence. Ellson also introduced questions of race and frustration, and of reconfiguring success amidst social barriers. The delinquent here, as in *The Amboy Dukes*, merits some sympathy. Yes, they have violated various laws, but neither Duke nor Frank Goldfarb have given up on themselves. They are still ambitious, but are held back by external circumstances, such as their neighbourhood, adults, or racism.

Duke was also significant for presenting itself as purposeful and socially relevant fiction. The first edition contained a preface that explained that New York City was currently home to over one hundred large gangs, many with female auxiliaries. These gangs, Ellson wrote, tended to be racially or ethnically organized and existed for the purpose of self-protection, establishing territorial rights, and fighting. *Duke*, he said, was

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[72] Hal Elson, *Duke*, in *Raw Rumbles: The Hal Ellson Omnibus* (1949; reprint, San Francisco: Rudos and Rubes Publishing, 2008), 13–16, 34–39, 83–98, 109–20.
[73] Ibid., 20–21, 24–25.

written not to glorify the evil of their actions, but to demonstrate that it is a sickness caused by society: "Above all, no blame should fall on the boys. They are the helpless victims."[74] Ellson was sincere in his desire to present delinquency as symptomatic of larger social ills, but this sociological framing would come to be employed as cover throughout the decade by stories that were more obviously exploitative and sensationalist, playing upon a conscious dread and fascination that Ellson helped to raise.

Ellson quickly followed with *Tomboy* (1950), another notable contribution to the emerging genre—the female delinquent. This novel was graced with an introduction by Dr. Fredric Wertham, not yet at the height of his fame as an anti-crime comics crusader. Wertham commended Ellson for the "authenticity" of his novels, the complexity of the teenage characters, the "drab degradation of the adults," and the limp response of alleged sympathetic parties. Miriam Linna's assessment of Ellson reinforced Wertham's position. Ellson, she wrote, sought to be the medium through whom these marginalized teens could speak. He shunned the easy path of depicting female delinquents as sexualized props and scenery. Instead,

> Ellson treated young women as real people with gargantuan problems that went beyond the boys' rumbles. Writing from the poor urban perspective, Ellson knew that there were very few sweet tomorrows for gang girls, that their only futures were dead end streets, and yet he gave them dignity and omniscience, sort of a base Madona [*sic*] quality of suffering to no avail. ... Ellson had this microcosm thing that worked culture into subculture into sub-subculture—he took us into the inner workings of a gang, which was a small scale instance of what was happening in the world at large, and then he moved his theories into the individual characters, never resorting to sensationalism. Truth to him was always more riveting than the imaginary.[75]

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[74] Ibid., 10.
[75] *Bad Seed* 4 (1986): np.

Like *Duke*, *Tomboy* is less a connected narrative than vignettes that describe the experiences of Kerry Brangan, 15, as she navigates a frustrating life that takes her into the orbit of a gang called the Roaches. Many familiar elements are present in *Tomboy*—a broken home, an alcoholic parent, casual crime, racial animosity—but the novel is most notable for featuring a female protagonist (albeit one who exhibits masculine aggression) and presenting the initiation rituals of new gang members. This involves stripping the initiates, beating them, and, in the case of females, carving onto their body the initials of the male member who has claimed them. *Tomboy* does not include a scene of sexual initiation—either group sex or with the boy who claimed her—but many gang-themed novels that followed in the decade played up that sensationalist element.[76] Thus, two more key elements of the genre, the female delinquent and sexualized violence, emerged.

After Ellson, the focus on sincere explorations of delinquency mostly shifted to film, where *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *Rebel Without a Cause*—what Andrea Carosso called the "rebellion triptych" of 1950s teen movies—firmed up the character of the delinquency genre before giving way to the exploitation impulse. The first on the list had both the oddest backstory and the most indirect influence on the genre. *The Wild One* (1953) was based on a short story by Frank Rooney, "Cyclists' Raid," published in *Harper's* in January 1951. Rooney's tale was itself inspired by actual events cited in a brief July 1947 story in *Life*, "Cyclist's Holiday." On the Fourth of July weekend of that year, some four thousand motorcyclists rode into Hollister, CA, as part of a convention. As the weekend progressed, the riders graduated from stunts to alcohol-fueled vandalism. Local police were unable to restore order and had to wait until the

[76] Hal Elson, *Tomboy* (1950; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1967), 36–41.

motorcyclists left on their own. The story was only a single paragraph, but was accompanied by an almost full-page photo of one of the members. He was a large man, sitting on his bike, shirt open, with a hat sitting askew on head. He held a bottle of beer in each hand, and well over a dozen empty bottles surrounded his bike. The photo ensured that the text was unambiguous; this was crude debauchery and it held hostage an entire town.[77]

Rooney's story takes the Hollister incident as its premise and relates the hellish weekend when Gar Simpson and his branch of the Angeleno Motorcycle Club arrive in town. The bikers are initially quite polite, patronizing the local hotel and diner. Simpson tells hotelier Joel Bleeker that the group were casually riding up the California coast, hoping to enjoy the country. "The youth of America," Simpson says. "Our hope for the future." Despite the group's manners, Bleeker finds himself irritated and suspicious of them, discomforted by their lack of individuality and dress. As in Hollister, by evening the bikers are drunk and the situation grows more chaotic, with bikers throwing beer bottles and vandalizing building exteriors. Simpson makes no effort to rein in his men. The night of violence concludes with the accidental death of Bleeker's daughter. The bikers flee town and Bleeker knows that they will never be able to positively identify her killer. Later, however, one of the gang, a much younger youth, returns, for he is revolted by what his friends did. Bleeker rages at the boy for not stopping the gang, but the boy explains that there was nothing he could have done against the group. A mob of townspeople descend upon the boy and beat him harshly. Bleeker delivers many of the blows, but then opts to protect the boy. The story ends with a frustrated and hollow

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[77] Carosso, *Cold War Narratives*, 152; and "Cyclists' Holiday," *Life* 23, no. 3 (21 July 1947): 31.

Bleeker considering how to go forward after this horrible day.[78] The reader is left the impression of deep insecurity, that with little protection or recourse, the peace of a small town could be so easily disrupted by a gang of thugs, and where citizens can be transformed into a mob as violent as the bikers. The violence that occurred was not purposeful nor easily comprehensible, other than, possibly, an indictment of the dangers of the mob—any mob.

Two years later, Rooney's story was adapted by director László Benedek, and the thrust of the narrative shifted from random violence and insecurity to alienation and intolerance, Bleeker's tragedy turned into Simpson's (renamed Johnny Strabler) struggle to fit in.[79] The film opens with a shot of a long stretch of road and ominous superimposed text that reads: "This is a shocking story. It could never take place in most American towns—but it did in this one. It is a public challenge not to let it happen again." A voice-over from Johnny, speaking in the past tense, expresses regret for what happened and a wish that he could have stopped it. Instead, like everyone else, he just went along with events. From the perspective of the postwar mass society debate, the film seemed set up to consider the tension of the individual seeking to not succumb to the group.

Much as in "Cyclists' Raid," the motorcycle gang—here rechristened the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club—reaches the town, where the local merchants, including Frank Bleeker, welcome them as customers. Inside the bar, Johnny chats with Kathie, Chief Bleeker's daughter and Frank's niece, who asks him where the gang will go when they leave. Johnny becomes somewhat exasperated, telling her, "Oh man, we just gonna go." Speaking in jive, he explains to her that tensions build up during the week, so on the

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[78] Frank Rooney, "Cyclists' Raid," *Harper's* 202, no. 1208 (January 1951): 34–44.
[79] *The Wild One*, directed by László Benedek (Columbia Pictures, 1953).

weekend they relieve the stress by just riding around. Both his need to be free of social constraints and his jargon mark Johnny as an outsider. One might go so far as to say he is an individualist, yet he is also shaped by his identity as a member of the biker gang.

One of the local girls, Mildred, learns the name of the club and asks, "Hey, Johnny, what are you rebelling against?" He deadpans, "Whaddaya got?" Mildred laughs at this and repeats the exchange to Kathie as if it is a big joke. Indeed, Marlon Brando's delivery of his response suggests that Johnny does not take his rebellion seriously either. That is, his rebellion is largely a joke, a futile gesture. This is, in fact, born out by the events of the film.

Johnny's gang is about to depart when a rival club shows up, and their leader seeks redress of grievances against Johnny. Tensions escalate amongst the gangs and townspeople, and after Johnny and every other biker are arrested on a false charge of killing Jimmy, an elderly bartender, the townspeople's cries for vengeance are especially thick. Eventually, Frank and Art, another resident, come forward to tell the chief that the bikers did not commit the fatal act. The chief acknowledges this but tells Johnny that he still holds him morally responsible for Jimmy's death—hearkening back to the opening narration, Johnny must agree—but lets him and all the other bikers go, ordering them out of the county. Later the same day, Johnny returns alone to Bleeker's Cafe, where the chief and Kathie are being served by Frank. The chief walks out without acknowledging him. Johnny struggles for words, unable to express his thanks, before riding off alone.

Film historians Mark Thomas McGee and R.J. Robertson claimed that Stanley Kramer, the film's producer, intended the movie to be an indictment of middle America's intolerance toward difference but backed off for fear of antagonizing censors. Thus the hypocrisy of the town's business people, who welcomed the bikers when the money was

flowing and turned against them after it had been exhausted, was downplayed in favour of the inherent violence of the gang.[80] And yet, it is hard to dismiss the ease with which the townspeople became a violent mob, even ignoring the local police chief's call for order. Just as in Rooney's short story, there is little meaningful difference between the respective gangs once the battle was pursued.

While the film was fundamentally unsympathetic to rebellion, the means of reaching this conclusion provided considerable material for counter interpretations. For one, Johnny's "Whaddaya got?" line, which could be read as dismissive of rebellion or of the unfocused, illegitimate nature of Johnny's stance, undercut the validity of rebellion in postwar America, and perhaps even of diversity. The film also forcefully depicts the biker gangs as thugs, easily given to debauchery, violence, and theft, and concludes with Johnny admitting, if not to the Bleekers, to the audience and himself that his conduct—his rebellion—was wrong. In the end, Johnny bows to authority.[81] Like Rooney's story, the peaceful assumptions of small town life are shown to be unjustified, as a bunch of hoodlums in leather jackets might arrive at any moment, serving as, perhaps, a warning of teenage subversion escaping from urban slums and conquering new territory. Adult suburbanites could not have missed the random danger that Johnny and his gang represented, nor the fundamental inadequacy of the town's institutions to resist and protect its residents. The dominant narrative, then, was one that rejected the legitimacy of those who sought to carve out a life outside the mainstream, for it was necessarily predatory and hostile to peace and order.

Yet, as Jon Lewis observed, Johnny embodied the male ego ideal—tough, strong,

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[80] McGee and Robertson, *The J.D. Films*, 24.

[81] LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 32; Carosso, *Cold War Narratives*, 154; and Jon Lewis, *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 30.

confident, oozing working-class masculinity—and was undeniably charismatic. Whatever the plot points and resolution, McGee and Robertson suggested, the spirit of the characters was affecting. Johnny was at his most appealing not when he acceded to authority but when he dissented, when he exhibited independence from his gang and the townspeople. And, indeed, this was a notable reading of the movie, for beyond the hypocrisy and intolerance of the townspeople, the thuggish behaviour of the bikers, and Johnny's submission at the end, Johnny's dissent was alluring.[82]

The film, too, established a visual tone for youthful rebellion. A decade after *The Wild One* was released, Grace and Fred Hechinger wrote of the teen archetype promoted by Hollywood:

> [Brando's] image is reflected on city streets, in high school corridors and subways. He is the unkempt but cocklike, overcombed, sallow youth, dressed in black leather jacket, the uniform of the adolescent mob. His speech is the inarticulate, monosyllabic accompaniment to the awkward gestures and the phony swagger which convey arrogance without backbone.[83]

While not a proper juvenile delinquent film, *The Wild One* contributed greatly to future delinquent movies by bequeathing a style, of an independent and cool figure operating outside the consensus, if not necessarily as an individual. The delinquent genre soon made use of this alienated yet alluring rebel.

The second of the major sincere juvenile delinquency films was *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), adapted from Evan Hunter's novel of the same name.[84] Both novel and film related the experiences of Richard Dadier, a new teacher in an inner-city vocational

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[82] Lewis, *The Road to Romance and Ruin*, 28–29; Carosso, *Cold War Narratives*, 152; and McGee and Robertson, *The J.D. Films*, ix.
[83] Hechinger and Hechinger, *Teen-age Tyranny*, 105.
[84] *Blackboard Jungle*, directed by Richard Brooks (MGM, 1955); Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955; reprint, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997).

school filled with society's abandoned and abused youth. While the film was mostly faithful to Hunter's text, it deviated from the original's rather grim presentation of life in the slums. Leerom Medovoi went so far as to suggest that Hunter's novel mocked the middle-class ideal of education as fuel for social mobility, thereby rejecting a key liberal precept about social progress. The film version, on the other hand, was an unambiguous triumph of liberalism, of the virtue of a single individual overcoming the thuggish and sluggish mass culture represented by the delinquent students of the school.[85]

The film begins with Rick (Glenn Ford) arriving at North Manual High School, where he is to begin work as a teacher. As he enters the school, students stare at him suspiciously from behind a fence that look much like prison bars. Other teachers whom Rick meets share various tactics for cowing the students. One named Murdock informs him, "This is the garbage can of the educational system." He shares two tips: "Don't be a hero and never turn your back on the class." Their job is to sit on the garbage cans so that women can walk around the city during the day without being attacked.

Rick is confronted with a multi-ethnic but universally rebellious class of students. Of particular note is Gregory Miller (Sidney Poitier), a cool but snide black youth, and Artie West (Vic Morrow), a white thug who is openly contemptuous of Rick's authority. Rick handles several challenges to his authority with calm and steely deliberation. He identifies in Miller natural leadership qualities, and enlists him in helping bring the class under control. Miller demurs, for his experience with racism has soured him on institutional education. Yet Rick redoubles his efforts to both teach his class and win over Miller after a succession of events that establish the students' savagery. Matters come to a head when Rick catches West cheating during an exam and calls him to the front of the

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[85] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 143.

class. West defies him, and when Miller stands with Rick, the two boys almost come to blows. Rick steps in and West pulls a knife. The confrontation escalates into both a battle for control of the classroom and a test of Rick's faith in rationalism in dealing with these delinquents. Despite holding the knife and having the nominal support of the class, West is on the defensive throughout, unable to counter Rick's confidence. A cornered West succumbs and surrenders. The class rallies around Rick, who tells them they have taken a step forward as citizens. Rick's victory is not just in defeating Artie's barbarism and crude rebellion, but he has persuaded the borderline delinquent Miller to give institutionalized liberalism another chance.

Blackboard Jungle has been interpreted, in the main, in a couple ways. Both Andrea Carosso and Peter Biskind perceived in the film an advocacy for Cold War consensus liberalism. Biskind saw Rick as bringing civilization to the savages, achieving a beneficial social order. The other teachers serve as representatives of other political positions and found wanting. On one hand, there are the conservative teachers who advocate violence and repression, treating the students as a problem impossible to solve, so they need to be kept at bay. On the other are the bleeding-heart liberal teachers like Rick's friend Josh, who naively believes that these are all good kids. That stance, Josh learns, turns teachers into prey. Instead, Rick represents the kind of muscular and rationalist liberalism promoted by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., able to control his emotions and break the students' mob mentality through the force of his confidence and intellect. Carosso argued that Rick's efforts are about drawing the excluded minority, Gregory Miller, into the middle-class consensus. Artie West, although white, is a sociopath and ill-suited to the benefits of mainstream life, but Miller's delinquency is not of his own making. Irrational racial prejudice have placed him in the delinquent category, even

though his intelligence and integrity demonstrate that he deserves better. Employing rational liberalism, Rick helps Miller escape this trap so that he can join the mainstream. Rick's triumph can be the nation's triumph if Americans as a whole are willing to embrace liberalism and tap its potential.[86]

The film has also been seen as a framing of the juvenile delinquency issue as one that is fundamentally an adult problem. That is, when teens rebelled, what was really at issue was how it affected adults. Artie West's antisocial and violent personality, Thomas Doherty argued, was a depiction of youth never seen before on movie screens. It suggested that the social contract between youth and adult had been voided, leaving only suspicion and the threat of violence in its wake. Indeed, James Gilbert said, the language and behaviour of teens demonstrated that they had broken from adult values. *Blackboard Jungle*, Leerom Medovoi stated, was not a movie made for teenagers, but a "social problem" film for adults that showed teenagers as a disruption to the social order. Contemporary critics certainly extrapolated this message. Edward N. Wallen, principal of a Bronx vocational high school, expressed his belief that the movie would negatively skew the public's opinion of the students and teachers. Columnist Hedda Hopper, who declared it the most brutal film she had ever seen, believed that it would scare away potential new teachers even as it provided delinquents bad ideas and advice.[87]

Yet, the film played a valuable role in developing the juvenile delinquency genre, albeit almost certainly not intentionally so. Despite being a movie aimed at adults, the

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[86] Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us To Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 204–05; Carosso, *Cold War Narratives*, 157–58; and Medovoi, *Rebels*, 143.

[87] Lewis, *The Road to Romance and Ruin*, 47; Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 58–59; Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 184; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 184; McGee and Robertson, *The J.D. Films*, 29; and Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*, 46.

inclusion of Bill Haley and the Comets' early rock n roll anthem, "Rock Around the Clock," at the film's beginning and conclusion was an acknowledgement of youth culture as distinct and alien from adult understanding. And teenagers responded, with numerous reported incidences of youth in the audience getting up to dance in the theatre. Leerom Medovoi cited the musician Frank Zappa, who said that when he saw the film as a teenager, hearing "Rock Around the Clock" made the experience seem like a victory even though the narrative was undoubtedly a triumph of the adults. It was this effect that caught the eye of independent producer Sam Katzman. Realizing that teenagers were a significant unaddressed market audience, he and others began to produce movies that showed playfully rebellious teenagers whose lives were dominated by rock n roll and who were at odds with adult authority. While some of the tougher juvenile delinquent films that followed further borrowed from "the nasty and brutish vision" of *Blackboard Jungle* to assert liberal ideals, the film's greater significance is better measured by how it helped launch teen-oriented exploitation films that adopted the tropes of adult-teen conflict, but also of good but misunderstood teens even as they abandoned the more explicitly sociological intentions.[88]

The third and best known of the major sincere juvenile delinquency films was *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), a movie as laced with postwar cultural fault lines as *Blackboard Jungle*, but more influential because it expanded the delinquency terrain to materially comfortable suburbia, featured a narrative that emphasized how adults negatively affected teens, and whose point of view made primary the teenage audience.[89] *Rebel Without a Cause* significantly expanded the teenage population, both as on-screen

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[88] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 161; and Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 57, 101.
[89] *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray (Warner Bros, 1955).

rebels and in-the-audience consumers. However, in raising delinquency's profile as a problem affecting potentially all teenagers, it opened the door wide for sensationalist exploitation treatments that divorced presentation from real-world concern.

The film begins with three teenagers, all white and seemingly middle class or better, being held at a police station. Jim Stark (James Dean) has been brought in for public drunkenness, Judy (Natalie Wood) for violating the community's curfew, and John "Plato" Crawford (Sal Mineo) for allegedly shooting some puppies. Soon enough, however, there are strong suggestions that all three have run afoul of the law because of a breakdown of some sort with their parents. Plato's parents are divorced, and while he no longer sees his father, his mother is out of town. A nanny who has come to pick up Plato confirms that his mother is frequently absent. Judy tells Detective Ray Fremick that she thinks her father hates her and believes her to be "the ugliest thing in the world" and "a dirty tramp." And yet, when Judy learns that her mother, not her father, will be picking her up, she feels betrayed. When Jim's parents and grandmother arrive, his father downplays his son's actions, while his mother urges to keep it all private. The back and forth sniping drives Jim to cry out, "You're tearing me apart! You say one thing, he says another, and everybody changes back again." Taking Jim to another room to speak privately, Fremick learns that Jim and his family have recently moved to this town after Jim had "messed a kid up" for questioning his masculinity. His parents think that this fresh start will fix the problems, but, looking out the window at his mother scolding his passive father, Jim asks, "How can a guy ever grow up in a circus like that?" He longs to escape the confusion of his family and find belonging.

The next day is Jim's first at his new school. He is harassed by Judy's clique, and goaded into a knife fight with a boy named Buzz. While Jim is slashed across the chest,

he gets the better of Buzz and holds his blade to the boy's throat. Jim tosses aside the knife and tells Buzz that they'll settle matters elsewhere. Buzz challenges Jim to a chickee run (a car race). That night at home, Jim calls out for his mother, but it is his dad, in an apron, who responds. "You thought I was mom?" his dad asks, the perception of his inadequacy and emasculation lost on no one (save perhaps himself). Jim asks how to be a man and satisfy one's honour. His father is confused by the question and advises cautious evaluation of the pros and cons of any action, perhaps canvassing more opinion. His response reflects the other-directed Organization Man mentality described by David Riesman and William H. Whyte, a reluctance to put forth an opinion that has not been tested for approval by the group. Jim desperately rejects this.

> "What can you do when you have to be a man?"
> "Well … now …"
> "No, you give me a direct answer! Now, are you going to keep me from going?"
> "Jim, did I ever stop you from anything?"

Jim's need is for masculine moral guidance but his apron-clad father can offer only permissiveness and consensus seeking. Jim speeds off into the night for the chickee run.

Judy and the other kids wait on the edge of a cliff. When Jim arrives, Buzz takes him aside and shows him a couple stolen cars that they will be driving. They properly introduce each other and shake hands, then look over the cliff. Buzz observes, "That's the edge. That's the end." The chickee run is a race toward the cliff's edge, with the first person to bail out the loser.[90] The two boys share a cigarette and Buzz admits to Jim, "I like you." When Jim wonders why they have to follow through on the chickee run, Buzz

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[90] Another variation depicted in hot rod movies involves two cars driving towards each other, with the first to veer off deemed the loser. In the same vein, *Dragstrip Riot* [aka *Teenage Rumble*], directed by David Bradley (American-International, 1958), features a train drag, in which two competitors parked on a railway track, waiting for an oncoming train. The first to flee was the chicken.

replies, “You gotta do something”—a statement that suggests powerlessness, boredom, and the limitations of demonstrating masculinity. The race begins and Jim is the first to bail out. Buzz’ victory is short-lived, however, as his jacket catches on the door handle, trapping him in the car. It goes over the cliff and he dies. The teens look over the cliff in horror, then flee en masse.

Jim goes home to confront his parents. They have already heard about the accident at the cliff and Jim confirms that he was there. He tries to explain the difficulties of acting tough, but his dad just rambles on in passive agreement until Jim explodes. Jim wants to go to the police and confess his involvement, to do the right thing, but his parents try to dissuade him. His father tells him that a person cannot be so idealistic, that knowing he did the wrong thing should be sufficient. His mother declares that the family will just move again. Jim declares that the time for running away is over. He begs for his father to stand up for him, but Mr. Stark buries his head in his hands. Furious, Jim throws him to the ground and begins to strangle him before again driving off into the night.

Jim goes to the police, but is dismissed by an officer at the station. Several of the boys from the cliff have been brought in for questioning, and they believe Jim is there to inform on them. Unaware that the gang are searching for him, Jim calls Judy and they go to an abandoned mansion to talk. Plato, too, meets up with them, but soon enough the gang finds the three of them and begin hunting for Jim inside. The police are not far behind, and in the confusion, Plato shoots and wounds one of the gang. Accusing Jim of abandoning him, Plato screams, “You’re not my father,” and runs away.

His escape is short-lived and despite Jim’s best efforts, Plato is shot dead by the police. Jim is holding Plato’s dead body when his father comes to comfort him. He tells his son that he (Jim) did “everything a man could,” which is to say that being a man

could still mean failing. Jim sobs and clutches at his dad's leg, begging him, "Help me." Mr. Stark replies, "You can depend on me, trust me. Whatever comes, we'll fix it together. I swear to you. Stand up. I'll stand up with you. I'll try to be as strong as you want me to be." Jim introduces Judy to his parents, then he and Judy walk away. Meanwhile, the nanny mourns for Plato by herself, observing, "Poor baby got nobody, just nobody."[91]

The most common interpretations of *Rebel Without a Cause* have gravitated around the failure of adults and social institutions, that if young people had fallen, it was not of their own volition. Behind the chastised juvenile delinquent, Peter Biskind argued, was a delinquent parent. Indeed, Biskind said, *Rebel* "so sentimentalizes its delinquents that although they may be angry and (self-)destructive, they are more moral, upstanding, and law-abiding than anyone else." Jackie Byars likewise interpreted as superficial the movie's juvenile delinquency. Instead, she stated that the film exposed the family as a deeply flawed social institution. Jim and Judy spend the movie seeking ethical truths from adults, yet they are consistently failed, all but ensuring that these kids will grow up morally malformed. Further to this, Robert L. Griswold suggested that affluence and material luxury was insufficient for raising moral and happy children. Rather, parents had to nurture democratic values, too. The movie's conclusion, Steven Cohan argued, demonstrated that the family was still the proper site for proper moral instruction, with

[91] Irving Shulman wrote the original screenplay for *Rebel Without a Cause*. After his draft was rejected, he published it as *Children of the Dark* (New York: Popular Library, 1956). Shulman's version had a much harder edge to it. Jim (renamed Steve) is far more violent and angry with his parents, rather than confused and in need of guidance. Steve's father is less a wimp in Shulman's telling, and more a passive-aggressive misogynist. Instead of the little girl lost of the film, Judy is more promiscuous. Plato undergoes the greatest transformation. The film version of Plato is a lonely and socially inept boy, clearly damaged by parental abandonment despite the material wealth in which he has been raised. In Shulman's treatment, Plato is a violent and psychopathic homosexual, an insane thrill killer devoid of conscience. The cause of this remains the lack of parents, but where Sal Mineo's Plato is someone to be pitied and mourned, Shulman's version is to be feared. When he is killed by a police sniper while holding a grenade, the response is more relief than regret.

Jim's father pledging to work harder to be a proper man for his son. Biskind, however, contended that *Rebel* did not advocate on behalf of kids per se, but for experts. The failure of Jim's parents was not for lack of trying, but skill. Throughout the movie, Jim's father is entirely earnest in his efforts to provide guidance to his son; his failure lies in the quality of his advice. Instead, Biskind suggested, *Rebel* argued for experts trained in raising children, like social workers, psychiatrists, and teachers (such as Rick Dadier). Parents were simply too inept to be trusted with such a vital job.[92]

Abigail Cheever saw the movie as exposing clear divisions emerging between adults and youth. Cheever observed that before the chickee race, Plato says of Jim, "he doesn't say much, but when he does you know he means it," which serves to contrast the insincerity of their parents. The implication of that observation, as the narrative plays itself out, is that the sincerity of youth is the means of redeeming adult failures. Further to the theme of division, Thomas Doherty observed that Jim instinctively gravitates to the values of his peers, not his parents, which is a notable difference from earlier films, where youthful protagonists struggle with dual loyalties. The challenges in *Rebel* came from other teens, which Jim has to address if he is to maintain his status as teenager and young man. No such conflict exists in his family. Indeed, his parents alter their lives—moving the family to deal with their son's troubles—to minimize conflict. More than present a separate teenage culture, Doherty suggested, *Rebel* made alienation and

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[92] Biskind, *Seeing is Believing*, 200–01; Jackie Byars, *All that Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 90–91; Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 186; and Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 253. James Gilbert and Jon Lewis also subscribed to this interpretation that adult authorities were to blame for the failures of the kids. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 185; and Lewis, *The Road to Romance and Ruin*, 22.

confusion seem a natural, even desirable state for youth.[93]

Andrea Carosso argued that the youth of the film looked at adult life as dystopic, but as they could see no viable alternative, they retreated into a teenage subculture that recreated the same hypocrisy. Their rebellion was fundamentally unconstructive and only resulted in the same type of conformity. *Rebel* thus made the search for identity and authenticity into a closed circle of confusion, alienation, and unfocused rage. Jon Lewis also saw conformity within the rebellion. The chickee run scene, he said, was a game to prove life by risking death. It claims to be rebellious, but is, in fact, conformist given that neither Jim nor Buzz feel they have another option. Jim is marginally more insightful in asking why they follow such rituals, yet he still subscribes to the dictates of the group. Leerom Medovoi pointed out that that *Rebel Without a Cause* was in sync with Robert Linder's position in *Must You Conform?*, which rejected adjustment and conformity as leading to unproductive rebellion and mass tyranny. The movie, Medovoi said, showed how suburban conformity drove teens to senseless acts of rebellion.[94]

Rebel Without a Cause was the high water mark for the sincere juvenile delinquent film. While a key influence on the youth-centred films that followed, few shared an interest in treating delinquency as a true social problem. Instead, subsequent films seized upon the appeal of the alienated youth presented by James Dean. As LeRoy Ashby observed, even though *Rebel* was a fundamentally conservative film that endorsed traditional gender roles and a firmer role for parents, both the movie and its promotional

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[93] Abigail Cheever, *Real Phonies: Cultures of Authenticity in Post-World War II America* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 23–24; and Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, 84–86. On the other hand, K.A. Cuordileone argued that *Rebel* demonstrated that an inability to endure loneliness and alienation led a person into the arms of the group and psychopathy/totalitarianism. K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 156.

[94] Carosso, *Cold War Narratives*, 156; Lewis, *The Road to Romance and Ruin*, 25; and Medovoi, *Rebels*, 179.

posters offered the image of the teen-as-rebel icon: sullen, denim, t-shirt, cigarette in hand. Grace and Fred Hechinger realized the importance of Dean's image for future youth-oriented movies. The teen hero was petulant and aggrieved, validating antisocial behaviour. In other words, what *Rebel Without a Cause* offered was a normalized notion of teenage life as one in conflict—with adult institutions first and one's peers second—and an appealing moody detachment. Dwight Macdonald fumed that the movie was "one of those well-intentioned sociological-psychological 'documents' that somehow manage to convey the idea that anti-social behavior is both normal and attractive." Whether set in the suburbs or inner city, focused on the poor or well-to-do, the juvenile delinquent film splintered into a variety of youth-targeted exploitation films that held onto the tropes of their more well-meaning predecessors, even as they increasingly dispensed with the idea of juvenile delinquency as anything but a plot device.[95]

The shift in emphasis from sincere to sensational was neither immediate nor total. Some of the notable, more serious films in the wake of *Rebel* included *Dino* (1957) and *Riot in Juvenile Prison* (1959).[96] In *Dino*, Sal Mineo starred as Dino Minetta, sixteen and recently released from reform school after being part of a robbery that ended in a security guard's death. Dino is angry at the world, especially his parents, who disowned him. While he was incarcerated, Dino's younger brother Tony joined a gang and now tries to bring Dino into the fold. On the other side is his parole officer and a social worker who strive to keep Dino from recidivism. The latter slowly gets through to Dino, learning of beatings received by his father and offering vital adult sympathy. Dino sabotages his

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[95] Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, 325; Hechinger and Hechinger, *Teen-age Tyranny*, 104–05; and Macdonald, "A Caste, a Culture, a Market, Part 2," 62. Similar observations were made by Andrea Carosso and James Gilbert: Carosso, *Cold War Narratives*, 152; and James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 186.

[96] *Dino*, directed by Thomas Carr (Allied Artists, 1957); and *Riot in Juvenile Prison*, directed by Edward L. Cahn (United Artists, 1959).

brother's gang's robbery scheme because he now sees the gang life as a dead end, and then enlists the social worker to help keep Tony from ending up in jail. Parental failure sent Dino on a criminal path, but the efforts of a social worker and the affection of a non-delinquent teenage girl bring him back. Even stronger than *Blackboard Jungle* or *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Dino* made the case for liberal experts to address the failures of individual citizens.

Riot in Juvenile Prison seemed even more inspired by *Blackboard Jungle*, taking the latter's metaphor of school-as-prison and dispensing with the school component. The thrust of the story is an experiment by liberal psychiatrist Paul Furman to turn a reform school into a site of rehabilitation rather than harsh discipline. Like Rick Dadier's strategy with Gregory Miller, Furman focuses on a natural leader named Eddie Bassett as part of his effort to win over the teen inmates. Success is slow but steady until a violent incident scuttles the plan and the old beatings and discipline return. After Eddie leads a revolt against the returned repression, the state's governor directly intervenes and secures peace. The film closes with a narrator explaining that juvenile delinquents just want an adult who will listen and offer help, an adult like Paul Furman.

In both films the faith in experts and inherent decency of youth—even those who have been convicted of crimes—was reaffirmed, while older prescriptions of corporal punishment by parents and other adult authorities was demonstrated to be the source of delinquency, not its remedy. This was postwar liberalism triumphant. Unlike *Blackboard Jungle*, however, the focus of both *Dino* and *Riot in Juvenile Prison* was on the delinquent youth. Where *Blackboard Jungle* was guided by the problem of what delinquents do to adults and what adults must do to solve the problem, these two films reversed the equation and argued that the on-screen delinquents were not fundamentally

bad, that their deviancy was the result of past and on-going adult and institutional failure. True, in both films as in *Blackboard Jungle*, adults made all the difference in remedying what was amiss, but what was amiss was the adults themselves. To solve the delinquency problem, adults had to modify their behaviour and earn the respect of their juniors. Thus, in the post-*Rebel* conversation, as critics like Macdonald and the Hechingers lamented, the aggrieved teen perspective was normalized. But this normalization also gradually broke down the delinquency narrative by making rebellion less irrational and more justified, thereby lessening its threat to the wider community.

Sincere accounts like those immediately above notwithstanding, the post-*Rebel* field, in both print media and film, saw the genre splinter and adopt more sensationalist and exploitative trappings. Producers may have seized upon the trappings of delinquency movies, but not as an investigation into its causes and possible remedies. These works did not exactly endorse skirting of the law, but they did tend to normalize it, thereby making it seem a less threatening social issue. One of the most common juvenile delinquent sub-genres in the 1950s was the hot rod movie, inspired, in all likelihood, by *Rebel Without a Cause*'s famous chickee run scene.[97] These films appealed to producers and audiences alike because they contained ample action in the form of car races, car chases, and car accidents; they easily fit into a narrative of youth against adult authority; they lent themselves to traditional cinematic narratives of romantic competition and pursuit; and

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[97] *Rebel*'s depiction of extralegal hot rod races were not the first depiction in a youth-oriented film. That distinction likely goes to a B movie called *The Devil on Wheels*, directed by Crane Wilbur (Producers Releasing Corp., 1947), which centred on a sixteen-year-old named Mickey, his first hot rod, and the dangers of drag racing and, more generally, fast driving. The mental hygiene films of the postwar period also returned to this theme of illegal drag racing and irresponsibility behind the wheel. See, for example, *Last Date*, directed by Lewis Collins (Wilding Picture Productions, 1949); *Road Runners*, directed by George de Normand (*Southern California Timing Associates*, 1952); *The Cool Hot Rod* (Sid Davis Productions, 1953); and *On the Run*, directed by Sid Davis (General Petroleum Corporation, 1956). More generally, see Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 73–82.

they supported the emergent social narrative that teenage culture was tied to the automobile (that these films often played at drive-ins to teenager audiences sealed matters neatly).

Most hot rod films tended toward lighter fare, where the dangers of aggressive and irresponsible driving were tucked in with romantic pursuits. Take, for example, *Dragstrip Girl* (1957), in which the titular character, Louise, is eighteen and the pride of parents who will do anything for her.[98] This includes buying her a hot rod and moving from town to town until she finds one to her liking. There is little ambiguity that Louise runs her family. Despite her parents' mild admonitions about her not taking life seriously enough, Louise explains that "all that jazz comes soon enough," so she needs to concentrate on having fun with her hot rod and going on dates and to parties. This sets up a narrative of a noble poor boy, Jim, and a conniving rich boy, Fred, each vying for Louise's affection via their hot rods. Over and over, Jim bests Fred in a fistfight, a chickee run and road race, and in maintaining the better car, and, because of all this, gains Louise's favour. *Dragstrip Girl*, then, is almost entirely a celebration of a teenage culture that involves driving (reckless and otherwise), near-adult romance, and relative autonomy from adults.

A collection of novels by Henry Gregor Felsen—*Hot Rod* (1950); *Street Rod* (1953); *Rag Top* (1954); *Crash Club* (1958); and *Road Rocket* (1960)—mixed instruction with tales of aggressive teenagers behind the wheel. *Hot Rod*, for example, blended praise with constructive criticism for young drivers. Bud Crayne, 17, is an orphan and naturally gifted when it comes to cars. His skills as both a mechanic and driver have engendered a contempt for other drivers and, more generally, traffic rules that should apply only to the

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[98] *Dragstrip Girl*, directed by Edward L. Cahn (American-International, 1957).

lesser skilled. His recklessness brings him to the attention of the local cop, who, with one of Bud's teachers, seeks to initiate a driver's education program. Bud initially rejects their overtures until he hears of a driving challenge that offers a college scholarship, his only feasible chance of getting into engineering school. He has to keep a clean driving record to enter, but, soon enough, he lets his ego get the best of him and he is caught in a reckless race. The only thing keeping him out of jail is the advocacy of the cop and teacher. They are convinced that he needs to fail at the driving competition to realize that he needs formal driver training. And, indeed, this is borne out. In the meantime, two younger boys, imitating Bud's aggressive style, are killed in an accident. Deep down, Bud knows that he bears responsibility for setting such a bad example. The novel ends with yet another fatal accident involving Bud's classmates—Felsen's novels were notable for rather gruesome climaxes to emphasize the seriousness of reckless driving—and Bud, his confidence shaken by his recent failures, is enlisted to drive for help. Bud achieves a measure of redemption, and, despite the many deaths, learns the value of adult instruction. He wins a second competition and gets to pursue his college dreams.[99]

Teenage Thunder (1957) shared much with Felsen's novels.[100] Johnnie Simpson is eighteen and lives with his dad and aunt. Johnnie's mother died when he was three, and that seems to play a factor in him being sullen and obsessed with hot rods. Dad has little tolerance for any of that, believing that he has provided well for the boy materially, and so Johnnie should aspire to be more than a mechanic. There is some common ground, then, between this film and *Rebel Without a Cause*, with a communication gap between father and son, the inadequacy of material comfort, and disagreement over what it takes

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[99] Henry Gregor Felsen, *Hot Rod* (1950; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1951).
[100] *Teenage Thunder*, directed by Paul Helmick (Howco International, 1957).

to become a man. The thrust of the movie, like *Rebel*, is about Johnnie's quest to earn his dad's respect, but on Johnnie's terms, by demonstrating how committed he is to excelling with cars. Yet, as with all hot rod movies and fiction, Johnnie is addicted to speed and is easily goaded into chickee races, which leads to lectures from the police on road safety. After another fight with his father, Johnnie borrows a hot rod and runs away from home to compete in a legal drag race. His dad arrives in time to see Johnnie win all three races, which is enough to persuade that his son merits his own hot rod. Johnnie is a far cry from the delinquents of earlier films. If he suffers from any anti-social traits, it is clearly because his father does not respect him as an individual, and it is only through the father growing and learning that the tension is defused. Not only is drag racing and hot rod culture not treated as evidence of delinquency, it is the means by which Johnnie realizes his potential as a human being—if only his father stops hindering that dream.

What the hot rod genre helped establish was that cars were an essential quality of postwar American youth. They carried with them risk and temptation, as the ubiquitous chickee run scenes demonstrated, and so this genre pursued, with varying degrees of seriousness, the question of how to imbue necessary maturity on immature drivers. In this, it addressed the question of integrating teenagers into the privileges of adult consumption, yet also bringing them under state oversight concerning the public roads and a sense of responsibility for one's actions. Should adults take a firm hand or did they need to give teens freedom to work out the delinquents in their midst? The hot rod genre, then, suggested a certain tension in the postwar liberal conception of the expert as the guiding hand.

Rivaling the hot rod formula for the most common delinquent derivative subgenre was that of the female juvenile delinquent. These stories tended to track closest to the

more sincere delinquent movies and novels being produced at the time. In *Teenage Doll* (1957), the action is sparked by the discovery of Nan Baker's body in an alley.[101] Nan was a member of the Black Widows, a girl gang, and the other Widows are certain that the new girl, Barbara Bonney, is responsible. Barbara has just moved to the city and been seen with Eddie Rand, leader of a boy gang, the Vandals. Eddie was also seeing Nan, and the Widows believe that Barbara must have killed Nan in a fight over Eddie. They are partially correct, but Nan was the aggressor, and she died accidentally after attacking Barbara. As the Widows believe that Barbara will run to Eddie for protection, they need to raise money to bribe him in order to grab her. The movie turns to the efforts of individual Widows to get money, detailing their circumstances and deviancies. Lorrie goes home, where her hungry young sister sits alone in garbage. Lorrie verbally abuses her sister while rooting inside their mother's purse for money, then leaves the girl in the dark. Squirrel goes to her parents' restaurant and lifts cash from the register. May approaches her older sister Janet and mocks her social climbing, asserting that she (May) will not whore herself out like Janet, then empties her sister's purse. Helen comes home to find her father with a young woman. After deriding him, she takes the money left by her mother, the family breadwinner, to pay the utility bill. And Betty, the daughter of a cop, sneaks into her parents' bedroom and steals his gun. Barbara, meanwhile, has made her way to Eddie, who reluctantly agrees to help her get out of town. Before that can happen, however, a battle royale begins between the Vandals, another boy gang called the Tarantulas, and the police. Rather than follow Eddie's plan to escape, Barbara surrenders to the police. The Widows see that their plan for revenge has been foiled, and the two most seemingly middle class of the gang, Betty and Squirrel, decide that gang life is not

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[101] *Teenage Doll*, directed by Roger Corman (Allied Artists, 1957).

for them and also give themselves up to the police.

Teenage Doll stood out for avoiding simple conclusions or assessments as to what kind of teen joined a gang and why. Some of these girls are cruel and/or insane, some are bitter, and some are just looking for friendship. The audience never learns how Barbara, a modest, middle-class girl, became mixed up with Eddie, nor is it revealed whether she is charged because of Nan's death. The film was notable for mostly avoiding action sequences, instead spending its time following the private lives of the Widows. They all have diverse backgrounds, yet end up in the same gang. If *Teenage Doll* offered no easy resolutions, neither did it accept easy explanations. Instead, it presented female delinquency as prevalent and mysterious, and so especially worrying.

No such ambiguity existed in *The Violent Years* (1956), which was written by the notoriously unsubtle exploitation filmmaker, Edward D. Wood, Jr.[102] The movie begins with a shot of a blackboard, on which is written the guidelines for civic morality: Good Citizenship, Self Restraint, Politeness, Loyalty. Four girls—Paula, Phyllis, Geraldine, and Georgia—approach and snicker. The narration reveals the movie's thrust, that modern life is dominated by violence due to "the uncontrolled passions of adolescent youth," which have been nurtured by selfish parents who have abdicated their responsibilities. The four girls all come from well-to-do homes, particularly Paula, whose father is a newspaper editor. Their parents are naive, not realizing their daughters are part of a notorious girl gang that has been robbing gas stations and sexually assaulting young couples. Matters escalate when they are hired to vandalize their high school on behalf of a "foreign organization." When the police arrive, Phyllis, Geraldine, and one officer die. Paula and Georgia flee, but the latter dies when their car crashes. Paula is found guilty of

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[102] *The Violent Years* [aka *Female*], directed by William Morgan (Headliner Productions, 1956).

first-degree murder, after which the trial judge delivers a sermon on the vices of thrill-seeking and egoism, likening them to drug addiction. This problem, he says, can come from any home, irrespective of wealth, "where the parents are too busy in their own affairs to take time to teach their children the importance of self-respect, self-discipline, politeness, courtesy, the love for the mother and the father, the church, and their country." Paula's conviction is a false coda. Instead, we are told she was pregnant, but died in childbirth. Lest the lesson be lost on the audience, her parents apply for guardianship of their grandchild, but the same judge tells them that their own delinquency set in motion this horrible series of events. The nation needs to re-embrace religion, re-establish a moral code, and re-emphasize corporal punishment to end bad behaviour. Because Paula's parents lack these qualities, the judge rules it better for the infant to be placed in foster care until s/he can be adopted. Far more so than most delinquency films, *The Violent Years* endorsed a more traditional and authoritarian response, even as it accepted more liberal explanations for delinquency.

Bud Clifton illustrated the theme of female contagion and invasion in *D for Delinquent* (1958). Clifton prefaced his story by explaining that his work was based on conversations with teachers who had had difficulty with "imaginative and oversexed girls who just had to denounce somebody," and that Clifton himself had lived in a small town that was dominated by "an uncontrollable high school crowd."[103] Clifton's story presents the effects of a new girl, Gloria Transic, 16, who moves to a small town outside of San Francisco. Gloria does not want to be in what she considers a hick town, but is nevertheless determined to dominate the teen social scene. Her sex appeal draws in

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[103] Bud Clifton, *D for Delinquent* (New York: Ace Books, 1958. Bud Clifton was a pseudonym for writer David Stacton.

Jimmy Masters, 14 and the son of one of the town's policemen. Both Jimmy's dad, Bill, and one of the teachers, Chuck, recognize Gloria as a manipulator but can do little to prevent Jimmy from being drawn into the circle of the local hood in an effort to impress her. Robbery, gang initiation, and sex are all part of Jimmy's new life. It is later revealed that Gloria's parents moved them to the town because her daughter was a drug addict and needed to get away from San Francisco. However, her former supplier and pimp tracks her down. Gloria's heroin use begins again and sets in motion her false accusation of rape against Chuck. Bill Masters sees his town turn ugly, suspicious, and vengeful—not entirely removed from the town in *The Wild One*. Matters are settled when Gloria's male accomplices are killed and she is sent back to a reformatory, but Chuck nevertheless chooses to leave town to start over again. While the town had some minor delinquency problems before Gloria arrived from San Francisco, it is clear that she and her city problems of drug addiction, sexual delinquency, and a predatory nature could tear apart an otherwise decent community. *D For Delinquent* confirmed, then, that delinquency could happen anywhere, to any teenager (i.e., white, middle class) or even adult, because delinquency was less a sociological problem than a contagion, and, notably, female delinquents were the carrier.

The idea of delinquency invading otherwise good homes and communities was a subject explored by Wenzell Brown in particular, who published numerous novels and non-fiction works about juvenile delinquents and other crime in the 1950s. While his earlier books hewed to the framework established by Ellson, towards the end of the decade, as he published more non-fiction delinquency books, he pursued themes of teen gangs leaving the city and invading rural and suburban spaces. *Teen-Age Mafia* (1959) is the story of a group of leather-jacketed and bicycle-chain-twirling hoodlums belonging to

a predatory nationwide gang called Pachucos, whom Brown claimed were coming close to rivaling the Mafia in power.[104] Despite a large cast of characters, the novel focuses mostly on Whitey Carew, a psychotic thug, and his girl friend/partner Norma Quinn, who were likely inspired by the infamous thrill-killing teens Charley Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate. The intensity of the violence, drugs, and sex is much greater than earlier in the decade, but more significant are both the deliberateness of the gang members and how they bring their violence to others. They are not the bored and lost teens of Ellson, but organized and purposeful in their criminality. A key development in the novel occurs when the gang flees the city after committing a murder and break into the country home of a wealthy couple. They vandalize the home, kill a caretaker, and engage in gang initiation rituals throughout the course of a weekend. They also savagely attack the elderly couple when they return home. Assenting to the principle that crime cannot pay, each of the members of the gang die in various incidences, save for Norma, who is paralyzed. The larger point is impossible to miss—these are not children to be pitied and helped but predatory monsters to be contained.

A similar theme and assessment was found in a somewhat odd film that took its cues from *The Wild One*, director Edward Bernds' *Joy Ride* (1958).[105] Miles Renny is a middle-aged, married man living in the suburbs. After buying a new Thunderbird, he observes several seemingly clean-cut teens in his driveway eyeing up the car. He shoos them away, a rather innocuous act that sets in motion all that follows. Paul, the leader of the group, decides that Miles needs to be paid back for his rudeness. Over the next several weeks, they engage in a campaign of threats and terror against the Rennys,

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[104] Wenzell Brown, *Teen-Age Mafia* (New York: Gold Medal Books, 1959), 6.
[105] *Joy Ride*, directed by Edward Bernds (United Artists, 1958).

demanding to be lent the car for an evening. Miles stands his ground, even as the police prove to be no assistance. After the terror escalates to a home invasion, Miles concocts his own solution. When the boys contact him again, he accedes to their demands. He meets them downtown, but rather than hand over the keys to his car, Miles pulls a gun on Paul. Miles forces Paul to drive the car faster and faster until the boy admits that he is terrified. Satisfied, Miles orders him to drive to the police station, where Paul gives up his accomplices. The detective handling the cases explains to Miles how these seeming all-American kids would do something like this: "They live in fear. Fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of parents, you name it." Fundamentally, it is not their fault, but the detective still thinks that a long stretch of time in prison will teach them to respect law and order. Miles disagrees and refuses to sign the complaint against the other boys. He does not want Paul's accomplices to go to jail and possibly become hardened criminals just because they foolishly followed a conscienceless and unredeemable monster like Paul, who will be sent to prison. The film ends with another set of kids showing interest in Miles' car, but these, we understand, are certainly the good kids of society.

The set-up to the film is dominated by a more traditionalist or conservative perspective, where the rationale for the offending youths' behaviour is not raised because it is seemingly unimportant. They are just bad kids. Meanwhile, the failure of the police to help Miles suggests a failure of institutions to assist victimized citizens. The route to justice comes through Miles' decision to become a vigilante, and his tactics are not employing reason but countering terror with terror. Miles does not win because of superior intellect or morality, but due to a deeper reservoir of courage, a greater arsenal of aggression, or both. To that point in the film, delinquency is treated as one of any means necessary to restore order. Yet, in the end, as the representative of order prepares

to follow through with the harsh punishment, even as he knows it is probably not just, Miles steps in—almost taking the law into his own hands again—by refusing to swear out a complaint against the accomplices because he sees prison as unjust punishment. That is, he accepts that there are reasons besides being bad kids, and that these reasons trump the fate that the courts might mete out. The conservative perspective is tempered, at least somewhat, in the end.

More frequent were the films that seized upon the trappings of the prominent delinquent movies to deliver, not an investigation into the causes of delinquency, but a presentation of youth culture that incorporated the traits of delinquency. These films did not exactly endorse the skirting of the law, but they did tend to normalize it, thereby making it seem a less threatening social issue. One key film was *The Delinquents* (1957), the first movie from noted director Robert Altman. *The Delinquents* was shot in 1955, after Altman had been approached to make a movie about juvenile delinquents. He wrote the screenplay in five days and shot it in hometown Kansas City, MO. What is especially notable is that when Altman wrote it, *Blackboard Jungle* had just been released and *Rebel Without a Cause* was still being filmed. It was only after the delinquent film became an exploitation staple that *The Delinquents* gained release.[106]

Like so many films of the genre, *The Delinquents* begins with boilerplate narration about the social crisis of juvenile delinquency, of how the nation's moral fibre had been weakened and citizens must unite in common cause. From here, the story moves to Scotty, 18, arriving at the home of his steady girlfriend Janice, 16. However, Janice's parents have decided that the teens would both do well to date more widely, and so,

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[106] *The Delinquents*, directed by Robert Altman (United Artists, 1957); Todd McCarthy, "The Delinquents (Robert Altman)," in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System: An Anthology of Film History and Criticism*, ed. Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 216–17; and McGee and Robertson, *The J.D. Films*, 58.

dejected, Scotty goes to the drive-in by himself. In the car next to him are several delinquents, led by Cholly and Eddy. Scotty is accidentally blamed for one of their pranks, and so the gang takes it upon themselves to befriend him. Cholly suggests that he act as Scotty's stand-in with Janice, picking her up for a date and taking her to Scotty. Things go awry when Scotty takes Janice to a party thrown by the gang at an abandoned home, and Eddy and Cholly each take the opportunity to paw at Janice. She and Scotty leave the party, and shortly thereafter the police arrive. The gang believe that Scotty tipped off the police and now seek revenge. After getting Scotty drunk, they force him to participate in what ends up being a botched gas station robbery. To keep Scotty from informing on them to the police, they kidnap Janice, but Scotty rescues her just before the police arrive. The final narration avoids blame or positing what made Cholly and his friends delinquents, but instead urges citizen responsibility to cure the disease of delinquency through "patience, compassion, understanding, and respect for parental and civil authority." The conclusion, then, is to shrug its shoulders and ask people to be better. At best, like the containment theory described by William Graebner, the only solution is to keep the bad kids away from the good. Less a story of delinquency as social problem—opening and closing narration notwithstanding—*The Delinquents* plays like a noir film where the protagonist, through little or no fault of his own, is pulled into a web of criminality and peril.

By the end of the decade, the delinquent film had fully evolved into the youth movie, where bad kids co-mingled with good, competing for many of the same material goals. In *High School Caesar* (1960), the scope of *Rebel Without a Cause* is modified to

turn Plato into someone more outwardly confident, but no less antisocial.[107] Matt Stevens, like Plato, is a poor little rich boy living alone in a mansion (save for servants) as his parents travel the world. Lacking love, he covertly leads a gang of black leather jacketed thugs in his high school in a protection racket and test-selling scheme. To the principal and teachers, Matt is clean cut and upstanding; to the students, he is a tyrant. Although Matt cheats to win the student body presidency election over an honest student named Kelly, Matt's obsession with control is absolute. Kelly and some other kids regularly hold legal drag races just for fun and camaraderie, but Matt demands to be included and to require an entry fee for the races. He is humiliated when Kelly beats him in their race, and so afterwards he secretly runs Kelly off the road, killing him. There is no suspicion of Matt's culpability until he makes a play for Wanda, a girl whom his lackey Cricket desires. Because of this betrayal, Cricket tells the other teens that Matt killed Kelly. Matt's aura of invincibility is shattered and Kelly's best friend Bob punches him in the jaw as the other teens encircle them. Matt breaks down and sobs, calling for his daddy as police sirens are heard in the distance. Even though *High School Caesar* borrows much from *Rebel Without a Cause*—well-to-do teens living rather high stakes lives, youths clustering in gangs, the disastrous effect of absent parents—there is little sympathy to be earned for Matt Stevens. It is clear that it is the other teens who merit respect. There is no sense of redemption or awareness for Matt at the end, only just desserts for a bully. *High School Caesar* suggests that even if there are delinquents, other teens are sufficient for setting the problem right.

In the latter half of the decade, then, the juvenile delinquent genre mushroomed, expanding the palette of approaches even as it largely abandoned any kind of sincere

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[107] *High School Caesar*, directed by O'Dale Ireland (Filmgroup, 1960).

effort to consider delinquency as an authentic problem whose root causes needed to be ascertained. Instead, these exploitation tales, while no less ideologically informed, morphed delinquency's traits into fairly harmless youth culture, random and inexplicable accounts of violence that just happened to involve teenagers, or as more fantastical stories of widespread danger. The point to be made is that such variety and volume blunted the impact of the delinquency question. It became less of a social problem being documented and explored by conscientious writers and filmmakers, than escapist sensationalism playing off developed tropes.

By the end of the decade, delinquency literature in all forms began to abate, the supposed panic playing itself out. As the large Baby Boomer generation took their place as the nation's adolescents, the representation of teens became less hysterical or wary and more encouraging, even admiring. Films such as *Gidget* (1959) signaled a new genre of teen film, the beach party formula, that emphasized youth as a time of positive energy and innocent romance. There was nothing to fear from these surfing teens.[108] Those elements of teenage life that seemed so troubling earlier in the decade—hot rods, steady dating, a semi-autonomous teenage subculture, eager participation in the consumer economy—and seemed tied to delinquency largely lost their capacity to signal that something was grossly amiss with America's youth, and perhaps with American society overall. Even as the paperback industry and smaller, independent studios seized upon the delinquency issue to capitalize on the anxiety and curiosity that earlier accounts helped stir up in the public's imagination, their efforts to exploit greater numbers of angles had the effect of numbing and neutralizing the problem. Which is to say that the exploitation

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[108] McGee and Robertson, *The J.D. Films*, ix, 99; and Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 177.

merchants, rather than augmenting the panic—which would have been beneficial to their sales figures—actually defused it, slowly closing off their marketability. While the tempting explanation is that saturation of the formula poisoned public interest, far more intriguing is the notion that the narratives and characterizations developed and employed made delinquency less terrifying and more harmless fantasy. The implication of this is that this variety of consumer capitalism, of sensationalism and exploitation, functioned to disperse social anxiety even as it sought to capitalize on it. This is not to suggest that these later accounts lacked ideological heft, that they were fluff where the sincere accounts were substantial. The argument here is quite the opposite. The latter novels and films sufficiently complicated and modified the delinquency genre into a more benign youth genre, rejecting older conceptions by adopting those traits for teens more generally. In doing so, delinquency lost much of its power to move public opinion.

CHAPTER 6
The Flight Fantasy: Migration and Urban/Suburban Narratives

N.R. De Mexico's 1950 novel *Marijuana Girl* is both typical and atypical of the juvenile delinquent genre's treatment of place in postwar America. It pursues common themes of community as intimately bound with deviancy, be it reflective or causative, and that mobility—specifically, the ability to escape—was highly coveted. Yet, unlike most other movies and books of the genre, *Marijuana Girl* is non-committal in terms of where one should flee and why. The narrative follows Joyce Taylor, who is seventeen and living with her aunt in suburban Long Island. Joyce's parents are perpetually overseas on business and she has been shuffled from one relative and school to the next since she was a young child. She is a creature of mobility due to parents with interests valued more highly than her own. Joyce engineers her expulsion from high school by performing a strip tease during a study period, but cannot fully explain why she does such things, concluding that she is just "bad" and "defiant."[1]

Joyce finds work at the local newspaper where she becomes the target of the affections of Frank Burdette, the city editor. Frank, a marijuana smoker and jazz fan, and takes her to a Greenwich Village club where she tries the drug for the first time. Before long, she is having an affair with the married Frank, but still maintaining a relationship with Tony Thrine, part of a local wealthy family and president of his senior class. The desperate need for love from any man, the reader is told, is her way of compensating for her parents' absence. However, after some soul-searching, Frank breaks off the affair to save his marriage, and a distraught Joyce moves to New York.[2]

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[1] N.R. De Mexico, *Marijuana Girl*, in *The N.R. De Mexico Novels* (1950; reprint, Shreveport, LA: Ramble House, 2006), 23–30. N.R. De Mexico was a pseudonym of novelist Robert Campbell Bragg.
[2] Ibid., 39–50, 59–73.

On her own, Joyce works at a magazine by day, and immerses herself in the Greenwich Village jazz scene by night, revelling in freedom and narcotics.

> Joyce went home that night feeling that things were right. Gin and Jerry [some jazz musicians] were looking out for her. You could feel safe with people like that, people who had your best interests in mind. It was the kind of thing that made you feel wanted. You could go to their house and sit down and turn on the jive, get just a little high and really feel in there. She caught herself thinking in jive, and laughed gaily to herself, making a middle-aged woman facing her in the subway give her a disapproving frown. Then she thought, maybe colored people were the real people, the right people. Maybe that was the way to live.[3]

After several months, Joyce is a heroin user. Inevitably, her addiction leads to her being fired from her job and she becomes a prostitute. Believing that what Joyce needs is a loyal and steady man, Tony, who has never extinguished his torch, takes it on himself to save her. He obtains medical help for her and she moves back to Long Island, where they agree to marry and settle once he is finished with college.[4]

Marijuana Girl uses location as a pendulum. Joyce is frustrated in the suburbs, with its confining social codes. She seeks attention, having been abandoned by her parents, and her relative luxurious life there does not bring her happiness. By her own admission, Joyce purposefully pursues defiance and is expelled for violating middle-class decorum. When she meets Frank, she believes has found a kindred bohemian spirit. These two non-conformists embrace the taboo life of Greenwich Village, with its black jazz and especially the ubiquity of drugs. Only the city can satisfy those needs. Their affair, conducted in both the city and the suburbs, collapses when Frank is confronted by his wife about his infidelity and he chooses wife and family, security and suburbia. Joyce

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[3] Ibid., 77–80, 83.
[4] Ibid., 88–94, 106–16.

responds by fully embracing the place that accepts her dissent. It is only when her city life collapses, when the thrill of deviance is worn away and reveals itself as spiritual and physical rot, that she contacts upright Tony, who can engineer her return to the suburbs. It is understood that this realization is a victory, that Joyce has gotten out of her system both the drugs and her need to act out, that what she always longed for was the love of another. This stability allows her to return to and belong in suburbia.

This chapter explores the interwoven postwar narratives of America's cities and its new suburbs. The era was notable for a vast internal migration. In the 1940s, 1.6 million non-whites moved from the South to the North, followed by another 1.45 million in the 1950s. Yet, the story of the period that dominates popular memory was of almost exclusively white departure from the industrial cities for the sprouting suburban communities. By 1955, some four thousand families each day were leaving the city for suburbia, headed for the nineteen million new homes built by the end of the decade. It was part of a long-term process; from 1950 to 1980, eighteen of the twenty-five largest cities lost population.[5] Contemporary assessments of what these developments meant sought to understand the nature of both city and suburb, of its residents, and the implications for the nation as a whole. These diverse interpretations and advocacies appeared in academic journals and books, popular magazines, and, as this chapter demonstrates, popular fiction and movies. Most discourses, centred on how the city and/or suburb affected the white middle class, were laced with moral imperatives even as they claimed dispassion. Whether asserting a narrative of urban decline or urban vivacity, of suburban optimism or suburban sterility, the decision of where to live and how live

[5] Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 117; Loren Baritz, *The Good Life: The Meaning of Success for the American Middle Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 196; and David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 142.

was no mere private concern, but one of profound social implications.

While these narrative interpretations focused on questions of physical structure, of material need, of politics and economics, of family, and of security, what is argued here is that what unified them all were questions of mobility and escape. The obvious understanding to this is one of physical mobility and escape, as many critics and advocates saw the white middle-class exodus to suburbia as flight, be it "white flight" or "flight to the suburbs." But another dimension of escape was that of social responsibility, reflecting a greater political and social orientation from the public to the private. Staying in the city or leaving for suburbia might make sense from a personal point of view, but, some critics charged, it was devastating from a public perspective. Or perhaps following personal ambition could be consistent with what was best for the nation.

With this focus on questions of escape, this chapter blends an analysis of intellectual discussions of urban decline and suburban migration and how these ideas were treated in juvenile delinquent fiction and film. If most intellectuals advocated for urban living and treated the suburbs with a harshness that frequently strayed into contempt, those who told stories of juvenile delinquents were much more ambivalent. Broadly speaking, delinquency stories set in the city shared a perception of decay and a desire for escape. However, the writers of these tales varied on the morality of leaving the city versus staying. The question of whether the city was redeemable meshed with questions of private versus public good. When considering the suburban setting, the juvenile delinquent texts tended toward agreement with intellectual critics. The flight to the supposed safety of the new subdivisions proved no panacea, for delinquency also migrated. Furthermore, if the delinquent novel or film frequently indicted the failures of the parent, in the urban setting it was due to their social failings—they were alcoholic,

unambitious, philandering. The suburban parent, however, was a failure because of their social success. They provided well for their family, ensuring material luxury and the promise of a comfortable future, yet that attention resulted in familial collapse. In short, in escaping the city, they also escaped any moral grounding, to the detriment of their children and community. Overall, then, if intellectual critics found the urban-suburban question one that promoted moral clarity, those who took up the question in delinquency fiction and films found more doubt.

Why did white America seem to turn against the city in the postwar period? Eric Avila saw race at the core of the decline of the postwar city and its accompanying narrative. The domestic needs of World War II initiated waves of black migration to Northern and Midwestern cities, sparking frequent racial violence from entrenched whites. What Avila called "the dominant paradigm of race and space after World War II" was a process of concentrating non-whites within decaying inner cities as white people and their capital left for new suburbs. Or perhaps the impetus was technology related. Robert Fogelson traced the onset of urban decline to the 1920s, when increasing numbers of Americans, frustrated with mass transit, turned to private automobiles. Growing numbers of cars on city streets created greater congestion, and so, by the late 1940s, downtown areas were re-structured to service automobiles. Yet, the predominant thinking was that the modifications were inadequate, that streets were still too crowded, parking too scarce. This spurred ever more urban renewal projects to satisfy the automobile, including freeways connecting city to suburb. Yet, even as the national retail sector grew in the decade, its share in urban areas declined.[6] The conclusion was that the old

[6] Eric Avila, "Popular Culture In The Age Of White Flight: Film Noir, Disneyland, And The Cold War (Sub)Urban Imaginary," *Journal of Urban History* 31, no. 1 (November 2004): 5–6; Eric Avila, *Popular Culture In The Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in the Age of White Flight* (Berkeley and Los

industrial city was ill-suited to the immediate needs of a more mobile population.

Of greater interest here is the idea that attitudes toward the city as concept and as actuality had a symbiotic relationship, where, as Robert Beauregard claimed, the more jaundiced perspective pre-dated both structural decline and white flight. In thought and word, American cities were in decay long before they were physically neglected and abandoned. The narrative of urban failure, he claimed, was not one of physical collapse but social contradiction. While modernism assumed that the arc of history should have precluded the possibility of decline, Beauregard argued that Americans have always had an ambivalent relationship with the city as concept, a waxing and waning in which the city stood as proxy and lens for any number of social tensions. The city was allegory, "a dynamic matrix of meanings, an elusive rhetorical structure that entraps all sorts of notions related to the fate of cities and, more broadly of the nation." The narrative of a crumbling city represented the vulnerability of civilization, of general social breakdown. As such, urban decline should be understood as connected to anxiety and loss, whether this be population, jobs, prosperity, or confidence. Loss of population or jobs should not have necessarily been taken to mean decline, for a city's health and social value cannot be measured exclusively by growth. Those were only pieces of evidence that were interpreted through a pre-existing lens of collapse. Why was the migration of, primarily, rural Southern blacks to Northern and Midwestern cities not considered evidence of the city's allure and viability, for the rural-to-urban migration had previously been regarded as a positive development? Yet, even as these migrants replaced departing white

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Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 3; and Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 251, 314–15, 384–85. See also Frederick Lewis Allen, "The Big Change in Suburbia, Part I," *Harper's* 208 (June 1954): 21–28; and "The Big Change in Suburbia, Part II," *Harper's* 209 (July 1954): 47–53.

residents, the dominant narrative was of decay and escape.[7]

Well before the suburbanization boom of the postwar period, commentators sketched their views of the city as a collection of problems, of traffic congestion, polluted rivers and air, slums, and ineffectual and corrupt municipal government. This need not have been defeatist, but rather taken as a series of challenges. Alison Eisenberg detailed how, in the late 1950s, trade journals promoted an earnest and optimistic narrative that urban renewal was turning around the struggling downtown. Urban advocacy groups also pursued publicity campaigns in popular magazines like *Family Circle*, *Life*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*. Still, merely raising the cliché that "nobody goes downtown anymore" became self-fulfilling prophecy, for even entertaining public debates about saving a dying downtown fed a narrative of eclipse. Thus, the city as concept and reality came to be regarded as both an unsolvable problem and a permanent condition.[8]

If this were an era when so many white middle-class people left for new suburban communities, it was also an era of urban structural transformation. Urban renewal began in 1949 as a partnership between municipal and federal governments to clear blighted land so as to make the city amenable to modernization. The operating assumption was that construction of new office buildings, apartments, retail stores, and restaurants would revitalize suffering neighbourhoods. The idea was not far from the principles guiding suburbanization, to take empty space and build a new community. The key difference

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[7] Beauregard, *Voices of Decline*, 5–6, 12, 26, 36–38, 110.

[8] Ibid., 109–10, 115; Robert A. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 4–5; and Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 167–73. Also see Eric Fure-Slocum, *Contesting the Postwar City: Working-Class and Growth Politics in 1940s Milwaukee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) for a recent study of postwar how Milwaukee's liberal politics of growth triumphed over the city's socialist coalition. Rather than pursue a narrative of urban decline, Milwaukee's redevelopers successfully promoted one of market solutions for structural and social problems.

was that urban renewal and slum clearance required destroying existing homes and businesses to create the empty space.

Renewal suffered several practical problems that it was never able to overcome. One was a genuine urban housing shortage in the 1940s and 1950s that made slum residents hostile to relocating, even temporarily. Furthermore, a goal of clearance was decreasing population density, and so it was understood that not everyone would return to the rebuilt neighbourhood. This excess population necessarily ended up worsening crowding problems elsewhere. Nor did new development translate into a better quality of life. As small businesses were razed and public areas eliminated, street life vanished and the sense of community collapsed as people hid behind high-rise apartment doors. Admission to housing projects was determined by income level, establishing communities defined by poverty. The income criteria for public housing were also unrealistically low, so that those who rose above the level and were evicted might yet end up returning because their income was still too low to survive independently, thus quashing incentives at self-improvement. Demoralization, confinement, and alienation came to predominate the postwar experience of urban renewal.[9]

Emerging from the frustration of urban renewal came the most prominent

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[9] Daniel Seligman, "The Enduring Slums," in *The Exploding Metropolis*, ed. Editors of *Fortune* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 103–08; Beauregard, *Voices of Decline*, 144; and Marty Jezer, *The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945–1960* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 181–85.

The example of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is instructive as to how a city failed to address residency change and infrastructure renewal. Between 1950 and 1980, the city's population declined by around 30%, while also becoming more non-white overall. Despite much needed infrastructure repairs to deal with traffic congestion, downtown businesses resisted the disruption for fear of lost business. Any efforts at public housing were equally uneven and chaotic, seemingly predicated on the idea that the poor would just go away on their own. As the minority community expanded its population and share of space, racism from white Lancaster residents precluded sensible policy that might have ended segregation much sooner. Lacking dominant civic groups and a consensus on renewal, suburban developers peeled off residents and businesses, in turn making urban redevelopment all the more difficult. David Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940–1980* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 8–40.

advocate of urban living of the period, Jane Jacobs, who was less a proponent for the bohemian life of her Greenwich Village neighbourhood than the conditions she believed facilitated it. In arguing for the vital city—alive and necessary for human happiness—she took an anarchist position in opposition to an array of forces, government and corporate, that sought to remodel the city and bring order to perceived malignant chaos. Her direct enemy in this fight was the urban planner who sought to force the rationalization of abstract models upon urban spaces and the people who dwelled within. Such models elevated people-as-statistics over people-as-human-beings. The former were interchangeable data; the latter were unique, non-quantifiable, non-reproducible. Where theory and lived reality collided, Jacobs charged, the urban planners demanded fealty to the abstract. Nurturing a livable city meant embracing and promoting the diversity and freedom of movement that made the city worthwhile in the first place. "Designing a dream city is easy," she wrote. "[R]ebuilding a living one takes imagination."[10]

In "Downtown is for People" (1958) and *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jacobs set forth a sweeping indictment of the principles and purposes behind contemporary urban revitalization. The current model, she stated, had spent billions of dollars and the result was "marvels of dullness and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality." Cultural and civic life were disemboweled by "lackluster imitations of standardized suburban chain-store shopping." City and suburb alike were being fed "monotonous, unnourishing gruel," for designers who confused the character of cities with ordinary towns. The city was dynamic and worked best when it encouraged and satisfied diverse residents and needs. "This is not the rebuilding of

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[10] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 136; and Jane Jacobs, "Downtown is for People," in *The Exploding Metropolis*, ed. Editors of *Fortune* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 164, 167–68.

cities," she charged. "This is the sacking of cities."[11]

Jacobs argued that urban renewal projects suffered from an adherence to standardization whose results, however neat and orderly, were little different from that of "a well-kept dignified cemetery." The analogy was purposeful, for Jacobs saw revitalization projects as killing the spirit of the city, leaving only its rotting body behind. Orderliness was antithetical to the urban experience, nor was it what attracted people to the city in the first place. A great city was not just a large town or a more dense suburb. Rather, it was a diverse collection of strangers who nevertheless did not feel threatened by this uncertainty. Public peace was maintained not by the police but by invested residents and users of the street. A heavily used street, she argued, was a safe one; an unused street tended to facilitate crime. This point, Jacobs claimed, ran counter to urban planning orthodoxy, which was guided by a notion that sought imposed order and calm, rather than lively interaction and observation. When public activity was discouraged, it implicitly argued for the acceptance of insecurity and a belief that streets were dangerous places, an assumption that fostered actuality. Parks, playgrounds, and other open spaces, the supposed antidote to the sinister streets, shuffled children from a site where there were many adult eyes watching to one with little observation. Structures did not monitor and protect, only human beings did. Thus, a vital sidewalk culture generated both security and a shared sense of interest—a public responsibility—for children.[12]

Slum clearance failed because of its governing premises. It was a paternalistic practice that sought to make "impossibly profound changes" via "impossibly superficial means." The proper way of approaching slums, Jacobs said, was to accept that residents

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[11] Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 3–4, 6–7.
[12] Ibid., 30–37, 46–47, 74, 82; and Jacobs, "Downtown is for People," 140–42.

were intelligent and self-interested people who should be engaged as such to tap into a desire for regeneration from below. As long as the dominating impulse of the slum was escape, there would be no interest to improve it from within. Personal investment in community was the key characteristic of any vibrant neighbourhood, including a slum. Where adults lacked energy or ambition, or youth desired escape, this was a neighbourhood in decline. When those left behind were replaced by those of limited economic choices, the physical deterioration of those neighbourhoods only accelerated. On the other hand, when people stayed in a slum by choice, it developed an essential strength of trust and competence, a diversity of mutual struggle, success, and support. Defeating a slum meant creating conditions where residents had the means and opportunity of leaving, yet saw value in staying.[13] Imposing order from above via abstract models countered this entirely.

It was the duty of citizens to ask of planners and redevelopers what community qualities must be emphasized, what aspects of the streets preserved and augmented, and how to promote a living city. The citizen was the true expert in this and the machinery of renewal must reflect their insights and interests. Jacobs concluded *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* with the following:

> Dull, inert cities, it is true, do contain the seeds of their own destruction and little else. But lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves.[14]

While not an explicit response to suburbanization, Jacobs was indirectly writing about the new subdivisions inasmuch as she saw urban planners applying the

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[13] Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 271–76, 281–82, 287.
[14] Ibid., 448.

methodology of the new communities to the old industrial cities. Furthermore, her criticism, however heartfelt, consisted of jabs and roundhouse punches at a straw man. No planners or theories were ever cited, nor did Jacobs offer a meaningful alternative to urban renewal plans. Her position rested on an opposition to government power. At best she offered, according to Steven Conn, a kind of slow motion, incremental approach to renewal.[15] In that, she sat well with the radical critics of mass culture and their grand, sweeping condemnations of abstracting ideology supplanting actual human beings. Her concern was with the dominance of urban models of interchangeability that radical intellectuals believed dominated America. The cities, with their supposed virtuous diversity, suggested the possibility of resistance, of contradiction and complication to the master plans. The attack of the liberal planners offered inductive proof as to the nobility of city life, as if exterminating the urban spark was part of a grand scheme to fully pacify the American people. Also like the radical critics, Jacobs was guided by some past golden age, before the automobile and government power pushed and pulled the city dweller, lemming-like, toward the suburban abyss. Hers was the humanist fight against remote power and rationalization, a faith that the grassroots, given the opportunity, would nurture a self-sustaining culture. Unlike most radicals, however, Jacobs maintained a belief that ideology was not stronger than human beings, that human will could yet triumph. In this sense, Jacobs shared the perspective of another prominent defender of city life, the liberal journalist William H. Whyte, Jr**.**

Like Jacobs, Whyte asserted that urban renewal projects would turn the city into a "sterile and lifeless" expanse (i.e., suburbia). Pollution might be eradicated, but so, too,

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[15] Steven Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 190–91.

would the spirit of the city. These "bleak new utopias" were not inevitabilities. All that was required was an understanding of the function of a city. What those who loved cities had in common was an appreciation for privacy, variety, and excitement, something that planners and redevelopers seemed bent on eliminating in favour of dull and symmetrical high-rises that the architects themselves would not want to live in. Housing projects were a "failure of aesthetics" that promised to make the city "a gigantic bore." Suburbia, he predicted, would prove to be a fad once people learned what they had acquired and what they had given up. Appreciating the city meant accepting its impurities and vices. The city, if allowed to be a city, would soon enough remind expatriates that whatever the concerns about crime, pollution, or racial strife could never trump its essential satisfaction and opportunity.[16] To this end, he encouraged federal aid to cities to assist imaginative and experimental architecture, and subsidization of middle-class neighbourhoods to counter the tug of suburbia.[17] Whyte's argument contained much overlap with Jacobs', but exhibited the tone of a spurned lover, promising suburbanites that they would soon enough realize that they never had it so good in the city. The liberal Whyte saw the problem less as government and corporate power per se than an improper application of that power. What Whyte and Jacobs shared, however, was a faith that variety of structure and population was something to be embraced, for it generated a truly rich life, and that only the city could support such diversity. The best of America was in the city, but it required commitment to its nature, not abandonment or mutilation.

Jacobs, Whyte, and other boosters were fighting more than urban planners and

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[16] William H. Whyte, "Are Cities Un-American?" in *The Exploding Metropolis*, ed. Editors of *Fortune* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 1, 4, 19–20, 29–30.

[17] Ibid., 6, 30–31. Whyte made the puzzling claim that the middle class was the only demographic group whose housing was not being subsidized. There was public housing for the poor and suburban subsidies for the wealthy, but nothing, apparently, for the middle class. Did he actually believe that the hated middle-class suburbs were divorced from public policy?

middle-class whites with moving vans. The narrative of urban eclipse extended into a variety of popular genres and media. For example, Carl Abbott demonstrated that in nuclear-themed futurist fiction "cities are most conspicuous by their absence." Small towns were more likely to be the setting for post-apocalyptic stories, suggesting that rebuilding America must occur on a smaller scale. When featured or even just mentioned, cities represented danger, the nation's disastrous past not its future. Cities were the targets of the nuclear bombs and then produced new threats in the form of radiation, insane and violent refugees, and disease. The city represented attack and peril, whereas the suburbs and small towns were refuge from chaos.[18]

The city was also the hostile setting for noir films that treated the city not as the epitome of civilization, but as a predatory state of nature, exacting tremendous social and psychological costs on its residents. A permanent dusk of sinister shadows and littered with abandoned buildings, deserted alleys, and immoral amusements, the noir city upended ideas of justice as it persecuted the innocent and protected the guilty, blurring good and evil. Themes of betrayal, alienation, and disillusionment saturated the noir city, allowing psychopaths to feast on imperilled innocents. Abandoning the city was both a moral and existential urgency.[19]

Contemporary reportage confirmed—or perhaps was confirmed by—the noir writers. Journalist John Cameron asked his readers, "Can a city whose playgrounds are battle fields, whose parks are death traps and whose children aren't safe on its streets be retrieved from the packs who run it?" Central Park had been reduced to "a 2 1/2-mile

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[18] Carl Abbott, "The Light on the Horizon: Imagining the Death of American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 2 (January 2006): 177, 182; and Avila, *Popular Culture In The Age of White Flight*, 98.

[19] Avila, "Popular Culture In The Age Of White Flight," 7–10; Avila, *Popular Culture In The Age of White Flight*, 71–73, 77–78; William Darby, *Necessary American Fictions: Popular Literature of the 1950s* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987), 9; and Paula Rabinowitz, *Black & White & Noir: America's Pulp Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 3–5.

stretch of no-man's-and after dark, frequented only by roaming bands of armed youngsters who, if they did not have murder in mind, certainly had mayhem." So bad were conditions that Cameron could quote a Catholic priest who called for mass arrests and incarcerations with the rhetorical question, "We cage wild animals, don't we?"[20]

The city as jungle extended beneath the streets. In "Hell Underground," Austin Halevy described New York's subway tunnels as "a cavern 240 miles long filled with unspeakable horror." These were no feats of engineering that moved vast numbers of people mostly efficiently and cheaply, but "dark tunnels" and "gloomy underground stations" filled with human monsters. While any city contained its share of "mentally unbalanced and morally irresponsible men on the fringe of acute insanity," New York's subway system was a "desolate amphitheater" conceded to the sadists.[21] The subways were evidence of not civilization but savagery and the inability of society's guardians to protect those foolish enough to descend below ground.

Within the juvenile delinquent genre, the nature of the urban neighbourhood and the fate of its human occupants was considerably more varied. In Irving Shulman's pioneering delinquency novel *The Amboy Dukes* (1946), the significance of neighbourhood is established on the first few pages, with descriptions of gangs of boys standing on street corners, hanging out in poolrooms and barber shops. They engage in idle conversation, whistle at girls, shout at other passersby, and wait for work from neighbourhood mobsters. *City Across the River* (1949), the film adaptation of the book, introduces the Flatbush neighbourhood of Brooklyn via shots of a bustling city street ("busy by day, teeming at night"): a passed-out drunk leans against a garbage can; a

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[20] John Cameron, "Is New York City Run By Boy-Girl Animal Packs?" *Inside Detective* 37, no. 12 (December 1959): 23–26, 64–65.
[21] Austin Halevy, "Hell Undergound," *Deadline Detective* (February 1953): 22–23.

woman casually moves him to use the can, then puts him back; and a toddler is seen playing an alley with a garbage can. In short, the setting is of dirt and destitution.[22] Like all urban juvenile delinquency films of the era, and supporting Jacobs' later premise, the street is key to the neighbourhood. By day, the streets are alive with kids and vendors. There are community centres available to focus youthful energy to friendly competition and teamwork, and to counsel those more troubled. By night, however, the street is inhabited by predators and prey. The oblivious walk past darkened alleys where delinquents lay in wait to pull them in.[23]

In both film and novel, Frank Goldfarb (renamed Cusack in the film) celebrates his sixteenth birthday by taking his younger sister Alice to Manhattan so that she can "goggle at things she's often dreamed of but seldom seen"—the zoo, the Empire State Building, and Rockefeller Plaza. It is a world of luxury and order. By contrast, when they return to their Brooklyn tenement, they are greeted with the screams of domestic violence. For Alice, their outing is one of wonder and joy, a glimpse of a world that can scarcely be believed yet serves as inspiration. Frank pretends to share his sister's elation, but hates his duplicity. Where her experience is one of "religious rapture," his is "bitterness and venomous irritation." He is "sullen, suspicious, bitter, cruel, uncaring," the product of living in "a stinking, rotten tenement of carrion brick in a putrescent neighborhood, where [Frank] had known nothing but the despair that was attendant upon

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[22] Irving Shulman, *The Amboy Dukes* (1946; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1961), 1–2; and *City Across the River*, directed by Maxwell Shane (Universal International, 1949).

[23] See, for example, *Crime in the Streets*, directed by Don Siegel (Allied Artists, 1956); and *Dino*, directed by Thomas Carr (Allied Artists, 1957). In both films, the protagonist has a moment of clarity while in the midst of a nighttime felony and turns away from the violence bred on the urban street. *Teenage Doll*, directed by Roger Corman (Allied Artists, 1957) treats the city as a shadowy labyrinth, whether made up of blind alleys or a car junkyard that serves as a gang clubhouse. The darkened city here is place that blends people from all backgrounds and intents, offering danger and adventure, freedom from unhappy homes amidst bewildering mazes. The city is sinister, yet seductive.

hopelessness and an enervating poverty."[24]

Successive delinquent novels were much more explicit in equating the urban neighbourhood to a jungle, which is to say more akin to a savage, unforgiving nature than civilization. Teenage gangs reclaimed abandoned tenements, warehouses, and factories for their clubhouses, suggestive of a post-apocalyptic society, not one of achievement. Take, for example, Hal Ellson's *Tomboy* (1950). In one scene, Kerry Brangan, the titular Tomboy, returns to her gang's clubhouse, located in an abandoned factory, a site of decay and scavenging:

> It was quiet on the street where the factory stood, and on the comer Tomboy looked around, then gazed at the factory; here and there a shattered window glinted but most were darkening already and the scarred, decaying facade told nothing. Turning away, she suddenly changed her mind, and went down the street and climbed the fence.
>
> Once inside in the dim light of the factory cellar she stopped and gave the signal, then stood there listening to the echo of her voice go ricochetting through the dark corridors until it lisped away. The sharp odor of urine assailed her and the permanent damp chill which inhabited the cellar.[25]

The city is in every meaningful way a ghost town, abandoned by adults physically and ethically, drained of all but violence and criminality.

Chico Encheandea is the protagonist amidst similar circumstances in Wenzell Brown's *Run, Chico, Run* (1953). Chico's neighbourhood of Spanish Harlem is a diabolical labyrinth:

> The block was a place where life crowded in on itself. A place filled with loud noises, violent quarrels, incessant haggling. There was danger on the block. Men like Raul who'd entice a kid into his room with the promise of candy.

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[24] Shulman, *The Amboy Dukes*, 6–9, 14. Frank eventually does get out of Flatbush—in a sense. In the novel, he is killed when he is thrown off a rooftop; in the film version, he is merely imprisoned for murder.
[25] Hal Ellson, *Tomboy* (1950; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1967), 97.

> Drunks. Muggers. There were dark alleyways where snowbirds and stumblebums lurked in the shadows, cats that would swish you even for a dime. There were cellar joints that were used as pads. Daisy rooms like Mamma Lina's or Ida's Place. Candy Sam sold reefers and so did the barman at the Villa Marola. Congo Dewey came down from Harlem to collect for the policy racket. The prowl cars were never off the block for long. The nabs gave the poolroom the eye, climbed the stairs to Mamma Lina's for a cold beer or stopped to chat with Candy Sam.
>
> Sure there was danger on the block but if you were sharp you could side-step it. And there was safety too. The block took care of its own—in it own way.[26]

If the city were a trap for most characters in the delinquent genre, for others it is a playground, albeit of a more sociopathic nature. Vin Parker's novel *The Thrill Kids* (1955) traces a sudden killing spree by four Manhattan teenagers.[27] All four come from various middle-class or higher homes—certainly nothing like the slum creatures of other delinquency fiction. Yet, none of them come from ideal circumstances, with parents either overly indulgent or overly strict, too available or not at all.[28] After a chance encounter with a couple in a Manhattan park one evening, in which the four boys assert a right to discipline the two—stripping and groping the girl, kicking and punching the boy—they hit upon the idea of being "a sort of police corps … to police the parks of the city to rid them of vagrants and vandals" proves too enticing. Calling themselves The Defenders and looking for pleasure through violence, they seek to exact justice on the city's "vandals and juvenile delinquents." After failing to intimidate a man drinking alone in the park, they come across an older man sleeping in Central Park whom they burn with

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[26] Wenzell Brown, *Run, Chico, Run* (New York: Gold Medal Books, 1953), 22.
[27] Vin Packer was a pseudonym for novelist Marijane Meaker.
[28] Vin Packer, *The Thrill Kids* (Gold Medal Books, 1955; reprint, Cincinnati: Prologue Books, 2012), 11, 27–29, 40–49, 51–52, 117.

a cigarette and otherwise torment, before fatally stabbing in the back.[29] Upon arrest, the sentences handed out reflect the degree of remorse each boy shows.

The Thrill Kids was notable for treating urban delinquency as something not necessarily connected to the working class, but also establishing urban decay as spilling out from the slums and neighbourhoods dominated by tenements. Nowhere in the city was safe, including the pastoral idyll of Frederick Law Olmsted. The city, irrespective of material circumstance, generated these deviants, nourished them, and set them loose.[30]

If the desire to escape the city was common in the urban delinquent genre, its achievement was much more mixed. Ellson's *Tomboy* concludes with a rare instance of seeming success. After a robbery gone wrong and no home worth returning to, Tomboy and her friend Lucky decide to run away together: "Darkness sprawled across the park and the sounds behind them came softly now, weighted with despair like the cries of a dying city. But the night seemed alive in the freight yards, intensely black, touching them with dampened hands." Once inside the train yard, they spy their means of escape:

> They waited, then a whistle sounded twice and the train moved; jolting itself and stopping, it moved on again heavily. Springing up, Lucky and Tomboy ran toward the

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[29] Ibid., 119–20, 155–69.

[30] *The Thrill Kids* was inspired by the "Boy Hitler" murder. One evening in August 1954, a disturbed teenager named Jack Koslow from Brooklyn who openly admired Adolf Hitler (despite Koslow being Jewish) went on a rampage in a Brooklyn park with three confederates. They initially assaulted two couples, beating the boys and stripping and whipping with sticks the girls. When they found a man on a bench sleeping off a bender, they beat him into unconsciousness then hauled and threw him into the East River. Upon arrest, none denied their involvement. Koslow was declared insane and transferred to a psychiatric hospital. "Murder," *Teen-Age Gangsters* (Chicago: Hillman Periodicals, 1957), 51–57; Wenzell Brown, "Hate Calls the Tune," *The Teen-Age Jungle* (Standard Magazines, 1956), 28–31, 61–62; and Wenzell Brown, *Teen-Age Terror* (New York: Gold Medal Books, 1958), 145–54.

Edward Ronns' *Gang Rumble* also explored the idea of the city as plaything of the young and wealthy psychopath. Mike Tarrant is a member of a working-class gang, but he lives in Society Hill, "an island floating with moats and castellated walls in defense against the slum-clearance projects and ancient buildings being torn down in dust and rubble for the new Mall around Independence Hall" (15–16). Despite living in luxury, he is as contemptuous of the world. Philadelphia exists for him as a site of prey and opportunity, whether that includes murdering prostitutes and fellow gang members or armed robbery. Edward Ronns, *Gang Rumble* (New York: Avon, 1958).

> train and, grabbing a ladder, climbed to the top of a car and lay flat. The train was rolling a little faster now but heavily yet, as if tired of its endless trekking.
>
> "Okay, we made it, kid," Lucky said, turning his head. "We're off for somewhere. How do you feel?"
>
> "Scared," Tomboy answered. "Scared as hell!"[31]

The city is all they knew, providing the routines and expectations of their life, yet deep down they know that any future happiness requires leaving the city, their friends, and their family. Whether they succeed was wholly unclear—in all likelihood they will be arrested before the train leaves the city—but breaking with the patterns of behaviour dictated by the city is mandatory.

Joseph Hilton's *Angels in the Gutter* promotes itself as the story of teenage girls, "hard and cynical beyond their years, openly contemptuous of the law, eager for the glamour of the big-time ways of violence," but it is governed by the idea of escaping the city.[32] Ruthie is sixteen and has lived in a succession of rundown apartments in New York City with her traumatized veteran father and selfish mother. School serves as an escape of sorts for Ruthie, but it, too, is unstable given how frequently the family moves. Two girls named Aggie and Hilda ask Ruthie to join the neighbourhood gang, the Silver Hawks. The promise of excitement and camaraderie is all the enticement Ruthie she needs, and she soon becomes the personal deb of Al, the gang's leader.[33]

Al does not enjoy a nurturing home life, either, but he and Ruthie each respond differently to these frustrations. Ruthie dreams of escaping the neighbourhood, of finding a place where she has a measure of privacy, away from the fighting and nagging:

> She had forgotten where she had intended going and why. She only knew that she hated the street and the

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[31] Ellson, *Tomboy*, 150.
[32] Back cover of Joseph Hilton, *Angels in the Gutter* (1959; reprint, New York: Gold Medal Books, 1955).
[33] Ibid., 9–19.

> neighborhood and everything. She seemed to be seeing it all at once with the eyes of a stranger—the dirty, refuse-clogged gutters, the battered garbage cans, the littered areaways. The slatternly women hurrying home from a last-minute trip to the store, the men who looked either beaten down and helpless or pugnaciously tough to compensate for their failure in other ways. The draggle-tailed kids, coated in smut and grime, screaming filth and obscenities that they understood well enough but were still too young to be put into practice.
>
> Everything was ugly and hateful, but there wasn't any escape anywhere.[34]

Al sees the gang as his means of transcending the humiliation and abandonment of his home life. The gang is the essence of the neighbourhood, however dysfunctional, and so to dominate the gang is to dominate his environment. To this end, he sees Ruthie more and more as an object to this end, whether it is as organizer for the gang's debs or trying to prostitute her to raise money for his projects. After a robbery goes bad, Ruthie urges Al to flee town with her. He is shot down by the police, but despite the expectation of reform school, Ruthie is unfazed. She knows that she will be escaping the neighbourhood.[35]

The essence of urban life in such stories, then, is of an environment corrosive toward body and spirit, where individual escape is a sensible response. The city is a graveyard for the not-yet dead. And while it does not play a causative role in delinquency, the city does function to support delinquency in ways that it does not nourish more healthy and productive lives. Much less common within the genre were stories that emphasized a need by residents to think socially and regard the deep problems in their urban neighbourhood as solvable, that staying and working to make a more just and appealing community was a moral duty. The theme of decaying neighbourhoods plagued by gangs was consistent, but when ideas of flight were raised, they were

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[34] Ibid., 61–66. Quote on page 65.
[35] Ibid., 160–75.

ultimately deemed to be unworthy ambitions.

Harry Whittington's *Teen-Age Jungle* (1953) is a story of two teenagers, Rocky and Margie, each seventeen years old, as they consider whether to stay or flee from their neighbourhood. Rocky is ambitious, like Al in *Angels in the Gutter*, a known delinquent who believes he can run the neighbourhood criminal gang one day. Margie is wary of him and his possessive amorous advances. Between harassment from the police and local gangs and a troubled home life, Margie sees little of value in the neighbourhood. Her plan is to acquire secretarial skills, find a decent-paying job, and move away.[36]

Three other characters complicate Rocky's and Margie's respective goals. Je-Je, the current boss of the local gang, perceives both Rocky and Margie as threats after he sees them talking to a police detective, Lt. Mallory, a cynical figure who believes only harsh measures and monitoring can keep teenage crime under control. The third person is a young man named Brad Craddock, a City Welfare employee. He lived in the Bronx as a boy for a period of time, but was lucky because his parents moved the family to Connecticut. Since completing a law degree, he thinks about all the kids who have never known the quiet of the country. It was unfair, he said, that a lack of money meant that these kids could not get away to "live their own lives, get away from things they don't like." Brad wants Margie's help in attracting kids to a youth club that he is starting up via the city. If these kids cannot have the virtues of the suburbs, he will make the city a little less oppressive. He tells Margie that people join country clubs to prove themselves worthy of the elites, and that in this neighbourhood Margie is the elite. Margie tells him that she does not need a social club, but Brad counters that the club and neighbourhood

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[36] Harry Whittington, *Teen-Age Jungle* (New York: Avon, 1953), 12–14. *Teen-Age Jungle* is a revised version of Whittington's *Sinners Club* (New York: Carnival Books, 1953).

need her. She reluctantly agrees.[37]

The club catches on, to the irritation of the gangs, who see it as a challenge to their power, and Mallory, who refuses to see any good in the kids. He believes that encouraging kids to congregate only promotes bad behaviour. The viability of the club as stand-in for neighbourhood, then, is threatened by malignant inclinations inside the neighbourhood and reactionary authority outside. Furthermore, Margie's enthusiasm for the project is compromised because she is attracted to Brad, but feels betrayed when he tells her he plans to move on to another neighbourhood once the club is stable.[38]

Yet, her personal feelings of betrayal aside, Margie understands that the club needs to prosper if the neighbourhood is going to overcome gangsters like Rocky. She throws herself into establishing it as public site shared for and by the kids. Despite and because of this achievement, Rocky's hoods force their way in and take over. The club turns criminal, with sex, drugs, drinking, gambling, and violence the norm. His views confirmed, Mallory intends to raid the club, which will result in the end of all the city's youth clubs. Disillusioned, Margie prepares to admit defeat, even as Brad reaches out for help. Margie's values are put to a test when her business school teacher finds her secretarial work. Despite the risk of losing her new job by being caught in the raid, she goes to the club to stand with the kids, avoiding arrest only through Brad's assistance.[39]

Margie starts work at her secretarial job, but elects to stay in the neighbourhood, recommitting to the club and standing up to both Rocky and Mallory to make it work for the kids. The novel ends with Rocky's arrest and Mallory's reluctant admission that he is wrong about most of the neighbourhood's teens. Whittington concludes with a passage

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[37] Ibid., 46–49.
[38] Ibid., 49–58.
[39] Ibid., 110–21,128–45.

reminiscent of Jacobs and her affection for the street as concept and place:

> The street looked clean and good, like after a rain. The buildings along it were just buildings like buildings all over the city and the people in them were the same, only now she was no longer ashamed of them. Now that she knew she was not trapped, there was no longer the compulsion within her to run away, to escape. She had won. The street was no longer a menace. It was just a street, a long block between two busy avenues.[40]

The presumption of the slum as malignant and the idea of flight does make some sense for Margie, as both elements of the neighbourhood and forces outside seem to conspire against her. However, there is a strong liberal argument in *Teen-Age Jungle* that virtuous people like Margie and Brad, representing the private and public, must work to make the neighbourhood more appealing, not just abandon it. Indeed, the liberal faith is validated—even as Mallory's reactionary views are disproven—as people bend their environment to drive out the malignant.

In *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955; both Evan Hunter's novel and Richard Brooks' film adaptation), geography challenges the characters as much as they do each other, and the decision whether to rise above the environment or succumb becomes the crux of the narrative. The opening shot of the film is of an elevated train, then focuses on a bus—both distinctly urban forms of transportation—as new teacher Richard Dadier steps out. He stands in front of the gated North Manual High School. A woman walks by and is hooted at by the boys behind a barred fence, giving the impression of being jailed and certainly of separation between savagery and civilization. This initial scene, then, establishes the setting for what amounts to an urban jail. (In the novel, the school is

[40] Ibid., 157–58.

similarly described as an "endless concrete monotony" and likened to Alcatraz prison.)[41] Indeed, one teacher, disillusioned or perhaps just ill-suited for the job, tells Rick:

> This is the garbage can of the educational system. Every vocational school in the city. You can put them all together, and you got one big, fat, overflowing garbage can. And you want to know what our job it [*sic*]? Our job is to sit on the lid of the garbage can and see that none of the filth overflows into the streets. … I'm telling you it's a garbage can, and you'll find out the minute you get a whiff of the stink. All the waste product, all the crap they can't fit into a general high school, all that stink goes into the garbage can that's the vocational high school system. That's why the system was invented. … The point is, you got to keep them off the streets. And this is as good a place as any. We're just combinations of garbage men and cops, that's all. … People don't knowingly dump diamonds in with the garbage. They throw crap in the garbage, and that's what you'll find here.[42]

This is clearly a conservative interpretation of city and delinquency—irredeemable and manageable only via brute force.

Dadier is a navy veteran who lives with his wife on the eleventh floor of the City Housing Project, "content in the tight little vacuum they had built around themselves." Rick, raised in tenements in upper Manhattan and the Bronx, is well aware of the routine violence of the neighbourhood. Anne is pregnant, and as a young couple they are clearly bucking the trend to leave the city for the suburbs. Rick embodies liberalism, of the individual fighting against his environment to solve problems.[43] His students, children of

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[41] *Blackboard Jungle*, directed by Richard Brooks (MGM, 1955); and Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955; reprint, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997), 1.

[42] Hunter, The Blackboard Jungle, 69–70.

[43] Ibid., 145. Edward De Roo's *The Little Caesars* borrows from this premise. Jeff Randall is a former slum kid who joined the Marines, then came back to the inner city to help street kids as a member of the city Youth Board and as a popular high school physical education teacher. His wife, Gert, hates living in a ghetto because of the "slum kids" to whom she is exposed as a nurse treating the results of gang violence. Jeff believes the slums are all in the mind and he will never move to the suburbs. He has provided well for his family and turned their apartment in a reconditioned brownstone into something quite admirable, even if the rest of the neighbourhood has failed to keep pace. It is his responsibility to help others achieve

the slums, are undeniably delinquents. In the first term alone, there is an attempted rape of a teacher, vandalism of another's record collection, a plot to hijack a newspaper truck, and Rick and another teacher are beaten in a darkened alley. There is little doubt that many if not most of the students are budding criminals, and it is only through Rick's dedication, persuasion, and superior values that the ethos of the gang is broken.

In Brooks' film, a discouraged Rick consults a former college professor about his frustrations. The pep talk he receives benefits from an unsubtle inclusion of clean-cut students singing the American national anthem to make clear that the stakes are not just a handful of juvenile delinquents or even the neighbourhood, but American values of liberty and individual success. In the film's climax, it is appropriate, if again unsubtle, that a flagpole holding the American flag is used to hold the delinquents at bay and end a classroom rebellion, capping Rick's victory in winning over the class. When *Teen-Age Jungle*'s Margie stays to fight for her community for largely personal reasons, Rick's decision has national and ideological importance. In both, however, flight to the suburbs, to abandon the neighbourhood as a cast prison, is unacceptable. Problems like urban vice can be conquered, but it will take strong and devoted liberals who refuse to back down.

The narrative of postwar urban decline, expressed by intellectuals, journalists, writers, and filmmakers, coalesced around the premise that the city was in trouble, in idea and actuality. But why were people fleeing the city? It was an open question. Perhaps it was the criminals and deviants who were forcing out the good. Perhaps poverty and vice had smothered the city, dividing people into predators and prey, a reversion to a state of nature. Or maybe the threat came from those who claimed they were there to save the city

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as he has. (The balance of the novel deals with their son, who gets drawn into gang life.) Edward De Roo, *The Little Caesars* (New York: Ace Books, 1961), 5–16.

through renewal schemes or repression. These diagnoses were acted out in popular media for public audiences, as were proposed strategies. The point to this is not to suggest consensus (beyond that of the city in trouble) but instead the very openness of the question and the availability of such diverse diagnoses and prognoses. Was flight a sensible course of action or was it cowardly? Where should power lie—in the people of the neighbourhoods or state structures? The commentators discussed above understood that these were moral questions, of private and public, of courage and possible martyrdom, of the wisdom of mobility. If the morality of flight governed the narrative of urban decline, the endpoint of that flight proved just as supportive of such moral debate.

In 1953, journalist Harry Henderson published in a pair of articles for *Harper's* his impressions of six new suburbs and the dominant perspective of the residents. These new communities, he said, were free of social problems like slums, abandoned lots, and crowded streets. Newness reigned, with plenty of play areas and convenient shopping. These communities had no history, but this was an asset, for it meant no limiting traditions, established families, or bad areas of town. Everyone was from a "good neighbourhood." Aesthetics confirmed monotony—"nothing rises above two stories, there are no full grown trees, and the horizon is an endless picket fence of telephone poles and television aerials"—yet no one complained, for individuality was asserted inside the home. Externally, however, the group dominated, determining behaviour, attitude, and style—"a kind of super-conformity." Participation in group activities held a certain moral obligatory quality. Still, suburbanites were friendly, warm, unpretentious, and quick to help out those in need. It was for this reason that residents were so

enthusiastic and felt a measure of security from their neighbours.[44] Relocation to the new subdivisions was victory and success. If so, what was it a victory over?

Writing in 1958, sociologist Ernest R. Mowrer asserted that suburbia's development was a marriage of pushing and pulling forces, blending prosperity with a belief that the city "teems with wickedness and moral degradation." The suburbanite was not seeking refuge from the modern world, but rather a cleaner version of urban life. The loss of urban traits—anonymity, class and other divisions—was only a temporary state, mandated by the early days of suburban life, which necessitated a spirit of co-operation. In time, these old distinctions and divisions of urban life would reassert themselves, allowing for a truer recreation of the city, but with the old vice excised.[45] Leaving the industrial city for the suburb, Robert Beauregard later argued, meant leaving behind a way of life, of turning one's back on urbanity and coexistence with diversity. Suburbanization was a moral decision that rejected the idea of saving the city.[46] These new communities developed codes and structures to maintain what their residents enjoyed about city life while prohibiting what was objectionable. The governing principle of suburbia, in essence, was one of exclusion or segregation.

Dianne Harris pursued this idea, approaching suburbia as an ideological construct for segregation. Textual and visual representations of postwar houses, she argued, helped to reinforce racial, ethnic, and class identities, particularly in equating of whiteness with homeownership and citizenship. More so, white suburbanites were fully aware of the nature of these segregated communities. This mask of apolitical intent—benignly

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[44] Harry Henderson, "Mass-Produced Suburbs I: How People Live in America's Newest Towns," *Harper's* (November 1953): 25–32; and "Mass-Produced Suburbs II: Rugged American Collectivism," *Harper's* (December 1953): 80–86.

[45] Ernest R. Mowrer, "The Family in Suburbia," in *The Suburban Community*, ed. William Dobriner (New York: Putnam, 1958), 149–53, 161.

[46] Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 173.

expressed as the American Dream—was a form of "enlightened false consciousness" that validated a racialized politics. What George Lipsitz called "the white spatial imaginary" idealized homogeneous spaces that could be controlled into predictable patterns, to hide social problems rather than address them. It encouraged individual escape rather than engagement of social contradictions that promoted marginalization.[47]

Normalized whiteness was able to hide in plain sight, to disguise that race was paramount. Landscapes, too, hid in plain sight, claiming to be natural and thus neutral, when they were, in fact, ideologically charged cultural containers. Suburban homes were portrayed as neat, clean, and orderly, in what amounted to the rules for being white. Black homes, to the converse, were described as crowded, dirty, and lacking in privacy to the extent of promoting immoral behaviour. White homes were shown as uncluttered to the point of sterility, opposing the stereotype of cluttered tenements associated with the lower class and immigrants.[48] Suburban life, then, was about naturalizing a division between affluent from non-affluent, white from black, and, in making order a private concern, to extinguish any sense of social responsibility.[49]

Eric Avila argued that the suburban migration was not about abandoning or eradicating Euro-American traditions, values, or practices, but about privatizing them, extracting them from the diversity of the urban space, and replanting them in confined

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[47] Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1, 12; and George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 29.

[48] Harris, *Little White Houses*, 96. In 1943, the National Association of Real Estate Boards released *Fundamentals of Real Estate Practice*, advising realtors to be aware of those living on the margins. Black people, even those of some wealth, were grouped with gangsters and madams as among those who devalued a neighbourhood. As Eric Avila observed, the significance was less that black people were seen as potential threats to property values, but that their skin alone made them a bad risk (white people actually had to demonstrate their deviancy). George Lipsitz added that it illustrated the mindset that black people moving into white neighbourhoods or using their public facilities was de facto criminality. Avila, *Popular Culture In The Age of White Flight*, 80; and Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 25–26.

[49] Harris, *Little White Houses*, 30–38; and Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 188.

and controlled private spaces. Connected to the normalization of whiteness was the elevation of privacy as a core American value, especially countered against the public diversity intrinsic to the city. Privacy was an especially dense and charged concept, for it was attached to ideas of purity of self and family, uncontaminated by outsiders. As such, the outsider, the corrupter and contaminant, existed as an ever-present (imaginary) threat in the suburban imagination, serving to unify residents and justify exclusion.[50]

Beside the waves of single-family homes dotting the landscape, the structures of consumption took on greater ideological significance. As Lizabeth Cohen detailed, developers tended to situate retail areas at the centre of the community, altering older urban models that reserved such sites for public space and then allowed residential areas to spread out from there. This vacuum of public space allowed developers to conceive of a new kind of community where private retail space played a civic function, carefully controlling expression in ways that privileged commerce. In so doing, they elevated property rights over public speech. Furthermore, developers believed that creating new communities centred around controlled shopping areas could triumph over the anarchy of open urban communities. To this end, centralized administration relied on scientific analysis for store placement, standardized design, and security and comfort. Suburban developers conceived the shopping mall as a means of perfecting the downtown, which is

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[50] Avila, *Popular Culture In The Age of White Flight*, 16; and Harris, *Little White Houses*, 118–19. Catherine Jurca's study of the suburb in twentieth-century fiction argued that this was an essential contradiction explored by writers, where the suburban home seemed the physical representation of success, yet the resident characters felt cheated and existentially homeless. These presentations, Jurca suggested, rested on intellectuals' complaints about mass production and standardization, and its supposed transformative power. Authentic pride of home ownership simply could not exist under such artificial conditions. Suburbanites did not find satisfaction or refuge in their homes, and were utterly alienated by their choices. The suburban experience was something of a self-inflicted wound, where the elements of success become evidence of failure. The exception to this were stories where non-whites and the working class intruded, highlighting the power of self-determination and to segregate. Presence of the unwashed and unwanted could reinforce the value of suburban life. Catherine Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5–12.

to say excluding unwanted figures common to urban spaces—vagrants, prostitutes, racial minorities. In this, a new type of civic identity was sought, one organized around consumption, order, whiteness, and middle-class norms.[51]

This private view of American life found expression in a short film called *In the Suburbs* (1957), produced by women's magazine *Redbook* to promote the suburban ideal—middle-class, young, fertile, materialist, white—as synonymous with the magazine's own commercial vision of America.[52] The film sought to capture, and naturalize, a range of emotions and experiences, from success, family, and community within suburbia versus frustration, insecurity, and isolation in the city, to the anxiety of being new homeowners and parents in need of the kind of expert advice that *Redbook* offered. Above all, life in suburbia was one of "making choices," for it meant being immersed in a culture of consumption. "It's a happy-go-spending world," the narrator explained. The suburbs, he continued, were created by young adults, and the shopping centres were built in their image. More than this, the shopping centre was an expression of core American values, updated to capture modern technology and social experience. The whole experience could be summed up by the phrase that *Redbook* promoted: "Easy living." Yet, the narrator also described suburbanites not as highbrows or lowbrows but "wrinkled brows." They were serious because these were serious times, complicated times. *Redbook*'s experts existed to help these young adults who represented America's present, and their children who represented the future. It was an especially liberal vision of the suburbs—challenging, in need of expert assistance, and an embodiment of some mythical American spirit presumably handed down since 1776.

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[51] Lizabeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (October 1996): 1051–56, 1068.

[52] *In The Suburbs*, directed by Tracy Ward and Bert Spielvogel (On Film, Inc., 1957).

The vision of suburbia as promoted by Henderson and *Redbook*, occurring at opposite ends of the 1950s, emphasized the moral sensibility of the urban exodus. There was no question of whether leaving the city merited criticism, or that suburban life represented retreat not success. These sanguine appraisals of suburbia, the sibling and beneficiary of the urban decline narrative, dominated a decade, but they did not go unchallenged. Intellectual assessments were, for the most part, overwhelming in their assertion that, far from representing a golden age, the new subdivisions were a false idol.

Much of the intellectual criticism of suburbia in the 1950s emphasized its supposed conformity and sterility. The suburbs were said to be alienating and atomizing, with only superficial social connections. Consumer culture, bound up with suburbia, was anxiety inducing, where loss of status both drove unnecessary consumption and severed people's compassion for others. The very affluence that suburbia represented, critics asserted, generated deep unhappiness. The bland mass-produced homes and furnishings were antithetical to individualism. These critics could not see as attractive any style of life associated with consumption, and so suburbia had to be appalling.

Sociologist David Riesman's critique was typical of this group. In "The Suburban Sadness," he questioned whether the suburbs could support cultural diversity. He argued that there was a certain critical mass of ethnic and class diversity required for high culture to thrive, but suburbia, with its monotone population, generated a bland conformity hostile to creativity. Suburbanites were too insular, anonymous, and invested in leisure to promote necessary political and cultural leadership. In time, he feared, suburbia's weedy expansion and influence would extinguish individualism and liberty.[53] William F. Whyte,

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[53] David Riesman, "The Suburban Sadness," in *The Suburban Community*, ed. William Dobriner (New York: Putnam, 1958), 379–83.

Jr. saw the suburbs as the natural home of America's rising class of corporate loyalists—conformists at work, conformists at home. The group mentality that guided them at work infected their private lives, albeit in a way that proved only their commitment to the group, not truly to the well-being of the community. This was no accident, for the nature of their job, fully at the mercy of their employer, meant that their residency could never be permanent.[54] Thus, there was no interest to seek ties. Participation was compensation for the vacuum of impermanence in their lives and a moral commitment to group norms. Aspiration, removed from individualism, became a commitment to keeping down with the Joneses, an assured culture of the bland and indistinct middlebrow.[55]

One of the more persistent critics of suburbia was writer John Keats, who described the residents with vinegar prose. In *The Crack in the Picture Window* (1957), Keats asserted that suburban developments "destroy established cities and trade patterns, pose dangerous problems for the areas they invade, and actually drive mad myriads of housewives shut up in them." The affluence with which the suburbs were associated was solely material, and even at that only temporary (if real at all). Keats' story followed the lives of the fictional John and Mary Drone—an unsubtle suggestion of both the generic and the passive, tarring them as part of the mass—and the purchase of their "tiny" first suburban home. All suburbanites, Keats argued, compromised horribly, for their home was never the stuff of dreams but of availability and budget. The whole process was a conspiracy between government, bank, developer, and realtor. They all knew that the "doll houses which out-slum the slummiest of our prewar slums" would sell immediately, because the naïve Drones foolishly believed that this was the proper expression of the

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[54] Indeed, according to historian Loren Baritz, the average early suburbanite moved every three years. Baritz, *The Good Life*, 19.

[55] William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 302–03, 20, 328, 346–47, 384.

American Dream. The Drones, like most of their peer group, lacked business savvy, especially when it came to real estate, and were desperate to have their own home. A process bent on manufacturing and selling bland and unsound homes reflected, Keats charged, a widespread absence of social responsibility.[56]

Friendships in suburbia were achieved under circumstances akin to a lifeboat from a sinking ship. No true friendship could occur under such limited and confining circumstances, where contact was limited to car pooling or children's events. Making friends was mandated, but when everyone was the same, these relationships offered nothing but an echo. This was all a part of suburbia's true evil, its "destruction of individuality." In a mass society, people were under enormous pressure to be in agreement, and "[t]he physically monotonous development of mass houses is a leveling influence in itself, breeding swarms of neuter drones."[57]

> I submit, as proved, that these drones are prey to drift and abyssal boredom, and cannot be said to have lives of their own. I submit housing developments combine the worst disadvantages of suburbs and city slums without reflecting the advantages of either. I submit housing developments are a disruptive influence in our national life. I submit housing developments pose many clear and present dangers to us all, and on that thought, conclude this inquest.[58]

A few years later, Keats returned with yet another piece on these ersatz communities. Now Keats dissected Nick and Fran Baxter, who "live, so to speak" with their children in a "real-estate nightmare." The Baxters were "[n]eat, clean, wholesome, slightly vacuous," exactly like those in women's magazine ads. They bought their home because it was the popular trend and, they believed, cheaper than renting in the city. Their

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[56] John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1957), xii, xv, 7–8, 15, 32, 47–49.
[57] Ibid., 23, 71–72, 193.
[58] Ibid., 193–94.

ignorance carried a high price in commuting time, rising taxes, and social isolation. Their neighbourhood, "like most developments, is a jail of the soul, a wasteland of look-alike boxes stuffed with look-alike neighbors." So penetrating was the group mentality that it rendered life to be "a kind of communism."[59]

The homogeneity of suburbia was "pathetically obvious," more like "barrack communes." All behaviours, all styles, were intended to stay consistent with the group. There was a pathetic anxiety in this conformity, as if residents were scared to exhibit an original idea. But the fear was justified: "Heresy is the worst suburban sin, ostracism the worst fate, adjustment to the group is held to be the highest good; and suburbia's factorylike new schools are generally temples to this creed." This "groupiness" held back suburbanites. Until they realized the illusion—the delusion—of their lives, they could never be fully developed and responsible individuals.[60]

The absence of genuine individuality, Keats charged, encouraged unethical behaviour. Nick was a nice guy, like everyone else there, but he was also, like everyone else, a thief and a liar, padding his expense account and living on credit. No suburbanite believed his lifestyle was wrong, but operating on instant gratification and evading hard choices was fundamentally immoral. Worse still, he was mortgaging the future of his children, an unforgivable act of irresponsibility.[61] Thus, Keats suggested, the moral failings of the parent would be borne on the child.

Writing in *Dissent*, political scientist William J. Newman similarly saw in suburbia a failure of bourgeois values. Nobody, he claimed, truly lived in the suburbs. The subdivisions were, more accurately, "resting places where one stays for the night."

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[59] John Keats, "Compulsive Suburbia," *Atlantic Monthly* 205 (April 1960): 47.
[60] Keats, "Compulsive Suburbia," 49–50. Keats' barracks analogy was not unlike Whyte's comparison of suburbia to dormitories. Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 295–96.
[61] Keats, "Compulsive Suburbia," 48.

The common phrase of the time, "flight to the suburbs," was misdirected, he said, for fleeing from the suburbs was as frequent as the grudging trips back every evening. It was impossible to conceive of loyalty to such a place where commitment was limited to superficialities, such as tax rates or clean streets. To live in the suburbs was to seek to ascend socially, which necessarily required forming no attachment to community.[62]

The suburb was "the ultimate expression of the bourgeois value system." This was the laboratory for a grand social experiment, for if it could not be achieved in what Newman called subtopia, it could not happen anywhere. The ideology of suburbia was "achievement," which was shorthand for "personal success, social mobility, and public esteem." To be middle class was to embrace this concept, for it saturated all of life. Yet the existence of suburbia as escape suggested that there was something suspect about the goal, that reality was something to be avoided. If the suburbs represented an illusion inspired by a desire to flee from the reality of bourgeois society, it was a tacit admission of the failure of American society and values. To maintain the illusion meant regularly returning back to reality and then the fleeing over and over and over again. The truth, Newman charged, was that a "bourgeois utopia" could not be built from "bourgeois cruelty." Sooner or later, the fantasy and the social contradictions would be exposed.[63]

Writing in 1955, *Playboy* writer and editor A.C. Spectorsky asserted that, unlike the heavily analyzed suburbanite, the exurbanite was a new class not yet understood by

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[62] William Newman, "Americans in Subtopia," *Dissent* 4 (Summer 1957): 256.

[63] Ibid., 260–63, 266. Sociologist Robert Fishman extended Newman's idea of suburbia as the embodiment of bourgeois ideals. However, Fishman claimed it was never achieved due to both the presence of offensive urban elements and contradictory bourgeois values. The essence of suburban life was an expression of exclusion: work was excluded from home; the middle class was excluded from the working class; suburban green was excluded from urban gray. Suburbia was a purposeful alienation of the middle class from the urban and industrial landscape that nourished it. As space and concept, the suburb represented confidence, success, and affluence, but also anxiety, fear, and loathing of the "others" who inhabited the cities that generated so much of the nation's—and therefore the suburb's—prosperity. Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 3–6, 135, 153–54.

any anthropologist or sociologist. The exurbanite lived farther from the city than the suburbanite and in more expensive and spacious homes. Exurbanites were city people at heart and could never be happy in suburbia, regarding it as too domestic, dull, and crowded. He was, nevertheless, "an exile," never able to acclimatize to his new home. Exurbanites were fairly wealthy and typically employed in the idea industries (publishing, radio, television, movies, music) that dominated politics and entertainment. The exurbanite was part of the influential set who created and promoted styles and fashions for the rest of the country. It was not snobbery that led to the exurban life, but conformity with one's work peers.[64]

The exurbanite commuter was notable for his physical stamina—rising earlier than his urban counterparts, then driving to a train station for a long ride into the city. By evening, the process was reversed, with delayed dinner and an earlier bedtime. The mental demands were even worse, threatening to turn the commuter into "a raving psychotic." Yet, the exurbanite was not only happy with this existence, he was proud of it. The anxieties of the exurbanite were entirely self-created, born of a desire to escape from the intense competition and frustrations of work, and a simultaneous belief that he had transcended the rat race and fulfilled the American dream. Nevertheless, "Exurbia" was a "Limited Dream," a partial escape for, whatever his professional success, his felt shame for prostituting his talents. Some hid from their lives by drinking; others fully embraced their cynicism, admitted their corruption, and wallowed in it. A tiny group became "anti-intellectual intellectuals"—they admitted their ability and tendencies, but regarded their status as dirty—and sneered at professional intellectuals.[65]

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[64] A.C. Spectorsky, *The Exurbanites* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1955), 4, 6–7, 14, 17.
[65] Ibid., 2–3, 12–13, 270–76.

A much smaller group of intellectuals critiqued the critics. Sociologist Herbert Gans, a resident of one of the new suburbs, considered his professional peers' portrayal of suburbanites as shallow and lazy cultural boobs to be "upper middle class ethnocentrsm." Gans' neighbours were not apathetic and passive conformists, nor were they trend-following conspicuous consumers. Suburbanites sought only comfort and modern surroundings, not a new identity.[66] Bennett Berger's in-depth study of a working-class suburb in California also rejected accusations of obsessive homogeneity, rootlessness, and a corporate drone mentality. The descriptions of common architecture and equal income levels were not off the mark, he said, but ideas of a distinct suburban mindset were unproven. The subjects in Berger's study only wanted a more materially comfortable lifestyle.[67] What the critics failed to appreciate, Scott Donaldson wrote in 1969, is that those who lived in the suburbs did so by choice and were happy with their decision. They accepted a life of commuting and high property taxes because, if not idyllic, the suburbs provided greater happiness than the city.[68]

What was it that intellectuals truly loathed about suburbia? Conformity? Status anxiety? Mass culture? Gadgets? Those were just symbols, Berger asserted. He suggested that suburbia had been made a scapegoat "to blame the consequences of [a national] commitment to chrome idols." The suburban critique was, he claimed, a safe and toothless attack that did not address deeper issues of ambition and social and economic mobility. Critiquing suburban culture did not risk retaliation from those with real power, thus demonstrating the intellectuals' limited sway. The additional problem of the critique

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[66] Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1967), vi, 38, 149, 417–18.
[67] Bennett M. Berger, *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Works in Suburbia* (1960; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 4–12, 26–27.
[68] Scott Donaldson, *The Suburban Myth* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 89.

was that it asserted as hollow or harmful the very items that the suburbanite considered evidence of success. It was difficult to persuasively argue that what demonstrated happiness and achievement should actually be a source of shame. No wonder the intellectual came off as "the eternal crotchet, the professional malcontent."[69]

Indeed, what was the point of the critique? Robert Beauregard suggested that it was less about the lives of suburbanites than keeping alive an idealized conception of the city. Suburbia was a physical representation of intellectuals' disappointment that the masses did not embrace their preference for urbanity. The criticism of suburban life, historical geographer Michael Johns claimed, was "misplaced carping by snobs who were resentful of losing their status as arbiters of good taste to an expanding mass market." In the end, was the canard of mindless conformity written for anyone but critics who had status-related reasons for promoting it?[70]

If intellectuals were largely writing for and to themselves, the same cannot be said for the novelists and filmmakers whose audiences included those self-same suburbanites. This, however, did not mean that the new communities, with their reputation for safety, order, and familial integrity, were validated by the delinquency genre. Two prominent themes of suburban delinquency will be detailed below—suburbia as false refuge from vice and parental delinquency—to demonstrate that the postwar escape narrative followed suburbanites to their new homes.

David Hulburd's *H is for Heroin* (1952), a purportedly true story, relates the descent into drug addiction of teenage Amy Burton.[71] Amy was born in 1934 in

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[69] Berger, *Working-Class Suburb*, 101–03. Donaldson chipped in that there was also an ironic bandwagon effect amongst critics—i.e., conformity—in these assessments. Donaldson, *The Suburban Myth*, 2.

[70] Michael Johns, *Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s* (Los Angeles: University of Caifornia Press, 2003), 114–15.

[71] David Hulburd, *H is for Heroin* (1952; reprint, Toronto: Popular Library, 1953). Amy Burton's story is

Tennessee, where her parents Louise and Frank were poverty stricken due to the Depression. The family moved often because of Frank's search for work, which meant that they had never had a respectable home. While living in a run-down part of San Diego in 1948, Amy's parents allowed her to have a party in their backyard. Boys brought beer and lay on blankets with girls, something that sent Frank into a rage. He found work in Los Angeles and moved his family to nearby Coast City so that they would not be exposed to urban vice.[72] Like most other suburban communities, Coast City is "neither rich nor fashionable, and has few marks of distinction." The homes are not luxurious—1–3 bedrooms, a breakfast nook, a "modern kitchen," full lawn, and patio in the back. It is, in short, a proper modern suburb, fit "for the respectable retired couples out of the vast Middle West, and for the tourist in for the day or the week, the tourist with the bright blue slacks and the wife to match."[73] If Frank believes he is shielding his family from urban vice, he is naive. Amy makes quick friends with "frank and caustic" teens and listens to "those Negro bands on the radio," while Louise, bored with her life, finds work as a telephone operator, which allows her to get out of the house.[74]

The balance of the book tells of how rebellious Amy loses interest in schoolwork and spends her days on the beach, where she falls in with a crowd of drug-using teens, becomes promiscuous and a marijuana and heroin addict. At age 16, she marries Eddy, 21, a polite and respectful shipyard worker, but is secretly a heroin user and dealer who

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almost certainly the same source material for the short anti-drug film *The Terrible Truth* (Sid Davis Productions, 1951). Amy was given the name Phyllis Howard in *The Terrible Truth*, but otherwise the compressed narrative closely mirrors Hulbard's. The exploitation film *Teenage Devil Dolls* [aka *One Way Ticket To Hell*], directed by B. Lawrence Price, Jr. (B. Lawrence Price, Jr. Productions, 1955) also contains elements similar to Hulburd's work. The factual nature of Hulburd's story (or *The Terrible Truth*) should therefore be approached with some skepticism.

[72] Hulburd, *H is for Heroin*, 19–25.

[73] Ibid., 13–16.

[74] Ibid., 26–28. Coast City is pseudonymous, presumably to mask the Burtons from identification.

drags his new wife into his business. Eddy buys the couple a house, but that mark of middle-class stability cannot stop their downward spiral. The state of Amy's life is laid bare when the two are arrested and she is forced to contact her parents. Frank's initial concern is what Amy's arrest means to his reputation, for the move from Tennessee to California was a self-perceived liberation, and now his daughter's failure threatens to compromise his success and status. After a short stay in a juvenile facility, the family moves to Los Angeles to get Amy away from Coast City and continue her recovery.[75] While Hulbard highlighted Amy's natural bent for rebellion and an unsettled home life—an angry and controlling father and personally unsatisfied mother—what is striking about this account is that on the surface the Burtons represented the rising tide of middle-class suburban success in postwar America. Frank Burton moved his family to the suburbs to protect them, yet none of it mattered. The hallmarks of urban juvenile delinquency were found to be just as prevalent outside the sinful city.

Where Hulbard found corrosive vice already in suburbia, Bud Clifton's *D for Delinquent* (1958) related how sixteen-year-old Gloria Transic came to Seacliff, a small town south of San Francisco, and upended residents' lives. Gloria does not want to be in a relative backwater town like Seacliff—like the Burtons, her family have moved from the city for their Gloria's moral and physical health—but has decided it better to rule in hell. She is predatory urban vice sizing up prey. When Gloria shows up in his Spanish class, Chuck, a teacher at the local high school, immediately senses that she is trouble. He is friends with an unmarried female teacher named Tuttle, and they know that they are not accepted as part of the community because they are newcomers. They are only there because of a suburban population explosion that has otherwise shaken the certainty and

[75] Ibid., 36–37, 99–112.

comfort of the older residents. Grimes, the principal, tells Chuck that he has to become more involved in the community, that being a teacher necessarily means being a community leader.[76] More precisely, it means fitting in with the town ethos. Gloria, Chuck, and Tuttle are all foreigners, in a sense, and none of them are able to or desire to conform. This condition drives the conflict of the story.

A chance encounter with a carnie named Bernie reveals Gloria's past as a junkie and prostitute. She met Bernie when she was fourteen and a poor girl in San Francisco who hated her strict parents. He soon got her addicted to dope and then pimped her out. It was from this life that Gloria's parents sought to save her.[77] Lonnie, one of her classmates, learns her secret and uses this knowledge later on at a party at his gang's clubhouse. After giving Gloria marijuana, she is put through a sex initiation, but flees when she suspects that the whole gang will be taking their turn with her. She is picked up walking on the highway by Chuck, who has the misfortune of being seen by another teacher with a hysterical girl in a torn blouse. He knows that the worst possible interpretation will spread, chiefly because of his own outsider status.[78] At a school dance, after a confrontation between Lonnie and Gloria ends with the latter's dress ripped, Chuck is again seen with her in questionable circumstances. When Gloria accuses Chuck of attempting to rape her, he is arrested despite the police officer's skepticism towards Gloria's story. Other girls come forward, including Gloria's rival, Lurline, who claims that Chuck had tried to seduce them, too. As the stories spread, the town becomes hysterical with speculation. Inevitably, Chuck is fired from his teaching position.[79] It is only when a mob gathers outside the jailhouse that Lurline admits that she fabricated her

[76] Bud Clifton, *D for Delinquent* (New York: Ace Books, 1958), 13–21.
[77] Ibid., 52–63, 75–77.
[78] Ibid., 63–75.
[79] Ibid., 109–27, 137–38, 143–48.

story. Following a violent confrontation with police in which Lonnie and Bernie are killed, Gloria is arrested and admits that she lied about Chuck. She is sentenced back to a reformatory, while Chuck and Tuttle leave town to start a new life together.[80]

As much as *D for Delinquent* suggests that suburbia is not immune to urban vice like drugs, prostitution, and gangs—Lonnie runs a stereotypical teen gang before Gloria arrives—it presents the way of life as both restrictive and fragile to diversity and deviancy. The town uncritically turns on Chuck, ostensibly because of the seeming incriminating evidence, but more because he is an outsider and so does not merit charitable consideration. Gloria's presence ignites the discord, but it reveals a greater truth about the community that makes clear that Chuck and Tuttle must leave if they are to find happiness. Suburbia is no sanctuary from delinquency. Rather, delinquency preys upon the xenophobia and conformity already present.

Dragstrip Riot (1958) is an archetypal late-1950s juvenile delinquent/teenager film, laced with light romance, fist fights, hot rods, and drag races.[81] Unlike delinquent films set in the city, where locale is more obviously tied to the criminality of youth as facilitator (drawing on the narrative of urban decline), these movies, more suggestive of suburbia and wealth, demonstrate that there is no escape from the danger. Rick is a blond, all-American teen who has moved from San Francisco, where he spent three months in juvenile detention for fighting (an unjust charge), to somewhere more rural and luxurious in coastal southern California. He lives in a large ranch-style home with his doting but widowed mother and her father-in-law, who thinks that Rick is spoiled and undisciplined. Grandpa thinks that Rick should be working this summer in order to become a

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[80] Ibid., 170–71, 183–92.
[81] *Dragstrip Riot* [aka *Teenage Rumble*], directed by David Bradley *(*American-International, 1958).

responsible man; mom wants him to have fun these last few months before going to college. To this end, he (like his friends) drives an upscale sports convertible and spends his days racing and relaxing on the beach. No, doubt, Rick comes from privilege.

The movie rests on Rick and another boy, Bart, squabbling for the affections of another teenager, Janet. Rick bests Bart in a chickee run, but then is set up in a fight with a motorcycle gang. One of the gang dies and Rick is falsely blamed; because of his prior conviction, all the teens and the general community assume his guilt. He eventually proves his innocence and wins both Janet's affections and his grandfather's respect. What is more suggestive about a movie like *Dragstrip Riot* is that so many of the problems of the city—gangs, violence, death, out-of-control teens—are plausibly present in what is supposed to be more ideal circumstances. The community certainly expects more of their children and quickly enforces its own form of justice by shunning—something more particular to stories in suburban settings—but none of it is incomprehensible. Suburbia may offer luxury and opportunity, but the problems of juvenile delinquency seemingly cannot be eliminated, the challenge to individual and group always present.

Intellectuals frequently impugned the skills and priorities of suburban parents with regards to their children. This was an especially devastating angle of attack, given that a common justification and validation of suburban life was that it provided children with the best of American life. Writing in 1962, Peter Wyden feared that suburbia's insular and materially luxurious environment made life too easy for kids, that they were missing out on more challenging experiences for proper development.[82] Suburbia was "painstakingly designed in the dreams of its residents to *be* bland." Suburbanites desired blandness as a remedy from the "tumult and strife" of the city. They wanted quiet, clean,

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[82] Peter Wyden, *Suburbia's Coddled Kids* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 2.

and new, but this provided their children with a false experience that left them ill-equipped for functioning in the larger world. Suburbia may well be Edenic, but the rest of the world was outside the garden and demanded fewer illusions and protections.[83]

While suburban fathers tended to be hard-working, intelligent, and ambitious, their commitment to their family's material well-being left them absent, meaning that they failed as male role models. A common perception was that mothers were in charge of the home, with fathers serving as helpers. This perceived blurring of gender roles might have dire consequences for the children, especially daughters who saw their mother acting in a "bi-sexual capacity." Sons were simply left adrift.[84] Always quick to deliver a kick to the suburban ego, John Keats concurred. Men were, for the most part, "dependent, childish" and subject to the dreams and demands of their wives, unable to provide proper masculine inspiration. Worse, children came home from school to an empty house, their parents at work to stay afloat and grandparents nowhere near. Left to themselves, save for perhaps a semi-watchful lurking neighbour, these children developed an insecurity that could blossom into delinquency.[85] Others saw the parental dysfunction as resulting in a filiarchy—a world dominated by and organized for children.[86] Suburban delinquency stories frequently explored these ideas of parental delinquency, of the flight from responsibility for children and the social consequences.

The film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) was notable for reframing and popularizing the juvenile delinquency problem away from the urban working class to the

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[83] Ibid., 32–34. Emphasis in original.
[84] Ibid., 20–26.
[85] Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window*, 149–52.
[86] Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 378; Mowrer, "The Family in Suburbia," 157; and Donaldson, *The Suburban Myth*, 15.

more affluent suburbanite.[87] Jim, Judy, and Plato—the three teenage protagonists—all come from material wealth, but all three have emotionally strained or barren relationships with their parents, and this causes their delinquency. Both Jim and Plato live in immense homes. Plato's parents are divorced and he no longer sees his father. His mother regularly travels, and so he is raised by a housekeeper. When the film begins, he has been arrested for killing some puppies, and it is clear that his ethics are confused because of his parents' absence. It is unclear Jim's father's profession, but the family lives in a large seemingly Victorian house that they recently purchased after moving to this unnamed California community. The family's move was predicated on extricating Jim from legal problems after he "messed a kid up" in their previous community, and when Jim is again in trouble with the law, they consider another move.

Jim's first day of school emphasizes the dominance of cliques, and neither he nor Plato are part of the elite crowd. Indeed, Jim's presumption that he be considered their equal brings about a hostile response that leads to a knife fight and, later, a fatal car race. This, in turn, leads to Jim, Judy, and Plato hiding out in an abandoned mansion in the hills, as both a gang of teens and the police hunt for them. Inside, Jim and Judy play at being a married couple, mocking adult concerns and behaviours, but more than anything they search for the peace of mind that the suburban life is supposed to offer yet does not. Reality soon catches up and both the gang and police show up. Amidst violence and gunfire, Plato is, in the final scene, shot dead by the police.

Rebel Without a Cause presents suburban life as materially wealthy, yet emotionally bankrupt and wholly alienated. It is only through fantasy and play acting that any of the youthful characters can find a semblance of security and happiness. But even

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[87] *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray, Warner Bros, 1955.

that is short-lived, for the reality of life here is ritualized violence and enforced roles. What is even more notable is that these are undoubtedly upper middle-class, if not upper-class homes and families. *Rebel* comes close to blaming suburbia for delinquency, but does so only indirectly in depicting the materially successful adults of suburbia as having failed to provide for their children with emotional or physical protection.

Irving Shulman wrote the initial, rejected screenplay for Nicholas Ray's film, then published it as *Children of the Dark* (1956), in which suburbia's kids are especially traumatized despite their material advantages. The inside cover establishes the false assumptions of the suburban ideal:

> A quiet town in the suburbs …
> Some "nice" young people …
> And five days of terror:
>
> Barlow was a small, quiet town in the suburbs, until one fateful day. A home was wantonly wrecked … a car was stolen … a boy was killed … a woman was attacked on a lonely street.
>
> Barlow was caught up in five days of terror—all the work of some "nice" young people out on a spree of cruelty, hate and defiance.[88]

Children of the Dark is set in Barlow, somewhere in the Midwest—"just east of the Mississippi River"—not California, as in *Rebel*. In some respects, it is distinctly suburban. Shulman explains that it is freed of "old family tradition," notably friendly and optimistic, but jealously protective of its residential prerogatives. Yet, Barlow also has an industrial area and distinctive class-based areas of town, including a slum that concerns the city's leaders.[89]

The story starts with a too-rowdy party at the home of a well-to-do teen whose

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[88] Irving Shulman, *Children of the Dark* (New York: Popular Library, 1956).
[89] Ibid., 15–16.

parents are away. This is not the disorder and criminality of urban delinquents. It amounts to excessive drinking and some shattered glass and noise that is quickly stifled by the police. It is, nonetheless, alarming to the city's adults. Yet, Shulman wrote that these kids are not indicative of Barlow's teenage population:

> They were at home, visiting, or sitting quietly without disturbing their neighbors at a movie. Some were at church or kidding around a soda fountain or sitting in booths and just talking, behaving normally, doing the best they could to live and let live in an uneasy world. They too knew the terrors of youth; they were acquainted with the nightmares, so vivid that they were realities. And this was the miracle: they survived without delinquent blemish. But there was a minority, a strident minority, that wasn't this lucky or strong.[90]

Steve Stark is a newcomer to Barlow and, quite naturally, seeks to fit in. Unlike Jim Stark's parents in *Rebel,* who urge him to fit in with his peers, the expectations of Steve's parents serve as a counter force to this goal. They are concerned about his casual dress and urge him to wear suits. Steve responds in a manner that hit upon two themes of suburbia, as expressed by critics. One is conformity. Steve argues that just as his father dresses to fit in with others at his workplace, he too has to dress like others at school. "Why should I be different?" he asks, both accusingly and rhetorically. His mother concedes that, yes, he should want to be like his peers, but still laments that teen fashion is a race to the bottom. Steve launches a second attack of the critics, that of the impermanence of their residence. How could he make friends when the family's tenure is subject to the interests of his father's employer, "digging me up every time I get set?" His father counters that their most recent move was part of a promotion, one that has resulted in this better home, more comfortable and spacious. He asks, "Doesn't it help you if this

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[90] Ibid., 18–20.

is the best neighborhood we've ever lived in?" Steve's mother confirms the achievement: "This is a better community." Steve's rebuttal made clear that he wants something else: "For how long? Until Dad gets promoted again?" Steve leaves and goes to a bar.[91]

Richard "Plato" Crawford, another teenager from Barlow, is small, with overly large eyes hidden behind glasses. He is quite intelligent, but intentionally flunks exams so as to not seem better than his classmates. "If you're not like them," he tells Steve, "they don't like you." Plato lives in the wealthy section of Barlow, where he is raised predominantly by the family housekeeper. His parents are divorced and contact with his father is limited to a monthly support cheque. The lack of communication burns at him and feeds his sense of abandonment. Within the time frame of the novel, he is also without a mother, who is on an extended shopping excursion in Chicago. These indulgences (such trips do her "worlds of good") are not unusual and feed his alienation. He understands, not incorrectly, that his parents think of themselves first and absolve themselves of any responsibility to their boy as long as he is housed in luxury.[92]

Plato's mental anguish manifests itself in random and secret violence. He believes that he has found in Steve a friend and substitute father, but when Steve and Judy, another teen at their high school, become a couple, he feels rejected once again. Walking home alone, distraught and suicidal, he is approached by a woman looking for directions. Plato snaps and shoots her in the head with his zip gun—a weapon better associated with urban youth gangs—and, immediately elated and empowered, flees into the night. It is the third shocking occurrence—the raucous party, a chickee race that led to a boy's death, and now this murder—in a short span of time, and it sends Barlow into a state of panic.

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[91] Ibid., 58–60, 73–85.
[92] Ibid., 8, 34–35, 97–106.

Plato, however, has no regrets, justifying her death by his perception that his victim had behaved selfishly. He also blames his actions on both his mother and Judy—if they had only treated him better, none of this would have happened. All women, he thinks, are discourteous.[93]

At the novel's climax, Steve and Judy and the police independently conclude that Plato is the woman's killer. As police surround his home, Plato holds Steve and Judy hostage. He rages against Judy and his mother and exchanges gunfire with the police. Neighbours gather, commenting on how impossible this all seems—Plato seems such a nice and quiet boy and this a neighbourhood of such high quality![94] Steve and Judy escape from the house and Steve lobbies the police to cease fire. Plato may be a killer, he says, but he was made one by adults who know nothing about kids. The police allow Steve to re-enter the house to negotiate with Plato, but when the latter opens fire on the neighbourhood once more, he is shot and killed by a sniper. Two confused women, neighbours, survey the scene, so contrary to what Barlow is supposed to represent:

> "I don't understand," the woman spoke in a hushed and anxious voice to her neighbor, who now stared at the burning house. "Children today have everything. And look what happens."
>
> "You hope and pray for children," her neighbor wept a little. "Hope and pray to God for children and then when you have them what happens? Tell me," she tugged at her good neighbor's sleeve, "what happens?"[95]

Certainly, these neighbours think, the blame does not lie with the parents. Yet, the novel wonders, how many more Platos were out there in suburbia?

High School Caesar (1960) revisits *Rebel Without a Cause* and considers the

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[93] Ibid., 147–53, 172–74.
[94] Ibid., 196–209.
[95] Irving Shulman, *Children of the Dark* (New York: Popular Library, 1956), 220.

story from the perspective of Plato, even while pumping him up with some false confidence.[96] Matt Stevens is a high school senior in a wealthy suburb where he lives in a mansion filled with servants. His parents are normally travelling abroad. This absence of love and feelings of abandonment have warped Matt's sensibilities. To the adults of his high school, he is a charismatic and an upstanding student. His fellow students know that he is actually the leather-jacketed leader of a youth gang that engages in protection schemes. The film details Matt's corruption and fall from power. After forcing his way into a road race with some other teens, then losing the race, he and another boy, Cricket, stalk the winner, Kelly, then accidentally cause his death. Despite suspicions, no one can prove that Matt is responsible. Inevitably, given his lack of ethics, Matt betrays Cricket, who in turn tells the teens how Kelly really died. After Matt loses a fist fight with Kelly's friend Bob, a group of teens silently judge him guilty. His power broken, Matt is left sobbing, calling for his absent father as police sirens approach. Despite the scenes of great wealth and the surface evidence that Matt is a well-adjusted teenager—he possesses all the talents of a future leader of society—the truth is that his parents' failures have created a monster who abuses his position to cause misery to those around him. There is an indictment in this film of the reliance on surfaces in suburbia, for they mask real malevolence and danger. Material wealth and modern gadgets, the markers of success, alone cannot produce happiness, not when parents are delinquent.

Some comment should also be made that even though Matt is unambiguously corrupt, perhaps irredeemable, the vast majority of the teens in the movie, who come from the same community, are upstanding citizens. When they judge him guilty and shun him, they assert their own virtue. Suburbia itself cannot be blamed for Matt's criminality,

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[96] *High School Caesar*, directed by O'Dale Ireland (Filmgroup, 1960).

but neither does it ensure well-intentioned children and a safe environment. What the suburban delinquency texts discussed (with the exception of Hulburd's *H is for Heroin*) all rest upon is a liberal belief in the superiority of individual over environment. Just as *Blackboard Jungle* and *Teen-Age Jungle* put forth the idea of human effort triumphing over an environment of predatory cynicism, these suburban stories of parental failure argue that an environment of material comfort did not by its very nature generate a superior morality. When liberal intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Reinhold Niebuhr argued for a conception of human imperfectability and of moral struggle, the authors of suburban delinquency stories picked up that baton to demonstrate that as long as suburbia was filled with human beings, it could never be a utopia.

In an era of such physical unsettlement—new subdivisions emerging from former farmland, urban neighbourhoods razed and replaced with glass and steel and concrete towers; whites departing the city, blacks and Hispanics relocating to urban spaces—it is understandable that interpretations of what this meant for the nation—its politics, its economy, its values, its self-conception, and especially its future—would also be unsettled. Because these discussions, whether in academic journals, mass-market magazines, or popular fiction and film, drifted into or embraced the moral dimension of these choices, the act of migration was portrayed as one of flight or escape. Migrants fled a wicked city for a better life. They fled from their social responsibilities in favour of private indulgence. They fled their roles as parents. They fled their good sense. But however great the effort to flee, vice was never far behind. Public intellectuals and advocates who took up the case—Jacobs and Whyte, Henderson and *Redbook*, Keats and Riesman, to name a few—pursued the question with a clarity of purpose and a vision of a better life, whether it be in the city or its bedroom communities. The novelists and

moviemakers, operating on a more personal level, brought to the conversation much more ambivalence. It was, these fictional portrayals accepted, a moral question, but offered less certainly as to where moral responsibility rested. It was, they showed, a question from which there was no escape.

CHAPTER 7
The Mad Circus: Representations of Masculinity in Crisis

The decade's most iconic juvenile delinquent movie, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) was, among other things, an expression of masculinity in crisis or transition in postwar America.[1] While all three main characters—Jim, Judy, and Plato—suffer from identity crises of varying types due to parental failure, the narrative mostly focuses on Jim Stark's struggle to become an individual and a man. When the film begins, Jim is at a police station, arrested for public drunkenness. His family has recently moved to this new town to protect him after he, by his own admission, "messed a kid up" because the boy called him a chicken (that is, questioned his character). When Jim's parents arrive, it is apparent that they are the true source of his problems. Despite wishing that they could keep this matter private, Jim's parents cannot help but snipe at each other in public. He looks at his hectoring mother and mewling father then asks a police detective, "How can a guy ever grow up in a circus like that?" It is, in fact, the central question.

On the first day of school, Jim's efforts to fit in with the other kids fail, and he is drawn into a knife fight with a boy named Buzz. Jim is reluctant to fight, but knows that his standing with his new peers depends on it. He wins the duel, and under most circumstances this should have settled the question of his character, but instead the two agree to continue the fight—the examination, Buzz calls it—with a chickee run (a driving test of courage) that evening. The question of what it takes to be a man constantly insists itself upon Jim. He returns home and calls out, "Mom?" His dad emerges wearing a frilly apron and asks, "You thought I was mom?" Jim is obliged to say yes. Dad explains that he is taking care of supper because mom feels unwell. Jim has no other male role model

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[1] *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray (Warner Bros., 1955).

to turn to, and so he asks the person in the apron how to be an honourable man. It is no surprise that dad cannot provide a direct answer to Jim's question. Instead, sounding anything but like a decisive man, dad suggests making a list of pros and cons, seeking outside opinions and options, all to avoid self-reliance and responsibility. Dad continues babbling on, oblivious that Jim has sped off into the night. The scene suggests that the inside of the Stark home is a mess of gender confusion.

Away from the ambiguity of the home, Jim and Buzz share a moment alone together before they test their mettle—a car race toward the cliff's edge, where the first to bail out is proven the coward. They look to the rocks and sea far below and Buzz says, "That's the edge. That's the end," as if to punctuate the existential nature of this test. They share a cigarette and Buzz concedes, "I like you." Jim asks why they have to go through with the chickee run, and Buzz replies, "You gotta do something!" This could mean a fight against boredom or finding a means to prove one's worth as a man, or both. Regardless, the stakes are set absurdly high, as miscalculation or refusal to concede means death. How did growing up in material comfort come to this? That Jim, Buzz, and the watching crowd of teens believe that the whole scenario makes sense underscores the larger insanity. To confirm this, Jim bails out first—and loses the contest of bravery—but Buzz' jacket gets caught on the door handle and he goes over the edge.

At home, Jim is faced with a new crisis of character—how does he make right what just happened? He explains to his parents that this was all a matter of honour, that his reputation at school would have been permanently stained if he had not accepted the challenge. His father rambles on, trying to agree with and support his son until Jim snaps, "You're not listening to me! You're involved in this just like I am." Dad is reluctant to offer advice, but finally says that one cannot be idealistic all the time, that knowing he

was wrong should be sufficient punishment. Jim replies that everyone involved must own up to their responsibility in Buzz' death. He pleads with his father to stand up for him as he seeks to atone, but dad just buries his head in his hands. Jim leaves and goes to the police station, but no one there is willing to speak to him, confirming that the adult world will not let him take responsibility for his actions.

In the film's final act, Jim, Judy, and Plato hide away in an abandoned mansion and build a fantasy adult life, but reality besets the three as both a gang of teens and the police arrive. After Plato is shot dead by the police, Jim's father tries to comfort his son, telling Jim he did "everything a man could" for Plato. Being a man can also mean failing. Just as at the start of the movie, Jim is on the ground. He clutches at his dad's legs. "Help me," he begs. This time he gets what he needs. His father responds, "You can depend on me, trust me. Whatever comes, we'll fix it together. I swear to you. Stand up. I'll stand up with you. I'll try to be as strong as you want me to be." At last, Jim might become a man if his father does, too.

Rebel Without a Cause, saturated in visual cues and verbal dilemmas, captures many facets of the debate over masculinity in the 1950s. Could one be conciliatory and be a man? Did domesticity necessarily compromise masculinity? How could a masculinity rooted in independence and action express itself in a society that increasingly defined itself in groups and bureaucracy? In a society of material luxury, were traditional definitions of manhood rooted in struggle still operative? Did the individual even exist in any meaningful sense, and, if so, what did gender even mean if men or women could seize any traits as their own? How could a guy ever grow up in a circus like that?

This chapter considers the question of masculinity as expressed by both postwar intellectuals and the juvenile delinquent genre in film and print. The interest here is not to

assess the validity of these critiques—that is, whether gender roles were converging or even reversing, whether changes in the economy and society were compromising individuality, whether masculinity was in crisis—but to consider two sets of contemporary expression of these questions. One consists of purposeful critiques by academic and popular intellectuals of the period such as C. Wright Mills, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., William H. Whyte, Jr., and Philip Wylie, who saw disturbing changes in American society that had reduced the status of men. The other is made up of films and novels from the juvenile delinquent genre that drew from the same kinds of arguments and perceptions for their narratives. There was considerable overlap in the kinds of assumptions, representations, and analyses of postwar masculinity, but, perhaps surprisingly given their reputation for being formulaic, the fictional accounts presented much more fluidity and possibility when it came to gender. Where the intellectual works clustered around questions of individuality, labour, insecurity, and the proper roles of men and women, fictional works considered possibilities that masculinity could be identifiably expressed amidst this social change. Between the two contexts, it is evident that this discourse of masculinity, in change or in crisis, was widely disseminated in the decade. This is not to suggest that these arguments found agreeable audiences—as James Gilbert cautioned, despite the tooth-gnashing of critics, far more men and women accepted these new sets of roles and relationships, suggesting a wider acceptable spectrum of masculinity and femininity than their fretting critics—but that they achieved greater elaboration and circulation in media than normally considered.[2]

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[2] James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5–8, 219–21.

A note must be made on the use of some juvenile delinquent texts for the purpose of exploring the question of masculinity. Many delinquency novels and films emphasized female delinquency, but they will be used here to explore masculinity issues rather than femininity. This is not to dismiss the issue of a

In the immediate postwar period, America began to embrace its new role as preeminent global player in terms of trade, diplomacy, and military, yet, the inclinations of the American population generally turned inward. After some fifteen years of extreme insecurity, the mood of the populace as a whole leaned to stability and domesticity. At the war's end, women who had supplied valuable labour to the war effort were encouraged to return to the home, nominally to assist in the psychological readjustment of men, who were perceived as requiring a reassertion of gendered labour norms. Yet, this was no effort at complete restoration of pre-war or even pre-Depression gender roles. A revised conception of masculine domestication, as both fathers and husbands, was also seen as easing their adjustment. That is, a commitment to domestication and emphasis on the family was supposed to benefit men, women, families, and nation alike.[3]

Sociologists of the period emphasized that postwar life, defined by affluence and consumption, demanded a different kind of family, one that jettisoned older kin structures of extended families in favour of the contained nuclear model, idealized as white, middle-class, and suburban. The social scientific expert gained new influence as interpreter and adviser, and promoted a more involved form of fatherhood. Fathers were advised to develop close relationships with their children from infancy so as to develop a bond that

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more fluid conception of femininity or to replicate the decade's own privileging of the masculine at the expense of the feminine. There certainly is a good argument to be made that the delinquency genre offered representations and possibilities for young women that ran counter to the dominant and strict boundaries of femininity in the 1950s. However, the aims of this chapter and dissertation in general are to explore how intellectual writing and popular cultural texts overlapped, how they may have unconsciously engaged in a larger conversation, and the concern over masculinity was a topic of much greater concern. It is no surprise that male intellectuals were more anxious over the fate of their own sex and gender. Where women and femininity were discussed in such essays, it was largely as to how they affected men (usually negatively). So, the use of female delinquency fiction and film here to explore masculinity is done not to naturalize male privilege and objectify the feminine for masculinity's sake, but as a way of better engaging with the intellectual and cultural milieu of the period.

[3] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 162–63; and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 5, 9, 33.

would only strengthen over the course of the child's life. This was part of a call for a more democratic model of fatherhood, replacing the traditional authoritarian version. Much of this reconsideration could be traced to the recent war against fascism and the current Cold War against Communism. Psychologists argued that authoritarian parenting produced potential deviants—criminals, homosexuals, or Communists, all of whom were threats to democracy. Parents were instructed to raise their children in ways that promoted self-reliance, democratic values, tolerance, and heterosexuality.[4]

The husband's role also evolved. In 1954, *Life* ran a short piece called "The New American Domesticated Male" that listed the changed norms for men—marrying younger and having kids immediately, buying a home rather than renting an apartment, and participating with his wife in purchasing household furniture and appliances. Due to the high cost of hiring out, the husband became a dishwasher, a cook, a repairman and builder, and a minder of children. A series of cartoons illustrated these changes, with depictions of men building a barbeque pit, entertaining business associates in his home, enjoying modern luxuries, looking after the kids when his wife was out, mowing the lawn, shopping with his wife, and participating in PTA meetings.[5]

This new emphasis on husbands in the home had consequences outside the home, too. Men risked career promotion if they chose bachelorhood or a childless marriage. Bachelors were regarded as immature, even disturbed. This jaundiced view of

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[4] Peter N. Stearns, *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 41, 58; Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 88–89; and Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 8, 208–13. Inherent in this perspective was a class bias toward a middle-class ethos. Blue-collar fathers might be able to provide materially, but unless they adopted a middle-class mindset, they were potentially damaging their children. This model encouraged greater freedom and expression by children, something that required active participation from parents, necessarily took a middle-class level of affluence and security for granted.

[5] "The New American Domesticated Male," *Life* 36, no. 1 (4 January 1954): 42–45.

bachelorhood was, in part, connected to the Red Scare, which connected homosexuality to Communism, both sinister and covert existential threats to American life. Any man unwilling to aver his heterosexuality through marriage and fatherhood raised worrying possibilities. The model of participatory fatherhood was thus connected to a moral democratic ideal and the good of the community and nation. Violation engendered suspicion of a man's sexuality, ideology, loyalty, identity, and maturity.[6]

Yet, we should exercise some caution in appreciating the extent of these developments. There was a more equitable division of household chores compared to previous generations, but even within the home a separate-spheres stance reigned. Despite the expectations of mutual decision making, one study found that most women normally deferred to their husbands, particularly on money issues. In practice, women held authority only on smaller, daily matters. And despite a mostly unacknowledged reliance on female labour for the household income, the man still represented the outside world and spent most of his waking hours away from home.[7] Wives' perceptions that their husbands were not truly living up to their share of household chores were significant sources of tension within middle-class homes. There was also the suggestion that the suburban ideal, with its emphasis on greater standards of material luxury, forced fathers

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[6] Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 32–33; May, *Homeward Bound*, 132; Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and the Bomb," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 166; and Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (New York: Berg, 2001), 67–68.

[7] Postwar prosperity was somewhat of a historical fluke, a combination of private war savings and an industrialized nation virtually alone in being undamaged by the war. Even with this, one third of white households could not survive on a single income, and the poverty rate of two-parent black families was 50%. Furthermore, the social fetish for early and fecund marriages increased a need for labour that could only be satisfied by married women. In other words, the great postwar economic expansion depended on women in the labour force, so much so that, by 1956, 70% of middle-class families were dual income. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 28–30, 161; and Loren Baritz, *The Good Life: The Meaning of Success for the American Middle Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 192.

to spend longer hours at work, leaving mothers to play both roles in the house.[8]

Despite the challenges and frustrations, and despite the concerns of the critics to whom this chapter now turns, it can never be forgotten that most young, white, middle-class men willingly embraced these new conceptions of manhood and domesticated themselves, and that this was a central facet for those who aspired to middle-class life. Surveys found that men derived more satisfaction from providing for their families than they did from their careers, displacing older forms of male identity founded on self-discipline, productive power, and delayed gratification.[9] That concession was what united the diverse perspectives of those intellectuals who proclaimed a crisis of masculinity.

One prominent avenue of analysis emphasized the sinister power of women. This line of argument rested on the idea that gender roles had not only converged, but had, in fact, switched places. Women had achieved unhealthy and abnormal influence in both the private and public spheres, rendering men supplicants. The critics who embraced this stance wrote in angry streams, alternately bitter at women for upsetting the social balance, and furious at men for letting it happen. The seminal text of these angry men was Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* (1942). Written at a furious pace—Wylie claimed it was done in under two months—the book was nothing less than a totalizing jeremiad against modern life, whose ills he traced back, in no small part, to the malignant influence of women. Consumerism, bureaucracy, political apathy, and conformity—all traits associated with femininity—now trumped time-honoured masculine qualities of individuality, self-reliance, genius, and responsibility. It was not just these gendered

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[8] Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 140–41, 144; Weiss, *To Have and To Hold*, 40–42, 97, 99, 112; Scott Donaldson, *The Suburban Myth* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 14–15; and Sloan Wilson, "Just a Big Rat Race?" *Life* 47, no. 26 (28 December 1959): 119.

[9] Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 6.

characteristics were redefining America, but that women were enslaving men, body and soul, by appealing to male sentiment to motherhood. He called this threat Momism.[10]

Wylie's language, florid and splenetic, was doubtless a key to his success, offering voice to the frustrated. For example, the predatory character of the American woman was described thusly:

> She is a middle-aged puffin with an eye like a hawk that has just seen a rabbit twitch far below. She is about twenty-five pounds overweight, with no sprint, but sharp heels and a hard backhand which she does not regard as a foul but a womanly defense.

In the phrase that the book was best known for, Wylie chastised others for lacking the courage to say what was so obvious: "Gentlemen, mom is a jerk." In a footnote to the 1954 edition of *Generation of Vipers*, Wylie added to this unsubtle description. Mom was a "human calamity," a "cheap-holy compensation for our degradation of woman," and "irresponsible and unreasoning."[11]

Women used their power to take over organizations because, Wylie said, men, as individualists, naturally feared and were intimidated by the group. This influence was used maliciously, sacrificing the integrity of men everywhere for female self-interest. Wylie likened Mom to Hitler and to Joseph Goebbels because of her talent for "mass-stamping … the public psyche" and her "matriarchal sentimentality, goo, slop, hidden cruelty, and the foreshadow of national death." Mom was determined to bring down the American republic and install her "personal feudalism" of cheap sentimentalism.[12] To Wylie, this was slavery, for controlling the spirit of another necessarily meant controlling

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[10] Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, rev. ed. (1955; reprint, New York: Cardinal, 1965), vii; K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 126–28, 132–34; and Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 68–72.
[11] Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, 191, 188, 188n.
[12] Ibid., 192–95, 204.

their body. The boy who believed he was proving his manhood by defending his mother and challenging his father was enslaving himself and losing any claim to being a true man. This was the problem: men, in a misguided attempt to prove themselves worthy of respect by defending womanhood were ceding their independence to a succubus:

> I give you mom. I give you the destroying mother. I give you her justice—from which we have never removed the eye bandage. I give you the angel—and point to the sword in her hand. I give you death—the hundred million deaths that are muttered under Yggdrasill's ash. I give you Medusa and Stheno and Euryale. I give you the harpies and the witches, and the Fates. I give you the woman in pants, and the new religion: she-popery. I give you Pandora. I give you Proserpine, the Queen of Hell. The five-and-ten-cent-store Lilith, the mother of Cain, the black widow who is poisonous and eats her mate, and I designate at the bottom of your program the grand finale of all the soap operas: the mother of America's Cinderella.[13]

Yet, Wylie claimed that he was not hostile to women or motherhood, only that in America the status of women had been forcibly distorted into something like a religious cult. American women were Cinderellas looking for "a good-looking man with dough" to rescue them from domestic labour. Reaching the status of Mom, that warm and familiar personality who caused men to behave irrationally, allowed her to spend the day reading magazines, gossiping with other Moms, and going to the movies. She leached off the labour of her husband, who toiled to pay for household appliances that negated much of her social usefulness. The relationship was nothing less than parasitical.[14]

Historian Rebecca Jo Plant has offered much-needed context to Wylie's diatribe, demonstrating that his argument was more than simple misogyny. Plant explained that Wylie inserted himself into an argument concerning the changing conception of

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[13] Ibid., 198, 204–05.
[14] Ibid., 46, 185–86, 189, 192.

motherhood, from one of Victorian sentimentality and moralism to a more utilitarian, modernist model. The Victorian model set as its ideal the mother who was sacrificing and a moral teacher. This assigned special status to mothers, one justifying elevation and protection. Modern America had moved past this. The society in which Wylie lived acknowledged female sexuality, granted women the vote, and considered them part of the consumer market. If women wanted to be in the arena of public life, they had to surrender their special status. This was the contradiction that informed Wylie's venom. He attacked those women who were publicly active, who claimed civic mindedness, yet, in Wylie's view, did so for selfish reasons. The positions they espoused were of secondary importance compared to their intentions and methods, for they were intruding in men's domain without ceding privilege. Wylie also snickered at the idea that mothers were morally superior and raised the moral character of the nation. Instead, he saw their tastes as horrendous and debasing the nation. In defining women by their cultural habits—radio soap operas, movie magazines—he believed that he was presenting persuasive evidence that Mom was the lowbrow. In this, one can see the conservative mass cultural critique, particularly that of Bernard Iddings Bell, who bemoaned the consequences of exalting the common man. In their pursuit of profit, the cultural manufacturers had engaged in a race to the bottom. Plant erroneously placed Wylie's mass cultural critique within the same realm as the Frankfurt School Marxists, but he was quite clearly a conservative.[15]

Wylie was not without his allies. The psychologist Erik Erikson, for example, argued in *Childhood and Society* (1950) that Momism was linked to "bossism," a type of bureaucratic paternalism that infantilized employees. The danger to men and the nation,

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[15] Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 19–54.

Erikson declared, was clear: "Momism in alliance with the autocratic rigour of a new continent, and bossism with the autocracy of the machine." Historian K.A. Cuordileone noticed a similarity between Wylie's description of women and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s of Communists, that each manipulated the individual man through punishment, reward, misdirection, and false promise to create a cult of oblivious slaves. The reliably cantankerous Dwight Macdonald approvingly cited Wylie as he indicted Americans' stunted maturity, suggesting that Peter Pan was a more accurate symbol for the nation. Journalist Richard Gehman, writing in an issue of *Cosmopolitan*, began his piece by asking, "Men, isn't it time we did something about ourselves?" After acknowledging Wylie as an "amiable wasp" who had been right all along, Gehman detailed the worrying influence of women, notably in the world of fashion. Women were picking out men's clothes, leading to a feminine atrocity of bright colours, corsets, scented soaps, and sun lamps. Gehman quoted an unnamed anthropologist who said, "The U.S. male seems to draw ever within himself. He is becoming a more passive, even irresponsible, figure."[16]

The historian and journalist J. Robert Moskin also embraced Wylie's depiction of the oppressed male at the hands of wife and mother. Writing in *Look* in 1958, he declared that from birth to death the American male was defined by subservience to women. Nurses, teachers, and his mother controlled a boy's every move. Within the household, the wife had usurped her husband, setting the tone for family consumption and claiming authority over his income. Female dominance further compromised the man's role once he became a father. If a man worked hard to provide for his family, he might be accused of abandoning his son emotionally. Perhaps he confused his son by not handling the same

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[16] Erikson quoted in Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 72; Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, 132–34; Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," *Diogenes* 3 (Summer 1953): 10; and Richard Gehman, "Toupees, Girdles, and Sun Lamps," *Cosmopolitan* 142 (May 1957): 38–43.

domestic chores as the mother. Or, far more worrying, maybe he was the "housework-participating father" who became a male mother. Within the workplace, the growing number of female co-workers put men in active competition with women. Worse, maybe he was her subordinate. And if he had a secretary, she played the same domineering role as his wife did at home. And through it all, Moskin lamented, hardly anyone was standing up and urging men to say, "Enough."[17]

An even greater popularizer of the idea of the predatory female and her male victim was Hugh Hefner via his magazine *Playboy*. Yet, Hefner did not reject consumption in the way that Wylie did. Hefner's ambition was to promote an idea of the good life that was both without restrictions and distinctly male-centric. Hefner pursued a distinct course that allowed a redefinition of masculinity that demanded distinct gender roles yet allowed men to conceive of themselves as consumers, a characteristic normally reserved for women. To do so, *Playboy* relied on a conception of women as conniving domesticators who sapped men's healthy hedonistic instincts. Hefner's goal was to promote the idea of a limitless good life, where consumer goods and sexual partners should be readily as part of a life of male-centred fun. Hefner offered to men, including those married and in the suburbs, the life of a hedonistic, urban bachelor and sophisticated consumer.[18] *Playboy*'s success, according to Elizabeth Fraterrigo, was due

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[17] J. Robert Moskin, "Why Do Women Dominate Him?," in *The Decline of the American Male*, ed. Editors of *Look* (New York: Random House, 1958), 4–9, 14–16, 24.

[18] Hefner benefited from ideological spadework conducted by *Esquire* magazine since the 1930s. Historian Kenon Breazeale demonstrated how *Esquire* cultivated the male consumer by disparaging women's consumption vis-à-vis that of men. During the Great Depression, as corporate America struggled to revive itself, new markets and ways of promotion were pursued. *Esquire* blended the woman's magazine format (personal, consumer-minded) with more manly journalism in a way that both exploited and denied the feminine quality of indulgent consumption. To do this, consumption was treated as an admirable trait, a skill, but one normally degraded by the wretched tastes of women, who were drawn to surface qualities. Men had to rescue consumption by making intelligent choices based on substance. To reconstruct consumption and production as masculine traits, femininity had to be tweaked, to qualify its consumptive capacities as inferior to not just male production, but also to male consumption. Women, thus, served as

to "its simultaneous existence at the margins and at the center of postwar society." To critics, *Playboy* discouraged civic-mindedness and possibly encouraged consumer anxiety, but Hefner said consumption was the sensible reward for hard work.[19]

Playboy guided readers to the female domain of consumptive pleasure without compromising masculinity. The photographs of nude women assured readers that this was unmistakably a heterosexual male domain, thus facilitating the inclusion of advertisements and essays on design, fashion, and furniture. On all fronts, *Playboy* sought to reassure and flatter its readers even as it pushed them to a lifestyle of consumption. Entwined in this effort, Hefner promoted clear gender distinctions, claiming that the blurring of gender roles was producing unhappiness. Co-existing with the magazine's depiction of women as sexual creatures meant for men's pleasure, *Playboy* treated women as gold diggers constantly plotting to trap men, to neuter them via domesticity. It only made sense to remain a bachelor, for it offered freedom, pleasure, variety. The crisis of masculinity was more a crisis of femininity, of women exercising an unnatural dominance. What *Playboy* presented was an alternative model of male sexuality that also

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foils to prove the superiority of male taste. Kenon Breazeale, "In Spite of Women: Esquire Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer," *Signs* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 1–10.

Historian Tom Pendergast saw the same effort at work, but argued that embracing a consumption-friendly masculinity was the reader's choice, not something imposed by culture industry producers, and one that occurred at differing paces amongst various demographic groups. In the first half of the twentieth century, as more men worked in bureaucratic environments and lived in equally impersonal cities, they sought out new ways of conceiving of themselves as men. Questions of personality, sexuality, self-realization, and appearance were all relevant in this new mode of work and leisure. *Esquire*'s success inspired the efforts of working-class men's magazines *True* and *Argosy*. Instead of middlebrow stories and urbane fashion, they ran tales of adventure beside ads for rifles and hunting jackets. Where *Esquire* conceived of its readers in terms of style and image, *True* connected consumption to productive sports like hunting and fishing. These magazines presented a world where traditional, working-class masculinity was not at all inconsistent with shopping for pleasure and presentation. These pre-*Playboy* magazines did not bemoan gender-role confusion, but asserted a confident masculinity. Recreation of masculinity was a promise of even more satisfaction, not dread and confusion. Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900–1950* (Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 2–3, 8, 13, 206–08, 225, 227, 235, 238, 266.

[19] Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4, 9.

sought to reassert strict gender roles.[20]

In the *Playboy* worldview, the chief weapon employed by women was "togetherness." The term came into popular usage in 1954, coined by the editors of *McCall's* magazine to express a complementary model of gender and family. It suggested that the family was the core social unit—implicit in this was the presence of children—and husband/father and wife/mother had mutually supportive responsibilities to every family member, including emotional support. Personal identity was conceived as an extension of their family, substituting personal ambition in favour of group security. Historian Marty Jezer summed up the concept: "[T]ogetherness neatly bridged what was real with what was missing. It represented a concern with material comforts, affluence, security, familial well-being."[21]

In practice, togetherness set a high bar of expectations, for familial duties, career requirements, and community obligations were plentiful enough that meeting them all often kept couples run ragged. That so much was done for the sake of the family (i.e., the children) could mean that husband and wife had little time for each other, placing strains on the marriage. Furthermore, implicit in the concept of togetherness was that the husband was expected to make the greatest alteration of behaviour, to domesticate himself—to place himself in his wife's domain—for the benefit of others. Yet he was also expected to provide for the family, putting in long hours at work then come home and still be available for family activities. Critics of the concept saw husbands compromised as both individuals and men. Hostility to togetherness found common cause with the Momism critique by treating domesticated masculinity, less self-interested and

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[20] Ibid., 11, 32–33; Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 4–5; and Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 77.
[21] Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 66–67; Weiss, *To Have and To Hold*, 116–18; and Marty Jezer, *The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945–1960* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 223.

less independent, as benefiting women, not men.

A number of writers in the postwar period saw a connection between labour and changes in standards of masculinity. The American workplace was growing increasingly bureaucratized and reliant on skills related to service rather than production. Demonstrations of loyalty and dependence and negotiating the structures of power were seen, especially by critics, as the essence of modern work. The white-collar job seemingly confirmed David Riesman's assertion that the other-directed persona, attentive to buying and selling personality itself, was the essence of postwar America. If upward mobility, security, and material comfort made such work attractive, critics saw it as evidence of a fundamental feminization of men.[22]

Sociologist C. Wright Mills was one of the first prominent postwar critics to assert the profound effect of widespread bureaucratic structures and methods on both labour and the national character. That Mills regarded labour as a male domain necessarily meant that he saw this shift as affecting conceptions of masculinity. American growth in the nineteenth century, he claimed, was built on masculine traits of discipline, initiative, and delayed gratification. The business sphere at mid-century, however, was one driven by adherence to the group and passivity, each considered feminine qualities.

The white-collar worker, he argued, was a fragmented creature, objectified before the forces that abstracted him. Lacking independence or awareness, he posed no threat to this sweeping power. His existence at work was marked by battles against customers and superiors alike, all destined to be lost with performed grace and patience. Bureaucracies had seized subjectivity from human beings and reduced them to "interchangeable

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[22] Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 35, 40; Baritz, *The Good Life*, 210; Andrea Carosso, *Cold War Narratives: American Culture in the 1950* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 40, 120–21; and May, *Homeward Bound*, 85–86.

parts."[23] Within this structure of embedded subservience, the worker answered to greater numbers of ever more distant managers whose own identities were inseparable from the structure. The dominance of abstract systems encouraged bloodless decision making in ways that human(e) relationships would never allow. In this economy of remotely managed personalities, the employee became alienated from his own personality.[24]

What this new labour structure did to men was eradicate the entrepreneurial impulse in favour of obedience, appearance, and personality. That is, men were judged as if they were women. That men worked side by side with women further compromised their worth as men, both by the feminized group nature of the work and their equal status as labourers. This was social descent—alienation, abstraction, and interchangeability—via fundamental structural shifts in American economy and society. It was a force beyond human control that left the American worker utterly emasculated.[25]

Writing later in the decade, sociologist William H. Whyte introduced the concept and term for which the postwar white-collar worker came to be known: the organization man. Where Mills' office worker was a misshapen creature, mutated by powerful and remote forces, Whyte's organization man was neutered by choice, a strategy of accommodation and ambition. The organization man adhered to a code that Whyte labelled the social ethic, which could also be called a bureaucratic or corporate ethic. It represented a pledge of hyper-loyalty to the company. Despite being ardently and

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[23] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), ix–xvii.
[24] Mills, *White Collar*, 73–77, 110, 184.
[25] Journalist Vance Packard carried Mills' critique of fragmentation into the late 1950s. In *The Status Seekers* (1958), Packard asserted that life within a corporation was dominated by stratification, with expectations that employees identify with, and behave according to their rank. Bureaucratization, gender equality within the workplace, and subservience to so-called efficiency experts made labour an isolating, mystifying, and unsatisfying experience. The effect was to sever labour from any sense of self-respect. Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers* (1958; reprint, New York: Pocket Books, 1962), 6–7, 29, 31, 261–63.

dogmatically anti-collectivist (i.e., anti-Communist), the organization man willingly, if obliviously, subscribed to collectivization within the workplace, faithfully walking the company line. The ethic was a deliberate form of social engineering consisting of three chief premises: the group was the source of creativity; belonging to the group was the chief aim of the individual; and science could be employed to perfect the previous two points. The social ethic acknowledged the individual as the basic unit of society, but asserted that living as an individual was existential meaninglessness. It was only by joining others and sublimating himself to that group could the employee transcend his destructive ego. Conflict between individual and society could be overcome by a sincere and persistent quest for consensus, to "create an equilibrium in which society's needs and the needs of the individual are one and the same." It was, Whyte said, a utopian faith that required a narrow and immediate view of society to seem plausible.[26]

The practical component of the social ethic was what Whyte termed scientism, a flawed faith that the techniques of natural scientists could be applied to improve human behaviour. The ever-more intricate bureaucratic approaches of business and other organizations came to rely on social engineers who assured managers that the work environment could be manipulated and modified to achieve perfect harmony. Even should this state be achievable, Whyte said, it ignored the greater moral question of whether such harmony was desirable. Social science opposed conflict because it violated the aim of harmony, but progress and creativity depended upon conflict, of the clash between competing ideas and perspectives. Furthermore, what would this equilibrium even look like? What compromises must be made to achieve it? The danger was not

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[26] William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 3–8; and Nicolas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 229–34.

whether this utopia could ever exist, but that the very effort was destructive of the creative spirit inherent in liberal capitalism.[27]

Two related premises informed this deference to the group. One was the misguided belief that scientism, in fact, had proven the superiority of the group, that acquiescence was an achievement in and of itself; the other was that deference was an ethical act. The latter point was justified as part of a democratic crusade against forced collectivization, where voluntary sublimation of the ego could dispatch workplace tyrants. If some wondered whether this was actually an assault on individuality, the social ethic possessed a superior vocabulary and models to demonstrate the critic's error. The social ethic sought to make dissent difficult, even illogical, to convey.[28]

Unlike in Mills' analysis, Whyte saw this tyranny of the group as self-imposed. The organization man was aware that he possessed qualities distinct from those around him, but the social ethic taught that there was no benefit to dwelling on this. Besides, had the social ethic not been responsible for his material success? His personal experiences demonstrated that society was good and dissent foolish. As historian Alan Brinkley suggested, part of the price exacted for joining the middle class, as white-collar work ensured, was abandoning old identities, allegiances, and values, including autonomy and ambition. This was not the same thing as conformity, for most organization men asserted with great conviction their fidelity to individualism and deep loathing of mass society. This gave Whyte some hope, for true individualism might only be dormant. Unlike Mills' belief in an overpowering and autonomous social apparatus, Whyte's social ethic was devised by people, kept alive by people, and could be undone by people. Opposing the

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[27] Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 26–35.
[28] Ibid., 53–55.

social ethic was not an attack on capitalism or democracy, but a rejection of a false utopia that had grafted itself onto the American way of life. It was not systematic failure, but misguided compromise. It traded personal integrity and independence for material reward and social status. Whyte closed with the following call to arms:

> He must *fight* The Organization. Not stupidly, or selfishly, for the defects of individual self-regard are no more to be venerated than the defects of co-operation. But fight he must, for the demands for his surrender are constant and powerful, and the more he has come to like the life of organization the more difficult does he find it to resist these demands, or even to recognize them. It is wretched, dispiriting advice to hold before him the dream that ideally there need be no conflict between him and society. There always is; there always must be. Ideology cannot wish it away; the peace of mind offered by organization remains a surrender, and no less so for being offered in benevolence. That is the problem.[29]

While Whyte did not specifically address the question of masculinity, he drew from gendered qualities that would have been understood by his readers. The social ethic, with its emphasis on deference to the group, pleasing others, and concern with security, was undoubtedly a feminine ideology. What it replaced—individuality, creativity, ambition—was traditional masculinity. Yet, Whyte did not give in to the pessimism of so many critics. The American worker may have allowed himself to be emasculated, to be abraded for both material and moral reasons, but this decision could still be undone. This diagnosis was of limited comfort to those alarmed by the decline in male individuality.

George B. Leonard, Jr. was clearly drawing from Whyte's argument in his own,

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[29] Ibid., 12–15, 401, 438–40, 448 (emphasis in original); Alan Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 67; Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 73; and Abigail Cheever, *Real Phonies: Cultures of Authenticity in Post-World War II America* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 5.

more obviously gender-driven critique. Leonard presented the life of generic Gary Gray, an office drone seething amidst institutionalized impotence and stolen individuality. Part of Gary's frustration was that there was no clear thief, no person to blame. Instead, Gary's life was controlled by a voice from a loudspeaker (not unlike in Russia or China, Leonard offered). Those daring enough to complain were labelled "maladjusted," their critique negated. That was the power of "The Group," to dismiss any dissent as malady. Although solidly middle class and prosperous, Gary was a figure of little consequence in his workplace, lost within a world of anonymous teamwork, "phony politeness and synthetic good intentions." He hated himself for sacrificing his identity just to fit in. Leonard likened this compromise to rape, further signalling Gary's emasculation.[30]

Worse yet, it was not just in the workplace where "The Group was always right" predominated. Even on commuter trains, with cramped seating designed for the masses, a person could not exist for himself. People were trained—transformed—to expect, consume, and appreciate standardized goods. It was all part of a program "to become just one more faceless Group, a stage setting for the assembly-line dinner party, the mass-produced smile, the interchangeable friend." No matter the problem, organization, supervision, and obeisance to the group was the solution. This was a moral issue, and one that could not be accounted for until "it is remembered that The Group was created for the individual, rather than the individual for The Group."[31]

Then again, perhaps this had nothing to do with women or the workplace. In a 1958 essay published in *Esquire*, the liberal intellectual and historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. waded into the masculinity question. The crisis of masculinity, in Schlesinger's

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[30] George B. Leonard, Jr., "Why Is He Afraid To Be Different?," in *The Decline of the American Male*, ed. Editors of *Look* (New York: Random House, 1958), 28–32.
[31] Ibid., 28, 35–36, 38, 41, 47.

reckoning, was a consequence of modernity, where people were able to forge an identity for themselves, yet too many rushed toward the blur and uniformity of the group (i.e., mass society). Modernity was a bewildering state of existence but too many were ill-equipped to accept the responsibility for developing their own distinct identity, and so they reached out for security in amorphousness.

The roles of the modern husband and wife had blended, with men handling domestic duties like cooking meals, washing dishes, and tending to the kids, while women made budgetary and other household decisions. Women seemed like "an expanding, aggressive force, seizing new domains like a conquering army"; men barely defended themselves before agreeing to the victors' terms. This was evidence that Americans were living in "an age of sexual ambiguity," one dominated by the psychoanalysts who saw neuroses in individuals and society alike. Men feared they were not masculine enough, while women were frustrated that they were just women. Why, Schlesinger asked, were women concerned with being more than themselves yet men lacked the confidence to be themselves? "What has unmanned the American man?"[32]

Schlesinger raised the common answer promoted by figures like Wylie or Hefner, that the masculinity crisis was due to female aggression. In granting domestic authority and prestige to women at some ill-defined point in the past, men had allowed their authority to atrophy. Now that women sought to expand their influence and undermine masculinity, men were unable to respond effectively. Schlesinger rejected this line of argument because it treated the American male as hopelessly immature and incapable of adaptation or struggle. It also implicitly posited that in a free competition, women would

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[32] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Crisis of American Masculinity [1958]," in *The Politics of Hope* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), 237–40. Originally published in *Esquire* (November 1958): 63–65.

triumph over men, suggesting natural female superiority (and, if this were so, were women not setting right a historical error?). Some women were superior to some men, Schlesinger allowed, but blanket statements added little positive to the debate.[33]

Instead, he posited that gender identities and expressions were in flux as a consequence of modernity. Once, he argued, status governed social relations, where identities were externally pre-formed by custom. Democratic modernity, however, had done away with such structures in favour of individual autonomy. The dilemma of mass democracy was that in offering individuals the opportunity to control their own fate, the concomitant responsibility drove many "from the unendurable burden of freedom into the womblike security of the group."[34] Like some sinister joke, in offering individuality, the viability of individuality was challenged. The importance of all this was that "if people do not know who they are [as individuals], it is hardly surprising that they are no longer sure what sex they are." So, recovering male security would not be achieved by putting women "back in their place." Indeed, Schlesinger stated that the masculine supremacy promoted by Wylie and Hefner was a "neurosis of an immature society," and it was best for men and women to be free of such ideological constrictions. The crisis of masculinity was, at heart, a more general individuality crisis brought about by modernity.[35]

Each man must first and foremost conceive of himself as an individual, not as part of a mass. This was not to suggest that group membership was necessarily harmful or wrong, for any kneejerk behaviour was contrary to the liberal faith in rationalism. But it was vital to appreciate that the individual and the group were two entirely different concepts and must be kept distinct. With this in mind, and like Hefner, Schlesinger

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[33] Ibid., 239–40.
[34] Ibid., 242. Note the snide feminine connotation in asserting the group to be womblike. Individuality, the implication ran, was clearly a masculine quality.
[35] Ibid., 243–44.

declared that togetherness was a "sinister" doctrine, for it violated the inherent "apartness" of individuality. As a consummate postwar liberal, and in line with Whyte's prescription, this rested on personal choice. This could be a means of liberation if guided by individual responsibility and consultation. "A virile political life," he wrote, "will be definite and hard-hitting, respecting debate and dissent, seeking clarity and decision."[36]

What these perspectives all shared were assumptions of an uncomplicated masculinity defined by individuality, personal ambition, creativity, intelligence, and action, and an equally uncomplicated femininity defined by passivity, security, consumption, and group identification. It was no coincidence that their perception of the American character, of American greatness, was synonymous with these masculine traits. The feminine was not without its value, but those qualities played supporting roles. The postwar period, these critics fretted, was characterized by great damage to these concepts and which sexes best embodied them. Thus, it was not just social relations undergoing alteration, but the whole of the American character and its future. With the exception of Hefner, with his modified masculine consumption, these figures held firm to the older masculine ideal and saw only danger or ruin in its alteration or abandonment. In this, they shared a conservative longing for supposed simpler times lost to the past.

While these critics were direct in their concerns, analyses, and prescriptions, they were not the only writers trafficking in these ideas. Popular culture of the period drew from these debates. Sitcoms of the era, for example, frequently relied on the perceived feminization of society for their narrative tension. The authority of the father was often challenged, largely because dad was a soft touch, even naive, suggesting that the real

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[36] Ibid., 244–46. Note, again, the gendered terminology that favoured the masculine. A proper and enriching political discourse was virile and hard-hitting—i.e., quite physical and manly—insinuating that America's current politics was distressingly effeminate.

power rested with mother. Noir movies, too, portrayed threats to masculinity in their depictions of sinister femme fatales and, more indirectly, in expressions of labour anxiety. The noir hero, often dishevelled, coarse in language and grooming, could seem an expression for a time when men were entrepreneurs—individual, hard-working, meritocratic—but were now part of a lost America amidst a white-collar labour market.[37] Of interest here, however, are novels and films from the juvenile delinquent genre. Those texts that focused on female delinquents frequently used that scenario to demonstrate how their deviancy challenged or otherwise compromised the status or well-being of male characters. These were not quite Wylie's Momism thesis in another guise nor Hefner's gold diggers and domesticators, but, nevertheless, illustrations of the dire effects when teenage girls adopted aggressive and ambitious traits.

One common theme was that of the female delinquent who used her sexuality not out of love or romance or confirmation of domestic stability, but for personal gain. In *Gang Girl* (1959) by Don Elliott, sixteen-year-old Lora Menotti moves into a new neighbourhood and plots to take over the local gang.[38] Unlike most other delinquent stories and contrary to social scientific analysis of delinquency, there is no apparent cause for her aberrant behaviour. Lora is a purely inner-directed creature of malevolent power.

On her first day in the neighbourhood, Lora wanders into a hangout of the Cougars and sizes up the debs (the female auxiliary of the male gang), immediately concluding that she is their superior. Before day's end, she lets it be known to Whitey, the gang's leader, that she is available to him. Lora harshly beats Donna, his personal

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[37] Carosso, *Cold War Narratives*, 95; Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 34–78; and Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America*, 10–11, 14, 28–29.

[38] Don Elliott, *Gang Girl*, in *Gang Girl • Sex Bum* (1959; reprint, Eureka, CA: Stark House Press, 2011). Don Elliott was a pseudonym of the prolific science fiction writer Robert Silverberg.

deb, to prove her worth, then she and Whitey consummate their relationship. When he informs her that she must have his initials carved into her breast, she begins scheming anew. Lora plans on becoming a call girl when she turns eighteen and knows that being disfigured like that would compromise her earning power. Whitey must be replaced as leader, and so she targets another gang member, Squirrel, to do her work. Squirrel is reluctant—he is Whitey's friend and comrade—but Lora seduces and goads him into proving his courage by challenging Whitey for leadership of the Cougars. Squirrel defeats Whitey in a knife fight, and as Whitey is stabbed to death, Lora revels in the feeling as if she did the deed herself. When Squirrel's girl Mae resents being replaced by Lora, she is subjected to a gang rape. It is all so easy to manipulate and ascend:

> It was a lot better this way, Lora thought. To run free and wild, to feel power, real power, in your hand. To drink and fight and smoke. To have sex whenever you want, instead of saving it like the squares did for their wedding night. Sure, you could get killed in a rumble. What of it? Live fast, die young.[39]

In the novel's final act, Lora is lured into the clubhouse, where she is surrounded by many of the girls whom she has dispatched through her machinations. None of the boys are there. The girls accuse Lora of bringing disunity to the gang and now order needs to be restored. They tear into Lora, rip off her clothes, and carve Whitey's initials into her breast. They smash her teeth with a chain and rip out her hair, then dump her into the street. Lora is taken to a hospital, but she would rather die, knowing that she will never be a high-priced call girl. As Elliott explained, "Lora was learning that there were limits to her power. She was learning that you could push a group of people only so far—

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[39] Ibid., 38–73, 95.

and then their fury would explode in consuming destructiveness."[40]

A number of aspects of this story merit emphasis in relation to the representation of masculinity. While the boys of this story hold formal power, they lack any real influence. It is Lora who manipulates and manoeuvres, using her sexuality to make boys work for her and her ambitions. So utterly pacified are the male figures that Lora's reign of terror can only be extinguished by other girls. They seek to correct matters by exposing the true nature of Lora's power, her sexual allure, and then take it away, reinforcing that no matter her ambition and tactical skill, her femininity is all she has. Yet, even in doing so, they demonstrate that women hold the real power in the gang—the power to disrupt and the power to reassert control. The resolution, in fact, suggests that even before Lora came along, the power in the gang did not reside with the males. Whatever their physical strength and willingness to fight and die, males lack initiative.

That lack of initiative represents a second indictment of masculinity and distorted femininity. Lora exhibits both long- and short-term strategic thinking in her quick evaluation of how to use people for immediate goals, but also to not compromise her ultimate ambition of being a call girl. Compare this to Whitey and Squirrel, neither of whom can see what this newcomer is doing until it is too late. They cannot see beyond her flattery and sexuality. The other debs pick up on Lora's ambitions almost immediately but lack the resources to counter her. They are also limited by the custom of the gang that grants authority to the boys. It is Lora who sees regular exercising violence, both within the gang and against rival gangs, as a means of reinforcing and expanding control. Until Lora came along, the Cougars were largely directionless, fighting only

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[40] Ibid., 109–15.

when attacked.[41]

Finally, Lora is the sexual aggressor in all her encounters. The boys she goes to bed with may believe that they are initiating matters, but it is clear that she guides every encounter. This includes her use of sex to buy time when Whitey insists on carving his initials on her breast, and when she manipulates Squirrel into betraying Whitey by fighting for control of the gang. Lora's sexuality is not a demonstration of femininity—to please her man—but to amass power for herself. In all, then, *Gang Girl* relies heavily on ideas of gender reversal within the world of juvenile delinquent gangs. And while Lora's presence is clearly disruptive to the gang, the novel's conclusion, settled by other girls, suggests that Lora did not initiate this state of affairs, only capitalized on it.

In Edward De Roo's *The Fires of Youth* (1955), the female delinquent takes on the role of succubus. Teenager Harry Hart lives with his parents and younger sister in a medium-sized city. He is a choir member and aspires to make the school baseball team. At the same time, Harry and his friends are awakening sexually and spend their time thinking and talking about girls. Harry's coach tells him that he has to make a choice, sports or girls, because a divided attention will hinder his baseball ambitions.[42] Nevertheless, he is attracted to Virginia Davis and they begin dating. She is sexually mature and guides Harry through his first sexual experience. She also invites him to join a secret society to which she belongs, the Gregarians, which she euphemistically describes as being devoted to parties. It is, in fact, a sex club, something that Virginia is nonchalant about. She assures Harry that they are still going steady, regardless of her Gregarian promiscuity, but Harry is dumbfounded by the revelation. Still, he is incapable

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[41] This may also suggest the influence of ideas that tied group identity to the sapping of male initiative and skill. Under Lora's control, the Cougars are aggressive and effective, but before that strong guiding presence, the group's strength was less than the sum of its members.

[42] Edward De Roo, *The Fires of Youth* (New York: Ace, 1955), 21–24.

of saying no to her, even as his baseball skills deteriorate and his relationship with his parents becomes abrasive. When his father forces Harry to stand up to Virginia, she informs him that they are no longer going steady, but, out of principle, does not rescind his invitation to that weekend's Gregarian party. Despondent and feeling betrayed by the world, as well as grounded by his parents, Harry sneaks out to the Gregarian party, arriving to find an orgy in progress. He vomits at the sight and flees into the street, where he is found by his father who assures him that he is now a man.[43]

The Fires of Youth relies on a number of dominant ideas of the era. That Virginia comes from a single-parent home is an immediate signal that she is marked for deviance. Her mother, despite being widowed, continues to be sexually active with her boyfriends, which inadvertently (mis)educates her daughter. Virginia is almost certainly destined to be a sexual deviant.[44] Because this is Harry's story, the reader cannot be certain of her future happiness, but it is unlikely that she will prosper without intervention and rehabilitation. Her role in the novel is to act as temptation to Harry, a boy who embodies the nuclear family ideal. Drawing him into the adult world before he is ready brings him near to ruin. He is not a likely candidate for delinquency, but Virginia, who does not

[43] Ibid., 73–93, 138–44, 151–58.

[44] Ibid., 54–58. Social scientific analysis of unmarried mothers in the postwar period varied depending on the race and class background of the women. Prewar, unmarried pregnant girls were believed to be hypersexual and of low intelligence. The growing influence of psychiatric analysis shifted the thinking to unconscious desires or neuroses. In the 1950s, with an ardent social devotion to family and prescribed gender roles, out-of-wedlock pregnancy was assessed not as hypersexuality but neurosis related to family dysfunction (generally, aggressive mothers and passive fathers). The failure of the daughter, then, could be understood as the failure of the parents. In the case of unmarried pregnant black girls, the hypersexuality argument was mostly replaced with cultural and environmental explanations, namely that the culture of black people was pathological and encouraged irresponsibility. What the two perspectives shared was a sense that premarital sex was not truly the fault of the girl—she was too passive to exhibit real subjectivity—but she was nevertheless expected to submit to the medical profession and/or the state for rehabilitation before she could re-enter society. Sara B. Edlin, *The Unmarried Mother in Our Society* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Young, 1954), 93–114; Regina G. Kunzel, "White Neurosis, Black Pathology: Constructing Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy in the Wartime Postwar United States," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 306–24; and Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15–17, 24–26, 89–93, 100–01.

value her own sexuality, threatens to bring down others around her. In the end, Harry realizes the wisdom of his parents and teachers—to refrain—and this serves as evidence that he has achieved a maturity that sex alone does not grant.

De Roo drew not just from the idea of the destructive power of unchained female sexuality. Rather, just as important, Harry's conduct is rather feminine in his reluctance to have sex and then his horror in discovering that Virginia is extremely and unapologetically promiscuous. This is a notable reversal of gender roles in the postwar context. The decade is understood as one of paradoxical freedom for women, with greater democratization of the family and increased emphasis on female sexual pleasure, yet restricted gender roles and fetishization of unmarried women's chastity. Sociologist Wini Breines explained that sex was the weak link in the postwar quest for gendered order, for white girls were tempted and teased with sexual freedom, yet also cautioned and contained from pursuing it. Much of middle-class life was dominated by this "doubleness," of a co-existing and mandated Puritanism and hedonism.[45] Brett Harvey's oral history of American women in the 1950s provided ample evidence of this contradictory state. Sex, Harvey explained, was a "triple-bind." A girl who went too far might be labelled "fast"; one who did not go far enough might be tarred as a prude; and allowing one's passions more free reign before stopping out of terror or guilt risked being called a tease. The risk and punishment was theirs alone. "Getting caught" was something that applied only to girls, for it was their lapse, their blame.[46]

The underlying logic of this anxious path was a view of female sexuality as

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[45] Wini Breines, "Postwar White Girls' Dark Others," in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 56; and Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 88, 110.

[46] Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 6, 21; and Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 167.

commodity, in which the purchase price was the security of marriage. Advice books from the period used market terms to describe the dangers of premarital sex, whether it was "cheap" behaviour or the danger of becoming "second-hand goods." Female sexuality was also measured in male self-worth. An educational film entitled *Are You Popular?* (1947) assisted teens with gaining friends and thriving in large groups.[47] In a high school cafeteria, several boys discuss a new girl, Caroline. They cannot precisely explain why they like her, but they all do. The opposite opinion is held of Ginny, a girl who thinks the key to popularity is parking with boys at night. When the boys talk about Ginny and learn that she will date anyone, each boy feels less important. That Ginny is overly accommodating makes boys feel less masculine and therefore devalues her popularity. Ginny is shunned and sits by herself, unlike Caroline, who has no scandal attached to her. A 1959 advice book for men and women stated, "Good etiquette, for a man, is whatever makes a woman feel more like a woman, without making her feel weak-minded …. [It] is whatever makes a man feel more like a man, without making him feel more harassed and put upon than he normally does anyway." Historian Beth Bailey argued that this demonstrated both the delicate and doubt-filled construction of gender; adherence to these rules were essential for alleviating social anxiety. The greater point was that girls were taught that their bodies were valuable commodities to be sold, but that true value could only be ascertained at the right time and place.[48]

Sex out of wedlock become something of an obsession in the postwar period, with various experts and officials drawing significance between non-sanctioned sex and

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[47] *Are You Popular?* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1947).

[48] Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 97; and Harvey, *The Fifties*, 8–9. Also see *Teen Life* 1, no. 1 (September 1959), which advised young women that popularity depended on making boys feel wanted and special.

existential threats to the nation. The rationale was that defeating Communism required virile and mature men, and that marriage with kids proved these qualities. Those who eschewed these norms were immature, possibly perverts, and unreliable in the fight—maybe even actively working for the enemy. While men were the ostensible targets, there was an assumption that behind every perverted man was a domineering mother or shadowy seductress. A properly domesticated woman kept the nation's men on the correct path and the nation strong. Just as containment served as a foreign policy to hem in the Communists, containment of female sexuality preserved the nation's moral fibre. Yet, single women were told to employ their sexuality—termed "allure"—to find a husband. Their sexuality was to be bait, to tempt the man into chasing and capturing the woman. All this emphasis on sexuality and the dangers of premarital sex placed a higher risk on the woman, for her reputation and prospects for marriage and happiness were tied to her sufficiently controlling her sexuality.[49]

As in De Roo's fiction, Americans could read about actual teenage sex clubs. In Somerville, MA, twenty-five teenage girls formed a "disc jockey club" that was a facade for a sex club. Initiation required "committing perverted acts" with boys from the auxiliary. In some cases, these clubs or parties were said to be organized by adults and fuelled with alcohol. Writing in *Front Page Detective*, Stanley Forbes described a multitude of harrowing delinquent activities, including orgies and teenage girls prostituting themselves for thrills and money. One congressman claimed that Oklahoma City suffered from teenage sex and drug parties, leading to addiction, unwanted pregnancy, and abortion. Teens from all classes, he said, participated in these orgies.[50]

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[49] May, *Homeward Bound*, 91, 93, 98, 108, 112, 114, 117–19.

[50] "Sex and Liquor," in *Teen-Age Gangsters* (New York: Hillman Periodicals, 1957), 38–43; Stanley Forbes, "What's the Matter With Our Kids?" *Front Page Detective* 13, no. 16 (August 1950): 14–16;

What Edward De Roo tapped into, then, was not just a fear of uncontained female sexuality but also a reversal of assigned roles. The boys in such stories behave more modestly, pressured by the sexually aggressive girls, and it is the boys whose lives suffer from their decision.[51] Like real-life males, these girls do not worry about their reputation; indeed, in the short term they seem to benefit from their ability to attract and bed multiple boys.[52] The larger effect of all this on families, friends, and teammates is discord. Harry's redemption comes from rejecting Virginia as a deviant and re-establishing his ties to the larger community. Confronting the discord, he re-asserts himself as a masculine moral decision maker, not a sexual object for female pleasure.

What stories like these suggest is the circulation of conservative gender criticism, of Momism and its variations, beyond manifestos. Like Philip Wylie and Robert Moskin, Edward De Roo and Don Elliott presented scenarios where gender convergence and reversal damaged men and brought havoc to the immediate community.

Questions of independence and acquiescence to the group as they related to a male identity was an even more frequent theme in juvenile delinquent novels and movies. This should not surprise as both questions were bound up in larger issues of life in a mass society. Yet, unlike with the critics cited above, there were many examples in the delinquent genre that presented masculinity as something best preserved and expressed within the group. Classroom educational films were especially reliable sources of other-

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Howard L. Durkin, "The Young and the Damned," *True Police Cases* 6, no. 67 (September 1954): 67–68; Alwyn J. St. Charles, *The Narcotics Menace* (Los Angeles: Borden Publishing, 1952), 122–23; and Peter Wyden, *Suburbia's Coddled Kids* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 100.

[51] See also, for example, Edward De Roo, *The Young Wolves* (New York: Ace Books, 1959); and Bud Clifton, *D For Delinquent* (New York: Ace Books, 1958).

[52] *The Violent Years* (1956) also employs this device, following the crime spree of a gang of teenage girls—Paula, Phyllis, Geraldine, and Georgia, whose names are all feminized forms of male names—who demonstrate their gender confusion by raping a young man. When Paula is revealed to be pregnant, it seems inevitable that she dies in child birth, as she lacks any kind of feminine instincts to be a mother. *The Violent Years* [aka *Female*], directed by William Morgan (Headliner Productions, 1956).

directed ideology of the type that David Riesman detailed in *The Lonely Crowd*.

In *Boy With a Knife* (1956), a troubled teenage boy's home life turns him toward delinquency.[53] Jerry Phillips is friends with a number of boys who suffer varying emotional and social problems because of their environment. Bud Williams is a social worker who seeks out delinquents to help them belong and shed their resentments. Bud observes that Jerry is easily angered and relies on a knife that acts as "an equalizer." Bud forms a club as a means to make the boys feel included and to focus their energies. However, for every step forward that Bud helps Jerry take, the boy's home life is a step backwards. When Jerry tells his parents that he is planning on running for an office in the club, his stepmother says she does not like him hanging out with those kids. His father meekly acquiesces. Jerry finally snaps and terrorizes his stepmother with the knife. When she demands that Jerry be sent to live with his grandmother, his father finally steps up and advocates for his boy. Jerry surrenders his knife as he no longer needs the equalizer. One component of this short film is undoubtedly the gender imbalance within the Phillips home—the step-mother is corrosively authoritarian while the father is passive and subservient. Any solution requires correcting this disorder. But it is no small point that Jerry only begins to find his identity within the club that grants him needed structure. *Boy With a Knife* unambiguously argues for the importance of the group, properly regulated and expertly advised, as a means of developing an independent male identity.

The mental hygiene film *Shy Guy* (1947) follows the efforts of bashful Phil to fit in with his peers.[54] The trick is to get people to stop thinking that he is different, for being an outsider is no way of living. Phil's father assures him that everyone is different and

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[53] *Boy With a Knife*, directed by László Benedek (Dudley Pictures Corp., 1956).
[54] *Shy Guy* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1947).

that that was what made people interesting. When Phil says that what makes him different, like his clothes, are keeping him from fitting in, his dad tells him to dress like other students. He also encourages Phil to figure out what other people are interested in and study what the popular kids do to make themselves so appealing. The next day, dressed like the other teens, Phil studies his peers. He notes that being a good listener is key, as is being helpful to others. At a school dance later that week, Phil is able to apply his lessons, sharing his expertise on radios when some other boys are in a quandary. Making the others aware of both his existence and helpful nature is just what is needed for him to be accepted. The argument, then, is that individuality and respect can only be achieved by active participation within the group, that being sensitive to other people's interests is how to make others sensitive to one's own interests. This was not an argument for conformity or acquiescence—everyone is different, Phil's father told him—but of realizing it is within the group that one's individuality will emerge.

The hot rod genre was particularly given to extolling the virtues of the group as a means to promoting masculinity. Like most in the genre, the film *Hot Rod Girl* (1956) features a malignant newcomer who does not know the rules and seeks to dominate the group.[55] He must be destroyed or assimilated for the group to succeed. The group, too, must accede to the rules of the larger community in order for its members to thrive. The newcomer in this case is Bronc Talbot, who wears a black leather jacket, drives a slick car, and carries a haughty attitude. He is an outsider, and there is little positive about his character or behaviour. He is quizzed by the mechanically minded hot rodders about his engine, but Bronc snickers that he has no clue about such things and could not care less to learn. He bought the car at a bargain price because the seller was desperate. One of the

[55] *Hot Rod Girl*, directed by Leslie H. Martinson (American-International, 1956).

teens, Flat Top, challenges him to a game of chicken to assert the group's primacy and honour. Bronc wins the challenge, but because he is a defiant outsider, he gains no respect from the teens nor does Flat Top lose any.

When a traffic officer speaks to the hot rod club about the virtues of legitimate racing—regulated, with safety-inspected cars, and on a devoted track—Bronc sasses him and the idea of rules. After Bronc's car fails inspection and disqualifies him from a race, he accuses Jeff, another teen, of framing him and threatens revenge. Soon enough, Bronc trails Jeff and Lisa (the titular hot rod girl) on a winding mountain road.[56] Bronc accidentally hits and kills a boy on a bike. Initially, he successfully argues that Jeff was the guilty party, but later investigation proves Bronc is to blame and he is arrested.

In the case of Bronc Talbot specifically and the hot rodders more generally, there is an understanding that dissent is inappropriate—it is the hallmark of the criminal—and that acquiescence to authority provides real happiness. Bronc the outsider and individualist who seeks to dominate the group is proven over and over to be a disreputable character, whereas the hot rodders, all members of a racing club who seek to legitimize their cars and races within the law, are admirable and proven to be on the side of right in every dispute. The conflict between Bronc and the hot rodders, then, makes apparent that respect and responsibility are best served within the group.

The Wild One (1953) illustrates the uneven prospect of individuality within the

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[56] The character of Lisa Vernon is worthy of note. In the opening scenes of the movie, she is shown easily winning a qualifying race (indeed, a new course record) and is clearly admired by the male drivers. She is, at worst, the equal of these boys in an arena dominated by men. Yet, nothing seems amiss about this. Her ability is not damaging to her happiness nor are the boys emasculated by her skill or even her presence within the group. If that is surprising, then the remainder of the movie reasserts female passivity. Lisa's driving skills go unmentioned and unemployed. When she is with boys in a car, she is a passenger. Her purpose in the film after the opening sequence is to support Jeff in his various challenges. She does not even play a notable role in clearing Jeff's name. Yet, at the film's conclusion, she and Jeff spearhead the effort to restart the sanctioned drag race project, suggesting that she still carries influence amongst the drivers, but not in any way that erodes others' status.

group, but settles on the group as preferable to going it alone.[57] Johnny Strabler is the leader of the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club, a group of young men devoted to escaping social pressures by riding, drinking, and carousing on weekends. He is caught between his quest for personal freedom and the pressures of being part of both a gang and wider society. The essence of the film is the rapid unravelling of social order when the BRMC ride into a small California town to have a few drinks and relax. While initially appreciating the financial boost the bikers provide, drunken rowdiness and the arrival of a rival gang turns the town's residents into a vigilante mob seeking to restore order.

The juxtaposition of freedom within the gang versus the peril of individuality is made starkly clear in the film's last act. After telling his gang that it is time to leave town, Johnny goes looking for Kathie, the daughter of the town's sheriff, to say goodbye. The residents of the town, by now devolved into a mob, believe that he has kidnapped Kathie (or worse). They trap Johnny inside a building and begin to beat him. He manages to break free and reaches his bike, but while trying to ride off, someone in the mob throws a tire iron. Johnny is thrown from his bike, which careens into a crowd, killing an old man. The mob seizes Johnny and he (along with every other biker) is arrested. He is not released from jail until Kathie and a couple other townspeople come forward to assert his innocence. It is no minor point, however, that Johnny is threatened, beaten, and then captured by the mob when he is alone. On one hand, the mob demonstrates the danger of the group to the individual—Johnny is only freed when several townspeople defy the mob to assert his innocence—but, more importantly, it is Johnny leaving his own group that puts him in jeopardy. Not only does the motorcycle gang give his life meaning as a man and as an individual, cut off from that structure places him at the mercy of a vicious

[57] *The Wild One*, directed by László Benedek (Columbia Pictures, 1953).

world. *The Wild One* presents a conundrum of postwar life and the relationship between the individual and the group. The group, be it motorcycle gang or town mob, is no ideal, but it is nevertheless safer to be inside the group, any group, than go it alone. Achieving a degree of autonomy and self-realization only happens from within the group.

If the positive group position—that the group was conducive, even beneficial to the preservation and promotion of an individual (read: masculine) identity—ran counter to intellectual criticism, it was also a rarer bird in the juvenile delinquent literature. Far more prevalent were those that adopted liberal positions, where a recognizable masculine identity—one of action and autonomy—is secured through struggle against one's environment and the group. In these stories, delinquency, represented by the gang, neighbourhood, or even family, acted as a negative social force that characters must rebel against to achieve their freedom and masculine identity.

In Harlan Ellison's *Web of the City* (1958), Rusty Santoro, president of the Cougars, has decided to leave the gang. He wants a future and "a life that had some purpose," not the inevitable violent death that gang life promised.[58] The problem is that no one leaves the Cougars, and now he feels the neighbourhood closing in on him. At the novel's beginning, he is beaten in the street by members of his gang for his individualist ambition. "You can't get free," Ellison wrote. "Once stained, always stained. The seeds of dirt are sown deeply. And are harvested forever."[59]

Rusty knows who ordered the attack—his chief rival in the gang, Candle Shaster. Candle says that he cannot be the new gang president while the stronger and more intelligent Rusty is around, a reminder that Candle is second best. Rusty agrees to a final

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[58] Harlan Ellison, *Web of the City* (1958; reprint, New York: Ace Books, 1983), 25.
[59] Ibid., 5–8.

fight with Candle, yet wonders whether he will ever be free. Still, he also knows that to avoid the fight now means that both his sister and mother would be constantly hassled on the street. Rusty and Candle engage in a savage fight to prove their character and skill. Each boy is armed with a switchblade and they are separated by a two-foot handkerchief held in their teeth. The first to lose their end of the cloth loses the fight. Rusty is the victor, and despite calls from the gang to kill Candle, he refuses and snaps the blade to reinforce that he is now out of the gang. It is not enough to say that one is a free individual; it is a status that can only be achieved by courage and struggle. It is an ancient test of bravery, but one that still proves the character of the participants.[60]

John Roeburt's *They Who Sin* (1959) also illustrates the challenges of remaining an autonomous man within a society filled with organizations demanding participation and ownership, but is less sanguine about the possibility of success. Rico Mendero is seventeen and lives in a tenement with his parents and younger sister. His life is one of constant challenges within his neighbourhood. Despite an assertion that he is not interested in joining a street gang, he is informed that he has been drafted by the Black Eagles, who have a rumble coming up against a rival gang. He is also stopped by a notorious cop named Bolinger who gives Rico a dollar and tells him he is now one of the policeman's personal army of neighbourhood informers. Alone afterwards, Rico throws

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[60] Ibid., 46–62. The remainder of the novel is a murder mystery, as Rusty seeks to solve the rape and murder of his younger sister, a Cougar deb. Once he solves that, he leaves the city and the gang, the source of his problems, behind him.

Web of the City was Ellison's first novel, and in an effort at verisimilitude, he went undercover and joined a New York City gang in 1954. He went through the club's initiation rituals, which involved a group beating, participating in a rumble, and claiming a deb. He also fought a "Comanche" duel against a boy named Candle as described in the novel. Ellison won the fight and, like Rusty, let the boy live, even though his standing in the gang dropped because of that mercy. It was only after he participated in a rumble that Ellison abandoned his false identity for good. Harlan Ellison, *Memos from Purgatory* (1961; reprint, Edgeworks Abbey / E-Reads, 2008), 23–26, 41–65, 80–95, 120–29.

the money in the river and considers jumping in himself.[61]

The next day, Rico is punished by the Eagles for his absence during the rumble. He is forced to run a gauntlet of Eagles, accepting their kicks and punches until he is knocked unconscious. That night, while walking with his friend Manuelo, they are stopped by a policeman. When they run away, Manuelo is shot dead and Rico is arrested and charged with attempted burglary. The bruises he received from the Eagles are used as evidence that he was at the rumble, and so, on his lawyer's advice, he pleads guilty and receives a sentence of probation. Back on the streets, Rico wonders whether he would be better off in jail. He might go crazy being locked up, he thinks, but he would not have to fight every day. Driven by rage and frustration at how his life has turned out, Rico goes on an armed robbery spree. Unfortunately, he chooses a liquor store that is being staked out by the police. Rico shoots his way out, but kills Bolinger in the process. He returns home and hides on the roof, where his father finds him. Rico tells his father that he will not surrender but neither does he want to live anymore. His father understands. He shoots and kills Rico, then commits suicide himself.[62] Faced with the seemingly insurmountable and incessant task of remaining independent of the neighbourhood gangs and of a justice system that has failed him, Rico opts for death. He dies an individual and by his own choice, for he knows that he cannot be a free man in that environment. There may seem a certain romantic nobility to his decision, to live free or die, but this is less so when it is obvious that there is no option for living free.

The Blackboard Jungle (1955) presents competing versions of masculinity within the arena of juvenile delinquency, both among the delinquents and the teachers seeking to

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[61] John Roeburt, *They Who Sin* (New York: Avon, 1959), 5–14, 23–34.
[62] Ibid., 99–159.

combat it.[63] The teachers of North Manual High School serve as proxy parents, and so their teaching styles model parenting options. When Rick Dadier arrives, he finds an environment where the authoritarian model of fatherhood is the norm. Rick meets his principal, who is wary of the new teacher's quiet demeanour and concerned that Rick might not be able to command respect. Foremost, Principal Warnecke tells Rick, there will be no discipline problem in this school. The veteran teachers confirm the emphasis on coercive discipline. One teacher tells Rick that this school "is the garbage can of the educational system," and the primary goal of the teachers is to sit on the garbage can so that women can walk around the city during the day without being attacked.[64]

The polar opposite of the authoritarians is another new teacher, Josh Edwards, who seeks to win over his hostile class by appealing to their better nature and intellect, playing them songs from his jazz collection. He wants them to appreciate the subtlety and artistry in the music, but they mock and surround him, gleefully smashing his records. Josh is left catatonic and quits the job. The veteran teachers are largely unsympathetic,

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[63] *Blackboard Jungle*, directed by Richard Brooks (MGM, 1955).

[64] In Evan Hunter's novel, on which the movie is based, the principal's name is, quite tellingly, Mr. Small. At the start of the school year, Small gathers his staff for an authoritarian pep talk:

> I want a well-disciplined school because we can't teach a disorderly mob. That means obedience, instant obedience. That does not mean delayed obedience, or tomorrow obedience, or next-week obedience. It means instant obedience! It means orders obeyed on the button. The teacher is boss, remember that! And I'm sure I don't have to remind a great many of you of that fact. … Troublemakers? I want troublemakers squelched immediately! If a teacher can't handle a troublemaker, I want that damned troublemaker sent to either Mike or myself, and you can bet we'll know how to take care of him, you can bet your life on that. I don't want any troublemakers in my school. There are reform schools for troublemakers, and that's where I'll send them as sure as I'm standing here, as sure as I am Principal of North Manual Trades High School. … So on Monday morning, we come here ready for trouble. If there's no trouble, fine and dandy. If there is, we step on it immediately. We step on it the way we would step on a cockroach. I want no cockroaches in my school, the same way I want no cockroaches in my kitchen.

It is less certain here which group Small seeks to dominate more, the students or his teachers. The impression, however, is that in Small's view those inside the school (and probably outside) are all in need of strict discipline. Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955; reprint, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997), 27–28.

seeing Josh's attempt as proof that nothing but brute force can manage these delinquents.

Rick represents the tough-minded liberal approach, but even he is unprepared for what he finds in his classroom. To his face, the students are cold hostility; with his back turned, they are a lethal threat. A series of events lead Rick to consider quitting: another new teacher, Lois Hammond, is assaulted in a stairwell and Rick has to subdue her attacker; in response, Rick and Josh are attacked by some students in a darkened alley; the classroom incident that led to Josh quitting; and a rumour campaign that Rick is having an affair with Lois, which hospitalizes Rick's wife. The environment, Rick says, prevents him from actually teaching, and if neither teachers nor students care, why should he?

Rick's dilemma is resolved via a conflict between competing versions of masculinity as expressed by two of his students. Artie West is a white adolescent and an irredeemable sociopath. Artie is neither clever nor composed, and obvious about his criminal inclinations. He is raw defiance without purpose, an authoritarian who draws power from his gang. His opposite amongst the students is a black teen, Gregory Miller. He is intelligent but cynical, as resistant to the teachers' authority as any other, but his motivation is due to a lifetime of disrespect because of his race. Rick recognizes Gregory's inner strength and charisma and seeks to enlist his aid in winning over the class, but Gregory spurns the offer. Indeed, he tells Rick that nobody gives a damn about anything, and so he is quitting school at the end of the term. Gregory embodies the liberal ideal of individual strength, but his environment—the authoritarian nature of both the school and his peers, as well as the racism of wider society—has turned these noble traits into bitterness. Their respective experiences in the school lead Rick and Gregory to the same conclusion and solution.

At the film's conclusion, the three versions of masculinity—Rick, Artie, and Gregory—come to a head. Rick catches Artie openly cheating on an exam and orders him to the front of the class to be chastised. Artie defies the demand and Gregory calls him on it, and they almost come to blows. It is understood that the nature of the classroom and authority over it is at stake. When Rick threatens to take Artie to the principal, the boy pulls a knife on him. The class, save for Gregory, unites against Rick, but Gregory keeps them from interfering. Despite holding the knife, Artie loses his nerve in the face of Rick's confidence. Artie pleads for others to help, signalling his defeat. Another boy, Belazi, makes a grab for the knife, but the mood of the class has fully shifted in favour of Rick and Gregory. Artie and Belazi will be expelled, as there is no room for their type of false masculinity—thuggish, authoritarian, anti-social yet reliant on the group—but, just as important, Rick and Gregory each agree to stay.

What *The Blackboard Jungle* offers is a clear illustration of the liberal fear of the group, whether the blind authoritarianism of the jaded veteran teachers or the crude belligerence of Artie West and his goons. Both exhibit bluster and power within the group—covertly, that is; the teachers are boldest behind closed doors, while Artie and his confederates attack Rick and Josh in the shadows of a darkened alley—but all are revealed to be ineffectual cowards. Both Rick and Gregory, idealists struggling in the miasma, are committed to individualism, and this self-reliance gives each of them the strength to triumph over the group. Even in the face of physical danger in the film's final act, Gregory and Rick assert themselves and win the day. In doing so, they prove their self-worth as men.

Taken as a whole, these fictional accounts and the more deliberately intellectual critiques of masculinity and gender roles, suggest a rather wide circulation of ideas about

masculinity in crisis. Common anxieties expressed by critics and storytellers included gender convergence or inversion and an erosion of individuality and autonomy, two concepts that were highly sympathetic. But some examples of the delinquency genre also allowed the group to express a distinctly male identity. What these examples suggest is that a perceived crisis of masculinity was not just exercised within intellectual circles, academic and popular, but that the complaints and ideas found traction in formats often disparaged and loathed by those same intellectuals. Audience reception of either intellectual essay or juvenile delinquent narrative is not of interest here. Rather, it is the diversity of the analyses and the media in which they appeared, along with an apparent belief that this was a question worth investigating or utilizing for fictional narratives. Even as white-collar masculinity cemented its status in the decade, there was sufficient tension to promote widespread consideration of its implications. If men were, overall, comfortable with sacrifices to traditional masculinity in exchange for material comfort and a secure family, that did not alter the fact that there was yet a market that tapped into anxieties rooted in redefining gender roles.

CHAPTER 8
The Good Consumer: Drugs and Hot Rods in Fordist America

> Youth is a happy time and a carefree time. A time of auto rides and double dates. It's a time of fun and pranks and jokes, of ice cream cones and chocolate sodas. Youth is a time for getting a job, for finding one's place in the world. But sometimes in these troubled days, the very thoughtlessness of youth has led to a living nightmare.
>
> - *Drug Addiction* (1951)[1]

A frequently told story of teenage addiction in the 1950s was of a young blonde girl named Joanne Barbara Scott, a junkie by age fourteen and found dead in steamer trunk at sixteen.[2] She was born in Milwaukee in the mid-1930s, where her father was a trawler captain. An especially willful child who hung out at waterfront jazz clubs, she was first arrested at age thirteen for associating with delinquents. The next year, she was arrested on a narcotics charge, at which time she was discovered to be pregnant. Soon after, she married Gerald Scott, an older black youth who eschewed drugs; their baby, Dawn Marie, was born three months later. She initially sought a clean life, but pressure from old friends reactivated past habits. Before long, she was injecting heroin three to four times a day and prostituting herself for drug money.

A steady routine of arguments with her husband spurred Joanne to run away to New York in 1951. She was soon arrested by the vice squad and, as a minor, returned to

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[1] *Drug Addiction* (Encyclopedia Britannica Films, 1951).

[2] The summary of Joanne Scott's life and death is constructed from: "Blonde's Trunk Death Linked to Dope Ring," *Binghamton (NY) Press*, 1 March 1952; "Body of Girl Found in Trunk on Estate," *New York Times* 1 March 1952; "Bronx Seaman Held in Trunk Death Case," *New York Times* 2 March 1952; "Dope Peddler Faces Charges in Girl's Death," *Rome (NY) News-Tribune*, 3 March 1952; "Dope," *Teen-Age Gangsters* (Chicago: Hillman Periodicals, 1957): 47–49; Joachim Joesten, *Dope, Inc.* (New York: Avon Book, 1953), 5–8; Ted Gibbons, "Dope, Vice and the Underworld," *Police Dragnet Cases* 2, no. 4 (July 1956): 13–16, reprinted in David Jacobs, *Hellcats, Vixens, & Vice Dolls: Women, Crime, and Kink of the Fifties* (West Orange, NJ: Idea Men Productions, 2007), 14–15; Wenzell Brown, "The Deadly Habit," in *The Teen-Age Jungle* (Standard Magazines, 1956), 10–13, 61; and Wenzell Brown, *Monkey On My Back* (London: Elek Books, 1954), 3–8 [this part of Brown's book was also excerpted in *Look* 17, no. 5 (10 March 1953): 98–99].

Milwaukee and her husband's responsibility. While some accounts indicated that Gerald Scott welcomed back his wife, others claim that he filed for divorce. Regardless, she again fled to New York in January 1952 with another addict, a black man named Guy Douglas, and re-entered "the junk-laden world of 42nd Street." Joanne possessed an unusual "freshness and vivacity" that stood out amongst the other prostitutes, particularly her brightly coloured dresses, but like the other addicts in Times Square, her life was an endless grind of numb stupors and sex to feed her addiction. With no fixed address, her days arced back and forth between the sidewalk and grimy rooms with johns.

Joanne claimed that she was going to quit using ("Junkies always talk big—until they need the next fix," wrote Wenzell Brown), but her friends laughed it off because her usage was especially intense and frequent.[3] Yet, on 17 February 1952, she contacted the Police Narcotics Bureau from a drug store payphone. Declaring, "I've got a monkey on my back," she offered to trade information on the local drug trade for help to break her addiction. Her call was traced and a squad car rushed to the source, but by the time it arrived she was gone. However, two nearby drug dealers were arrested. Word spread on "the junkie grapevine" that Joanne was a snitch. A few nights later, she was dead.

She was last seen alive at the Harlem apartment of Barney Robinson, a former sailor and known junkie who threw dope parties. He later told police that "she needed a fix bad. The monkey was crawling all over her." Robinson provided her with a shot of almost pure heroin or possibly a speedball (heroin followed by cocaine). According to others in the apartment at the time, Joanne went into a bedroom and stripped off all her clothes before injecting herself, then fell unconscious. Not long after, partygoers found her blue and unresponsive. The next day, Robinson bought a trunk at a pawn shop and,

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[3] Brown, "The Deadly Habit," 12–13.

with the help of friends, shoved Joanne's body inside. They then drove around, looking for a place to dump the trunk, settling on the Greenwich, Connecticut, estate of James C. Greenway, where the trunk was discovered by a caretaker on 29 February. After a short investigation, Barney was charged with violating the sanitary code for transporting a body across state line without a permit and with selling heroin, while Douglas was charged with transporting a minor across state lines for immoral purposes.[4]

Apart from her addiction and the circumstances by which her body was disposed of and found, the coverage of Joanne Scott's life and death consistently cited her association with black men—her husband, as well as fellow junkies Douglas and Robinson—and that she abandoned her infant daughter. The account of her death by Joachim Joesten in *Dope, Inc.* (1953), for example, was especially unsubtle in its details of racial transgression, describing Scott as appearing like "a country girl of Anglo-Saxon, Irish or perhaps Dutch stock," while the men who abandoned the trunk had "brawny dark arms," along with other details of how she consorted with black men and died in black Harlem.[5] Hers was a life of aggressive transgression: drug use that alarmed even other junkies; promiscuity; race mixing; and absence of maternal instincts.

Joanne Scott's life and death was noteworthy, too, for illustrating one of the recurring anxieties of postwar America—that its youth were now freely and forcefully acting as probationary adults, enjoying greater independence and indulging in the growing leisure and consumer economy. Joanne Scott served as a warning of how this could go horribly awry. Her acts of consumption and tastes were self-destructive and harmful to those around her. She could be cited as proof that children needed to be reined

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[4] There was also speculation that she was killed by drug dealers for snitching to the police. Gibbons, "Dope, Vice and the Underworld," 15; and "Dope," 48.
[5] Joesten, *Dope, Inc.*, 5–12.

in, for both their own good and that of society. They needed expert guidance and education before braving the new world of commercial leisure.

This chapter considers two sub-genres of juvenile delinquent novels and films, the drug story and the hot rod story, as a means of interrogating America at the peak of what is sometimes known as Fordism. This concept, named for the pioneering automobile manufacturer Henry Ford, will be explained in greater detail below, but, briefly, it refers to a scheme of greater control of the labour process by management in exchange for higher wages and, even more importantly, encouragement of the working and middle class to participate heavily in the consumer economy to stimulate production. Fordism as economic system stepped back from a pure, free market ideal, allowing for government regulation to smooth the cycles of the economy and use tax revenue to provide social assistance to citizens. Fordism as cultural system, however, did not fully trust consumer participation in a free market. Thus, formal and informal inducement, dissuasion, and education was employed by state and industry to encourage/train "better" consumers. It was the embodiment of American postwar liberalism—nominally individualist and aspirational, yet predicated on experts and authority striving for efficiency and stability.

Hot rod and drug stories act as two distinct means for considering how consumption was promoted and delimited to young people learning this new fundamental of American life. The hot rod story acknowledged and encouraged young drivers, but also showed what could go wrong if the driver were too individualistic, too concerned with his/her own pleasure at the expense of others. The hot rod story sought to warn of the undesirable consequences for selfish behaviour, of how it compromised the greater pleasure of the American way of life. The drug story tackled these issues from a different angle. Consumption and leisure were shorthand for happiness and the good life; drugs

were both siren song and perversion of this ideal, and thus could never be validated like hot rods. These stories emphasized the dire fates of those unlucky enough to fall under narcotics' wicked spell. In both types of stories, the path to happiness lay in surrendering enough of one's individual autonomy to the group ideal embodied in the managed state and a culture of expertise. Being a happy individual in postwar America meant taking cues from others and heeding experts. This chapter, then, can be understood as an exploration of one means by which the postwar Fordist hegemony maintained its dominant status, by illustrating both the dark consequences of ill-conceived individuality and the happiness of following the expert-guided crowd. It was an acknowledgement that youth was a necessary part of this new social system, even as that admission generated anxiety. This chapter argues that the mass culture that so anguished many critics was a key mechanism in the Fordist liberal hegemony.

Fordism's origins lay in the late nineteenth century, when scientific and technological knowledge grew to a point where more efficient and productive techniques could be conceived and instituted. The analysis of engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor was central to this evolution in capitalist production. Taylorism employed intense supervision and surveillance of the workforce, standardization of the work day, reduction of labour into smaller and smaller deskilled units, and time and motion studies to improve efficiency. Limiting the human factor in favour of scientific management and abstraction was in service of greater productivity and profit. Taylorism also offered a "social physics" that, once established, denied worker objections over what was expected from a task or its pay. These efforts worked to deny subjectivity in labour and institute an impenetrable and inarguable objective logic that determined behaviour and value. Even as the worker was atomized by this process, he was made dependent on an abstracted

workplace hierarchy. Scientific management turned the labour force into an intricate machine that required external analysis and coordination to keep the process operating efficiently without slowdown. As there was no way for any single worker to appreciate what his contribution meant to the whole, and he was dependent on others to coordinate his labour. What this did was further rationalize labour, eliminating any kind of independent thinking on the factory floor, and create a new category of worker, the "technical employee" who served to link the factory floor with the design and the scheduling departments. Rationalization begat hierarchy, isolation, and dependence.[6]

Henry Ford adopted and expanded Taylor's system in his automotive manufacturing plants. Wherever it was employed, Taylorism was met with worker resistance in the form of absenteeism, strikes, and other disruptions, and so Ford offered higher-than-standard wages to encourage labour-force stability. Yet, even this found only limited success, and so Ford other methods of achieving order and predictability. He hired professionals to educate his workers to a morally correct life, one that facilitated modern production, such as abstaining from alcohol. While these social control efforts were quite primitive and mostly ineffective, the idea of altering lifestyles of workers outside the factory to improve production germinated.[7]

It was the Italian Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci who first glimpsed the even deeper significance of Fordism, a term he coined.[8] Gramsci was skeptical that Fordism was, in fact, evidence of a new stage of capitalism, believing it more likely an

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[6] Martyn L. Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 80–81; and Daniel Bell, "Work and Its Discontents: The Cult of Efficiency in America," in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1960), 226–29.

[7] Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 84; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 125–27; and Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 11–13, 26.

[8] In an act of foresight, he interchangeably called it Americanism.

intensification of previous trends toward fragmentation, abstraction, and assault on worker autonomy. And yet, Gramsci believed that the investigation by industrialists into the private lives and morality of their employees was no aberration. It represented, he argued, "the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a conscious ness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and of man." The goal, always, was to eradicate any humanity or spiritual essence from the labourer. The only thing that mattered was remolding the worker into a better producer, a more passive and pliable machine. Movements like Prohibition were designed to keep the worker, after a long and punishing day on the factory floor, from compromising himself for the next day's labour. Private immorality could not be allowed to damage the machinery.[9]

This was the dilemma of Fordism. Higher wages encouraged a more stable labour force that was trained in and accepted more strict production methods. But placing in a worker's hands more money risked him spending it on commodities or services that made him a less adaptable and less efficient producer.[10] Thus, inducements had to be balanced by controls outside the factory so that the true end—productivity—was not compromised. At the time of Gramsci's writing, this effort had been limited and sporadic. The larger question was whether a combination of "the material and moral pressure of society and the State" would lead to a "psycho-physical transformation" of the average worker so that the standard of labour would be Fordist. The significance of Fordism was clear:

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[9] Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism, " in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 302–03.

[10] This is, in fact, what Daniel Bell argued happened in the postwar period. The participation of the masses in the consumer culture encouraged a more hedonistic lifestyle that, in turn, hindered their productivity. In short, highly productive capitalism produced workers who became less efficient labourers. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976; reprint, New York: Basic Books, 1978).

"Hegemony here is born in the factory."[11]

This was not the only vexing issue. Creating a more effective work force for the purpose of higher production without corresponding consumption ensured regular crises of overaccumulation (i.e., more goods produced than could be sold, leading to economic contraction). Higher wages served a purpose greater than mere labour stability; they generated a pool of potential consumers to absorb the commodities generated by this new level of production. Just as Fordism sought to produce better workers, it also needed to produce consumers from a segment of society unaccustomed to that type of participation. Nurturing a mindset to use higher wages for commercialized leisure not only remedied the overaccumulation problem, it had the potential benefit of neutralizing labour radicalism. That is, by convincing labour that their interests coincided with capital via the sphere of consumption, the militant worker could be neutered.[12] Gramsci saw this goal as requiring both structural and superstructural tactics. The extensive nature of this kind of project, of training people to be both passive labourers and active participants in the sprouting consumer economy, required the co-ordinated efforts of private industry and state actors, suggesting that the next stage of capitalism required some form of planned economy. Whether that society was liberal, fascist, or socialist was not pre-determined and therefore a major political question of the time.[13]

One of the points of failure in early efforts to change worker consciousness was a lack of social and economic supports that might give people the means and confidence to

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[11] Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," 285, 312.

[12] Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 84; and Esteve Morera, *Gramsci's Historicism: A Realist Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 144. On the other hand, Gramsci speculated that by turning workers into automatons, operating on command and reflex, their minds would be freed and able to better consider their predicament, thereby fomenting a revolutionary consciousness. Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," 309.

[13] Morera, *Gramsci's Historicism*, 100, 143, 147; and Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 127.

fully participate rather than save their money. In the Great Depression, ironically enough, an opportunity arrived to alter consciousness towards consumption. Largely against corporate opposition, the New Deal established structures aimed at preserving economic and social stability at a national level. This involved public spending that encouraged workers to increase private consumption. The goal was to tame the unpredictability of the market and turn it into something beneficial for the whole of society. World War II allowed for another notable leap forward, setting the structural tone for the postwar economy. Government strictly regulated essential production, but also provided guaranteed markets, demonstrating to industrialists potential profitability via state participation. Steel, petrochemicals, rubber, electrical goods, automobiles, and shipping all matured in the war and expanded in peacetime under state encouragement. However much industrialists may have bristled at state regulation and interference, the war demonstrated the potential profitability of regulated capitalism with guaranteed markets.[14]

Yet, none of this was a certainty. The immediate postwar period was the site of fierce struggle, negotiation, compromise, and finally confirmation of a Fordist hegemony. In the postwar years, a bargain was struck between capital, labour, and state. Capital agreed to forego the most obvious forms of exploitation—low wages—in exchange for assurances of steady rates of profit and labour peace. Labour tamed its radical instincts in favour of regular increases in real wages. And both agreed to state regulation and other interventions to protect these gains. All involved endorsed the end goal of full employment, high wages, and economic growth. This could not have occurred without

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[14] Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 85; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 129–33; and Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 15–16

the establishment of the welfare state, which asserted the power to regulate the market and tame much of its unpredictability, and provide security and stability for citizens. The significance of this peace was the establishment of a foundation where high rates of production, it was believed, could be sustained by high rates of consumption, seemingly solving overproduction and promoting widespread affluence.[15]

Tempestuous labour disputes of the late 1940s, especially in stark contrast to the decades following, were indicative of resistance to the desires of state and capital. Legislation like the Taft-Hartley Act helped defang labour unions, while a drumbeat of anti-communist investigations either drove out radicals or chilled any interest in job action. Carrots were also plentiful, as legislation was enacted to promote home ownership, education, health, and other social benefits for the working and middle class (albeit skewed considerably towards white men). As Lizabeth Cohen has shown, these social programs safeguarded and promoted the citizen's purchasing power, reframing the state-citizen relationship as, in her term, a citizen's republic, whereby a permanently expanding economy was seen as the solution to any problem.[16]

Corporate America committed to technological change, steady capital investment, and economies of scale for the purpose of steady growth and rising wages. Scientific management and planning came to dominate business life. Growth was reliant on all the partners compromising some of their own interests for that goal, and so corporations finally accepted labour unions once the latter demonstrated an interest to collaborate. The state pursued fiscal and monetary policies that smoothed out the business cycle, as well

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[15] Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 86–87; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 132–33; and Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 153.

[16] George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 256–59; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 133–38; and Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 116–33.

as engaged in public investment projects that encouraged production and consumption by assuring virtual full employment.[17]

As Cohen demonstrated, for Fordism to mature and succeed, participation could not be optional. Mass production, distribution, and consumption were more than the circulation of commodities, but an ideal that married abundance with freedom, "almost a national civil religion." Consumption now became a central aspect of daily life, where even the working class came to expect greater disposable income and leisure time. This defined, Martyn Lee stated, "the will to consume." The corporate sphere embraced social scientific techniques to expand its role and deepen its involvement in all stages of production, personal relations, and product promotion (design, marketing, distribution planned obsolescence). In all this, the state's regulatory capacity was significant, promoting high production and consumption as social norms.[18]

The suburban shift was a key example of the logic of Fordism at work. It relied on: 1) higher wages so that even working-class labourers could afford a home; 2) deskilled and highly rationalized construction processes; 3) government subsidies and other assistance to make mass development feasible and desirable (i.e., to not suffer from an overaccumulation of housing); and 4) a de-radicalized labour movement that came to see itself as invested in the economic health of the nation. Suburbia allowed the masses to literally buy their way in as full consumer-citizens. The suburbs further de-radicalized labour by transporting people farther from their workplace, by better shaping the distinction between work and leisure, and by dividing the worker's consciousness. Instead of work and home lives feeding into other a unity of life and purpose, suburban

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[17] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 133–35.
[18] Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 127; Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 94; Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, 34–35; and Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 18–19.

leisure encouraged a bifurcated view of a socio-economic system that provided a life of material luxury. Work may have been stultifying, but the stocked suburban home could justify dissatisfaction in half of one's life.[19]

Postwar Fordist liberalism thus represented a successful hegemony, as it effectively normalized consumption, commodification, bureaucracy, and labour abstraction at the core of American life. Fordist corporate liberals, George Lipsitz argued,

> elevated consumption over production, conformity over dissent, and bureaucratically administered social harmony over direct democracy. They succeeded in utilizing the state as an instrument of both capital accumulation and ideological legitimation, while at the same time colonized for capital new areas of investment opportunity.[20]

Corporate liberals controlled core resources and institutions by uniting diverse groups and achieving broad support for their worldview as representing the common interest. The coalition brought in union liberals and business conservatives through mutual material benefit. "Postwar Fordism," the Marxist scholar David Harvey summarized, "has to be seen, therefore, less as a mere system of mass production and more as a total way of life. Mass production meant standardization of product as well as mass

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[19] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 17–19; and Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 257–59. Also see Thomas W. Hanchett, "Financing Suburbia: Prudential Insurance and the Post-World War II Transformation of the American City," *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 3 (March 2000): 312–328, which details the much less considered role of the large insurance companies in lobbying state governments to facilitate new subdivisions and then financing that commercial and residential development.

Even the design aesthetics of the period reflected the Fordist ideal. What was known as Contemporary was a commercialized form of Modernism, which emerged in the 1920s as a rejection of more ornate styles. Like scientific labour management, seeking to abstract and better manipulate, Modernism treated the home with functionalist logic. Rooms were devised to serve multiple purposes and the home itself to incorporate more mechanical devices to perform domestic labour. Where Modernism was understood as avant garde, Contemporary, in proper hegemonic language, was regarded as common sense. Functionalism was pragmatic and commercially efficient. Indeed, the mass production methods of the new suburbs meshed well with Contemporary's essential logic—standard in design, adaptable to need. See Lesley Jackson, *Contemporary: Architecture and Interiors of the 1950s* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994).

[20] Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 264–65.

consumption; and that meant a whole new aesthetic and commodification of culture."[21]

As important as policy and structural changes were for establishing Fordism as the dominant American ideology following the war, the effort required promotion via diverse media and spokespersons. The type of people most prominent in this effort, historian Jackson Lears explained, were those most connected with and exemplifying the new perspective. The hegemonic bloc of the postwar America was one of a "new class" of managers, administrators, academics, technicians, and journalists—"people who manipulated symbols rather than made things."[22] The new class was not unified in any traditional sense (e.g., by class or religion), but rather shared common interests, experiences, and worldviews. They were, for the most part, "rootless urbanites or suburbanites," corporate employees, and affluent. More succinctly, they were believers in the (corporatized) American Way of Life, and were convinced that their own interests coincided with that of the nation at large. In this, they saw the mixed economy, dependent on cooperation between business and government, as addressing their wariness of extremism from the left or right. Because modern American capitalism had solved the so-called contradictions identified by Marx, they reasoned, all social conflict could be managed out of existence. That labour was no longer militant, for example, was not evidence of surrender but successful maturity.[23] They embodied a "pragmatic optimism"

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[21] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity,* 135. Martyn Lee similarly concluded, "Fordism saw the first attempt to establish a social consciousness based upon mass commodity consumption and which, it was hoped, would soon become inscribed throughout everyday life and its practices." This was not to suggest an infinitely coordinated, all-powerful consciousness industry, only that commercial and state interests, generally speaking, promoted a hegemonic Fordist worldview. Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 93.

[22] T.J. Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 50.

[23] For a contemporary affirmative example of this ideal, see Russell W. Davenport and the Editors of *Fortune*, *U.S.A.: The Permanent Revolution* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951). The postwar liberal consensus was expressed as individual diversity and happiness through the team, power safely diffused and distributed into an array of political and economic sectors, rationally dissuaded labour militancy, and

yet also possessed a "bland indifference to the darker dimensions of life." In short, they were both the beneficiaries and boosters of Fordist ideals.[24]

Similarly, literary scholar Andrew Ross observed that where intellectuals were traditionally found outside of power, by yoking themselves to the new class they now served as "cultural deputies" of the liberal elite, acting to legitimate expressions of Fordist ideals. In this environment, social difference was established not by what someone produced but by what they consumed—which is to say, expressions of taste. The intellectual's function was that of arbiter of taste.[25] In this way, the consumption choices of the masses could be subject to evaluation, recommendation, and, if necessary, condemnation. Cultural gatekeepers sought to play a similar role as the factory foreman, to keep behaviour and attitude disciplined and beneficial to the status quo.

The Fordist perspective was also communicated more directly, more obviously, through educational programs. The so-called mental hygiene film, short films that were ubiquitous features of secondary education from the late 1940s to the early 1970s—not coincidentally, Fordism's apogee—sought to teach youthful students proper conduct. Never ambiguous, mental hygiene films created ideal scenarios to demonstrate the consequences of not following the rules—whether the subject was dating, heeding ones parents and teachers, or taking drugs—by illustrating the dire consequences. The

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a boisterous and optimistic American life in work and play. Standardization and management were the means to individual expression and happiness, not a clamp. American capitalism, the authors argued, was fundamentally popular and participatory because Americans possessed the moral rigour to make it so (*passim*, but especially 26–27, 66–69, 78–108, 205–06).

[24] Lears, "A Matter of Taste," 51. Also see Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 134–35. Lears' larger point in asserting this corporate liberal hegemony with its homogeneous ideal—one that alarmed some, served as validation for others—was that acknowledging that ideal should not be taken to mean that it reflected reality. Any hegemony, as Gramsci understood, necessarily operates amidst pockets of dissent throughout the society. Looking for those contradictions and oppositions was the duty of any historian examining this period.

[25] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 55–56, 59.

unspoken assumption was that teenagers were just as likely (perhaps more likely) to make poor choices as good ones and so needed proper instruction. As Ken Smith, a historian of these films, emphasized, "[s]ociety and dogmatic rules were never wrong; it was always the teenagers who were at fault." In instilling Fordist values, the point was to assert that individual happiness depended greatly on learning social discipline, to accept instruction and hew to the status quo—all traits valuable to being a productive worker and reliable and moral consumer.[26]

Consumption and discipline, then, became a novel but critical pairing in the postwar period. In the process, it created new social constellations. "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," Russell Lynes' rather tongue-in-cheek essay published in *Harper's* in 1949, explored status anxiety in America. He argued that the traditional social structure based on class and rooted in productivity was in eclipse, replaced by taste (meaning consumption). "It isn't wealth or family that makes prestige these days," he wrote. "It's high thinking." The question of culture had come to permeate everything, for now every citizen, consumers all, staked a claim to some form of culture. "It is this association of culture with every aspect of daily life, from the design of his razor to the shape of the bottle that holds his sleeping pills, that distinguishes the highbrow from the middlebrow or the lowbrow."[27] This is, in fact, a key point to understanding Fordism's cultural angle in postwar America. However much mass production and consumption depended on standardization, this society was sliced up by personal and group taste.

Lynes' schema divided society between highbrows, upper middlebrows, lower middlebrows, and lowbrows, all defined by their relationship to cultural consumption.

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[26] Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945–1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999), 12–45. Quote on p. 13.
[27] Russell Lynes, "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," *Harper's* 198 (February 1949): 19–20.

Even more to the point, how the different brows related to and judged each other were rooted in choices of consumption. The highbrow, for example, was a self-regarded cultural authority who sneered at the middlebrow, who used the cultural sphere for material gain. The highbrow saw himself as the firewall who protected real culture from the base commercialized form. The lowbrow tolerated the highbrow even though he found odd the latter's obsession with analysis and significance, while the highbrow was comfortable with the lowbrow's passive satisfaction with formula. The lowbrow's interest in culture was purely hedonist. As long as he had fun, it was a fair deal. The highbrow found this attitude ignoble but sincere and unthreatening to real culture.[28]

Highbrows opposed the upper middlebrow cultural do-gooders who sought to educate others in cultural matters, for their motives were suspect. However sincere the upper middlebrow's interests in promoting art and culture, as money was never a non-consideration, his preferences were always tainted by popular (read: commercial) taste. In this, he was caught between serving commerce and serving art. The upper middlebrow was certain that taste was important, yet did not possess the confidence and certainty as to what his taste should be. The lower middlebrow, on the other hand, knew what he liked but was still entirely susceptible to popular trends. The lower middlebrow, Lynes contended, dominated America. Lower middlebrows were "a dreadful mass of insensible back-slappers, given to sentimentality as a prime virtue, the willing victims of slogans and the whims of the bosses, both political and economic." They were constantly seeking to improve, whether it was their mind or their home, torn between fad and tradition. They kept the machinery of commercialized culture running.[29]

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[28] Ibid., 23–25.
[29] Ibid., 25–27.

In this turmoil, Lynes argued, the highbrow desired to eliminate the middlebrow and establish a cultural/intellectual feudalism in which lowbrows were confined to folk art, while highbrows opined on and created fine art. "But the highbrows haven't a chance; things have gone too far. Everybody but the genuine lowbrow (who is more wooed than wedded by the highbrow) is jockeying for position in the new cultural class order." Indeed, while Lynes intended his piece to be playful, it led many readers to evaluate, justify, and perhaps reconsider their tastes, confirming his suggestion of cultural uncertainty. *Life* quickly responded with its own cartoon-based chart that presented the four demographic groups and their preferred tastes against eleven categories of common consumption.[30] Both Lynes' revised stratification—even more lines of division than traditionally regarded—and the seriousness with which it was accepted was especially curious, historian Michael Kammen observed, given that so many critics fretted that this was a period of homogeneity. Most important, however, public response indicated that, indeed, American self-regard had undergone a fundamental shift and one's participation in the consumer economy was a key component of social identity.

Recognizing the seriousness of this stratification, Lynes returned to the question in *The Tastemakers* (1954). Taste, he said, was an essential part of modern capitalism. It was not something to be confirmed and satisfied, but an endless demand, something created and re-created, generating its own momentum and pressure to keep up. Americans lived in the Age of Corporate Taste, for tastemakers used the mass

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[30] Ibid., 28; Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 95–100; and "High-brow, Low-brow, Middle-brow," *Life* 26, no. 15 (11 April 49): 99–102. The most prominent of those who took Lynes' categorization seriously was Dwight Macdonald, who followed through the implications of the premise to apocalyptic conclusions, where "a tepid, flaccid Middlebrow Culture … threatens to engulf everything in its spreading ooze." Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," *Diogenes* 3 (Summer 1953): 7. An irony that Macdonald ignored or failed to realize was that Lynes' essay appeared in the decidedly middlebrow *Harper's*, which, in Macdonald's perspective, should have disqualified it from serious consideration.

communication power of corporate power to influence the cultural interests of millions. The Age of Corporate Taste was synonymous with the suburban shift, notable for its quest for stability, conformity, and reasonableness, one where education, recreation, and community service were representative of the good life. Yet owning a home introduced its own pressures, requiring expressions of taste that demonstrated one's social location.[31]

The middlebrow, flush with disposable income and non-disposable uncertainty, was the target of the tastemakers who nurtured both cultural anxiety and their personal expert salve. Which car to drive? Which dress to wear? Which sofa sent the correct message? Which sent the wrong message? The insistence of endless advice, as well as the assertion that there was indisputably good taste and bad taste, but no agreement as to which was which, only amplified the uncertainty. Americans, Lynes suggested, were taught to believe that their tastes revealed something significant about their personality. But what was their personality, let alone how best to express it? This created yet another layer of reliance on expertise, the social psychologists who established normality.[32]

Most wanted to possess good taste, but few actually enjoyed their personal taste because they spent too much time worrying about its nature and how it affected their social status. As such, there was no actual cultural pleasure. Indeed, those who genuinely enjoyed their tastes tended to be resented by others, unless it was shared. Art was reduced to status marker, and a defensive one at that. Instead of art for art's sake, American cultural appreciation had become taste for taste's sake, an exploration of textbooks and categories, not personal interest. Artistic investigation was transformed into something purposefully unadventurous. Lynes admitted that he did not know what good taste was,

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[31] Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* (New York: Harper, 1954), 4–7, 236–37.
[32] Ibid., 334–36. See also Ross, *No Respect*, 53–56.

but believed that it was "not constant and that it is a creature of circumstance."[33]

What Lynes described in both "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow" and *The Tastemakers* was a society that had evolved into one whose citizens identified primarily as consumers, and, furthermore, turned consumption into the fluctuating means of social stratification, with all the potential anxiety that that entailed. It was one thing to be boxed in by one's occupation or ethnicity, but consumption and taste was an atomizing idea whereby each person was regarded as responsible for his or her own growth or stagnation. Consumption was social signalling. Who was successful in such an environment? Who understood the criteria? How did the individual left at sea make it back to land? This captured well cultural Fordism, at once driven by individual and mandatory consumption, but also a social instability that demanded expert navigators through choppy waters. It seemed a scenario reliant on uncertain satisfaction.

In *The Status Seekers* (1958), journalist Vance Packard took Lynes' curiosity in a more hectoring direction. Packard asked what happened to class distinctions amidst widespread affluence. Did distinctions disappear? Did status anxiety vanish? This was the assumption before "this era of fabled plenty" began—that material comfort would eliminate class distinction—and conventional wisdom accepted that America was in the midst of a great equality. Quite the opposite was happening, Packard said. An entirely unique and cancerous status system was emerging built on affluence and consumption.[34]

The physical mobility of suburbanites, itself evidence of affluence, was a constant game of appraisal of new neighbours and co-workers, and the anxiety of possibly not fitting in, or fitting in with the "wrong crowd." Because of this, Packard claimed,

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[33] Lynes, *The Tastemakers*, 338–39.
[34] Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers* (1958; reprint, New York: Pocket Books, 1962), 1–3.

acquisition of status symbols that could shape perception became especially valuable. Advertisers, whose benighted tactics he sought to expose in *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), played a significant role in both generating anxiety and promoting consumption as panacea. Those reliant on material evidence of their superiority were Packard's pitiable status seekers, whom he blamed for the debilitating social stratification of the nation: "In truth, America, under its gloss of prosperity, is undergoing a significant hardening of the arteries of its social system at some critical points."[35]

Social structures had been dramatically altered by changes in the American economy, including: a vast increase in personal wealth; a declining distinction between rich and poor in terms of material possessions; the predominance of white-collar work; a growth in productivity and concomitant increase in leisure time; and job specialization and deskilling. Scientific management in office work implemented a stratification that demanded employees conform their behaviour to assigned rank. This rigidity fragmented the workforce, isolating employees from those outside their immediate task. Even the division of labour was seeming more like factory assembly lines, with office workers handling only partial and repetitive tasks, not the full and complete job. Depersonalizing the work experience made labour unsatisfying and the labourer mentally stagnant. In short, Taylorist rationalization had expanded beyond the factory with predictable consequences. People sought satisfaction outside the workplace, but trapped themselves further by consuming "flamboyantly," in a manner Packard uncharitably likened to Romans circuses.[36] American life, he said, was in a dire state: "We are badly maladjusted

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[35] Ibid., 4–6.

[36] Ibid., 6–7, 17–23, 28–29. Packard's understanding of office work was influenced by journalist William H. Whyte, Jr., who was among the fiercest and most-read critics of labour practices in the 1950s. His concern was with the transformation of labour from an individualist Protestant work ethic to a homogenizing standard subservient to bureaucracy. Social engineers dominated American business,

to our environment and are becoming more maladjusted every month." The effects of this, he believed, were manifested in "extraordinarily high psychoses rates" at the bottom levels of society, and delinquency and crime rates amongst the young lower class.[37]

Daniel Horowitz argued that Packard's criticism rested on a belief in a mythic past of simplicity and virtue. Packard yearned for a healthy group-centred society—an organic one, not something manufactured, one where people understood the whole, not just their place. He sought inclusion, not exclusion. Packard was distinct from most liberals who feared passive consumption; he pointed the finger at the capitalists who created and inspired consumer culture, for it only divided people needlessly.[38] In this critique, he stood as someone who identified that the Fordist enterprise had created a new kind of person, one distressingly distinct from the idealized past that Packard longed for.

Daniel Bell, too, saw a connection between declining job satisfaction and compensation via consumption. In "Work and Its Discontents: The Cult of Efficiency in America" (1956), Bell mused about the purpose of work. That is, the traditional impetus for work—hunger and shelter—no longer applied in an era of widespread affluence. (In this assumption, Bell joined the flawed conventional thinking that affluence was a permanent and ubiquitous feature of American life.) Maintaining social status, Bell answered, was the motivation; it was about the carrot, not the stick. Like Packard, Bell believed advertisers and credit card companies, bombarding the public with messages of

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promoting submission to the group and emphasizing the destructive nature of dissenting thought and behaviour (i.e., individualism). Adherence to the group became the highest virtue, the source of all productivity and happiness. This was not brainwashing, for the employee was aware of how much he faked his group consciousness, thereby feeling a fraud. Any active dissent, however, was met with assurances that he simply did not appreciate the larger picture and that his resistance was unwarranted. William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956).

[37] Packard, *The Status Seekers*, 289–90.

[38] Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Influence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939–1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2004), 111–13; and Daniel Horowitz, *Vance Packard & American Social Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 110–17.

buying and selling happiness, had overcome traditional American frugality and encouraged the worker to mortgage his future for immediate gratification. It was this, Bell asserted, that had truly disciplined the worker—not the rationalization of the factory floor, but the promise of consumption, that money and credit and access to goods led to a better life. Immediate gratification had de-radicalized the worker. It was no minor development that the "desperate drive" toward leisure was borne of an effort to escape from work. Americans were embracing pastimes and hobbies as never before because work was no longer satisfying.[39] The connecting tissue between rationalization and fragmentation of labour and the turn to consumption was a lonely search for happiness.

In *The Affluent Society* (1958), economist John Kenneth Galbraith positioned this problem in a social context. The unprecedented widespread abundance available to many Americans, quite worryingly, had coincided with a lack of interest in the poverty and suffering of others. This was, Galbraith charged, due to marketing, which had persuaded Americans to believe and pursue "many things that are unnecessary, some that are unwise, and a few that are insane. Some are a threat to affluence itself." The fundamental problem with the American economy and its social effects, Galbraith argued, was that the level of production was unjustified. The supposed urgency of production was informed by a wartime desperation no longer applicable. Production of the unnecessary—luxury goods—amounted to "make-work and boondoggling." In making all desires urgent, it turned consumer demand "obscurantist." Yet, the dominant "theory of consumer demand

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[39] Bell, "Work and Its Discontents," 246–47, 250–51. There was no such hand-wringing in a double-sized issue of *Life* devoted to "The Good Life" and emphasizing the role of sports, arts, relaxation, and love as evidence of the nation's progress. An editorial entitled "Leisure Could Mean a Better Civilization" emphasized that poverty had all but been eliminated, and if work had become "more irksome and less meaningful," there was now more time for individual pursuits. More importantly, a "million serious definitions of happiness, all pursued in joy and freedom, could add up to a great civilization." "Leisure Could Mean a Better Civilization," *Life* 47, no. 26 (28 December): 62–63.

and by a system of vested interests" was something to which both liberals and conservatives subscribed. The consensus, in effect, was guided by folly.[40]

"Ideas," Galbraith wrote, "come to be organized around what the community as a whole or particular audiences find acceptable." More so, public approval rested on "what they best understand." Ideas achieving such familiarity gained stability and predictability. This, Galbraith argued, was the essence of conventional wisdom, what Gramsci would have understood as common sense, a key element in the ascendency and dominance of a hegemonic bloc. Conventional wisdom acted much like religious faith and ritual, requiring repetition to reconfirm its power. Only difficult real-world events, practical problems that could not be ignored, might challenge conventional wisdom.[41] The point of this was to suggest that Americans' devotion to private and luxury consumption was fundamentally irrational, a belief resting on self-flattery and deliberate ignorance of social cost, but that a reckoning was inevitable.

The essence of the American economy was a "virtuosity in persuasion" keeping up with a "virtuosity in production." The latter may have been complimentary, but the former certainly was not. When so much of the nation's capital was used for cars and television sets instead of hospitals and schools, what was the purpose of America's mighty economic engine? People were willing to accrue mountains of personal debt but were hostile to public debt. Personal luxury became a necessity, but spending on the common good was frowned upon. It was this problem of "social balance" that was so galling. Production and consumption of private goods robbed any possibility of public investment in the common good. The conventional wisdom that privileged the private life

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[40] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society,* 40th anniversary edition (1958; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 1–2, 143–44.
[41] Ibid., 7–11, 16.

over the public, Galbraith argued, was betraying communities and the nation.[42]

This kind of criticism, literary scholar Leerom Medovoi has posited, undercut whether the Cold War consensus actually existed, for it suggested that Fordism served as a notable fault line within liberalism. If mass production and mass consumption mandated participation in private material acquisition, where did individuality fit in such a scheme? How did one reject Fordism?[43] This was, in fact, a key tension within postwar corporate liberalism. Fordism treated individual dissent or deviance as a threat to the stability (i.e., productivity) of the group. Just as expression of individuality could disrupt a well-meshed team in the workplace, the deviant in civil society was seen as having dramatic and destructive ramifications on family, community, and nation. Fordism implicitly privileged the group but exaggerated the power of the individual. That is, the individual could not do good—only the group accomplished good—but only harm, to him/herself and especially the group. The individual was not compromised in this perspective, but his/her actions, nevertheless, could only be appreciated by their effect on others. The individual had choice, but its significance was measured socially.

This re-conception of individuality was not the only significance of Fordism. Fordist scientific management and labour relations and the grand consensus between capital, labour, and state allowed America's productive capacity to expand dramatically, offering affluence to a greater share of the populace than ever before. Yet critics questioned whether it was worth it if, as they claimed, Americans were not happier. The old presumptions of scarcity that were tied to productive capacity and drove so much social criticism no longer appeared to be operational. Social critics were now faced with

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[42] Ibid., 147–48, 152, 186–89, 193–94. Also see Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Influence*, 101–08.
[43] Medovoi, *Rebels*, 22–23; and Jancovich, *Rational Fears*, 20.

the question of too much abundance. How one spent money became more important than how one earned that money. But, these critics emphasized, what did that mean for the health of the group, be it family, community, or nation? Was anyone truly happy? Consumption was understood as linchpin for the good life, yet, pursued recklessly or poorly, it could also disrupt the precarious social balance. Just as Fordist production relied on dispassionate analysis that assaulted the idea of individuality in favour of the group, Fordist consumption was seen as requiring analysis and correction, to remove harmful individual choice in favour of that which benefited the group. If intellectuals were wary of consumption's deeper social effect, the products of the popular media, themselves symbolic of the new economy and its beneficiaries, betrayed little doubt. Indeed, the importance of consuming wisely played out in novels and films of the era, exploring cultural uncertainty and reinforcing the primacy of this new ideal. One site for this consideration was the teenage drug story.

The postwar period, if popular discussion were accurate, was awash in addiction. Near-ubiquitous to any discussion of the perceived teenage disaster was illegal drugs. Drug-fuelled mayhem filled the pages of crime magazines and newspapers, painting a picture of youth as both predator and prey, victimizer and victim of narcotics. Orgies, homosexuality (even homosexual orgies!), gang violence, and murder were presented as the end result of an epidemic of youth addiction.[44] Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, investigators for the Congressional juvenile delinquency subcommittee, cited one

[44] See, for example, Howard L. Dutkin, "The Young and the Damned," *True Police Cases* 6, no. 67 (September 1954): 9–11, 64, 67–68; Wolfe Van Nord, "Marijuana Murder of the Teen-Age Sweetheart," *Confidential Detective* (February 1958): 34–35, 44–46; Richard Cooper, "Hopped-Up to Kill!" *Police Dragnet Cases* 2, no. 6 (November 1956): 150–58; and "Thrill Pills," *Teen-Age Gangsters* (Chicago: Hillman Periodicals, 1957): 11–13. Also see, more generally, Alwyn J. St. Charles, *The Narcotics Menace* (Los Angeles: Borden Publishing, 1952), 87–103.

estimate of 25,000 teenage addicts in America in the mid-1950s.[45] In *Teen-Age Gangs* (1953), Dale Kramer and Madeline Karr wrote that marijuana was "considered old hat or kid stuff," and that 90% of teenage addicts were now heroin users.[46]

And yet, as historian Eric C. Schneider has written, the picture of addiction in postwar America was horribly distorted. It was true that there was a spike in heroin use in the late 1940s, largely amongst impoverished black and Hispanic youths whose population rapidly grew in segregated northern and western cities. However, the youthful face of the anti-drug moral panic stories and propaganda was a distinctly middle-class, suburban, and white, a group who had low usage rates.[47] The purpose of the drug scare was to emphasize how any child from any background, regardless of privilege—rather, especially from privilege, be it class or race—could become addicted. Thus, rather than the more accurate urban environment where drugs were bought, sold, and used, suburban locales like high schools and ice cream shops were treated as prime stalking grounds for nefarious drug pushers. By decontextualizing space in this manner, heroin use could be reframed and personalized, the result of a search for thrills and/or the sinister actions of pushers, not actual social conditions that engendered drug use. In this way, white identity was privatized, unmoored from society, and deviance became individual (poor) choice or mental illness of some kind. Put in more Fordist terms, the individual failed, not the group.[48] The victim, however, was never solely individual. In the foreword to *The*

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[45] Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 3," *Saturday Evening Post* 227, no. 30 (22 January 1955): 25.

[46] Dale Kramer and Madeline Karr, *Teen-Age Gangs* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), 234.

[47] See Stephen J. Gertz, *Dope Menace: The Sensational World of Drug Paperbacks, 1900–1975* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2008). *Dope Menace* reproduces many drug paperback covers, which almost uniformly show doomed white people, particularly attractive young white women.

[48] Eric C. Schneider, *Smack: Heroin and the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), xiv, 58. Also see John Gerrity, "The Truth About the 'Drug Menace'," *Harper's Magazine* 204 (February 1952): 27–31. Gerrity decried the drug panic as baseless sensationalism, for, he claimed, addiction rates were at historic lows and existing law enforcement was able to control narcotics

Narcotics Menace (1952), for example, Alwyn J. St. Charles listed the real victims of addiction: the addict him/herself, certainly; but also the addict's family, who were humiliated and possibly financially impaired as a result; businesses that were robbed and vandalized by addicts; and "government and society in general," due to the extra costs of law enforcement, hospitalization, and lost labour productivity. Individual failure necessarily meant social suffering. Curbing addiction became a social prophylactic.[49]

Public discussion of drug use generally followed a consistent pattern and portrayal. For one, drug addiction took an evolutionary and inevitable path. One drug necessarily led to the next, more addictive, more lethal one, with accompanying personal and social degradation. It started with alcohol, leading to marijuana, then snorting heroin, subcutaneous heroin injection ("skin shots"), and finally intravenous heroin injection ("mainlining"). The entire process, according to delinquency writer William Alan Brooks, could turn a teen into "a full-fledged drug addict in a few weeks' time."[50]

David Hulburd's *H is for Heroin* (1952) relates the descent into addiction of white teenager Amy Burton.[51] Upon moving to a Los Angeles suburb, Amy, then 14, meets

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trafficking.

The overwhelming number of anti-drug novels, films, and comic book stories from this period featuring addicted youths emphasized middle-class whites in suburban or small-town settings. A prominent exception to this trend was Hal Ellson's *Duke* (New York: Popular Library, 1949) and *The Golden Spike* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1952), which were in set in New York City and dealt with black and Puerto Rican addicts. Ellson, who sought faithful portrayals of real-world conditions to spur meaningful conversation and political action to help actual delinquents, was also notable for treating addiction as a social phenomenon, not individual failure. Drugs were ubiquitous in Ellson's novels, as both a means of alleviating the boredom and frustration of inner-city segregation and the snare that hinders the possibility of escape.

[49] St. Charles, *The Narcotics Menace*, Foreword.

[50] William Alan Brooks, *Girl Gangs* (New York: Padell, 1952), 15–16. Also see, for example, Joesten, *Dope, Inc.*, 26–28. St. Charles reproduced a newspaper profile of a young, white, female, middle-class addict, as well as an account of young man, each of whom followed the standard road of escalation. St. Charles, *The Narcotics Menace*, 28–47, 79–86.

[51] David Hulburd, *H is for Heroin* (1952; reprint, Toronto: Popular Library, 1953). The book claimed to be a true account, changing only the names of participants, but the story parallels several others from the period, notably the educational film *The Terrible Truth* (Sid Davis Productions, 1951) and exploitation movie *Teenage Devil Dolls* [aka *One Way Ticket To Hell*], directed by B. Lawrence Price, Jr. (B.

some other teens who regularly skip classes to spend time at the beach where some "blow up a joint." Soon Amy is smoking pot and listening to jazz on the radio. "That's most what you do after you blow up a joint," Amy says, "just goof around. You have a ball doing nothing."[52] Amy normally goes home stoned, but her parents, unlike addicts, cannot not tell because she acted cool. Amy smokes marijuana for a year, then begins to meet up with some other kids who use heroin and label Amy and her friends squares for sticking to pot. Having no reefers with them that day, they try a cap of heroin. Amy mainlines her first time—she skips sniffing—and does a couple caps that first day. She begins dating Eddy, a heroin junkie who "jolts" every night. Amy strives to avoid getting hooked, but is an addict in a month's time. She and Eddy soon marry, partly out of loneliness and partly to leave her parents' home and freely shoot heroin, and her collapse into addiction accelerates.[53]

The exploitation film *Girl Gang* (1954) relates the sordid lives of a drug ring and its enslaved customers.[54] Inside the apartment of a pusher named Joe, a young man and woman, Jack and June, sit on a couch, smoking marijuana. June asks Joe for another joint, but he refuses because she already owes him a lot of money. She moans that she really needs it because otherwise she cannot feel anything. She is up to five or six times a day now and had no idea she would get hooked so quickly. Joe tells June that he will show her something even stronger that will make her forget about marijuana. "You're a swell guy, Joe," she coos. "I knew you wouldn't let me down." Joe instructs June how to inject heroin, with instructive close-ups and step-by-step demonstration. Joe injects June

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Lawrence Price, Jr. Productions, 1955).

[52] Hulburd, *H is for Heroin*, 44–45. Amy: "You pick up all the words real quick, and after you've learned them it's so square not to use them. You know, words like 'blowing up a joint' and 'H' and 'scoring'."

[53] Ibid., 41–55, 60–68. It is worthy of note that Amy's easy introduction to heroin was so atypical as to raise doubt. The first encounter with heroin usually coincides with vomiting. See Schneider, *Smack*, 55.

[54] *Girl Gang*, directed by Robert C. Derteno (Broadway Roadshow Productions, 1954).

and we hear the dreamy sounds of a harp that represent drug-induced bliss.

Later, Jack and June bring to Joe's apartment a couple clean-cut novices, Bill and Wanda. Joe greets them warmly and distributes joints as a welcome present. (June and Jack have both graduated to various stages of heroin use, so that is their preference.) Both Bill and Wanda gag on the first puff, so Jack and June teach them how to smoke. The second puff goes smoothly and Bill says, "I'm beginning to like it." Wanda says she wants to join a cellar (i.e., sex) club, too. Bill expresses interest in the "something stronger" that June and Jack use, but Jack tells him to slow down. Bill and Wanda are feeling good and the harps play. In the kitchen, Jack says he is getting the "jumpin' jives" without his fix as he and June shoot up. When Bill and Wanda wake up, they immediately ask for "a few more mary janes." Joe replies, "Weeds today, shots tomorrow."

What is notable about these depictions of addiction as inevitable graduation is that they fundamentally collapsed all drugs and drug use. Marijuana may not have been as harmful as heroin—although some accounts treated marijuana use as promoting violence[55]—its use almost certainly led to heroin and despair, so the distinction between the drugs was merely the convenience of days or weeks. Considering this from a liberal ideal, drug use countered the fundamental precept of individual autonomy and free will. From the first puff, the user was compromised, unable to properly act in his/her own

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[55] For example, two Depression-era exploitation films, *Marihuana*, directed by Dwain Esper (Roadshow Attractions Corporation, 1936) and *Reefer Madness* [*Tell Your Children*], directed by Louis Gasnier (G and H Productions, 1936), each presented marijuana as causing homicidal lunacy. In 1952, Donald Crosby, 16, was charged with first-degree murder in San Diego after Ida MacKeown, 67, was slashed to death. Crosby said that he was high on marijuana at the time and was looking for things to steal when MacKeown's threats to call the police led him to kill her. Cooper, "Hopped-Up to Kill!," 150–58. Even more suggestive was a story headlined "Marijuana Murder of the Teen-Age Sweetheart," which related how Duane "Pat" Lattimer, 21, murdered his girlfriend while on a marijuana binge. Wolfe Van Nord, "Marijuana Murder of the Teen-Age Sweetheart," 44–46.

interest. Buying and ingesting drugs, therefore, was a perversion of the principles of the consumer economy, for the individual was all the worse from the experience. That one lost free will and became a miserable wretch only demonstrated the importance of informed choice. A bad choice could set off a chain of regretful events.

Perhaps worse than the physical effects of addiction, the concomitant moral rot turned the drug user into an anti-citizen. In his exposé account, *Dope, Inc.* (1953), Joachim Joesten emphasized that narcotics addicts lost "proper sense of reality, proportion and responsibility." The addict was far more likely to act out in anti-social and self-destructive ways:

> Under the influence of dope, a man who normally would shrink from committing a crime will rob, assault, rape, and perhaps kill without qualms.
>
> A woman who normally can resist temptation will lightly surrender herself.
>
> The once reformed criminal becomes an incorrigible repeater; the wavering girl turns into a hardened prostitute.
>
> The child becomes a persistent truant from school, neglects his homework and stay away from sports.[56]

Amy Burton and her husband quickly lose all self-respect, borrowing money from her parents for dope and stealing food. Then, out of money and dope, one of their friends, Turkey, suggests robbing a doctor of his prescription pad, then write out and sell prescriptions to junkies and buy heroin with the profits.[57] They are eventually arrested and only then does Amy receive treatment for her addiction. She further gains the clarity to understand that her husband is a con man and she files for divorce.

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[56] Joesten, *Dope, Inc.*, 19; St. Charles, *The Narcotics Menace*, 32, 62; and Richard Clendenen and Herbert W. Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 2," *Saturday Evening Post* 227, no. 29 (15 January 1955): 70. Most every anti-drug story examined here hewed to this narrative of addiction and its resulting criminal and moral decline.

[57] Hulburd, *H is for Heroin*, 77–82.

The addicts in *Girl Gang* go through even greater gymnastic depravity. The movie opens with four young women carjacking a convertible so that they can sell it to Joe for heroin. Jack and June bring in Bill and Wanda to Joe in exchange for drugs, knowing full well the fate that will befall them. Later on, June takes Wanda to a cellar club, where she is told that she is to be initiated by having sex with five club members. Wanda does not think she can do it, but the girl explains that the boys will give her free reefers and she will not even be aware of what is happening. All the members have done it, Wanda is told and she accedes. As the other kids smoke pot and make out, Wanda goes into a room with a sign marked "Private Business Keep Out." She emerges after several minutes in tears, and the other girls comfort her with a joint. Wanda confesses, "I guess I'm not as tough as I thought." June then drags a stoned boy into the room, saying, "C'mon, jerk, I didn't come here for nothin'. I gotta be initiated." Later still, Bill and Wanda are recruited into the gang's plan to rob a gas station. The robbery goes poorly and June shoots the attendant, who manages to shoot both Bill and Wanda. Bill is left behind for the police to find, but Wanda succumbs from her wounds.

"The Monkey" (1953), a story in the social-commentary comic book *Shock SuspenStories*, relates how a teenaged Eddie Anderson became a junkie.[58] Evolving from marijuana to benzedrine to heroin, Eddie's desperation for money makes him belligerent. He loses his job and steals money from his parents, but when his parents discover his injection kit they chastise Eddie for abusing their sacrifices. Eddie's father tells him that they are turning him over to the police. Desperate and suffering withdrawal symptoms, Eddie brings a lamp down on his father's head, grabs his kit, and flees the house. He holes up in a cheap hotel room and waits for his dealer, which is where the police find

[58] "The Monkey," *Shock SuspenStories* 12 (December-January 1953).

him. They inform Eddie that his father died immediately from the blow to his head.

In addition to denying free will to the user, drugs perverted their productive power. The addict became a thief, a prostitute, a killer as an inevitable part of his/her drug use. Where the Fordist principle understood consumption and production in a symbiotic relationship—which was the whole reason for educating citizens to be wise consumers—the addict's consumption made him/her an anti-producer. Their actions introduced an anarchic immorality that compromised the overall productive capacity of the nation.

In most narratives, the drug addict was tricked into their addiction through a combination of peer pressure and free samples, not unlike the more jaundiced views of advertising. The educational film *Drug Addiction*, for example, tracks the descent of a youth named Marty. He is introduced to marijuana by his friends. He does not like it, but is determined "to be one of the gang if it killed him." Regardless of the ill effects—he is shown drinking soda pop from a broken glass, oblivious to it cutting up his mouth because he is so stoned—he is hooked and doomed. His friend Duke is a pusher and introduces him to heroin, both daring Marty to try something better and making it more appealing by not charging him for the initial experience. In no time, Marty is hooked and is forced to sell off everything he owns and then become a thief to keep up with the suddenly costly capsules. When Marty begs for an extension of credit from Duke's supplier, he is told to be more efficient with his heroin usage—he needs to inject the drug directly into his veins. Marty is dubious, but overcomes his fear of the needle, graduating from subcutaneous to intravenous injections. Ignorance on the part of the user and the

heartless, predatory nature of drug dealers are all part of the routine.[59]

Amy Burton and the characters in *Girl Gang* all arrive at their addiction through peer pressure, either trying to fit in with their drug-using friends or are tricked by people they trusted. In the film *The Cool and the Crazy* (1958), Ben Saul is starting a new school.[60] He is a drug dealer and well aware that teenagers are "looking for kicks." As an outsider, however, he has to prove himself to the kids, and so he treats a group of them to a night out at a jazz club then sasses some police officers. Winning their trust, he introduces his prey to marijuana, all part of a grander scheme to get them hooked and vulnerable to something more expensive and more difficult to resist. Of course, this sends them down the predictable path of addiction and, desperate for money, criminality. The spell is only broken when Ben, an addict himself, is killed while driving stoned.

Peer pressure and the drug pusher especially demonstrated the dark side of the consumption and conformity. The route to individual happiness, postwar liberalism asserted, lay in finding out and emulating what the group idealized. This was certainly the Fordist ideal in production—the elimination of the individual impulse that reduced efficiency. The standardized nature of Fordist commodities, affordable through an economy of scale, therefore relied on likeminded consumption. Developing a proper consumption mindset required surrender to a group consciousness. Yet, if this led to the consumption of drugs, it compromised the lives of users as effective workers. They may have become better criminals or otherwise degraded human beings, but this existence was well outside the interests and needs of the economy.

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[59] Also see Brooks, *Girl Gangs*, 16–18, 21–42; Albert E. Kahn, *The Game of Death: Effects of the Cold War on Our Children* (New York: Cameron & Kahn, 1953), 120–21; Morton Cooper, *High School Confidential* (New York: Avon, 1958); *The Terrible Truth*; *Girl Gang*; *Teenage Devil Dolls*; and "Rex Morgan Exposes the Teen-Age Dope Slaves," in *Teen-Age Dope Slaves* (Comics Library, April 1952).

[60] *The Cool and the Crazy*, directed by William Witney (American-International, 1958).

The importance of this representation of the drug pusher was that he acted as a sinister version of the Fordist capitalist. The pusher, too, sought to create a new human being, to shape patterns of behaviour and consumption, perhaps even production if brought in as a distributor himself. He worked by rationalizing his prey, offering inducements, guiding them stage by stage, raising prices and strategically denying service, all to the end of dependence and control. The whole point was to eliminate individuality—which is to say unpredictability—and create uniform, reliable consumers. The pusher's aims, however, challenged mainstream desires of a producing and consuming citizen, for it openly mocked the idea of free choice. The Fordist regime may have sought to limit choice, presenting a team ideal as superior for individual happiness, but drug consumption in these stories never failed to emphasize that individuality and happiness were victims in this relationship.

Youthful drug addiction was also connected to personal failure or weakness. People were said to use drugs for a variety of reasons, but generally because they were "neurotic" and "emotionally unstable." Drugs, Joesten argued, were taken "in a quest of temporary relief from inner conflicts, insecurity and turmoil; they seek temporary escape from the problems and cares of day-to-day living." This need to escape made the addict "a definite menace to all of society not only on account of his own impulses and actions, but also because he has a seemingly irresistible urge to draw others into the habit."[61]

According to Schneider, studies of heroin use in this period tended to portray the male user as "passive, almost effeminate," the result of an unhealthy relationship with his mother. Insufficiently masculine, male heroin addicts were described as working as or aspiring to be cooks, bakers, or tailors. Even injecting drugs could be seen as feminine,

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[61] Joesten, *Dope, Inc.*, 21. Also see Brooks, *Girl Gangs*, 18–19; and Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 61–66.

allowing themselves to be penetrated by a needle that ejaculated liquid into their bodies, filling them with orgasmic pleasure. Did dominant mothers and distant fathers produce effeminate boys who became candidates for drug addiction and other perversion?[62]

Wenzell Brown related the story of a young addict whom he labelled "The Kid on Apron Strings." David Trosser, the son of a friend, disappeared in Spanish Harlem while searching for heroin, and was found a week later in an alley, having fallen/jumped/been pushed off a building roof. Brown sought to understand how a child of privilege could end up in such straits. David's father Ralph was successful, a former college football player and a socializer. He wanted the same for his son, but David gravitated to his mother, Geraldine, who encouraged her son to pursue the arts, such as piano and dance. Ralph believed she was turning David into a sissy and was quick to anger when the subject arose. While David was at ease in the world of the arts, mere mention of his father would cause him anxiety. After David's addiction was discovered, he was committed to a sanatorium where a psychologist traced his problems to a dependence on his mother, an unsatisfactory relationship with his father, and personal inadequacies and frustrations. David had been overly mothered and came to require constant validation from her. Yet his interest in bop and Latin American music was also a rebellion against his mother's advocacy for high culture. David admired his father, but was unable to communicate with him because of the barrier established by his mother. His father's anger and contempt for David's "feminine" interests nurtured an emotional weakness that made the boy susceptible to the appeal of narcotics.[63]

Amy Burton, too, could trace her addiction to an insecure home life. The family

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[62] Schneider, *Smack*, 64–65.
[63] Brown, *Monkey On My Back*, 19–47.

moved a great deal when she was a child as her father sought permanent employment. He is a controlling man toward his wife and children, alternating between rage and coldness. As his daughter grows up to be both rebellious and gregarious (not unlike Joanne Scott), his anger toward her and his wife only grows. At one point, he threatens to take their son and leave the family. Both Amy's addiction and early marriage, it is understood, are responses to domestic unhappiness. After Amy's arrest and the discovery of her addiction, her father's main concern is what it might do to his reputation. Once their daughter has recovered her health, the family moves to Los Angeles to get Amy away from Coast City. Amy, however, still seems angry and ready to flee, perhaps because nothing about her home life has changed.[64]

Theories about addiction that emphasized individual psychological causes won out over those that stressed economic and social marginalization. The fault lay not in social inequality, instability, and decay, but the failures of parents, especially mothers, to raise competent and confident children. There were lurking threats seeking out these compromised children who lacked good sense, and parents who improperly raised their children made it more likely that they would become ensnared.[65]

If addiction were an entirely private failure, the outside expert was the addict's only salvation. This was the crucial payoff to the juvenile delinquent drug story. Addiction may have been an individual failure, but the significance was played out in the unhappiness of others, in lost work productivity, in stolen goods, ultimately in the public sphere. The solution, sensibly, lay in surrender to the state. Addiction was something too great for any single person or even a family to overcome. To be restored to full and

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[64] Hulburd, *H is for Heroin*, 19–25, 99–112.
[65] Schneider, *Smack*, 66; and St. Charles, *The Narcotics Menace*, 151–52.

proper citizenship required ceding autonomy to experts and let them rebuild the addict's mind and body. In this way, the drug story reinforced Fordist principles of power.

The most obvious agents of power in these stories are the police. It is the efforts of narcotics officers that end the misery in *Girl Gang*, with Joe the pusher arrested and medical treatment provided for Bill. Detectives break the drug ring to which Ben Saul belongs in *The Cool and the Crazy*, then chase the boy down until he crashes his car, freeing the good teens of his malignant influence. Amy Burton's addiction is not uncovered until she and Eddy are arrested and she is allowed to detoxify after being sentenced to a juvenile prison. Hulburd made a point of departing from Amy's story to argue for more dedicated narcotics units to control illegal drug use. The drug addict, Hulburd argued, was a peculiar, rather anarchist figure:

> He conforms to no accepted rules of society or of the family, and answers to no one for his conduct, not even to his fellow addicts, among whom, unlike thieves, there is no honor, no loyalty.

Police needed special training for properly dealing with these transgressors. It took an exceptional type of individual to become a member of a narcotics unit:

> [T]hey are staffed mostly by young men, members of the post-war school of police forces: alert, intelligent, well trained, honest, and fanatically devoted to duty. They are tough, and they are also realistic. They know the kind of people they are dealing with.[66]

The other primary authority figure in any drug addict redemption story is the doctor, particularly when working directly with law enforcement. In the comic book *Teen-Age Dope Slaves* (1952), the serial character Dr. Rex Morgan teams up with Agent Presser of the Narcotics Bureau to help young Bruce Grayson break his heroin addiction

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[66] Hulburd, *H is for Heroin*, 83, 87.

and arrest the pusher who is manipulating him. In *Drug Addiction*, Marty is sentenced to rehabilitation at a hospital, where he undergoes physical and psychological therapy, something that the narrator makes clear is the only way an addict can ever recover. In short, drug experts brought order from chaos, returning errant individuals to the team.[67]

The archetypal anti-drug exploitation film of the era, *Teenage Devil Dolls* (aka *One Way Ticket To Hell*) (1955), covers all the above qualities in the form of a police case study documentary. No dialogue is uttered by the characters; it is, instead, narrated by a narcotics detective named David Jason. The key characters are "one neurotic mother, one very tired step-father, and one nineteen-year-old girl whom we shall call Cassandra Lee." In the summer of 1949, Cassandra is working as a stockgirl in her mother's downtown business, which is where she meets Russell Packard and his juvenile delinquent friends. They are as emotionally damaged as Cassandra, but in her case it is due to a lifetime of being "bounced from one knee of one stepfather to another by a much-married mother." Her mother, though aware that she has failed Cassandra, is wholly ignorant of a teenager's needs. This failure plays havoc with the emotional stability of both women. In one watershed moment, Cassandra rejects her mother's calling to her and hops on the back of Packard's motorcycle, the first in a series of bad decisions. Cassandra's fall is rooted in maternal failure. Her mother has been married multiple times and is more concerned with running her own business than minding her

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[67] Yet, even this was no guarantee. In another purported true story that was related in the *Saturday Evening Post*, a mother detailed the harrowing experience of her teenage son's heroin addiction. He finally surrendered to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics for rehabilitation, and entered treatment at the government addiction hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. Upon his release and return home, however, he was obviously under heroin's influence again. The story ended with the narcotics agent telling the woman, "I know parents aren't built this way, Mrs. B., but you'd better forget you have a son." However disheartening this account may have been, the addiction story was, in fact, frequently littered with corpses, demonstrating the liberal idea that there were no utopias, successes and failures never pre-written. Cameron Cornell, "My Son is a Dope Addict," *Saturday Evening Post* 224, no. 30 (26 January 1952): 20–21, 77, 79–81, 84.

daughter. Deviance is all but thrust upon Cassandra, merely waiting for her to carry through.

Later that day, Cassandra first encounters marijuana, a lesser narcotic that serves as the "first faltering step" to hard drugs. Cassandra, Jason explains, faces a teen's greatest pressure: "conformity to the group pattern." She initially rejects the joint, and over the next several weeks the group treats her with suspicion and subtle ridicule. Jason explains, "The adolescent personality demands and needs to belong, to belong meant conformity to the group's pattern of behaviour." Conformity is not a negative quality—certainly not in the workplace—but the damaged Cassandra is attracted to the wrong group, drawn to participate in the wrong rituals of consumption. She finally surrenders her independence to the group and starts smoking pot.

By the school year's end, Cassandra's personality has undergone a gradual but drastic change. She is "irritable, reticent, and pointedly anti-social." Old friends now avoid her, except for Johnny Adams, who has always walked her home and refuses to believe she has changed. Seeking an escape from her family, Cassandra marries Johnny after high school. Cassandra is scared, but Johnny has a good career ahead of him. Alas, Cassandra is "emotionally immature and badly maladjusted," unprepared for the routines and responsibilities of being a housewife. Not unlike Joanne Scott, she meets up with Russell again and goes riding and smoking pot with the gang. She leaves her husband for good. Cassandra is next found selling dope out of an apartment to "the teenage bop crowd" from the nearby high school, but her addiction compromises her ability to do the job properly. Arrested in a police raid and guided by self-preservation, Cassandra provides information leading to the arrest of several drug gangs.

Once her probation is up, Cassandra runs away again "into the world of drugs and

dreams." Her life turns into a series of addiction-driven criminal escapades. She goes into business together with a drug dealer with Margo, another lonely heroin addict, but run afoul of another dealer who roughs up and captures the young women. In a basement, he injects Margo and Cassandra, and "re-forges the chains" and recaptures the slaves. Four months later, Cassandra is found in an alley and admitted to a hospital. Due to a lack of narcotics treatment facilities, she is assigned to a ward for the mentally ill until her family have her transferred to a private sanatorium. However, Margo continues to sneak heroin to her. When Cassandra re-emerges in the city eight months later, she falls in with Cholo Martinez, known to police as a drug and car smuggler. Once again, Cassandra is picked up by police in the midst of a criminal act. At the film's conclusion, she is sent to a federal narcotics hospital in Kentucky. The film ends with superimposed text on the screen that emphasizes both the seriousness of the drug problem in the country and the long odds against permanent recovery from addiction.

Within a single story, *Teenage Devil Dolls* captured the dominant and recurring themes of the juvenile delinquent drug story. The inevitable progression of narcotics that squeeze free will, the physical and moral depravity of the junkie, the predatory dealer, the character flaws and familial dysfunction, and salvation in the form of state authority—and, above all, the white, middle-class victim—the film plays every note perfectly. More subtly, however, *Teenage Devil Dolls*, reinforces a Fordist narrative of America. The problem in this film is not that Cassandra should not be pursuing happiness through consumption or that she should concentrate on being productive. Rather, she consumes poorly. At each stage, she deviates further and further from community norms and falls into the clutches of the heretical addicts. Behaviour modification occurs, but not to make her a fuller, more reliable citizen. Instead, she falls into the dark side of consumption.

Untutored, she turns to the kind of indulgences that Henry Ford feared when he demanded his workers abstain from alcohol. Bad influences in Cassandra's life are compounded: her mother and step-father(s); Russell Packard and his friends; Margo and other drug dealers; even her well-meaning but naive husband. This new world requires discipline, for corrosive selfishness could rot away the public foundation for the good life. Her (possible) redemption can only come through the narcotics officer and the narcotics hospital. Acquiescence to the state, itself the group writ large, is the only hope for happiness. *Teenage Devil Dolls* is a tale of postwar liberalism, reflecting life as struggle and the importance of hewing to the right influences. The fate of the individual rests on picking the correct group to which to conform. Like other drug stories, conformity and consumption become the most important choices a person can make.

The relationship between postwar youth and automobiles was far more complicated and possibly worrying than that with drugs. Part of the question was one of numbers. In the 1950s, America fully, rapturously embraced car ownership and driving. Production went from 2 million automobiles in 1946 to 8 million in 1955; car registrations grew from 25 million in 1945 to 40 million in 1950 and 51 million in 1955. By 1960, almost nine out of ten suburban families owned a car, with one-fifth possessing two cars, and two-thirds using a car to get to work. Ubiquitous in postwar life, driving quickly became an expected rite of maturity for teenagers. By 1960, 1.5 million cars in America were owned by teens, while 5.9 million had drivers licences, representing 7.2% of all drivers. Without question, there were more teens driving cars than smoking joints or shooting heroin into their veins. But in those numbers was the more vexing challenge: automobiles were a standard part of the American experience, and so deviant use of the car required a finer remedy. Historian Cotten Seiler has argued that an ideology of

"automobility" in the postwar period—equating cars with freedom—was "a sort of palliative ideological exercise" meant to resuscitate an individualism compromised by Fordist labour practices.[68] Yet, what will be argued here, is that the language of liberalism was the means by which the Fordist standard couched its dominating and group impulses. Drugs were much easier to condemn outright, but the interests of American economy demanded that, like consumption in general, young people adopt a proper attitude towards cars, one that deferred to state and industry.

Most prominent in this effort was the mental hygiene film. "[T]eenagers," Ken Smith wrote, "were basically considered borderline sociopaths anyway, and automobiles were seen as their most powerful tool to spread mayhem." Fuelled by adrenaline, alcohol, or youth itself, fictional teenage drivers mocked good sense, terrorized the innocent, and died in spectacular crashes. "The most frightening image in all delinquency films was that of normal-looking white kids who have enjoyed all the benefits of free enterprise and suburbia throwing it contemptuously back in adult faces."[69] It was undoubtedly hard for adults to fathom.

One of the earliest and most striking short educational films was *Last Date* (1949), starring a young Dick York.[70] In a large and well-furnished bedroom, teenaged Jeanne writes a friend to let her know that she is back from the hospital. Yet, when she thinks about what happened and sees other kids having fun, she says that wishes she had died in the accident. The audience only see her from the behind. Something horrible must have happened to her face. She laments that she has had her last date.

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[68] Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States Since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 130; Jessie Bernard, "Teen-Age Culture: An Overview," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 338, no. 1 (November 1961): 3–4; and Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, 71–72.
[69] Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 45.
[70] *Last Date*, directed by Lewis D. Collins (Wilding Picture Productions, 1949).

She remembers back to the day of the big football game and afterward waiting for Nick and Larry with her friend Cathy. Nick offers to drive everyone home in his "new monster." Jeanne says yes, but Cathy opts out, citing a desire to avoid "teen-a-cide"—"the fine art of killing yourself before you're twenty." Nick rolls his eyes at this and drives Jeanne home on a frightening, but thrilling ride on the turnpike. When Nick drops her off, Larry is waiting on her porch, wanting to talk about teen-a-cide. He tells her that it is not worth risking one's life pursuing speed. She welcomes Larry's attention more than anything else and agrees to go with him to the dance that night. He drives sensibly, resisting her goading to go faster.

At the dance, Jeanne has a great time with Larry until Nick offers to take her for a quick spin. In the dark, Nick again pushes his car to the limit, passing everything on the road and running red lights. Jeanne is terrified and hears in her head a radio announcer talk about teen-a-cide. Nick passes a truck on a blind curve and smashes head first into another car. The screen fades to black and Jeanne screams, "My face! My face!" Back in the present, writing her letter, Jeanne reiterates her wish that she had died in the wreck. Sobbing, she smashes a mirror. A moment of thrills becomes a lifetime of regret.

The relationship between cars and teenagers quickly dovetailed with various explanations for juvenile delinquency. Clendenen and Beaser cited mobility as breaking down community ties. People were less rooted to their towns and cars made it harder for parents to keep track of their kids' friends, facilitating dubious peers' influence. Novelist James Farrell cited prosperity as a contributory cause to delinquency. Widespread affluence allowed teens to buy cheap cars, providing them greater mobility and opportunities to behave poorly. Sociologist Ralph W. England, Jr. treated delinquency as an adaptive process, where immature and inexperienced teens seized upon hedonistic

aspects of adult life. One example was drag racing, chickee runs, or joy ride thefts, all done for fun and thrills. Grace and Fred Hechinger claimed that aggressive teen driving was due to "pent-up energy and their need to prove themselves." And Wenzell Brown cited a psychiatrist who claimed that speed-obsessed teenage drivers were "frightened and neurotic" and suffering "feelings of inadequacy and frustration."[71] What these perspectives shared was a belief that teenagers simply were not properly prepared to take command of an automobile.

Public discourse settled on the term "hot rod"—strictly speaking, customized roadsters built for speed—as shorthand to describe any car driven aggressively by a teenager. A 1949 *Life* story, "The 'Hot-Rod' Problem," was illustrated with photos of both hot rods and accident scenes, making obvious the connection. With some detail, the article described variations of "chicken"—competitive demonstrations of bravery behind the wheel—and a game called "pedestrian polo," in which those on foot were targeted by drivers and sent diving for safety. In "Go, Man, Go" (1956), Wenzell Brown quoted an unnamed California police chief: "A hot rod can be a more dangerous weapon than a loaded gun." What sparked his assertion was a drag race in which an innocent party's car was sideswiped, killing the driver and her baby. The chief continued: "These hot rodders who use the public roads as raceways are in the same class with the kid hoodlums who go about mugging, rolling and staging hold-ups. We've been going to easy on the hot

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[71] Wenzell Brown, "Go, Man, Go," in *The Teen-Age Jungle* (Standard Magazines, 1956), 63; Grace and Fred M. Hechinger, *Teen-age Tyranny* (New York: Morrow, 1963),83; Ralph W. England, Jr., "A Theory of Middle Class Juvenile Delinquency," in *Middle Class Delinquency*, ed. Edmund W. Vaz (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 249; James Farrell, "What Makes Them That Way?," *Coronet*, 36, no. 3 (January, 1958), 74–75; and Clendenen and Beaser, "The Shame of America, Part 2," 70. On the other hand, Herbert Gans, in his examination of one of the new suburbs, claimed that the lack of public transportation made teenagers dependent on adults. Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1967), 207.

rodders. It's time we cracked down."[72]

Less reactionary were calls for education and peer pressure to improve driving habits, as well as specifically authorized hot rod clubs and tracks. The *Life* story trumpeted how the Seven Tenths Club in Dallas, TX, presided over a juvenile traffic court that could issue punishment to violators. Peer judgment, the article claimed, had a powerful effect on recidivism. Writing in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1949, Sidney Shalett and Henry C. McFadyen publicized driver's education programs, asserting both the danger of the untrained teenage driver and how reputation-obsessed teens could be educated to take pride in possessing responsible driving habits.[73]

Still, there were a few voices who questioned whether the hot rod question was anti-social immaturity in need of taming. In "The Hot-Rod Culture" (1950), Gene Balsley, a graduate student of David Riesman, offered that the true hot rodder (there was a distinction of authenticity amongst enthusiasts) was not driven by danger but a purer experience behind the wheel. Where most Americans thought highly of the cars produced by Detroit, the true hot rodder regarded the automotive industry as complacent. Detroit's cars, to this view, were uneconomical, unsafe, and ugly. They were designed for status, not driving. The hot rod was an attempt to create something "magical and vibrant," but also to employ sound engineering philosophies.[74]

While hot rodding could be considered a protest against Detroit, it was also a desire to participate in the automotive production without being part of the industry. Riesman and his colleague Reuel Denney argued that the act of deconstructing and reconstructing a car made a person less passive: "[F]ar from being manipulated, he is

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[72] "The 'Hot-Rod' Problem," *Life* 27, no. 19 (7 November 1949): 122–28; and Brown, "Go, Man, Go," 14.
[73] "The 'Hot-Rod' Problem"; and Sidney Shalett and Henry C. McFadyen, "Our Youngsters Don't Have to be Killed," *Saturday Evening Post* 222, no. 25 (17 December 1949): 17–18.
[74] Gene Balsley, "The Hot-Rod Culture," *American Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1950): 354–55.

often the manipulator. Thus, apparently, the consumer can attain a measure of autonomy despite the attempts of mass-producers to channel consumption in 'respectable' direction." If the hot rodder was a rebel, it was in a quest to restore a producer's ethic, to reunite leisure, labour, and craftsmanship. Which is to say, to deny Fordism inside and outside the factory. What these contrary theories suggested, Balsley wrote, was that consumption might reflect a more critical intent than normally acknowledged.[75]

Historian George Lipsitz concurred with Balsley. The hot rod was a site of significant rebellion and identity construction, not just the cheap and reckless gags of teenagers. Suburbanization, urban renewal, and highway construction all worked to disperse working-class communities, making car ownership important for building and maintaining ties. But even as old communities were destroyed, an interest in car customization created new working-class bonds. The standardized car or abandoned junker could be transformed into something of value and individual expression, the obscure or incomplete highway converted into an impromptu drag strip.[76] The skills of young people applied to customizing cars, married with experienced mechanics who taught streamlining and gaining more power, could generate a "prestige from below." This was work as play, providing meaning not offered in wage labour, especially in an era of automation. It also rejected Fordist routine, division, and deskilled labour in the name of efficiency, and instead allowed a more craftsman's approach to car work.[77]

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[75] Ibid., 357–58.

[76] Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 266. Also see Tony Baker, *Hot Rodding in Santa Barbara County* (Arcadia Publishing, 2014), a photograph-rich account of the legitimate hot rod circuit in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. It is especially noteworthy to emphasize the customization of the vehicles, with bodies and parts cobbled together from different decades of manufacture.

[77] As Karal Ann Marling explained, Detroit's strategy in the first half of the decade was to pursue stylistic modifications—bigger tail fins, bigger bumpers, more chrome, all known within the industry as gorp. In 1955, Chevrolet introduced a model with a powerful V-8 engine, the first domestic car aimed at a youth market perceived as synonymous with power and speed. When the automobile industry hit a slump in the late 1950s, carmakers pursued the teen market more deliberately. The gorp-laden car fell out of favour

The mental hygiene film *The Cool Hot Rod* (1953) illustrated the fine line that producers walked in promoting cars and driving while also positioning individuality as a problem to be overcome.[78] The narrative begins with young Bill Bowers driving his hot rod in the sunny city to which his family has just moved. Bill, as narrator, says that he considers this a town of "sleeping joes," and that he will have to educate them about hot rods. After school, he asserts himself by recklessly speeding past the other kids. He is pulled over by a traffic cop who accuses Bill of driving like "a wild man," which the boy takes as a compliment. Bill receives a citation to appear before his school's traffic court, where other teens sentence him to traffic school. He also learns of the "real hot rodding" promoted by the Knights, a local teen car club that promotes safety inspections and legitimate drag strips. While everyone wants to be a Knight, the required clean driving record and car safety inspection exludes most. Maintaining high standards for the cars has therefore become a matter of status amongst the teens. When Bill applies to race at the club's strip, his car fails some safety checks. It takes him a month to get it up to code, but, he explains, it is that commitment to safety that makes drag racing safe. The whole thing is a "professional deal." To Bill's further disappointment, he learns his car is not as fast as he thought, proving that he has a lot to learn from the sleeping joes. He gets an after-school job to pay for new parts and studies manuals to rebuild and improve his engine, even winning a scholarship for his innovative carburetor design. He now realizes that real hot rodders are concerned with safety, and that he was the real square.

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not because of impracticality, but consumers (finally) decided it was ugly. This ended the dominance of the family/multipurpose automobile and signaled the ascent of the personal car. More jaundiced, Lipsitz regarded it as an example of corporate production co-opting and turning individual creativity into a mass-marketed commodity. Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 267–68; Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, 9; and Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 139–41, 158–59.

[78] *The Cool Hot Rod* (Sid Davis Productions, 1953).

The film explicitly sets up a conflict between the individual and the group, personal standards versus the community's, and in each and every instance the individual is proven incorrect. Bill believed he was happy and exceptional, but by submitting to the authority of the group and its mastery of the facts, he is shown that he was misguided. Yet, none of this was a cause for sadness or rebellion. Instead, it sets Bill on a path for genuine accomplishment and happiness. Teenage driving and even drag racing are validated, even as individuality is cast in a suspicious light.

If there were a dean in hot rod fiction in the 1950s, it was Henry Gregor Felsen, who published five novels on the subject between 1950 and 1960. His work cautioned immature teens and their rush to own a car. Felsen's work was also consistent in expressing the distinctly Fordist values of deference to the authority of the group and the expert, and the need to eradicate the hubris of individuality. These precepts were not only the path to happiness, but the means to avoiding pain and death. Felsen's *Hod Rod* (1950) blends a story of a naturally gifted and dedicated teenage daredevil driver with an overt argument for driver training. It establishes both individual talent and the need to curb individuality in favour of the state as guide and enforcer. The protagonist, Bud Crayne, is seventeen, and in his leather jacket and boots and faded denim pants, he captures the look of a juvenile delinquent, but is actually quite self-reliant and talented.[79] Yet, he is prone to the weaknesses and limitations of any teenager:

> When he was happy, his happiness reached its peak when he could express it in terms of speed and roaring power, the pull of his engine, the whistle of the wind in his ears, and the glorious sensation of free flight.
>
> When he was unhappy, discontented, moody, the wheel again offered him his answer. At these times there

[79] Henry Gregor Felsen, *Hot Rod* (1950; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1951), 6–7.

was solace and forgetfulness behind the wheel.[80]

Bud is a purist when it comes to his car and driving. He is contemptuous of others on the road, those inferior drivers in inferior cars. This makes him a bit of a loner, for he relates better to his car than other people.

Bud's nemesis and advocate is Highway Patrolman Ted O'Day. While impressed with Bud's skills, he is concerned that the boy sets a bad example for his peers. O'Day is allied in this effort with Guy Cole, the school's shop teacher who hopes to set up a driver education program and believes that Bud's participation would inspire other teens to enrol. Bud spurns the entreaty, but a related driving challenge called a Teen-Age Roadeo piques his interest, for winning the first-prize college scholarship would allow him to attend engineering school. Cole wants to prove that no driver without formal training, including Bud, can win the competition, a result he hopes will convince the town's teens to take lessons. More immediately problematic for Bud is that all entrants must have a clean driving record, which means curbing his aggressive instincts.[81]

The other strategy for Cole and O'Day is to train another boy, Chuck, to prove that their program of "disciplined, thoughtful driving" is superior to Bud's raw and arrogant style. Cole assures Chuck that he has an insurmountable edge over Bud:

> He can handle a car, but he can't handle himself. The Roadeo is a contest with rules, Chuck. Strict rules. And Bud will lose because he doesn't care about rules. He thinks rules are for others, and he's above them. He won't get any further than you would get in basketball if you went into the game with that attitude. No matter how good you were, Chuck, you'd foul out if you ignored the rules. And that's where Bud will lose. And that's where you will win.[82]

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[80] Ibid., 8–9.
[81] Ibid., 38–52.
[82] Ibid., 114–15.

Driving in a simulator, Bud fares poorly because his impulse is to speed up rather than brake, and rages at the film drivers for thwarting his right to road. In the road test, Bud drives well, but loses points for not signalling—stupid technicalities, he thinks. He is shocked and angry when he learns that he finished second to Chuck. Afterwards, he takes out his anger and self-pity by driving faster, more dangerously. But having been judged as second-best, driving no longer holds a thrill for him and he decides to quit altogether.[83]

Later on, several teens engage in a game of hide and seek, which involves driving fast in the dark without lights. O'Day happens to be driving with Bud when they hear the inevitable car crash and discover the wrecked cars. Chuck, who was a passenger, is the only one still alive, but his survival depends on quickly getting him to a hospital. They put Chuck in O'Day's cruiser, and the patrolman tells Bud that only his driving skill, aided by the siren and flashing lights, can get there in time. Along the way, they are plagued by aggressive joyriders, and Bud notes the license plates to pass on to the police. They arrive in time, and O'Day observes that both Chuck's and Bud's lives were saved. Plus, as the runner-up in the local Roadeo, Bud takes Chuck's place in the state Roadeo.[84]

In the novel's coda, Bud dismantles his car, so soured on the aggressive driving it represents. He is taking driving lessons from Cole, a frustrating experience because he has so much to unlearn. Bud also wants to talk to other teenagers about safe driving, for he realizes the error of his past assumptions.[85] On the day of the state Roadeo, Bud is confident that with Cole's training he can win, even though, he says, the deaths of his peers will always be on his conscience. He says that he has learned to use his skill with

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[83] Ibid., 122–42.
[84] Ibid., 143–71.
[85] Ibid., 172–75.

Chuck's brain. Cole and O'Day grimly begin their search to find and save the next Bud.

Hot Rod is a superb distillation of the Fordist principle of creating the new man, one who accepts that his individuality is an impediment to success, regardless of any natural gifts. The superior man submits to training, to "unlearning" individualism in favour of the proven group standard. When Bud is humbled, punished for his faith in his own superiority, it is, in fact, a victory over self, and he becomes an instant convert to the virtues of training. Where others have died for their foolishness, Bud lives, and it is fully understood that he will win the state-level Roadeo and the college scholarship. Bud believed he was happy when his personal approach to driving won him the respect of his peers, but by the novel's end he realizes that it was a false happiness, and that submitting and allowing himself to be recreated is the real path to happiness.

Felsen's next hot rod novel, *Street Rod* (1953) focused on Ricky Madison, 16, of Dellville, Iowa, who obsessively dreams of building his own hot rod. His problem is that his parents will not let him have a car, yet without one Ricky believes he is not worthy of his friends. Someday, he thinks, he will build a car better than any ever put out by Detroit. It is an ambition that is as much about proving his skill to himself as to others. A car means being independent, having guts, being able to escape.[86]

Initially denying his request for permission to buy a car, Ricky's parents accede to the latest advice in a parenting book, worrying that their son is being damaged by being the only one of his friends without a car. They hope car ownership will teach him responsibility. What they do not realize is that Ricky has chosen to buy the car behind their backs. Almost immediately, the opportunity turns rotten. Desperation leads Ricky to overpay for a car that barely runs. His dream of inclusion becomes a nightmare of

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[86] Henry Gregor Felsen, *Street Rod* (1953; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1971), 1–6.

ostracization because of this hopelessly inferior car. To his parents, Ricky's deceit is evidence that he lacks the maturity to own a car. After several of his friends donate spare parts to help repair the junker, Ricky tells his parents that he plans on fixing it up to sell and one day own a garage. This disappoints them, as they hope he will attend college.[87]

Encouraged by his father to seek a stretch of highway for one afternoon per week for drag racing, Ricky organizes the Dellville Timing Association and reads a petition before town council in support of the dragstrip. The councilors, however, counter that teens should learn to obey the laws, not be encouraged to drive recklessly. Ricky responds that denying the dragstrip will not dissuade some from racing, so in the interests of safety the councilors should support the legitimate racing option. The council rejects the proposal and an angry Ricky vows to run those men off the road if he gets the chance. Hostile to their suddenly very small town, Ricky and several other boys drive to Des Moines for fun. They race about in the downtown and have run-ins with the police before heading back to Dellville. Ricky's dad tells him that these kinds of stunts only validate the council's decision. If they wish to persuade the council to reverse itself, Ricky and the other teens need to provide evidence that they are responsible drivers. Ricky is taken aback by his father's words, spoken to like an adult for the first time in his life. He decides to start up a hot rod club that emphasizes responsible driving.[88]

He gains few converts to a more mature approach to driving, but several adults encourage him to enter his hot rod in an upcoming competition. Ricky wins first prize and, more importantly, draws interest from others looking for help customizing their own cars. However, his friend and rival, Link Aller, is contemptuous of Ricky's success and

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[87] Ibid., 9–13, 37–50.
[88] Ibid., 73–93, 112–20.

adherence to the rules. Ricky tells him that once the dragstrip is authorized, he will prove his car's superiority. Link sneers that he will not take part in any organization that restricts his driving. Going back to Dellville, Link challenges Ricky once again. Beating Link is the one thing that Ricky has not accomplished and he gives in to his ego. With his superior hot rod, Ricky pulls away, faster and faster, then loses control and crashes into a river, where he and his girlfriend drown.[89]

There is considerable thematic overlap between *Hot Rod* and *Street Rod*, but the latter novel is less prescriptive in tone. Instead, where *Hot Rod* makes Bud's conversion rather sharp and sudden—two traumatic moments (losing the Roadeo and driving Chuck to the hospital) are sufficient to make complete his intellectual conversion—*Street Rod* presents the difficulty in making law abiding an immature and individualistic young man. Carrots and sticks bring him close to the desired mentality, but his ego emerges time and again. Ricky's death reinforces how taut the line is between individuality and the good life provided by adherence to community rules. Or, rather, Ricky's failure is that he foolishly allows himself to choose Link's anti-community rules. Where *Hot Rod* appeals to the driver as rational creature—Bud cannot deny the evidence of the superiority of driver education and a more humble approach to driving—*Street Rod* works more emotional terrain, emphasizing less the bounty of victory than the price of failure. As the mental hygiene films made clear, an individual benefited from conformity, but only if the group to whom he conformed was virtuous and representing the best interests of the community. Not unlike the drug novel, where one puff of a joint could set off a domino chain of despair, one moment of individual pride could lead to disaster. The stakes, quite

[89] Felsen, *Street Rod*, 134–54. Link serves as an uncompromising rebel in this novel, and his survival would seem to complicate an argument that deviance has dire consequences. *Rag Top* (1954; reprint, Felsen Ink, 2013), Felsen's sequel to *Street Rod*, is the story of how Link, unable to forgive himself for his part in Ricky's death, is redeemed by accepting the importance of law and order.

clearly, were high. Staying within established lines might promise happiness, but fear of slipping up was another inducement.

Throughout most of the 1950s, these themes promoted by Felsen dominated hot rod novels and films. One of the earliest teen driving films, *Hot Rod* (1950) (not connected in any way to Felsen's book), contained the soon-to-be common elements of such stories: illegal drag races; criminal and fatal consequences; peer pressure to own, customize, and race hot rods; parental ambivalence toward legitimate drag racing; and eventual adult acceptance of the idea after the teens demonstrate their maturity.[90] In *Go, Man, Go!*, by Edward De Roo, whose delinquency fiction emphasized themes of immature teenagers pursuing adult behaviours, an adolescent boy's quest to join a hot rod club leads him to grow up too fast. The results were criminality, underage casual sex, and familial discord. It was only at the end that the dream was exposed as hollow, that it was better to enjoy a more sedate youth while one is still young.[91]

A notable shift occurred in the latter half of the decade, when both the delinquency panic had abated and the idea of teens and driving was more fully immersed into a normal rite of passage. *Teenage Thunder* (1957) begins with a scene of a drag race, which the narrator says is the country's fastest-growing organized sport, something that allows young men to build sportsmanship and their appreciation of competition.[92] It is a safety valve for youthful energy, an opportunity for those with hot rods to race or, for

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[90] *Hot Rod*, directed by Lewis D. Collins (Monogram, 1950). Other examples that used some or all of these elements include: *The Devil on Wheels*, directed by Crane Wilbur (Producers Releasing Corp., 1947); *Hot Rod Girl*, directed by Leslie H. Martinson (American-International, 1956); and *Dragstrip Girl*, directed by Edward L. Cahn (American-International, 1957).

[91] Edward De Roo, *Go, Man, Go!* (New York: Ace Books, 1959). Felsen's *Road Rocket* (1960; Montreal: Bantam, 1961) [originally published as *Boy Gets Car* (Random House, 1960)] also fit this theme. *Road Rocket* was the story of a teenager consumed by the idea owning a hot rod, but then discovered the ethical compromises required to acquire and maintain one. Only by selling the car did he regain his freedom.

[92] *Teenage Thunder*, directed by Paul Helmick (Howco International, 1957).

those without, to go home and build their own car. The hot rod dilemma seems a settled matter, one in favour of the young drivers.

Johnnie Simpson, 18, aspires to build and drive cars, but his father, Frank, regards it an unworthy ambition. It is on this point that strained feelings between father and son play out. Frank regards his son's history of aggressive driving as evidence of immaturity and disrespect for his father. There is also an element of class snobbery, as Frank sees Johnnie's goals as working class, thereby wasting real opportunities to succeed in life. Johnnie says he will get a job to buy his own car, but Frank forbids it, not until Johnnie proves he is mature enough. Defying his father, Johnnie begins working at Bert's garage as a mechanic. A game of chicken with a rival, an admission of working in the garage, and augmented strife between Frank and Johnnie brings the story to its key moment. After an effort at reconciliation goes awry—Frank attempts to teach Johnnie to box, but ends up knocking him around—father and son conclude that the other hates him. Johnnie secretly gathers his money and leaves the house. He breaks into the garage and "borrows" Bert's hot rod. Johnnie calls his girlfriend to say he will return it in a few days, and she concludes he plans on racing the car. Frank, Bert, and Bert's son arrive at the hot rod race, where Johnnie apologizes to Bert. They still want Johnnie to drive, including Frank, who says he wants him to win for them all. Of course, Johnnie edges out his rival, Maurie, and punctuates the victory with a successful fistfight with the boy. Amidst congratulations, Frank admits his error and allows Johnnie to continue working for Bert.

What *Teenage Thunder* does is reverse the education process. It is Frank whose attitudes are keeping his boy from being part of the automobile culture. It is parental resistance that now drives youthful rebellion. Johnnie wants to be part of the group, but his father erroneously believes it is the wrong group for him. There is never any doubt

that father is failing son. The possibility of losing Johnnie and of seeing his skill on the track changes all that. There are no fatalities in this story and the chicken run has no real consequences save to further separate father and son. Maurie is as much a holdover from discredited ideals as Frank, and so it is only fitting that the film's resolution is Johnnie's victories over both. He achieves both peer status and wins the right to define his life by the automobile.

What the writers of drug and hot rod stories and intellectuals like Lynes, Galbraith, and Packard all understood was that American self-conception had been transformed into something rooted in consumption, of status through material goods. Critique or advocacy, they reported on a significant change to the American way of life tied to Fordist labour relations. Fordism required a new type of worker, one pliable to the demands of Taylorist efficiency and eager to spend his/her wages on material goods. This ideal necessarily rejected the free agent. The pliable worker took orders and functioned as part of team; the consumer spent in ways not detrimental to one's productive capacity or others'. Experts and other authorities were not just tasked with turning individuals into efficient labouring machines, but to steer people to make choices that benefited the group, to teach them to think in terms of the group as a way of thinking about themselves. Training consumers was no minor project and the effort and effects can be glimpsed in the observations of the intellectuals and the drug and hot rod stories cited here. If the intellectuals were more critical of the process, the juvenile delinquent stories served to advocate, educate, and train, making clear that becoming an adult meant becoming a consumer, but that not all consumption was appropriate. Where the drug story emphasized strict aversion to certain behaviours, the hot rod story offered glimpses of the good life and the grave. The advice in both stories was strikingly similar—subsuming

individuality to the group, deference to the expert and authority figure, and accepting that personal happiness came from denying one's own uniqueness. The Fordist ideal was a complex weave of individuals expressing their individuality by denying it, of identifying with the group to find personal happiness, of consuming to improve production. The drug and hot rod stories were rarely subtle, presenting stark choices of misery and death or the good life. This was the anxious question of taste, for the price of affluence had also raised the price of failure.

CHAPTER 9
The Expanded Conversation: Why the Mass Culture Critics Matter

Consider two accounts of postwar critics and mass-distributed texts. After critic Dwight Macdonald published a vinegar review of novelist James Gould Cozzen's novel *By Love Possessed* (1957), it launched a fascinating and acerbic public conversation between the two men over art and mass audiences.[1] The review, "By Cozzens Possessed," published in *Commentary* in January 1958, was a harsh counter to a book that had already been well reviewed and sold briskly. Including the Book of the Month Club edition, *By Love Possessed* sold over a half million copies in hardcover, plus another three million in the *Reader's Digest* condensed form. The sale of paperback reprint rights set a new standard. In short, it was an undeniable critical and commercial success. In his review, Macdonald, by instinct one to swim against the stream, declared Cozzen's a wretched stylist and shallow thinker, which he attributed, at least in part, to the author's distance from any true literary community. In declaring Cozzens' audience to be dim-witted housewives, Macdonald further implied something uncomplimentary to Cozzens' masculinity and seriousness as a writer. More pertinent, Macdonald declared the success of *By Love Possessed* to be further evidence of the undemanding middlebrow's dominance. Cozzens, his critical admirers, and, especially, his audience were all guilty of disparaging art and demeaning the role of the artist.

Historian Joan Shelley Rubin, who assessed this affair, explained that Cozzens did appeal to the so-called middlebrow. His mammoth book connoted importance in its size, which gave it a built-in allure to the large swath of the middle-class readers seeking

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[1] Joan Shelley Rubin, "Middlebrow Authorship, Critical Authority and Autonomous Readers in Post-war America: James Gould Cozzens, Dwight Macdonald and *By Love Possessed*," in *Middlebrow Literary Culture: The Battle of the Brows, 1920–1960*, ed. Erica Brown and Mary Grover (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 148–67. Macdonald's review was reprinted in his *Against the American Grain* (New York: Random House, 1962), 187–212.

respectability through consumption. He also benefited from an extensive advertising campaign, which would have signaled artistic illegitimacy to more than a few critics. Yet, Cozzens was uncomfortable with the success of *By Love Possessed*. He regarded the condensed version to be the "'boobs' edition" and fretted over the "non-readers" who had been lured into buying it. Cozzens, after all, considered himself a highbrow, all too willing to dismiss other writers for their lack of authenticity and abuse of language. This self-perception made Macdonald's critique especially wounding. When Cozzens responded in print to Macdonald's review, he engaged in bizarre anti-Semitic paranoia, and further declared his critics to be "pretentious pseudointellectuals" and "literary queers." He was the real man, the real artist, while his detractors were the frauds. Macdonald and Cozzens each regarded the other's sensibilities as childish, the implication being that an immature audience could only speak to an equally immature writer to speak to them. The encounter-in-print was drenched in angst over unworthy audiences, with their fat wallets and thin minds, intruding in what should be a proper conversation between artist and critic-as-peer. Cozzens clearly was not worthy of that conversation—he obviously made his choice, in Macdonald's view—and deserved to be shamed in public. Cozzens said that he was capable to speaking to mature readers, but Macdonald should not so flatter himself. Each man was aware of their respective evolving/declining status and lashed out at the other, implicitly acknowledging that the judgment of the audience was now what really mattered.

Leerom Medovoi also investigated how audiences affected critical appraisal of postwar fiction.[2] Specifically, he examined the evolving reputation of J.D. Salinger's *The*

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[2] Leerom Medovoi, "Democracy, Capitalism, and American Literature: The Cold War Construction of J.D. Salinger's Paperback Hero," in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 255–287.

Catcher in the Rye (1951), especially after the successful releases of a paperback edition and more youthful audience. When *Catcher* was published in hardcover, it enjoyed critical plaudits and sold well enough to reach the bestseller list and become a Book of the Month Club pick. And then it mostly faded from critical and popular memory, even though the New American Library paperback edition sold a steady quarter-million copies a year. It was not until 1957 that *Catcher* was "re-discovered," mostly by liberal literary critics who were guided by sociohistorical analysis of literature and saw in it something profound about America at mid-century. For the next six years, Salinger's work experienced a blizzard of analysis until it once again faded out of interest. The most common interpretations of the book were as psychological meditation on the processes of growing up, but also as national allegory about guilt and innocence and the American Dream.

This framing of the novel as an allegorical treatment of America as youth itself was conditioned, Medovoi suggested, by the postwar paperback revolution. Given their mostly jaundiced view of paperbacks and their readers, this presented a problem for critics. How could they bestow scholarly interest to a novel whose audience was, they presumed, mostly young paperback readers? New York Intellectual Leslie Fiedler, for example, bound paperbacks together with the more pervasive damaging influence of youth culture on the arts. The understanding of kitsch as infantilizing its consumers meant that all mass culture audiences, including adults, were transformed into children. Mass culture and youth culture were interchangeable. That Salinger sold well in paperback could therefore be considered evidence that *Catcher* was not serious literature. One critic of Salinger, George Steiner, snarled, "Salinger flatters the very ignorance and moral shallowness of his young readers. He suggests to them that formal ignorance,

political apathy and a vague *tristesse* are positive virtues."[3] Salinger, like the others who appealed to the paperback audience, were pseudo-artists, taking their cues from what the audience wanted rather than assert a truth. The danger—to some, the expectation—was that these commercially successful writers would squeeze out serious writers, or force them into degrading imitation. This opinion, however, was not universally maintained amongst cultural critics—some held hope that a novel of *Catcher*'s calibre might raise the artistic appreciation of mass audiences; and some tempered their criticism out of allegiance to the liberal consensus—but this troubling concession to audience and form again raised its head. Pessimistic or not, there was an assumption of a benighted audience of paperback readers, and that that necessarily complicated any analysis of the text.

Such critics were not wrong in realizing that conditions had changed at mid-century, that innovations in distribution—both in physical format and where and how to engage—fundamentally altered relationships between producers, audiences, critics, and texts. In this evolving dynamic, the status of producers and texts was ambiguous. On the one hand, there was much more opportunity for increasing numbers of artists to pursue a greater diversity of subject matter. But, as a counterweight, the commodification of cultural work elevated commercial considerations to an extent not before seen, limiting the artist's independence in purpose and content. More clearly, critics lost influence and that loss was directly attached to the greater independence of mass audiences whose tastes merited serious consideration from cultural producers. And that was what drove the mass culture critique. Whether considering the radical position, which saw cultural production turned into something mechanical, pervasive, and domineering; conservative, which regarded mass culture as hijacked by the crudest of tastes, an expression of

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[3] Steiner quoted in Medovoi, "Democracy, Capitalism, and American Literature," 271.

misapplied democracy; or liberal, which sought to maintain some kind of expert influence to prevent either radical or conservative nightmares from occurring—the common factor was the distinctly altered status and influence of critics and audiences. In naturalizing their gatekeeping role, critics treated these developments less as possibility than problem, not evolution but corruption.

This is not to suggest that we should dismiss the analyses of these critics as ego-driven tantrums. They asked pertinent and unsettling questions, guided by the evidence at hand. Was artistic creation compromised by the profit motive? Was dissenting or challenging art more likely or less when dependent on appealing to a mass audience? Was satisfying coarser and marginal tastes more generally harmful to art and a civic ethos? And was there not some justification in being wary of the inclinations of mass movements in the wake of the horrors of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia? These interrogations of uncertain conditions demanded consideration, and the value of the questions is evident in that they remain very open questions.

But where their analysis stumbled was in key foundational assumptions—in both privileging their high modernist aesthetic tastes as transcendent and their inability to let go of a hierarchical model of culture and society. They treated cultural engagement as something rarefied. Commodification, however, had an unnatural and corrosive leveling effect that unjustly elevated the low producers, consumers, and texts while simultaneously compromising modernism. In doing so, they created mechanical models that generated a priori conclusions. For all the words and theories, these models relied on preformed conclusions that mass-produced, -distributed, and -consumed cultural texts were anti-art and anti-social. The book, film, illustration, or song was damned at the moment of conception because of its commercial properties, the creator's dishonourably

profit-minded intentions, and the undeveloped tastes of the audience. The only purpose to cultural analysis within such a self-imposed box was to consider mass culture's greater implications for true art and artists, and for society more widely. In a period when the volume and consumption of commercial art expanded immensely, despairing conclusions about conformity and decline was, given this perspective, entirely sensible. Had they allowed for the possibility of cultural value and purpose being determined in the act of consumption as well as in production, they may have appreciated the cultural process as dynamic. If they allowed, as Antonio Gramsci argued decades earlier, that each person is an intellectual and that production and consumption are intellectual acts, they may have been drawn to apply historicity in assessing cultural texts for their ideological and even aesthetic value. Such a perspective does not treat cultural engagement as one of pluralist perfection, for uneven power relations and purposes were and are always in play, with dominant hegemonic values holding a distinct edge. But treating cultural production, distribution, and consumption as situational and unsettled inhibits such easy and despairing notions of mass cultural uniformity.

This consideration of mass culture critics should not be treated as archaeology or quaint curiosity. Rather, if we can appreciate the bias and reflexive assumptions that guided the analysis of mid-century critics, it can and should inspire reflection in contemporary scholarly inquiry, historical or otherwise. Why does intellectual history, far more often than not, confine itself to deliberate and elite consideration of ideas and practice? Why is the circulation of critical analysis regarded as privileged to acknowledged intellectuals and their preferred forums? It skews our understanding of who considers ideas, dominant and dissenting. It limits how we think about their circulation and the actors in any discourse. Expanding the palette, rejecting models that

are hierarchical and self-segregating to consider how ideas and conversations might be widely distributed, consumed, and evaluated allows for more sophisticated and historically dynamic arguments of how hegemony is achieved, maintained, resisted, and re-constituted. Again, this is not an argument reliant on perfect access to the means of production or consumption or of common interpretative ability, but, in fact, to treat intellectual discourse as much more messy and bound up in any number of hegemonic battles throughout society.

Juvenile delinquency texts in the 1950s served just that purpose. They drew from and fed social insecurity over the role of mass culture and the inclusion of youth in the greater dialogue in American life. As a genre that was especially obvious in its historicity, it was pregnant with the ideological fault lines of the period—gender roles, consumption, community, and individuality. Benefiting from an anarchic marketplace for books and exploitation films, these texts imbibed the social and intellectual tensions of their creation and consumption and provided vehicles for their producers and consumers to consider and work through the significance and possible resolution to these uncertainties. They were not mere distraction, even if some, perhaps many readers and viewers treated them as such, but means of affirmation of, and dissent from, the postwar liberal consensus. They were considerations of many of the same concerns of the notable social critics of the period. They were mass cultural forms that were a means of interrogating mass culture. Within the grand expansion of commercial culture in the 1950s, there were far more gaps, far more opportunity for both social affirmation and deviance of the mind than allowed by mass culture's critics. It was in that cultural and intellectual space that the postwar liberal hegemony was constructed and critiqued. It was in that space that the history of postwar America can be better understood.

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Marijuana. Directed by Dwain Esper. Roadshow Attractions Corp., 1936.
Motorcycle Gang. Directed by Edward L. Cahn. American-International, 1957.
No Time To Be Young. Directed by David Lowell Rich. Columbia, 1957.
Pleasantville. Directed by Gary Ross. New Line, 1998.
The Party Crashers. Directed by Bernard Girard. Paramount, 1958.
This Rebel Breed. Directed by Richard L. Bare. Warner Bros., 1960.
Rebel Without a Cause. Directed by Nicholas Ray. Warner Bros., 1955.
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Sorority Girl. Directed by Roger Corman. American-International, 1957.
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Teenage Crime Wave. Directed by Fred F. Sears. Columbia, 1955.
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Untamed Youth. Howard W. Koch. Warner Bros., 1957.
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