

FROM DEPRESSION KIDS TO COLD WARRIORS:
CONSTRUCTING AMERICAN BOYHOOD
THROUGH HOLLYWOOD FILMS
IN THE POSTWAR YEARS,
1946-1951

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies
Drew University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation by Peter W. Lee

The Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

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This study looks at the impact of the Great Depression and the Second World War on the United States in the post-World War II years, approximately 1946-1951. The study frames this impact through the construction of American boyhood in mainstream Hollywood motion pictures. The economic and social legacies of the 1930s and 1940s shaped the ways filmmakers created boy characters within filmic narratives. Such narratives included the (re)formation of the nuclear family, addressing delinquency through gun culture, the “race question,” and internationalism. The ways producers and the public negotiated these themes through cinematic boyhood speak to a larger concern for stability after fifteen years of uncertainty and hardships. These themes segued into what historians later characterize as the Cold War consensus and containment culture: patriotism, militarism, and conformity as safeguards against communism.

DEDICATION

To James and Theresa Lee

CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
ABBREVIATIONS	viii
INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW	1
THE FAMILY IN TROUBLE, 1920-1945.....	28
RE-CREATING THE POSTWAR FAMILY AND PATRIARCHY	64
PREVENTING DELINQUENCY THROUGH GUN CULTURE, 1949-1954.....	116
WHITEWASHING THE RACE CYCLE IN 1949	178
THE INTERNATIONAL PICTURE.....	241
COMMUNISM AND “DEANLINQUENTS”	301
BIBLIOGRAPHY	320
VITA.....	366

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. <i>Stars in My Crown</i> (1950)	20
Figure 2. The Lost Generation	31
Figure 3. <i>Wild Boys of the Road</i>	36
Figure 4. Man-to-man in the New Deal	38
Figure 5. Family solidarity under the shadow of war	52
Figure 6. Not a hard-bodied Dad	87
Figure 7. The carefully composed nuclear family	88
Figure 8. A deleted scene.....	92
Figure 9. Like father, like son.....	107
Figure 10. The nuclear family, revitalized under a masculine role model	109
Figure 11. <i>Johnny Holiday</i> (1949) via Ronnie Alcorn	131
Figure 12. Urban corruption	140
Figure 13. Pressbooks for <i>Johnny Holiday</i>	149
Figure 14. Downplaying gunfighters.....	152
Figure 15. John Baron's world	165
Figure 16. Armed for freedom.....	170
Figure 17. "Oxford's own story."	195
Figure 18. Grudging admiration	199
Figure 19. Limited progressivism	206
Figure 20. A gun-slinging priest.....	219
Figure 21. Sidestepping the Night Riders.....	227
Figure 22. No match for Emil.....	253
Figure 23. Americanization at work	269
Figure 24. Bobbysox appeal	277
Figure 25. A romance	278
Figure 26. An accusation	278
Figure 27. An apology	291
Figure 28. Defending American childhood and pastimes	308
Figure 29. The teenager at stake in the Cold War	311
Figure 30. Assimilated and socialized	314
Figure 31. Stability reversal	318

Charts and Graphs

Table 1: Timeline of events	26
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ABBREVIATIONS

AMPAS	Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
<i>BO</i>	<i>Boxoffice</i>
<i>BOBG</i>	<i>Boxoffice BookinGuide</i>
<i>CD</i>	<i>Chicago Defender</i>
<i>CSM</i>	<i>Christian Science Monitor</i>
CCF	Core Collection Files, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
<i>DV</i>	<i>Daily Variety</i>
<i>FD</i>	<i>The Film Daily</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>The Hollywood Reporter</i>
MHL	Margaret Herrick Library
<i>LAT</i>	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>
<i>MPH</i>	<i>Motion Picture Herald</i>
<i>NYT</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>
PCA	Production Code Administration
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
USC	University of Southern California
<i>VW</i>	<i>Variety Weekly</i>
<i>WSJ</i>	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
WBA	Warner Bros. Archives
<i>WP</i>	<i>The Washington Post</i>
WHS	Wisconsin Historical Society

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

You must tell them that war is bad for children.

—European war orphan Michael to American war orphan Peter Frye concerning the nascent arms race in *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948)¹

Preventing a depression in America can be even more important to national defense than preserving the secret of the atom bomb. The self-discipline which tries to hold down wages and prices is more genuinely patriotic than any hurling of epithets at another country.

—editorial, *Christian Science Monitor*, 1948²

This dissertation examines the postwar years from 1945 to the early 1950s through the construction of boyhood in American films. Historians consider this period the starting point for the Cold War. Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech, the Soviet Union's detonation of the atomic bomb, the "loss" of China, and the Korean War serve as standard markers signifying the escalating tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Film history, in particular, portrays the late 1940s as a "dark" period for Hollywood, foreshadowing McCarthyism in the U.S. at large. The H.U.A.C. hearings, the Hollywood Ten and the subsequent blacklist, and the beginnings of the end of the studio system all originate in the five years after Japan's surrender. Accordingly, what historians and the public later call "containment culture"—the promotion of capitalism, the nuclear family, and idealized gender roles—is usually seen as a direct response on the part of a patriotic public to support the Cold War effort.³

¹ *The Boy with Green Hair*, directed by Joseph Losey (RKO Radio Pictures, 1948), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2010).

² "Double Danger," *Christian Science Monitor* (CSM), March 12, 1948, 22.

³ Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

This dissertation complicates this historiography. It argues the immediate postwar years were a unique transitional moment in American history between the Great Depression and World War II on one hand, and the post-war, Cold War on the other. Thus, the social and cultural boundaries of what scholars later characterize as domestic containment did not arise solely due to threats from Russia and the related spread of communism. Rather, this dissertation contextualizes these social and cultural anxieties concerning domestic and international anxieties through the backdrop of the “Roaring Twenties,” Great Depression, and World War II. Many of the public concerns and anxieties typically associated with the communist threat were, to a certain extent, carryovers from the past fifteen years of economic and social disruptions. Specifically, with the United States victorious over fascism, the public feared a national backslide into the Great Depression. In 1944, Boris Shishkin, an economist for the American Federation of Labor, predicted up to 20 million workers would lose their job after the war ended, leaving the home front in a “deadly depression” worse than the stock market’s fall in 1929. Cancelled government contracts would also lead to shortened work hours, cuts in pay, and fewer prestigious jobs.⁴

The United States proactively sought to prevent the Depression’s return by maintaining the wartime production boom. At home, the ideology of a “consumers’ republic” promoted private ownership, materialism, and family solidarity as signs of

⁴ Quoted in Andrew E. Kersten, *Labor’s Home Front: The American Federation of Labor During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 194-195. Shishkin’s article had a wide circulation in the press, including *The Stars and Stripes*. On the Depression and war’s impact on the future “sunbelt” region, see Dean P. Cunningham, *American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt: Conservative Growth in the Battleground Region* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter one.

social mobility.⁵ In matters of foreign policy, American leaders publicly associated the rhetoric of free enterprise and free trade with freedom in general through programs like the Marshall Plan. However, such ballyhoo belied an ulterior agenda. American international postwar planning called for multilateral markets in which the United States had greater access than any other country. By creating outlets for its surpluses, and replacing the decaying British Empire's sterling with the dollar, policy planners believed American industries would avoid the overproduction that led to the Great Depression.⁶ Within this framework, the strong emphasis and rhetoric on a close-knit nuclear family and white collar employment were less about promoting anticommunism and more about the search for stability, peace, and order after the struggles of the previous two decades.

Hollywood's depiction of boyhood during this period highlights the search for normality. The prominence of father-son themes in the movies was not new; since the medium's inception, movies spotlighted the dangers of parental negligence and fears concerning delinquent children. However, for the postwar years, these pictures represented a meshing of social forces beyond a simple affirmation of American "Victory Culture." Filmmakers used boy characters as vehicles to explore facets of anxieties expressed in family life, gender dynamics, societal delinquency, and the country's role in international relations.

⁵ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York Knopf, 2003); Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), chapter one.

⁶ Curt Caldwell, *NSC 68 and the Political Economy of the Early Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Thomas C. Mills, *Post-War Planning on the Periphery: Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy in South America, 1939-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 3, 48-52. Policy makers pointed to the postwar depression in 1920-1921 after World War I as precedence. They blamed this slump on overproduction and falling demand when the Great War ended.

During the postwar years, Hollywood occupied a unique position. The industry had a long history of public criticism regarding its portrayal of sex and violence, particularly the impact of these vices upon children. Social critics also accused the industry of catering to political radicalism, especially during the Great Depression. During the war, the studios scored good public relations points by contributing to the nation's propaganda efforts to wave the flag and saw the number of ticket sales reach new heights. Unfortunately for the studios, the industry fell into a long decline after 1946 as critics rode into national prominence by blaming the movies for promoting "un-American" subversion. Hollywood, among the first industries to feel the heat of Cold War anticommunism, reacted defensively and reinforced images of idealized stability of marriage, various nostalgic interpretations of history, and set narrow boundaries for childhood socialization and discipline. This yearning for stability became central in 1950s domestic containment. However, this dissertation argues the movie depictions of these issues stemmed from long roots in the fifteen years prior to the Cold War.

In terms of celluloid boy characters, historians generally characterize older adolescents or young adults (usually "man childs," defined as physically grown men who lack social maturity) of the mid 1950s as those who first resist the Cold War containment. Studies usually cite actors Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* (1953) and James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* (1956) as the typical archetypes. Both Brando and Dean were in their mid- to late-twenties when they starred in their iconic roles, and are certainly important for representing youth anxieties from the mid 1950s. However, they actually inherit the screen legacies of "real" filmic boys, those in their "tween" and teenage years,

who, throughout the previous two decades, addressed the turbulent shifts in the U.S.'s social milieu.

Many of the motion pictures discussed in this dissertation are obscure today and not all were box office successes in their initial releases. Nevertheless, the consistent presence of nonconformist youths, and the controversies they sparked during the films' productions and among audiences, demonstrates many of the anxieties did not originate during the Cold War, but continued themes from the past fifteen years. Producers, directors, writers, and actors created and promoted these stories in the hopes they would generate profits while often wishing to air their political or social beliefs.⁷ Producers and filmmakers, usually men in the industry for decades, considered children as vehicles to discuss, affirm, and refute the many shifts underway in postwar America.

Literature Review: Children and Movies

Historians and film scholars generally overlook youths in motion pictures. Since the introduction of motion pictures in the late 1890s, contemporary reformers recognized children as ready-made motifs to attract sympathy and spur social change. Whether utilized as laborers, welfare recipients, or innocent victims of social corruption, the movies presented kids as symbols of morality.⁸ Social critics also linked the movies to delinquency and social maladjustments. In the 1930s, the multi-volume Payne Studies and its condensed form for mass consumption, *Our Movie-Made Children*, helped

⁷ See Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸ Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Films and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 53-54, 72; Paul Buhle and David Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 18, 408-412; Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence* (New York: Knopf, 1990), Chapter one1; See also Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

contribute to the formation of the industry's self-censorship policy, the Production Code, and shaped the public's relationship with the movies.⁹ Nor were child audiences passive; for instance, historian Sarah J. Smith notes children in Great Britain displayed agency in selecting, digesting, and censoring American movies and the messages they saw.¹⁰

In terms of historical scholarship, the study of childhood in motion pictures is a recent trend.¹¹ In the 1970s, the earliest books about filmic children centered on child star biographies and compiled filmographies.¹² Even the leading child star in American cinema, Shirley Temple, attracted little attention. Only after Temple's death in 2014 did new work examine her screen persona, ranging from a social crusader in the Great Depression to a pigtailed moppet onto which men could project their desires.¹³ Other

⁹ Harry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933); Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Amherst: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The literature on the Production Code is large. For an overview of the evolution of censorship, see Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1945); Gerald Gardner, *The Censorship Papers: Movie Censorship Letters from the Hays Office, 1934-1968* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1987); Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Matthew Bernstein, ed., *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Francis G. Couvares, *Movie Censorship and American Culture*, second edition (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & The Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Sarah J. Smith, *Children, Cinema & Censorship: From Dracula to the Dead End Kids* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

¹¹ John Stephens, ed., *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film* (New York: Rutledge, 2002).

¹² See Edward Edelson, *Great Kids of the Movies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1979); David Dye, *Child and Youth Actors: Filmographies of their Entire Careers, 1914-1985* (Jefferson, MO: McFarland, 1988); John Holmstrom, *The Moving Picture Boy: An International Encyclopedia, 1895-1995* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1996); Bob Nareau, *Kid Kowboys: Juveniles in Western Films* (Madison, NC: Empire Publishing, 2003).

¹³ See Kristen Hatch, *Shirley Temple and the Performance of Girlhood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015) which focuses on the child star and eroticism; John Kasson, *The Little Girl who*

studies concentrate on specific time periods, such as the Great Depression¹⁴ or the “beach” movies of the 1960s.¹⁵

For the postwar period, historians have yet to analyze the construction of filmic children. Instead, historians concentrate on “sexier” genres: film noir,¹⁶ anti-communist pictures,¹⁷ the atomic cycle,¹⁸ and the impact of television on the motion picture industry and American culture.¹⁹ Literature about the blacklist, and the Hollywood Ten in particular, dominate this period.²⁰ The Red Scare’s effect on Hollywood overshadows

Fought the Great Depression: Shirley Temple and 1930s America (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014) looks at Temple within a socio-historical lens of the Great Depression; Gaylyn Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classic Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter two, situates Temple’s coquettish as an affirmation of masculinity and a “pedophilic” eroticism.

¹⁴ Jeffrey P. Dennis, *We Boys Together: Teenagers in Love Before Girl-Craziness* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007)

¹⁵ Thomas Lisanti, *Hollywood Surf and Beach Movies: The First Wave, 1959-1969* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014).

¹⁶ The literature on film noir is vast. Two recent works on the genre as social history are Dennis Broe, *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2010); Mark Osteen, *Nightmare Alley: Film Noir and the American Dream* (New York: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Tony Shaw, *Hollywood’s Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); J. Hoberman, *An Army of Phantoms: American Movies and the Making of the Cold War* (New York: The New Press, 2012); N. Megan Kelly, *Projections of Passing: Postwar Anxieties and Hollywood Films* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

¹⁸ Joyce Evans, *Celluloid Mushroom Clouds: Hollywood and Atomic Bomb* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Jerome F. Shapiro, *Atomic Bomb Cinema: The Apocalyptic Imagination on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Mick Broderick, ed., *Hobakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996).

¹⁹ Nancy E. Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Cecilia Tichi, *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

²⁰ There are many interview books, memoirs, studies about key figures, filmographies, and debates about the culpability of those blacklisted. Some prominent titles include Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking, 1980); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (New York: Doubleday, 1980); Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin’s Press,

the historiography, as the industry retreated from its earlier social activism to avoid unfavorable publicity. In addition to an exodus of talent leaving Southern California for Europe to find tax shelters and relief from H.U.A.C., the studio system entered a very long decline due to intense labor strikes, rising production costs, the threatened closure of half the European market due to the Iron Curtain, and the break-up of mass urban movie audiences as the middle-class moved to the suburbs and bought television sets. The 1948 Supreme Court decision *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.* (334 US 131) ended the industry's vertical integration system, forcing studios to divesting themselves of their theater chains. Studios no longer had a guaranteed distribution network for their films, ultimately leading to fewer productions. All of these factors reinforced the box office slump as ticket sales dwindled.²¹

Several works examine juvenile delinquency as it relates to "J.D." pictures or "Deanlinquents" of the late 1950s and 1960s—the abbreviations and catch-phrases demonstrate the dominance of actor James Dean as an assumed representation of all youths.²² However, these studies focus on Dean and his many imitators as reactions to the

2007). Some of the more recent titles include Jack D. Meeks, "From the Belly of the H.U.A.C.: The Red Probes of Hollywood, 1947-1952" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2009); Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Jeff Smith, *Film Criticism, the Cold War, and the Blacklist: Reading the Hollywood Reds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

²¹ Many studies examine the postwar box office slump, with television, suburban flight, and H.U.A.C. shouldering most of the blame. A good starting point is Drew Casper, *Postwar Hollywood: 1946-1962* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

²² Mark Thomas McGee and R.J. Robertson, *The J.D. Films: Juvenile Delinquency in the Movies* (Jefferson, MO: McFarland, 1982); Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Timothy Shary, *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Noel Brown, *The Hollywood Family Film: A History, from Shirley Temple to Harry Potter* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), Chapter four; J. David Slocum, ed., *Rebel Without a Cause: Approaches to a Maverick Masterpiece* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). Ian Wojcik-Andrews only addresses Disney and European cinema, especially

Cold War, not the much-younger children in the years immediately after World War II, and scholarship all but ignores the continuities of social anxieties between the 1930s and the 1950s.²³ One recent study limits its focus to one person, Walt Disney, and his studio.²⁴ Other works describe the postwar years as a separate era in history, segregated from what came before. Mike Chopra-Gant limits his study to the top grossing films of 1946-1947 and his discussion of the family centers around adults navigating an assumed Cold War/anti-Russia environment.²⁵ Stella Bruzzi looks primarily on the senior partner in parent-child relationships from 1945 to 2000; her work examines the construction of fatherhood, but has little to say on how the development of dad shaped his children or how those anxieties continued themes from earlier years.²⁶

Literature Review: Childhood Context

In the twentieth century, the role of children became an increasing concern for social reformers. Historians point out that the transformation of American kids from economic contributors in households to innocent youths needing protection and guidance was inconsistent in ideology and implementation. Concerns over youth intensified during the 1920s; despite President Warren Harding's campaign platform promise to

Italian neo-realism, as the most significant developments in the period. See Ian Wojcik-Andrews, *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 77-87.

²³ The standard survey about the Great Depression's impact on children's lives into adulthood is Glen H. Elder, Jr., *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

²⁴ Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

²⁵ Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America: Masculinity, Family, and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

²⁶ Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2008).

bring about a “return to normalcy,” such desires never materialized. Grown-ups freely labeled their children the “lost generation” in terms of social convention, “flaming youths” in regards to devalued moral sensibilities, or, as novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald described himself and his peers, the “damned and the beautiful.”²⁷

The Great Depression and the World War II years reinforced the crisis concerning children. In the 1920s, children regarded their parents as outmoded; in the Depression, those children came of age during a decade often unable to provide for their own kids. Historians note the Depression traumatically impacted children who saw their families break up, go without bare necessities, and turn to charity.²⁸ World War II further fragmented families: fathers went to war, mothers went to factory work, and children became “latch-key” kids. Although many families “made do” in the name of the war effort, the dearth of parental supervision, critics argued, created breeding grounds for juvenile maladjustment.²⁹

²⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Damned and the Beautiful* (New York: Scribners, 1922). For a brief overview of early twentieth century studies on childhood, see Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Joseph M. Hawes, *Children between the Wars: American Childhood, 1920-1940* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997); Kristie Lindenmeyer, “A Right to Childhood”: *The U.S. Children’s Bureau and Child Welfare* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); David I. Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998); James Marten, *Childhood and Child Welfare in the Progressive Era: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004); Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)

²⁸ Glen H. Elder, Jr., *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Robert Cohen, ed., *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Kristie Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Childhood in the 1930s* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007).

²⁹ William M. Tuttle, “Daddy’s Gone to War”: *The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ralph LaRossa, *Of War and Men: World War II in the Lives of Fathers and their Families* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Lisa K. Ossian, *The Forgotten Generation: American Children and World War II* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011). There are many studies and memoirs detailing the experience of European and Asian children who fought in battle, witnessed atrocities, and died in the conflict.

World War II ended with the United States and the Soviet Union positioned, as one journalist described it in 1947, as “the two great superpowers of today,” struggling over a world, particularly Europe, turning “desperately about for some basis of stability.”³⁰ Despite the U.S. positioned to enter an era of prosperity, the public feared a national backslide into Depression. The demobilization of young G.I.s and the questions about women’s work also complicated the picture concerning future gender roles. The nuclear family experienced shifts during the past fifteen years (even more so, if the generation gap of the Jazz Age is included). Fears over juvenile delinquency and worries over the training required to do white collar work later culminated in the “crisis of masculinity,” described by contemporaries and accepted by historians, but had its origins in earlier decades.³¹ Despite the perceived prosperity and an enlarging middle class as the 1950s progressed, such fears did not abate. The popular image of the “organizational man” who measured his manliness in paychecks and material goods affirmed the U.S.A. as a “peoples of plenty” when compared to the gulags behind the Iron Curtain.³² However, many who made it to suburbia found the bland facets of conformity stifling and unfulfilling. They romanticized World War II as a period of true masculine virility.³³

³⁰ Volney D. Hurd, “France and European Unity: Truman Doctrine to Extend Northward?” *CSM*, April 24, 1947, 13.

³¹ The classical study is James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent of the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency, expanded edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David B. Wolcott, *Cops and Kids: Policing Juvenile Delinquency in Urban America, 1890-1940* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005).

³² David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1958). See also Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

³³ For a historical analysis of postwar prosperity and its impact on the family, the standard reference are Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York:

The boundaries of Cold War containment idealized American youth through the cookie-cutter solutions prescribed by child experts to ensure acceptable socialization. Searching for signs of national recovery, many venues of popular culture expressed stability through strong family relationships and social ascent. If father “knew best,” as one long-lived television program stated, he needed to re-establish himself with Junior. The turbulent decades of Depression and world war led many to believe maladjusted juveniles shared a strong correlation with absent fathers.³⁴ As a result, social guardians fretted over boys who defied their parents, and regarded them as deviants and perverts, not as participants in a separate youth subculture.³⁵

With such high stakes for young men, many child experts set rigid guidelines to raise children. Several historians suggest girlhood took precedence over boyhood.³⁶

Basic Books, 1988) and Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Historians have long noted Americans did not fully subscribe to domestic containment; see, for instance, Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

³⁴ James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005). For general works on fatherhood, see Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*; LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood*; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); E. Anthony Rotundo: *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Moon* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), chapters 2-4.

³⁵ Dale Kramer and Madeline Karr, *Teen-Age Gangs* (New York: Popular Library, 1954); Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1955); Eric C. Scheider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), chapters 3-6; Mariah Adin, *The Brooklyn Thrill-Kill Gang and the Great Comic Book Scare of the 1950s* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014).

³⁶ Peacock bases her claim on a quantitative analysis of *Life* magazine ads from 1945 to 1968 in which girls outnumbered boys, although she concedes girls usually appeared in a supporting roles as “future mother, consumer, and provider,” to “fathers and their responsibilities.” The Soviet Union especially played up girlhood as “a vessel for constructing consensus than was the boy who had the capacity for challenging the normativity of the Stalinist body.” Margaret Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 39. For a film history on the prominence of girlhood from the silent to mid-century, see: Gaylyn Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Performing Girlhood in Classic Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapters 4 and 5; Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).

Historian Kelly Schrum contends “girl culture,” defined as the close relationship between girlhood and consumerism, continued uninterrupted since the 1920s. During the war years, pictures such as *Young America* (1942) spotlighted girls’ ability to “solve adult problems and explore their roles in an adult world while living in a teen world and maturing in the process.”³⁷ In the postwar years, magazines such as *Seventeen* addressed issues of atomic energy and economic inflation alongside homemaking and dating tips for bobbysox readers.³⁸ Although girlhood certainly troubled social reformers, critics centered their concerns mostly on sex delinquency.³⁹

Despite historians’ advocacy of girlhood agency, many contemporaries, and even critics, idealized gender relationships with boyhood prioritized over girlhood.⁴⁰ The boy,

³⁷ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls’ Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 137. She cites MGM’s Andy Hardy series as an exception in which the teenage boy protagonist “focused on himself and his immediate concerns, such as how to buy a car or kiss a girl.” But for every *Love Finds Andy Hardy* (1938) there was a *Boy of the Streets* (1936) or *Captains Courageous* (1937), films in which boys tackled issues of crime, class, and familial disintegration, concepts which Andy Hardy recognized as well. Conversely, for every *Young America*, there was *The Youngest Profession* (1943), which featured a gang of star-struck high school girls pounding the pavement for MGM autographs and swooning over Robert Taylor.

Historians also demonstrate many women were “not June Cleaver” in the sense the stereotyped image of a perky homemaker did not reflect the majority of women’s lives. See Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

³⁸ Kelly Schrum, “‘Teena Means Business’: Teenage Girls’ Culture and *Seventeen Magazine*, 1944-1950,” in *Delinquent Daughters: Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Culture*, ed. Sherrie Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 134-163.

³⁹ See Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Ruth M. Alexander, *The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Michael Rembis, *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ D.G. Brown, “Sex-Role Development in a Changing Culture,” *Psychological Bulletin* 55, no. 4 (1958): 232-241; Carmen Luke, *Constructing the Child Viewer: A History of the American Discourse on Television and Children, 1950-1980* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 106-107; Carole Kismaric and Marvin Heiferman, *Growing Up with Dick and Jane: Learning and Living the American Dream* (San Francisco: Collins Publishers, 1997), 18; Angela F. Keaton, “Backyard Desperados: American Attitudes Concerning Toy Guns in the Early Cold War Era,” *The Journal of American Culture* 33, no.3 (September 2010): 183-196; Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problem of Youth in the Organized System* (New York: Random

as a future breadwinner, businessman and team player, soldier, and political leader, projected courage, fortitude, independence, and risk-taking as ideal characteristics.

Failure to do so risked the public (and peer) perception of him as politically “soft” and “wishy-washy,” susceptible to “un-American” indoctrination.⁴¹ Should this idealization of boyhood fail, the public feared postwar boys would turn into a “sissified” generation. The term reflected Philip Wylie’s 1942 treatise of a boy raised by matronly “vipers” and unable to protect the ideals of American democracy against political radicalism.⁴²

Historians are uncertain whether the majority of men accepted the idea of a “crisis of masculinity,” or if a “crisis” even existed outside the writings of political leaders and academics. However, any consideration of idealized male identity must include the socialization of boys into men. The movies, as one of the country’s top mediums for mass entertainment from the 1930s into the 1950s, serve as a lens to examine the shifts in masculinity.

House, 1956), 13. See also Harry Manual Shulman, *Juvenile Delinquency in American Society* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 69 and 588.

⁴¹ K.A. Curordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Alan Meyer, *Weekend Pilots: Technology, Masculinity, and Private Aviation in Postwar America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015). On the movies and alternate portrayals of cinematic masculinity, see Karen McNally, *When Frankie Went to Hollywood: Frank Sinatra and American Male Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

⁴² See Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar & Rhinehart, 1942); on the changing role of motherhood and Philip Wylie’s impact on the national discourse concerning gender roles, one recent study is Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). On motherhood in postwar movies, see Michael Rogin, “Kiss Me Deadly”: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies,” *Representations* 6 (Spring 1984): 1-36; Mike Chopra-Grant, “Hollywood’s ‘Moms’ and Postwar America” in *Motherhood Misconceived: Representing the Maternal in U.S. Films*, eds., Heather Addison, Mary Kate Goodwin-Kelly, and Elaine Roth (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009): 125-138. On the stigmatization of homosexuality, see Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Historian Victor D. Brooks labels the 1950s a decade of “kid-watching,” where dads and sons dressed in matching attire and parents catered to little league and scouting demands.⁴³ By kid-watching, adults guided youngsters into adulthood and socialized them to counter the uncertainties during the Depression and World War II. The chapters in this dissertation divide into topics, each one devoted to a facet of boyhood in the early postwar years, including family construction, delinquency, the “race question,” and patriotism. The films’ messages varied and, at times, contradicted each other. However, all the pictures addressed the lingering concerns from the Great Depression and World War II as filmmakers struggled to reconcile their prewar ideologies with changes in the postwar years. As Hollywood experienced the effects of the Red Scare, the effects of international crises, and the box office failures of many pictures championing prewar liberalism, they narrowed their productions to support anticommunism. By the 1950s, this search for stability from the past fifteen years of history led to the “containment culture” of the 1950s: white-collar social mobility, defending the home, rugged masculinity and abolition of “sissiness,” and obedience to parents, particularly fathers.

Literature Review: General Hollywood Context

Although this dissertation does not focus on the political economy of Hollywood during the late 1940s, the time period marks the beginning of Hollywood’s decline in the midst of postwar prosperity. The movies discussed in the following chapters play against the backdrop of the contentions between conservative and liberal voices in Hollywood, the debates over childrearing, the rise of television, government scrutiny into popular media, and the Korean War. In crafting their films, producers readily kept an eye on

⁴³ Victor D. Brooks, *Boomers: The Cold-War Generation Grows Up* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 177.

current events and the shifts in the social milieu, adjusting their movies' content—even sacrificing ideological convictions—to meet practical demands of making profits.⁴⁴

In the film industry, the buck literally stopped with the box office. Since the public determined whether or not a film failed, audience reception is an important part of this project. While determining exactly how each moviegoer reacted to a picture is impossible, indirect evidence offers glimpses into what audiences generally felt about a certain production. Preview screening cards, film reviewer observations, popular polls, and memoirs provide some filtered feedback.⁴⁵ Audiences were also fickle and not homogenous; a rural/urban divide is clearly observable when studying reception. Small town and rural audiences voiced their disapproval over “foreign” accents, “sophisticated” material including operatic musicals, sexual content, and controversial social subjects (i.e., alcoholism, excessive violence) projected on screen. Instead, they enjoyed seeing their “small town values” of close-knit communities and family solidarity glorified on film. To examine these diverse reactions, exhibitor reports and trade papers provide direct feedback from showmen describing their customers' reactions. Although exhibitors had ulterior motives (their criteria of a “good” picture usually depended on ticket sales rather than artistic merits), they had an eye on their public. Specifically, exhibitors marketed their products in the form of contests, charity events, complementary

⁴⁴ See Dore Schary, *A Case History of a Movie* (New York: Random House, 1950), 73.

⁴⁵ Preview screenings are essentially “rough cuts” so that studio brass can judge public reaction as they revise the picture for official release. Filmmakers could re-cut the picture, shoot additional scenes, dub over disagreeable dialogue, or, in extreme cases, recast a certain role or revamp a picture entirely. At times, critics saw a picture with a general audience and recorded reactions they thought notable.

In addition, several versions of the same film may exist, which complicate analyses of audience reception. “Road show” pictures, usually prestige productions on tour in exclusive showings, may contain a longer cut than those meant for general releases. Local (and foreign) censors also excised footage they thought offensive for their region. In the South, for instance, censors routinely excised footage with black performers or racial themes, and studios took this into consideration during production. See chapter four.

screenings, and other “ballyhoo” to compete with other pictures at different venues in a form of showmanship obsolete in today’s megaplex.⁴⁶ Just as a picture succeeded because audiences embraced its production values or message, a film’s failure gives the historian information about shifts in public taste.⁴⁷

Finally, just as producers, moviegoers, critics, and social experts disagreed about the ideal way to raise a child, celluloid kids of the screen also underwent a transformation. The influx of European neo-realism, such as *Shoeshine* (1946), *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), *The Fallen Idol* (1948) and *Germania Anno Zero* (1948) used children as stand-ins for economic and political uncertainties. These stark, hard-hitting pictures influenced American filmmakers to demand equal creative freedoms.⁴⁸ In the search for recapturing ticket sales, Hollywood sought “fresh” new faces. According to one *Photoplay* analysis of “the new look” for Hollywood men, actors like the virile Marlon Brando and sensitive Montgomery Clift were “boys trying to do a man’s work. Most of them are adolescent, and this applies regardless of age. These heroes include boys who’d like to be men.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ For an early critique on exhibitors-as-critics, see Tamar Lane, *What’s Wrong with the Movies?* (Los Angeles: The Waverly Company, 1923), chapter seven. See also Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, ed., *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴⁷ This methodology has drawbacks as well. One 1950 study points out habitual moviegoers see “practically every picture” their local theater featured, regardless of content, genre, or star. Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at Its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1950), 16-17.

⁴⁸ On the influx of gritty European flicks, see Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies 1940-1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) chapter five; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), Chapter one2; Steve Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Sidney Skolsky, “The New Look in Hollywood Men,” *Photoplay*, July 1957, 41-43, 111-112.

Alongside the changes in leading men, Hollywood's "moppet" pool of child actors were also not a homogenous lot. By 1957 industry gossip Hedda Hopper announced, "Child stars are scarcer than they used to be." The shortage of worthy young thespians did not stem from a lack of driven stage mothers. Rather, the star quality of child troupers had altered. Hopper added, "When a child role crops up these days it seems to call for more than the usual amount of know-how."⁵⁰ This know-how, the ability to portray multiple character parts, reflected the malleability of postwar child actors to tackle different roles. Unlike the "archetypes" of the 1930s and 1940s, like the sentimental Shirley Temple, an exuberant, plucky Mickey Rooney, or the reigning child actor of the war years, Margaret O'Brien, no single child actor dominated the postwar years.⁵¹ Instead, their wide range demonstrated the elasticity of parts addressing a wide range of adult concerns, such as divorce, militarism, racism, and internationalism. By 1956, the *New York Times* reported, "The days of the kiddie star in Hollywood—the precocious, doll-like, Shirley Temple type moving about a peppermint-stick world—seem over. Of late, children are used more naturally in movies, playing roles that spring with some genuineness from life-like situations. None of these new child actors is a star,

⁵⁰ Hedda Hopper, "Eyer, 11, Will Costar with Clint Walker," *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, July 3, 1957, 11. See also Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: The University of Kansas Press, 1985).

⁵¹ In one 1946 poll, Margaret O'Brien still led the polls, with "No Favorite Child Actor" following. "Butch" Jenkins, O'Brien's closest rival, garnered only six percent of the vote, with Peggy Ann Garner, Roddy McDowall, and "other" making up the rest. See Handel, *Hollywood Looks at Its Audience*, 144. In 1950, O'Brien became a teenager and after her *The Secret Garden* (1949) flopped, she and MGM mutually severed their contract. According to an MGM studio ledger, *The Secret Garden* lost \$840,000. See E.J. Mannix ledger, Howard Strickling papers, Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). On O'Brien's termination with six months left on her contract, see "Margaret O'Brien Stays at Metro Till September," *Daily Variety (DV)*, June 9, 1949, 1. "Margaret O'Brien, MGM Sever Pact," *Hollywood Reporter (HR)*, June 1, 1949, 1.

which seems right, since few children ‘star’ in actual life.”⁵² As film historian David Dye notes, the “major child-films of the fifties portrayed the confusion” of the industry in general.⁵³

As fictional characters, these movie boys expressed the views of their creators. As indicated through studio production files, censorship reports, trade paper and media commentary, and fickle audiences, the roots of Cold War containment in the 1950s came from a patchwork affair with many voices of authority overlapping and contradicting each other. Likewise, filmmakers did not speak with one mind and their work reveals contradictions supporting and defying public taste, which critics or moviegoers detected. Although they were characters in fiction, filmic boys challenged and reflected these adult sensibilities. Historians point to the “juvenile delinquent” genre in the latter 1950s with James Dean inaugurating the screen’s visualization of defiance. However, this search for stability emanated from the unique moment in the immediate postwar years, as Americans struggled with concerns from the Great Depression and World War II. Studios used younger boys, across multiple genres, as vehicles to explore anxieties from the past two decades. As time progressed, this notion of stability became the foundations of the Cold War consensus the “Deanlinquents” rebelled against. **[Figure 1]**

⁵² “Children Play Their Parts,” *New York Times* (NYT), July 15, 1956, 153.

⁵³ David Dye, *Child and Youth Actors: Filmographies of Their Entire Careers, 1914-1985* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988), xi. Dye asserts the television child personas, in contrast to their big screen counterparts, exuded the Cold War orthodoxy of the conformist family. That these television programs invaded the suburban home may have contributed to the sameness of 1950s family programs.



Figure 1. *Stars in My Crown* (1950). The postwar years reflect the troubles of the past, including the need for a strong father figure (Joel McCrea, center right) to show a youth (Dean Stockwell, center left) the need for discipline to stand up for national values against outside threats. This message, presumably about racism, is appropriately deceptive and reflects Hollywood's transition from prewar social progressivism into the anticommunism (see Chapter four). Author's collection.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter one provides a broad sweep of American history from the 1920s to the end of World War II. The chapter specifically examines the cultural and social effects of the Great Depression and World War II, particularly on the family, youth delinquency, and national identity. The Great Depression and the war tore the family unit apart amongst the economic and political upheavals during those two decades. When the United States emerged from World War II, the public tempered the jubilation of so-called “victory culture” with fears of a return of Depression and a Third World War. This

backdrop for stability and “normality” informs postwar American cinema, from leftist screenwriters, directors, and producers, to the messages projected on screen, to audience responses and box office grosses.

Chapter two looks at the nuclear family, with an emphasis on father-son relationships. The Great Depression and World War II disrupted the fabric of familial ties, both physically in the form of absent fathers and psychologically with many children deprived of strong adult guidance and role models. The early postwar years, with the threat of an economic backslide to chaotic depression, idealized the two-parent household as the norm (even if it was not for many families) as a firm foundation for security. To do this, critics and civic leaders stigmatized single parent household, those led by mothers, and divorcees. Their argument of an “incomplete” family leading straight to juvenile delinquency became a cornerstone in Cold War containment.

The Decision of Christopher Blake (1948) addresses Hollywood’s supposed threat to the nuclear family’s reconstruction. The movie indirectly reflected the H.U.A.C. hearings and the attempt to root out subversives in the film industry who threatened to undermine American institutions. This perception had credibility because of the high rate of celebrity divorces and sexual freedoms associated with the industry’s glamour. *The Decision of Christopher Blake* attempts to refute these critics with a happy ending upholding marriage, while simultaneously presenting a serious depiction of divorce’s effect on a boy’s maturation. The narrative could not reconcile these two factors and the public rejected the picture. In contrast, *Any Number Can Play* (1949), released a year later, successfully presents a threatened nuclear family pulling together through an affirmation of fatherhood. Hardship during the Great Depression required a father to be a

“tough guy” to withstand the emasculating sense of failure, while World War II films confirmed this image as a patriotic necessity to defeat fascism. Actor Clark Gable built his career playing this motif and in *Any Number Can Play*, his values override those of a moralizing son who dares question his rugged lifestyle. The ending presents this “hard” masculinity intact, allowing the family to retire to the suburbs and a life of respectability.

Chapter three examines juvenile delinquency in the postwar period. Although “bad children” always existed throughout history, reformers in the twentieth century traced modern delinquency to urbanization and the influx of immigrants in the nineteenth century. Each generation worried about the perceived waywardness of the next: the Jazz Age, the Depression, and World War II children seemed to widen the “generation gap” with their respective elders. The studios acknowledged juvenile delinquency existed, but in films such as *Johnny Holiday* (1949), the industry shifted the blame to corruption in modern city life, and bad parenting in particular.⁵⁴

This chapter focuses specifically on gun culture and militarization of youth to correct delinquency. Firearms played a dual role in America. Although critics linked gun violence to crime, guns also symbolized law and order. Hollywood became a battleground where supporters of both camps aired their views. During the Great

⁵⁴ Industry representative Arch Reeve conceded many “juvies” said the movies inspired them to commit crimes, but he refuted them: “It’s common practice for poor cornered kids to shift their blame.” The Motion Picture Association of America outlined their views in a pamphlet entitled *Exploding a Myth: Motion Pictures ARE NOT Responsible for Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: Motion Picture Association of America, 1950). The industry cited works such as Eleanor and Sheldon Glueck, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: Commonwealth Fund, 1950); D.H. Stott, *Delinquency and Human Nature* (Dunfermline, Scotland: The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 1950); Paul Tappen, *Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: McGraw-Hill Books, 1949). The Motion Picture Association of America “strongly recommend[ed]” Tappen’s work and quoted the National Probation and Parole Association’s announcement: “The parent who feels a sense of guilt about his own role in the family and his own responsibility is sometimes only too glad to find a scapegoat in Hollywood or on the radio.” See “A Symposium of Opinion Concerning Causation through Dramatized Entertainment—Motion Pictures and Radio Programs,” September 1948, “Juvenile delinquency—statements 1947-1956,” 27.f.270, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) records, MHL, AMPAS.

Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps prepared young men in a paramilitary environment (albeit strictly prohibiting guns), and World War II, especially, shaped the relationship between kids and guns through the idealization of the citizen-soldier.

Through gun culture, children could express their natural aggression and develop their values of patriotism and vigilance against threats. Guns in the “wrong hands” led to tragedy, but with proper guidance—usually a strong father figure as described in chapter two—a gun served as a rite of passage for a boy into responsible adulthood. *The Gunfighter* (1950), released at the outbreak of the Korean War, defies this message and portrays gunslingers as lonely, alienated, and tragic, which audiences rejected. *Suddenly* (1954), released after the Korean War, reinforces the need for boys to pick up firearms.

A boy and his mother learn guns could lead to delinquency, but they served a greater purpose in the formation of the citizen-soldier, including thwarting a presidential assassination. *Suddenly* is an outlier in this dissertation, released in the mid 1950s rather than the immediate postwar period. It serves as an appropriate ending point, positioning the child as a well-adjusted citizen-soldier.

Chapter four looks at boys learning about race relations through the movies.

Hollywood retreated from wartime-inspired, leftist “social message” pictures of the past fifteen years, lest critics accuse them of supporting subversive agendas. Many “race pictures” toned down their messages; boys of color sought social advancement, but remained linked to poverty. Chapter four examines white youths’ attitudes towards racism with two pictures: *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) and *Stars in My Crown* (1950). Both are set in small southern towns with the same actor, Juano Hernandez, as the victim of prejudice. The earlier film presents a hard-hitting attack on bigotry, continuing the

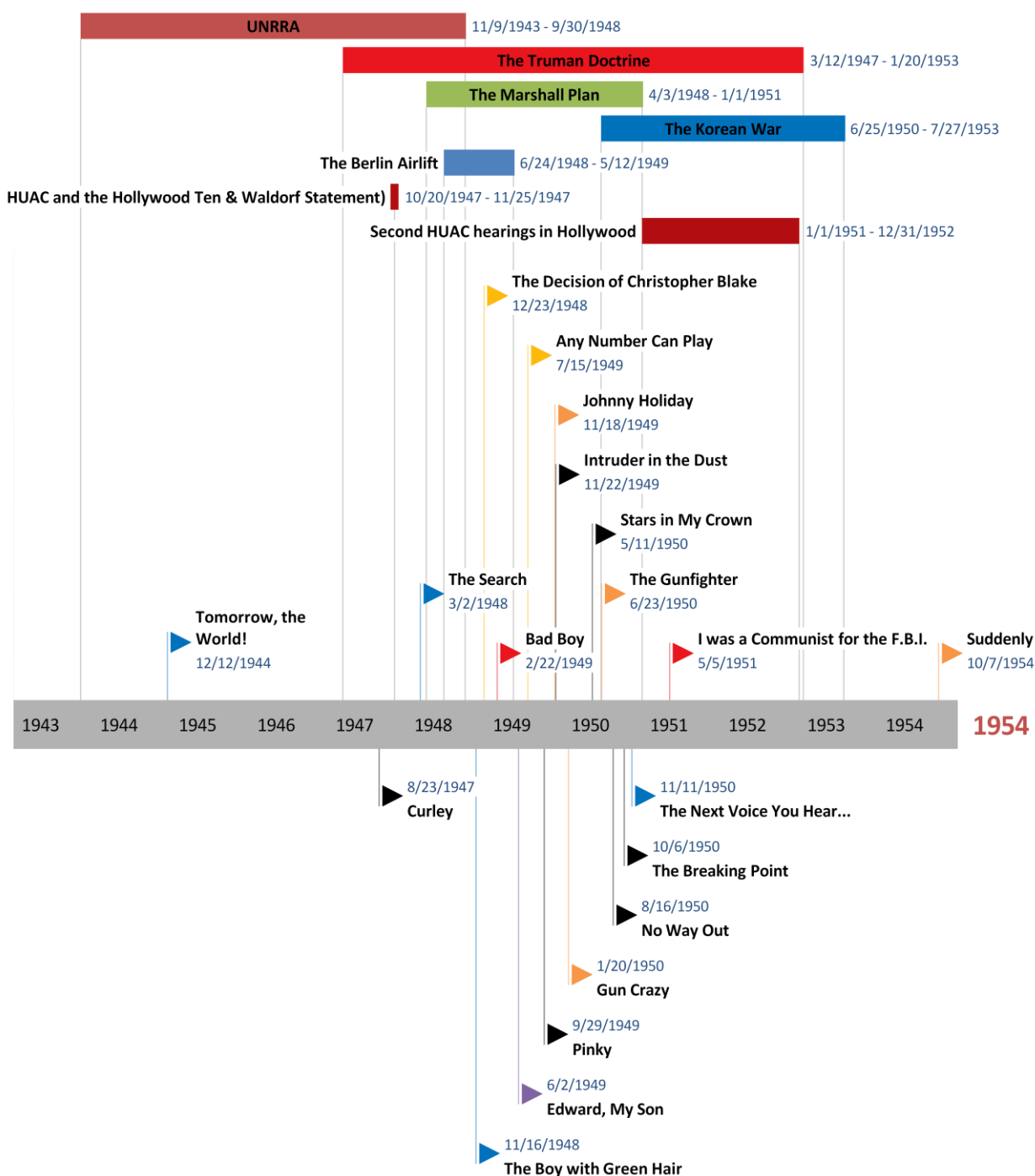
social progressivism of the 1930s, and met public disfavor for upsetting social norms. In a larger context, the perceived association between communism and civil rights colored the film during a time when anticommunist fervor increased, especially during the Korean War. In contrast, *Stars in My Crown* affirms the small town values and backhandedly whitewashed slavery in nostalgia. The film ignores the 1930s and 1940s entirely by appealing to a sentimental nationalistic narrative set in an earlier period, post-Civil War Reconstruction, as the “true” answer to the race question. The failure of the former movie and the monstrous success of the latter highlight the limited progressive stance Hollywood and the public took to race relations.

Chapter five looks at the international context concerning the U.S.’s role as a postwar leader. *Tomorrow, the World!* (1944) was a wartime effort to address the rehabilitation of European children through internationalism. The film’s message of a “soft peace” met a rocky reception from the American public and government officials, who banned the movie for audiences overseas. *The Search* (1948) serves as a postwar example for the need to support internationalism and cooperation to prevent future war orphans. Director Fred Zinnemann’s picture did everything “right” in terms of social containment: a good American father figure, a glorification of American socialization for white ethnic groups, and an effective use of American history and ideals of progress. However, the film still ran into difficulties reaching out to audiences who did not want the country to expand its role in international affairs, even for the sake of the children. Only when the social context changed from internationalism into the Truman Doctrine and a patriotic imperative to combat communism, did the movie become a smash hit.

The Search's audience ultimately viewed the film as a representation of American values and the need to promote anticommunism, not the internationalism Zinnemann intended.

By the early 1950s, Hollywood fully embraced anticommunism. Many historians look at Hollywood's alleged connections to the "Reds," filling book shelves with debates over the Hollywood Ten's culpability and where the responsibility/blame lies for the blacklist. For its own part, the industry, unsurprisingly, maintained its innocence, publicly declaring "only 200 out of 25,000 Americans" had listened to the communist party line, while the overwhelming majority found it "stupid, unworkable, subversive, and contrary to all democratic convictions." The defensive tone extended to its products, in which "not a single film has been named in which subversive propaganda reached the screen. There never was a chance for it to get in and there never will be."⁵⁵ Pictures such as *Bad Boy* (1949) and *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.* (1951) projected a polemical tone that set a standard of youth containment for the rest of the decade. This blanket anticommunism also shaped the historiography, with James Dean leading the charge for youth agency. However, Dean's screen persona rested on long-standing social and political anxieties from the previous two decades. Even as Hollywood slowly towed the Cold War line, the unique moment of the immediate postwar years shows that screen children explored and addressed those anxieties before becoming boxed by containment.

⁵⁵ "Hollywood Against Communism," n.d. Essays, 12-f.126, AMPTP records, MHL, AMPAS.

Table 1: Timeline of events; dates approximate.

Film dates reflect their premieres in one key city, after which the studios distributed them into the first run market. Small towns and rural areas sometimes did not receive prints until six months (or longer) after the initial release. In other words, moviegoers may have seen these movies up to a year after the dates listed.

Films are color coordinated according to chapter. Films under the timeline bar are additional titles mentioned in the dissertation but are not the focus for the chapter. The primary films under discussion are the titles above the timeline bar.

Color Key:

Chapter two titles (including *Edward, My Son*, which shows up as purple)

Chapter three titles.

Chapter four titles.

Chapter five titles.

Conclusion titles.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FAMILY IN TROUBLE, 1920-1945

...the family is a sacred institution and *the* fundamental institution in our society.

—“Middletown spirit,” ca.1937 (emphasis added)¹

Hell! What’s the use of my even thinking about getting married, let alone tying myself up in an engagement. I’m stuck! There’s just no future for our generation, and there’s nothing we can do about it. I don’t expect to marry—can’t hope to on this sort of job.

—teenage boy in “Middletown,” ca.1937²

The country can’t go on this way. It’s the end of America.

—Roger, a World War I vet-turned-“Forgotten Man,” *Heroes for Sale*, 1933³

In 1946, for its tenth year anniversary issue, *Life* magazine featured an article about the postwar environment. Titled “Dreams of 1946,” the magazine detailed the hopes of servicemen and women with high hopes for the future. “During the war years G.I.s and war workers dreamed of a brave new postwar world that would be full of air-conditioned peace and electronically controlled plenty,” the writer proclaimed.⁴ “The war, which kept a great many American dreams from coming true, also made the dreams

¹ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1937), 151.

² *Ibid.*, 410.

³ *Heroes for Sale*, directed by William A. Wellman (First National Pictures, 1933), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2006).

⁴ “Dreams of 1946,” *Life*, November 25, 1946, 57.

more roseate and wondrous.”⁵ Now, the magazine implied, anticipated prosperity brought those dreams within reach. *Life* provided large photo spreads under the caption “Family Utopia”: moving vans delivering televisions, washing machines, baby carriages, and even private helicopters to new homes, and men and women fawning over the latest fashion (sportswear and lingerie, respectively).⁶ These pictures served as the magazine’s proof that prosperity, and “normalcy,” lay right around the corner.

Life’s description of Americans and their “dreams” of material goods underscored the legacy of the Great Depression and World War II. The economic austerity and the social plights of the Depression, followed by four years of global war, left psychological impressions on the public, especially children who grew up during the later 1920s and 1930s.⁷ Having known economic, political, and social hard times for most of their lives, these survivors were now veterans of five years of world war.⁸ As the Allies came closer to victory, soldiers and those on the home front began envisioning a stable, postwar world, lest the Depression return. As one historian characterizes the period, Americans in the 1950s met the “uncertain future with visions of carefully planned and secure

⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁶ Ibid., 58-60.

⁷ Glen Elder, *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Kathleen W. Jones, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), chapters 4-5; Glen H. Elder, Jr. and Richard C. Rockwell, “Economic Depression and Postwar Opportunity in Men’s Lives: A Study of Life Patterns and Health,” in *Research in Community and Mental Health* 1, ed. Roberta G. Simmons (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1979), 249-303; John A. Clausen, *American Lives: Looking Back at the Children of the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸ After Pearl Harbor, the Selective Service Draft broadened the draft age from twenty-one to thirty-five to eighteen to thirty-eight. At one point, the army drafted men as old as forty-five, including actor Clark Gable who was forty-one when he enlisted for basic training.

homes, complete with skilled homemakers and successful breadwinners.”⁹ In popular myth, signs of success included an emphasis on family solidarity, social mobility, the growth of suburbs, and the need to conform. Historians and the public attribute these characteristics as hallmarks of the Cold War and anticommunism. However, the postwar transitions, especially the articulation of boyhood and masculinity, more accurately reflect a response to the legacy of the past two decades. Americans entered the postwar years with the experience of the Great Depression and World War II burnt into the public consciousness. As case studies demonstrate, even if children of the Great Depression rarely referenced the economic scarcity and social transitions in their adult years, they still developed a “depression mentality:” making do with less, building nest eggs in preparation of future hardships, and finding security in the family.¹⁰

This chapter examines the cultural and social effects of the Great Depression and World War II, particularly on the family. Social and economic anxieties from the past fifteen years placed incredible strain on the American social fabric, but this instability also stemmed from the “boom” years of the 1920s. The Roaring Twenties defied the “return to normalcy” slogan presidential candidate Warren Harding used as a campaign platform. Harding referenced the pre-World War I lifestyle of middle-class gentility and propriety as the embodiment of ideal American values.¹¹ The 1920s, however, was anything but “normal.” In their landmark 1920s study of typical mid-sized American

⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th anniversary edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 88.

¹⁰ Clausen, *American Lives*, 284-285, 504-505.

¹¹ Americans upheld these values, even if the social realities of the 1910s did not match these ideals. See Mark Whalen, *American Culture in the 1910s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Charlie Keil and Ben Singer, eds., *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations* (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

towns, which they called “Middletown” (represented by Muncie, Indiana), sociologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrill Lynd described the generation gap with young people idealizing “beautiful jazz babies” and “petting parties in the purple dawn,” which violated traditional, respectable sensibilities.¹² The cultural, social, economic, and political upheavals of the “Lost Generation” refuted older values as antiquated. Movies about “flaming youth,” such as *The Plastic Age* (1925) and *The Godless Girl* (1929) pointed to the artificial and spiritual dearth of the period, while literary modernists expressed disillusionment as they broke away from social mores.¹³ [Figure 2]



Figure 2. The Lost Generation in *The Godless Girl* (1929). Judy Craig (Lina Basquette) initiates Sonny “Bozo” Johnson (Eddie Quillan) into atheism. He swears by Darwin rather than the Bible, but both find spiritual redemption at the end. Author’s collection.

¹² Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* [1929] (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956), 266.

¹³ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Chris Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s: Writers among the Ruins* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012)

Within this framework, many Americans viewed the Great Depression as a bitter corrective to the excesses of the Roaring Twenties. In 1931, writer F. Scott Fitzgerald, who famously glorified the Lost Generation in works such as *The Great Gatsby*, looked back on his prosperous heyday with nostalgia. However, he conceded, “Many people still succumb to violent retching when they happen upon any of its characteristic words,” suggesting the decade left a bad taste in many people’s mouths.¹⁴ In the same year, historian Frederick Lewis Allen looked back at “yesterday” not with fondness, but as an era requiring redress. The Depression—as a symbolic medical tonic for the Roaring Twenties—was a needed, if “bitter draught” to take.¹⁵ Spiritual remedies however, did not help the Depression’s impact on the family, youth delinquency, and disenchantment with American democracy.

The Great Depression was more than just a moral “corrective” to the 1920s; it devastated the population. While the Jazz Age of flappers, automobile culture, Prohibition, nativism, and the emergence of white collar work placed strains on familial and social relations, the Depression shattered family solidarity and security.¹⁶ By 1935, the median family annual income was \$1,600, far below the \$2,500 level for a

¹⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” in *Fitzgerald: My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920-1940*, ed. L.W. West III (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 130.

¹⁵ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1931), 257.

¹⁶ For a good starting point on the 1920s, see Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 1929-1941 (New York: Crown, 1984); Lynn Dumenil, ed., *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Macmillan, 1995); Paul V. Murphy, *The New Era: American Thought and Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Roman & Littlefield, Publishers, 2016); on the Great Depression, see Michael A. Bernstein, *The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

comfortable standard of living, with many families making do on \$500.¹⁷ The decreased standard of living mirrored the housing crisis. In 1930, 23,235,982 unoccupied homes dotted the country due to foreclosures.¹⁸ In 1931, home construction dropped two-thirds from the average of the previous decade.¹⁹ By 1933, half of the twenty billion dollars of national mortgage debt was in default.²⁰ Savings vanished as banks permanently shut their doors. Up to seventy percent of banks in twelve states suspended their operations.²¹ The economic catastrophe threw a quarter of the population out of work and lowered the GNP by thirty percent between 1929 and 1932.²²

Perhaps the most dramatic symbol of family dislocation was upheaval from the Dust Bowl. Severe drought and soil erosion in the Great Plains generated immense dust storms, burying crops and homes. In Haskell County, Kansas, for instance, the total yield of harvested bushels of wheat dropped from 1.7128 million in 1930 to 0.0895 million in 1933.²³ Three million people, from south Texas to North Dakota (and parts of Canada), became migrants as they fled westward to escape. Donald Worster describes the

¹⁷ Hamilton Cravens, *Great Depression: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 46.

¹⁸ Alexander J. Field, "The Interwar Housing Cycle in the Light of 2001-2012: A Comparative Historical Perspective," in *Housing and Mortgage Markets in Historical Perspective*, eds., Eugene N. White, Kenneth Snowden, and Price Fishback (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), 70.

¹⁹ Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 86. Radford notes the housing market had declined since 1925, but the Depression left the industry in shambles. The many bank failures expedited the collapse.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

²¹ Elmus Wicker, *The Banking Panics of the Great Depression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

²³ Daniel Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 151.

dislocation as “a generation of human tumbleweeds, cut loose from the soil.”²⁴ In his ballads, songwriter Woody Guthrie immortalized the Dust Bowl’s traumatic effects of families loading their meager belongings on jalopies and beginning the long trek into uncertain futures.²⁵ Songs such as “I Ain’t Got No Home Anymore” aptly summarized the drifting American, harassed by the police, spurned by the rich, and without hopes of finding relief from the “hot and dusty road, that a million feet have trod.”²⁶ As described in Steinbeck’s 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and John Ford’s 1940 film adaptation, many of the pejoratively-dubbed “Okies” found little sympathy in communities already hard-pressed to support their own.²⁷ One billboard along the Nevada-California border summarized the attitude of Depression-hit inhabitants toward outsiders: “Okies Go Home: No Relief Available in California.”²⁸ The social aspects of the Okies (and “Arkies” from Arkansas) magnified the ecological and economic devastation. Unlike Native Americans or migrant Asians and Mexican workers, Okies were citizens, mainly white, and thus attracted attention and sympathy via writers like Steinbeck and Works

²⁴ Ibid., 129.

²⁵ See Ed Cray, *Ramblin’ Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Brad D. Lookingbill, *Dust Bowl, USA: Depression American and the Ecological Imagination, 1929-1941* (Bowling Green, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001), 101.

²⁶ Quoted in Cray, 123.

²⁷ James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

²⁸ Quoted in Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Twenties and Thirties: The Olympian Age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 101.

Progress Administration photographers like Dorothea Lange.²⁹ The fear of rising numbers of “poor white trash” in the Golden State, however, led some to lump Okies in an underclass with minorities; some public signs directed “Negroes” and Okies to share the same facilities, while one congressman suggested deporting the Okies to Brazil.³⁰ Nor could they go home; in Oklahoma City, for instance, so many residents rifled through restaurant garbage to ward off starvation that one state official suggested selling the refuge for needed revenue rather than allow starving people to rummage through the trash for free.³¹

Families Shattered: Desertion, Divorce, and Depression

Households not able to withstand the economic pressure broke up via desertion, divorce, and suicide. Studies, such as *The Unemployed Man and His Family: The Effects of Unemployment upon the Status of the Man in Fifty-Nine Families* were rife with anecdotes about fathers abandoning their wives and children, or even committing suicide, due to the emasculating economic hardships challenging their traditional roles as breadwinner and provider.³² Although several recent historians point out some families economized and fathers became “stay-home dads” who helped with the housework and children, many other fathers, unable to cope, deserted their families.³³ Nor were the

²⁹ Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 483.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, 25th anniversary edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 129.

³² Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Man and His Family: The Effect of Unemployment Upon the Status of the Man in Fifty-Nine Families* (New York: Dryden Press, 1940).

³³ On fathers being helpful, see Ralph LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Lendol Calder, *Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

fathers the only ones who abandoned their families. The United States Children's Bureau confirmed "hundreds of thousands" of "roving boys," not wanting to burden their families, ran away in search of work and to fend for themselves.³⁴ [Figure 3]



Figure 3. *Wild Boys of the Road*. Hollywood exploits the “roving boy” crisis of the early Great Depression with sex appeal, hoodlumism, and other dangers emanating from the “agony of Today’s forgotten youth!” The group shot here is from the aftermath of a rape scene (committed by an adult hobo). The hero (Frankie Darro, comforting the victim), leads the boys in revenge, pushing the offender from the moving boxcar. They escape punishment for the killing.

Even intact nuclear families sought stability. Many turned to a symbolic family figure for reassurance. President Franklin Roosevelt projected a grandfatherly image whose “fireside chats” and speeches evoked a folksy, down-to-earth assurance for the country.³⁵ The First Lady, Eleanor, wrote a “My Day” column where she described

³⁴ Grace Abbott, “Children and the Depression: A National Study and Warning,” *NYT*, December 18, 1932, XX5; see also Errol Lincoln Ulys, *Riding the Rails; Teenagers on the Move during the Great Depression* (New York: Rutledge, 2004), 10.

³⁵ Nancy Beck Young, William D. Pederson, Byron W. Daynes, eds., *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Shaping of American Political Culture* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2001).

meeting the common people, listening to their problems, and providing empathy.³⁶ Historians note the Roosevelts' parental public images inspired desperate Americans of all ages to write them, begging for advice, relief, or a sympathetic ear to voice their troubles.³⁷ Many of these letter writers centered on their families, describing emasculated men in identity crises, overtaxed women struggling to find food, and children wanting to help, but not knowing how. One father's letter represented the plight of the country, begging Roosevelt to help him "save my home for my family." He detailed his "good loving wife" and their four children, whom they teach to "love God, go to Sunday school and train them to live to be proper Americans who love their country, and if needs [sic] be give their lives for it."³⁸ The key to national salvation, he asserted, laid in family security.

Young children also became a symbol of hope and the family stability. As historian John F. Kasson points out, child actress Shirley Temple shot up to superstardom as the top box office draw in the mid 1930s. Temple, with her precocious charms, hair styled in ringlet curls, and adorable baby face and voice, projected innocence mixed with wisdom. Her screen characters were often wiser than the adults as she resolved plotlines dealing with families breaking up and economic distress.³⁹ As Temple aged, her box

³⁶ Maurine H. Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self-fulfillment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 167.

³⁷ Robert Cohen, ed., *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Robert S. McElvaine, ed., *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

³⁸ A.G. to Federal Emergency Relief, letter, December 12, 1934, in *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man*, ed. Robert S. McElvaine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 59-60.

³⁹ John F. Kasson, *The Little Girl who Fought the Great Depression: Shirley Temple and 1930s America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

office declined, and another youngster, Mickey Rooney, succeeded her. Rooney projected a teenage exuberance not rooted in delinquency. His long-lived “Andy Hardy” persona, presented in fifteen MGM films from the 1937 to 1946 (plus a short in 1940, several public service announcements, and a revived attempt in 1958), celebrated family togetherness and wholesome values in a Midwestern small town created on MGM’s backlot. Stories typically ended with young Hardy seeking wisdom and “man to man” advice from his father, a judge, and promoting piety, patriotism, and generosity. The series largely elided the Depression, generally focusing on Andy’s troubles with girls, money to treat girls, and the material pains of growing up and wooing/impressing girls, such as buying a car or preparing for high school functions. **[Figure 4]** The series, cheap to produce and enormously successful, presented an idealized image of American stability that did not exist for large segments of the public outside theaters.



Figure 4. Man-to-man in the New Deal. Andy Hardy (Mickey Rooney, second from left), has girl troubles and advice from his father (Lewis Stone, left), who presides over this socialization into manhood. Andy’s sister (Cecilia Parker, right) watches the maturation process. Author’s collection.

While the movies offered images of wholesomeness in Temple and Rooney vehicles, they also darkly characterized the American family under tremendous strain. Marriage rates dropped during the first half of the Depression as did divorce rates—the latter because many people could not afford lawyer fees or alimony and simply broke up through desertion.⁴⁰ Either way, divorce, desertion, or delayed marriage spelled trouble for the family unit. One movie, *Let's Try Again* (1934), unspooled with a title card declaring, “Perhaps we need an N.R.A. for matrimony,” linking the national Depression directly to the “300,000 married Americans” who found “divorce the only way out.” After all, “if the home goes to smash, the country goes to smash.”⁴¹ Many movies played on the theme of traumatized children who “go wrong” thanks to their parents splitting. *Divorce in the Family* (1932) centered the impolite topic in the marquee, but has a happy ending when a traumatized boy learns to appreciate having two fathers, rather than one (or none) during the Depression. *Wednesday's Child* (1934) featured a boy suffering a nervous breakdown during a divorce before his father overcomes his selfishness. In *What Becomes of the Children?* (1936), parents reconcile to save their kids. Hollywood's chief censor, Joseph Breen, initially skeptical the movie “might be one of the sensational and somewhat sexy pictures” enthused the film was “well done and

⁴⁰ “100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Rates Statistics: United States, 1867-1967,” *National Vital Statistics System* 21, no.24, *U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare*, 1973, accessed February 24, 2017, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_21/sr21_024.pdf; “The Depression and Alimony,” *NYT*, September 30, 1931, 20.

⁴¹ *Let's Try It Again*, directed by Worthington Miner (RKO Radio Pictures, 1934), DVD (Personal Collection of Robert Connors). For a descriptive survey of filmic matrimony, see Jeanine Basinger, *I Do and I Don't: A History of Marriage in the Movies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), part two.

worthwhile story of the evils of divorce” where “parents are indifferent toward the needs of their children for companionship and sympathetic understanding.”⁴²

These films’ surface approval of marriage notwithstanding, divorce and Hollywood became a subject of criticism as many movies glamorized the breakup of the family. Since the Production Code—Hollywood’s self-censorship guidelines—did not ban the actual word “divorce” and many scenarios rested on a marriage breaking-up, Hollywood continually threw marriage on the rocks and made adultery look fun, right before the inevitable reconciliation. *The Divorcee* (1930) has Norma Shearer evening the score with a philandering husband and she earned an Oscar for her troubles. *The Gay Divorcee* (1934; an extra *e* added to the title of the original play to appease censors) alluded to the merriment from troubled marriages.⁴³

Hollywood itself became a source of controversy and, according to moralists, embodied the nation’s waywardness in a time of economic upheaval. This moral upheaval had roots in earlier time periods, where delayed marriage and sexual freedoms during the 1920s signified women’s independence and the younger generation’s breakaway from “old fashioned” sentiment.⁴⁴ This created a backlash from conservative figures who made headlines attacking Hollywoodites for airing their private lives and “contaminating” the younger generation. In Middletown, some folks darkly joked one of

⁴² Joseph Breen to Fred Eastman, letter, April 3, 1936, “What Becomes of the Children? [Sentinel, 1936],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, AMPAS.

⁴³ Betty Lasky, *RKO: The Biggest Little Major of Them All* (Santa Monica, CA: Round Table Publishing, 1989), 112.

⁴⁴ Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Chapter four; Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Lea Jacobs, *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

the few “good” things about the Depression was the dropping divorce rates due to tough economic times, and the town now “beat Hollywood’s 1934 divorce rate of 25 per 100 marriages.”⁴⁵ More serious, in 1939, Illinois state representative William F. Gibbs introduced a bill to win the war on marriage. “To our young boys and girls the marriage contract has become a plaything,” he declared. Gibbs traced the problem to Hollywood “where divorce and marriage are so common among many of the most luminous stars.” His bill would make exhibitors criminals if they showed any movie featuring a player “who has been divorced two or more times.”⁴⁶ In this case, Gibbs’s plan failed; Depression audiences still wanted escapism in tabloids and the movies. One hit that year, *The Women*, has Norma Shearer sobbing her way to Reno to divorce a philandering husband and her teary-eyed daughter begging God to reunite her parents. Her prayers work; Shearer fights to win her husband back from the clutches of a social-climbing shop-girl. Although the film ends with Shearer running back into her unfaithful husband’s arms, the movie highlights the fun drama surrounding divorce and scandal. For shop-girls desperate to move upwards socially, morally-loose living and husband-stealing became acceptable, even encouraged, means to attain financial stability.⁴⁷

National Family Disunity: Political Crises

The perceived decline of family life extended into the “national family,” provoking criticism of the government’s and capitalism’s ability to take care of citizens.

⁴⁵ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*, 152-153.

⁴⁶ John Trumbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World: U.S. and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

⁴⁷ Joan Crawford, who played the shop-girl in *The Women*, previously portrayed many other working-class women who work their way up the social ladder by any means possible. Such films include *Possessed* (1931), *Grand Hotel* (1932), and *Mannequin* (1937).

In the early Depression, President Herbert Hoover reiterated a conservative stance for government, arguing relief measures and intervention would destroy American individuality and self-reliance. Instead, he pushed through the Smoot-Hawley Tariff, designed to increase the price of imports, thereby promoting consumption of domestic-made goods. For the contemporary public, these acts generated no immediate relief as the crisis worsened, creating greater disenchantment in the country and its institutions. In 1931, one critic savagely stated Hoover's oft-quoted expression concerning recovery and prosperity "right around the corner" made the U.S. the "laughing-stock" of the world. He concluded, if Hoover sincerely believed his administration "coped successfully with the unemployment problem," then "he has indeed reached the pinnacle of self-delusion."⁴⁸

Eight months later, the entire nation had reason to believe Hoover had lost touch with the common man. In February, 1932, the President responded to the Bonus Army, a group of 43,000 veterans and their families and associates, who set up shacks around the Capitol to demand early payment of their promised World War I bonuses. After two of the Bonus Army died in a confrontation with Washington police, Hoover ordered the army to eject them from the city. General Douglas MacArthur went further, burning down their shacks, and charging in with tear gas and fixed bayonets.⁴⁹ The U.S. Army defeated the Bonus Army, but the real loser in the public eye was Hoover. The popular nickname for shantytowns—"Hoovervilles"—ensured the memory of the Bonus Army did not fade into history.

⁴⁸ "Untermeyer Returns: Criticizes Hoover: Europeans Laughing at his 'Prosperity by Predictions,' Attorney Declares," *NYT*, August 25, 1931, 15.

⁴⁹ Paul Dickson, and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker and Company, 2004).

President Hoover's, and the government's, lack of response led the public to glamorize outlaws who bucked the system. The Bonus Army played by the rules through nonviolent protests (despite MacArthur's claiming they wanted to overthrow the government) and national headlines documented their treatment from an uncaring government. As a result, anti-establishment figures arose as a form of gratuitous subversion. The legacy of Prohibition, with glorified gangsters and their exciting defiance of the law, took on a symbolic heroism during the Depression.⁵⁰ Impressionable children and their disillusioned parents glorified these gangsters as working class heroes who attained the American Dream by trumping the rules. The capitalist system and American-styled democracy let the entire country down during hard times. The gangster, on the other hand, showed crime paid off. Bonnie and Clyde, John Dillinger, and other lawbreakers attracted fans for their successful exploits against the political and social establishment.⁵¹ The cinematic public enemies became typed in the screen personas of James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, George Raft, and other character actors who initially shot to fame by playing "tough guys" on screen.⁵²

⁵⁰ In 1939, the movie *The Roaring Twenties* glamorized the period Frederick Lewis Allen thought excessive. The film mimics a documentary, complete with a narrator.

⁵¹ See Mary Elizabeth Strunk, *Wanted Women: An American Obsession in the Reign of J. Edgar Hoover* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

⁵² Herbert Blumer and Philip M. Hauser, *Movies, Delinquency, and Crime* (New York: Macmillan, 1933). For selected secondary sources, see David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Jonathan Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Creaser to Touch of Evil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, and Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The Payne study planned a volume devoted to boys and the urban scene, titled *Boys, Movies and City Streets*, but incorporated the text into the larger volume *Children and the Movies*. See Richard Maltby, "Why Boys Go Wrong: Gangsters, Hoodlums and the Natural History of Delinquent Careers," last modified 2005, accessed February 24, 2017, <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic232335.files/3.%20Maltby.doc>. For a scintillating read of the "youth" problem by an undercover F.B.I. agent/journalist, see Courtney Riley Cooper, *Designs in Scarlet* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939).

American capitalism, the public believed, failed, as evidenced by gangsters, morally bankrupt social elites, and corrupt politicians. In capitalism's place, alternate political and economic models gained popularity for their emphases on duty, loyalty, and patriotism. In Italy, dictator Benito Mussolini "made the trains run on time" and seemingly energized his nation, earning the respect of admiring Americans in the process. In 1927, journalist Irving S. Cobb favorably likened Il Duce to an "Italian [Theodore] Roosevelt" for restoring Italy's masculine image, just as Roosevelt led the "strenuous life" to rectify "soft"-bodied masculinity.⁵³ In Germany, Adolf Hitler's steady rise and emphasis on law and order gave rise to a German-American bund in the U.S. to bring a hard stability out of social chaos.⁵⁴

Political and cultural vigilantes also arose to combat corrupt businessmen and politicians intent on crushing the "little guy." Huey Long gained national prominence as a popular demagogue as Louisiana governor, U.S. senator, and presidential hopeful. Long promised to make "Every Man a King" via wealth redistribution, directly challenging "the system."⁵⁵ In films such as *Washington Merry Go Round* (1932), *Gabriel over the White House* (1933), *The President Vanishes* (1934), and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), the protagonists understand the system is broken and they employ extreme measures—even dictatorship and abolishing Congress, in the case of

⁵³ Quoted in John Patrick Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 63.

⁵⁴ The media inflated the Bund, stating it boasted over a million members. See Michael Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in American Magazines, 1923-1939* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 113; Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, & the Great Depression* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1983).

Gabriel over the White House—to save the country from itself.⁵⁶ In radio and the nascent comic book industry, the “mystery men” and superhero genres emerged, promoting leotard-clad supermen as the only individuals capable of restoring American democracy and values.⁵⁷ In early Superman and Batman stories, readers see the public depicted as helpless, the police rendered useless, and political figures ignorant of “true” conditions and unable to stop crime and wrongful deeds. The vigilantes take it upon themselves to restore civil liberties, even if they toss aside the law for the greater good.

Alongside vigilantism and fascism, socialism reached an apex in the U.S. during the Great Depression. President Franklin Roosevelt capitalized on his grandfatherly image, but also seemingly endorsed facets of socialism. The National Recovery Act’s Section 7(a), which became the basis of the Wagner Act, granted workers the right to form unions. Other programs, including Social Security, unemployment relief, job placement, and agricultural assistance helped pull socialists into the New Deal coalition (and co-opting Socialist Party of America’s candidate Norman Thomas).⁵⁸ By offering immediate relief through massive government spending and direct government involvement on behalf of workers, Roosevelt built popular support.

Socialists, and the Hollywood Left, in particular, supported the New Deal. Pictures such as *Our Daily Bread* (1934) glamorized farm collectivism and the need for social cooperation. Social justice against tyrannical capitalists and the unthinking mob

⁵⁶ Colin Schindler, *Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema and American Society, 1929-1939* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁵⁷ Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

⁵⁸ John Nichols, *The “S” Word: A Short History of an American Tradition...Socialism* (New York: Verso, 2011), 120.

became the foundation of many films, including *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *Fury* (1936), and *They Won't Forget* (1937). Prison films, such as *The Big House* (1930), *Hell's Highway* (1932), and *The Mayor of Hell* (1933) promoted class and race equality as incarcerated men and boys from all backgrounds pooled their resources to survive against a brutal, merciless system of (prison) labor exploitation.⁵⁹ Socialism also gained traction among ethnic minorities. Since the nineteenth century, socialism attracted impoverished African Americans with promises of political, economic, and social brotherhood. In the Depression, disgruntled African Americans found solidarity and political identity through socialist groups in the Depression.⁶⁰

A New Deal for the Traditional Man

The New Deal channeled popular anger and disenchantment into a re-masculinization of the working man. Since the Industrial Revolution, rural rehabilitation reflected a popular belief in nature as a remedy for moral purification and spiritual rejuvenation. Social reformers, especially Progressives in the early twentieth century, drafted child labor laws with the corrupt factory system and its attendant street life in mind; they romanticized farm labor and the “great outdoors” as character building.⁶¹ The

⁵⁹ The history of the Hollywood Left is immense. For a starting point, see Sam Mithani, “The Hollywood Left: Cinematic Art and Activism in the 1930s” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2007); Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁰ See Philip S. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1977); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Winston James, “Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* (1999): 45-63; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

⁶¹ Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 77-81; Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency, expanded edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David B. Wolcott, *Cops and Kids: Policing Juvenile Delinquency in Urban America, 1890-1940* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005); Susan

Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, and the YMCA exemplified this ideology of physical work and spiritual “good works” to promote socialization.⁶² These organizations laid the foundation for the New Deal agencies during the Great Depression.⁶³

Franklin Roosevelt’s “alphabet soup” of programs affirmed the male role of provider and breadwinner. New Deal programs provided job opportunities, not charity or relief. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), in particular, socialized young men into the national work ethic through outdoor projects. The CCC and other programs not only offered dependable paychecks, they also kept restless men off city streets. Roosevelt specifically noted, “The overwhelming majority of unemployed Americans are now walking the streets,” which he aimed to correct.⁶⁴ Sending boys and men into the wilderness met with popular approval. In 1941, former probation officer George Vold confirmed the rural countryside promoted the “value and respectability of work, of family stability and continuity of land.” He called these values “insurance against want” and a rebuttal against “pleasure-seeking and [a] ‘soft life,’” which Vold considered vices festering in amoral urban streets. Leaving the fast-paced materialism of cities “provide[d]

J. Pearson, *The Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Animals and Children in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

⁶² Jeffrey P. Hantover, “The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity,” *Journal of Social Issues* 34, no.1 (January 1978): 184-195; David Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boys Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Tim Jeal, *Baden-Powell: Founder of the Boy Scouts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Jay Mechling, *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Suzanne Caverly, “Marketing Masculinity: Male Identity, Boy Culture, and the Boy Scouts of America, 1900-1940” (MA diss., California State University Long Beach, 2010).

⁶³ Shulman, 591. He conceded many well-known gangsters had small-town roots. See also Neil M. Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kenneth B. Kidd, *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), chapter one.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Maher, *Nature’s New Deal*, 29.

a youth] a pattern of conformity, an acceptance of the regulations and controls of the settled community.”⁶⁵ This form of rural rejuvenation worked; when the Bonus Army returned in 1933, demanding early payment of their World War I bonuses, Roosevelt countered by offering them jobs in the Civilian Conservation Corps.⁶⁶ Over 2,500 veterans accepted the offer and those who declined had free transportation home.

Anti-communism in the Interwar Years

However, the New Deal also attracted many critics. Franklin Roosevelt’s courting socialists and minorities drew condemnation from citizens who feared a revolution to overthrow the United States. This stigma stemmed from the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which ousted the Russian czar, executed the royal family, drove the aristocracy into exile, and then turned on itself in a series of purges as factions struggled for power. In the United States, the threat of Bolshevism emanated from long-standing grievances and anxieties from the Industrial Revolution and immigration. The Red Scare of 1919 drew its strength from social crusaders bent on eliminating subversive “Bolsheviks,” although the term became a blanket pejorative to persecute labor unions, foreigners, perceived anarchists, minorities, and anyone who threatened to undermine the Church, family life, and the “American way of life.”⁶⁷ Throughout the 1920s, social

⁶⁵ George Vold, “Crime in Cities and Rural Areas,” *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science*, September 1941, 45.

⁶⁶ Adam Seth Cohen, *Nothing to Fear: FDR’s Inner Circle and the Hundred Days that Created Modern America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 227.

⁶⁷ The classic study on the Red Scare is Robert K. Murphy, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955). See also Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011).

conservatives worried over political and social radicalism's threat to the home, the economic free enterprise system, and government.

During the Depression, social conservatives (and certainly many business leaders) criticized the New Deal, but they also needed the funds and support these programs offered. When sociologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd returned to Muncie, Indiana, in 1935 to follow up on the typical "Middletown," they interviewed the city's businessmen. This "Republican stronghold" admitted they desperately needed government help and readily accepted it ("git while the gittin's good"), while condemning such programs for other communities.⁶⁸ While local businessmen soured to reconcile their political ideology with their real-life economic plight, more prominent politicians responded by investigating supposed communist conspiracies. The House Committee on Un-American Activities (H.U.A.C.) formed in 1938 under Representative Martin Dies.

Among Dies's first targets, and certainly the most prominent, was Hollywood. The film industry flaunted its "loose" morality before the public in terms of the sensational divorce and sex scandals. It glorified the gangster and ridiculed capitalism, the moneyed classes, and even the political system in so-called "message pictures."⁶⁹ Many studio personnel were active members of the socialist party or had left-leaning sympathies, which, in Dies's eyes, made their roles as public entertainers even more dangerous. Although the industry maintained a self-censoring body as a public relations

⁶⁸ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*, 87, 368-369.

⁶⁹ The contradiction concerning Hollywoodites profiting from their attacks at the wealthy only heightened the subversion in social critics' eyes. Many moguls, star players, and production personnel were Jewish and of European descent, which reinforced the conspiracy in social critics', and anti-Semitic thinking. They suspected Hollywoodites of hoarding money and bankrupting Christian values, especially the seduction of American maidenhood.

measure (and to head-off government interference), H.U.A.C. accused the industry of spreading subversive communist programming and agitating for war. The Committee wanted to “break” Hollywood by ending the vertical monopoly between studios and the theaters and prepared to subpoena key personnel. Dies’s Committee alleged the movies were merely one of many subversive activities proliferating in the U.S., especially in the ways they corrupted youth and family life.⁷⁰ When the U.S. entered World War II, however, Hollywood enlisted in the war effort and the Committee backed off.

Entering World War II

World War II ended the economic aspects of the Great Depression, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor did not erase the effects of the past ten years in public memory. Indeed, the war continued concerns over familial instability and uncertainties about the country’s future in the fight against fascism. The public objected to the Army drafting men with dependent children, but the continual urgency for manpower prevailed. On October 1, 1943, the War Department reclassified fathers who were originally III-A—meaning they had children but were not engaged in war work—as I-A, making them eligible for the service.⁷¹ Eventually, 16.1 million Americans saw active duty, and the vast majority of those servicemen and women had families, which the war disrupted. By 1944, the *New York Times*, covering the public anticipation for news about D-Day, reported over 200,000 families “already felt personal shock and pain through the death, wounding or capture of a relative.” To bolster morale, the writer quickly turned the

⁷⁰ See Robert C. Albright, “Immorality in Bund Charged by Girl, 19,” *WP*, August 19, 1939, 1; Sidney Olson, “Ex-Communist is Accuser Presence at Council Charged Investigators Refuse Comment,” *WP*, October 19, 1938, 1.

⁷¹ Ralph LaRossa, *Of War and Men: World War II in the Lives of Fathers and their Families* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 31.

readers' attention to "such homely matters as tomato plants and cutworms."⁷² From Pearl Harbor in 1941, to the invasion of France in 1944, to the high casualty reports from island-hopping in the Pacific and anticipated heavy casualties in a planned Japanese invasion a year later, the home front continually braced itself through an emphasis on the facets of family-centered home life.

The war effort portrayed the war-torn family with patriotic rhetoric. **[Figure 5]** The movie *The Fighting Sullivans* (1944), for instance, based on the five real-life Sullivan brothers who grew up and survived economic hardship, ended with the siblings enlisting and dying together in the South Pacific Theater. When the regrettable War Department telegram shows up, the wives and parents of the boys soldier on. Dad goes to work, the women folk become war workers and WACs. When the Navy dedicated the destroyer *U.S.S. The Sullivans* in their honor, their mother christened the ship, urging war workers to "get it over with so other boys can come home to their mothers."⁷³ Other crises from the Great Depression, such as the housing shortage, created logistical problems for service men and workers flocking into war industries, particularly on the west coast. The movies painted an optimistic vision of family dislocation in pictures such as *The More the Merrier* (1943), *The Doughgirls* (1944), and *Since You Went Away* (1944), all of which glamorized the frustration of transient war workers through romance, as strangers shared living quarters and fell in love. The housing shortage, these films suggested, was an opportunity for matchmaking, matrimony, and future family stability when the war ended.

⁷² "The Nation," *NYT*, May 28, 1944, 2E.

⁷³ Scot Hart, "Mother of 5 Sullivan Boys Urges Speeding of War Effort," *WP*, February 3, 1943, 1.



Figure 5. Family solidarity under the shadow of war. In MGM's *Joe Smith, American* (1942), the every-man Dad (Robert Young) works in a war plant and presents the fruits of his labor to his son (Darryl Hickman). Homemaker/wife (Marsha Hunt) completes the family unit.

Social and Political Tension in the Home Front

Outside of the Hollywood gloss and happy endings, intense tensions simmered. They erupted in the form of race riots, reports of amoral juvenile delinquents, and open hostility against “un-American” elements. The availability of work in manufacturing plants, for instance, increased the rate of migration of African Americans from the south looking for jobs and better futures. By the time the “Second Great Migration” ended in

the 1970s, over five million African Americans had moved north.⁷⁴ Population swells and changes in racial demographics in cities like Detroit and Los Angeles placed pressure on fragile economic structures still recovering from the Great Depression. Racial tensions also increased, as the NAACP and other civil rights groups waged a “Double V” campaign to win the war against fascism abroad and racism at home.

The mass migration of African-Americans into the North and West added to fears about racial-mixing at a time when white men serving the war effort could not protect their womenfolk. The intermixing between black culture and white youths worried middle-class moralists since the 1920s, when jazz attracted care-free, white “bohemians” among the Lost Generation. The threat of miscegenation remained throughout the 1930s as swing music became popular and white youths eagerly consumed “black” music.⁷⁵ In 1943, tensions boiled over as race riots broke out in Detroit and Harlem. In Los Angeles, the Zoot Suit Riots symbolized the resentment from white servicemen against “uppity” minorities who favored zoot suits. The zoot suiters’ flamboyant clothing connoted an assertion of black/Latino masculine manhood, hypersexuality, miscegenation, and a rejection of white masculine values of stoicism and suppression of emotions.⁷⁶

Renewed agency and social activism among minorities set white Americans on the defensive. The context of global war further added to white anxieties, as the public

⁷⁴ See E. Marvin Goodwin, *Black Migration in America from 1915 to 1960: An Uneasy Exodus* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 20; Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 6. The First Great Migration occurred at the end of Reconstruction.

⁷⁵ David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁷⁶ Luis Alvarez, *Power of the Zoot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), chapters 3 and 4.

recognized this white masculinity as key to its nation's survival. In 1944, the *New York Times* quoted General John Pershing, who had led the American Expeditionary Force to victory against the Germans in World War I. The reporter stated Pershing "shared his 'every confidence' that American manhood again 'will win through to victory'" against the Nazis.⁷⁷ But critics were not as certain Americans still had the stuff. One month earlier, J. Edgar Hoover reported youth craziness and crime increased since the Great Depression. "An appalling wave of juvenile crime which threatens to engulf the flower of American manhood" was underway, the F.B.I. director warned. Speaking during National Family Week, Hoover urged greater parental supervision.⁷⁸ Hoover, himself rumored as a closeted homosexual, and who closely monitored the sex lives of others, projected a narrow model for American masculinity.⁷⁹ Deviating from this mold led wayward youngsters into delinquency. In December, 1943, *Life* magazine reported a rise in the number of juvenile delinquency cases. San Diego, a "wartime boom" city in Southern California, reported a fifty percent increase in crime rates for boys and 355 percent increase for girls.⁸⁰

Social critics blamed the war for the family instability supposedly generating this crime wave. The war tore families apart under the guise of patriotism, *Life* magazine

⁷⁷ "Pershing Voices Confidence," *NYT*, June 7, 1944, 9.

⁷⁸ "Hoover Indorses National Family Week as Means of Combating Juvenile Crime," *CSM*, May 3, 1944, 13.

⁷⁹ On Hoover's rumored homosexuality, see Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 350-351; Athan Theoharis, ed., *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 349-351; David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11-12; Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 179-180.

⁸⁰ Roger Butterfield, "Our Kids are in Trouble," *Life*, December 20, 1943, 97.

alleged, and many young people used this excuse to explain their moral lapses. “Victory Girls” offered their sexual services to lonely servicemen as a sort of morale booster, while reports of intense battles overseas desensitized boys into becoming “thrill seekers” by breaking windows, snatching purses, and other acts of “hoodlumism.”⁸¹ Even patriotic boys became legally-classified delinquents when they ran away from home to enlist, lied about their ages, or quit school to get war jobs.⁸² The lack of parental supervision—with dad in the service and mothers performing war work—left children with no direction. On the cinematic front, movies such as *Where are Your Children?* (1944) confirmed the causality between fractured households and delinquency.

The topic of working women complemented the masculine crisis and the debate over shifts in gender roles. In the 1910s and more so in the 1920s, consumer culture increased in the form of fashion trends, cosmetics, and leisure activities and women took on jobs to afford them.⁸³ During the Great Depression, many public guardians tried to bolster the image of husbands as breadwinners by urging working women to surrender their jobs to unemployed men, even if this ideology played out more in fiction than real life.⁸⁴ In World War II, Americans accepted the necessity of women in the workforce—this time, to free up able-bodied men for war. Many historians point to the “Rosie the River” image as a symbol for female empowerment. However, even here, women’s

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 98.

⁸³ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Ariel Beuajot, “Coiffing Vanity: Advertising Cellulois Toilet Seats in 1920s America,” in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Lee Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 150-168.

⁸⁴ See Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997); Jennifer Haytok, *The Middle Class in the Great Depression: Popular Women’s Novels of the 1930s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

prescribed gender role as mother and caretaker dominated, and social conservatives urged women to stay in the workforce only “for the duration.”⁸⁵ Nearly eighty percent of women expressed hope they would keep their jobs after the war (even hoping for equal pay with men), stating they found fulfillment outside the home.⁸⁶ However, for critics, this desire merely confirmed the upheaval in gender roles regarding the work force and the accompanying familial instability since the end of World War I.

Even as social guardians wanted women to stay at home, the lack of male role models upset the maturation process for boys. Literary works such as Philip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers* (1942) and David Levy’s *Maternal Overprotection* (1943) blamed the decline of manliness in political and social discourse on mothers who infantilized their children. Wylie proclaimed “the war began at a time when society was disintegrating,” which he traced back to the Great Depression and its disruption on public discourse.⁸⁷ Although Wylie scorned many aspects of social life, including schools, the church, and the state, he paid special attention to the smothering of sons from overly-

⁸⁵ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Elaine Tyler May, “Rosie the Riveter Gets Married,” in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II*, eds., Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 128-143; Donna B. Knaff, *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012).

⁸⁶ For several contemporary headlines regarding the question of women’s postwar careers, see Bess Wilson, “Women Warned their Jobs to End with War,” *LAT*, January 9, 1944, B1; “Women Open Way to Post-war Jobs,” *NYT*, January 8, 1944, 16; “Employed Women Hope to Keep Jobs,” *NYT*, August 15, 1945, 16; “80% of Md. Women Want to Keep Jobs,” *WP*, August 31, 1945, 3.

⁸⁷ Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers: A Survey of Moral Want* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942), 1. On the changing role of motherhood and Philip Wylie’s impact on the national discourse concerning gender politics, see Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

attached mothers. According to Wylie, this “momism” negated individualism, personal growth, and strangled masculinity in apron strings.

Even though the war threatened white masculinity, for the Hollywood left, the war was a high point in terms of production output, box office revenue, and audience attendance.⁸⁸ The war temporarily stymied accusations of the industry’s promoting socialism and immorality. As late as 1940, Martin Dies accused Hollywood of fostering and shielding communists.⁸⁹ But during the war, Hollywood became a needed propaganda tool and the Soviet Union was an American ally, motivating H.U.A.C. to tone down its rhetoric lest it seem misguided, even unpatriotic. The industry’s leftists, in particular, joined the war effort with enthusiasm and promoted the warmth between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. These political liberals, especially screenwriters and émigré production personnel from Depression/war-torn Europe, crafted films such as *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *The North Star* (1943), and *Song of Russia* (1944) to address the political and social inequalities they witnessed from the 1920s and 1930s: unemployment, pro-labor movements, and absolute equality between the races. The postwar United States, they hoped, would not resemble its prewar incarnation with racial oppression and unequal wealth distribution.

Family Stability in War

Given the shifts in the work force, race relations, and child delinquency, social conservatives sought to maintain established institutions, not upset them further. The

⁸⁸ Many scholars have made this point. See John Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office, 1895-1986* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), Chapter one; Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁸⁹ “Bay Way of Report,” *NYT*, March 3, 1940, 128.

family unit remained central to this solidarity. The family experienced social and economic upheavals since the 1920s, and the wartime boom ending the Great Depression offered a renewal of the American Dream once the Allies defeated Hitler and Tojo. During the war, the marriage rate rose as people, seeking stability in creating a home life before the war tore the social fabric apart, rushed to the altar. The “war stamp bride” made the cover of *Life* in 1942. Her bouquet, made up of war stamps, symbolized the bond between patriotism and family life under a common cause, and proceeds from the sales of her “victory-stamp bouquets” went to the war effort.⁹⁰ Looking back from the vantage point of 1947, actress Linda Darnell commented women were fearful of “being ‘old maids’ and also because there was so much emotion in the air.”⁹¹ For Darnell, the emotion in the air contained more than just romance. The fear of becoming an “old maid,” without family support and security, was first and foremost on the minds of many. In addition to G.I.s marrying their hometown sweethearts, war brides from abroad also elevated the marriage rates. As American soldiers crossed national and ethnic lines, many fell in love and tried to make “home” wherever they were at any given time.⁹²

Even as World War II’s end approached, many Americans worried the brief window of economic hope and stability from the war was already closing. The wartime boom provided a foundation for economic stability, but a potential backslide to

⁹⁰ “Victory-Stamp Bouquets are Newest Fad,” *Life*, June 22, 1942, 40.

⁹¹ Jack Holland, “Are Young Marriages Wise?” *Screenland*, September 1947, 69.

⁹² See Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), chapter three. There are many volumes of interviews with war brides. See Elfrieda Berthianume Shukert and Barbara Smith Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II* (New York: Presidio Press, 1988); Miki Crawford, Karie Kaori Hayashi, and Shizuko Suenaga, *Japanese War Brides in America: An Oral History* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Corp, 2010); Hilary Kaiser, *French War Brides in America: An Oral History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008).

Depression threatened to bring the nation back to 1929. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, provided veterans with job help, housing, unemployment compensation, education, and medical assistance. The Bill echoed the public memory of the Bonus Army and the need to empower veterans to build nest-eggs against potential future hard times. Congressman William Lemke insisted the House expedite the Bill's passing, saying businessmen and veterans "are convinced that the only way to prevent another depression after this war is to put the returning servicemen on their feet and help them get re-established in our civilian economy."⁹³ Even the Bill's official name, with an emphasis on "readjustment," reflected Lemke's argument concerning the rapid re-integration of G.I.s into the American Dream. Approximately 7.8 million G.I.s—approximately 51 percent of the war's veterans—took advantage of the Bill to attend college, vocational training programs, and find housing.⁹⁴

However, permanent stability seemed illusory, especially since threats from home and abroad threatened to abort the American Dream. Communism became a focal point for critics as the new oppositional force shadowing any projections for prosperity. "Everyone knows that Communism is for state ownership of all property, including your house, your farm and the factory, the shop the office in which you work," New York governor Thomas Dewey declared in 1944, as he accused "reds" of infiltrating the New Deal.⁹⁵ One letter to the *Los Angeles Times* agreed communism was not only incompatible with "Americanism," but anathema to values of individualism: "As long as

⁹³ "Quick Action Sought on Soldier Bonus," *CSM*, May 12, 1944, 11.

⁹⁴ Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

⁹⁵ Warren B. Francis, "Dewey Says Reds Seizing New Deal," *LAT*, November 2, 1944, 1.

men try to improve themselves and their race there will be classes in society.”⁹⁶ For fifteen years, the American Dream eluded the Depression/war-torn public and was finally within reach. The public jealously guarded its hopes and aspirations against any sign of challenge. Social classes were inseparably tied to capitalism, individualism and free enterprise, asserted James Conant, president of Harvard University in 1947, and any attempt to artificially sever those ties—such as communism—met national resistance.⁹⁷

In this context, the House Committee on Un-American Activity’s insisting “commies” spawned in the film industry took on renewed vigor in the postwar environment. Hollywood promoted friendlier relations with the Soviet Union during the war and propagandized social progress, but H.U.A.C., and the public, now read those messages as subversive. Indeed, after the war, labor strikes and struggles for trade union recognition rocked Hollywood and other industries, supposedly led by pro-Soviet agitators.⁹⁸ Self-declared leftists, such as screenwriter John Howard Lawson, the “number one” of the Hollywood Ten, publicly refused to recant his support for labor rights, social equality, and “the complete equality of the Negro people of this country and I feel passionately about it.”⁹⁹ By continuing to upset American social mores, Lawson

⁹⁶ C.O. Patterson, “A Letter Answered,” *LAT*, June 30, 1947, A4.

⁹⁷ Russell Porter, “Stress Social Responsibility as Factor in American Life,” *NYT*, September 7, 1947, F1.

⁹⁸ See Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Red, and Trade Unionists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle against the No Strike Pledge in the UAW during World War II* (Detroit: Bewick Press, 1980); George Lipsitz, ed., *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Timothy J. Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For?: The TWUA in the South, 1945-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*, second edition (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), chapter 6.

⁹⁹ Gerald Horne, *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 162.

and his ilk convicted themselves in the public eye with such statements. Their guilt did not stem solely from their supporting communism per se, as historians accept as conventional wisdom, but for undermining the nation still reeling from a generation of economic and social change.

Indeed, the Depression remained a topic in headlines and among policy planners throughout World War II. In 1944, in the midst of war, world economists gathered at Bretton Woods to plan the postwar order with checks and balances to prevent the Depression from returning.¹⁰⁰ At home, the public, as one reporter noted while covering the 1948 presidential election, feared “something may come along to upset the present prosperous, respectable state of affairs.”¹⁰¹ Both presidential candidates, Harry Truman and Thomas Dewey, promised to promote prosperity and peace—refutations of the Depression and war—but, as the reporter noted, the one “devil” threatening to “rock the boat” was “communism and Communists.”¹⁰² Social and economic anxieties, built up from the hard times of the past two decades, centered on anticommunism as the major threat to lasting stability. After his upset victory in the election, Truman reiterated communism as a “false philosophy” against American democracy in his inaugural

¹⁰⁰ On the economists’ debate on postwar Depression, see Byrd L. Jones, “The Role of Keynesians in Wartime and Postwar Planning, 1940-1946” *American Economic Review*, 62, no.1/2 (March 1972): 125-133; Mark Eyskens, “The Influence of the Great Depression on Economic Theory,” in *The Great Depression Revisited: Essays on the Economics of the Thirties*, ed. Herman Van der Wee (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972): 24-44; Georg Manfred Schild, *Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks: American Post-war Planning in the Summer of 1944* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995); Mark David Van Ellis, *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America’s World War II Veterans Come Home* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), chapter one; Kazuhiko Yago, *The Financial History of the Bank for International Settlements* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 94; Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Thomas L. Stokes, “Mood of America, Election Time, 1948,” *NYT*, October 17, 1948, 73.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

address.¹⁰³ In contrast, Truman argued “as our stability becomes manifest” through “democracy and material abundance,” other nations “will abandon their delusions” to support the concepts of American liberty and freedoms.¹⁰⁴

The family remained the main bulwark of this idealized American system. In 1945, *Life* documented the formal end of the war in Europe, giving President Truman a full page photo as he announced V-E Day.¹⁰⁵ But the issue’s main focus, including the cover, was on masculinity in the projected postwar family. Teenage boys took the stage, who, “faced with war, they are just the same as they have always been.”¹⁰⁶ The magazine showed adolescents engaged in daily life: pretending to shave, “fooling around” with jalopies and girls, and consuming large amounts of food. But the photojournalist’s anticipated return to normalcy, like Warren Harding’s campaign platform twenty-five years earlier, elided contemporary history. The magazine deliberately ignored the Depression in photographs and text as if it never happened. Teenage boys, *Life* alleged, were never bootlegging, gin-soaked “sheiks” in the Lost Generation, the “roving boys” and CCC workers in the 1930s, or delinquents during the war because of a lack of parental supervision. Instead, the article’s tribute to the resiliency of teenage boys “as they always have been” underscored the public’s continuing search for stability; these kids were middle-class suburbanites, which the magazine projected as the norm for its reading public. These anxieties later transitioned into the popular definitions of cultural containment: anti-communism, conformity, social

¹⁰³ “President’s Inaugural Address Text,” *WP*, January 21, 1949, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ “Washington in June,” *Life*, June 11, 1945, 98.

¹⁰⁶ “Teen-age Boys,” *Life*, June 11, 1945, 91-97.

mobility, and patriarchy. But in the immediate aftermath of World War II, these values carried over as answers to the legacy of economic depression and global war. These discussions shaped the development of issues like militarism, race relations, and internationalism. But the immediate impact was the construction of the postwar family.

CHAPTER TWO:
RE-CREATING THE POSTWAR FAMILY AND PATRIARCHY

I have a lot of nice things planned for you when you grow up...and I want you to live up to them by being decent and honest now...a father wants to be proud of his son, Tommy...why, there's nothing that would give me more pleasure than to be pointed out someday as 'Tommy Woodry's father' but if you're going to get all mixed up like you're doing now...well...I just don't know what we're going to do about it.

—Ed Woodry to Tommy, *The Window*, 1949¹

In 1948, *Life* photojournalist Nina Leen adopted the lingo of the nascent nuclear age. She described the family unit as “atomicistic”—a harrowing term she defined as a nuclear family fracturing due to a lack of cohesion and outside interests—as the new norm.² Leen saw this fracturing as a symptom of modern living in an urbanized, or suburbanized, world. The parents had “only one major function left: that of giving their children the affection and care they need until they leave home” and start families of their own.³ The family unit continued into the next generation, but Leen worried over the lack of parental and child togetherness. Without the close-knit relationships between members, the family, and its status as a national value, was merely a hollow façade without meaning. The United States defeated economic depression and fascism, but, in Leen’s eyes, the family remained troubled in a time of peace and prosperity.

¹ *The Window*, directed by Ted Tetzlaff (RKO Radio Pictures, 1949), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

² Nina Leen, “The Family in Trouble,” *Life*, July 26, 1948, 89.

³ *Ibid.*

Leen's description of fractured family identities worried contemporaries. Historians point to an idealized "hard" masculinity as the normative gender role for 1950s men to prove modern life did not make them soft in domestic work or in patriotism. The Mike Hammer-esque archetype embodied these values, reflecting the need for citizen-soldiers to battle communism abroad and at home.⁴ However, a broader historical context suggests Leen's worries about the nuclear family were nothing new. This narrow projection of a masculinized manhood was initially a response to the fractured nuclear family from earlier decades. Specifically, the concept of fatherhood, and a father's ties with his son, became heightened social concerns due to the experience of the Great Depression and the war years.

This chapter examines two films: *The Decision of Christopher Blake* (1948) and *Any Number Can Play* (1949). The two movies, released one year apart, highlight the reconstruction of family solidarity from the Great Depression into the postwar period. Both movies reference the Depression as a backdrop for familial troubles, but only one film succeeded in rebuilding the family after two decades of hardships. *The Decision of Christopher Blake* responded to the divorce crisis and attempted to explore the issue through a boy's eyes. The film's failure came from its lack of parental agency to guide a child's maturation; a morally-weak father and a detached mother, coupled with an artificial happy ending, did not seriously address the public's concerns about a troubled nuclear family after two decades of Depression and war. In contrast, the father's relationship with his son in *Any Number Can Play* spotlights renewed patriarchy as the

⁴ On Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, see Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 182; Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 34-37; K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xiii-xv.

family unit's salvation. Charley Kyng's Depression-era background gave him a strong backbone, empowering him to succeed economically and correct his son's passivity. Defending itself from charges of subversion, Hollywood affirmed the narrowing character traits of acceptable masculinity for maturing boys. While scholars generally attribute these characteristics of Kyng's "tough guy" image to the Cold War and anticommunism, these movies demonstrate the reconstructed postwar nuclear family centered this patriarchal persona as a source of stability after two decades of economic and social uncertainty.

Context on Masculinity

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, industrialization, urbanization, and enculturation placed strains on familial relationships as the nature of employment and recreation changed.⁵ These economic and social shifts—the Roaring Twenties, the Depression, and war years—shaped familial relations. Those periods officially ended, but the public worried about their possible return. As late as 1953, political commentator Drew Pearson listed parallels between the “prewar era” and “today,” with “layoffs in the

⁵ On the changes in masculinity, see Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), Michael A. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); for changes in specific time periods, see John Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Katie N. Johnson, *Sisters in Sin: Brothel Drama in America, 1900-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture, 1875-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008); Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007). For a brief overview of leisure in the United States from 1900 to 1950, see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Woman and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Susan Currell, *The March of Spare Time: The Problem and Promise of Leisure in the Great Depression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). For a filmic context, see Steven J. Ross, *Working Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

auto industry...farm income down... unemployment insurance payments doubled since last year,” and “clouds of depression hover[ing] over Russia” in the form of crop failures.⁶ The latter, Pearson noted, bore a similarity to the 1930s hard times in Germany, which led to Hitler’s rise. With history seemingly repeating itself, reaffirming family values concerning individualism, patriotism, and gender roles became a priority.

The postwar reconstruction of the “traditional” nuclear family was a top concern, especially the reintegration of the father as head of the household. Historian Ralph LaRossa notes fatherhood after the war’s end required a dad to act as an economic provider, a “pal,” and a male role model.⁷ However, contemporary studies confirmed the difficulty of returning soldiers and their kids in adjusting to one another.⁸ Child experts, notably Benjamin Spock, believed the effect of absent dads during the war (and the Depression) led to an upswing in juvenile delinquency and a manly character giving way to a generational “sissiness” in boys. The fear of effeminacy and weakness later became prominent in the 1950s during the Red Scare and its Lavender corollary, which emphasized continual vigilance and preparedness.⁹ Mindful of “weak” boys, Spock

⁶ Drew Pearson, “Prewar Era has Parallels Today,” *Washington Post (WP)*, December 24, 1954, 25.

⁷ Ralph La Rossa, *Of War and Men: World War II in the Lives of Fathers and their Families* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 101.

⁸ Paula S. Fass and Michael Gorssberg, eds., *Reinventing Childhood after World War II* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture*, chapter three; Lois Meek Stolz et al., *Father Relations of War-Born Children* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954). Stolz’s study examines nineteen families around Stanford University. Forceful fathers “immediately resulted in alienation of their first-borns, whose attitudes became more rejecting of their fathers than were the attitudes of the non-separated group” (319).

⁹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Francis Stoner Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 201-213; Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture*,

emphasized the importance of active fathers to guide their sons. In his *The Common Sense Guide to Baby and Child Care*, published in 1946, Spock thought it necessary to tell parents, “A boy needs a friendly, accepting father.”¹⁰ After years of familial troubles due to economic hardship and war, Spock’s statement underscored the urgency to reconstruct father-son bonds.

The political backdrop made such masculine socialization a necessity. By 1948 and 1949, American and Soviet tensions rose as Czechoslovakia and China fell to the commies.¹¹ The nascent atomic arms race also added to tensions. Frederick H. Osborn, the U.S. Deputy on the United Nations Energy Commission, declared the U.S. “would exert every effort to maintain its ranking position on atomic armaments” until “satisfactory international controls” emerged.¹² By maintaining nuclear superiority, the U.S. would force the Soviets to the negotiating table under American terms.¹³ However, the conflict escalated and by 1950, when the Soviets acquired “the bomb” and the Korean War started, columnists described the conflict requiring a masculine response. “Military, economic or political destruction of Western civilization and of our American way of life are definite possibilities if the danger from the East is not met boldly, imaginatively, and

chapter two; Daniel Winunwe Rivers, *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and their Children in the United States since World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), chapters one and two.

¹⁰ Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Guide to Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 254.

¹¹ Philip D. Beidler, *The Victory Album: Reflections on the Good Life after the Good War* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 17.

¹² “Atomic Race has Started, U.S. Tells U.N.,” *WP*, June 5, 1947, 2.

¹³ See Gar Alperowitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: the Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1965); Raymond P. Ojserkis, *Beginning of the Cold War Arms Race; The Truman Administration and the U.S. Arms Build-Up* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

with united effort,” the *New York Times* warned.¹⁴ In the writer’s eyes, Americans lulled about in a “never-never-land” of wishful thinking while the Communists shouldered arms for world conquest. “The Chinese Red Army is not the equal of Western armies, man for man, in firepower or equipment,” the newspaper warned, “but it more than makes up for material deficiencies by numbers.” The writer’s final assessment: “we can lose the world in Asia if we are not wise and strong.”¹⁵

Other voices urged the nation to prepare for an inevitable World War III. In 1948, the *Los Angeles Times* promoted full-family enlistment to utilize the country’s manpower, from aging grandfathers to the “youngest, toughest, most resilient” high-school boy.¹⁶ General Lewis Blane Hershey, the director of the Selective Service, told families and communities to take initiative to start civil defense plans. “In the atomic age, you can’t sit around and wait for instructions from headquarters.”¹⁷ Ex-servicemen fathers filled in for “headquarters” in their families and the homefront. Popular public figures, such as Venerable Fulton John Sheen, also took to the airwaves in radio and television to bolster an aggressive form of fatherhood as an essential part of the postwar family and national defense. The two parent household was ideal, Sheen argued, asserting the current “instability of man” was “due to a flight from fatherhood.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Hanson W. Baldwin, “Greatest Peril for U.S.,” *New York Times* (NYT), December 1, 1950, 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “World War III: We’d All be Drafted for World War III,” *Los Angeles Times* (LAT), October 31, 1948, G28.

¹⁷ Ibid., G5.

¹⁸ Fulton John Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1948), 149.

A religious figure taking up the mantle of tough masculinity to address moral crises was not new. The so-called “muscle gap” was a consistent theme throughout the twentieth century as men adjusted to the changes in gender roles, the workplace, and leisure time activities, especially the “feminizing” effects of industrialization, consumerism, and urbanization that allegedly signified the decay of masculinity in society.¹⁹ “Muscular Christianity” bridged the gap by presenting faith as a spiritual strength, which translated into hardened physiques and built good character traits like self-reliance and confidence. This rhetoric reemerged in the postwar years via a heightened religiosity in public discourse that would propel preachers like Sheen and, especially, Billy Graham into national prominence by equating Stalin with Satan.²⁰

Given the concerns about the Depression, the just-concluded war, and fears about the return of both through communism, the movies suggested no price was too great for family solidarity. One way boy characters matured was by sacrificing the possession they most held dear, their pets. Many pet-themed movies killed off or otherwise expelled the animal from the family to bring fathers and sons closer together. Movies starring Lassie (starting with *Lassie Come Home* [1943]), the “Rusty” series (eight films between 1945 and 1949), and shorts like “A Boy and his Dog” (1946) showcase the closeness

¹⁹ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Donald E. Hall (ed.), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). The term “muscle gap” comes from 1961, characterizing the perceived loss of virility in American foreign policy. See Max Eastman, “Let’s Close the Muscle Gap,” *Readers’ Digest* (November 1961), 124.

²⁰ T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009); Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). In terms of selling “Americanism” abroad, the United States Information Agency rejected candidates to symbolize the “average” American man and woman if they had divorce records. See Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 151.

between the boy and his pet. The pet allows the boy to find a place in his otherwise unfriendly families/communities made up of overly stern fathers, unsympathetic mothers, and indifferent townsfolk. Novels, including *Old Yeller* (1956; filmed 1957) and *Where the Red Fern Grows* (1961), featured the same themes.

In the end, the boy reconciles with his community and enters into manhood by sacrificing his pet. He mourns the loss, but then accepts his tragedy and moves on. He feels grown-up for having faced death through his best friend's demise. In *The Yearling* (1946), young Jody (Claude Jarman, Jr.) executes his pet fawn to save his family's crops. As MGM's synopsis notes, "Forced to kill his pet, Jody runs away from home, to return after suffering, grown a man in spirit."²¹ Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, other films such as *The Sun Comes Up* (1949), *Old Yeller* (1957) and *Goodbye, My Lady* (1955) feature separation as the climax; the latter film's theme song, "When Your Boy Becomes a Man," confirmed the point.

Although Hollywood sacrificed cinematic pets to heal households, the movies also tore families apart through depictions of divorce. Marriage break-ups, whether onscreen or in scandal-ridden Hollywood, provided sensational and heartfelt melodrama, but also incurred the wrath of moralizers for ruining the nation's values. The industry felt Congressional charges of "un-Americanism" since the 1930s and the pressure resumed and heightened in the postwar years. In particular, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (H.U.A.C.) charged industry personnel of subverting national norms and morals. Although the Hollywood Ten and their alleged communist ties have

²¹ Lillian Culver, Screen Synopsis, June 25, 1945, "The Yearling [MGM, 1945]," Motion Picture Association of America. Production Code Administration (PCA) records, Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science (AMPAS).

attracted most of the scholarly attention, the alleged loose-living among Hollywoodites added more fuel for critics' fiery rhetoric and scandal-mongering. An increase in divorce rates in the immediate postwar years prompted an intensified scrutiny into Tinsel Town. As a result of this public anxiety, the industry attempted to clean up its image by embracing the re-constituted nuclear family with its virile, masculine father figure, championing these ideals through filmic father-son relationships.

Patching Up the Family: Hollywood and Divorce

The Great Depression's and World War II's devastating effects on the nuclear family did not end in 1945. During the war, the marriage rate rose as people, seeking stability in creating a home life before the war tore the social fabric apart, rushed to the altar. The war's end, however, witnessed a rise in the divorce rate as spouses learned they were not compatible. Economic conditions, notably the housing shortage, accentuated strains as newlyweds tried to settle down.²² In 1946 alone, 628,760 American divorces cases were filed and one out of every fifty-five couples saw their wedding knots unravel.²³ Although the divorce rate might seem numerically small, it generated widespread concern about the continuing familial strains from the past fifteen years. In September, 1946, one year after the war ended, columnist Malvina Lindsay mused over the divorce rate's impact on the economy: "It will definitely mean that more mothers will have to work outside the home, more children require day or institutional

²² Dianne Suzette Harris, ed., *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

²³ Roderick Phillips, *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Amherst: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 212; see also See Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

care.”²⁴ Although such conditions existed during the war, and the majority of women workers in 1945 actually wanted to keep working, Lindsay thought this reversion constituted a step backward because the family was more important for stability. “The social trend of the day is toward a more feminine role for women,” she insisted, and feared the divorce rate would lead to “a decline in the birth rate.”²⁵ In 1947, *Life* magazine stated, “Most social scientists” claimed the “family system is undergoing the Greco-Roman style of dissolution.”²⁶ The fall of classical Greece and Rome had “almost universal corruption and disregard of the marriage agreement,” a declining birth rate, sloppy parenting, and “juvenile delinquency and adult delinquency.”²⁷ According to these critics, Americans Americans were doomed to repeat this history if they did not learn the lessons from previous civilizations.

The postwar cherishing of marriage and family life rebutted the continuing threat of dissolution, even in the midst of American “Victory Culture.” Despite the popular notion of the 1950s as a heyday for the nuclear family, divorce rates during the decade exceeded pre-war rates, causing social critics to worry that the nation was “headed

²⁴ Malvina Lindsay, “‘Decline’ of the Home,” *WP*, September 3, 1946, 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ “The Family: In Western Civilization It is Seriously Threatened and Needs Material and Moral Help,” *Life*, March 24, 1947, 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Psychologist Carle C. Zimmerman also used historic examples to show how calamities result from family disunity. See Carle C. Zimmerman, *Family and Civilization* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947). Not every psychologist viewed the increase in divorce with alarm. Joseph Kirk Folsom argued the “freedom” gained through divorce was a sign of a healthy American democracy as partners realized they were no longer chained to each other. When they did find true love, their emotional bonds would be much stronger. See Joseph Kirk Folsom, *The Family and Democratic Society* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1948). Judging by the alarm that social commentators regarded divorce, Folsom was in the minority.

toward Sodom and Gomorrah.”²⁸ Anecdotes throughout the late 1940s abounded concerning the blasé attitudes of adults and their children who apparently held little respect for the sanctity of their families.²⁹ When the divorce rates leveled off during a recession in 1948, one newspaper writer sighed, “[A]t least the marital mistakes of war have been straightened out to [a] large degree.” But the commentator still worried, stating, “Whether it shows a trend toward stabler [sic] marriage is debatable.”³⁰ The article explained divorce rates decreased because, like during the Depression, “the high cost of living has hurt the divorce business” and desertion, the “poor man’s divorce,” was rising in its stead.³¹ Within this context, desertion rates increased in times of austerity while divorce rates increased in times of prosperity. Either way, the family split up. Indeed, by 1957—thus during the “boom” years of 1950s affluence—over twelve million out of forty-five million kids, one quarter of the nation’s children, had first-hand experience with divorce.³² Even in the midst of postwar prosperity, the family unit remained as “troubled” as it was in the Depression.

²⁸ “100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Rates Statistics: United States, 1867-1967,” *National Vital Statistics System* 21.24, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1973, accessed February 24, 2017, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_21/sr21_024.pdf. Quote from “Divorce Recession,” *WP*, October 21, 1948, 8.

²⁹ “Boy Loses Divorce Fight,” *NYT*, October 21, 1949, 22; “Boy, 9, Runs off to Reno to Divorce Folks,” *LAT*, June 25, 1947, 1. Divorce cases also made for sensationalism, with photos of distraught children, familial bickering, and outraged relatives. See, for instance, Dorothy Andrews, “Mrs. Jillson Granted Divorce, Custody of 4-Year-Old Son,” *WP*, December 17, 1947, 1; “Judge Refuses to Split Family in Divorce Row,” *LAT*, April 26, 1945, 11.

³⁰ “Divorce Recession,” *WP*, October 21, 1948, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Ruth Strang, *The Adolescent Views Himself: A Psychology of Adolescence* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957), 337. Strang does not clarify if these children’s parents split or if they knew someone who went through a divorce.

With the family unit a pressing issue, social guardians targeted Hollywood for the industry's long-lived association with sexual licentiousness and disregard of social responsibility. This criticism extended to the "real life" behavior of filmmakers who glamorized marriage for impressionable young people.³³ One producer complained about the public pressure: "divorce never can be shown as a solution to a domestic problem. Thus a major factor in the life of the United States can never be shown in the movies."³⁴ But such edicts did not stop productions from skirting around the edges. In the 1940s, the powerful Catholic pressure group the Legion of Decency gave half of Hollywood films a "B" classification—"objectionable in part"—for featuring a "light treatment of marriage."³⁵ Rare was the film defying this rule. In 1946 RKO remade the Depression-era film *Wednesday's Child* (1934) as *Child of Divorce*, with a new glum ending showing the neglected child in a settlement house, waiting, "like many other lonesome children of divorce."³⁶ One reviewer approved the coda: "Honest, intelligent little pictures are rare and should be cherished, even celebrated in Hollywood."³⁷ Still,

³³ Leen, "The American Family is in Trouble," 93. Film historian Jeanne Basinger argues movies did not sell "real" marriages, but dramatized them to entice audiences to see the solemn institution go through the wringer. See Jeanne Basinger, *I Do and I Don't: A History of Marriage in the Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 7.

³⁴ Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 268.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169, 195. In addition to divorce, "gold digger" movies highlighted vivacious women who wanted only to marry rich men and enjoy the good life.

³⁶ *Child of Divorce*-Synopsis, "Child of Divorce [RKO, 1945]," Motion Picture Association of America. Production Code Administration (PCA) records, Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

³⁷ "Hayward, Flesicher in Auspicious Blows," *Hollywood Reporter (HR)*, October 15, 1946, 3. See also "Trade Showing," *Daily Variety (DV)*, October 15, 1946, 3.

public disfavor made the story unsalable. Despite a lean production cost, RKO lost \$20,000 on the project.³⁸

According to guardians like the Legion of Decency, these “light treatments” of marriage reflected Hollywood’s attitudes regarding their moral responsibility to public taste.³⁹ Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, these critics expressed their views in polemical texts, blaming the movies for the nation’s perceived moral failings.⁴⁰ In the postwar years, works such as *Movie Mad America: An Utterly Frank and Revealing Expose of the American Movie* continued to attack films. “Hollywood is a divorcing set!” screamed the first line. “There is a higher percentage of divorces among the stars than among any other group in the nation, unless it is the ‘idle rich.’”⁴¹ While the public may accept the dalliances of celebrities as the price of fame, the outlandish lifestyles of movie stars were ripe for critics who thought moviemakers, and their productions, transgressed public

³⁸ “C.J. Tevlin Ledger,” *The Historical Journal of Radio, Film, and Television* 14, no. 1 (January 1994): microfiche.

³⁹ Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, “The Formative and Impressionable Stage: Discursive Constructions of the Nickelodeon’s Child Audience,” in *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era*, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 1999): 64-76. The most infamous of these condemnations is Harry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933). On Forman’s skewed interpretation of his study’s data, see: Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Amherst: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ See John R. D.D. Rice, *What is Wrong with the Movies?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1938); John Carrara, *Enemies of Youth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1939); Dan Gilbert, *Hell Over Hollywood: The Truth about the Movies!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1942); John R. Rice, *What is Wrong with the Movies?* Fifteenth edition (1938; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954).

⁴¹ U.E. Harding, *Movie Mad America: An Utterly Frank and Revealing Expose of the American Movie* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1952), 9.

taste.⁴² Fan culture, especially movie magazines, reflected both views by routinely featuring Hollywoodites who held nothing sacred concerning the bonds of matrimony.⁴³

The emphasis on family life, however, demanded Americans take their wedding vows seriously. The blend of faith and family played out as “muscular Christians” flexed their muscles against the memory of the Depression and war by attacking godless communism in the postwar years. Anti-communists pointed out the Soviet Union replaced the family and the Church with the state. The House Committee on Un-American Activities was blunt: “The long and short of it is just this: You cannot be a Communist and believe in God.”⁴⁴

Religious leaders adopted a hardened masculine stance as they defended the nation’s spirituality against the morally lax film industry. In 1947 *Motion Picture Magazine* published “What Does *Your* Church Say about Divorce in Hollywood?” The article featured representatives from various faiths who united to attack Hollywood’s glamorizing divorce. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders ordered Hollywood to stop “being what it is now popularly regarded as being—the very front and center of the

⁴² Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Chapter four; Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Lea Jacobs, *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴³ For a small sampling, see: Ida Jean Kain, “There’s No Cause for Divorce in Modern Methods of Dieting!” *WP*, July 23, 1946, 14; “My Hollywood Dictionary,” *Photoplay*, February 1943, 90; Maureen O’Hara, “What Marriage has Taught Me,” *Photoplay*, April 1943, 41; Weston East, “Here’s Hollywood Gossip,” *Screenland*, August 1948, 40-41; Erskine Johnson, “Hollywood Newsreel,” *Hollywood*, January 1943, 12.

⁴⁴ House Committee on Un-American Activities, “100 Thing You Should Know about Communism and Religion,” *100 Things You Should Know about Communism*, second edition (Washington DC: Committee on Un-American Activities, 1949), 35.

attack upon sanctity and integrity of American home life.”⁴⁵ Allegedly, Hollywood divorce weakened the nation’s moral fiber, leading to broken homes, juvenile delinquency, and outright criminality—all of which would destabilize the nation just as the country was recovering from war and the Depression.

The article’s polemical defensiveness appealed to the movies’ legacy of glamorizing and spreading social ills.⁴⁶ The article gained widespread circulation when the *Los Angeles Times* summarized it on the front page.⁴⁷ One reader claimed “the latest Hollywood marital cavortings [sic] have left us feeling disgusted, and we haven’t seen a movie since.”⁴⁸ After watching marriages break up on and off the screen since the 1920s, these readers regarded the industry as an obstacle to family stability. The controversy intensified when industry representatives demanded the magazine withdraw the material and publisher “Buzz” Fawcett refused. Instead, he presented his case on radio, asserting his magazine “has done its proper job” to expose “the lightness with which Hollywood people seem to take marriage [...] and we wanted it corrected from within before the movie public became aroused and perhaps would take matter into their own hands.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “What Does Your Church Say about Divorce in Hollywood?” *Motion Picture Magazine*, March 1947, 99.

⁴⁶ For example, the Estes Kefauver hearings into juvenile delinquency investigated the alleged ties between the movie industry and maladjusted youngsters. See Edwin Schallert, “Rumors of Morals Code Quiz Upset Hollywood,” *LAT*, June 10, 1955; Thomas M. Pryor, “Hollywood Test,” *NYT*, June 26, 1955. Reporter Frank S. Nugent notes blaming Hollywood was not new. He cites several earlier “moral panics” from the silent period onward. Frank S. Nugent, “Cavalcade of Hollywood Heroes,” *NYT*, May 4, 1947, SM12.

⁴⁷ “Religious Figures Flay Morals of Film Colony,” *LAT*, February 18, 1947, 1.

⁴⁸ Mrs. Robert Baker, letter, *Motion Picture Magazine*, June 6, 1947, 16. See also Alma Books, letter, *Motion Picture Magazine*, June 6, 1947, 16.

⁴⁹ Arch Reeve to Publicity Directors, Letter, June 17, 1947; “Script Used by Erskine Johnson—Hollywood Commentator and Columnist,” March 7, 1947, AMPTP, AMPAS.

With declining ticket sales and H.U.A.C. putting Hollywood under the microscope for subversion, Fawcett further escalated the industry's public relations nightmare.⁵⁰

This association between marriage, religious faith, and anti-communism impacted Hollywood in the postwar years. While not as widely studied as anticommunism, the postwar Hollywood family—on and off the screen—became hot topics as H.U.A.C. intensified its investigations, first on the Hollywood Ten, then on the industry. In 1947 *Variety* reported the formation of a new watchdog group to “scan cast lists for names of divorced players and take action.”⁵¹ The trade journal did not specify the repercussions, but studio heads responded with uncertainty. RKO's Dore Schary complained about the industry's cowering before the “tide of hysteria,” asking, “How many organizations are

⁵⁰ The scandal died partly because the tabloid needed the industry's cooperation to survive. Industry rep Arch Reeve recalled *Motion Picture Magazine* editor Maxwell Hamilton begging forgiveness for the “unfriendly and destructive” article. Hamilton cited dwindling circulating numbers and claimed his publication carried a tone “above ordinary level” of journalism. Arch Reeve to Charley Schlaifer, Letter, September 1, 1947, AMPTP, AMPAS. For the industry's perspective, see: Arch Reeve to W.H. Fawcett, Jr., Letter, March 17, 1947, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (hereafter AMPTP) records, AMPAS. See also Mary Desjardins, “Fan Magazine Trouble”: The AMPP, Studio Publicity Directors, and the Hollywood Press, 1945-1952,” *Film History: An International Journal* 26, no.3 (2014):29-56, especially 38-41; Arch Reeve to Kenneth Clark and Glen Allvine, Letter, February 25, 1947; “Fan Magazines-Motion Picture Magazine f.139. AMPTP, AMPAS; Perry W. Lieber to Arch Reeve, Letter, June 17, 1947; Charley Schlaifer to Arch Reeve, August 25, 1947, AMPTP, AMPAS; Perry W. Lieber to Arch Reeve, Letter, June 17, 1947; Charley Schlaifer to Arch Reeve, August 25, 1947, AMPTP, AMPAS; Ernie Foster to Arch Reeve, Inter-Office Memo, February 27, 1947, AMPTP, AMPAS. Foster noted that, at the end of the divorce article, *Motion Picture Magazine* advertised a future issue featuring a “big, hard-hitting article on ‘Politics in Hollywood’ by John Garfield. We’ll have another problem on our hands then, no doubt.” H.U.A.C. hounded Garfield, contributing to the actor's fatal heart attack at age thirty-nine. Garfield himself defended his peers' wedlock statistics, arguing the divorce rate was only thirty percent among his colleagues. He lamented, “Hollywood actors and actresses live in a small town which is spotlighted by more than 400 newspaper and magazine writers who write and print all the rumors.” John Garfield, “To the Fans,” *Motion Picture Magazine*, June 6, 1947, 14. In 1950, MGM production chief Dore Schary confirmed Garfield's statistics but added the industry was clamping down to make certain individuals “a little more dignified, a little more reserved, a little more fitting to their position in the public eye.” See Dore Schary, *Case History of a Movie* (New York: Random House, 1950), 227, 237. His book, ostensibly to promote his upcoming feature *The Next Voice You Hear* (1950), also propagandized Hollywood “as a place where normal, likeable people work hard and well at intelligent trades.” See “Notes on Sales Promotion, July 12, 1950, “Dore Schary: Next Voice Making of a Movie Corresp 1950 Oct-Dec 18,” Dore Schary papers US Mss 37, Box 46, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁵¹ “‘Too Many’ Monitors of Pic Industry Hit By Schary at SPG Dinner,” *Weekly Variety*, November 26, 1947, 5, 21.

we going to permit as monitors for the industry?”⁵² One week later, on December 3, 1947, the Motion Picture Association of America’s president, Eric Johnston, answered Schary’s query with the so-called Waldorf Statement. Named after the New York hotel where he, Schary, and other executives met, the industry officially disavowed the Hollywood Ten and promised to fire anyone who “advocates the overthrow” of the U.S. government.⁵³ The Waldorf Statement set the stage for the blacklist and the Red Scare.

Divorce continued to play out in the movies, Hollywood, fan culture, and the general public.⁵⁴ This concern stemmed from public memory of the Depression and the war years, and centered on anticommunism as security against an ideology threatening to uproot the postwar family. To address the general concerns about divorce, and the charges made specifically toward the industry, studios attempted to bolster their reputation as family-friendly venues of entertainment. Warner Bros.’s answer was *The Decision of Christopher Blake*.

The Non-Decision of Christopher Blake

The Decision of Christopher Blake (1948) reflects the popular view of divorce as national crisis through a child’s eyes. The failure of the original play and the film adaptation highlights the public’s ambiguous attitudes toward divorce and its impact on the family and children. Playwright Moss Hart recently married and, although childless,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ The Waldorf Statement is reprinted in many books about the Hollywood Ten. See William T. Walker, ed., *McCarthyism and the Red Scare: A Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 136-137.

⁵⁴ See Linda Darnell, “Don’t Rush into Divorce,” *Photoplay*, March 1948, 72-73, 123-126; Ed Sullivan, “Speaking Frankly,” *Modern Screen*, February 1948, 27 and 92; Louella Parsons, “Good News,” *Modern Screen*, January 1948, 4; Fred Rodell, “Divorce Muddle: The U.S. Has the World’s Highest Divorce Rate and the World’s Most Tangled Divorce Laws,” *Life*, September 1945, 86- 87, 90, 92, 95-96.

found the topic timely and “a change of pace” from his usual comic satires.⁵⁵ The play’s protagonist, twelve-year-old Chris, says as much: “It’s always in the papers about people getting divorced. Nearly every single day.”⁵⁶ Hart staged the boy’s daydreams throughout, allowing viewers to peer into his subconscious in visions of abandonment, revenge, and delinquency due to his parents’ splitting.⁵⁷ Chris struggles to decide which parent to stay with. His dad becomes chummy with a sculptress and his mother’s fundamental unhappiness foreshadows a “disease” Betty Freidan identified two decades later. Mrs. Blake thought domesticity would end her unrest, but with her son near adolescence, she prefers to end the façade. The judge senses the irreconcilable differences, stating, “Sometimes people get married for the wrong reason and get divorced for the right one.”⁵⁸ Chris accepts his mother’s need to start over and chooses to live with his father. Chris leaves his nightmares behind as he matures, but audiences refused to accept the unhappy ending. The play received mixed reviews and lasted only 114 performances on Broadway, much to Hart’s disappointment.⁵⁹

Moss Hart’s *Christopher Blake* failed on stage, but at Warner Bros., studio chief Jack Warner liked the play, and, disregarding its mediocre reception, offered \$305,000

⁵⁵ Steven Bach, *Dazzler: The Life and Times of Moss Hart* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 272; Brooks Atkinson, “Hart’s Desire,” *NYT*, December 8, 1946, 85.

⁵⁶ Moss Hart, *Christopher Blake* (New York: Random House, 1947), 17.

⁵⁷ Hart cast child actor Richard Tyler, a child of divorced parents, albeit Tyler told the press he had “none of this trouble” the play was about. See “Young Tyler Likes Acting and Bugs,” *Life*, January 13, 1947, 101; Lester Bernstein, “The Rules and Richard Tyler,” *NYT*, January 26, 1947, X1 and X3; quote on X3.

⁵⁸ Hart, *Christopher Blake*, 109.

⁵⁹ Jared Brown, *Moss Hart: A Prince of the Theater* (New York: Backstage Books, 2006), 277-278.

for the rights.⁶⁰ To transfer the work to the screen, screenwriter/producer Ranald MacDougall suggested changing the title to exploit “whatever little selling value is left in the memory of the play” with sentimental titles such as *The Innocent Heart of Christopher Blake* or *This Small World of Christopher Blake*.⁶¹ For the titular role, MacDougall chose veteran Ted Donaldson, convinced Donaldson’s perceptive reading would convey Chris’s maturation as he makes his decision.⁶² One screen treatment described Chris with a “sensitive face that reflects dignity somewhat beyond his years. He is very serious about nearly everything and gives the impression of continually wondering about things [...] He is growing up.”⁶³ Even with a good lead, Warner Bros. conservatively estimated a cost of \$4,622,500 (with a camera negative cost of \$2.5 million) and hoped to gross \$5 million for a \$337,500 profit.⁶⁴

At this early stage, MacDougall aimed to portray a boy’s maturation. That Chris will grow up from this parents’ splitting suggests that divorce, while devastating, could impart valuable lessons for children. One critic thought children from divorces “are often unwanted, dissatisfied, unhappy, starved for attention and love.” They “are the people who will crowd our courts and fill our prisons tomorrow [and are] so poorly equipped to

⁶⁰ Ibid., 278. *Variety* reported the screen rights sold for \$400,000, see “‘Christopher Blake’ Goes to WB,” *DV*, December 23, 1946, 1. Hart wanted \$500,000 for the rights; the final sale price reflected the play’s failure.

⁶¹ Ranald MacDougall to Steve Trilling, Interoffice Communication, November 7, 1947, “The Decision of Christopher Blake” Files, Warner Bros. Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California (hereafter WBA).

⁶² Ranald MacDougall to Steve Trilling, Interoffice Communication, July 12, 1947, “The Decision of Christopher Blake” Files, WBA.

⁶³ Ranald MacDougall, “Decision of Christopher Blake,” May 22, 1947, “The Decision of Christopher Blake” Files, WBA.

⁶⁴ “Christopher Blake,” folder 12678B. “The Decision of Christopher Blake” Files, WBA.

face life and dissatisfied, are fertile ground for that sinister evil communism or something even worse.”⁶⁵ Influenced by these popular opinions, MacDougall faulted Hart’s original ending for its financial failure. “Divorce is on the upsurge in the U.S.” and was a sign of “the result of uneasy times in which we live,” he wrote a week after the *Los Angeles Times* reprinted *Motion Picture Magazine*’s exposé. Referring to the fan magazine’s article, MacDougall lamented the “currently popular [trend] among the clergy and the laity, to blame the situation on Hollywood” in shameless publicity plugs. He wanted to show “Hollywood is as conscious of the moral and human implications of the divorce problem as any other segment of the population.” He felt “certain changes in the basic structure of the play” would create “a high engrossing picture that will meet great sympathy and do a certain amount of good.” Warner Bros. would play the public benefactor and produce an “interesting, entertaining, box-office, and a ‘clean’ picture” about family solidarity and resiliency against disruptive forces.⁶⁶ *The Decision of Christopher Blake* would help defend the industry from public and government criticism.

The first step in changing the play’s “basic structure” consisted of removing the parents’ fundamental unhappiness. MacDougall expanded on the Blakes’ home life to “show what it means to him [Chris] and them [the parents] to lose their relationship.” Primarily, this included a comedic maid (Mary Wickes). In regards to the adults, MacDougall called Hart’s married couple “rather selfish and unpleasant people, almost entirely preoccupied with themselves,” which, he thought, made for unsympathetic

⁶⁵ Mrs. Robert Baker, letter, *Motion Picture Magazine*, June 1947, 16. See also “Divorce Called ‘Burglar,’” *NYT*, September 30, 1946, 42.

⁶⁶ Ranald MacDougall, *Decision of Christopher Blake*, February 25, 1947—folder Notes 1813A, WBA.

characters. “Neither of them should be placed in the position of insisting upon a divorce,” he wrote. “We should feel that if there were any way possible to avoid it, or prevent it, both of them would do everything possible to stop the proceedings.”⁶⁷

MacDougall’s wanting to make his characters more sympathetic reflects the transition of familial anxieties from the Great Depression and World War II into communism. MacDougall acknowledged the contemporary concerns about divorce, but he failed to consider the historical context as it applied to the Blakes, who originally saw marriage as a form of security, but found matrimony unsatisfying. Hart’s version of Mrs. Blake, especially, reflected the American experience of living through hard times. Although the play did not give her age, she clearly married during the Depression; Hart made Chris a twelve-year-old when he published the play in 1947, dating the boy’s birth to 1935. This means the Blake marriage occurred approximately a year before, at the height of the Depression. She lived through hard times, and did not romanticize the family. Instead, she voiced stability as her main objective: “I married Dad because I was frightened and alone, and I wanted what every girl is brought up to want—a husband and something called security.”⁶⁸ With the war over and Chris on the cusp of adolescence, she wants to move on.

Mrs. Blake echoed the concerns of news headlines about the need for familial stability, but her open confession about finding the family empty and unfulfilling countered the rhetoric of a happy home life based on love. MacDougall rejected her marrying “for security, and down through the years has shuddered to herself every time it

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Hart, *Christopher Blake*, 63.

became necessary to go to bed with him.” He entertained the possibility some women did this, but thought this happened “only rarely, and such a woman is a psychiatric case rather than a human problem.”⁶⁹ Indeed, some social experts traced divorce to “the personal freedom of women, which can and does cause innumerable tragedies and [...] is the real cause of juvenile delinquency and other social ills.”⁷⁰ In reflecting these popular guidelines, MacDougall wanted Mrs. Blake to morph into “a woman of great worth and sterling ability, who has consciously and with full knowledge of the sacrifice it entails, given up an independent existence for love of her husband and son.” Love and family togetherness, not a cold calculation for security during times of economic and social hardships, became the story’s new backdrop. MacDougall cast Mrs. Blake’s attorney as the scapegoat for urging her on despite her better judgment to halt the divorce. Furthermore, the lawyer “doesn’t know anything whatsoever about children. As a result he becomes a villain in the imagination of Chris” and calls the boy “Chrissie,” a moniker with the unfortunate rhyme with “sissy.”⁷¹ The lawyer’s infantilizing/feminizing the maturing boy prevents the child from maturing and thus drew the audience’s ire away from the family, who were now victims of a lawyer’s conniving tactics.

While Mrs. Blake received the majority of attention (actress Alexis Smith has first billing in the credits), Mr. Blake fared less well. Hart’s Mrs. Blake’s initial desire to find security from economic conditions, and her honest rejection of this ideology made

⁶⁹ Ranald MacDougall, “Decision of Christopher Blake,” February 25, 1947—folder Notes 1813A, WBA.

⁷⁰ Alma Books, letter, *Motion Picture Magazine*, June 1947, 16. See also: “Jean Parker asks Divorce; Blames Work,” *LAT*, July 1, 1949, 2; Jack Harrison Pollack, “The Real Causes of Divorce,” *LAT*, January 8, 1956, L8, L9, and L10.

⁷¹ Ranald MacDougall, “The Private World of Christopher Blake,” final, July 22, 1947 Ranald MacDougall papers, AMPAS.

her the dominate spouse. Her husband suffers in terms of masculine demeanor. In the play, he comes across as a nice guy who realizes he made a mistake by having an affair, but remains puzzled why his wife insists they divorce. He wants to stick with the nuclear family, but Hart reveals Mrs. Blake's unhappiness actually made him unhappy as well, which led to his initial infidelity. His clinging to the romance of an ideal marriage, rather than face reality, persuades Chris to choose to stay with his father. The boy and his mother realize Dad could not go on without a family.

While Hart's Mr. Blake lacked a masculine demeanor, MacDougal's version fared no better. Blake cannot even talk to his son without fumbling. When Mr. Blake haltingly brings up the topic of sex education, for instance, Chris bluntly tells his father the school system has informed him of the basics, even if he did not believe it. Mr. Blake takes his son on outings, but he is often the passive player. When he approaches the topic of his adultery (defined as nightclubbing and theater), Chris takes over, asking his father what his intentions are towards his lover. Later, Mr. Blake tells his wife he "made a mess of things" trying to explain the divorce to their child. Fearful he ruined the boy's life, he wants to call the whole thing off and carry on like before. All the while, Mr. Blake nervously scrunches his hat, which his wife comments on. She then rebukes his offer: "You asked for this divorce and I'm giving it to you."⁷² The film switches the roles in the divorce suit, revealing Mr. Blake, not his wife, wants out. But he flip-flops while his hurt wife remains firm. Although Mr. Blake is a successful breadwinner, judging by their spacious house, he lacks a masculine demeanor and a literal "hard" body to govern his household and serve as a role model for his son. **[Figure 6]**

⁷² *The Decision of Christopher Blake*, directed by Peter Godfrey (Warner Bros., 1948), DVD (Personal Collection Courtesy of Robert Connors).

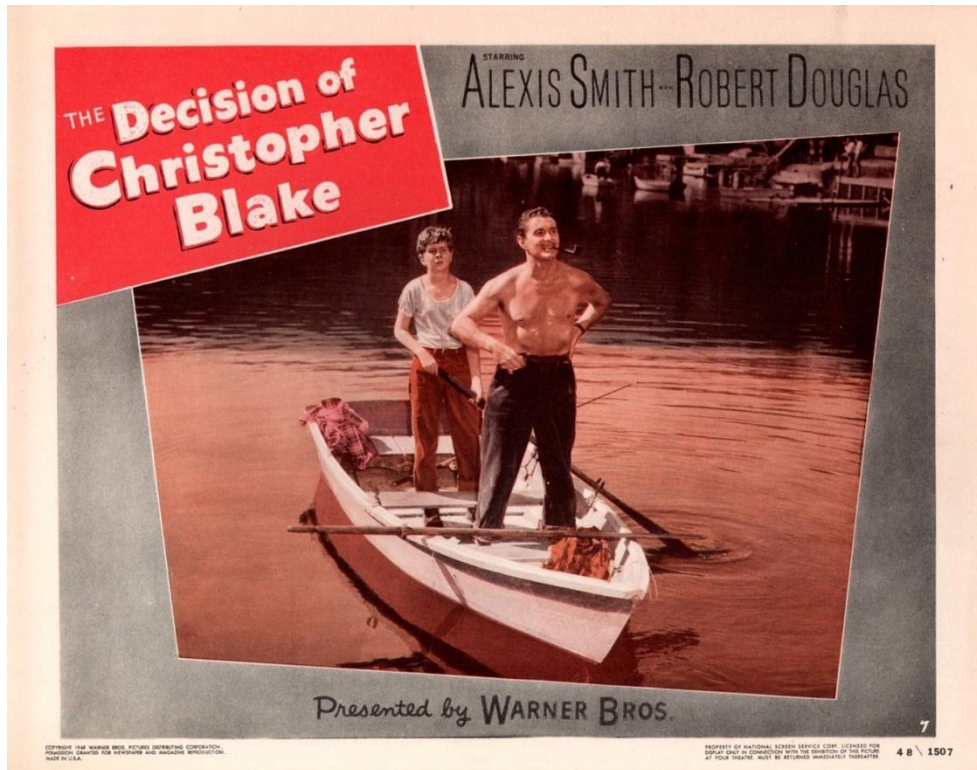


Figure 6. Not a hard-bodied Dad. The middle-aged Mr. Kenneth Blake (Robert Douglas, right), with his lack of musculature and gentlemanly pipe, is not a man's man, despite his best attempts. His son, Chris (Ted Donaldson), watches from behind, unexposed to his father's average build. In the film, Douglas appears in this scene fully clothed. Author's collection.

To avoid public apathy, MacDougall's revisions inverted the play's ending. He recognized the public fervor over the *Motion Picture Magazine* article reflected the social anxieties over the family. MacDougall determined to avoid accusations of furthering Hollywood's "light treatment of marriage" and avoid reprimands from industry executives. "Our entire story hinges upon not having an objection from the [Eric] Johnston office to the question of adultery and the eventual forgiveness of him [Mr. Blake] by Mrs. Blake," the producer wrote.⁷³ She finds forgiveness easier, knowing an "adjustment to each other becomes imperative to the continuance of life together." MacDougall insisted upon holding the family, even if it meant depriving his characters of

⁷³ Randal MacDougall to Steve Trilling, Interoffice Communication, February 20, 1947, Story File 416/565 1813A, "The Decision of Christopher Blake" Files, WBA.

all motivation. This premise led to the “most important of all the changes [...] that I consider vitally necessary there should be no divorce.” MacDougall underlined his position, arguing the disintegration of the family unit “would be a resounding flop at the box office, and a target for every moralist and clergyman in the country,” who, as *Motion Picture Magazine* demonstrated, had a ready audience. He wanted the parents to discover “their true feelings” and “Chris will stay with both of them.”⁷⁴

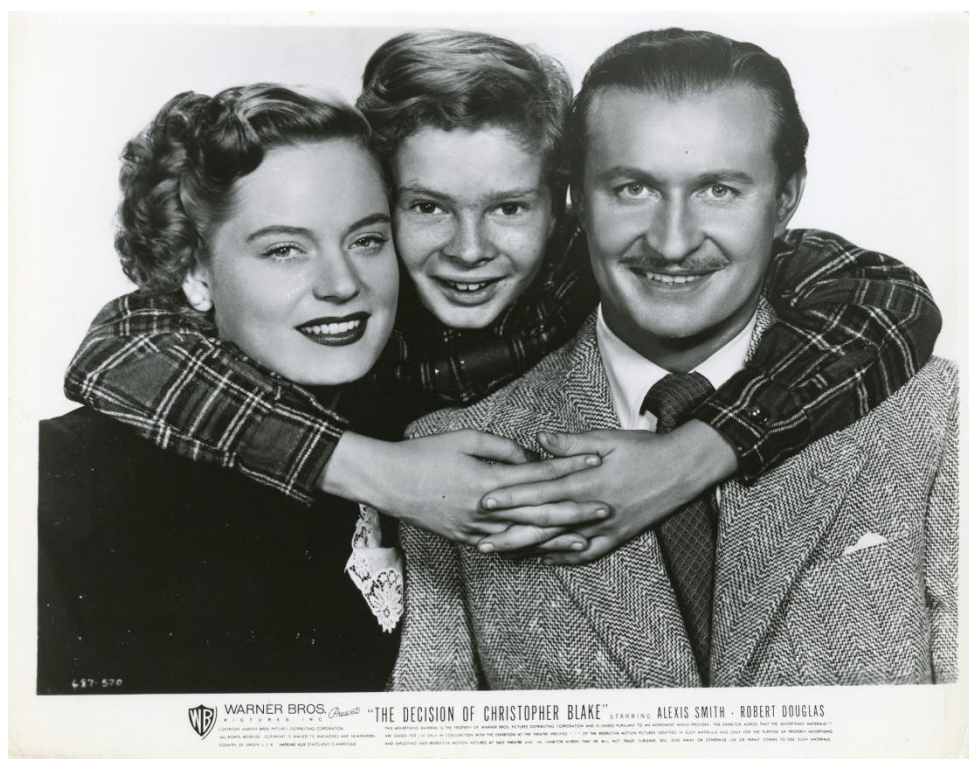


Figure 7. The carefully composed nuclear family. Chris (Ted Donaldson) binds Mom (Alexis Smith) and Dad (Robert Douglas) together. Producer Ranald MacDougall believed this portrait would bolster Hollywood’s image as a city of “clean” family living. Author’s collection.

To help publicize MacDougall’s view, studio publicist Marty Weiser ordered promotional photograph stills to emphasize family togetherness. Weiser posed the actors with Donaldson in the middle, a visual link anchoring the parents together. [Figure 7] He instructed his staff photographers to “point out how a child is the strongest link

⁷⁴ Ibid.

between husband and wife,” noting, “We do not know who they are but they represent the average American family.”⁷⁵ Publicity also avoided the plot, circulating articles about Mrs. Blake (Alexis Smith) hearing wolf whistles or Mr. Blake’s (Robert Douglas) ordeal posing as a statue for his movie son’s daydreams.⁷⁶

MacDougall’s treatment reflects contemporary political tensions and the family as a source of stability. One of the dream sequences tie divorce and family disintegration with continuing threats against national and family security. With tensions between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. increasing and predictions of World War III in the press, Chris responds by developing a “super atomic bomb” and a world peace plan in case the Russians do not cooperate with American demands. One dream sequence echoes the U.S. position of maintaining nuclear superiority. For his efforts, Abraham Lincoln awards Chris a “super-duper badge” for advancing American interests. Unfortunately, when Lincoln learns Chris’s parents are divorcing, Honest Abe is ashamed, seeing this “horribly ghastly” domestic calamity as a national disgrace and he orders the Blakes reunited.⁷⁷ But an assassin targets the Great Emancipator and Chris takes the bullet. As their son dies, his parents blame divorce for their family’s destruction. Not only is the boy genius’s demise tragic in itself, his death leaves the United States unable to use either the super atomic weaponry or implement the plan for world peace. The maintenance of the family unit, Chris’s dream sequence hints, literally acts as the backbone of the

⁷⁵ Marty Weiser to Alex Evelove, Interoffice-Communication, September 12, 1947. “The Decision of Christopher Blake—correspondence 1948.” f. 142. Marty Weiser papers, AMPAS.

⁷⁶ Cast and Credits, “The Decision of Christopher Blake [Warner Bros. 1948],” Core Collection Files (CCF), AMPAS.

⁷⁷ *The Decision of Christopher Blake*, directed by Peter Godfrey (Warner Bros., 1948), DVD (Personal Collection Courtesy of Robert Connors).

nation's strength. Nor is this merely a flight of fancy; in his waking hours, Chris spends time in his laboratory creating his atomic bomb to make his daydream a reality.⁷⁸ The family's impending divorce, the movie suggests, will ruin children as the country's future citizen-soldiers and peacemakers. To safeguard American interests, the family unit must remain intact at all costs.

To further emphasize the family unit, industry censors and MacDougall played down the theme of divorce throughout the film. Concerning the Lincoln dream sequence, industry censor Joseph Breen described the original script, writing, "Christopher envisions himself as committing suicide publicly in order to bring his parents together" before the President. Breen claimed suicide due to broken homes was "a situation which is, unfortunately, so common nowadays" and presented "a very bad and easily imitable example to numbers of unhappy and possibly unbalanced children."⁷⁹ He suggested a "heart attack and public collapse and death." MacDougall accepted Breen's recommendation to remove suicide from the story. He took the opportunity to introduce an outside source, the assassin, to threaten the family. By saving Lincoln, Chris protects American history, but sacrifices its future. Chris's death and his parents' divorce deprive the U.S. from remaining a world power in war or peace.

⁷⁸ Contemplating her son's plan for world peace, Mrs. Blake offers to write a "nasty letter to [Soviet Minister of Affairs Vyacheslav] Molotov," ordering the hardened diplomat to cooperate. The studio worried, "Is this good for international relations?" Ranald MacDougall to S. Hetta George, Inter-Office Communication, June 9, 1947, WBA. Chris originally replies, "Let's see what happens" and they share a laugh. As tensions escalated throughout 1947, Chris's line changed to "I don't think that'll help." Ranald MacDougall, "The Decision of Christopher Blake screenplay, May 22, 1947, WBA. The film deleted the "nasty" and gave Chris a pessimistic response: "Naw, he'll only say no." See *The Decision of Christopher Blake*, directed by Peter Godfrey (Warner Bros., 1948), DVD (Personal Collection Courtesy of Robert Connors).

⁷⁹ Joseph Breen to Jack Warner, letter, July 28, 1947, "The Decision of Christopher Blake [WB 1947]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. MacDougall also considered a scene where Chris shoots "the other woman" seducing his father and she turns out to be his mother. Ranald MacDougall, "The Decision of Christopher Blake, May 22, 1947, 80, WBA.

In other passages, Breen also modified language in the script to de-emphasize divorce as an acceptable solution to failed marriages. He deleted dialogue from the court judge: “Other times I run across people that got married for the wrong reason, ~~and get divorced for the right reason.~~”⁸⁰ Screenwriters altered the sentence to “Sometimes people come in here who got married for the wrong reasons, and want a divorce for the right one.” The judge extends his speech, telling Chris his parents realized “they were giving up the only thing that made their life...and yours...worthwhile. Their marriage—their family. Sometimes people don’t even realize what they’re losing until it’s gone.”⁸¹

To soften the subject more, MacDougall took a hatchet to his production without motivation from Breen. Stills advertised Chris’s worst nightmare: a “howling, hostile mob and a cruel-looking Judge who tries to force a decision out of the whimpering witness.” **[Figure 8]** The court rules “the divorce is the boy’s fault and that his parents never wanted him.”⁸² Divorce made Chris a thief, arsonist, and poor student—just as critics had argued a lack of family structure created delinquents during the Depression and war years. MacDougall eliminated the dream and excised other bits, including Chris’s line “Only married people get divorced.”⁸³ These edits reduced the running time

⁸⁰ Joseph Breen to Jack Warner “The Decision of Christopher Blake [WB. 1947],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁸¹ *The Decision of Christopher Blake*, directed by Peter Godfrey (Warner Bros., 1948), DVD (Personal Collection Courtesy of Robert Connors).

⁸² “The Decision of Christopher Blake,” folder 1012 12772A, The Decision of Christopher Blake Files, WBA. A school chum also insinuates Mrs. Blake has a “friend as well.” See Ranald MacDougall, “The Decision of Christopher Blake,” screenplay, April 7, 1947, 135-143. WBA. The film omitted one dream where Chris finds a caring family in South America and becomes wealthy. He returns home and finds his biological parents destitute. Chris leaves them to their fate. The implication of a child of divorce finding material success contradicted the belief that divorce was a one-way road to misery.

⁸³ The *New York Times* singled out this scene in the original play as “overwhelmingly affecting and a genuine contribution to the theatre’s meager knowledge of human behavior.” See Brooks Arkinson, “The Play,” *NYT*, December 2, 1946, 33.

to seventy-five minutes and undermined the theme about genuine familial dissolution. The short running time indicated the studio's plan to offer it as a double-feature or increase the number of daily showings to increase ticket purchases.



Figure 8. A deleted scene. This still shows Chris as a symptom of divorce: a delinquent, poor student, and an unwanted child—carryovers from the Great Depression and World War II concerns about familial dissolution. Author's collection.

MacDougall's edits removed the "bite" from the picture, diminishing Chris's experience. On the positive side, critics singled out Ted Donaldson's good performance and emotional pathos during the varied dream sequences to bring about familial reconciliation. However, despite Donaldson's credible acting skills, the ending fell flat. When Chris tricks his parents into making up in the real world, as MacDougall insisted he should, the boy does so in an anti-climatic manner. He "chooses" his father, and his mother, ashamed, runs out of the courtroom. Mr. Blake chases his wife and they

reconcile off camera while Chris and the judge wink at each other. After a fade out, the reunited family leaves the courthouse together. The end.

This “real life” solution lacked drama and mocked the issue of divorce by portraying it as a silly spat between parents. For Chris, his sudden about-face negates the impact of his personal nightmares over the loss of a parent. After exposing audiences to the boy’s inner angst, the movie renders the child’s viewpoint irrelevant. In Hart’s play, Chris breaks down and cries, but this display does not make him a sissy. He matured by overcoming the family unit’s demise. The movie’s production avoided this trauma by restoring the family without solving the underlying issues—that the need for security and stability during and since the Depression contributed to rash marriages, families, and, now, divorces. After all, as case studies point out, families split up during the Depression and World War II, but children endured, matured, and even thrived without a nuclear family structure.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the family unit remained idealized in the public consciousness as a leading source of American strength in times of uncertainty.

By excising this context to play it safe, MacDougall ignored the real-life experiences of his audience. Moviegoers were resentful. The *Washington Post* thought nothing “suggests that these people could possibly have been in love with each other; a happy ending does nothing to make you suppose that this time they will be any more compatible.” MacDougall rejected Hart’s original backdrop for the Blakes, but chose not to concoct a new backstory. Indeed, the critic singled out the contrived setting, arguing, “had these parents seemed like ordinary human beings instead of polished celluloid puppets” or “their home resembled an ordinary home instead of some plush designer’s

⁸⁴ See John A. Clausen, *American Lives: Looking Back at the Children of the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

idea of what a home should be, there might have been an air of actuality about this very real problem.”⁸⁵ Critics panned its contrived ending. “Watch the clever trick he [Chris] pulls! And sure enough, there’s the sweetest reconciliation you ever saw,” *Modern Screen* scoffed. “Until Pop falls in love again, I guess.” The emotional punches were “so far from honest it makes you tired.”⁸⁶

Ironically, MacDougall’s attempt to remove controversy from the picture excised much of the play’s original punch, leaving audiences feeling cheated. Mr. Blake made a mistake, but he is really a nice guy; Mrs. Blake is hurt and angry, but she loves him deep down. Showmen thought the movie appealed only to “women folk who will tend to understand and appreciate the problem involved and the plight of the child.”⁸⁷ *Boxoffice* suggested theaters appeal to welfare workers and religious figures for endorsements, or “if there is a ‘Christopher Blake’ in your area, invite him as a special guest on opening night.”⁸⁸ But such strategies contradicted the film’s message. Experts, distressed women

⁸⁵ Richard L. Coe, “Small Chris Has Wooden Parents,” *WP*, December 17, 1948, B3. See also H.R., “Moss Hart’s Play Adapted to the Screen,” *Christian Science Monitor (CSM)*, December 20, 1948, 5; Bosley Crowther, “The Screen in Review,” *NYT*, December 11, 1948, 12; John McCarter, *New Yorker*, December 18, 1948, “The Decision of Christopher Blake [Warner Bros. 1948],” CCF, AMPAS; Herbert B. Alexander, “A Child is as Good as His neighborhood,” *Parents*, April 1950, 26; “Your Guide to Current Films,” *Screenland*, December 1948, 54; “‘Quotes’ What Newspaper Critics Say About New Films,” *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, December 20, 1948, 22.

⁸⁶ “The Decision of Christopher Blake,” *Modern Screen*, January 1949, 96. Warner Bros. employed the same “trick” Chris uses in an earlier divorce-centered picture, *Never Say Goodbye* (1946). This picture, however, played for laughs among the misunderstood swanks of 5th Avenue, complete with dueling Santa Clauses. Leading actor Errol Flynn also had more box office pull than Alexis Smith.

⁸⁷ Clipping, *Motion Picture Herald (MPH)*, December 4, 1948, “The Decision of Christopher Blake [Warner Bros. 1948],” CCF, AMPAS. “The Decision of Christopher Blake,” *The Independent Film Journal*, December 4, 1948, “The Decision of Christopher Blake [Warner Bros. 1948],” CCF, AMPAS; “Trade Show,” *DV*, November 30, 1948, 3; York, “‘The Decision of Christopher Blake’ Spotty Drama About Divorce,” *The Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, December 6, 1948, 10; “Prod. Decision of Christopher Blake-clips,” WBA. See also “‘The Decision of Christopher Blake’ with Alexis Smith and Ted Donaldson,” *Harrison’s Reports*, December 4, 1948, 194.

⁸⁸ “Exploitips,” *Boxoffice BookinGuide (BOBG)* supplement, *Boxoffice (BO)*, December 4, 1948, 16.

folk, and real “Christopher Blakes” need not exist because the film asserts underlying social and economic tensions played no part in divorce and divorcees needed only a chance to make-up to rekindle the flames. Bad timing also played a part; Warner Bros. released the picture around Christmas and the premieres flopped in New York and Chicago.⁸⁹ The film earned below the average gross in the big cities, with Cleveland reporting an abysmal forty-two percent.⁹⁰ In small towns, the film also struggled. “This show didn’t entertain nor did it do any business,” complained one West Virginia rural theater.⁹¹

Even though MacDougall inadvertently sabotaged his own production, his desire to helm a “clean” production reflected Hollywood’s retreat from its earlier social activism. H.U.A.C.’s developing storm over Hollywood motivated MacDougall and his peers to play it safe. But in doing so, they cheated the moviegoers who deplored divorce in principle and also rejected a hypocritical gloss from Hollywood. The contradictory demands stumped moviemakers. In a *Life*-sponsored roundtable, producers discussed solutions to the postwar slump. They bemoaned the difficulty of complying with “thousands of prohibitions” and catering to the lowest common denominator who “will be the first to desert it for television.” One showman thought *The Decision of Christopher Blake* a “reasonably adult treatment of divorce” but had to “double it up with Abbot and Costello to bring in the customers.” Another asserted, “Hollywood

⁸⁹ Cast and Credits, “The Decision of Christopher Blake [Warner Bros. 1948],” CCF, AMPAS. The film’s debut in Chicago grossed a “tragic \$6000.” Three Warner theatres in New York double-billed the picture with *Smart Girls Don’t Talk*, but the combo grossed a “lightweight \$26,000” See: “‘Hurry Up, Santa,’ Shouts First Run As Take Dips to 186G,” *DV*, December 12, 1948, 3; “Chi Biz Blitzed by Pre-Yule Call & Snow Storm,” *DV*, December 21, 1948, 4.

⁹⁰ “Boxoffice Barometer,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, February 26, 1949, 1.

⁹¹ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, March 18, 1950, 4.

deliberately confuses fantasy with reality, thereby providing neither the recreation of true fantasy nor the recognition of true experience.”⁹² The lack of a “true experience” centered upon the cardboard parents whose troubles came from disillusionment about marriage as the ideal means of stability during the Depression. During a time when the Soviet Union threatened the postwar peace, thereby necessitating Chris to build a “super atom bomb,” the boy’s daydreaming about the horrors of divorce and the destruction of the family (and nation) did not align with the syrupy ending, resulting in audience apathy and confusion. While MacDougall cut the negative cost from an estimated \$2.5 million to \$1.489 million, the expected earnings never materialized. By 1956, the movie grossed a mere \$516,000 in domestic and foreign rentals.⁹³

Re-masculinizing Fatherly Bonds: “Delinquent” Dads vs. “Priggish” Sons

The failure of *The Decision of Christopher Blake* came from many factors. The audience and critics deplored the handling of the divorce plot, but they also pointed out the lack of characterization of the parents. Producer Ranald MacDougall removed the parents’ agency for divorce by avoiding the references to the Great Depression and World War II present in Hart’s original play, but failed to fill in the void. While Mrs. Blake became the wronged housewife rather than an unhappy one, Mr. Blake came across as a disconnected father. He had little to do with his son other than offer faltering conversation. His one attempt at performing a parental duty—telling Chris about the

⁹² Eric Hodgins, “What’s With the Movies?” *Life*, May 16, 1949, 105-106.

⁹³ “Comparison of Negative Costs and Gross Income,” [William Schaefer Ledger], William Schaefer Collection, WBA. The family unit also disintegrated in MGM’s *Edward, My Son* (1949). Spencer Tracy plays a patriarch sacrifices everything to spoil his unseen son. His marriage collapses, his business fails, and, his son, after fathering an illegitimate child, disappears. The production cost \$2.4 million, grossed \$2.14 million, but lost \$1.16 million when the studio accounted for publicity and other expenses. See “E.J. Mannix ledger, 1924-1963,” Howard Stickling papers, MHL, AMPAS.

“birds and the bees”—backfired, leaving Dad befuddled and clueless about what went on in his son’s overactive imagination. The lack of ideal role models, particularly a strong father figure, did not create a setting to guide their son’s maturation.

In contrast to Mr. Blake, MGM’s *Any Number Can Play* (1949) found financial success by presenting a father figure whose masculinity empowered him to triumph against all odds. The film symbolizes this “high stakes lifestyle” by situating it in a casino populated with character types, from society matrons to low-life thieves. But among the many players, the movie’s winner is clearly the gambling house proprietor, Charley Kyng, who resolves his familial tensions with his wife and, more importantly, his son. This “hard” masculinity on the father’s part played into his gender role as the affirmed “king” of his castle: the home and workplace. Appropriately, the movie’s protagonist reflected this view in his surname and by the actor who played him, Clark Gable, long known as Hollywood’s “King” for his rugged masculine screen persona established during the 1930s.⁹⁴ Unlike Blake, who initiated a divorce suit and then changed his mind when the going got tough, Kyng thrived on challenges of struggling to build his casino from the ground up during the Depression. His success has high costs: his doctor tells him he must retire due to a weakened heart condition from stress, and his son thinks gambling is immoral. Despite the increased strains on his family life and his body, Kyng presses on, throwing himself into his work.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Gable’s acquired the title in the 1930s and it stayed with him until his death. As evidenced by biography titles, it is part of his legacy. See Charles Samuels, *The King: A Biography of Clark Gable* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962); Lyn Tornabene, *Long Live the King: A Biography of Clark Gable* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978).

⁹⁵ Robert Douglas, who played Mr. Blake, was eight years younger than Gable, although their screen characterizations disguise the age difference. Gable was born in February, 1901, and Douglas in November, 1909.

Kyng's heightened masculinity, as represented by his occupation, unnerved some social critics. The Production Code censors demanded MGM make clear Kyng was not an underworld ne'er-do-well engaged in illegal activity. Joseph Breen believed it "absolutely necessary to indicate definitely that it takes place in a state or city where gambling is legal. Otherwise, the present treatment would be entirely unacceptable."⁹⁶ Breen's criticism of gambling reflected his moral outlook and as a guardian of civic virtue. Indeed, in the early twentieth century, progressives frowned upon gambling as a sin, and this association was long-lived; as critics later pointed out in 1951, gambling represented a moral failing for those who wanted to get rich quick, even though nearly half of American adults admitted they gambled as a form of social mobility.⁹⁷

Clark Gable countered the charges of immorality, whether from social critics or his celluloid son. "I don't want tripe and I don't want pictures with messages." He elaborated: "This picture has no cockeyed message. The guy's a gambler with guts and the picture doesn't preach for or against gambling or making the eight the hard way."⁹⁸ Contrary to Gable's publicity statements, MGM's screenwriters made sure the film's depiction of gambling was morally acceptable as a tool for building a masculine character; Kyng's career as a gambler results from, and reinforces, his having "guts." As discussed below, Kyng's Depression-era masculine persona reflected his chosen career.

⁹⁶ Joseph Breen to L.B. Mayer, Letter, November 22, 1948, "Any Number Can Play [MGM 1948]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁹⁷ Erest Evred Blanche, *You Can't Win: Facts and Fallacies about Gambling* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1949), 11. For contemporary headlines, see "Gambling Expose," *WP*, March 27, 1949, B4; Edwin Goldenthal, "Gambling Contradiction," *WP*, September 5, 1949, 6. As an addiction, gambling leads to marital ruin in the movie *The Lady Gambles* (1949).

⁹⁸ Howard Strickling, "Clark Gable Feature," *Follow Up Promotion Campaign*, "Any Number Can Play" [MGM 1949]," CCF, AMPAS.

To address Breen's concerns, the film positions gambling as a means of supporting the nation's economy through taxes and card sales. This, too, came from the Depression; during the 1930s, cash-strapped local governments legalized horse racing, bingo, lotteries, and other forms of gambling as a source of revenue.⁹⁹ Kyng references this legalization by referencing its role as a source of civic revenue, explaining, "If you don't like gambling you might say you're not supporting your city government."¹⁰⁰ *Newsweek* connected the legalization of gambling as a form of character-building, noting, "Gambling is presented as a respectable vocation and even, after its rugged fashion, as something of an aid in molding character." A gambler "associates with some of our very best people and is often required to exhibit a high order of moral and physical courage." The result from this mix of courage and civic duty: a "pretty-adjusted citizen."¹⁰¹

Given his masculine career, tough personal demeanor, and patriotic contribution, Kyng seems the ideal father to impart these values to his son. According to *Variety*, MGM cast Darryl Hickman as Paul because the young actor was "almost a dead ringer

⁹⁹ Aaron M. Duncan, *Gambling with the Myth of the American Dream* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 11; Rita Barnard, *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nathanael West, and Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116; Reuven Brenner and Gabrielle A. Brenner, *Gambling and Speculation: A Theory, a History, and a Future of Some Human Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 83; James Worthen, *Governor James Rolph and the Great Depression in California* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006), 32-39, 162-166. Movie houses also partook in gambling to attract patrons, using ticket stubs as raffle tickets for free sets of dishes during certain "Bank Nights."

¹⁰⁰ *Any Number Can Play*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1949), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011). Censors in Ohio actually cut this line. Local Censor Report, Ohio, June 18, 1949. Any Number Can Play [MGM 1948], Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS

¹⁰¹ Clipping, *Newsweek*, July 11, 1949, "Any Number Can Play [MGM 1948]," CCF, AMPAS. The notion of a model citizen extended to Gable. One gossip columnist noted MGM hired professional card shark Sammy Lande to teach the star the art of "card-riffing, chip stacking, and maybe dealing off the bottom." The implication was that Gable was tough, but honest, and needed to learn the dirty tricks of the trade. See Florabel Muir, "Just for Variety," *DV*, January 5, 1949, 4.

for Clark [Gable] in movement and manner.”¹⁰² Unfortunately for the elder Kyng, Paul rejects everything for which his father stands. Paul is graduating high school, but his social maturation takes him in the opposite direction of his father. A moralizing prude, Paul rejects violence and aggression at every opportunity. The teenager, Kyng fears, lacks the male stamina to succeed in the real world as he had. Rather, his son shields his cowardice with a skewed, ethical outlook and this “yellow” streak shames the family.

For Paul, the casino’s noir-like shadows belied crime and unsavory characters, symbolizing the ambiguity and anxieties underlying postwar prosperity.¹⁰³ Although the Kyngs have a brightly-lit suburban house, the gloomy downtown casino remains the focus of Paul’s anxieties.¹⁰⁴ Screenwriter Richard Brooks described the seventeen-year-old as “in that awkward limbo between boyhood and manhood” who “‘knows all the answers to the world’s problems’—except to his own personal problems, of course.”¹⁰⁵ Paul, a loner, “speaks softly, adolescently self-piteous [...] His sensitivity makes him prey to his vivid imagination.”¹⁰⁶ This “vivid imagination” extends to his questioning his father’s livelihood. Even though the movie explicitly states Kyng operates within a legal

¹⁰² Florabel Muir, “Just for Variety,” *DV*, February 2, 1949, 4. Hickman replaced Scotty Beckett.

¹⁰³ On film noir and its connection to postwar culture, see Sheri Chinen Biesen, *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), Chapter three; James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Chapter one; Vivian Sobchack, “Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir,” in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 130-136. Rebecca Prime asserts the blacklistees in Europe inserted this loss of homeland security into their movies made while in exile. See Rebecca Prime, *Hollywood Exiles in Europe: The Blacklist and Cold War Film Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 88-89.

¹⁰⁴ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 65-105.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Brooks, “Any Number Can Play,”—script #1, Composite Screenplay, November 4, 1948, A1. Richard Brooks papers, AMPAS.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

framework and the town's elites patronize the casino regularly, Paul questions the morality of a life built on a shady profession.

Paul rejects his father's masculine fusion of individualism, capitalism, and all-or-nothing risk-taking, instead seeing his success coming from the expense of others. He asks his father to "stop the game. Give them back their money."¹⁰⁷ The incredulous father tells his son to wake up. Paul grew up in the latter Depression and war years but he attended the "best schools" and the "best summer camps" and always received extravagant birthday and Christmas gifts from his father, including his own car. Paul directly profited from this lifestyle and knows nothing about hardships in the real world. The boy is even reluctant to step into his dad's casino, where the dark cinematography connotes the uncertainties and struggles of adulthood. Kyng flatly tells his son, "If I'm still around when you've got it—give me the rules and I'll try to live by 'em. But right now I'm living in *this* world—and these rules I know."¹⁰⁸ When Paul continues to protest about the immorality of gambling, Kyng shuts him up: "I don't think you're old enough to judge your father."¹⁰⁹

Kyng's last statement underscored the hard times he endured. The film does not cite the Great Depression directly, but Kyng clearly struggled to get to the top during the 1930s. He says he started out as a "nobody" who "made a bundle in the roughest, toughest race of them all where you don't get any second guesses."¹¹⁰ Although Kyng

¹⁰⁷ *Any Number Can Play*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1949), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

describes his background within the context of his profession, this “gamble” took place in the Great Depression, where Kyng seized the opportunity when state governments made gambling legal. Indeed, Paul’s age of seventeen and his never recalling poverty suggest Mr. Kyng started his career around 1930-1931. The economic struggle of the Great Depression shadows Kyng’s business practice and his outlook on life. The “rules” he plays by come from his living through periods of austerity and he resents his pampered son’s criticizing him for providing for his family. Paul’s rejection of the casino not only distances him from his father, but also the masculinity his father represents. The teenager’s insisting his father give back the money further destabilizes gambling as a source of tax revenue and government support. Failing to appreciate his father’s struggles, Paul opposes the economic and social stability Charley Kyng provides his family and community.

Screenwriter Richard Brooks’s take on the Kyngs was opposite that of Randal MacDougall’s approach for the Blakes. Rather than avoid the Depression context as MacDougall did, Brooks engages this history and refashions it as a positive experience for the characters and the moviegoers. Mrs. Kyng (Alexis Smith) survived the Great Depression by supporting her husband. Although she certainly does not want to return to hard times (as evidenced by her wardrobe), she looks back on the Depression as a character-building exercise. Unlike Mrs. Blake, who wanted security from the hard times, Mrs. Kyng revises the Great Depression to fit the current emphasis of hard masculinity for fathers and sons. Their early marriage took place around 1931-1932,

among the worst years of the Depression in terms of housing and wages.¹¹¹ But Mrs. Kyng remembers the period for empowering her husband and how alive she felt in their struggles. To commemorate those happy years, she redecorated the basement with second-hand furniture to resemble their old one-bedroom apartment, where she spends her time when she feels down. She knows her husband also lives in the past, in his desire for Paul to “man up” and assume the family name. She asks herself, in a stand-off between her husband and son, whose side she would take. She sides with her husband: “I was a wife before a mother.”¹¹²

However, Mrs. Kyng also undermines her husband’s masculinity by indulging her son’s moralizing against her husband’s career. This form of smothering echoed the warnings from wartime writers, notably Philip Wylie, about the “sissification” of boys, and continued in the postwar years. In part, Charley Kyng contributed to Paul’s emasculated state due to his detachment—a common mode of anti-social behavior contemporary sociologists observed among returning servicemen. Paul explains the rift started when he refused to stand up for himself during a kindergarten scrap. His father begged his son to man up, getting down on his knees so he would appear smaller than the boy and ordering him to strike, but Paul refused to swing. Since then, Charley Kyng grew increasingly disappointed with his son’s ability to succeed in a “rough, tough” world that does not offer second chances.

¹¹¹ Alexander J. Field, “The Interwar Housing Cycle in the Light of 2001-2012: A Comparative Historical Perspective,” *Housing and Mortgage Markets in Historical Perspective*, eds., Eugene N. White, Kenneth Snowden, and Price Fishback (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), 70-71.

¹¹² *Any Number Can Play*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1949), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

In a larger social context, Paul's passiveness indicated meekness, timidity, and a lack of masculinity. According to one child-rearing guide published in 1949, the same year the film debuted, by age seven, "boys will fight for their rights if necessary," which the child expert authors saw as normal. "A certain amount of aggressiveness and ability to hold one's own is necessary at this age," the writers instructed, believing the child, "especially the boy, will find it even more necessary to hold his own" when he grows older.¹¹³ Such behavior tied into a tight-knit family, the authors contended, because the child "is also reaching for the approval of adults."¹¹⁴ A boy's assertiveness, then, was a hallmark of growing up. Paul's refusal to fight from an early age signaled to his father and the film's audience of his abnormality. Paul is in the wrong, not his father.

For the Kyng household, Charley Kyng's tough demeanor stemmed from his career and his experiences in the 1930s. As historian Ralph LaRossa notes, fathers during the Depression cut back time spent with their children to find and hold work.¹¹⁵ At the same time, holidays, notably Father's Day, became a public celebration to reaffirm the patriarch's role as breadwinner and head of his household. During World War II, this message of masculinity became heightened; in 1942, the Father's Day Committee's slogan was "Father—Defender of the Home," even though both young fathers and older sons marched off to war.¹¹⁶ The father-as-role model mirrored the

¹¹³ Gladys Gardner Jenkins, Helen Shacter, and William W. Bauer, *There are Your Children: How They Develop and How to Guide Them* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1949), 66-67.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹⁵ Ralph LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 167.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

tough-guy image of Hollywood's King and Gable's role as Charley Kyng: tough, combative, confident, and, by paying taxes, patriotic.

Within this context, Charley Kyng's only fault was his giving up on his son. By throwing himself into his career, he allows Paul to drift further into passivity and pacifism. Indeed, Paul drifts closer to his mother for guidance. He tells her about his prom date jilting him: "She found out who I am and that's the end of it." As a result, he now associates with the unpopular, dateless wallflowers. "I found just the girl for me. Nobody else would ask her out—so the chances are she won't ask me who my father is."¹¹⁷ Paul's girl troubles are not just within his age-group. He turns to his mom for everything, confiding in her about his concerns with his father, problems at school, and, when a fight breaks out at prom and the police book him, his mother has to bail him out. Paul's passivity comes directly from his moral high ground, but at the cost of his masculine aggression and characterization. The script spells out instructions for Darryl Hickman during the prom fight sequence: "PAUL HAS NOT YET STRUCK A BLOW."¹¹⁸ Charley Kyng, disappointed in his son's character, abandons childrearing to his wife and the audiences witness the tragic results coming from an absentee father.

Paul's point of view had merits. The Production Code censors wanted MGM to clarify the legality of Kyng's casino, signifying audiences might view the film as a glorification of a moral vice. In reviews of *Any Number Can Play*, some critics also questioned Charley Kyng's gambling as means of character development, but nobody

¹¹⁷ *Any Number Can Play*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1949), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

¹¹⁸ Richard Brooks, "Any Number Can Play,"—script #1, Composite Screenplay, November 5, 1948, 83. Richard Brooks papers, AMPAS

stood up for the boy's ideals.¹¹⁹ *Variety* mocked, "Pic's thesis maintains that gambling is legitimate—if you're a winner. Yarn develops the point via a domestic break between Gable, as the legalized gambling house operator, and his collegiate son who is ashamed of his pappy's profession. But [...] the kid becomes a convert to the rolling dominoes as a character builder."¹²⁰ The *Hollywood Reporter* warned exhibitors of "serious criticism" in the "exaltation of gambling and the holding up of the wheel of chance to a young boy as a fine, sportsmenlike way of life. It could be, but the PTA will have its own ideas."¹²¹ Indeed, one exhibitor commented, "Big time gambling is too rich for small town oil men and school kids. They complained. Business was only slightly below average, so I have no grouch over it. I enjoyed it myself and think it should do okay anywhere except in very small or rural communities."¹²² While social bluenoses, like the PTA, church groups, and "womenfolk" may have objected to the elevated masculine image Kyng projected and his son rejected, the idealized "hard" image of manhood—the rough-and-tumble characters Gable typically played well.

Audiences may not have approved of Charley Kyng's profession on a moral level, but they agreed Paul needed toughening up to survive in the "real world" outside his bright, suburban home, just as Kyng triumphed in the Depression. In the end, Paul

¹¹⁹ William R. Weaver, "Review," *The Motion Picture Daily*, April 7, 1953; Darr Smith, "Film Review," *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 23, 1949, "Any Number Can Play [MGM 1948]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹²⁰ Herm, "Film Review," *Variety Weekly* (VW), June 8, 1948, 18; Richard L. Coe, "Lavish Gambling Has Pious Payoff," *WP*, August 12, 1949, 24. Kyng's heart troubles compensated for any glorification of vice.

¹²¹ "'Number', 'Skip' Name Can't Help Confused Script," *HR*, June 1, 1949. One exhibitor commented, "This picture isn't bad. In fact, I thought it above average, but it is certainly not a picture for a town that has a church on every corner." See "The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures," *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, May 6, 1950, 2.

¹²² The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures," *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, December 3, 1949, 2.

finally yields and becomes a man in his father's image. Two criminals sneak into the casino thanks to Paul's jealous uncle, whom the film depicts as a genuine failed man, dependent entirely on the Kyngs.¹²³ The bad guys proceed to rob the town's elite at gun point. Seeing no one support his father (who has, as Paul noted, taken all their money), the boy jumps one gunman, effectively saving the family name. According to the script, "as though releasing all the punches he has withheld for many years, Paul starts hitting [hold-up man] Sisti with fury, sobbing and crying."¹²⁴ [Figure 9]



Figure 9. Like father, like son. Paul (Darryl Hickman) matures as the splitting image of his father. He sheds his passivity to defend the family, just as his father's "guts" allowed him to succeed during the Depression. Dad (Clark Gable, standing second from left) grins in approval. Author's collection.

¹²³ The uncle, Robbn Elcott (Wendell Corey), represents the worst of both worlds. He and his wife, Mrs. Kyng's sister, live with the Kyngs because Elcott cannot hold a job. Charley Kyng sees him as dependent, cowardly, and a parasite. Paul sees Elcott as lacking any morals.

¹²⁴ Richard Brooks, "Any Number Can Play,"—script #1, Composite Screenplay, November 5, 1948, 134. Richard Brooks papers, AMPAS.

Paul experiences a catharsis of virility and embraces his masculine initiation into the real world, not the imaginary world of his ideals. The *Los Angeles Times* confessed, “It is not made clear whether the boy capitulates because of his sudden admiration for his father’s iron nerve, his courage, or what.”¹²⁵ But the newspaper missed Kyng’s grinning approval as his son pummels the bad guy. MGM’s story synopsis corrected a typo, rewriting a sentence to emphasize the boy’s rising to meet his father’s expectation: “~~At least Paul realizes his father’s worth~~ In the brawl, Paul also proves his worth by coming to his father’s help.”¹²⁶ By slugging it out, Paul sheds his idealism and adopts Charley’s manhood as a fighter. The story synopsis notes when Kyng’s “son is finally showing some spirit,” the story hits the high-note. “In the brawl, Darryl, now recognizing that his father is a great man, comes to his father’s help. Clark is proud of his son.”¹²⁷ *Film Daily* concurred, calling Paul the problem, not gambling. The boy “is something not quite the chip off the old block that he might have been. But he improves.”¹²⁸

With the family reunited under his own terms, Kyng no longer needs the casino to symbolize his hard-won success. Kyng retires, leaving the dark interior for country fishing before going back home with wife and son. **[Figure 10]** Kyng leaves his profession and demeanor intact as he transitions his tough-guy persona into the suburbs, his son at his side. Kyng’s last act is to cheat at cards—the first time he has done something shady—but he does so deliberately in order to give his gambling house to his

¹²⁵ John L. Scott, “Gable Wins Big Gamble on Screens,” *LAT*, July 23, 1949, 7.

¹²⁶ F.B. Kopp, “Content Analysis Chart,” “Any Number Can Play [MGM, 1948],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ “Film Daily Reviews of New Features, *FD*, June 2, 1949, 10.

associates. Paul's improvement met with approval from moviegoers, as the film grossed \$3.205 million against a large \$1.363 million cost, netting \$763,000 in profits.¹²⁹



Figure 10. The nuclear family, revitalized under a masculine role model. Kyng cheated “only once” to retire to a life of fishing. Paul’s (left) acceptance of the card suggests he has tempered his absolutist morals. In an aesthetic reading, Gable (center) stands out from his family with his lighter-colored coat. The gambling house’s name “Charley’s,” above Gable, affirms the possessive dominance of the father figure over his wife and child. Author’s collection.

Although Paul leaves for college after the film ends, he earned a more useful education outside the classroom. He learned his former moralistic outlook on life did not take into account the life experience of his father, whose “guts” empowered him during the Depression and establish a prominent place in the community. Kyng provides for his family while his tax dollars support the local government. Paul’s morals have some

¹²⁹ “E.J. Mannix ledger, 1924-1963,” Howard Stickling papers, MHL, AMPAS.

idealistic merit, but his father trumps them by showing how those morals did not fit into the real world where, as Kyng notes, there are no second chances. The same parenting guide from 1949 affirmed this maturation process, claiming daydreaming adolescents must “fit into a realistic situation, translating the day-dreams of childhood into the actual possibilities of real life.”¹³⁰ Paul finally accepts this lesson and now appreciates his father’s legitimate career. The *New York Times* praised Kyng as an honest and dedicated family man who succeeded in his hard profession. “The pious intention is to show that gambling is rough, particularly on a fellow who has heart trouble and a priggish son.”¹³¹ However, the roughness of the gambling world was the point. By battling quasi-illegality, his weak heart, and his son’s misguided ethics, Gable wins the town over. The reviewer noted the elder Kyng represents “the irritable butt of shock and shame” in the picture, but the film does not support this assertion; society widows throw themselves at him and the town’s powerful businessmen shoot craps with enthusiasm, transferring their boardrooms to the casino tables.¹³² Kyng, the self-made casino operator, supports all of them by paying his taxes since the Depression, and projecting a masculine demeanor they all admire. In this environment, prudish Paul is the one who reforms. By toughening up to his father’s standards, Paul addresses Great Depression concerns about masculinity and family, turning the economic crisis into a character-building exercise. Just as Kyng’s guts led him to succeed and support his town, Paul will leave his childhood home ready and able to defend his family and country against subversive forces.

¹³⁰ Jenkins, Shacter, and Bauer, *These are Your Children*, 130.

¹³¹ Bosley Crowther, “It’s Only Money,” *NYT*, July 10, 1949, X1.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The ideology of a “hard” masculine father reinforced an America under attack from abroad and during the postwar years. As Mrs. Kyng demonstrates, the past fifteen years were a time of struggle. But they were “good” years in that they made men tough, hardened to the practical demands of the real world, and conditioned them to survive. World War II’s end did not mean families could relax; with a Third World War seemingly around the corner and the threat of depression returning, families could not afford to become lax and start questioning the hard masculinity that enabled men like Charley Kyng to achieve success. Paul Kyng fell through the cracks—unlike Christopher Blake, Paul’s passivity prevents him from building a super atom bomb to force the Soviet Union to agree to world peace. But Paul’s father teaches him to subscribe to the ideals of a hegemonic masculinity, embodied by Hollywood’s King himself, who developed his screen persona during the Great Depression. Privately, Clark Gable-the-man was not Gable-the-image; as Darryl Hickman recalled, before takes, propmen continually offered the King towels to wipe his nervous, sweaty hands. However, before the cameras and the press, Gable played the part.¹³³

The King himself embraced the role of Charley as a return to a comfortable screen type. When he came back to Hollywood after his wartime service ended, Gable was dissatisfied with the parts MGM gave him: a domesticated seaman married to a librarian in *Adventure* (1946), a soap advertiser in *The Hucksters* (1947), and a sensitive

¹³³ Dick Moore, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star (but don’t have sex or take the car)* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 169-170. Hickman added Gable wished he had a son and often roughhoused with him, like a father would.

army surgeon caught in a love triangle/weepie in *Homecoming* (1948).¹³⁴ *Any Number Can Play* represented a return to form for MGM's "King." Judging by the box office take, Americans, seeking reassurance that the Depression would not return and hoped the Soviets would stand down, welcomed the return of Gable's tough-guy image who can prepare his son to face the cruel, outside world.

In contrast, Christopher Blake's failure to make a decision irked moviegoers. The issue of divorce indicated the failure of the family to find stability from the past fifteen years and facing turbulent international crises ahead. The unfolding arms race and predictions of World War III—with Chris "one moment devising a plan for world peace, the next, building a whizzer of an atom bomb"—reinforced the need for families to stay homeward bound in what was later called domestic containment.¹³⁵ Within this context, producer Randal MacDougall thought whitewashing the play's coda appealed to family solidarity. For the picture's last line, the judge orders the Blakes to "keep out of my court. I hate divorces!"¹³⁶

Unfortunately, the movie version of Hart's dilemma settled for a faux happy ending. MacDougall, wary of social guardians and H.U.A.C. looking for Hollywoodite immorality, deprived Chris of making a choice after an hour of emotional wrangling. The *Hollywood Reporter* lamented "not even the best efforts of such superior artists can make Christopher Blake anything more than a bad dream dramatically and a worse one

¹³⁴ "Gable will Ask for Okay on Outside Picture a Year," *DV*, April 1, 1949, 1.

¹³⁵ "'Blake' Film Offers Drama," *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 18, 1948, "The Decision of Christopher Blake [Warner Bros. 1948]," CCF, AMPAS; see also Philip K. Scheuer, "Child Seen as Victim of Divorce," *LAT*, December 18, 1948, 7.

¹³⁶ *The Decision of Christopher Blake*, directed by Peter Godfrey (Warner Bros., 1948), DVD (Personal Collection Courtesy of Robert Connors).

artistically.”¹³⁷ The film peeked into a child’s mind during the annihilation of marriage, but MacDougall’s decision to save marriage at all costs led to Chris Blake’s non-decision, which rendered such struggles pointless. Critics and audiences picked up on the faulty filmmaking; the film rubberstamping the institution of marriage did not address the underlying issues of divorce. Nor did the film address the continuing tensions in the family unit from the past two decades; as one *Life* article showed, divorce cases had no easy answers.¹³⁸ Unlike Paul Kyng, Christopher Blake does not grow up.

Fathers were by no means flawless. Even the most patriotic of fathers could misplace their priorities; in 1949, the *Los Angeles Times* reported one “very wealthy man with a position high in government circles” contacted a psychiatrist and wanted the doctor to tame his “wild” boys because their mother “spoils them.”¹³⁹ The father stated he could not “spend much time with them for I have to put my duty to the nation before everything else.” But the doctor realized the official erred: “your first responsibility to this country is to develop your sons into upstanding, well-balanced, responsible citizens. Nothing you accomplish in Washington can possibly be more important!”¹⁴⁰ The government official did not follow his advice, and now one son was a “drug addict” with “a serious problem of adjustment that verges on homosexuality,” and the other was a

¹³⁷ “Decision on ‘Christopher Blake’ Proves Negative,” *HR*, December 16, 1948, 6, “The Decision of Christopher Blake [Warner Bros. 1948],” CCF, AMPAS.

¹³⁸ Joe McCarthy, “Judge Hamill Hears a Divorce Case,” *Life*, April 11, 1949, 124-126, 128, 132, 134, 137-138, 141-142, 145. The article ends with Hamill giving the couple a sixty day reprieve to get back together, but whether they do so is left in doubt, as is their young son whose fate they will decide. The judge then moves on to the next case in his full docket.

¹³⁹ Edward A. Strecker, “The Vanishing American Father,” *LAT*, February 20, 1949, G4.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

thief.¹⁴¹ Misguided fathers, the article believed, were out of touch, indulgent, and indecisive. This created families on the brink of dissolution. Just ask Mr. Blake.

In Hollywood, divorce scandals continued to make headlines. America's former sweetheart, Shirley Temple, ended her first marriage in 1949 and never looked back. The next year, Ingrid Bergman's fling with director Roberto Rossellini made headlines and writers speculated on her own children's futures.¹⁴² PCA censor Joseph Breen personally begged Bergman to return to her husband and child to save her (and Hollywood's) reputation.¹⁴³ An outraged Senator Edwin C. Johnson even proposed a "Movie Clean-Up Bill"—yet another attempt to license the movies for interstate commerce, just as social guardians did in earlier decades. Films featuring actors "convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude" would be denied these licenses and Johnson directly referred to Bergman: "When she feels an urge to go on an immoral binge [...] she should have respect enough for her chosen profession to retire from it forever and forever remain in retirement."¹⁴⁴ With the family idealized as a source of national strength, those who would forsake it had no right to appear in public as a role model.

As Johnson and other civic leaders believed, the reconstruction of the nuclear family, with a strong father at the head, would give children the moral guidance to

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Charlotte Eaton, "What Future for Pia?" *Modern Screen*, June 1950, 27. For accounts of the stars' divorce, see their autobiographies: Shirley Temple Black, *Child Star: An Autobiography* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), Ingrid Bergman and Alan Burgess, *My Story* (New York: Bantam, 1981).

¹⁴³ See Jack Vizzard, *See No Evil: Life Inside a Hollywood Censor* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1970), 145-148.

¹⁴⁴ See "Movie Clean-up Bill Offered in Senate," *LAT*, March 15, 1950, 1. Other divorce movies include *Chicken Every Sunday* (1949) and *The Marrying Kind* (1952). The first is a comedy set in nostalgic 1900 and the second is a contemporary melodrama with comedic moments. Both end with the marriage intact. *Payment on Demand* (1951) ends in divorce, but the wife, who pushed for divorce, regrets her actions and leaves a candle burning for her ex-husband to return.

become citizen-soldiers and protect the country's values. This belief coalesced into anticommunism, to which Hollywood, already under H.U.A.C.'s magnifying glass, wholeheartedly subscribed. In addition, a belief in militarization and discipline to prevent wayward children stemmed from earlier decades as well. In 1930, even as the Depression worsened, the War Department refused to cut back on Citizens Military Training camps, citing the need to develop individual character during hard times.¹⁴⁵ In 1936, General John J. Pershing looked back on his fifty years of service, stating, "Good citizens cannot shut their eyes to the possibility of wars" and "they owe it to all that is sacred to make ample preparation against an evil day."¹⁴⁶ In the postwar years, as tensions between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. intensified, it seemed the "evil day" arrived, and families became the nation's first defense. Hollywood, under scrutiny for its supposed disregard for the sanctity of marriage and home life, defensively crafted masculine father figures to steer boys straight. The next chapter addresses this form of socialization, specifically, the legacy of militarism and gun culture in American boyhood and its appropriation into anticommunism.

¹⁴⁵ "900 Hear Hurley at Citizen Camp," *WP*, July 4, 1930, 5; John Garry Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers: The Plattsburgh Training Camp Movement, 1913-1920* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 297.

¹⁴⁶ "Pershing Appeals for Preparedness," *NYT*, June 13, 1936, 12.

CHAPTER THREE

PREVENTING DELINQUENCY THROUGH GUN CULTURE, 1949-1954

Pictures dealing with criminal activities in which minors participate, or to which minors are related, shall not be approved if they incite demoralizing imitation on the part of youth.

—Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry, 1934¹

Admittedly, the causes of this situation [juvenile delinquency] are not new, but they have been accentuated many times over by the changed conditions brought on by the war. Juvenile crime flourishes where the home ties have been weakened by divorce, separation, the desertion of a parent or the ignorance, carelessness or indifference of fathers and mothers. Our homes are not the sanctuaries of family life they once were.

—J. Edgar Hoover, 1944²

Next Sunday when you're wakened by the bang-bangs of the neighborhood Hopalong, at least you know your kid is happy, and isn't likely to grow up a gangster or cattle rustler.

—*Los Angeles Examiner*, 1952³

In 1935, sociologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrill Lynd revisited Muncie, Indiana, which they dubbed the typical American “Middletown” in an earlier study in the 1920s, to see how the Great Depression impacted daily life. They noted the townsfolk still believed social norms centered on family life, a continuation from pre-Depression

¹ Geoffrey M. Shurlock to J. L. Warner, letter, December 14, 1954, “The Bad Seed [W.B. 1956],” Motion Picture Association of America. Production Code Administration (PCA) records, Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). Shurlock cited this to Jack Warner, warning him the plot of his production *The Bad Seed* violated the Code’s statute on child criminality.

² John Edgar Hoover, “A ‘Third Front’—against Juvenile Delinquency,” *New York Times* (NYT), February 27, 1944, SM8.

³ “Hopalong Gets Praise as Model to World Youth,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, March 22, 1952. One professor of criminality added westerns “help boys return to a sort of healthy primitivism that has been largely wiped out by modern life.”

years. “A marriage without children is regarded, according to the traditions of this culture, as incomplete,” the Lynds wrote, and “healthy couples” without kids were “alternately sympathized with, gently coerced or condemned as ‘selfish.’”⁴ But the economic crisis made this ideal elusive, as many young people delayed or chose not to marry. The end of the Great Depression in 1941 and the end of World War II in 1945 provided married couples opportunities to create stable home lives. This “making up” led to the baby boom, with four million children born in 1948 alone and a total of 76 million children born by the time the boom ended in 1964.⁵

The addition of kids contributed to the growth of families, but *raising* children to become upstanding citizens constituted a major concern in the postwar years. The issue of juvenile delinquency had long roots since the Industrial Revolution, and concerns over delinquency continued through the “lost generation” of the Roaring 20s, unemployment and restlessness in the 1930s, and wartime anxieties in the 1940s. Even though the United States basked in postwar prosperity, the issue of delinquency seemingly worsened, leaving child experts, civic leaders, and the public perplexed as to how to save morally straying youths.⁶ The traditional means of socialization, the classroom, became controversial as the educational system became enmeshed in accusations of communism,

⁴ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrill Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 164.

⁵ See Victor Brooks, *Boomers: The Cold War Generation Grows Up* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), vii; see also Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶ “Delinquency Fight Starts as War Ends,” *Washington Post (WP)*, August 13, 1945, 5; “Fifth Horseman,” *WP*, April 12, 1953, B4; James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent of the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 79.

subterfuge, and incompetence, which supposedly contributed to delinquency.⁷ In December, 1945, J. Edgar Hoover warned the country of communists using veteran groups and delinquents as fronts to distract Americans. “Undoubtedly,” the *Los Angeles Times* noted, “part of the delinquency is to be traced to the studied efforts of the Commies to flout law and order.”⁸ This concern persisted; in 1957, the Sputnik crisis, alongside reports of teacher and facility shortages, heightened worries about unprepared American children unable to compete on the world stage.⁹

Hollywood was indirectly involved in public education. Programs like the Teaching Film Custodians, a multi-studio group promoting film usage in schools, existed since 1937, but served mostly as a public relations measure.¹⁰ In the late 1940s, studios,

⁷ The Cold War classroom is beyond this dissertation’s scope. See Michael Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth: Coming of Age with the Atom, 1945-1955* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2003); Philip Jenkins, *The Cold War at Home: The Red Scare in Pennsylvania* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), chapter 6; Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Richard C. Lowentin, “The Cold War and the Transformation of the Academy,” in *The Cold War & the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years*, ed. Noam Chomsky, et al. (New York: The Free Press, 1997): 1-34; Charles H. McCormick, *The Night of the Vipers: McCarthyism and High Education in the Mundel Affair, 1951-1952* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); William M. Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 113, 117; John L. Rudolph, *Scientists in the Class Room: The Cold War Reconstruction of American Science Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Andrew Hartman, *Education at the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). For contemporary accounts, see: Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can’t Read and What You can Do About It* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955); Ernest O. Melby and Jack Harrison Pollack, “Fighting Answers to Six Charges Against Our Schools,” *Parents’*, September 1952: 24, 124-25; “Crisis in Education,” *Life*, March 24, 1958, 12, 25; Sloan Wilson, “It’s Time to Close Our Carnival,” *Life*, March 24, 1958: 37.

⁸ “Warning on Juvenile Delinquency and Communism,” *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, December 16, 1945, 4.

⁹ Brooks, *Boomers*, chapter three; Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Cold War Kids: Politics and Childhood in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2014).

¹⁰ See also “The TFC Story: How The Motion Picture Industry Aids Education,” 1952. 12-f.125. Educational Films, 1946-1952, (AMPTP) records, MHL, AMPAS. Teachers also used the “21-inch classroom,” television. See Brooks, *Boomers*, 48-49. For a testimonial, see Sister Marie Cecile to Metro Goldwyn Mayer, letter, November 21, 1951. MPAA Correspondence 1951-1972, f. 335. Educational Films, 1946-1952, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers records, MHL, AMPAS. “Movies in the Classroom,” *NYT*, October 3, 1937, J4; Martin Tolchin, “Teen-Agers Turn Critics for Film on Themselves,” *NYT*, February 2, 1959, 18.

struggling to counter charges of “un-Americanism,” refuted rumors of their exploiting the alleged ties between delinquency and the classroom. In 1947, responding to an article about an upcoming movie “plac[ing] the blame for juvenile delinquency on our educational system,” industry representatives conducted a “thorough check” and reported “no film being made or under consideration in Hollywood would place any blame at all for juvenile delinquency upon the educational system.” Several executives “personally and emphatically” stated they would not criticize public schooling.¹¹ Instead, Hollywood depicted child socialization through another means: gun culture and militarism.

Gun culture and its relationship with boyhood is an understudied facet of the post-war juvenile delinquency scare. This relationship was not new; for decades, militarism served as a socializing agent to masculinize boys, but remained controversial. Critics contended guns contributed to the country’s growing crime rate and parents expressed alarm over their children’s war games, toy pistols, and, of course, the “inappropriate” movie content reinforcing this culture. Supporters of firearms advocated guns served as a rite of passage for boys into manhood. Guns, they claimed, empowered a boy to release his natural aggressiveness and express his devotion to protect his family, country, and patriotic values.¹² Like the economic “evils” of the Depression and fascism in World

¹¹ Movies such as *The Skipper Surprised His Wife* (1950) and *The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T* (1953) used boy characters to criticize rigid upbringings and the corporate “Organization Man.” By the mid-1950s, feature films, notably *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), and documentary shorts, such as *The Teenager in Trouble* (1955), pointed to overcrowded classrooms and urban environments as causes for delinquency.

¹² Angela F. Keaton, “Unholstered and Unquestioned: The Rise of Post-World War II American Gun Cultures” (PhD. diss., University of Tennessee-Knoxville, 2006); Angela F. Keaton, “Backyard Desperados: American Attitudes Concerning Toy Guns in the Early Cold War Era,” *The Journal of American Culture*, 33, no. 3 (2010): 183-196; Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992). The literature is sparse concerning the postwar craze over cap pistols and firearms, but the topic appears in passing. See Tom Englehardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 148-149; Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 90; Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and*

War II, the American “stalemate” in the Korean War reinforced the country’s need to militarize youths to preserve the country’s values.

This chapter looks at three films highlighting this relationship between boys and firearms. Postwar pictures such as *Johnny Holiday* (1949) and *Suddenly* (1954) featured good male role models who instruct boys to use guns to bolster the arsenal of democracy. Movies contesting this ideology, notably *The Gunfighter* (1950), fared less well among the public. The films demonstrate the prominent gun culture associated with boys during the 1950s was not just an aggressive response against communism. Rather, militarism drew directly from the Depression and World War II experiences as a defense mechanism for Americans to train their youths as citizen-soldiers to guard against social and economic uncertainties. In the postwar years, gun culture continued to serve as a means of socialization for boys. Firearms, under the guidance of a strong male role model, reinforced the masculine traits of self-reliance, individualism, and patriotism to not only stymie delinquency, but to prepare boys should depression and war return. As the postwar years progressed, gun culture eventually coalesced around anticommunism, magnified by the Korean War, as the primary threat against the United States. Gun culture enabled boys to stand ready as ideal citizen soldiers against economic hardships, deviant behavior, and subversive political forces.

Context on Cinematic Juvenile Delinquency

Memory (New York: Free Press, 2001), 245. For a personal account, see: Catherine Whitney, *Soldiers Once: My Brother and the Lost Dreams of America’s Veterans* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2009), 21. American gun culture also influenced youth identity and military preparedness in Canada. See Christopher Greig, *Ontario Boys: Masculinity and the Ideas of Boyhood in Postwar Ontario, 1945-1960* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2014), 34-46.

The issue of masculine social “decay” worried reformers, educators, and the public throughout the nineteenth century. Industrialization and urbanization reduced men to emasculated wage slaves, critics alleged, which led to alienation and criminality. In response, social reformers, especially Progressives, drafted child labor laws with the corrupt factory system and its attendant street life in mind. They romanticized farm labor and the “strenuous life,” as Theodore Roosevelt phrased it, in rural environments to build children’s morals and physiques and learn discipline.¹³ Early movies directly reflected these concerns, as pro-labor films connected urban blight and unsafe working conditions to wayward children. In movies, factories transformed bright-eyed kids to downtrodden laborers, prone to tuberculosis, body disfigurement, and death.¹⁴ Other films showed the negative effects of urbanity on naïve youths who easily fell in with the wrong crowds, leading to moral “ruination” and criminality.¹⁵

Child savers promoted the “Great Outdoors,” along with strict discipline and regimentation to rehabilitate undisciplined boys. For instance, the Indiana Boys School—the setting for *Johnny Holiday* (1949; discussed below)—dates its origins to

¹³ Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 77-81; Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency, expanded edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David B. Wolcott, *Cops and Kids: Policing Juvenile Delinquency in Urban America, 1890-1940* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005); Kenneth B. Kidd, *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Susan J. Pearson, *The Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Animals and Children in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence* (New York: Knopf, 1990), chapters 5 and 11; Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 51-54; Sidney Sheldon to Dore Schary, InterDepartment Communication, January 4, 1946. “Juvenile Delinquency: A Treatment,” Dore Schary papers US Mss 37, Box 46, WHS.

¹⁵ Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Lea Jacobs, *The Decline of Sentiment: American Films in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

1867 as a “House of Refuge” for delinquent youths.¹⁶ By the early 1900s, paramilitary groups like the Boy Scouts, with their ranks, uniforms, and rituals, reminded members of their civic duties as citizens and as developing men. In the same time period, educators such as G. Stanley Hall believed military schools made for a “poor man’s university,” allowing boys to build discipline through a system that was “a great promoter of national health and intelligence.”¹⁷ The War Department also maintained military camps during the 1910s through the 1920s, believing the camps instilled adolescents and young men with civic pride and responsibility, thus enabling them to function as civilians in the workforce and soldiers in times of national emergency.¹⁸ During World War I, children actively participated in food drives and “drilled” in organized sports.¹⁹

Gun culture accompanied militarism. Gun culture proponents tapped into earlier fears of lost masculinity. During industrialization and urbanization in the 1880s, the BB Gun and Daisy Air Rifle profited by marketing their products as social markers, a “boy’s first gun,” as youngsters grew into manhood.²⁰ Gun manufacturer Remington tapped into

¹⁶ *The Second Century: A Look at the Present, a Search for the Future: Indiana Boys’ School, Plainfield, Indiana* (Plainfield: Indiana Boys’ School, 1973).

¹⁷ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* Volume I (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 223.

¹⁸ John Garry Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers: The Plattsburg Training Camp Movement, 1913-1920* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky 1972).

¹⁹ Jonathan Weier, “The Building of Boys for War: “The Militarization of Boys’ Work in the Canadian and American YMCAs,” *Children’s Literature and Culture of the First World War*, eds. Lissa Paul and Rosemary R. Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2015): 162-178; Justin Nordstrom, “A Salesman Soldier for Uncle Sam”: Images of Childhood in US Food Conservation, 1914-1919,” *Children’s Literature and Culture of the First World War*, eds., Lissa Paul and Rosemary R. Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2015): 179-198.

²⁰ Neal Punchard, *Daisy Air Rifles and BB Guns: The First 100 Years* (St. Paul, MN: MBI Publishing 2002).

the same ideal when it introduced a “Boy Scout model” in 1913.²¹ Firearms, these manufacturers advertised, not only enhanced civic duty, via the connection to the Boy Scouts, they also reflected a maturing masculinity.

However, the connections between firearms and children generated concern. Social critics claimed children’s fascination with guns led to de-sensitized, violence-prone kids.²² Congress passed the first federal gun control measures during Prohibition in 1927 to limit access to cheap pistols sold through mail order, and again in 1934.²³ During the Depression, the lack of two-parent households worried reformers who worried over children growing up without the proper guidance to handle weapons. As social order tottered, gangsters became folk heroes among hard-hit, ethnic working-class men wanting to “strike back” at the system. Movies like *The Public Enemy* (1931) and *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934) opened with delinquent, impoverished young boys who shoot their way through competitors and lawmen to become big-time gangsters. From 1930 to 1933, the hardest years of the Depression, Hollywood released seventy-eight gangster pictures before the genre died down, largely due to the strengthening of the Production Code and public outcry from the Legion of Decency.²⁴

²¹ Roy M. Marcot, *The History of Remington Firearms: The History of One of the World’s Most Famous Gun Makers* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2005), 62.

²² See H.S. Kay, “A Dangerous Plaything,” *NYT*, November 8, 1914, C2; ““Cops and Gangsters’ New Game for Youngsters,” *LAT*, September 1, 1931, 9; Alexander DeConde, *Gun Violence in America: the Struggle for Control* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), chapter 9; Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children’s Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166-167.

²³ Harry L. Wilson, *Guns, Gun Control, and Elections: The Politics and Policy of Firearms* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 87.

²⁴ Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 110.

In 1934, coinciding with Prohibition's repeal and the end of the bootleg industry, Hollywood's Production Code censors largely deglamorized the gangster. However, the industry understood the necessity of guns as visual props to intensify drama and excitement, and opted not to banish guns entirely. Instead, the socialization surrounding firearms shifted to emphasize law and order. Notably, the tommy gun became an exclusive weapon for law enforcement personnel.²⁵ Nor did the studios act alone; J. Edgar Hoover promoted toy guns and government agents, the "G-men," to attract the gangsters' fan culture.²⁶ The proliferation of "Junior G-Men" in movies, radio, comic strips, and pulp novels legitimized and glorified gun usage for kids through a similar patriotic lens.²⁷ According to this ideology, guns alone did not create juvenile delinquents and there was no such thing as a "bad boy," to paraphrase Spencer Tracy's popular portrayal of Father Flanagan in *Boys Town* (1938). Rather, the filmic Flanagan knew little tough-guys merely needed good guidance and safe environments away from cities to transform into idealized citizens. Instead of turning to crime, cinematic gangs

²⁵ Herbert Blumer and Philip M. Hauser, *Movies, Delinquency, and Crime* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); Courtney Riley Cooper, *Designs in Scarlet* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939). For selected secondary sources, see David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Jonathan Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Creaser to Touch of Evil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, and Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Richard Maltby, "Why Boys Go Wrong: Gangsters, Hoodlums and the Natural History of Delinquent Careers," last modified 2005, accessed February 24, 2017, <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic232335.files/3.%20Maltby.doc>.

²⁶ In 1937, Hoover told parents "to let children play with toy guns." Quoted in "War Toys?" *Rotarian*, December 1940, 19. He gave Shirley Temple a toy machine gun so America's Sweetheart could yield deadly force under proper guidance, namely, the nation's top lawman. See "G-Man is Donor of Shirley's Gun," *WP*, October 29, 1937. See also Kenneth O'Reilly, "A New Deal for the FBI: The Roosevelt Administration, Crime Control, and National Security," *The Journal of American History* 69, no.3 (December 1982): 638-658.

²⁷ Athan G. Theoharis, ed., *The FBI: A Comprehensive Reference Guide* (Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press, 1999), 272-279; Bob Herzberg, *The FBI and the Movies: A History of the Bureau on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Hollywood* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), Chapter two.

like the “Dead End” kids became mainstream stars in “reform school” pictures, by cleaning up dirty streets, battling crooked politicians, and celebrating a working-class, ethnic heritage.²⁸

Reformers believed sending boys and young men away from crime-littered cities and into the “great outdoors” symbolically and physically revived their civic pride. During the Great Depression, work camps for young men echoed the ideology of discipline, hard work, and spiritual rejuvenation.²⁹ The New Deal’s Civilian Conservation Corp reflected this ideology for restless men who had slim job prospects; as the *Washington Post* reported, the CCC addressed the “‘wandering children’ of the Russian type”—described as “the first gust of a revolutionary storm” by giving these “boy-gangs” education, employment, and recreation.³⁰ One “roving boy” even named Franklin Roosevelt his “all-time hero” for a thirty-month stint in the Civilian Conservation Corp and for the CCC’s taking “a multitude of young men off the road and

²⁸ On the Dead End Kids and their successors, see David Hayes and Brent Walker, *The Films of the Bowery Boys* (New York: Citadel Press, 1984); Richard Roat, *Hollywood’s Made-to-order Punks: The Complete Film History of The Dead End Kids, Little Tough Guys, East Side Kids, and the Bowery Boys* (Albany, GA: BearManor Media, 2009). In 1944, actor Huntz Hall, looking back at the 1930s “Dead End” films, faulted the series for contributing to wartime delinquency and for criticizing social institutions. Hall, discharged from the service due to poor eyesight, learned of reports of the Nazis’ editing movies to show “the degradation of youth in ‘decadent democracies,’ especially America.” Hedda Hopper, “‘Dead End Kid’ Rues Past,” *LAT*, October 8, 1944, B1.

²⁹ Melissa Bingmann, *Prep School Cowboys: Ranch Schools in the American West* (Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press, 2015). For a series of personal anecdotes, see: Cynthia Quicksall Landsberg and Judith Pettibone, *The Hero Within: Healing Troubled Boys at Colorado Boys Ranch* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2007). Space prohibits a deeper examination of postwar films hailing the Boy Scouts. Like *Johnny Holiday*, pictures such as *Boys Ranch* (1946), *Room for One More* (1951) and *Mr. Scoutmaster* (1956) demonstrated an immersion in the rural environment rehabilitated delinquents. While reviewing the comedy in *The Bride Goes Wild* (1948), Joseph Breen wanted any parodist reference to the Boy Scouts removed. He feared the public backlash against a venerated institution for child socialization would damage the picture’s salability. See Joseph Breen to L.B. Mayer, letter, August 2, 1946, “The Bride Goes Wild [MGM, 1947],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. The script changed the Boy Scouts to the fictitious “Junior Woodmen.”

³⁰ “Boy-Gang Problem Strenuously Attacked by New Deal’s CCC,” *WP*, February 25, 1934, B1.

keeping them on the straight and narrow.” He added, “We were under military discipline. When World War II came, we made good soldiers.”³¹

World War II heightened the patriotic gloss concerning gun culture and militarism. After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, many boys revised their Christmas wish-lists. They wanted tommy guns, military hardware, and other accessories to avenge their country’s honor and dead, replacing conventional toys.³² As earlier generations did during World War I, children served in many capacities, such as citizen soldiers on scrap collection drives or play-acting as junior commandos.³³ In 1943, President Roosevelt praised the Boys’ Clubs of America for their work as Victory Volunteers. “I have always advocated the plan of citizenship training sponsored by your organization through its programs of physical training in the manual arts,” the founder of the CCC proclaimed. He called their work “of real significance” when the country was “beset with enemies who would destroy our way of life and who would destroy us.”³⁴ The Boy Scouts continued to do their part, earning Marksmanship Merit Badges; advertisements such as Winchester’s 1944 “Every Boy Has His Hero” campaign connected guns with enculturation and patriotism. During times of war, boys who earned their merit badges “are writing new and unforgettable chapters in the moving history of America,”

Winchester announced, showing a Scout fully equipped with maps, knapsacks, and his

³¹ Quoted in Errol Lincoln Ulys, *Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move in the Great Depression* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 233-235.

³² “War Dominates Children’s Desire for Toys; Many Ask Santa to Send Machine Guns,” *NYT*, December 9, 1942, 34.

³³ For typical examples of headlines, see “U.S. Urged to Train Boys to be Officers,” *NYT*, May 13, 1942, 17; Frederick P. Graham, “Some Wartime Books for Boys,” *NYT*, November 15, 1942, BR24. See also: Lisa Oddian, *The Forgotten Generation: American Children and World War II* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011); Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, Chapter one2.

³⁴ “President Praises Boys’ War Effort,” *Christian Science Monitor (CSM)*, April 8, 1943, 3.

Winchester rifle.³⁵ “On guard for America since 1866,” the company’s motto boldly proclaimed, connecting its past with “the historic Seventh of December,” and former scouts who, as men, were now role models for the current scouting generation.³⁶

American demobilization after the war enabled servicemen and women to reconnect with their families. While the family unit was essential for stability and adjustment during a time of transition, critics feared a reduced army could not respond to continual political tensions. The Truman administration proposed universal military training, in which all young men, upon turning eighteen, would undergo one year of basic military training.³⁷ Promoters of universal military training, such as Secretary of State George C. Marshall, justified the program as part of the “democratic traditions” with citizens fully engaged with the country’s defense.³⁸ Echoing the rhetoric of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Marshall advocated a “school of democracy” to foster strict discipline and skills for survival.³⁹ The advent of atomic weapons in World War II ended the war, but Americans needed to stay prepared should the Soviets acquire the bomb.

³⁵ Winchester Repeating Arms Company, “Every Boy Has His Hero,” Advertisement. *Boys’ Life*, August 1944, 31.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Michael Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Amherst: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119-158; Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Cold War Kids: Politics and Childhood in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 2014).

³⁸ William A. Taylor, *Every Citizen a Soldier: The Campaign for Universal Military Training After World War II* (Austin: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 29.

³⁹ General Henry Harley “Hap” Arnold of the Army Air Force also believed in rural rehabilitation. Speaking from his fifty-acre ranch, Arnold wanted a “youth camp movement—country wide—something that would use the fullest our vast string of national and State parks and recreation areas.” He added the “finest people anywhere are the people who live their lives in the forests and mountains,” specifically, “the trained men who run our forest services, our parks, and our fish and game workers.” The reporter noted Arnold was also California’s fish and game commissioner. See James D. White, “‘Hap’ Has a Delinquency Cure,” *WP*, July 27, 197, B2. For a similar view, see “Juvenile Delinquency Offset by Gardening,” *WP* April 26, 1949, B2. Historian Judith Sealander notes the CCC’s unusual success and

As a national program, universal military training did not pass. The proposal quieted down under President Dwight Eisenhower, who thought the program too costly and his “New Look” placed a greater emphasis on air power than ground troops.⁴⁰ The concept of universal military training also reminded critics of a Nazi-styled “cheerful obedience to the will of the leader.”⁴¹ Opponents contended this militarization was not, “and cannot be, a benign, socially-conscious institution acting as god-father to our youth.”⁴² They claimed the army “*is no youth movement*” designed to teach kids how to “clean their teeth [or] do 3rd grade arithmetic” because “the meaning of true discipline [came from] our homes and our schools.”⁴³ While critics admitted youths needed strict guidance, they wanted parents to impart civic values, not the army.

The outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, heightened the tensions over manhood, militarism, and youth. The U.S. “lost” China to communism in 1949, political

popularity led to later government-led training programs, such as the Job Corps in the late 1950s and 1960s, which failed. See Judith Sealander, *The Failed Century of the Child: Governing America's Young in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 155-183.

⁴⁰ John Sager, “Universal Military Training and the Struggle to Define American Identity during the Cold War,” *Federal History* 5 (January 2013): 57-74. See Michael S. Neiberg, *Making Citizen-Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), Chapter two. On the stigma of universal military training as an overreach on the part of the federal government and a misuse of tax dollars, see Hogan, *A Cross of Iron*, Chapter four.

⁴¹ Louis Bromfield, et al., *Militarism in Education* (Washington D.C.: National Council Against Conscription, 1950), 39. See also Albert E. Kahn, *The Game of Death: Effects of the Cold War on Our Children* (New York: Cameron & Kahn, 1953), chapter three.

⁴² Taylor, *Every Citizen a Soldier*, 86.

⁴³ Ibid. Some critics noted Franklin Roosevelt specifically directed the War Department not to train CCC enlistees in military tactics. One journalist explained Roosevelt did not object to military training per se, but the CCC comprised of lower-class boys and, “in event of war, those who had the CCC camp training would be the first to be exposed to the danger,” while upper-class youths “would have their battle experience postponed.” Roosevelt rejected military training in the CCC because it was “a discriminatory attitude against the poor.” See Arthur Rock, “In the Nation,” *NYT*, October 30, 1947, C24.

commentators asserted, and the country dared not “lose” Korea as well.⁴⁴ But civic leaders wondered if American G.I.s had the discipline and fortitude to contain communism. They cited precedence from World War II, when recruiters rejected high numbers of draftees due to psychological and mental immaturity.⁴⁵ In 1950, with the country once again sending men into combat, media reports warned about an emasculated “creampuff army” due to the “babying of soldiers.”⁴⁶ As the so-called police action dragged on, opportunists, notably Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, used the stalemate to criticize government officials. According to McCarthy, the emasculated troops reflected the bungling of foreign policy by incompetent, weak-willed men in the State Department, especially Secretary of State Dean Acheson. The senator labeled Acheson a “pompous diplomat in striped pants with a phony British accent,” as if the Secretary deliberately took on foreign-airs to distance himself from his all-American roots.⁴⁷ McCarthy’s accusations of masculine “delinquency” in the top echelons of

⁴⁴ See “U.S. Aid Vital to China, Mission Head Asserts,” *LAT*, February 29, 1948, 9; “U.S. Arms to China Urged by Dr. Tsiang,” *NYT*, December 23, 1948, 3; “U.S. Aid to China is Urged by Legion,” *WP*, September 1, 1949, 3; Walter Lippmann, “U.S. Lost China when F.D.R. Bowed to Chiang,” *LAT*, September 14, 1949, A4.

⁴⁵ Gladys Gardner Jenkins, Helen Shacter, and William W. Bauer, *These are Your Children* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1949), 6; George J. Hecht, “Top Priority for Children,” *Parents’*, March 1951, 26; Naoko Wake, “The Military, Psychiatry, and ‘Unfit’ Soldiers, 1939-1942,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 62, no.4 (October 2007): 462-94. Homosexuality was one of the main criteria, see Alan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1990), chapter 6.

⁴⁶ Hanson W. Baldwin, “Need of Training Revealed in Korea,” *NYT*, November 3, 1950, 4. A later study stated “overwhelmingly the most talented section of America’s young manhood remained in colleges at home,” performing technical and managerial duties, which left the “lesser” men to man the front lines. See Max Hastings, *Korean War* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987), 175.

⁴⁷ Robert L. Besiner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 305. Ironically, Acheson was born in Middletown, Connecticut—the town had the same name the Lynds used to characterize the “average” American town, its inhabitants, and their character.

Supporters of the State Department responded with anecdotes about masculine “front-line diplomats” who battled communists and their dupes. See also “State Department Held Incompetent,” *NYT*, December 18, 1951, 20. The *New York Times* singled out Donald R. Heath, American Minister for Indo-

government reflected the connotations between masculinity, militarism, and gun culture throughout the twentieth century, especially the past two decades of Depression and war, now retooled for communism.

The potential “delinquency” of government officials, ranging from communism to homosexuality, reinforced the need for proper male role models to guide boys into American manhood. This fear complemented the reformation of the nuclear family. The movies promoted fathers who surmounted the hardships of the past two decades, such as *Any Number Can Play*’s Charley Kyng (see Chapter two), as ideal masculine figures to head the family and mentor their sons. Gun culture became a way for boys and fathers to cement their bonds. In 1946, child expert Dr. Spock told parents not to worry about boys play-acting and “shooting you dead.” The boy is “just passing through the necessary stages in the taming of his aggressive instincts that will make him a worth-while citizen.”⁴⁸ The movie *Johnny Holiday* (1949) drew upon this legacy of militarism and gun culture to address continuing concerns over delinquency in the postwar years.

Johnny’s Country Holiday

According to its promotional ballyhoo, *Johnny Holiday* depicted an accurate picture of delinquency. The film’s producer, Roland W. Alcorn, was a former youth delinquent and credited his rehabilitation to reform school. After making a fortune in South American and Kansan granaries before his thirtieth birthday, he returned to his roots to tell “my original story” based “on my experiences as a boy in reform school—the

China, for exceptional bravery. “This is not the ‘cookie-pusher’ diplomacy of the ‘striped-pants’ school that critics of the State Department are so fond of talking about,” the newspaper huffed. See “Front-line Diplomats,” *NYT*, December 25, 1951, 30.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946), 252-253

Indiana Boys' School in Plainfield, Indiana."⁴⁹ Alcorn invested one million dollars to tell a semi-autographical movie dedicated "to the youth of America."⁵⁰ [Figure 11]



Figure 11. *Johnny Holiday* (1949) via Ronnie Alcorn, the former delinquent. Alcorn "began on the wrong side of the tracks" and now, "at the age of 30, a millionaire Hollywood producer" and a role model for *Parents'* "Medal of the Month" award (April 1950, 15). Author's collection.

As a novice to Hollywood, Alcorn's movie experience serves as a case study of the industry crafting a juvenile delinquent from a "fallen" boy who made good in life and now in the movies. The *Hollywood Reporter* noted juvenile delinquency could stump

⁴⁹ Richard L. Coe, "One on the Aisle," *WP*, June 22, 1950, 12; R.W. Alcorn to Greyson Bautzer, letter, June 24, 1949, "Alcorn Prod.-1949-June-Aug ('Johnny Holiday')", George L. Bagnall Papers, Box 1, WHS. Alcorn recalled he "was bored stiff in the plane on a wheat-buying trip" to Brazil, "so I just began to write." A.H. Weiler, "Assorted Notes About People and Pictures," *NYT*, January 15, 1950, X7.

⁵⁰ "United to Release First by Alcorn," *LAT*, July 24, 1949, D3.

producers wanting to create a melodrama with more punch: “first, because people don’t like to be preached to, and, second, because unless the subject is handled with intelligence and restraint, something very hard or very maudlin is inevitably the result.”⁵¹ Producers used over-sentiment or excessive violence to showcase troubled youths. The word “delinquent” itself connoted lurid sex and crime. In 1946, when RKO producer Dore Schary planned a film tentatively entitled *Delinquent*, he turned to local policemen for advice, because many movies “have appealed to sensationalism and have lacked the objective educational point of view that is important when approaching this kind of problem.”⁵² Even with his precautions, the Motion Picture Association of America told Schary the title “Delinquent” was dangerous. Titles could not “be sensational or attempt to cater to an irresponsible audience” for it could “quite easily lend itself to the sort of exploitation that gets the industry into trouble.”⁵³ Schary dropped the picture.

In contrast, Alcorn’s biopic, with its triumphal, real-life ending, depicted a real, successful reform school. The inclusion of a guest appearance by Indiana’s governor lent an atmosphere of authenticity, not exploitation.⁵⁴ The happy ending (as evidenced by

⁵¹ Clipping, *Hollywood Reporter (HR)*, December 12, 1947, “The Dangerous Years [Wurtzel-1947],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁵² Dore Schary to Eugene W. Biscailuz, letter, January 4, 1946, “Juvenile Delinquency, a treatment,” Dore Schary papers, US Mss 37AN Box 43, WHS.

⁵³ David Palfreyman to Dore Schary, letter, January 29, 1946, “Juvenile Delinquency, a treatment,” Dore Schary papers, US Mss 37AN Box 43, WHS.

⁵⁴ Alcorn stated “the school and its inmates have been placed completely at my disposal for the picture.” R.W. Alcorn to Greyson Bautzer, letter, June 24, 1949, “Alcorn Prod.-1949-June-Aug (“Johnny Holiday”), George L. Bagnall Papers, Box 1, WHS. In 1950, sociologist Albert Deutsch noted Indiana Boys’ School circa 1949 had changed significantly in recent years. Deutsch originally observed conditions in Indiana Boys’ School in 1947 and found them deplorable. The superintendent, a former dairy man, believed in corporal punishment and isolation, downplayed education, and wanted “military training here,” which meddling social workers opposed: “These boys could use it. If we keep ‘em at it all the time, it keeps ‘em out of mischief. We could get them neat-cut uniforms, like the new army ones. The boys would love it.” Deutsch noted conditions improved in 1948, when Governor Henry F. Schricker, the governor who appeared in the film, entered office, replaced the superintendent with a staff of child welfare workers

Alcorn's example) and a mawkish Christmas sing-along provided by popular songwriter Hoagy Carmichael reinforced the family-friendly tone. Most critics approved; *Variety* noted the film avoided the "preachment" stigma with a "warmly human picture that will send the customers home in hearty agreement with the Abraham Lincoln-inspired theme 'A man who never made a mistake never made anything.'"⁵⁵ The trade journal later clarified: "Its grosses potentially in the key city first runs is [sic] dubious, but it will undoubtedly score in the subsequent runs and the sticks." The reviewer believed "tie-ins with the public schools, PTA, etc., should be naturals."⁵⁶ Its observations reflected the movie's theme; only "in the sticks"—the rural and small town theaters—would boys find rehabilitation from the corrupt city environment.

In the postwar years, the Civilian Conservation Corps model, and paramilitary institutions in general, lingered in public memory as an effective means of checking juvenile delinquency. "The boys who were in the CCC became happier men, better citizens, better workers, and better soldiers because of their CCC experience," recalled one newspaper reader, fretting over the "shocking accounts" of "criminal gangs of boys

(presumably those seen in the movie), and "introduced many heartening reforms." See Albert Deutsch, *Our Rejected Children* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 47, 54.

⁵⁵ "Feature Reviews," *Daily Variety* (DV), November 18, 1949, 3.

⁵⁶ "Feature Reviews," *Variety Weekly* (VW), December 14, 1949, 8. *Johnny Holiday* earned strictly average grosses, with the first run market earning an average 101 percent of the gross. See "Barometer," *Boxoffice BookinGuide* (BOBG) supplement, *Boxoffice* (BO), July 8, 1950, 1. One Nebraskan exhibitor noted, "We missed the boat by not plugging it more. Don't be afraid to recommend it. However, it isn't big enough for top billing." "The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures," BOBG supplement, BO, October 21, 1950, 4. Alcorn provided a signed testimonial for his movie posters: "I was this boy! I was born to vice and violence...on the other side of the tracks...where to be good is to be *good* and dead! This is my story!" *Johnny Holiday*, insert poster, 1949, author's collection. Alcorn's name carried more weight in agribusiness than the movies, and reviewers did not believe his statement would draw patrons. See: "Feature Reviews," BOBG supplement, BO, November 26, 1949, 15.

and girls” in “crowded city areas.”⁵⁷ The reader proposed a “Conserving American Boys” movement as a rural-based federal program, in which “good citizenship should prepare the boys for military service.” Former CCC locales even served as makeshift camp grounds for local anti-delinquency programs.⁵⁸ By 1954, politicians acknowledged “a need for something along the lines of the old CCC program” to aid the older, troubled teen “no longer interested in going to school,” who “finds employment difficult to get,” and who “does not fit in too well any longer in his own home.”⁵⁹

Johnny Holiday thus draws from decades of social anxieties concerning urbanization, youth crime, and militarism. The film’s opening shot—an urban night scene filled with long shadows and an underworld of squalor and vice—features children as budding criminals. Older teen Eddie Dugan (Stanley Clements) and his younger accomplice, Johnny Holiday (Allen Martin, Jr.), fence hot goods to Eddie’s father, Barney (George Cisar). Even in the opening introduction, the film’s behind-the-scenes interplay reflected the issue of gun culture, boyhood, and delinquency. The elder Dugan suspects the boys of holding out on stolen goods and roughens them up. Eddie originally responds by drawing a gun on his father. The Production Code Administration’s chief censor, Joseph Breen, objected to this sequence, explaining to Alcorn of both their positions and responsibilities as purveyors of public taste:

It is not good, we feel, to suggest on the screen that a sixteen-year-old boy would threaten his father with a gun. We must ask that there[sic] use of a gun be eliminated entirely in these scenes—possibly some less lethal prop

⁵⁷ A.S.L., letter, “The Reader Writes,” *CSM*, July 23, 1951, 16.

⁵⁸ Shepard, Pat. “Ornery Youngster Rises to Assistant Police Chief,” *LAT*, October 28, 1945, A1.

⁵⁹ *Juvenile Delinquency, California: Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), 333.

could be substituted which would suit the purposes of your storyboards. Further, the brutalizing of the boy [Johnny Holiday] by Barney is unacceptable and would have to be toned down considerably.⁶⁰

The chief censor specified: “Barney kneeing Eddie in the face, as well as the brutal slapping and backhanding of the boy” had to go.⁶¹ A father-as-criminal accomplice was objectionable enough, but Breen allowed the character to remain. Nor did he mind young Dugan threatening his father for dramatic purposes. However, as the industry’s chief censor, he drew the line at giving Eddie a firearm with which to do so. Breen further drew from older traditions; as historian Gary Cross points out, the Federal Communications Commission attacked “blood and thunder” programming on the radio airwaves during the Depression; the fear of gangsterism, hoodlumism, and delinquency associated with firearms encouraged popular media to police themselves lest government agencies issue stringent regulations on behalf of children’s moral values.⁶²

Alcorn insisted on staying “true” to his life story. Associate producer Frederick Stephani met with censors to discuss the scene. PCA staffer M.E. Hohenfield summarized a “lengthy discussion” and “a number of alternate suggestions” before they agreed Dugan would “merely reach for a gun, but before he could get his hands on it,

⁶⁰ Joseph Breen to Frank Parminster, letter, June 7, 1949, “Johnny Holiday [Alcorn, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. Breen had the same qualms about *Boys’ Ranch* (1946), a picture about a real rehabilitation home in the west. He wrote Louis B. Mayer, questioning a shot of one boy aiming a gun at another. “Accordingly, we urge that you seriously consider omitting this detail.” See Joseph Breen to L.B. Mayer, letter, 9 November 1945; letter, November 20, 1945, “Boys Ranch [MGM 1945],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁶¹ Joseph Breen to Frank Parminster, letter, June 7, 1949, “Johnny Holiday [Alcorn, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. The final film features Holiday’s beating off-screen. The camera dollies from the action as Barney slaps him and the boy’s cries echo on the soundtrack. For audiences slow on the take, Johnny tells Eddie, “Your old man sure hits hard, don’t he?” *Johnny Holiday*, directed by Willis Golbeck (Alcorn Productions, 1949) VHS (Republic Entertainment, 1998).

⁶² Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children’s Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 167.

Barney, the boy's father, would grab him." Hohenfield clarified, "At no time would Eddie actually have a gun trained on his father." Perhaps sensing Eddie's inability to directly threaten his father lacked drama, Stephani opted to dump the gun angle entirely, "provided it would be acceptable for Eddie to draw a knife on Barney. We told him that, under the circumstances, this would be acceptable."⁶³ A knife was certainly no less lethal than a firearm, and the censors routinely urged caution for knife fight scenes, but the Production Code censors compromised by allowing knives as the lesser evil of the two choices. While children could misuse knives, the censors viewed knife-fights as a more "acceptable" type of violence than the use of firearms.

The authorities catch Johnny and send him to Indiana Boy's School. A kind of summer camp like Roosevelt's CCC, the reform school has a machine shop, a shoe shop, a bakery, and, for Johnny, a farm to revitalize his masculine virtue.⁶⁴ "Life in the reform school never looked more inviting," the *New York Times* observed, pointing to the lack of fences around the "rolling, green country," no bars on the windows, and "occupational therapy is liberally and wisely employed."⁶⁵ The boy wises up when gruff ex-cavalry sergeant Walker (William Bendix) takes a shine to him. Walker's military credentials

⁶³ M.E. Hohenfield, "Memo for the Files," June 16, 1949, "Johnny Holiday [Alcorn, 1949]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. Many "J.D." films feature knife fights for their "rumbles" rather than depict street shootings. The subject has room for further exploration concerning knives and the codes for masculinity.

⁶⁴ The school is not an idealized haven. Alcorn captures the rivalry between teachers (the shoe shop instructor resents his low point on the chain of command). In the film, the boys also have their own form of justice; when one runaway returns and the adults punish the entire school, the boys corner the offender in the shower and pummel him. Breen approved the sequence but warned against showing nudity in the shower room; the close proximity of the bare bodies suggested homoeroticism, especially when the boys usher their victim off screen for their retribution.

⁶⁵ "A View of Life in a Reform School," *NYT*, May 17, 1950, 36. Cinematographers symbolized the contrast between city and country life. The opening urban scene takes place at night with deep shadows while the film introduces the school in bright sunlight.

affirm him as a good model to reform undisciplined boys and he carries his old service revolver as a reminder of his authority. Employing a “soft touch,” Walker assigns Johnny to a mare, Nellie, and the boy falls in love with the animal. As noted in chapter two, pets serve as a means to rehabilitate kids and teach them social responsibility. Nellie’s pregnancy excites Johnny and her colt will reinforce their bonds. Here, the boy’s relationship with his horse takes on a military slant. Walker, steeped in military history, wants to name the colt after World War I General John J. Pershing. Johnny gets into the spirit and decides on a contemporary reference, “Eisenhower,” whom he calls a “real general.”⁶⁶ At the film’s midpoint, Johnny drills with the other inmates in cadet-fashion, complete with military uniforms and shouldering rifles. When Indiana Governor Henry F. Schricker drops by, the boys parade in his honor and he applauds the inmates’ display. He tells them this strict discipline “should and I know will, make good citizens of all of you. When you leave here, your slate will be clean.”⁶⁷

Schricker’s message of mixing militarism with the creation of good citizenship reflected the patriotism of World War II, in addition to the popular memory of the CCC camps from the Great Depression. Although the CCC ended in 1942, as early as 1944, officials considered reviving the program for demobilized troops as a means of employment and promoting “the interest of national defense,” the *Washington Post* reported.⁶⁸ According to the newspaper, a permanent CCC would maintain national parks, ensuring “adequate supplies of lumber and pulp wood should another war

⁶⁶ *Johnny Holiday*, directed by Willis Golbeck (Alcorn Productions, 1949) VHS (Republic Entertainment, 1998).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “Group to Plan Conservation Corps Revival,” *WP*, August 14, 1944, 7.

develop.”⁶⁹ This connection between paramilitary camps, national interests, and citizenship continued throughout the postwar period beyond juvenile delinquency as a de facto means of youth socialization. As symbols of masculinity, patriotism, and militarism, guns played a central role in this association. In 1948, the Boys Scouts’ magazine, *Boys’ Life*, featured advertisements for “A Complete Home ‘Shooting Gallery’” with firearms advertised as “safe fun for the kids.”⁷⁰ During the 1950s, the toy industry bloomed, toughening boys with military hardware lest they become effeminate and deviant.⁷¹ Television shows and commercials similarly prepped boys to defend democracy on the home front, the “wild frontier,” and in outer space via ray guns.⁷²

In *Johnny Holiday*, the Indiana governor’s speech also sets up Johnny’s fall in the second half of the film. During the parade, the police bring in Eddie Dugan. The older teenager immediately plans to escape and take young Holiday with him. Johnny represents Eddie’s final grasp as a gang leader and Eddie instantly resents the positive father figure: the gruff, but lovable, ex-cavalry sergeant. The school’s matron suggests Eddie is a “bad boy” beyond redemption. Since Hollywood did not believe in innate “evil” children, the resident psychologist corrects her: “No, he’s a sick boy” with a “big shot complex.”⁷³ Eddie’s “big shot complex” not only defies the Indiana School’s

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “\$15.00 Gun only \$4.95,” Advertisement. *Boys’ Life*, December 1948, 45.

⁷¹ Keaton, “Backyard Desperados,” 183-196; Roberts and Olson, *A Line in the Sand*, 245. For a personal account, see Whitney, *Soldiers Once*, 21.

⁷² Ann Kordas, “Wally Cleaver Goes to War: The Boy Citizen-Soldier on the Cold War Classroom Scenes,” *Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 163-173; Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdin Van Riper, eds., *1950s “Rocketman” TV Series and Their Fans: Cadets, Rangers, and Junior Space Men* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 97-114.

⁷³ *Johnny Holiday*, directed by Willis Golbeck (Alcorn Productions, 1949) VHS (Republic Entertainment, 1998).

mission, but the history/legacy of rural rehabilitation and socialization. Indeed, when Johnny first spots his former mentor while parading for Governor Schricker, the distraction causes the boy to break formation and he then trips over his rifle trying to get back with his company. Eddie grins in victory and Sergeant Walker groans with embarrassment.

Unfortunately, Walker himself severs Holiday's reform when Nellie has complications giving birth. The sergeant chooses to save the newborn colt rather than lose both horses. For the first time, Walker draws his service pistol and uses it, shooting Nellie. In Holiday's eyes, Walker not only kills a defenseless animal, but using a firearm compounds the betrayal. As an ex-military officer and the boy's father figure, Walker's use of lethal force against a boy's best friend undercuts the societal expectations of an officer's duty to serve and protect—the very message J. Edgar Hoover advocated for acceptable gun use in the 1930s. Even considering Eddie's attempt to murder Walker before Johnny's eyes in one scene, Nellie's death is the most violent scene in the film. This betrayal drives Johnny berserk and he rejects Walker completely.⁷⁴

Eddie exploits Johnny's trauma to accelerate his great escape. He affirms his victory by taking everything Walker values: "Walker's car, Walker's boy, and Walker's

⁷⁴ Johnny did not react as violently as the British. British censors, more stringent than Joseph Breen, ordered several cuts in the film including the "whole incident showing punishment of boy by other boys in the shower" discussed in footnote 64, Eddie's attempt to kill Walker, and the entire sequence of Nellie's death—this last cut removed the motivation for Holiday's break with Walker. Local Censor Report, Great British, May 30, 1958, "Johnny Holliday [Alcorn 1949]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. In addition, the public relations department in England told distributor United Artists the "name of the Governor of Indiana means nothing in this country" and recommended removing his Honor's speech in the parade grounds. See Arthur Kelly to Fred Meyers, letter, May 15, 1950, "Arthur Kelly File, 1946-1951, Kelly-Alcorn productions, Ltd.," United Artists Corporation Collection, Series 6B, Box 1, WHS.

gun.”⁷⁵ [Figure 12] By stripping the sergeant of his masculine attributes—his army weapon, his military transport, and his symbolic son—Dugan compounds Walker’s failure to redeem Holiday and pervert the state’s arsenal for criminal purposes. He no doubt plans to take all three back to the corrupt Big City, where the military hardware and Holiday’s presence will supplement his “big shot complex” as the masculine role model in Johnny’s life. Walker intercepts them, and in the final showdown, Johnny spurns his former gang leader and calls for help. Eddie turns the gun on Johnny but Walker goads the big-shot wannabe into plugging him instead. The good inmates storm the scene and haul Dugan away.



Figure 12. Urban corruption. Eddie Dugan (Stanley Clements, left) plans to take Walker’s (William Bendix, center) gun, car, and boy (Allen Martin, Jr., right) to the City. *Boys Prison* is the re-release title of *Johnny Holiday*. Author’s collection.

⁷⁵ Eddie forces Johnny to hotwire Walker’s car. Breen recommended the “actual details of what Johnny is doing to the car should be masked from the audience.” Joseph Breen to Frank Parminster, letter, June 7, 1949, “Johnny Holiday [Alcorn, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

Dugan stealing Walker's gun and shooting the ex-sergeant gave the Production Code Administration pause. Given the strong contextual associations between boys and guns, Joseph Breen approved various incarnations of good guys—lawmen, G.I.s, and cowboys—who used guns effectively while the villains often missed or superficially wounded their targets. Relegating the “bad guys” to poor shots saved the lives of filmic heroes and robbed the villains of their masculinity. Their failed socialization included an improper introduction to guns and their inability to defend themselves. These moral failures made them consistently miss the good guys during shootouts, which, in turn, led to their downfalls.

When Ronald Alcorn wanted Eddie to shoot six bullets into Walker, Breen balked. The censor condemned the shooting, even for melodrama's sake. Even though Eddie stood point blank next to his target, Breen refused to allow him to hit Walker, writing, “We cannot approve having the boy deliberately pump six bullets into the man. Some means will have to be found to limit this to one or two.” To make the point clearer, Breen wanted to remove the “juvenile delinquent” aspect entirely, recommending “in all seriousness that this boy [Eddie] be older than sixteen. This, in our opinion, is most important.”⁷⁶ Dugan's final age remains undisclosed, although in casting the moderately hairy-chested actor Stanley Clements, Alcorn implied his villain is older than the script's designation. PCA censor M.E. Hohenfield confirmed Alcorn's agreement to tone the climax down: Dugan “will not actually pump six bullets into the man; five of the shots will go wild, the sixth will hit and wound Walker.”⁷⁷ Even though an adult in

⁷⁶ M.E. Hohenfield, “Memo for the Files,” June 16, 1949, “Johnny Holiday [Alcorn, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

years, Dugan's poor shots demonstrates his lack of maturity. Without a good father figure, he never learned how to use a gun correctly. Audiences, familiar with Code-approved movie tropes, may have suspected Walker was never really in danger. The final scene shows a scrubbed-clean Johnny thanking a cane-wielding Walker—the sergeant's injury in the line of duty gives his wound a heroic air and the ex-military man hobbles with dignity. The boy promises to drop by and care for his colt, Eisenhower. As they depart, a new kid with a surly attitude enters Indiana Boys' School. An exasperated Walker appeals to the heavens: "Here we go again!"⁷⁸

Walker's last line underscored boyhood socialization as a protracted process. Eddie Dugan did not succeed in appropriating the retired sergeant's boy, car, and gun for criminal purposes. Still, reformers worried, without a good adult's guiding hand (i.e., not Eddie's father), boys, guns, and cars contributed to delinquency.⁷⁹ Concerning guns, Eddie's poor marksmanship demonstrates the way Hollywood symbolized a lack of maturation. But outside theaters, not everyone agreed with this position. Critics of gun culture feared an idolization of firearms at a young age corrupted kids, regardless of adult intentions. A boy's conception of guns and ammo could directly challenge the adults'

⁷⁸ *Johnny Holiday*, directed by Willis Golbeck (Alcorn Productions, 1949) VHS (Republic Entertainment, 1998).

⁷⁹ Space prohibits a discussion of cars and teenage delinquency. The "hot rod" epidemic exploded on the national consciousness in the postwar years. As wartime kids and older baby boomers earned their first set of "wheels," they individuated their flivvers. By tinkering, teens—mostly boys in popular culture—stamped aged cars with their personalities: increased speed, custom paint jobs, and modifications to enhance their presence on the road and among peer groups. Trade journals stated the "irresponsibility of kids at the wheels of stepped-up cars is something that must be curtailed" as boys "sport around with girls, all for male vanity." "Reviews of New Films," *The Film Daily (FD)*, January 27, 1947, 7; Jack D. Grant, "'Devil on Wheels' Top Notch Exploitation Feature Film," *HR*, January 22, 1947, 3; "Feature Reviews," *DV*, January 22, 1947, 3. Pictures such as *The Devil on Wheels* (1947) and *Hot Rod* (1950) urged adults to supervise hot rodding, in the same way they did with guns. Reformers suggested speedsters made effective messenger boys for civil defense. "Speedsters May be in Civil Defense Setup," *LAT*, September 1, 1950, 2; "Police Say Hot Rod Race Supervision Pays Off," *LAT*, November 5, 1950, 43.

efforts to discipline him.⁸⁰ One news report called the toy pistol an “equalizer,” meaning the child, “in his imagination, [is] on a par with an adult world that is forever telling him what to do and what not to do.”⁸¹ For celluloid delinquents with delusions of grandeur, guns, as an “equalizing” agent, refuted the moral outlook Hollywood’s father figures claimed to uphold. Fathers, too, could also reject the socialization between firearms and children. *The Gunfighter* (1950) presented one such troubled father figure who unsuccessfully challenged gun culture for turning kids into hounded outlaws. The movie’s unsatisfying box office returns suggest the public disapproved revisionism of gun culture and its ties to social maturation as the United States entered the Korean War.

Addressing Gunfighters and the Cowboy Mythos

Johnny Holiday presented Indiana Boys’ School as a microcosm of all reform schools. The producer, Ronald Alcorn, “made good” and attributed his rehabilitation to his experience and good male role models. The film drew from a public-approved tradition of rural rehabilitation and militarism as appropriate means for boys to mature.

However, the public’s associating gun culture with youth socialization extended beyond the social woes surrounding urbanization and industrialization in the 1920s and 1930s. Rather, the public read gun culture in the fabric of American history, especially the “Wild West.” The western frontier long reigned in the American imagination as the final refuge where boys experienced the “strenuous life” and transform their soft, city bodies into hardy men. The Wild West had deep roots in the public imagination and popular amusements; dime novels, circus acts, and Wild West extravaganzas showcased

⁸⁰ See “Denied Gun, Boy Starts Collection,” *LAT*, March 23, 1940, 8; “Boys to Face Court on Car Theft Charge,” *LAT*, March 20, 1941, A1.

⁸¹ Gerald Walker, “Should Small Fry Carry Small Arms?” *NYT*, June 29, 1958, SM40.

the west as a frontier region where individualism and beliefs in Manifest Destiny played out before audiences. Gun culture, as highlighted in biographies and casual role playing, centered on rugged cowboys, dashing cavalry officers, daring outlaws, and even women sharpshooters who braved the West and “civilized” it from “savages.”⁸²

Gun violence as a sign of rugged masculinity in the Wild West extended to the urban jungles of Prohibition and the Depression. At times, the boundaries between heroic cowboys and antihero gangsters blurred. In 1931, fan magazine scribe Helen Louise Walker observed, “You can’t tell the hero from the heavy, to save you.”⁸³ However, Walker pointed out the “good” cowboy always triumphed over “bad” gangsters; when eastern rum runners head west in *Gun Smoke* (1931), Walker notes the city ne’er-do-wells “are all killed—every one of ‘em; cowboys are better shots than gangsters.”⁸⁴ By 1934, the mandatory Production Code-approved happy endings required the hero to always out-draw the villain in the final showdown, as Eddie Dugan found out in *Johnny Holiday* when he failed to hit his target standing a few feet away from him.

Westerns enjoyed a new popularity during the postwar years.⁸⁵ In the Great Depression, cowboys symbolized individualism, self-reliance, and folksiness on par with

⁸² See Will Wright, *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1983); David Hamilton Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth* (Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2001); Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular Culture* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), chapter 6; Matthew Carter, *Myth of the Western: New Perspectives on Hollywood’s Frontier Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁸³ Helen Louise Walker, “Hunting for a Hero,” *Motion Picture*, July 1931, 66.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 67. Newspaper accounts provided real life examples of urban gangsters who fled into rural areas could not escape justice from modern “cowboys.” See: “Wild West Tamed Gangster,” *NYT*, May 17, 1931, 58; “Boulevard Gunfight Brings Fine of \$300,” *WP*, August 19, 1926, 3.

⁸⁵ The Old West served as a popular, but cheap, form of B-movie for most of motion picture history. By the 1950s, the themes of rugged individualism and the pioneer spirit civilizing the frontier

the pioneers they protected.⁸⁶ Aggressors usually came in the form of outsiders: Native Americans, Mexican bandits and outlaws, and bankers—the latter, usually corrupt “money-men” from the East—resonated with Depression-era audiences.⁸⁷ The legacy of the everyman-cowboy continued into the postwar period as gunslingers championed concepts of family, hard work, community, and private property as the traits that tamed the American frontier, and which delinquents like Johnny Holiday came to value in rural boys camps.⁸⁸ In 1950, a poll conducted among boys listed the western as their most favorite genre: the “average boy attends motion pictures approximately once a week” or “3.6 times a month—and enjoys Westerns more than any other type of film fare.”

inaugurated the “super” western, and launched John Wayne’s popularity into various “top-ten” lists for the rest of the decade. Television also thrived on the genre; as many as thirty-seven westerns aired simultaneously in the late 1950s. See Jim Collins, “Faces Without Names,” in *Back in the Saddle: Essays on Western Film and Television Actors*, ed. Gary A. Yoggy (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998), 145. Davy Crockett especially resonated with children and Disney cashed in on a \$20 million marketing bonanza for coon-skin caps, buckskin outfits, and other paraphernalia linked to the King of the Wild Frontier. See Paul F. Anderson, *The Davy Crockett Craze: A Look at the 1950s Phenomenon and Davy Crockett Collectibles* (Hillside, IL: R&G Productions, 1997), 52. In 1958, Ernst Dichter, head of the Ernst Dichter Institute for Motivational Research, commented, “Children are seeking for an opportunity to explain themselves in terms of the tradition of this country. Crockett gave them that opportunity.” See Anderson, *The Davy Crockett Craze*, 64. MGM spoofed the western craze in *Callaway Went Thataway* (1951), depicting a singing cowboy/Lone Ranger hybrid and his producers out to cash in on a kiddie TV hero. Fortunately, in a week-long Boys Week in Los Angeles, the honored Code-of-the-West prevailed. The studio inserted a closing title card: “This picture was made in the spirit of fun, and was meant in no way to detract from the wholesome influence, civic mindedness, and the many charitable contributions of Western idols of our American youth, or to be a portrayal of any of them.” See *Callaway Went Thataway*, directed by Melvin Frank (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2015).

⁸⁶ The “singing cowboy,” in particular, emphasized the gunslinger’s grassroots through his folk tunes. See Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana: University Press of Illinois, 2002), Douglas B. Green, *Singing in the Saddle: The History of the Singing Cowboy* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005).

⁸⁷ Francis M. Nevins, “Through the Great Depression on Horseback: Legal Themes in Western Films of the 1930s,” in *Legal Realism: Movies as Legal Texts*, ed. John Denvir (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 44-69; R. Philip Loy, *Westerns and American Culture, 1930-1955* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2001), 159; Jeremy Agnew, *The Creation of the Cowboy Hero: Fiction, Film, and Fact* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2014), 139; Michael Duchemin, *New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy* (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016).

⁸⁸ On the image of the cowboy as a role model for delinquents, see Bingmann, *Prep School Cowboys*, 173-175.

Thirty-six percent favored westerns as their favorite genre, with twenty-five percent preferring comedies and eighteen percent liking mysteries/adventure stories. The article used these statistics as a guide, noting “movie attendance has slumped off appreciably since the advent of television,” which also had an abundance of westerns.⁸⁹

Gun culture, as a historic force in the American western mythology, became a source of stability during the postwar years. Even though firearms played a rather minor role in American history up to the Civil War, gun manufacturers and nativist fears cashed in on guns by marketing them as symbols of national and personal security.⁹⁰ Studios used the western shoot-em-ups and high-noon showdowns as low-cost and bankable sources of income, accounting for nearly a quarter of films in 1948.⁹¹ In 1947, film critic Leonard Spinrad, looking back at the genre’s evolution since nineteenth century Wild West shows, observed westerns had one consistent theme. Westerns, “expressed in simplest terms” were episodes of “Good meets Evil, Good fights Evil, Good beats Evil.”⁹² Concerning boys, gun enthusiasts connected this moral maturation with the rustic frontiers of the past. In 1950, *Boys’ Life*, sponsored a Daniel Boone Target Shoot where Scout Troops, or members of the National Rifle Association’s Junior Rifle Club,

⁸⁹ “The Westerns Preferred,” *Motion Picture Herald (MPH)*, November 25, 1950, 40. On the western genre in the postwar years, see: Stanley Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 6-12; Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, chapters 7-10; John V.H. Dippel, *War and Sex: A Brief History of Men’s Urge for Battle* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2010), 249. The “west” also played out among East and West Germans re-creating their identity. See Pawel Goral, *Cold War Rivalry and the Perception of the American West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁹⁰ Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), chapters nine and ten.

⁹¹ Jeremy Agnew, *The Old West in Fact and Film: History Versus Hollywood* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012). 63.

⁹² Leonard Spinrad, “Boots and Saddles,” *NYT*, June 8, 1947, X4.

could show off their skills with firearms and win rifle accessories.⁹³ In 1960, the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute issued a pamphlet celebrating the tie between guns and Americanism. The writer traced the Pilgrims to the present, of which the "priceless tradition" of guns represented "a freedom which few nations enjoy. We find it in the movies, television, radio, and in the active participation of millions of Americans in the shooting sports." Accordingly, the "great saga of the winning of the West" infused "the great tradition and romance that is the heritage of our children."⁹⁴

Firearms figured heavily into this youth socialization, but, as the negotiations between *Johnny Holiday*'s production team and the Production Code Administration showed, gun culture remained controversial. As they did during Prohibition and the Great Depression, social critics expressed worries about firearms' impact on children's morals. Even during the patriotic atmosphere of World War II, the proliferation of toy weapons gave some psychologists pause. Anna Freud (Sigmund's daughter) worried the war supplemented a child's aggressive tendencies to smash things.⁹⁵ As postwar concerns over juvenile deviancy escalated, news reports added to the anxiety.⁹⁶

Johnny Holiday exploited these reports, as the film's pressbooks linked Johnny to "bad boys." **[Figure 13]** Outside theaters, parents and child experts remained divided

⁹³ "Daniel Boone Target Shoot," *Boys' Life*, June 1950, 4.

⁹⁴ "What Every Parent Should Know When A Boy or Girl Wants a Gun!" (New York: Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute, n.d. [ca. 1960])," 5. On Ringo's myth, see Jack Burrows, *John Ringo: The Gunfighter who Never Was* (Phoenix: The University of Arizona Press, 1987). Burrows notes many movies and television shows used the name "Ringo" to signify a tough cowboy (88-91).

⁹⁵ See Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 64.

⁹⁶ For examples, see "Two Boys Held in Shooting," *LAT*, October 16, 1946, 12; "Town Terrorized by 2 Boys, 8 and 10," *NYT*, November 8, 1947, 30; "'Gun Wasn't Loaded,' Parent Sobs," *LAT*, May 21, 1949, A1; "Boys Invade Home and Slug Woman," *LAT*, September 4, 1949, 11.

over whether gun culture helped kids work off hostility. In 1947, Albert B. Hines, executive director of the Madison Square Boys Club of New York, stated “delinquency has changed for the worst.”⁹⁷ Tracing juvenile delinquency since the club’s founding in 1884, Hines based his assessment on an alarming trend: “physical violence has decreased while stealing with guns has increased.”⁹⁸ In 1952, psychologist Vera Emanuel questioned the idea of teaching children to pump an “enemy full of lead,” even in play-acting.⁹⁹ She saw a correlation between gun play, violence in the media (including “casual gun talk”), and the country’s increasing violent crime rate. Some law enforcement officials agreed, noting clever teenagers modified cap pistols to shoot real bullets.¹⁰⁰ Gun culture, they argued, contributed to delinquency, not thwart it.

⁹⁷ “Boys’ Leader Traces Delinquency Trends,” *NYT*, May 20, 1947, 22.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Vera Emanuel, “Are We Making Gunmen of Our Children?” *Parents’*, May 1952, 48-50. The magazine identified Emanuel as a visitor from an unidentified “foreign country.” The writer implied her nationality and gender prevented her from understanding the appeal guns held for American boys. See also “Chicago Toy Pistol Ban Hits Small Fry,” *LAT*, February 19, 1950, 3 (toy sellers needed \$1 licenses to sell toy guns; parents called the ordinance “silly”); Lazarus Monfried, “To Ban Toy Pistols,” letter, *NYT*, April 12, 1954, 28. Monfried proposed banning one “source of evil,” the “cruel fighting, shooting or murder” in the movies. One reader stated Monfried needed to look at the lack of family togetherness, not toys. See Vincent Bryan, “Play and Potential Delinquents,” letter, *NYT*, April 17, 1954, 12.

¹⁰⁰ “Adapted Cap Pistols Can Kill, County Police Warn Parents,” *WP*, July 3, 1952, 23; “Probe Told of Juvenile Gang Wars in New York,” *WP*, November 21, 1953, 1; “Cowgirls” were also a problem: see “Girl with Cap Gun Arrested for Holdup,” *LAT*, May 6, 1954, A1.



Figure 13. Pressbooks for *Johnny Holiday*. The original pressbook (left) shows the star contemplating a backdrop of headlines about delinquents. For the re-release, entitled *Boys Prison* (right), Astor Pictures Corp. continued this form of exploitation.

Films critiquing gun culture as a form of youth socialization played into this controversy.¹⁰¹ Twentieth Century-Fox's *The Gunfighter* (1950) explicitly challenged gun culture by tackling the hailed image of the mythic heroic cowboy. The plot, loosely based on real-life “bad man” John Ringo, presents the outlaw and killer as Jimmie Ringo (Gregory Peck), a weary figure who wants “to forget his sanguinary past” as a “top gun.”¹⁰² Outdrawing him becomes the “top prize” for fame among young, trigger-happy teenagers. Ringo tires of these fame-seekers hounding him—to kill him—and yearns to

¹⁰¹ Some films, notably *Gun Crazy* (1949), presented mixed messages. Without a father, Bart Tare lands in juvenile court for stealing a desired firearm. Tare later falls under the charms of a woman and the two “gun crazy” youths go on a rampage. In the end, rather than murder a childhood friend-turned-cop, Tare shoots his partner and dies in a hail of police bullets. Despite a surface reading against firearms, the film indicates the boy’s misuse of guns came from the lack of a male role model and a domineering female accomplice. Fittingly, his best friend/cop guns him down.

¹⁰² Harry Brand, Synopsis of *The Gun Fighter*, “The Gun Fighter [20th C-Fox, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

settle down and live in a proto-suburbia, with a schoolmarm wife, a white picket fence, and a quiet life with their son Jimmie. Unfortunately for him, “the young, foolish ‘squirts’ in every bar-room won’t let him peruse his peaceful way” because they all want the honor of killing Ringo.¹⁰³ Producer Darryl Zanuck hoped this contradiction of the heroic, lone cowboy trope would spark controversy and box office revenue, by placating critics who blamed movies for encouraging violence, while Ringo’s complex characterization would attract fans wanting more than singing cowboys and simple plots.¹⁰⁴ He believed the movie could become a “real classic” by turning the gunslinger into a “pathetic figure of a lonely man who realizes his mistakes too late in life and tries in vain at the last moment to free himself from the mess of his own making.”¹⁰⁵

Ringo’s son Jimmie (B.G. Norman) plays the most crucial part in this revisionist narrative. All the kids idolize Ringo and Jimmie has bragging rights when he learns the famous gunman is his father and they share the same name. Ringo does not share the boy’s enthusiasm and promises the boy’s mother their son will not following in his footsteps. According to the Production Code’s film synopsis, when Jimmie asks his father to name “the toughest person he ever met, Ringo names [the sheriff], since he wants the child to get the right impression about outlaws,” namely, killers like himself.¹⁰⁶ Ringo further orders Jimmie to keep his distance from guns and himself—at least, while

¹⁰³ Bosley Crowther, “The Screen: Three Features Have Premieres” *NYT*, June 24, 1950.

¹⁰⁴ On the “sophistication” of westerns, see Hubbard Keavy, “And the Villain Still Pursued Him,” *WP*, March 1, 1942, L1.

¹⁰⁵ Darryl Zanuck to Nunnally Johnson, letter, June 14, 1949, “Gun Fighter—corr. #382,” Gregory Peck Collection, 36 Peck B34, Gregory Peck papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁰⁶ Harry Brand, Synopsis of *The Gun Fighter*, “The Gun Fighter [20th C-Fox, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

he is still a gunfighter. He orders his son to clear out the congregated youngsters “hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous killer” from the area where the film’s anticipated showdown will take place.¹⁰⁷ Young Jimmie does so, albeit using his newfound authority as the famed outlaw’s son to carry out father’s wishes.

The idea of a disenchanted gunslinger telling his son not to follow his footsteps challenged the conventional western. Zanuck stressed Ringo’s disdain for gun fighting would generate controversy—and revenue—among moviegoers: “It will probably startle and horrify certain dyed-in-the-wool Western fans who expect Roy Rogers to end up harmonizing with Burl Ives but these are the very things that will make it great.”¹⁰⁸ Zanuck wanted Ringo to deliberately counter the “folksy” cowboy of the Depression and war years with a more historically accurate icon. Some reviewers also appreciated the preaching against guns; the *Los Angeles Times* reported Peck’s “moralizing” speech at the end, where a lifetime of gunslinging inevitably leads to death at the hands of a teenage hoodlum, “is not too hard to take.”¹⁰⁹ **[Figure 14]**

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Darryl Zanuck to Nunnally Johnson, letter, June 14, 1949, “Gun Fighter—corr. #382,” Gregory Peck Collection, 36 Peck B34, Gregory Peck papers, MHL, AMPAS. Despite the message, Zanuck urged Johnson to focus on “riproaring entertainment” rather than preachment. He wanted to avoid a debacle like *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943), an anti-lynching picture which he derided as “probably the only Western in the history of motion pictures that ended up in the red” despite its low cost. Zanuck believed audiences found message pictures “entirely too intellectual, too morbid, and the ending [when the lynching occurred] was total futility.”

¹⁰⁹ Edwin Schallert, “‘Gunfighter’ Vital Old West Subject,” *LAT*, June 24, 1950, 9.



Figure 14. Downplaying gunfighters. Ringo (Gregory Peck) de-romanticizes his son Jimmie (B.G. Norman) about his lifestyle. Author's collection.

Unfortunately for Zanuck's hoped-for profits, *The Gunfighter* did not connect with audiences. Another critic for the *Los Angeles Times* explained the "novel idea" of a gunfighter's regret was "precisely its weak point."¹¹⁰ The "tall, gaunt, very convincing gunfighter" who refuses to fight flew in the face of audience expectations and their perception of cowboys as historic figures and as role models for boys. Indeed, while Ringo wants to re-connect with his family and retire, he clearly played no role in his son's upbringing; the boy did not even know his father's identity until Ringo identifies himself. In hindsight, Zanuck recognized he violated too many motifs and moviegoers,

¹¹⁰ Richard Griffith, "'Gunfighter's' Novel Idea Surprises Critics," *LAT*, July 4, 1950, 8.

mainly women, hated the aesthetics of a peace-toting gunfighter, symbolized by Gregory Peck's walrus moustache. Zanuck recalled women complaining, "If they wanted an ugly man, why didn't they take an ugly actor? Why waste Peck?" He later sighed, "I would give \$25,000 of my own money to get that moustache off Peck."¹¹¹ Peck recalled the mustache as part of an effort to make Ringo "like the people in daguerreotypes of the early West."¹¹² But audiences rejected this revisionism, clearly preferring the "handsome" heroes in the mythic West and all the accompanying characteristics, even if this image flew against historic authenticity.

Even worse than Peck's facial hair, *The Gunfighter* premiered two days before North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel.¹¹³ With headlines about "pampered" soldiers and wishy-washy statesmen in the press, coupled with the lack of immediate military success, the film's message went against public sentiment at a time when the country required a strong military presence to protect the free world—just as cowboys protected innocent townsfolk. Ringo's ideology and experience resisted American gun

¹¹¹ Quoted in Rudy Behlmer, ed., *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: the Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox* (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 190.

¹¹² Quoted in Gerald Molyneaux, *Gregory Peck: A Bio-bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 103. Decades later, producer Nunnally Johnson, who contributed to the screenplay, recalled the story about Peck's mustache as "nonsense." He also denied any intention to revise the western myth, although Zanuck's correspondence suggests otherwise. See Tom Stempel, *Recollections of Nunnally Johnson*. (Regents of the University of California, 1969), 280, *Internet Archive*, last modified November 3, 2008, accessed August 16, 2016, <https://archive.org/stream/recollectionsofn00john#page/n5/mode/2up>. Stempel's biography of Johnson, based on this interview, asserted, "Audiences brought up on *Jesse James* [1939; a very popular Depression-era biopic Johnson wrote, glamorizing the western outlaw] were put off by the relatively realistic description of Ringo, especially since *The Gunfighter* was one of the first films to begin to dismantle the popular myths of the West." Tom Stempel, *Screenwriter: The Life and Times of Nunnally Johnson* (San Diego: S.A. Barnes, 1990), 129.

¹¹³ Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warriors*, 96. Film scholar Stephen McVeigh characterizes *The Gunfighter* as "an approaching apocalypse," with Ringo, "like a Cold War superpower," running a mental countdown as his death draws near. However, 1950s Americans saw gun fighting in a different light than Ringo. For the public, a forceful show of arms would push the communists out of Korea and win the war. See Stephen McVeigh, *The American Western* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 81.

culture with ties to socialization and patriotism, including decades of accepted motifs in motion picture westerns. Now, the public, awash in the need to bolster a hard masculinity to win the Korean War, rejected *The Gunfighter*'s deglamorizing gun violence. Instead of seeing Ringo using his six-guns to defend himself in a thrilling climax, audiences see him lecturing to his young son about the evils of being a "tough guy." He then tries to sneak out of town in the final reel. He does not want to ride into the sunset; rather, Ringo plans on settling down in domestic bliss. He tells his sweetheart the idea "just kinda came over me. The way getting older comes over ya."¹¹⁴ Although only thirty-five years old, Ringo plans to hang up his guns.

Even in retreat, Ringo fails. A teenage gunslinger wannabe, Hunt Bromley (Skip Homeier), shoots him in the back just as Ringo prepares to flee. Bromley, like *Johnny Holiday*'s Eddie Dugan, has a "big shot complex" and sees gun play as his claim to fame just as Eddie wanted ex-sergeant Walker's gun, car, and Johnny. Bromley fully subscribes to the cowboy myth and Ringo tries to dispel such illusions. The gunslinger, tired of facing "a squirt like you" every place he goes, tells Bromley the image the teenager is building for himself is that of a "cheap, no-good bar-room loafer."¹¹⁵ Hunt is initially not a delinquent; regardless of his surly personality, he breaks no laws until he murders Ringo. When he shoots Ringo and takes his place, he becomes a wanted man in the same way Ringo was. The film implies Hunt, and Ringo's son and friends, shared a blind form of gun worship glorifying killers as tragic heroes, just as Americans glorified bootlegging gangsters during Prohibition. In *The Gunfighter*, justice and retribution did

¹¹⁴ *The Gunfighter*, directed by Henry King (Twentieth Century-Fox Film, 1950), DVD (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2008).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

not come from the law, but from other wannabes wanting to take their places. Indeed, the sheriff, whom Ringo told his son was the “toughest guy” he knows, does not arrest Hunt. The lawman avenges his friend’s death by kicking Bromley out of town as Ringo’s successor, with all the fame and sorrow accompanying it. One reviewer commented on the “irony of [Ringo’s] situation,” noting “his reputation as bad man supreme” made every “happy young trigger finger full of bravado and ready to take him on” to be like him.¹¹⁶ Gun culture, the film implied, corrupted kids and led them to a lifetime of loneliness. No matter how hard gunfighters tried to dispel the myth, boys only saw the glamour of gunplay.

Audiences rejected the message as much as they hated Peck’s ugly mustache. The picture earned above average grosses in the first run market of big cities, but the returns disappointed Zanuck, given the production’s budget and big-named stars.¹¹⁷ He called the premiere “miserable” and predicted the popular Peck would help “make a profit although not as much as *Yellow Sky* (1949),” a more traditional and violent western he produced two years earlier (also starring Peck) but he thought was inferior.¹¹⁸ He attributed the lower earnings to the violation of “so many true Western traditions that it goes over the heads of the type of the people who patronize Westerns, and there are not

¹¹⁶ Red Kann, “Review: The Gunfighter,” *Motion Picture Daily*, April 26, 1950, 3.

¹¹⁷ “Boxoffice Barometer,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, July 22, 1950, 1. *The Gunfighter* cost \$1.42 million to produce and earned \$1.95 million in domestic rentals. See Aubrey Solomon, *Twentieth Century-Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 222, 223 and 245. Actual profit margins are unavailable. One optimistic report in 1950 noted ticket sales were improving, reversing the box office slump, and listed *The Gunfighter* as one of example. However, he also added, “The International Crisis [i.e. Korea] was given little credit for the better business.” See “Definite Trend in Film Income Rise,” *Motion Picture Daily*, August 15, 1950, 5.

¹¹⁸ Darryl Zanuck to Nunnally Johnson, letter, July 13, 1950, Henry King Collection, Folder 15: The Gunfighter, Henry King papers, MHL, AMPAS.

enough of the others to give us the top business we anticipate.”¹¹⁹ Zanuck was correct about the mixed reception. One showman thought the film was a “small town natural” simply because it was a western, but another noted the film lacked “the hard-rising, fist-fights, and gunplay that the ordinary western has, but when things do happen, they happen fast.” The exhibitor stated his audience appreciated the novel ideas about a disillusioned gunfighter, but he was “sorry to say that I just broke even on the show.”¹²⁰ One exhibitor said, “My only comment on this picture is that it is different from the superwesterns,” although this “difference” did not pay because “we did below average business on this one.”¹²¹ One exhibitor complained further, describing *The Gunfighter* as “a western with a good moral and suspense but not much action. It is not worth anywhere near the top bracket that I paid for it.”¹²² He concluded with a warning to Twentieth Century-Fox to stop “misallocating pictures” or skip his Lansing, Iowa, location altogether.

The Gunfighter’s critique of gun culture as glorified delinquency did not appeal to audiences during the Korean War. At a time of crisis, moviegoers wanted a renewed commitment to hard masculinity, which gun culture provided during the Depression (with cowboys as the symbols of individualism and patriotism) and World War II. For some critics of gun culture, this glorification of firearms amounted to a near conspiracy between the media and government. One critic in the film theory journal *Film Sense* pointed out how “the films of violence and sadism” met “with the needs of the Defense

¹¹⁹ Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 189-190.

¹²⁰ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, November 4, 1950, 3.

¹²¹ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, January 13, 1951, 3.

¹²² “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, March 31, 1951, 4.

Department, the State Department, and the industrialists who benefit from a staggering 'defense' budget."¹²³ According to the journal, the "Mickey Spillane mentality on celluloid" desensitized moviegoers to the horrors of atomic war.¹²⁴ Zanuck's goals notwithstanding, this narrative mandated Twentieth Century-Fox downplay *The Gunfighter*'s anti-violence/anti-gun message to youths. Indeed, *Boxoffice* placed a positive spin on the film's morals by distorting it; among the suggested taglines was "None Shot Straighter or Quicker Than Jimmie Ringo...The True Story of the Southwest's Greatest Gunman."¹²⁵ Although this tagline accurately reflected Ringo's dead-shot aim, the filmic gunslinger considered his "true" story a tragedy and his "straight shooting" nothing to boast about. One critic sarcastically predicted the "members of the Society of the Preservation and Promotion of Western Pictures" would form a posse to protect the legacy of westerns. *The Gunfighter* "is so subversive to the whole way of life that has been developed so beautifully by the cowboy pictures that it threatens to overthrow the concept of pioneer Western life as handed down by our

¹²³ Quoted in Albert E. Kahn, *The Game of Death: Effects of the Cold War on our Children* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), 115.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ "Feature Reviews," *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, April 29, 1950, 16. The studio's advertising also contradicted Zanuck's intended message. The pressbook reported Peck's two young sons forced their dad to wear Ringo's guns around the house and play Cowboys and Indians every night. See "Gun-Toting Gregory, Night and Day," *The Gunfighter* pressbook, "The Gunfighter" Core Collection Files (CCF), MHL, AMPAS. The studio also boasted it owned the largest arsenal outside the U.S. Army: "if some hostile nation should attempt a surprise raid on the California coast," the studio claimed its 15,000 items, ranging from antique flintlocks to flamethrowers, would save the country. Twentieth Century-Fox could equip 20,000 men "with enough weapons and field pieces to wipe out a city of 100,000." Louis J. White, the studio's chief prop man, admitted they did not have an atom bomb, but he "feels certain that he can approximate the blast." See "'Gunfighter' Studio Owns Largest Private Armory," *The Gunfighter* pressbook, "The Gunfighter" CCF, MHL, AMPAS.

fathers.” The critic thought the movie “may alienate a large segment of the nation’s moppets,” even if serious adults might appreciate the unusual storyline.¹²⁶

As the Korean War progressed, Americans emphasized the connections between guns and youths, with appropriate adult supervision. American psychiatrist and father Sidney Green countered Vera Emanuel’s “foreign” interpretation of gun culture with a male, native-born perspective. Green claimed guns did not psychologically harm children. Rather, “the emotionally healthy child who plays at killing with guns today is pretty sure to grow into a considerate adult, a person who uses good judgment and restraint with an irritable boss and who can control his temper when everything goes wrong.”¹²⁷ Guns served as a character-building tool for the corporate office, as militarism did for CCC workers in the Great Depression and Ronald Alcorn/Johnny Holiday in Indiana Boys’ School. Green echoed Dr. Spock’s postwar argument about boys using guns to release their natural aggression, not lead them toward delinquency. The boy who blasted make-believe villains to relieve his frustration had a fantasy safety valve should an “irritable boss” make unreasonable demands.¹²⁸

More important, guns protected the nation and its ideals from harm. Ringo made his son vow not to take up firearms, but the Korean War and anticommunism made this promise seem silly. In the context of war, Ringo was an inappropriate father figure for young Jimmie. *The Gunfighter* took place in the mythic west, but in contemporary melodramas, the average American family also recognized the necessity of firearms,

¹²⁶ T.A.W., “The Theatre,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 1950. 12.

¹²⁷ Sidney Green, “Are We Making Gunmen of Our Children?,” *Parents*, May 1952, 50, 100.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

should dangers surface.¹²⁹ The Korean War represented such an outside threat, films like *Suddenly* (1954) depicted subversive elements also lurking at home, endangering ordinary citizens and the President alike. The title notwithstanding, the President's endangerment did not "suddenly" emerge. Rather, the tensions concerning delinquency from earlier decades played out in the Korean War. The movie ultimately turned towards anticommunism to address these concerns.

Suddenly: Arming Boys against Unreformed Delinquents

In 1953, independent producer Berman Schwarz and screenwriter Richard Sale met with Production Code Administration censor Eugene Dougherty to discuss *Suddenly*, a project named after the film's setting in a sleepy California town. Dougherty found *Suddenly* troublesome due to two issues. The first, a Code violation dating from the Depression days, involved a "machine gun" in criminal hands and "the unnecessary killing of several policemen."¹³⁰ He deemed these technical problems easy to fix with simple script changes. His "far more serious" objection concerned the plot, "an attempted assassination of the President of the United States."¹³¹ The premise posed a "very serious problem with public relations which might bring a great deal of grief to the

¹²⁹ Like Zanuck's experience with *The Gunfighter*, director John Huston recalled *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951) played to empty houses. Huston believed his film about cowardice during the Civil War brought the Korean War "very close to home" and "they wanted no part of it. It had something to do with bad timing." He added he himself did not want any reminders of "what was going on." His casting of Audie Murphy, the highest-decorated American soldier from World War II-turned actor, as the film's lead was an intentional attempt at irony, but audiences rejected it. See George Stevens, Jr., ed., *The Great Moviemakers of Hollywood's Golden Age at the American Film Institute* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 357; Edouard Laurot, "An Encounter with John Huston (Excerpts from a Conversation)," *Film Culture* 2, no.8 (1956); reprinted in Robert Emmet Long, *John Huston: Interviews* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2001): 12-18, quote on 17.

¹³⁰ E.G. Dougherty, "Memo for the Files: Suddenly," April 14, 1953, "Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹³¹ Ibid.

motion picture industry as a whole.”¹³² Dougherty suggested Schwarz contact the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) president, Eric Johnston, to request a “formal opinion of the Board of Directors, as to the acceptability, from a policy standpoint, of this basic story idea.”¹³³ By sending the filmmakers directly to the top of the industry’s administrators, Dougherty hoped Schwarz and Sale would realize the seriousness of the issue and, perhaps, abandon the project. If they did not, Johnston, not the Production Code Administration, would face any public outcry.

The Production Code Administration headed off Schwartz and contacted Johnston directly. In a letter to the producer, chief censor Joseph Breen summarized the industry’s position. Since Schwartz was an independent producer, not affiliated with any member studio, and not a member of the Association himself, Johnston personally did “not feel warranted in giving a decision on ~~such~~ a question of policy” to someone not under his jurisdiction.¹³⁴ But Johnston “has discussed the ~~story~~ script with a number of people in his office, and they agree with him in most earnestly recommending and urging him that this story be not produced.”¹³⁵ Breen admitted Schwarz’s independence allowed creative freedom not permitted to a large studio and “if the finished picture is approved under the Code, the Production Code Administration will have no other recourse but to approve

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Joseph Breen, untitled note, April 30, 1953, “Suddenly [Schwarz 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

it.”¹³⁶ A few days later, Breen reiterated the position, concluding, “The decision to proceed with, or abandon, this project, is for you to make.”¹³⁷

Schwarz lost his nerve and abandoned the project. Johnston breathed easily for six months and then the scenario returned. Robert Bassler, another independent producer, bought the rights to *Suddenly*.¹³⁸ Like Schwarz, Bassler’s independence freed him from MPAA guidelines. After a week of reviewing the script, Breen dutifully outlined the Code’s objections, all of them technical issues. He could not omit the assassination plot, but he toned down the violence. He cited criminal usage of machine/tommy guns violated the Code and firing into the camera “is invariably deleted by censor boards throughout the world.”¹³⁹ As he did for Eddie Dugan’s father in *Johnny Holiday*, Breen thought a “mature man brutalizing a small boy” horrible enough without the man “belt[ing] the boy into the room head over heels” and suggested the brute merely “shove or push him roughly.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Joseph Breen to Berman Schwarz, letter, May 4, 1953. “Suddenly [Schwarz 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. Privately, Johnston thought Schwarz’s project “brutal, sadistic, and in poor taste, but I do not think it can be arbitrarily stopped because the theme revolves around an attempt to assassinate the President.” Censor Geoffrey Shurlock even contacted the Secret Service for advice and possibly to intimidate Schwarz. Shurlock informed Johnston of Schwarz’s “state of indecision... Let’s hope he was impressed with your very strong recommendation and will drop the whole project.” Eric Johnston to George M. Shurlock, letter, May 8, 1953, Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Eric Johnston, letter, May 14, 1953, “Suddenly [Schwarz 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹³⁸ Robert Bassler to Joseph Breen, letter, December 10, 1953. “Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹³⁹ Joseph Breen to Robert Bassler, letter, December 18, 1953, “Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Breen also warned against bathroom humor. The boy’s urge “to go to the bathroom will be unacceptable if it is played for comedy. If it is handled in a straight-forward dramatic manner, we feel it would be valid.” Censors in Massachusetts deleted a reference to “rape.” See Local Censor Report, “Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

Breen's protecting children from undue harm was standard procedure for the Production Code. As in the case of *Johnny Holiday*'s Eddie Dugan, Breen was also normally wary of boys handling real guns, rather than toy props. However, in this instance, with the cinematic President's life at stake, Breen allowed the film's boy protagonist to use firearms to fight back and save the leader of the Free World. In this respect, Bassler's production tied the assassination attempt directly to gun culture and the boy's maturation. The film's youngster picking up a gun did not reflect delinquent tendencies. Those "bad" characteristics fell to the assassin John Baron, who, like *Johnny Holiday*'s Eddie Dugan, failed to mature and used guns to threaten society. By helping to defeat Baron, the boy will grow up to become a defender of American freedoms.

Actor Frank Sinatra eagerly tackled the role of the ruthless assassin. Sinatra wanted to "remake" his own screen identity by extending his range. He discarded his reputation as a crooning bobbysox idol by taking on meatier roles, such as a tough G.I. in *From Here to Eternity* (1953), and Baron presented the opportunity to play a villain.¹⁴¹ Baron plans to shoot the President off-screen, as the Commander in Chief stops in Suddenly, California, for a top-secret fishing trip. The assassin takes the Benson household hostage, since their hilltop residence presents an ideal firing location. The Bensons, made up of a war widow, her son, and her father, along with her boyfriend policeman Tod, and a television repair man, play for time as Baron rehashes his childhood. Although he does not cite the Great Depression, he, like Charley Kyng in *Any Number Can Play* (1949; see chapter two) started out the 1930s as nobodies. Tough men

¹⁴¹ Karen McNally, *When Frankie Went to Hollywood: Frank Sinatra and American Male Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), Chapter two. Lest he alienate his fan base, Sinatra told reporters "no matter what sort of rat I play," his "fans are much too intelligent to identify a screen role with an actor's off-stage character. "Sinatra Relies on Intelligence of Picture Fans," *LAT*, October 11, 1954, B9.

like Kyng prevailed against hardship by using his “guts,” but Baron failed to do so. He lacked proper role models: “My mother wasn’t married. My old man was a dipso[maniac].”¹⁴² Rather than tackle the Depression head on, Baron says, “Before the war, I drifted and drifted and ran, always lost in a big crowd. I hated that crowd.”¹⁴³ As he describes the crowd of humanity “scratchin’ and shovin’ and biting” each other to survive the economic crisis, Baron approaches the camera, his face filling the screen as his monochromatic blue-eyes gaze accusingly at invisible moviegoers.¹⁴⁴ “And when the mist cleared, all the faces would be me. All me, and all nothing!”¹⁴⁵

Determined to escape Depression anonymity, Baron exploits his one talent: sharpshooting. Through guns, he temporarily channeled his aggression in a productive way. During World War II, his trigger-happy finger won him a Silver Star, but his bloodlust led to a court-martial. Now, in 1954, Baron ascends the economic ladder with the skills the government honed within him. The film’s synopsis confirmed Baron suffered from the same big-shot complex that ailed Eddie Duagn: “when he came out of the Army, John aimed to continue being ‘somebody’: he had a gun and kept his killing trade.” Although the film never established Baron’s employers or their motives, such objectives did not matter: “Murder, to John, was strictly a business proposition.”¹⁴⁶ For

¹⁴² *Suddenly*, directed by Lewis Allen (Libra Productions, 1954), Blu-Ray (Image Entertainment, 2012).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ “Suddenly” Synopsis, “Suddenly [United Artists 1954],” CCF, AMPAS. When the hostages ask if the communists hired him, Baron says he does not know and does not care. One reviewer ridiculed the Production Code for okaying the plot if the bad guys used the “right equipment.” He also noted the reason for the assassination “is never explored in the screenplay,” although producer Robert Bassler was

completing the job, Baron will earn half a million dollars, tax free. Furthermore, he cites his Silver Star as proof he is “no traitor.”¹⁴⁷ Instead, he argues nothing will change. “Tonight at five o’clock I kill the President. One second after five there’s a new President. What changes? Nothing!”¹⁴⁸ Having abandoned his country’s leaders, he has faith only in his 30.06 German rifle liberated from Nazi hands, replacing the tommy gun Breen rejected. Baron says, “You know when you have a gun you are in a way sort of a god. If you had the gun then you would be the god.”¹⁴⁹ He recognizes firearms, and their place in American culture, have given him agency to destroy the very institutions that empowered him. **[Figure 15]**

“quick to point out that there is nothing personal about it at all.” Thomas Wood, “Movies Draw Up Rules for Shooting President,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, May 2, 1954, 4.3.

¹⁴⁷ *Suddenly*, directed by Lewis Allen (Libra Productions, 1954), Blu-Ray (Image Entertainment, 2012).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. *Dial 1119* (1950), featured the same trope: since childhood, twenty seven-year-old mental patient Gunther Wyckoff (Marshall Thompson) surrounded himself with “war books and weapons” because, as police psychologist John D. Faron (Sam Levene) rationalizes, he is “fighting his inability to function normally.” Firearms became Wyckoff’s crutch to “prove to a hostile world [that] he’s a hero.” When Wyckoff holds five people hostage, he recites his war record; like Baron, he won a medal for killing. In civilian life, Wyckoff sees only the “sad faces” of postwar crowds and a firearm enables Wyckoff to “attack and get to fight back.” “They gave me a uniform, made me a soldier, they gave me a gun, they told me to kill!” he screams. The twist ending reveals the draft board rejected him as an unstable teenager. Trapped in the fantasy world of G.I. Joes, Wyckoff kills Faron and then whimpers, “There’s no reason to shoot me” before the police machine-gun him down. Like Baron, Wyckoff tried to literally shoot their ways out from lonely crowd, but both end in self-destruction. *Dial 1119*, directed by Gerald Mayer (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1950) DVD (Warner Home Video, 2010).



Figure 15. John Baron's world. Baron (Frank Sinatra, standing, left) becomes a "somebody." He leaves the "mist" of the Great Depression behind by beating everyone around him into submission. Of the hostages, the boy (Kim Charney) and his mother (Nancy Gates) lay to the right. Grandfather Benson (James Gleason), a former Secret Service agent, remains the last threat. Author's collection.

Baron's failure to adjust in the postwar years coincides with the celebratory "victory culture" of the period. Historians and the public characterize World War II as a "good war" in public memory in which the United States emerged from the Depression to save the world from fascism.¹⁵⁰ Baron questions this narrative through the lens of the Korean War. Baron admits he was in a mist with ambitions to become a "somebody." When he joined the army, the military failed to detect his mental immaturity until after he

¹⁵⁰ John Morton Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1976); Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998); Kenneth Rose, *Myth and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II*, second edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

killed “twenty-seven Jerries” in cold blood.¹⁵¹ Rather than reward him for this act of patriotism, the army discharged Baron, but they provided nothing to ensure his transition into civilian life. Lacking discipline and ethics, Baron’s state of mercenary/traitor reflects his life experience of youth abandonment in the Depression and botched indoctrination under the military. After Baron explains his background, Tod, a true lawman, comments, “You’re a born killer, that’s all.”¹⁵² Baron agrees, basking in his unreformed delinquency.

Baron’s mental incompetency and subsequent manipulation by his employers to kill the President reflected the public’s and the military’s worry over the mental competency of G.I.s during the Korean War. As historian Susan L. Carruthers observes, the Korean War provided evidence of “failed” masculinity when twenty-one American G.I. P.O.W.s in Korea preferred to re-settle in China rather than come home. The press asserted this “sorriest bunch” of seeming traitors was not real men because their weak-wills made them susceptible to communist ideology.¹⁵³ Rather than focus on post traumatic stress and the experiences of these deserters, the United States regarded these individuals as “flawed” because the soldiers’ “muscular deterioration” made them unable to handle the rigors of American manhood.¹⁵⁴ One government booklet, *POW*, blatantly stated, “The Korean story must never be permitted to happen again,” referencing the

¹⁵¹ *Suddenly*, directed by Lewis Allen (Libra Productions, 1954), Blu-Ray (Image Entertainment, 2012).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Susan L. Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (University of California Press, 2009), chapter five. *Newsweek* coined the term in 1954.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

young soldiers who did not have what it took to stand up to Commie brainwashing.¹⁵⁵

Speaking for the public, the *New York Times* concurred, “The tragedy they represent warns us to prepare better defenses against similar brainwashing should our troops ever again come into similar danger of becoming Communist prisoners.”¹⁵⁶

Suddenly does not reference the Korean War directly, but the conflict’s stalemate and its infamous American defectors played out in headlines during the film’s production. A month before the film’s September release, Defense Secretary Erwin Wilson formed a committee to study brainwashing and ways to combat the Communists’ “diabolically ingenious pressures” inflicted on American prisoners.¹⁵⁷ Some generals advocated increased militarization as the answer, including “military ‘torture schools’” to harden soldiers to withstand “Red methods.”¹⁵⁸ General Jacob L. Devers stated “the American boy can take most anything if he knows what he’s up against.”¹⁵⁹ Mock invasions, such as the army’s taking over Moosonee, Wisconsin, in 1950, brought the public into this type of hardened conditioning in case the Reds invade.¹⁶⁰ Within this context, Baron, too, is an “unfit” soldier because his trigger-happiness, in conjunction with his big-shot complex, induced him to betray his country. Baron’s failure to adjust

¹⁵⁵ Charles S. Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 161.

¹⁵⁶ “Fruits of Brainwashing,” *NYT*, January 28, 1954, 26

¹⁵⁷ “A Study of ‘Brainwashing,’” *NYT*, August 24, 1954, 20. See also “Red Brainwashing Too Terrible, Expert Says,” *LAT*, March 10, 1954, 19. By 1956, some officials suggested P.O.W.s commit suicide rather than face the possibility of betraying their country. See Emma Harrison, “New Evils Seen in Brainwashing,” *NYT*, September 4, 1956, 27.

¹⁵⁸ Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 210

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 226-230.

came from his own background as an orphan without proper role models in the Depression. Harboring feelings of abandonment against the army that rightfully booted him out for mental instability, he expresses his masculinity as a shooter, just as Eddie Dugan wanted to do in *Johnny Holiday*.

Baron's life story makes for a sobering reminder for the Bensons and the audience to train their children correctly. Baron's army career gave him temporary guidance as to how to service his country, but the army erred in taking him in. Baron, like the "brainwashed" P.O.W.s, had poor parenting; one psychologist diagnosed the P.O.W.s as "men, who, as children, gave up the struggle to be themselves," implying this lack of individuality and good character made them mentally weak.¹⁶¹ The film emphasizes firearms did not cause delinquency. Rather, as with "big shot" wannabes Eddie Dugan and Hunt Bromley, the lack of proper socialization and role models led boys to misuse the historic association of guns as hallmarks of American masculinity. In seeking security through gun culture, delinquents embraced the glamorization of violence while ignoring the character-developing aspects for citizen soldiers.

Training the next generation to prevent delinquents-turned-failed men like Baron comprises the movie's second story arc. Young hostage Peter "Pidge" Benson III (Kim Charney) becomes the ideological battlegrounds between Baron's perversion and the Bensons' heritage of national service. Pidge's fascination with firearms and war movies initially makes him potentially another Baron, Eddie Dugan, or *The Gunfighter's* Hunt Bromley. The boy's war-widow mother, Ellen (Nancy Gates), refuses to let him play with toy guns or see war pictures. He dutifully obeys her and stoically endures his peers

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 210.

calling him a “sissy” for this apparent effeminate aversion to bloodshed. Mrs. Benson recognizes the derogatory term among World War II combatants signifying “softness,” a “mama’s boy,” or, worse, a homosexual incapable of becoming a “fighting man.”¹⁶²

However, the misguided mother persists in her pacifist leanings.

Despite his mother’s wishes, Pidge dreams of growing up to become a sheriff, like his mother’s suitor, Tod Shaw (Sterling Hayden), or following in his grandfather’s footsteps (James Gleason), a former Secret Service agent for Calvin Coolidge. However, Mrs. Benson rejects both career goals. Since her husband’s death in the Second World War, she associates guns with death destruction, torture, and cruelty. She recognizes her husband died for their country, but his death shattered her family and she stubbornly clings to her son. Shaw acknowledges her need for stability (which he continually offers through marriage) but he places patriotism and national security before family. He chastises her (“You can’t wrap the boy in cellophane”) and says toy guns prepare a boy to fight the nation’s enemies “when it’s his turn.” Grandfather voices the perspective of the film’s male role models: “Ellen, will you please stop being a woman?”¹⁶³

Mrs. Benson finally recognizes the lawmen’s viewpoint at the crucial moment. Baron allows Pidge to keep a toy pistol, commenting on how real it looks. Pidge secretly swaps the toy for his grandfather’s old Secret Service pistol, and fires a blind shot at the

¹⁶² Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: The Gay Press, 1990), 156 and 176. See also A Mother, “Was Our Boy a Sissy?” *Parents*, March 1951, 68; Julie Grant, “A Thought a Mother Can Hardly Face: Sissy Boys, Parents, and Professionals in Mid-Twentieth Century America,” *Modern American Queer History*, ed. Alid M. Black (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 117-130.

¹⁶³ *Suddenly*, directed by Lewis Allen (Libra Productions, 1954), Blu-Ray (Image Entertainment, 2012).

would-be assassin. [Figure 16] The boy misses, but his act prompts his mother and she picks up the revolver and kills Baron.



Figure 16. Armed for freedom. Despite his mother’s pacifism, Pidge (Kim Charney) prepares to protect his country and display his masculinity in *Suddenly*. Author’s collection.

In terms of the storyline, the Bensons’ actions did not really matter. The President, alerted to the possible danger, speeds on by without stopping, sacrificing his vacation for national security. However, for the Bensons, their ordeal as hostages served a greater cause, as Mrs. Benson realizes her womanly concerns must give way to a larger patriotism. Through a lens of national security, represented by the lawmen in her family, Mrs. Benson and her son will combat subversion.

As the studio’s synopsis summarizes, “The change in Ellen’s character is one of the major developments of the story.” She is “violently opposed to young Pidge seeing war movies or playing with a toy gun which Tod has bought for the boy. [But] with

threat of death hanging over all the people she holds dear, she begins to understand force is sometimes necessary to protect what we believe in.”¹⁶⁴ The film ends with her embracing Shaw; their presumed marriage will enable the lawman to properly educate his step-son in the correct use of firearms that had eluded Baron. The film acknowledges weak-willed young men existed, but asserted the United States would prevail, despite deserters and subversive infiltration. Grandfather Benson ends the picture telling his grandson when he grows up, Pidge might become sheriff and, later, also President. Thanks to his actions, the promise of American democracy—that any boy might lead his country—perseveres for future generations.

Not everyone agreed with *Suddenly*’s message. Producer Robert Bassler claimed his picture portrayed American citizens acting admirably under fire, but some thought the concept of a Presidential assassination taboo for the movies. Mrs. May B. Conway complained about the lurid ad copy. “There has been enough shooting of Presidents” in the media, she alleged, “without making a picture for the horrid communists to enjoy.” She went on: “with all the awful shooting and killing in pictures that have been made, I don’t wonder there has been so much of it in real life and it has surely set a bad example for teenagers.”¹⁶⁵ She admitted the industry could not make childish “pollyanna [sic] pictures,” but insisted she and “many others” like her vowed they would not support productions setting teenagers on the path to delinquency.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Blowitz-Maskel, Synopsis: *Suddenly*, “*Suddenly* [Schwarz, 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁶⁵ Mrs. May B. Conway to Motion Picture Industry Council, letter, September 17, 1954, “*Suddenly* [Schwarz, 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁶⁶ One exhibitor relayed his problems in selling the picture: “The only thing I didn’t do to call attention to this film was try to assassinate the President myself. Results were still just 87 per cent.” See: “Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, January 15, 1955, 2.

Although Joseph Breen objected to the story, once it passed the Production Code, he was obliged to defend it. He assured Conway *Suddenly* did not corrupt youngsters. He pointed to Grandfather Benson's concluding speech to Pidge as an affirmation of violence fitting within acceptable social bounds. To protect the President, the Bensons *had* to eliminate Baron at the end. Baron's failure did not arise from American institutions, but from a lack of social guidance when he was young. Like Eddie Dugan, Baron could not handle guns appropriately, due in part to a poor family structure, which led to his downfall. Correct guidance, such as Pidge's prospective stepfather and his grandfather—both lawmen—opened up a bright future that included the Oval Office itself. The Code generally ruled against showing firearms in children's hands, Breen acknowledged, but the film showed how an "average American family reacts when it is put to the test of impending destruction. Even at the expense of endangering their own existence they rally to the defense of their cherished American ideals, in this case represented by the President. This, the producer feels, is a lesson which the Communists would do well to ponder."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Breen to May B. Conway, letter, September 21, 1954, "Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. Bassler described his movie as an "allegory of the reactions of a group of typical Americans when faced by the threat of damage to their American heritage, symbolized by the attempt on the life of the President. In order to make the point, the victim, perforce, has to be identified as the President, and could not be merely some 'big shot.'" He added he "would be proud to show it to Secret Service or anybody else interested." Geoffrey M. Shurlock, Memo for the Files: *Suddenly*, May 6, 1954, "Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. On the day the censors issued its certificate, Shurlock wrote "this is a reasonable and, in fact, complimentary portrayal of law enforcement in the U.S. from the Secret Service down." The President escapes harm thanks to the "inherent courage and resourcefulness of average Americans [...] even under the most discouraging circumstances." See Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Kenneth Clark, letter, May 24, 1954. "Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. Clark replied, "As the Secret Service apparently comes out so well in the picture, perhaps we can uncross our fingers—but not too much." Kenneth Clark to Geoffrey M. Shurlock, letter, May 28, 1954, "Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953]," Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

Other film critics agreed with Breen. The *Los Angeles Examiner* lauded this “movie-going experience which will lift your spirits and your faith in this country and its everyday people!”¹⁶⁸ The *Hollywood Reporter* liked the “fresh idea” and depiction of “five commonplace citizens [who] pit their wits and courage against the killer[s...] without flag-waving [and is] an inspired story of Americanism.” Audiences will feel “there are vast reservoirs of courage and guts in ordinary people and that, at the grass-roots level, this country is as sound as it was in the days of the pioneer.”¹⁶⁹ To display this level of “courage and guts,” communists inherited the role previously held by Prohibition/Depression-era gangsters, World War II Nazis, and assorted western “badmen.” Pidge, following in his grandfather’s footsteps, inherited the mythological construction of American boyhood.

Conclusion

Hollywood had a mixed relationship with firearms. Throughout the twentieth century, censors and social guardians worried about the glamorization of violence among boys. Guns gave them a sense of power and respect they otherwise lacked. For critics, the instability of the nuclear family during the Depression did not provide appropriate adult role models for impressionable youths. During World War II, guns took on a heightened level of patriotism, but the fear over firearms continued to find expression in the form of juvenile delinquency stemming from the lack of social guidance. Pictures such as *Johnny Holiday* mixed gun culture and rural rehabilitation together as forms of

¹⁶⁸ Kay Proctor, “Sinatra Excellent in ‘Suddenly’ Portrayal,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, October 7, 1954, 6.

¹⁶⁹ Jack Moffitt, “Bassler, Allen, Sale Present Fresh Idea,” *HR*, September 7, 1954, “Suddenly [Schwarz, 1953],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

appropriate socialization. Eddie Dugan wanted to steal Sergeant Walker's boy, car, and gun to satisfy his "big shot complex." He failed to get away because, as the Production Code Administration insisted, the bad guys were not real men.

Reconciling gun violence and gun culture for youths remained an issue in the postwar years. The legacy of Depression-era delinquency resurfaced in adult men like *Suddenly's* John Baron. The specter of communism threatened to upend the stability of American life, including education. As the House Committee on Un-American Activities made clear, the commies planned to take a child "from the nursery, put him in uniform with the hammer and sickle flag in one hand and a gun in the other, and send him out to conquer the world."¹⁷⁰ American boys needed to step up as citizen-soldiers, if and when the "red" invasion occurred. Guns served to toughen a boy to resist such mental infiltration.

When the U.S. entered the Korean War, Joseph McCarthy and others claimed the lack of success stemmed directly from a lack of masculinity. Deserters were not "real men" because they lacked the stamina to withstand Communist brainwashing. Therefore, boys must flock to guns in the same way girls did to dolls as a form of gender enculturation. Movies contradicting this premise, such as *The Gunfighter* with Jimmie Ringo teaching his son gun culture only led to alienation, loneliness, and death, met with box office disappointments. On the other hand, movies promoting gun usage as a method

¹⁷⁰ House Committee on Un-American Activities, "100 Things You Should Know about Communism and Education," *100 Things You Should Know about Communism*, second edition (Washington D.C.: House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1949), 53. The House Committee quoted a Soviet guide to education instructing kindergarten teachers to have their children "play Red Army soldier" in "preparation for organized and disciplined labor in high schools, in production and in the service of the Red Army." This was different than American patriotism and individualism, the House insisted, because Soviet kindergartens train children to "serve Communism, and Communism alone, regardless of his own individual ambitions or instincts" (55-56).

to toughen boys up, and to protect the home, strengthened the boundaries of domestic containment as much as it strengthened the development of the boy characters.

Guns remained ubiquitous in the movies throughout the remainder of the decade. Not every film spotlighted firearms, but they became familiar accessories for screen kids and a source of amusement for adults. In *Close to My Heart* (1951), one beleaguered dad wonders why anyone would want kids, as his three boys shoot up the living room with cap pistols, screaming bloody murder. *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) had young Arnie's (*Leave it to Beaver*'s Jerry Mathers) play-time shoot-'em-ups open the story about a lively corpse, while *On Our Merry Way*'s (1948) Edgar Hobbs (Donald Whorf) runs away with a BB gun and terrorizes two conmen. In *Cause for Alarm!* (1951), Hoppy (Bradley Mora) imitates his namesake Hopalong Cassidy to compensate for his emasculating eyeglasses and suburban life. *Little Fugitive* (1953) centers on a young boy who idolizes westerns. He thinks he shot his brother and flees to Coney Island. At the end, the boy sits in front of a television, shooting blanks at the screen, while his brother watches. Melodramas like *Four Boys and a Gun* (1957) showed the sad fates of young men in the big city, leading to robbery, murder, and, finally, execution.¹⁷¹ Despite the cautionary tales these producers intended, the ubiquity of toy guns in the movies and daily life created a blasé parental attitude. In 1954, one parent noted not every kid who played with a gun "will grow up to be either a cop or a criminal."¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ The synopsis assures the "boys," like Eddie Dugan, are "between 18 and 20," with one married and expecting a child. The censors worried over the last line, in which all take the rap for the murder and will get the chair. The line, "You know fellas—I'm not scared anymore," indicates he "finds himself as a result of the criminal activity in which he is engaged." That they embrace their identities through murder countered the masculinization of American gun culture. Geoffrey Shurlock to Sidney Harmon, letter, 16 March 1956, "Four Boys and a Gun [Security, 1956]," PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁷² Vincent Bryan, "Play and Potential Delinquents," *NYT*, April 17, 1954, 1.

Even though some parents seemingly shrugged off firearms, its presence in the public and popular culture stemmed from decades of the social messaging. In the postwar years, advocates of gun culture and militarism for boys looked to the past. These eras included the Old West, “child-saving” scout programs in the 1910s, “junior” G-men and work camps in the Great Depression, and the patriotism during World War II. Delinquents like Eddie Dugan (whom the Production Code Administration insisted was older than sixteen), wannabes like gunfighter Hunt Bromley, or unreformed delinquents like John Baron represented the dangers boys guarded against. Without a father figure to guide a boy’s natural aggression, the troubled boy—budding delinquent Johnny Holiday or firearm fans Jimmie Ringo and Pidge Benson—might fall into delinquency as well. These concerns reflected the larger efforts for stability in the postwar years, which finally centered on communism as the threat to the social order.¹⁷³

The “Reds” were not the only source of social agitation in the late 1940s. The emerging Civil Rights movement challenged the reconstruction of white, middle-class stability and normality. As the *New York Times* noted, civil rights leaders like A. Philip Randolph demanded complete desegregation of the armed forces to “prevent negro draftees from entering into a campaign of civil disobedience.”¹⁷⁴ When President Harry Truman ordered army desegregation in 1948, ROTC programs incorporated African

¹⁷³ Even the communists recognized the cowboy image as an American propaganda tool: “many innocent kids the world over had been misled down the path of crime through ‘Texas films’ [while ignoring] how right and justice always triumph and how true love invariably wins the day in Western movies.” See Richard Kasichke, “Texas Shirts, Cowboy Hats, New Objects of Red Wrath,” *WP*, September 3, 1953, 3. *The Gunfighter*, of course, was an exception to this rule. In 1958, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported East German Deputy Minister President Walter Ulbricht told a group of youth leaders not to wear cowboy shirts “and if they must wear clothes with pictures they should show North Viet Nam—not Texas.” See “Cowboy Shirt Trend Irks Communist Chief,” *CSM*, September 18, 1958, 4. See also “Swiss Act to Expel 40 Americans in Rodeo After Cowboys and Cowgirls Engage in Riot,” *NYT*, October 26, 1948, 33.

¹⁷⁴ “Loyalty Pledged for ROTC Negroes,” *NYT*, April 3, 1948, 3.

American enlistees. The *New York Times* explained “more Negro youths may receive the military training and acquire benefits from such training.”¹⁷⁵ Militarism became a method to bring African-Americans into the mainstream in the same manner it socialized white delinquent boys. Strict military discipline and patriotism supposedly quelled the restlessness of all disadvantaged groups. This, in turn, soothed the uneasiness such racial agitation generated in the white mainstream. In the movies, racial assimilation also served as building blocks for social stability. The next chapter looks at the end of the postwar “social message” race-cycle through the lens of American boyhood.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. See also “Equal Opportunity is Sought for Negroes in College Training as Reserve Officers,” *NYT*, October 21, 1949, 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHITEWASHING THE RACE CYCLE IN 1949

If someone insists that there is discrimination against Negroes in this country, or that there is inequality of wealth, there is every reason to believe that person is a Communist.

—Albert Canwell, chairman, Washington State Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, 1949¹

There was a time, not so many years ago, when every schoolboy knew that the antebellum South was a land of gentlemanly slave owners who spent their mornings under the dueling oaks and the rest of the day on pillared porches bemused with mint jelups, while faithful Negro field hands worked and sang in the cotton rows. More recently it has become even better known that the Old South made up a minority of arrogant, miscegenating plantation owners, mobs of tobacco-chewing poor whites and many Negro slaves, all of whom were busily engaged in escaping on the underground railway.

—Nash K. Burger, book critic, 1951²

I don't know. In school they call this the Dark Continent. This is twice as bright as Indianapolis.

—Eight-year-old Hank McKenna to his parents, on vacation in Morocco, *The Man who Knew Too Much*, 1956³

In 1977, director Joseph Losey looked back on *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948), an RKO picture about a twelve-year-old whose tinted locks become a metaphor for world

¹ Historians frequently cite Canwell; for example, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 21; Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 182; Tony Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex: Race, Madness, Activism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 48.

² Nash K. Burger, "Books of the Times," *New York Times* (NYT), July 17, 1951, 25.

³ *The Man who Knew Too Much*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1956), DVD (Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005).

peace. The plot originally focused on “anti-racism,” not a call for international disarmament. *Newsweek* connected the film to the original short story: “No amount of script alteration can altogether cover up the fact that a boy with green hair might be needlessly shunned by his companions just as boys with different colored skin have known to be.”⁴ But RKO avoided racism to court mainstream white audiences. Losey recalled producer Dore Schary insisting the theme revolve around World War II’s impact on children. Losey regretted the lost opportunity to explore discrimination: “This is the essence of the idea; this is what should have been done primarily, and it wasn’t. The important thing to speak about then was peace.”⁵ Losey’s statement captured a snapshot of Hollywood’s uncertainty in tackling social issues in the postwar years. When deciding between advocating a general international peace or tackling racial unrest at home, the studios avoided race. Losey’s recollection is indicative of the closing window during the postwar years to address social concerns. By the early 1950s, the “social message” genre, especially films about civil rights, largely vanished from the screen.

Traditionally, historians point to World War II movies as the catalyst for the social message genre, with war films promoting an idealized racial “melting pot.”⁶

⁴ Clipping, *Newsweek*, January 17, 1949, “The Boy with Green Hair [RKO 1949],” Core Collection Files (CCF), Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

⁵ Program Notes, “The RKO Years,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 14, 1977, “The Boy with Green Hair [RKO 1949],” CCF, MHL, AMPAS.

⁶ Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986); Clayton R. Koppes, and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and propaganda Shaped World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Lary May, “Making the American Consensus: The Narrative of Conversion and Subversion in World War II Films,” in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II*, eds. Lewis A. Erenberg, Susan E. Hirsh (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); 71-104; Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry, *We’ll*

Compared to the rhetoric of the “master racists” the Allies battled in Europe, Hollywood hailed the ethnically-diverse casts of studio-made combat units as microcosms of democracy. Army segregation notwithstanding, interracial camaraderie among celluloid G.I.s and civilians in pictures like *Bataan* (1943), *Sahara* (1943), and *Lifeboat* (1944) showcased diversity as an American strength. This led to a postwar “race” cycle of movies battling prejudice, notably *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947), *Pinky* (1949), and *Home of the Brave* (1949). This breakthrough culminated in Sidney Poitier’s ascent as a “distinguished” black actor.⁷

This traditional narrative about the social message genre ignores continuities from the Great Depression. During the economic crisis, unskilled whites vied for jobs in traditionally black-dominated fields, such as construction and domestic work. In addition, white workers urged employers to fire black workers first. In North Carolina, African-American unemployment figures reached thirty to sixty percent higher than whites in urban areas.⁸ One Georgian wrote President Roosevelt, stating the relief officials “give us black folks, each one, nothing but a few cans of pickle meet [sic] and to the white folks blankets, bolts of cloth and things like that.”⁹

Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006); Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), part 2; Thomas A. Bruscino, *A Nation Forged in War: How World War II Taught Americans How to Get Along* (Nashville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013).

⁷ See also Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 143-158; Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸ Anita Price Davis, ed., *North Carolina during the Great Depression: A Documentary Portrait of a Decade* (Jefferson, MO: McFarland and Company, 2003), 82.

⁹ Quoted in Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941*, 25th anniversary edition (New York: Random House, 2009), 192.

Black civil rights leaders responded to the Depression, but national and regional unity eluded them. Nationalists competed with socialists, militants, communists, trade unionists, and religious figures with different political strategies.¹⁰ Civil rights leaders, like A. Philip Randolph, appealed to the New Deal for assistance, but programs met resistance from whites. The Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC), for instance, disciplined restless young men (see Chapter three). Local government officials, however, discouraged black men from enrolling; in Mississippi, whites made up 98.3 percent of CCC enrollment during its first year.¹¹ Discrimination and segregation characterized CCC camps nationwide, with black enrollment making up a mere five percent.¹²

Any New Deal aid to African-Americans led some critics to accuse Roosevelt of political and religious subversion. In 1928, the Soviet Union chastised the U.S. by declaring a purge of “white chauvinism” in its ranks and advocating “self-determination for the Black Belt.”¹³ During the Depression, with social order in flux, conspiracy mongers, notably red-baiter-isolationist-anti-Semite Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Dilling, called the “Jew Deal” an attempt to imitate “mongrel Russia” in the U.S.¹⁴ “The New Deal is not only Communism but it is black Communism,” she declared, bemoaning a “Negro

¹⁰ Cheryl Greenberg, *“Or Does it Explode?”: Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); H. Viscount Nelson, *Black Leadership’s Response to the Great Depression in Philadelphia* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006)

¹¹ Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 113

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jeff R. Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 22.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Dilling, *The Roosevelt Red Record and Its Background* (Kenilworth, IL: self-published, 1936), 162. For Dilling’s political influence, especially her pro-Nazi stance, see Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), chapter two.

Supremacy” movement usurping American democracy.¹⁵ On a local level, the Ku Klux Klan, the White Legion, and other white supremacy groups linked civil rights to larger social subversion. Channeling anti-labor and anti-Communist sentiment, they targeted union activists, strikers, and “uppity” African-Americans. One Alabaman Ku Klux Klan bulletin warned, “Paid organizers for the communists are only trying to get negroes [sic] in trouble.” The announcement assured the state “is a good place for good negroes [sic] to live in, but it is a bad state for negroes who believe in SOCIAL EQUALITY.”¹⁶

During World War II, African Americans waged a “Double-V” campaign to defeat fascism abroad and racism at home. The 1941 March on Washington Movement, for instance, demanded an end to segregation in the armed forces. In June, 1941, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, creating a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to end discriminatory employment practices in federal agencies engaged in war-related work. However, in 1942, War Manpower Commissioner Paul V. McNutt slashed FEPC’s budget and refused to enforce rulings. A. Philip Randolph and Walter White felt betrayed by this “surrender to the Ku Klux spirit.”¹⁷

“The Ku Klux spirit” endured after the war. The Korean War reinforced this view, as the public blamed the stalemate partially on army desegregation.¹⁸ At home, defending the racial hierarchy reflected fears of backsliding into the Great Depression;

¹⁵ Dilling, *The Roosevelt Red Record and Its Background*, 229.

¹⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 75.

¹⁷ Andrew Edmund Kerstein, *Race, Jobs and the War: FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 40.

¹⁸ Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 101-119.

postwar civil rights threatened white stability in the same way black activism did during the 1930s. Critics believed communist masterminds manipulated African-American “dupes” to upset social norms.¹⁹ In 1947, Congressman John Rankin, chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (H.U.A.C.), reiterated the conspiracy between blacks and reds: all the “racial disturbances you have seen in the South have been inspired by the tentacles of this great octopus communism, which is out to destroy everything.”²⁰ Hollywood, also ensnared in the same tentacles, struggled to free itself by severing its ties to the “social message” cycle.

This chapter looks at two pictures, *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) and *Stars in My Crown* (1950). Made concurrently at MGM, the films situate white boys who respond to racism in their small southern towns. The financial failure of *Intruder in the Dust* and the monstrous success of *Stars in My Crown* highlight audience apathy regarding civil rights and Hollywood’s withdraw from social activism. The historic plight of the South, reinforced by recent memory of racial unrest from the Great Depression and then-current events unfolding in Korea, shaped the audiences’ hardening anticommunism. In the early 1950s, The Citizens’ Councils, viewing the civil rights movement as an attack on “southern values,” worried over the “softening” of children’s section pride due to

¹⁹ See Clarence Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); John Noakes, “Radicalizing Subversion: The FBI and the Depiction of Race in Early Cold War Movies,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no.4 (July 2003): 728-749. For contemporary accounts, see George S. Schuyler, *The Communist Conspiracy Against the Negroes* (New York: Catholic Information Society, 1947); John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 39-40. For films, see *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.* (1951) and *Trial* (1955), discussed in the conclusion.

²⁰ Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 28.

“integrationists” and “race-mixers.”²¹ This fear of children overturning the status quo during a time of postwar re-adjustment led the public and critics to reject *Intruder in the Dust*, in which a white teenage boy challenges his small town’s racial norms. In contrast, *Stars in My Crown* used nostalgia and a revised historical narrative, especially post-Reconstruction, to present a “true” solution to racism, one rooted in Southern values of eternal small town solidarity, simplicity, and religiosity as a source of social stability for youths. *Stars in My Crown* capitalized on these values, garnering public and critical acclaim. At the same time, by appealing to mainstream white sentimentality and a narrow public reading of history, the film negates the need for civil rights activism.

Context: Orthochromatic Blacks and Whites

The history of ethnic groups in the film industry has a well-documented literature.²² From the birth of the movies onward, African Americans sought to counter the established stereotypes from older stage traditions, especially blackface minstrelsy, or caricatured roles, like sassy mammies and accommodating “Uncle Toms.”²³ But

²¹ Vincent Lowery, “Preparing the Next Generation for Massive Resistance: The Historical Pageantry of the Children of the Confederacy, 1955-1965,” in *Children and Youth during the Civil War Era*, ed. James Marten (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 209.

²² Jacqueline Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Manthia Diawara, ed., *Black American Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Allyson Nadia Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence, *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser, *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001); Patrick McGilligan, *Oscar Micheaux: The Great and Only* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

²³ African-Americans used other venues, such as theater, ballet, and opera, to present themselves and their culture as integral to the national identity. See Stephanie Leigh Batisite, *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African-American Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Brian Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Great Depression* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012). In addition, apologetic Asians (detectives like Charlie Chan excepted), and siesta-prone Latinos have littered the screen since the medium’s inception. White

producers often lacked funds and quality equipment and faced apathy from white audiences. They competed with studios' technically-superior "race" pictures catering to segregated theaters and minority neighborhoods. Due to studio dominance, the majority of African-American roles remained limited, even in mainstream films about race, such as *Imitation of Life* (1934) or *Show Boat* (1929, 1936, 1953).²⁴ Only in the celluloid underworld, such as *Bullets or Ballots* (1936), or those in the "prison" genre, did black and white adults maintain a crude equality, the latter through law-enforced chain-gangs, death rows, and "big houses."

Portrayals of children in the movies differed from that of grown-ups. Since the eighteenth century, the public viewed children as "innocents," uncontaminated by adult prejudice and societal vices.²⁵ This innocence empowered them, if unintentionally, as agents of social change. Throughout the twentieth century, white, middle-class parents worried over their offspring partaking in "hip" fads, particularly "black music" like jazz, as signs of degeneracy.²⁶ In the genre of children's literature, leftist writers, including

ethnic groups also experienced typecasting: the blarney-spouting Irish, the snooty English, the amorous French, and the Southern drawl have prominent exposure on celluloid.

²⁴ Norma Manatu, *African American Women and Sexuality in the Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003).

²⁵ Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Ian Wojil-Andrews, *Children's Films: History, Ideology Pedagogy, Theory* (New York: Garland Publications, 2000); Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Karen J. Renner, ed., *The 'Evil Child' in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁶ Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Norman Mailer, "The White Negro" [1957], reprinted in Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 337-358

Langston Hughes, created positive portrayals of African Americans and promoted themes of racial harmony to influence their audiences' developing world views.²⁷

Not yet fully integrated into adult sensibilities, screen children questioned social prejudices with a level of tolerance grown-ups lacked.²⁸ Celluloid juvenile delinquents (see chapter three) drew strength from a brotherhood in pictures like *The Mayor of Hell* (1933; including a shot of black and white boys holding hands in fear) and *Boys Town* (1938). Outside reform schools, children shared race-neutral friendships in movies like *Skippy* (1930), *The Champ* (1931), and *Penrod and Sam* (1937). The *Our Gang* series (1922-1944; re-ran on television as *The Little Rascals*) featured inclusiveness in the title and the kids accepted each other as equals.²⁹ White children extended this tolerance to black adults, most famously Shirley Temple's tap dance with Bill Robinson in *The Little Colonel* (1935), which Twentieth Century-Fox reprised in three subsequent pictures. In contrast, white adults struggled to reconcile prejudice with their children's idealism. In *The Beloved Brat* (1938), the friendship between a rich white girl and a poor black boy makes her parents and white servants uneasy. The film ends by compromising parental

²⁷ See Julia L. Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 273-282. Mainstream comic books did as well; see Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 61-64.

²⁸ This extends back to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), where "Little Eva's" close relationship with Tom drives the tragedy. See Barbara Hochman, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution: Race, Literary, Childhood, and Fiction, 1851-1911* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011); Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Atlanta: The University of Georgia Press, 2005).

²⁹ Leonard Malton, *The Little Rascals: the Life and Times of Our Gang* (New York: Crown, 1992), 108. This does not mean the series embraced full racial equality. Aside from children, black adults often appeared as primitive, superstitious, and aped animalistic behavior. See Julia Lee, *Our Gang: A Racial History of The Little Rascals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 134-135.

sensibilities and childhood idealism. They hire the boy's parents as new servants, dress them in white, and promise to educate their child.

During World War II, Hollywood constructed a "New Negro" in the spirit of racial tolerance. The "New Negro" appeared more "natural" than the shuffling caricature of old, but this enhanced persona remained largely confined to maids, porters, and passers-by.³⁰ The *New York Times* noted "all-Negro" pictures like *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) and *Stormy Weather* (1943) "are following the desires of Washington in making such films at this time." The "official expression" mandated "increased employment of Negro citizens in certain heretofore restricted fields of industry [and] would be helped by a general distribution of important pictures in which Negroes played a major part."³¹ In movies, ethnic characters appeared as extras or "crowd fillers" to demonstrate integration; their ubiquitous presence connoted social progress.³²

The wartime "New Negro" complemented and reinforced the color blindness screen children shared. In *Mokey* (1942), the boy hero (Bobby Blake) runs away to his friends' shantytown house and passes himself off as their cousin; yearning for stability, Mokey prefers the close-knit African-American home to his middle-class, but broken,

³⁰ Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 136; Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 388. For a contemporary source see "Better Breaks for Negroes in H'wood," *Weekly Variety*, March 25, 1942, 1. The war against fascism included the Axis Japanese power. See John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

³¹ Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Takes a Hint from Washington," *NYT*, February 7, 1943, X3. See John Beaufort, "Move Marquees Shed light into Darkness of Racial Prejudice," *CSM* (*CSM*), July 15, 1949, 9.

³² See also Cripps, *Making Movies Black*; Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 208-209. In television, scholars did not pay attention to the representation of black children until the mid-1960s. See Carmen Luke, *Constructing the Child Viewer: A History of the American Discourse on Television and Children, 1950-1980* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 141-142.

family. In the *Our Gang* short “Baby Blues” (1941), Mickey (Bobby Blake) reads every fourth child is Chinese and thinks the stork will bring an Asian sibling. After learning Chinese kids eat American-style ham and eggs, Mickey wants a new Asian brother, but his Mom gives him twin sisters; the “other” reflects gender, not race. Frank Sinatra, no stranger to slurs about his Italian heritage, starred in the short “The House I Live In” (1945), dissuading Anglican boys from ganging up on a dark-haired Jew. Crooning lyrics about the melting pot and rhetorical wartime inclusiveness, Sinatra dissolves the barriers.³³ Although the Sleepy Lagoon murder case in 1942 and the Zoot Suit Riots in 1943 demonstrated simmering racist tensions belied the public lip service about equality, the studios nevertheless presented tolerance as essential to good government.³⁴

Despite the accolades of progress, actual reform, either in studio sound stages or Main Street, faced enormous challenges in the postwar years. The race issue played into the increasing antagonism between the Soviet Union and the United States. In Europe and, later, former colonies in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, the two superpowers competed to bring countries into their political and economic spheres (see Chapter five). The United States could not simply impress impoverished civilians with displays of material goods, cultural exchanges, or the generosity of the Marshall Plan. The U.S. also countered charges of bigotry and xenophobia at home, which, the Soviets pointed out,

³³ Art Simon points out Paul Robeson also sang the lyrics. See Art Simon, “The House I Live In: Albert Maltz and the Fight against Anti-Semitism,” in *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, ed. Peter Stanfield, Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, and Brian Neve (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007): 169-183.

³⁴ The Sleepy Lagoon case became *The Lawless* (1950), a film allegory attacking H.U.A.C.. See Doug Dissen, “The Violent Poetry of the Times: The Politics of History in Daniel Mainwaring and Joseph Losey’s *The Lawless*,” in *“Un-American” Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist*, ed. Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, and Peter Stanfield (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007): 97-112.

they prohibited since the 1920s.³⁵ In response, the U.S. circulated statistics and articles showing “the situation of blacks in America never stopped improving” due to “the capitalist system’s constant ability to adapt to change.”³⁶ Indeed, some news reports all but claimed segregation over, predicting “the good times will roll forever,” symbolized by Jackie Robinson’s ascent into Major League baseball.³⁷ However, institutional policies proved resistant. In 1951, *Parents’* received a complaint about the lack of “Negro children” photographs, and editors reiterated their house rule not to use black kids on covers, although they “use photographs of Negro children when it seems natural and not forced.”³⁸ They pointed to a three-year-old story which attacked prejudice, but their “natural and not forced” policy gave way to delay.³⁹

With the Soviet Union glorifying prejudice-free communism, Hollywood’s “New Negro” and the racial friendships among screen children declined. Social critics, drawing from the association between “reds” and “blacks” during the Great Depression, clamped

³⁵ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War, Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Margaret Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 46-50. In 1952, film scholar Victor Jerome observed “every fresh blow for freedom by a people under imperialist oppression—in Korea, in Indonesia, in Vietnam, in Malaya, in the Philippines, in Africa—arouses the solidarity of the Negro people here.” He urged Hollywood to join the civil rights movement. See V.J. Jerome, *The Negro in Hollywood Films* (New York: Masses & Mainstream, 1952), 9.

³⁶ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The Free Press, 2013), 66. For examples, see “Teen Agers Deplore Prejudice,” *CSM*, October 22, 1949, 7; “Hands across the Color Line,” *Parents’*, August 1948, 34.

³⁷ Roi Ottley, “Harlem is Confident, but Cautious,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1947, SM20.

³⁸ Dorothy Indenbaum, “Letters to Editor,” *Parents’*, February 1951, 28.

³⁹ “Darkness at Six,” featured a boy beginning public school. After his initial enthusiasm, he grew to hate schooling because of teasing. Only at the end does the reader learn the child is black (which readers could not necessarily infer from the illustration). See Sue Ulrich, “Darkness at Six,” *Parents’*, February 1948, 23, 110-113.

down on industry leftists, especially the Hollywood Ten, for promoting social equality. As one F.B.I. agent reported during the war, the “inherited ‘ideologies’” of industry leaders “are determining these developments and bending them in a direction unfavorable to American ideals and customs—and it can be said, in the long run, democracy.”⁴⁰ H.U.A.C., scrutinizing Hollywood before World War II and again once the war ended, loudly publicized these charges against leftist movie personnel.⁴¹

Intensified government investigation and heavy studio pressure persuaded progressive filmmakers to selectively embed messages to avoid outright critiques of social norms.⁴² In “all-color” productions, such as *Bright Road* (1953), children accept their marginalization.⁴³ *Bright Road*’s opening narration asserted a harmless “fantasy” and “make-believe,” rather explicitly addressing inequality, but the film faced wary audiences and local censors who disliked potential messages.⁴⁴ Other postwar films

⁴⁰ Quoted in John Sbardellati, *J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies: The FBI and the Origins of Hollywood’s Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 66.

⁴¹ In the late 1930s, H.U.A.C., led by Senator Martin Dies, accused Hollywood of subverting American values and for propagandizing U.S. entrance into World War II. Once the United States joined the Allies, Hollywood enlisted in the effort, which made H.U.A.C. back off. See John Joseph Gladchuk, *Hollywood and Anticommunism: H.U.A.C. and the Evolution of the Red Menace, 1935-1950* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 101-102; Melissa Ooten, *Race, Gender, and Film Censorship in Virginia, 1922-1965* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), chapter four.

⁴² *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *Lost Boundaries* (1949) had initial northern runs to generate positive word of mouth before their studios distributed them in southern circuits. Studios also produced different trailers; the northern trailer for *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) featured more brutality and coarse language. See “Intruder in the Dust Trailer (Northern Version),” November 8, 1949; “Intruder in the Dust Trailer (Southern Version),” October 21, 1949, *Intruder in the Dust*, f.1-675, Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴³ Many ethnic groups participated in civil rights activism, but the largest and most publicized efforts were those of African-Americans. See Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Cold War Kids: Politics and Childhood in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2014), 31. The majority of “race” pictures centered upon African Americans.

⁴⁴ Mary Elizabeth Vroman, who penned the original story, claimed, “I didn’t want to prove anything. I didn’t want to agitate anything. I merely thought—if people could now these children as I do, they would be certain to love them all.” Producer Al Gilks confirmed the film “makes no protest; it makes no complaint.” See Al Gilks, “See How They Run,” *International Photographer*, December 1952, 11-12.

discussed race by featuring minorities as troubled kids needing white tutelage to “make good.” Delinquents-of-color find rehabilitation through private institutions (*The Quiet One* [1948]) or government social workers (*Navajo* [1952]; “Give Us the Earth!” [1947]). While such films garnered critical acclaim (*The Quiet One* received Academy Award nominations for Best Original Screenplay and Best Documentary), audiences remained wary. The *Washington Post* reported one theater double-billed *The Quiet One* with *Tomorrow’s a Wonderful Day* (1949), a film about a boy’s bright future in the then-new Israel, and noted the moral preachment wore thin: “No matter how much you may admire the aims of both pictures, by the time you’ve seen them together, you’ve had all the elevation you’ll want for a month.”⁴⁵

On the surface, Hollywood paid lip service to its images of tolerance. In 1947, actress Hattie McDaniel extolled the progress she witnessed during her fifteen years in Los Angeles.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, filmmakers avoided offending white audiences. That same year, NAACP executive Thurgood Marshall observed with dismay the excising of celluloid racial progress, like the removal of a black character who, defying stereotype of a black jockey or gambler, knows nothing about horse racing and dice.⁴⁷ Marshall

Producer Sol Baer Fielding predicted, “The Negro audience will just about pay for the cost of the picture. If it has enough quality to attract a segment of the white audience, it will make a profit.” He hoped the low budget and fast shoot compensated for the risky subject. Bob Thomas, “MGM Doing Offbeat Film with an All Negro Cast,” *Hollywood Citizen-News*, August 28, 1952, 18. MGM lost \$263,000 on the project. “E.J. Mannix Ledger,” Howard Strickling papers, AMPAS.

⁴⁵ “‘Amateur’ Film at Dupont Moving,” *Washington Post (WP)*, September 24, 1949, B7.

⁴⁶ Hattie McDaniel, “What Hollywood Means to Me,” *Hollywood Reporter (HR)*, September 29, 1947, reprinted in Tichi Wilkerson and Marcia Borie, *The Hollywood Reporter: The Golden Years* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1984), 210-211. When asked why she consistently accepted roles of maids throughout her career, McDaniel replied she rather play maids for high salaries than become a real maid working for pittance. See Al Young, “I’d Rather Play a Maid than be One,” *NYT*, October 15, 1989, BR13.

⁴⁷ Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds, and Trade Unionists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 32.

blamed the “damn” H.U.A.C. for harassing progressives and urged for the Committee’s “abolition.”⁴⁸ With H.U.A.C. investigating charges of Communist propaganda, and the public rejecting hard-hitting “message pictures” for undermining stability, Hollywood avoided unwanted publicity.⁴⁹ As the box office receipts for MGM’s *Intruder in the Dust* and *Stars in My Crown* demonstrate, the studios silenced children as voices for racial reform. Americans, selectively drawing from the historical connections between earlier associations of communism and civil rights activism, rejected children as agents of change as the social message cycle in the postwar years came to a close.

Unwanted Strangers: *Intruder in the Dust*

When crafting *Intruder in the Dust*, director Clarence Brown adapted William Faulkner’s 1948 novel and added his own recollection of lynch mobs when growing up.⁵⁰ Producer Dore Schary had a reputation for social-message productions, and he and Brown overrode studio chief Louis B. Mayer’s objections over the grim subject.⁵¹ The film pleased Faulkner, who feared a bowdlerized film adaptation and worked with Brown

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ On race and the Hollywood Ten, see Gerald Horne, *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), xix and 10; John J. Gladchuk, *Hollywood and Anticommunism: H.U.A.C. and the Evolution of the Red Menace, 1935-1950* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 101-102. Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper’s Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), chapter 6; Sbardellati, *J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies*, 170-173.

⁵⁰ Regina K. Fadiman, *Faulkner’s Intruder in the Dust: Novel into Film* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 28.

⁵¹ Schary recalled Mayer objected because he thought the project unwholesome and, therefore, unsalable. Mayer preferred stories about motherhood. See Fadiman, *Faulkner’s Intruder in the Dust*, 28. Schary added Mayer did not think highly of the finished film and faulted Hernandez as “too uppity. He ought to take off his hat when he talks to the white man—and he didn’t say thank you to the lawyer.” Dore Schary, *Heyday* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1979), 213.

to ensure the message remained.⁵² Faulkner liked the picture, but film scholar Donald Bogle suggests the film failed because “it appeared at the end of the problem picture cycle” and “it was overlooked” by audiences tired of the topic.⁵³ To an extent, Bogle is correct. *Intruder in the Dust* appeared as the “social message” cycle declined and exhibitors noted the theme put off moviegoers. “‘When is this cycle to end?’ was the general trend of the comments,” said one North Dakotan. “It is a good story that Metro sold to us right by our customers [who] were not having any lecture films—before, now, or later.”⁵⁴

Early on, MGM recognized audience apathy and warily tried to avoid a “lecture.” During pre-production, the studio confined racism to the South and advocated a “hands-off to the federal government.” Studio reader Irma E. Lowe explained, “The negro problem is one that must be faced and solved by the Southerners themselves. And this story is aimed to show that there is a nucleus from whom the solution will, in time, come.”⁵⁵ The agent for change comes from Southern youth, in this case, a boy. Director Clarence Brown agreed, stating he “felt it would do a lot to set the South right in its

⁵² Gene D. Phillips, *Fiction, Film, and Faulkner: The Art of Adaptation*, (The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 100.

⁵³ Bogle, *Toms. Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks*, 156. Faulkner previously used the same characters in a short story, “Tomorrow,” published in 1940, eight years before he published *Intruder in the Dust*. The short story has little to do with race. A film adaptation, *Tomorrow*, was released in 1972.

⁵⁴ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *Boxoffice BookinGuide (BOBG)* supplement, *Boxoffice* (BO), October 21, 1950, 2.

⁵⁵ Irma E. Lowe, “Synopsis of Novel,” May 20, 1946. “Intruder in the Dust” 1444-f.1-667. Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS. Faulkner presents this view in the novel. Lawyer Gavin Stevens lectures “we must resist the North: not just to preserve ourselves [...but] the privilege of setting him free ourselves: which we will have to do for the reason that nobody else can since going on a century ago now the North tried it and have been admitting for seventy-five years now that they failed.” This speech does not appear in the film. William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (1948; New York: Vintage International, 1991), 151.

thinking. That thinking must come from within themselves—and they’re doing a hell of a good job of it...without antilynch laws from Washington.”⁵⁶ Lowe concluded the picture showed off positive, “seldom-seen side of the Southern white—decent, compassionate, and humane. With the proper handling, this could make a terrific film.”⁵⁷

These disingenuous statements concerning a federal “hands-off” policy belied the political tensions the issue of civil rights generated in postwar America. Contrary to what MGM believed, the developing Civil Rights movement consistently demanded federal intervention, such as the 1941 March on Washington movement, to overcome the “Ku Klux spirit” preventing racial progress. On July 26, 1948, President Truman desegregated the army with Executive Order 9981. The move spurred disgruntled southerners to form a “State’s Rights Party,” later called the Dixiecrats, and a platform around states’ rights and resistance to integration. Party leader Strom Thurmond connected African-American advocacy with communists, who had “their designs upon our national security.”⁵⁸ In their view, attacking the long-standing racial hierarchy undermined the heart of American national identity. For MGM’s purposes, crafting a film promoting a “states rights” methodology, whereby the South does not need federal laws, sidestepped the political tensions. It also deflected further charges from H.U.A.C. of “anti-Americanism” and subversive Hollywood attempts to undermine the status quo.

⁵⁶ Philip K. Scheuer, “Brown Champions Work on Location,” *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, October 30, 1949, D1. Brown told the newspaper of his own Southern heritage “by adoption,” stating he “went south when I was 12.”

⁵⁷ Irma E. Lowe, “Synopsis of Novel,” May 20, 1946. “Intruder in the Dust” 1444-f.1-667. Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

⁵⁸ Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 37.

On a local level, Oxfordians in Mississippi resented the Hollywood intruders airing their racial problems. According to Faulkner, his fellow townsfolk complained they “don’t want no-one comin’ into our town to make no movie about lynchin’.”⁵⁹ Although Brown supported a hands-off approach for the federal government, he drew the line here. The director pressured Oxford’s leaders to welcome his cameras or he would film the entire picture in MGM’s soundstages and depict them however he saw fit. Fearing inaccuracies and also seeing the chance to boost their economy, local businessmen endorsed his project.⁶⁰ [Figure 17]



Figure 17. “Oxford’s own story.” *Intruder in the Dust*’s premiere in Oxford, Mississippi, reinforced racism as a local, and confined, problem, during its world premiere. Faulkner’s family had a stable where the Lyric Theater stood.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Gene D. Phillips, *Fiction, Film, and Faulkner: The Art of Adaptation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 92.

⁶⁰ Fadiman, *Faulkner’s Intruder in the Dust*, 29

MGM intended a “proper handling” to limit an antiracist message geographically and politically. By depicting racial troubles as a peculiar institution confined to a small southern town, the studio implied the message lacked relevancy outside the town, such as urban cities, or small towns in the north. MGM also premiered the picture in Oxford, but, as *Motion Picture Daily* reported, their “green light to an all-out campaign [...] in the Tennessee, Louisiana, and Mississippi areas” was contingent upon the “approval of picture by Memphis censor Lloyd T. Binford.”⁶¹ Binford notoriously resisted anti-racism in the movies. He tried to ban the picture *Curley* (1947), a juvenile film about very young school kids playing pranks on their teacher, but the Tennessee Supreme Court overruled him, stating he had “no authority to ban the motion picture *Curley* because of the presence of Negro actors in the cast.”⁶² To avoid similar legal entanglements from local censors, MGM shrewdly won censor approval by selecting Oxford for the gala premiere (including sending the film’s star, Tennessee native Claude Jarman Jr., on a promotion tour), to open up the Southern market.⁶³ The studio paid thirty-four film reviewers to cover the premiere on newsreels.⁶⁴ The message about the South’s ability to

⁶¹ “MGM Going All Out on ‘Dust’ Tri-State Bow,” *HR*, September 9, 1949, 4; “Memphis Censor OKs M-G-M’s ‘Intruder’,” *Motion Picture Daily*, September 9, 1949, 2.

⁶² The movie featured an integrated classroom with the children happily playing games together. The Court also clarified the film industry did not enjoy freedom of speech protection. See “Binford Bows to Court Ruling, Ends ‘Racial’ Bans,” *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, January 2, 1950, 8.

⁶³ After its Oxford premiere on October 10, MGM planned to open the film in two theaters in Tennessee by the twelfth. See *Daily Variety (DV)*, October 4, 1949, 7.

⁶⁴ “‘Intruder’ Pulls Year-High \$2,300 on Memphis Opening,” *DV*, November 10, 1949, 7.

solve its own problems also appealed to local pride.⁶⁵ Binford gave in, commenting, “It doesn’t live up to Southern ideals, but it will be all right to show in Memphis.”⁶⁶

Binford’s tactful admission underscored his growing concern over civil rights. In an interview with *Variety*, the censor accused Tennessee’s Supreme Court of playing politics. Specifically, he connected the Court’s decision to President Truman’s desegregating the armed forces. “Truman controls it [the Court],” he glowered, backhandedly condemning the President’s “recent actions” as the military slowly desegregated. Recognizing the Court effectively denied him power to ban race-themed pictures simply because of casting, Binford admitted he passed *Intruder in the Dust*, *Pinky* (1949), and other race-themed movies because he had “an inkling of what the court’s attitude probable would be,” if he tried to ban them as he did *Curley*.⁶⁷

Not taking any chances, MGM’s marketing department heavily emphasized the film’s unique local color as a selling point. The pressbook ballyhooed the 112-year-old town as a ready-made set with five hundred citizens portraying themselves, including a bit part for the mayor, and glossed over the townsfolks’ initial hesitance.⁶⁸ But even as

⁶⁵ One black newspaper, commenting on the production, predicted “Hollywood will probably adopt this part in toto.” See Gertrude Martin, “Movies of 3 Novels to Show Race Problems,” *Chicago Defender* (CD), March 19, 1949, 7.

⁶⁶ See “Memphis Approves Film,” *NYT*, September 10, 1949, 11; “‘Intruder in Dust’ Gets Miss. Preem,” *HR*, October 12, 1949, 9; “‘Intruders [sic] in the Dust’ Okayed for Memphis,” *DV*, September 9, 1949, 1; “Jarman to ‘Dust,’” *DV*, October 13, 1949, 10.

⁶⁷ Matty Brescia, “Tenn. Supreme Court Rules Binford has ‘No Authority’ to Censor *Curley*,” *Variety Weekly* (VW), December 21, 1949, 4, 18.

⁶⁸ “Case of Made-to-Order Type-Casting,” “Even Drafted the Mayor!” *Intruder in the Dust* pressbook, Cinematic Arts Library, University of Southern California (USC); John N. Popham, “Film Unit Tastes Real Southern Hospitality,” *NYT*, April 10, 1949, X5. One local said, “It was just like a picnic. We spent more time watching the movie or helping make it than we did at our jobs.” See “Faulkner and Oxford Helped,” *Life*, December 12, 1949, 153. Professional actors later dubbed over the Oxford residents’ voices.

MGM encouraged exhibitors to set up a contest to “catch your own intruder” (complete with cut-out footsteps for would-be sleuths to follow), the marketers danced around the central point. Aside from a few taglines (“A White Man is Murdered—and a Negro is Accused”), MGM avoided the race issue.⁶⁹

The movie opens by telling audiences not to confuse location shooting with reality. Studios usually buried such disclaimers about the film’s fictional elements in the technical credits. For *Intruder in the Dust*, MGM emphasized “none of the events took place in Oxford or its vicinity or any other actual place,” and any suggestion otherwise was “purely coincidental.”⁷⁰ The scene shifts to Lucas Beauchamp (Juano Hernandez), accused of murdering local businessman Vincent Gowrie. Beauchamp tells Chick Mallison (Claude Jarman, Jr.) he wants to see the boy’s lawyer/uncle, John Stevens (David Brian). Chick initially saves face, saying the “nigger” got what he deserved.⁷¹ But his conscience bothers him and a flashback shows Beauchamp saved Chick after the boy fell into a stream, nursed him to health, and refused payment. **[Figure 18]**

⁶⁹ Ad 308 and 212, *Intruder in the Dust* pressbook, USC. One radio spot read: “You’ll see the seething fury in the hearts of men...you’ll know the fear that stalks the night...the hate that walks Main Street!” without specifying race.

⁷⁰ *Intruder in the Dust*, directed by Clarence Brown (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1949), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

⁷¹ Ibid.



Figure 18. Grudging admiration. Lucas Beauchamp (Juano Hernandez, right) strips Chick Mallison (Claude Jarman, Jr., left) of his racial assumptions. Aleck (Elzie Emanuel, center), obeys both. The accompanying news snipe calls Beauchamp “insufferably proud and considers himself the equal of any white man, asking no favors of anyone, and accepting none.” Author’s collection.

Chick realizes he has a heavy moral debt and tries to buy Beauchamp gifts.

Beauchamp reciprocates and this builds mutual respect, even though Chick denies it.⁷²

Nevertheless, the boy asks his uncle to defend Beauchamp.⁷³ In contrast, Stevens voices the status quo and believes the expected lynching has “no hard feelings on either side” because it merely restores the racial norms. Studio reader Irma Lowe emphasized this

⁷² In one scene, Beauchamp sends a white boy with molasses for Chick. According to studio reader Frances B. Kopp, Beauchamp’s dignity came from “white blood in his veins” which made him “‘uppity’ and arrogant.” His “pride came to him from his white great grandfather” who also passed down Beauchamp’s land. Frances B. Kopp, “Synopsis of the Complete Okay Script, dated December 8, 1948 from Ben Maddow,” December 29, 1948. Intruder in the Dust files, Cinematic Arts Library, USC. Beauchamp’s ancestry does not appear in the film, probably due to miscegenation concerns, but it implies the white boy delivering the molasses is Beauchamp’s blood relative. The omission negates Beauchamp’s white blood as the source of his strength. The viewer simply assumes Beauchamp is a strong black man.

⁷³ One treatment visualized Mallison’s demons, showing Beauchamp’s “face and naked arms hanging upside down, not even Lucas Beauchamp but someone already anonymous, already effused by flame, by pride watered by gasoline, by leaves of fire shooting up from below.” Ben Maddow, Intruder in the Dust Treatment, October 1, 1948, “Intruder in the Dust,” 1444.f.1-668. Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

southern code regarding proud blacks, to which Stevens adheres: “we got to make him be a nigger first. He’s got to admit he’s a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intends[sic] to be accepted.” Beauchamp violates this code when he says “‘sir’ ‘master’ to you if you’re white but who you know is thinking neither and he knows you know [but] he doesn’t even care.”⁷⁴ Stevens openly blames Beauchamp for upsetting this stability, stating, “If you even just said ‘mister’ to white people and said like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now.”⁷⁵ He plans to beg for the court’s mercy.

Beauchamp ignores Stevens and when the lawyer leaves, he turns to Chick because the youngster is not fully indoctrinated in these social norms. Beauchamp says, “You ain’t cluttered. You could listen.”⁷⁶ Chick agrees, enlisting his black friend, Aleck (Elzie Emanuel), and elderly Miss Habersham (Elizabeth Patterson), the latter also defying the town with her independence and spinsterhood. The trio persuades Stevens of Beauchamp’s innocence. Gowrie’s father, more interested in justice than blind racism, joins them. Meanwhile, the townsfolk gather for the lynching-turned-festival. The camera pans over the crowd, music blares over loudspeakers, kids eat ice cream, women slather make-up, and men urge Vinson’s brother, Crawford (Charles Kemper), to set fire to Beauchamp’s cell. Habersham blocks the door, playing off the social veneration of southern womanhood to keep them at bay while the male heroes unearth evidence. They eventually apprehend Crawford for killing his brother. Stevens moralizes Crawford’s scheme “should have worked by every reason of geography and psychology and two

⁷⁴ Irma E. Lowe, “Synopsis of Novel,” May 20, 1946. “Intruder in the Dust” 1444-f.1-667. Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

⁷⁵ *Intruder in the Dust*, directed by Clarence Brown (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1950), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

hundred years of this county's history."⁷⁷ But Gowrie failed to consider a boy's outlook toward a black man who saved his life. The crowd disperses, ashamed for prioritizing traditional codes of behavior, especially family solidarity and honor, in lieu of justice.⁷⁸

Prejudice, however, does not die down easily. The next day, Beauchamp pays his legal fees and invites Chick over, which the boy readily accepts. In the film's most poignant scene, the black man pays his bill and pauses, eyeing Stevens expectantly. The lawyer explodes in pent-up anger, demanding why Beauchamp lingers. His former client, looking down at the seated lawyer, calmly responds, "My receipt," and Stevens realizes he, too, must overcome racism.⁷⁹ In the closing shot, Chick wonders why the townsfolk ignore Beauchamp as they reassess the previous day's events. Stevens explains the town's struggle to incorporate their new sensibilities into the small town atmosphere. They now see Beauchamp "the same as I do. They always will. [...] Proud, stubborn—insufferable: but there he goes: the keeper of my conscience,..." The script notes: "Stevens has been looking down toward the crowd but now he looks up, INTO CAMERA, as if toward the invisible audience" as he delivers the last lines: "—our conscience."⁸⁰ The finished film actually gives the last two words to his nephew to

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ In Faulkner's novel, Steven delivers this critique in a long speech about how Beauchamp saved the townsfolk's morality and how they, like Chick, are forever indebted to him. In rushing to uphold Crawford's family honor, they omitted a greater commandment, "*Thou shalt not kill*." See Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 195-196.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Hernandez recalled his working on his diction. "One thing I learned very soon [after arriving from Puerto Rico] was that if you speak English with any kind of accent, people are inclined to laugh at you." His careful speech contains no accent and his deep voice gives an air of formality in contrast to his white co-stars. Gladwin Hill, "Man of Character," *NYT*, May 28, 1950, 51.

⁸⁰ Ben Maddow, *Intruder in the Dust*, December 8, 1948- December 16, 1948, "Intruder in the Dust," 1444.f.1-642, Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

indicate this enlightenment transfers across generational lines. Chick Mallison represents a white recognition of black dignity.

The idea of white youth, unburdened with “two hundred years” of racial baggage, as the new hope for the America’s race relations, did not excite the public.⁸¹ On a positive note, some reviewers, such as *Parents’*, approved of a white boy who “learns a Negro has a right to personal dignity” in a town full of “racial tensions Beauchamp didn’t create.”⁸² NAACP Secretary Walter White preferred the movie to Faulkner’s book for its removal of the author’s “pseudo-science about ‘characteristic Negro odor’” in its portrayal of Lucas Beauchamp as a dignified protagonist. White urged fans who had a “profound conviction that something must be done about race hatred” to write producer Dore Schary a note of congratulations.⁸³

White’s enthusiasm aside, Chick’s challenging Southern norms and, by extension, American racial identities, did not sit well with crowds who saw the film as an attack on southern values. As historian Jennifer Ritterhouse points out, children learned societal

⁸¹ The Production Code censors passed the picture on a technical standpoint; Joseph Breen had more concerns over Chick’s undressing than race. Local censors, perhaps bowing to Binford’s authority, also reported no further cuts. Censors in Australia and New Zealand omitted a scene where the heroes recover Gowrie’s corpse from quicksand. “Local Censor Report,” “Intruder in the Dust [MGM, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. Production Code Administration (PCA) records, MHL, AMPAS.

⁸² “Family Movie Guide,” *Parents’*, December 1949, 111-112. For more laudatory notices, see Bosley Crowther, “The Screen in Review,” *NYT*, November 23, 1949, 19; “Movie of the Week,” *Life*, December 12, 1949, 149; “‘Intruder,’ Lynching Story, is Dynamic Screen Fare,” *HR*, October 11, 1949, 3; John Huston to Clarence Brown, Inter-Office Communication, June 17, 1949, “Correspondence—B-Miscellaneous, 93-f.887, John Huston papers, AMPAS; Dorothy B. Jones, “Program Notes on the film *Intruder in the Dust*,” Jones, Dorothy B. 1943-1957, 1-f.10. Motion Picture Industry Council records, MHL, AMPAS. In 1974 one critic singled out *Intruder in the Dust* as the only “race” picture from the period carrying the original power. Richard A. Maynard, *The Black Man on Film: Racial Stereotyping* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Book Co. 1974), 64.

⁸³ Walter White, “Columnist Walter White Sees Brighter Side of Negro Life,” *CD*, January 7, 1950, 7. The “odor” refers to a cultural stigma concerning African-Americans lacking “facilities to wash properly or often or even to wash bathe often even without the facilities to do it with; that it was a little to be preferred that they did not.” Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11.

racial codes at early ages, with etiquette and respectability centering on white dominance and enforced through coercion and threats of violence.⁸⁴ For Beauchamp to call Chick “uncluttered” not only connotes local values as a pejorative mess—“clutter”—but also labels Chick as an agent to subvert such norms. Film reviewers took exception to this view. One critic wondered if the film should “necessarily brand ALL Southerners, or even a majority as suggested by this incident, as bigoted and prejudiced human beings?”⁸⁵ Another said the picture “fails to come forth with a coherent viewpoint” and thought the concept of “the Negro [as] ‘the keeper of the white man’s conscience’ and that Southerners are ‘running away from themselves’ in the treatment of the Negroes” ludicrous.⁸⁶ Critics found these social role-reversals, with dignified blacks and prejudiced whites stewing in their own societal disorderliness, unsettling.

The critics’ defensiveness drew from the South’s longstanding perceptions of outsiders—usually the North—intervening in their deep-rooted values, including familial honor, social grace, and community solidarity as the basis of their way of life. This sectionalism existed since the birth of the nation, tore the country apart during the Civil War, and continued into the twentieth century as the South struggled economically when compared to the North. Biographer Joel Williamson notes Faulkner never referred to the Great Depression by name, partially because the economic crisis “was simply more of the

⁸⁴ Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁸⁵ Lowell E. Redelings, “‘Intruder in the Dust’ Realistic Photoplay of Racial Prejudice,” *Hollywood Citizen-News*, “Intruder in the Dust [MGM 1949],” CCF, MHL, AMPAS.

⁸⁶ Ezra Goodman, “Film Review,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, November 12, 1949, “Intruder in the Dust [MGM 1949],” CCF, MHL, AMPAS. See Brog, “Intruder in the Dust,” *Weekly Variety*, October 12, 1949, 12.

same and deeper.”⁸⁷ But Faulkner also hated the New Deal for its “undermining” the “individuality and freedom of his plain folk.”⁸⁸ Literary scholar Ted Atkinson points out Southern writers positioned regional values in opposition to “northern” capitalists and materialism, which they blamed for the South’s longstanding economic troubles.⁸⁹ In Depression-era Memphis, for instance, one newspaper criticized the New Deal, accusing “professional agitators and adventurers” of attacking “southern customs, southern traditions, southern institutions.”⁹⁰ The memory of the Depression remained strong; in 1946, Secretary of Commerce Henry A. Wallace traced racial discrimination to fears of unemployment. Delivering a speech at the Tuskegee Institute’s Founders Day, Wallace stated “the average American laborer, farmer, schoolteacher and professional man lives in fear” when they see blacks “taking a white man’s job.”⁹¹ The *Los Angeles Times* explained the public “has seen depressions and expects to see them again.”⁹² With this legacy in mind, Wallace claimed government-imposed fair employment laws only went so far. The “real answer” lied in a “prosperous America,” with “full employment” and the end of a “fear of insecurity.”⁹³

⁸⁷ Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 330.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ted Atkinson, *Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and Cultural Politics* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 97.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Roger Biles, *Memphis in the Great Depression* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 86.

⁹¹ “‘Abundant Life’ to Cure Race Ills, Says Wallace,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1945, 5.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

MGM was aware of this larger context. The studio attempted to mollify critics with the film's emphasis on Southern agency and a rejection of federal intervention. Critics attacked the film anyway, as did some social progressives. At Twentieth Century-Fox, Darryl Zanuck, planning *No Way Out* (1950), a race-riot picture starring Sidney Poitier, felt Brown did not go far enough. Zanuck, known for pictures like the anti-cowboy film *The Gunfighter* (1950; see chapter three), had produced the anti-racism pictures *Pinky*, *Home of the Brave*, and *Gentleman's Agreement*.⁹⁴ Zanuck told producer Joseph Mankiewicz, "*Intruder in the Dust* was a flop because it did not have the courage to say anything. It compromised up and down the line and sacrificed realism for pictorial beauty."⁹⁵ Zanuck thought the film artificial with its heavy-handed preaching.⁹⁶ Another compromise involved Elzie Emanuel, who played Chick's friend, Aleck. Emanuel told *Ebony* magazine Brown ordered him to bug his eyes out and tremble "in the best Stephen Fetchit manner" during moments of superstitious fear. Emanuel stated he resisted this stereotyped behavior, but "was finally forced to do the stereotype."⁹⁷ **[Figure 19]**

⁹⁴ See Ellen Christine Scott, "Race and the Struggle for Cinematic Meaning: Film Production, Censorship, and African American Reception, 1940-1960" (PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 2007).

⁹⁵ Darryl Zanuck to Joseph Mankiewicz, Interoffice-correspondence, June 14, 1950, "Production Files-Produced," 31.f-363, "Joseph L. Mankiewicz papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁹⁶ On Zanuck and "preaching," see Rudy Behlmer, ed., *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox* (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 172. He noted on *Pinky*'s script: "THIS IS NOT A STORY ABOUT HOW TO SOLVE THE NEGRO PROBLEM IN THE SOUTH OR ANYWHERE ELSE. THIS IS NOT A STORY PARTICULARLY ABOUT RACE PROBLEMS, SEGREGATION OR DISCRIMINATION." Rather, the film depicts one woman's decision to stop passing for white and "BE HERSELF." See Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 162.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Fadiman, *Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust*, 36. Brown also spooked Emanuel with white sheets and "ghost wailings" throughout the scene. In contrast, Juano Hernandez praised the cast and crew during his stay in Oxford, telling *Ebony* the racial tensions in Oxford were no different than New York's. See Fadiman, *Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust*, 35.



Figure 19. Limited progressivism. Clarence Brown detested racism, but he also indulged in ethnic stereotype. In *Intruder in the Dust*, Aleck (Elzie Emanuel), bug-eyed and superstitious, provides the sole comedic relief in an otherwise hard-hitting picture.

Zanuck's *No Way Out*, like *Intruder in the Dust*, sparked commentaries, but little profit.⁹⁸ *Variety* reported the race cycle in general turned off large segments of the audience. "One of the difficulties of this type of message pic is that it does not play as many contracts as other top-grossers." The trade journal compared race pictures to lighter movies, such as the comedy *Mr. Belvedere Goes to College* (1950). "The lighter fare gets many repeat dates that the Negro pix do not, plus the fact that some few houses

⁹⁸ *No Way Out* earned \$1.3 million in domestic rentals against a \$1.29 million budget. Audrey Solomon, *Twentieth Century-Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 223 and 246. Local censors also banned the picture: The Department of Public Safety of Massachusetts prohibited its showing on Sundays and the Chicago police lifted a ban after "an interracial committee" suggested a minor deletion. See "Police and the Movies," *NYT*, September 4, 1950, 10. Walter White expressed "amazement and sorrow" in *Intruder in the Dust*'s box office and urged African-American audiences not to do the same with *No Way Out*. See Walter White, "'No Way Out' a Picture Scarcely Without Equal," *CD*, August 26, 1950, 7.

in the South skip this type of product.”⁹⁹ Industry commentator Bert Briller suggested the public grew tired of message pictures’ nitpicking supposed societal faults. Briller observed a trend, as succeeding movies tried to top previous “message” pictures by piling on condemnations before the public. “What next?” he asked. “Where do you go after *Home of the Brave*, *Pinky*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *Lost Boundaries*, and *No Way Out* (Negro themes)—*Gentleman’s Agreement* and *Crossfire* (anti-Semitism),” and other themes? He suggested studios scale back the “social message” genre to “specialized audiences” and “their particular needs and preferences.”¹⁰⁰

The trade papers noted the topic divided audiences and many chose not to see the film. *Intruder in the Dust* elicited opinions varying “from disappointing criticism to rare unreserved praise,” but carried little middle ground.¹⁰¹ Like Zanuck, one moviegoer expressed this disappointment; he found Brown’s film “rather cold [...] I was almost forced to react with a ‘So what?’”¹⁰² The *Washington Post* noted such audience indifference killed the movie’s distribution. One local theater had “an abbreviated booking [for *Intruder in the Dust* and the film] hasn’t been seen since.” The paper wrote “to exhibitors it’s a problem, because it has no stars and because it happens to concern the relationship of whites and Negroes.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ “Inside Stuff Pictures,” *Weekly Variety*, August 23, 1950, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Bert Briller, “Radio Indies Like the New Tricks to Lure Business,” *DV*, November 7, 1949, 335. One exhibitor in McMinnville, Oregon, commented, “A picture of this type is not entertainment. It should be left to the lecture platform or the public forum.” His patrons complemented the film’s technical merits, but “this was a subject that did not appeal to them. They wanted entertainment and relaxation.” See “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, December 9, 1950, 3.

¹⁰¹ “MGM’s *Intruder* Draws Critics Praise and Censure,” *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, January 2, 1950, 20.

¹⁰² John M. Howard, letter, “Comment in the Mail,” *NYT*, December 4, 1949, X8.

¹⁰³ Richard L. Coe, “One of the Aisle,” *WP*, March 14, 1950, B9.

This relationship between the “whites and Negroes” largely deteriorated in the postwar environment. Many American servicemen, movie personnel among them, returned with ideas about a universal brotherhood.¹⁰⁴ But postwar adjustment coincided with fears of backslide into the Depression. During the Depression, communists and civil rights activists, jointly and separately, promoted labor unionization and assorted “Don’t-Buy-Where-You-Can’t-Work” movements for African-Americans.¹⁰⁵ In the immediate postwar years, groups like the Congress of Industrial Organizations promoted full employment for black union members, which gave the African-American community hope of attaining social equality.¹⁰⁶ However, by 1946, a backlash against labor unions, communism, and civil rights coalesced; in the Southern Baptist Convention in Knoxville, for instance, Rev. A.A. Haggard accused the Communists of making “definite plans to take over America this year, using ‘organized labor and the Negroes.’”¹⁰⁷ Referencing God and country, Haggard urged his followers to resist, lest they face the dire consequences, since “all fundamentalist preachers are first on the communist death list.”¹⁰⁸ By extension, preachers’ followers—the plain Southern folk—were next on the list. This wariness against social agitators solidified support for the status quo. In another instance, one citizen wrote his senator, rejecting “the philanthropic ‘greats’ of this day, the red and the pinks...the disciples of Eleanor [Roosevelt]...the pleas of

¹⁰⁴ See Bruscino, *A Nation Forged in War*, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Greenberg, “*Or Does it Explode?*”, Chapter five.

¹⁰⁶ Ken Fones-Wolf and Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2015), 180.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 179.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

[Frank] Sinatra [who] can never alter my convictions on this question [of race].”¹⁰⁹

Apparently aware of Sinatra’s wartime short “The House I Live In,” this writer saw through the propaganda efforts of Hollywood inclusiveness, which he linked to “the reds and the pinks” in politics and social life.

Audience apathy towards *Intruder in the Dust* reflected the perception of civil rights as a communistic movement. In the film’s immediate context, desegregation in the armed forces seemingly hampered American military strength, especially during the Korean War. The Korean War reinforced the public’s stance regarding youths and gun culture (see chapter three), but it also mirrored longstanding notions of racism. The *New York Times* reported one “major problem” in the army concerned “the best use of Negro troops.”¹¹⁰ Integrated support personnel, like truck drivers, “did well,” the newspaper reported, but “in combat units, particularly in the infantry, it is an understatement to say they did considerable less well.”¹¹¹ The columnist concluded “despite the peacetime social problems involved,” desegregation failed and “many in the Army” now advocated integration “in small numbers” only.¹¹² Although international tensions did not appear in *Intruder in the Dust*’s narrative about a town’s self-contained troubles, the public kept the “social problems” in mind. One exhibitor expressed his disgust: “This one took the cake. If we have many more poor nights, we’ll ship [MGM mascot] Leo to Korea.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Bruscino, *A Nation Forged in War*, 142. Bruscino uses the letters as evidence of civilian resistance to integration, which, he notes, differed from G.I inclusiveness.

¹¹⁰ Hanson W. Baldwin, “Need of Training Revealed in Korea,” *NYT*, November 3, 1950, 4.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ “The Exhibitor Has His Say,” *BOBG* supplement *BO*, November 25, 1950, 2.

The exhibitor's wisecrack about deploying the studio's pet lion to Korea underscored the picture's rocky reception. The heart of the movie featured a boy questioning social values during a time of crisis. Just as *The Gunfighter* (1950) did not connect with audiences because of its anti-gun message when G.I.s headed into a potential World War III, *Intruder in the Dust* similarly challenged accepted social norms during a time of uncertainty. Actor Claude Jarman recalled MGM "didn't know what to do with it [the movie] because they were dealing with a subject matter that they weren't ready to deal with."¹¹⁴ Jarman stated the studio ignored *Intruder in the Dust* and promoted *Battleground*, one of producer Dore Schary's pet projects and, according to Jarman, it "wasn't very good."¹¹⁵ But artistic merits aside, the World War II film—about the Allied winter campaign in Bastogne—fittingly allegorized the G.I.s in Korea.¹¹⁶ By re-presenting World War II with American soldiers battling for the principles of democracy and freedom, the studio scored public relations points and good box office.

With *Battleground* and reissues of older World War II movies doing well, Hollywood revived the dormant war combat genre.¹¹⁷ In 1951, industry commentator

¹¹⁴ Tom Goldrup and Jim Goldrup, *Growing Up on the Set: Interviews with 39 Former Child Actors of Classic Film and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2002), 166.

¹¹⁵ Claude Jarman, Jr., interview with author, February 6, 2015.

¹¹⁶ One exhibitor screened a reissue of *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943) in 1950, noting, "If the war in Korea is helping your boxoffice with war pictures, this is one of the best." He implied new and old pictures about the "good war" appealed to audiences tired about the stalemate in Korea. "The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures," *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, December 2, 1950, 4.

¹¹⁷ Aside from flashback sequences or films with a wartime setting (e.g., espionage pictures, home front traumas), the studios released one combat film in 1946, none in 1947, two in 1948, five in 1949, and then an increase as the Cold War heated up. See Jeannie Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 278-283. Hollywood released the first Korean War movie, *The Steel Helmet*, in January, 1951 although newsreels of the conflict, such as *Cassino to Korea*, were released in 1950. See also Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Debra Ramsay, *American Media and the Memory of World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2015), chapters 4 and 5.

Ivan Spear noted both World War II and Korea served as settings for a glut of productions, listing forty titles detailing battles, the home front, biopics, and even comedies.¹¹⁸ By 1953, blacklisted screenwriter Michael Wilson bitterly accused Hollywood of selling an unpopular war to the public: “Conceived militarily, the tactical mission of film producers has been to make an unpopular war palatable to the American people.”¹¹⁹ Public apathy, due to “the known facts of the misery confusion and cynicism of American troops in Korea” led producers to revive World War II as a Korean parallel. Wilson observed filmmakers “skillfully revived combat stories of Normandy and Okinawa” to “play upon the patriotic memories of a middle-aging generation while feeding the glory dreams of a younger generation born too late to take part in the crusade against German and Japanese fascism—*provided* the stories were stripped of anti-fascist content.”¹²⁰ Indeed, *Battleground*’s Nazis are minor players compared to what the American screen chaplain called a larger mission: “We must never again let any force dedicated to a super-race...or a super-idea, or super-anything...become strong enough to impose itself upon a free world.”¹²¹ By 1949, the super nemesis was no longer Nazism, but the commies who erected the Iron Curtain in Europe and took Asia by storm. Audiences left theaters with greater support of the American mission.

¹¹⁸ Ivan Spear, “The Big War Cycle On,” *BO*, February 24, 1951, 20-21, 24, 26.

¹¹⁹ Michael Wilson, “Conditioning the American Mind: War Films Show Vicious Over-All Policy,” *Hollywood Review* 1, no.1 (January 1953): 3. Wilson specifically blasted *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951) for showing the reluctant protagonist overcoming his cowardice to fight for his country. Wilson did not believe the film flopped badly since the theme of cowardice paralleled the “brainwashed G.I.s” from Korea (see chapter three). On Wilson’s blacklisting, see Rebecca Prime, *Hollywood Exiles in Europe: The Blacklist and Cold War Film Culture* (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 4-9, 72-76. Wilson later co-wrote *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957).

¹²⁰ Wilson, “Conditioning the American Mind,” 3.

¹²¹ *Battleground*, directed by William A. Wellman (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1950), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2004).

Intruder in the Dust's challenging the American/southern character held little appeal for moviegoers as the United States cemented its leadership of the Free World. MGM studio chief Louis B. Mayer justified his initial reluctance to okay the project, explaining racial pictures generally met mixed results when distributed abroad because of the "danger inherent in the foreign exploitation of such pictures."¹²² He singled out the communists in Eastern Europe who, "with thinly disguised glee," projected the plight of Great Depression-era Oakies in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) under the irony-laden title *This American Paradise!* to politically naïve audiences.¹²³ As for *Intruder in the Dust*, Mayer expressed his "dread to anticipate the probable reaction to so faithful and undistorted a picture of mob violence and race hatred." While the mogul thought "enlightened" people could see democracy's "incalculable privilege of self-improvement through self-criticism," the "less-understanding" folks would not. "Abetted by a little Communist prompting, [they] only see in them the failure of our institutions to live up to the high ideals we profess."¹²⁴ The studio's tepid exploitation angle reflected their meager earnings overseas. *Battleground* made over \$1.5 million in the foreign market, whereas *Intruder in the Dust* grossed a tenth of that amount in the same market.¹²⁵

¹²² Walter White, "Movies' 'Social Content' Covers Multitude of Sins," *CD*, August 19, 1950, 7.

¹²³ Ibid. Zanuck, who produced *The Grapes of Wrath*, commented to Schary he made the film "with the best intentions in the world and it was used by the communists to bolster communism and expose the plight of the American farmer in the dust bowl. *Pinky* was also exploited by the Communists, as was *No Way Out*." Darryl Zanuck to Dore Schary, Letter, January 1, 1956. U.S. Mss 37AN. Schary. Blackboard Jungle 1954-1956, Dore Schary papers, 1920-1980, Box 33. Wisconsin Center for Film & Theater Research, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

¹²⁴ White, "Movies' 'Social Content' Covers Multitude of Sins," 7.

¹²⁵ "E.J. Mannix ledger," Howard Strickling papers, MHL, AMPAS. Schary insisted his films promoted African-Americans on a national level. "More vital stories are being written and made into motion pictures which treat honestly and objectively of America and the peoples of every nationality, race, and creed who, together, have contributed to the fiber and substance of our democracy." Mayer, and the studio's marketers, clearly disagreed. See A.S. "Doc" Young, "MGM Studio Head Predicts Bright Future

Given the Korean/postwar context and MGM's lackluster promotion, *Boxoffice* reported *Intruder in the Dust* underperformed in large cities, playing ninety-nine percent in Atlanta, but flopped in other cities.¹²⁶ In Atlanta, the local censor, Christine Smith, excised parts she thought unreasonable, including much of the anti-racism aspects which she believed went "above the head of the average moviegoer."¹²⁷ Upon removing these elements, the movie "played largely on the peculiarities of southern whites," such as family honor and the Gowrie patriarch's seeking justice for his son.¹²⁸ *Boxoffice* agreed selective marketing and editing would successfully tone down the film's "emphasis on lynch law and its blood lusts." The "best chance to please audiences lie in its scattered moments of suspense and some action—not in its message."¹²⁹ The "racial discrimination question" could appeal to "special screenings for religious and educational groups, service clubs, school children, etc." to satisfy niche audiences, not the general public. The savvy exhibitor could also ask local media to sponsor "an essay contest on 'Democracy at Work' or some similar topic."¹³⁰ As the trade journal implied, to simply expose audiences to the picture without a filter seemed like an attack on the social fabric, not showcasing democracy "at work."

For Negroes in Hollywood," *CD*, February 25, 1950, 21. *Variety* noted MGM used the same initial campaign strategies for *Intruder in the Dust* and *Battleground*, including gala premieres on location, extended road tours, and exclusive preview screenings for elite townsfolk. See "'Intruder' Pulls Year-High \$2,300 on Memphis Opening," *DV*, November 10, 1949, 7; "One By Skelton," *DV*, August 8, 1949, 8.

¹²⁶ "Boxoffice Barometer," *BO*, February 25, 1950, 111.

¹²⁷ "Atlanta Censor is Putrid Explaining Why 'Pinky' is Nixed," *CD*, April 8, 1950, 21.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ "Feature Reviews," *BO*, October 15, 1949, 117.

¹³⁰ "Exploitips," *BO*, October 15, 1949, 118.

In Memphis and Atlanta, local censors Binford's and Smith's edits to make the movie palatable for local tastes led to successful premieres.¹³¹ In other cities, like Los Angeles, the film experienced difficulty. In a sneak preview during a reissue of *The Wizard of Oz*, MGM presented *Intruder in the Dust* to family audiences. *Variety* reported "only two patrons objected [...] to picture's theme, and both of these admitted they were from [the] deep south [sic] and therefore prejudiced."¹³² In regards to the questionnaire's crucial question "Do you like this type of picture?" the audience responded, "This is the type of picture we should get more often." The trade journal summarized the answers as an "absolute acceptance of Negro theme" and hoped for good returns.¹³³

The preview audience paid lip service to racial reform, but their sentiments did not translate to box office figures. Los Angeles's Four Star Theater optimistically booked an extended run of over one month and struggled to pull in customers. *Variety* reported "despite a hyped opening," the movie failed to gross even a weak \$4,400 in its first week.¹³⁴ The Thanksgiving holiday boosted attendance, but the "forced run" did not earn much more. By the time Four Star's booking ended, the film grossed \$800 in its final three days.¹³⁵ *Boxoffice* reported *Intruder in the Dust* earned twenty-five percent above the average gross in L.A., but this figure may stem from the film's longevity in

¹³¹ "Intruder Pulls Year-High \$2,300 on Memphis Opening," *DV*, November 10, 1949, 7.

¹³² "Hollywood Inside," *DV*, July 19, 1949, 2.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ "First Run Stumble to Weak \$249,400 Holiday Weekend," *DV*, November 15, 1949, 3.

¹³⁵ See "Three Big Houses Go Dark; 1st Run B.O. weak \$200,200," *DV*, November 22, 1949, 3; "Local First Runs Top '48; 'Foxes' Leads Pack," *DV*, December 13, 1949, 7; "'...Before Xmas And All Thru The House-' Sigh L.A. First Runs," *DV*, December 20, 1949, 3.

theaters.¹³⁶ The poor returns from risky projects made industry commentators uncertain if studios would continue to take chances. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to end block booking (where theaters booked a studio's entire yearly output to have access to a few choice selections) in 1948 deprived studios of a guaranteed distribution network. *Variety* wondered about future projects like *Intruder in the Dust* once "producers and distributors are divorced," or if studios would simply turn to mediocre, and risk-free, quality, like the aforementioned *Mr. Belvedere Goes to College*.¹³⁷

Outside the big cities, many small town theaters rejected the movie entirely for criticizing their lifestyle as stymieing social progress. One complained the "pat little sermons" did "no credit to the spectator's intelligence."¹³⁸ The *Los Angeles Times* doubted the film's "box-office huzzah" because "we still don't want to concede that any large segment of our population is that ruthless. We feel that its [sic] undermining to our general spirit in the eyes of the world in general." Finally, the film "isn't helped one whit by pretty final speeches about conscience."¹³⁹ One Michiganiaan regretted, "When we first studied this picture, we decided that we could not play it, and we should have stayed with that decision. We believe that this is not good small town material."¹⁴⁰ One North Dakotan, catering to a "rural and small town patronage," complained, "Leo, you are

¹³⁶ "Boxoffice Barometer," *BO*, February 25, 1950, 111.

¹³⁷ "Mayer, Schenck, and Rodgers Discuss Divorce," *DV*, November 1, 1949, 12. The article claimed Louis B. Mayer was initially "enthused" over the *Intruder in the Dust*'s smash opening in Memphis. However, the picture's ultimate reception surely confirmed his convictions the public disliked social messages in the movies.

¹³⁸ H.R., "'Intruder in the Dust,'" *CSM*, December 15, 1949, 4.

¹³⁹ Edwin Schallert, "'Intruder in the Dust' Grimly Courageous," *LAT*, November 12, 1949, 11.

¹⁴⁰ "The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures," *BOBG* supplement *BO*, June 24, 1950, 3.

giving us some headaches lately. This picture fell flat and definitely did not meet the rental asked.” He concluded, “It’s a problem picture,” summarizing the film’s content and salability.¹⁴¹

White resistance to Brown’s movie was clear, but some African-Americans also disliked the film. One Arkansan reported, “Our white patrons enjoyed it very much, but I don’t think the colored people understood it enough to enjoy it.” The exhibitor shrugged off his assessment as inconsequential because “[n]ot a single one came to see it the second night.” When he asked an African-American patron why the film failed to appeal to blacks, the customer replied, “We wants [sic] to be left alone. We liked westerns.”¹⁴² The respondent may have found the film aesthetically displeasing, but his response hinted at underlying racial strife. Rather than stir agitation, the black community preferred to remain silent, invisible, and out of harm’s way.¹⁴³ In its place, they sought comfort in the frontier myth; through the cowboy ‘n’ Injuns stuff, this African American could safely affirm participation in the national narrative by endorsing the genre’s themes of individualism and national expansion. Even the *Chicago*

¹⁴¹ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, October 14, 1950, 3.

¹⁴² “What the Picture Did for Me,” *Motion Picture Herald (MPH)*, October 7, 1950, 41.

¹⁴³ A scene in *Intruder in the Dust* shows the fears of the black population in Oxford. When Chick rides Faulkner’s horse at night, Brown intersperses shots of African-American families watching the boy pass. They huddle in the deep shadows and, although they lack dialogue, their cowering body language betrays the anticipated lynch mob extending their vigilantism against Beauchamp beyond the jail cell. They dare not stir the race relations in Oxford for fear of white retaliation. Their assertion of wanting to be let alone belies a defensive tactic for survival. Aside from these shots, no African-American character other than Beauchamp has screen time.

Defender's reviewer wished "two or three somewhat righteous lines near the end might have been omitted" to avoid the "soapboxes with patent messages."¹⁴⁴

This African-American voice hinted at an off-screen wariness of a backlash against civil rights messages. The legacy of the civil rights movement as a communist conspiracy created resistance on the part of those defending the "southern way of life." This perceived persecution had long roots; throughout American history, the South maintained a defensive posture as they witnessed their institutions under attack by meddling abolitionists in the nineteenth century, various Congressional compromises in the antebellum period, the devastating Civil War, and decades of sharecroppers, near-poverty, and troubled race relations.¹⁴⁵ In the post-World War II period, southerners reconstructed its image as a "New South," reflecting prosperity and modernity. White supremacy served as the one legacy from which the "New South" derived pride from its troubled past. Brown challenged this makeover by puncturing the racial and foundational values of small towns from which the "New South" traced its origins. This past shadowed the film's production and reception; the association between communism and civil rights in the public mind, alongside the ties between Hollywood leftists with civil rights and communism, reinforced H.U.A.C.'s investigation and contributed to the industry's retreat from social messages. MGM lost \$614,000 on *Intruder in the Dust*.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Lillian Scott, "'Intruder in the Dust' Puts Hernandez in 'The Tops' Class," *CD*, November 26, 1949, 27. Scott liked the line between Stevens and Chick when they watch the lynch mob disperse, stating that "they're running from themselves."

¹⁴⁵ Comer Van Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

¹⁴⁶ "E.J. Mannix ledger," Howard Strickling papers, MHL, AMPAS. Phillips erroneously states the film's "box office returns were satisfactory." See Gene D. Phillips, *Fiction, Film, and Faulkner: The Art of Adaptation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 99.

Heaven-Sent: *Stars in My Crown*

Intruder in the Dust continued the prewar filmmaking motif of using children to explore race relations. The film's hero, adolescent Chick Mallison, saved a black man's life, but also served as the voice of generational change for Oxford. With the movie's failure, screen children lost much of their agency as social crusaders. *Stars in My Crown* (1950) signified a shift in the construction of a child protagonist from a social activist to one upholding the status quo.

By mid-1950, independent theaters pulled the flagging *Intruder in the Dust* from circulation. They embraced MGM's second "race picture," *Stars in My Crown*. Juano Hernandez repeated the role of a wronged victim of racial tensions in the Deep South. In addition, the films shared the same theme about a white boy as a protagonist. *Stars in My Crown*'s director, Jacques Tourneur, adapted Joe David Brown's novel about a boy's growing up in small town Alabama with his grandfather preacher (the film de-ages the preacher into the boy's uncle). Evoking Christ in the title, *Stars in My Crown* uses religion and celebratory history as its framework. The picture does not end with a black man the keeper of white morality. Rather, an upbeat tone ensures small town American values remain unchallenged and timeless, regardless of the changes taking place in the outside world. This message of universal Christian brotherhood reaffirms the image of the United States as a nation of racial and social harmony; the country's "crown" contained no thorns.

While MGM's publicity stretched its marketing ploys for *Intruder in the Dust* to appease mainstream audiences, *Stars in My Crown*'s salesmen had an easier task. The movie's ads briefly tapped into the nation's gun culture as a form of socialization (see

chapter three); its poster ballyhooed a pistol-packed parson whose “sermons were spoken with bullets, his prayers were said with his fists!”¹⁴⁷ [Figure 20] The poster plays into Western mythology and the gunfighter motif by exaggerating a one-minute scene where the protagonist, Josiah Doziah Gray (Joel McCrea), tames the local saloon’s patrons to listen to his sermons at gun point, including the tag-line in which his guns will “speak” for him if they do not listen. As with *Intruder in the Dust*, the marketing angle for *Stars in My Crown* ignores any discussion of race. Instead, Gray becomes a masculine, virile hero in the best gunfighter tradition.

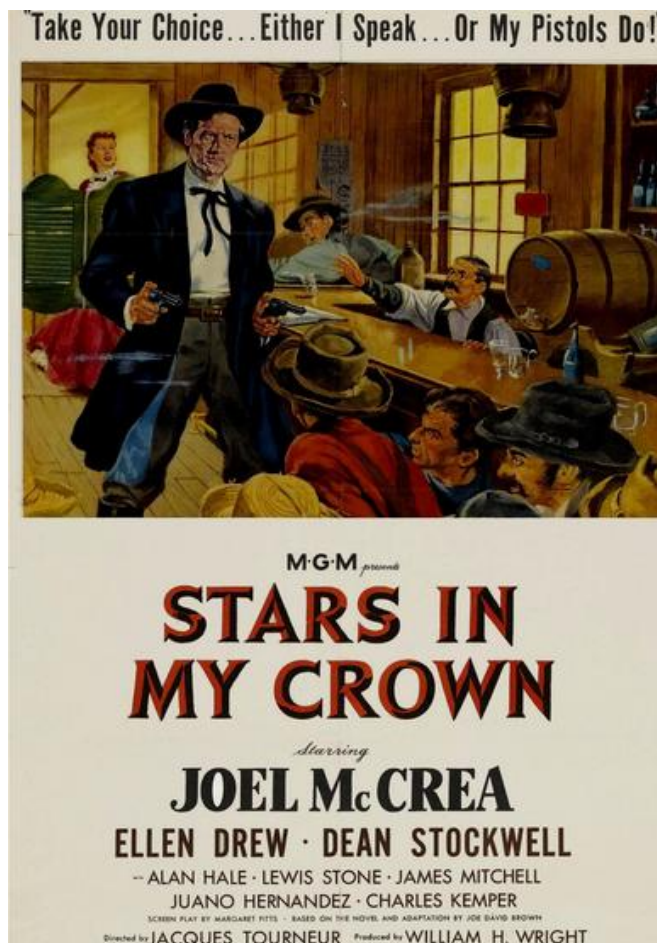


Figure 20. A gun-slinging priest. Parsons Josiah Gray (Joel McCrea) affirms his masculinity as a gunfighter in the western tradition. This show of virility makes up for the lack of action in this

¹⁴⁷ Stars in My Crown pressbook, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

gentle tale of nostalgia of clean, American small town values, which eliminates race as a social problem. The paperback edition of Brown's novel also featured the parson drawing his six-shooter to unbelievers. Author's Collection.

MGM's admen downplay the poster's implied violence through another aspect of American mythology, the utopian life of small town folks. One showman stated, the "biggest hits are those that tell the best stories about real people," not beauty queens, cavalry charges, or torrid love scenes. The film did not have "a Park Avenue penthouse or a Zulu Village—it's a U.S. town called Walesburg—very much like the one we live in."¹⁴⁸ Tie-ins reflected the glorified small town life. MGM suggested contests to "find the family with the most interesting pioneer history or antecedents." *Stars in My Crown* boasted a "Dean Stockwell American Boy Contest," inviting entries from schoolboys to compare themselves to the film's child star: "A sure-fire promotion for family picture patronage. Judges select winner on the basis of being 'most typically American school-boys.'"¹⁴⁹ Valorizing the "typical" American boy and his community, not airing social problems, paid off in box office dollars.

MGM studio reader Alice Goodman confirmed the film's theme struck gold. The plot revolved around "a boy's memories of his Grandpa, a fine old parson who preached the Golden Rule and won to religion those who scoffed." She commented, "This is a nice, clean piece of Americana simply told."¹⁵⁰ The *Hollywood Reporter* also favored this nostalgia angle: "to be brutally mercenary, there's an almost untapped source of revenue in this section of the potential film audience, the over-35 group who have

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Alice Goodman, "Stars in My Crown by Joe David Brown," May 28, 1947, *Stars in My Crown* Files, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

stopped going to movies.”¹⁵¹ According to the article, older folks, tired of the controversial films, wanted escapism and glorifying childhood always worked. Imitators should use “the same simplicity, single-mindedness and sturdy values that have distinguished this one.”¹⁵²

Stars in My Crown presents the construction of the American character through its small town roots. Film scholar Chris Fujiwara notes the picture contains almost no shots outside Walesburg: “the idea of community is already present in every scene.”¹⁵³ Unlike *Intruder in the Dust*’s Oxford, the fictional Walesburg existed in novelist Joe David Brown’s book and the MGM soundstage. The setting also existed in popular memory of the past, specifically, the former Confederacy. The screen treatment identifies the year as 1880, post-Reconstruction. The story thus eliminates the meddlesome agenda of the radical Republicans, but the narrator’s name, John Garfield Kenyon, indicates a reconciliation of sorts, with the name of a Union general who later became president.¹⁵⁴

The Civil War, like the Korean War’s use of World War II, became a means of providing racial stability for the postwar years by eliding the Great Depression entirely. The Civil War’s legacy shifted in public memory shortly after the conflict ended. In the 1880s, civil rights pioneer Frederick Douglass urged the public to heal the rifts between North and South, but, in doing so, he worried the white public would accept the white

¹⁵¹ Edith Lindeman, “A Lesson to Producers,” *DV*, August 17, 1950, 12.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Chris Fujiwara, *Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1998), 167.

¹⁵⁴ Margaret Fitts, “Stars in My Crown—Inc. Script, March 3, 1948,” *Stars in My Crown* Files, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

supremacist view of emancipation as a “blunder” and “failure.”¹⁵⁵ Reconciliation came at the expense of freedmen; by the fiftieth anniversary of the “Lost Cause” in 1915, pro-Confederate movies featured loyal “darkies,” heroic cavaliers, and spunky belles.¹⁵⁶ Movies from the 1930s—from *The Little Colonel* to *Gone with the Wind*—glorified the South as a survivor and would “rise again” from the depths of Depression.¹⁵⁷ In the postwar years, movies like *Rocky Mountain* (1950) showcased Confederate and Union cavalries teaming up to battle “reds,” i.e. the Indians. During the Civil War’s centenary in the 1960s, historical fiction writers concocted “what if” scenarios whereby a triumphant Confederacy also re-united with the Union to “make common cause” under “the original American Dream” and defeat Soviet invaders.¹⁵⁸

For *Stars in My Crown*, an adult John Garfield Kenyon looks back at his childhood self (Dean Stockwell). The grown up’s nostalgic narration reflects a longing to return to this stable image of town life. Kenyon does not undermine social norms as Chick Mallison did. Rather, the boy’s name signified unity for the reconstructed nation. Kenyon’s uncle, Parson Gray, cements the status quo as the norm. After he proves his shooting skills, as shown in the movie poster, Gray settles down among the congregation.

¹⁵⁵ David W Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory & the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 137.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), Chapter four.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce Chadwick, *The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2001), chapters 9 and 10; Brian Steel Willis, *Gone with the Glory: The Civil War in Cinema* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), chapter three.

¹⁵⁸ Jon Wiener, “Civil War, Cold War, Civil Rights: The Civil War Centennial in Context, 1960-1965,” *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, eds., Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 247.

Tourneur brings the audience directly into this atmosphere. The screenplay instructs the camera to simulate the effect so “the movie audience feels itself to be part of the congregation on the screen.”¹⁵⁹ As Gray speaks, “we see various SHOTS of the town that help to create an atmosphere—the peace and nostalgia of times long ago.”¹⁶⁰ The narrator, Kenyon’s adult voice, provides an audio counterpart: “There’s a city of gold right here on earth for all of us—the city of our youth. Walesburg is just one name for it [...] Walesburg, not as it is now, but as it used to be. I just have to shut my eyes and I’m there. Nothing’s changed, Even I haven’t changed. I’m always a boy in Walesburg.”¹⁶¹ Through Kenyon’s recollection, timeless values—Walesburg “as it used to be”—remain the bedrock to rectify modern-day troubles. The plot centers on two story arcs. In the first, a young doctor moves in and tries to prove medicinal science trumps religion. His fancy medical degree fails to impress the town folk. He initially has little sympathy for his ailing patients, but wises up to woo the schoolmarm and help end a typhoid epidemic.

The other theme involves race, in the form of white supremacy. MGM reader Alice Goodman described the “saving of the old Negro from the Night Riders is one of today’s problems and should go well with Southerners who are appalled at what is going on.”¹⁶² The “Night Riders” were an obvious stand-in for the Ku Klux Klan, but MGM

¹⁵⁹ Margaret Fitts, “Stars in My Crown—Inc. Script, May 21, 1948,” *Stars in My Crown* Files, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Margaret Fitts, “Stars in My Crown—CP Script, June 9, 1948,” *Stars in My Crown* Files, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

Alice Goodman, “*Stars in My Crown* by Joe David Brown,” May 28, 1947, *Stars in My Crown* Files, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

dodged a libel suit by renaming their celluloid clan.¹⁶³ Indeed, the Klan found new agency during the Civil Rights movement and become a prevalent force in the white “backlash” during the later 1960s.¹⁶⁴ One Klan spokesman said, “If the Supreme Court can’t maintain our Southern way of life then we *are* going to do something about it.”¹⁶⁵

Stars in My Crown’s masks the Klan’s ideological racism through the Night Riders’ economic agenda. In the film, Uncle Famous (Juano Hernandez), an elderly ex-slave, enjoys his retirement teaching young Kenyon how to fish. But he soon finds his property rights under siege by miner Lon Backett (Ed Bagley) who wants to tap a rich mineral vein under the land. When Famous refuses to sell, Backett forms the Night Riders to lynch him. Early screen drafts resolve Famous’s ordeal in the middle of the story, but the finished film moved this sequence to the end, centering it as the film’s climax rather than the typhoid epidemic.¹⁶⁶

MGM released *Stars in My Crown* in May, 1950, six months after *Intruder in the Dust*. Although the financial debacle of Brown’s film may not have outright influenced Tourneur’s project, the studio brass recognized fairly early on they needed to tone down

¹⁶³ MGM was probably aware the Ku Klux Klan sued Warner Bros. over *Black Legion* (1937) for reproducing its ephemera without permission. See Jeff Smith, *Film Criticism, the Cold War, and the Blacklist: Reading the Hollywood Reds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 125.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in David Mark Chambers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 343; Douglas Field, “Passing as a Cold War Novel: Anxiety and Assimilation in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*,” in *American Cold War Culture*, ed. Douglas Field (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 93; Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 215; Rick Bowers, *Superman versus the Ku Klux Klan: The True Story of How the Iconic Superhero Battled the Men of Hate* (Washington D.C: National Geographic Books, 2012).

¹⁶⁵ Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 305.

¹⁶⁶ In the original novel, the story arc is the first major plot point and takes up two chapters. The Night Riders do not appear in the rest of the book, although Backett’s (named Lon Hamilton in the novel) racism remains. He claims the African Americans are responsible for the climactic typhoid. See Joe David Brown, *Stars in My Crown* (New York: Pocket Books, 1949).

expressions of virulent racism. During a reshoot in 1949, shortly before Brown's movie premiered, the studio revised one confrontation between Uncle Famous and Backett. The miner originally offers to buy Famous's land. The former slave declines and the draft notes, "Backett stares at the old man in furious silence. He opens and closes his mouth a couple of times, but no sound comes. Then he gives his horse a stinging cut with the whip. The horse plunges down the road, the buggy rattling behind." Cut to Juano Hernandez: "Famous's face is creased with worry. He shakes his head."¹⁶⁷

In the retake, Backett's fury does not show on celluloid. Instead, after Famous declines, Backett merely urges him, "Think it over, Famous."¹⁶⁸ Calmly in command, he rides away and Famous's concern does not appear. The villain's race hatred transforms into a cordial warning. Along similar lines, earlier drafts had Gray pleading his parishioners to set aside their greed and leave Famous alone. The final film tones down much of the virulent rhetoric from the script:

Parsons: "Mr. Backett, I'm here to tell you this persecution of Uncle Famous has gone far enough! ~~Call off your dogs, or you're going to have a town full of angry people to answer to.~~"¹⁶⁹

The dialogue editing continued as Gray references the typhoid epidemic:

~~the poison in that well was mother's milk compared to the poison that's here in this room! You're sick men, every one of you—sick with greed and hate—and if you're let, you'll spread your sickness until there isn't a whole soul or a healthy conscience left in Walesburg! Well, I aim to see that you're not let—~~

¹⁶⁷ Margaret Fitts, "Stars in My Crown Retakes," October 6, 1949. "Stars in My Crown," 2782-f.S-2374. Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁶⁸ *Stars in My Crown*, directed by Jacques Tourneur (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1950), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

¹⁶⁹ Margaret Fitts, "Stars in My Crown—complete OK screenplay," May 4, 1949, Stars in My Crown 2782-F.S-2372, Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

[Backett asserts his right to free enterprise]

~~Right now, Mr. Backett, your business is interfering with mine! I'm asking you, before God, don't you realize what you're setting out to do here? Murder one old man, steal his property, take your cut, and call the job done? It won't stop there—don't you think it?~~¹⁷⁰

“Can't you see the poison in that well was cat-lap compared to this! And once this poison gets a start, it'll spread until there isn't a whole soul, or a healthy conscience left in Walesburg! Well, I aim to see that it *don't* get a start—”¹⁷¹

Gray originally called the men “sick” with “greed and hate,” which will lead to murder. But typhoid becomes the main focus, an outside “poison” which affects the body politic.

Kenyon's ten-year-old self knows his uncle will stand up to the Night Riders alone. Worried, he hides under Famous's front porch to provide support. But the boy's agency has limits; typhoid leaves him weak and he passively observes the “sick” Night Riders approach. Kenyon need not have worried for his uncle, as the film ultimately affirms the town's utopic community and atmosphere. Outsiders to “normal” Walesburg, like the greedy Brackett and the young doctor, must conform to these stable values, not contaminate them with notions of riches and cold science. The doctor recognizes the superiority of small town optimism to cure ailments, while Gray defeats the Night Riders with a fond recollection of slavery. **[Figure 21]**

When the Night Riders demand Gray hand Famous over, the Parson recalls the pre-Civil War days, when Uncle Famous faithfully served them and their fathers. Such references glorify Uncle Famous's antebellum life; Parson never says the word “slave.” Playing on sentiment, he reads Uncle Famous's will, which leaves the old man's meager

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ *Stars in My Crown*, directed by Jacques Tourneur (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1950), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

possessions to his killers. For instance, the parson singles out one Night Rider whose “daddy was my old master.”¹⁷² Famous bequeaths him a gift because “I couldn’t go out of this world without leaving something to old Mr. Cumberly’s son.”¹⁷³ This nostalgia works and “the men begin to leave the scene” as the “mob is a mob no longer but forty of fifty bitterly ashamed men in long white sheets, stumbling [...] faintly ridiculous.”¹⁷⁴ This Klan, the filmmakers suggest, are buffoonish men who simply need a lecture about how their actions disgrace their family legacies and southern values.



Figure 21. Sidestepping the Night Riders. Parsons Gray (Joel McCrea, right) and his nephew John Kenyon (Dean Stockwell) confront the Night Riders in this production still, but the film belies a

¹⁷² This quote came from a screenplay and did not make it into the final script. But the sentiment remained in the movie. See Margaret Fitts, “Stars in My Crown—complete OK screenplay,” May 4, 1949, Stars in My Crown 2782-F.S-2372, Turner/MGM scripts, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁷³ *Stars in My Crown*, directed by Jacques Tourneur (Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1950), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2011).

¹⁷⁴ Margaret Fitts, “Stars in My Crown—DC, August 31, 1948,” *Stars in My Crown* Files, Cinematic Arts Library, USC.

larger theme of antebellum harmony. Young Kenyon does not appear in this scene and neither does Uncle Famous. The status quo of historical memory triumphs in Walesburg. Author's collection.

Through the heavy use of nostalgia, the film rebuts the necessity for civil rights.

In the 1930s, the Ku Klux Klan warned blacks not to fall for communist lines about phony “social equality” and urged African Americans to accept their subservient social positions. In doing so, they maintained the status quo where everyone knew their place. In the postwar years, critics of civil rights revived this argument, warning the instability civil rights generated played into communists’ plans. *Stars in My Crown* validates this rationale by providing a historical moment predating twentieth century civil rights activism and political radicalism. Walesburg survived the Civil War and chaotic Reconstruction by adhering to a romantic view of slavery as a harmonious relationship. The film positions this older tradition as the “true” and ideal bond between blacks and whites, which civil rights agitators and their “commie” manipulators wrecked in their schemes to destabilize the United States. Uncle Famous did not need political radicalism and civil liberties to enjoy retirement, nor did the Night Riders need Famous’s land in their misguided get-rich scheme. Gray urges the Night Riders to restore this ideal and when they depart, racial tensions vanish. The historic small town model, with the adult Kenyon’s fond recollection, serves as the framework to answer postwar racial anxieties.

Actor Juano Hernandez’s Uncle Famous is hardly in the same mold as his portrayal of Lucas Beauhamp. After the Night Riders depart, young Kenyon emerges from hiding and learns his uncle pulled the sheet over their eyes. Famous’s “will” is merely blank sheets of paper. Famous is illiterate, invisible (he does not appear in this scene), and reliant on a white man’s glorifying the same traditions which condemned him to save him. Indeed, audiences cannot tell if Gray’s words reflect Famous’s feelings, or

if Gray made them up to play on the Night Riders' sentiment. Either way, the film renders Famous irrelevant to his own rescue; Gray's ploy required Famous to not only give in to his inevitable lynching, but to bequeath everything he owns to his murderers. *Stars in My Crown* affirms the status quo, leaving blacks stripped of their possessions, their agency, and even their lives.

Intruder in the Dust's Gavin Stevens wanted to throw Beauchamp on the mercy of those who wanted to execute him. Here, Gray does this, appealing to the lynchers' respect for a collective past. The use of public memory, such as the loyal slave who tended to his masters' whims, motivates the mob to disperse. Unlike Chick Mallison, neither the Night Riders nor young John Kenyon have the desire to elevate white consciousness. The audience, already basking in the adult Kenyon's fond recollection (and the debunking of modern medicine in favor of folksy charm which ends the epidemic), affirms their small town roots and traditions as sources of strength. Afterwards, the scene shifts quickly to the finale, where the local atheist, who resists Gray throughout the picture, stumbles in and converts. The congregation sings the title song, ending the picture. The closing shot, featuring the church, repeats the opening shot. Fujiwara suggests this repeat symbolizes a "closed universe."¹⁷⁵ John Kenyon knows Famous's ordeal has not—and should not—alter the community.

The studio's shuffling of dialogue and scenes toned down the racial aspects of the script, placing Uncle Famous's ordeal within acceptable narrow boundaries. The Production Code Administration also recognized this film's family-oriented theme

¹⁷⁵ Fujiwara, *Jacques Tourneur*, 167. Brown's novel ends with Kenyon as a soldier leaving for World War I. Including this ending in the film would take the viewer out of the eternal small town and into the twentieth century, where World War I leads directly into the 1920s and the Depression. The ending would also add production costs to film the extra scene and hire an actor to play the adult Kenyon.

discouraged a discussion of race. The censors gave *Intruder in the Dust* freer reign in dialogue, objecting to only the Code-prohibited terms “lousy” and “damn.” But chief censor Joseph Breen had wiser words for Tourneur’s project: “The word ‘nigger’ is particularly offensive to Negroes, and we must ask that the word be omitted.”¹⁷⁶ The slur appears in Brown’s film as a joint summary and condemnation of southern racism. Such controversial words had no place for *Stars in My Crown*’s nostalgic past and MGM assured the censors “the objectionable word above referred to is definitely out.”¹⁷⁷ With the stamp of approval, *Stars in My Crown* contained little objection (or objectionable material) to American consensus tradition or history.

This careful adherence to the racial and social boundaries paid off at the box office. Mrs. Dan Frankhauser, writing for the “Synodical Women’s Guild” in Nebraska, praised the picture for its cleanliness. “Our America needs more of this type of fine picture, those which portrays the moral and ethical value of our Christian faith,” she declared.¹⁷⁸ Reviewers lauded the wholesomeness while ignoring the race angle.¹⁷⁹ One Ohioan grinned, “The church people are our best friends since we gave them the chance to see and place their OK on this one in advance.”¹⁸⁰ The glorification of small town life

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Breen to L.B. Mayer, letter, April 4, 1949, “Stars in My Crown [MGM 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁷⁷ Robert M. Vogel to Joseph Breen, letter, April 25, 1949, “Stars in My Crown [MGM 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁷⁸ Mrs. Dan Fankhauser, Letter, December 4, 1950, “Stars in My Crown [MGM 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁷⁹ “‘Stars’ Inspiring Drama; ‘Girl’ Action in Sea Story,” *HR*, March 1, 1950, 3. See also “Stars in My Crown,” *DV*, March 1, 1950, 3; *Time*, January 8, 1951; “B.O. Paradox for M-G’s McCrea ‘Stars,’” *VW*, October 11, 1950, 3; “Stars in My Crown,” *MPH*, March 4, 1950, 19.

¹⁸⁰ “What the Picture Did for Me,” *MPH*, October 7, 1950, 41. The picture featured a Protestant preacher (a rarity in contrast to the many images of Catholic priests), which may have generated buzz from pressure groups eager to mimic the powerful Legion of Decency’s influence on Hollywood. See William

appealed to locals: “Best picture ever made in Hollywood for a small town. Broke house records. Brought in the mayor’s wife and one woman who came to a movie for the first time in 30 years, so must be good,” an Illinoisan reported.¹⁸¹ “Give me room, my friends, on this one,” gushed one showman in a two-paragraph report detailing “one of the biggest grosses of the year, plus one for our all time big grosses [...] the story is so wholesome that nearly everyone who came out make it a point to ask why we can’t give them more like it.” He concluded, “Every theatre should play this great picture and every manager should beat the brush to get them in. This is real public relations.”¹⁸²

Black critics did not share this enthusiasm. One reviewer called the film a “sentimental costume picture” with “adroitly works in a few sequences of [the] Ku Klux Klan activity in the border states.” The reviewer thought the sequence effective but questioned the sentimentality for hampering the narrative: “It hardly seems possible that men who have been friendly all their lives, from boyhood on, with a kindly old man could don hoods and robes and march on his home.”¹⁸³ A larger concern, however, was not the presence of the Night Riders, but the depiction of Uncle Famous. Unlike Lucas Beauchamp, Hernandez’s Famous does not spur whites into action. He hides when the good parson confronts the Night Riders singlehandedly. Afterwards, Famous disappears entirely; he does not appear in the finale when Walesburg witnesses the “miracle” of the atheist’s conversion.

D. Romanowski, *Reforming Hollywood: How American Protestants Fought for Freedom at the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 120-121.

¹⁸¹ “What the Picture Did for Me,” *MPH*, November 4, 1950, 39.

¹⁸² “The Exhibitor has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, January 20, 1951, 2.

¹⁸³ “Juan Hernandez Scores in ‘Stars in My Crown,’” *CD*, April 29, 1950, 20.

Uncle Famous's name and genial characterization alluded to the post-Civil War storybook character "Uncle Remus," the narrator of writer Joel Chandler Harris's collection of folktales published in 1881. The most well-known of these stories featured the Brer Rabbit, which supported white paternalism for blacks. In his original literary incarnation, Remus told his stories as moral uplift to young white boys, in the same way Uncle Famous taught young Kenyon how to fish.¹⁸⁴ On the surface, these kindly "Uncles" echoed movie children's ability to form friendships with black characters. But black critics attacked the derogatory "Uncle Toms" for catering to white audiences.

When Walt Disney adopted Uncle Remus in *Song of the South* (1946), civil rights leaders and white mainstream audiences denounced the project, leading to mediocre returns. One newspaper reader, "White Texan," told the *Washington Post* the "simple and clownish characters" with "arrested mental stature" were outmoded and offensive.¹⁸⁵ Both black and white demonstrators picketed various theaters with signs referencing the Double-V campaign: "We fought for Uncle Sam, not Uncle Tom."¹⁸⁶ Blacks were not united; actress Hattie McDaniel, who performed in *Song of the South*, rejected the protestors' argument, snapping "What do you want me to do? Play a glamour girl and sit on Clark Gable's knee?"¹⁸⁷ She pointed out actors of color, long

¹⁸⁴ See Catherine Silk and John Silk, *Racism and Anti-racism in American Popular Culture: Portrayals of African-Americans in Fiction and Film* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), Chapter two.

¹⁸⁵ "White Texan," "Song of the South," *WP*, January 18, 1947, 4. See also Jason Sperb, *Disney's Most Notorious Film: Race, Convergence, and the Hidden Histories of Song of the South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), chapters one to three.

¹⁸⁶ "'Song of South' Picketed," *NYT*, December 14, 1946, 18.

¹⁸⁷ Hedda Hopper, "Screen and Stage," *LAT*, December 14, 1947, H3. On the controversy, see Jim Korkis, *Who's Afraid of the Song of the South? And other Forbidden Disney Stories* (New York: Theme Park Press, 2012), 17-107; Maurice Berger, *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 36-41.

marginalized in the film industry, took whatever work they could find. Disney himself fondly recalled his small town roots in rural America, not unlike the adult John Kenyon. But while *Song of the South* conflicted with postwar advocacy for improved race relations, by 1950 the backward projection of nostalgic stability and fears of communist agitation made *Stars in My Crown* an accepted microcosm of the national narrative.

Within this context of nostalgia, a portrayal of a glorified, united country after a devastating conflict, and a poke at the Ku Klux Klan to show Americans can address social problems, *Stars in My Crown* won accolades for glorifying the United States. Outside theaters, the film won the Freedom Foundation's first place prize for the promotion of "political and economic rights which protect the dignity and freedom of the individual."¹⁸⁸ General Omar N. Bradley praised the film for depicting the American way of life and the "righteous crusade" will win the "global struggle for freedom's eternal survival."¹⁸⁹ The image of close knit communities like Walesburg became selling points for propaganda pictures for international moviegoers. Army films such as *A Town Solves a Problem* (1950) showed the former occupied European countries how American small towns (and not the Soviet gulag) foster the roots of democratic freedoms.¹⁹⁰ John Kenyon's adult voiceover echoed the same theme, demonstrating how the unbroken heritage of American values from the Civil War to 1950 resolves all problems. Although

¹⁸⁸ "Foundation Presents More Than 800 Prizes," *CSM*, February 23, 1951, 13; "Metro's 'Stars' Cited by Freedom Foundation," *VW*, February 21, 1951, 4.

¹⁸⁹ William G. Weart, "Bradley Predicts Liberty's Victory," *NYT*, February 23, 1951, 11. MGM had nominated *Intruder in the Dust* for the same award a year earlier, but the film did not win. See "Freedom Foundation Awards," *CSM*, November 10, 1950, WM19.

¹⁹⁰ *A Town Solves a Problem* (United States Army, 1950), Internet Archive, uploaded by Vermont Historical Society, accessed March 2, 2016. <https://archive.org/details/ATownSolvesAProblem>

the film acknowledges the existence of a Ku Klux Klan—the ornery townsfolk *do* don white robes—sentimentality and history, delivered through the pastor, trumps bigotry.¹⁹¹

Stars in My Crown's mainstream appeal generated monstrous box office for MGM. Among independent exhibitors, the majority ranked *Stars in My Crown* as “excellent” with seventy-four votes and twenty-nine rated the film “above average,” fifteen “average,” five “below average,” and not one thought it poor. In the same poll, *Intruder in the Dust* fared badly; among submitted opinions, one voted for “above average,” two “average,” one “below average” and six found the film “poor.”¹⁹² A North Dakotan summarized public opinion on *Stars in My Crown*: “When two of your regular patrons [...] say, ‘That is the best movie I have ever seen in my life,’ you know it has something. Then when another customer, who is a very irregular attendant, says, ‘If they had more of this type of picture, I would go to the movies more often,’ you are more convinced of its value.”¹⁹³ Such sentiment gave MGM \$225,000 in profits.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ *Storm Warning* (1951), released one year after *Stars in My Crown* but set in contemporary America, also featured the KKK as gangsters participating in illegal activities, but avoided the race issue altogether.

¹⁹² “Independent Film Buyers Report on Performance,” *MPH*, October 7, 1950, 48.

¹⁹³ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, June 16, 1951, 2.

¹⁹⁴ “E.J. Mannix Ledger,” Howard Strickling papers, AMPAS. *Stars in My Crown* cost \$1.175 million, about \$200,000 more than *Intruder in the Dust*. In terms of sheer grosses, Tourneur’s movie earned \$2.146 million while Brown’s film grossed \$0.837 million.

MGM considered a third race-centered picture, *Lost Boundaries*, based on William Whyte’s account of Dr. Albert Johnston and his family “passing” as white in New England. Whyte’s book focused on the teenage son’s identity crisis, but the film centers on the family unit and the white community’s acceptance. MGM shelved the project due to budget concerns and because it was “planning two films already dealing with other Negro questions, *Intruder in the Dust* and *Stars in My Crown*.” See Thomas F. Brady, “The Hollywood Wire,” *NYT*, November 14, 1948, X5; Charles Palmer to Arthur Mayer, letter, November 19, 1948, folder 35, Charles Palmer papers, MHL, AMPAS; A.H. Weiler, “By Way of Report,” *NYT*, May 15, 1949, X4. Film Classics produced the film. Screenwriter Charles Palmer stated the boy’s accepting his ethnicity “has the glimmering of a realization that his life isn’t exactly down the drain, that perhaps he can live as a colored man and get something out of it.” Still, he avoided calling it a “race picture” because “sociologists who hope to see it come out as a clinical study of the racial problem. Audiences will not go to see a picture of that sort. This must be the story of a man, who happens to be a

Conclusion

During the 1930s and 1940s, Hollywood movies showed children of all colors experiencing the same hardships afflicting the country. Economic troubles, fragmented families, and wartime uncertainties allowed them to form friendships and group solidarity on screen. In the postwar years, “social message” pictures used the same motif; as Lucas Beauchamp tells Chick Mallison, young people “aren’t cluttered” and could become agents of reform.

But during the postwar years, critics associated civil rights with communist subversion. For example, one spokesman for a local citizens’ association in Washington D.C., deplored “certain organizations” for disrupting the “natural state” of segregation in restrictive housing covenants.¹⁹⁵ Tracing the black population boom to the migration northward during Depression and war years, the spokesman claimed “unscrupulous

negro.” Palmer called the story a “spy” thriller situating one man “among enemies, where one false move may bring ruin” or a “blackmail” plot involving a “guarded secret,” which will make “this sort of picture will be more powerful than a clinical study. And it will be entertainment.” Charles Palmer, “Lost Boundaries,” undated, folder 21, Charles Palmer papers, MHL, AMPAS. He toned down several passages and Joseph Breen found it “reasonably free from any likely difficulty from the standpoint of political censorship.” Joseph Breen to Eugene Ling, letter, January 17, 1949, “Lost Boundaries [Film Classics, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. He thought it “contains little, if anything, to which anyone might find offensive.” Joseph Breen to Borden Mace, letter, June 22, 1949, “Lost Boundaries [Film Classics, 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS. Censors in Atlanta and New Orleans banned the picture. Atlanta censor Christine Smith cited her authority to protect the public from material which “adversely affect the peace, health, morals, and good order of the city,” in this case, blacks passing for white. “‘Boundaries’ Suit to Test Power of the Censors,” *DV*, November 21, 1949, 10.

Memphis censor Lloyd T. Binford okayed *Intruder in the Dust*, but found the idea of “white and Negro children playing together” a form of “social quality between white and Negroes in a way that we do not have in the South.” “MPAA May Join with De Rochemont to Fight Southern ‘Boundaries’ Ban,” *DV*, August 31, 1949, 20. The film also upheld Truman’s army desegregation order, showing the white-passing father and son in uniform. In an interview with *Variety*, Binford “exploded” with rage, stating, the “lead character, a Negro passing as a white, was an imposter and a liar. The people of his New Hampshire home town resented him until the minister in the film smoothed it over.” See Matty Brescia, “Tenn. Supreme Court Rules Binford Has ‘No Authority’ to censor Curley,” *VW*, December 21, 1949, 4. The producers attempted to overturn the ban on First Amendment grounds, but Tennessee Supreme Court, which chastised Binford over *Curley*, refused to hear the case and the ban remained. “State Censorship Upheld in Supreme Court in ‘Boundaries,’” *HR*, October 17, 1950, 5.

¹⁹⁵ “Race Segregation ‘Natural’ Here, Newell Tells Citizens,” *WP*, October 15, 1947, 11.

agitators” were taking advantage of “uninformed Negro” migrants, exploiting them to promote “social democracy, which is but another name for communism.”¹⁹⁶ The ultimate goal of this “nefarious plan” was to turn the “Nation’s Capital [into] the same condition that befell France and other European countries.”¹⁹⁷ In this view, the communists drew upon social fluxes from the Depression years to turn ignorant and innocent African American into pawns for world conquest.

In the film industry, the studios caved under pressure. The Hollywood Ten vocally supported racial equality, which reinforced their culpability under H.U.A.C.’s magnifying glass. This pressure encouraged Hollywood to stifle children’s voices. White screen youths had a history of racial tolerance and even friendships in the 1930s, but those who directly challenged social norms now preached those views to empty houses. The *New York Times* praised *Intruder in the Dust* for not catering to “the lowest and most juvenile of popular tastes” and the “educational impact [...] has been wholly positive.”¹⁹⁸ But these positive attributes did not make money: “its realism, its honesty, flavor and intention should be particularly recognized down there” in the South, which it was, and which led to its failure.¹⁹⁹ The public, caught in the beginning of the Korean War, rejected this form of education. For his next project, director Clarence Brown went

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ “Movies and the Negro,” *NYT*, November 25, 1949, 30.

¹⁹⁹ Bosley Crowther, “A Great Film: ‘Intruder in the Dust’ Commands High Praise,” *NYT*, November 27, 1949, X1.

back to the soundstages for *To Please a Lady* (1950), a Clark Gable vehicle about “midget autoracing.” Brown shrugged, “Essentially, it’s a studio picture.”²⁰⁰

Stars in My Crown avoided such troubles by setting the clock back to 1880, and then pointing to a romantic antebellum period to present an idealized harmonious relationship between blacks and whites. As the *Los Angeles Times* relayed, the picture “‘looks back’ on an older America, rich with the triumph of right over wrong, and filled with pastoral charm.”²⁰¹ This idealized nostalgic approach to the civil rights movement’s airing social problems satisfied white audiences who wanted to see their small town heritage hailed, not hissed at by social progressives and leftists. By 1959, critic Bosley Crowther observed, for each “dramatic subject in which Negroes are prominently involved,” marquees advertised “fifty white society dramas, family comedies, Walt Disney animal pictures, Westerns, and monster films.” He lamented “few of the pictures about the problems of the Negroes have done well at box offices in this country, or, especially, abroad.” He characterized “one of the best [as] a financial disaster. That was *Intruder in the Dust*.”²⁰² Ten years after the movie premiered, Crowther recognized Brown’s film as the apex of the “social message” cycle—and its failure marked the swift end of the genre.

²⁰⁰ Philip K. Scheuer, “Brown Champions Work on Location,” *LAT*, October 30, 1949, D1.

²⁰¹ Edwin Schallert, “Two-Gun Pastor Conquers Village,” *LAT*, April 18, 1950, A7. One critic suggested *Intruder in the Dust* appealed to ministers: “This is a story of the love and understanding Christ taught, the love and respect of one human being for another. It is a sermon in celluloid.” See Richard L. Coe, “One of the Aisle,” *WP*, January 28, 1950, 12. He also thought the preachments awkward and exhibitors did not report success in enlisting churches. See Richard L. Coe, “One of the Aisle,” *WP*, March 14, 1950, B9.

²⁰² Bosley Crowther, “Trouble Enough,” *NYT*, January 18, 1959, X1.

In 1949, the *Chicago Defender* optimistically predicted Hollywood found a “black gold mine” with race pictures. With four pictures released that year about racism and two more in development at the time of publication, the writer thought the “once-feared films about race” now made for sure-fire box office hits.²⁰³ But six months later, the same writer expressed dismay, noting the only success from the 1949 “experiments” was Juano Hernandez’s steady career.²⁰⁴ By 1957, the newspaper recalled 1949 as a golden year for promoting racial equality, but the potential languished unfulfilled since. Noting the white violence over desegregation had all the earmarks for a first-rate melodrama, one columnist hinted “the Hollywood touch” was key to “shaping American attitude” about race.²⁰⁵ Hollywood did not respond.

Despite Hollywood’s silence, even some quiet moments could pack a punch.²⁰⁶ After *Stars in My Crown* wrapped, Juano Hernandez’s contemplated his next project, a remake of the century-old *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This symbolic continuation of Uncle Famous did not materialize.²⁰⁷ Instead, Hernandez signed up for *The Breaking Point* (1951), as sidekick Wesley Parks to fisherman Harry Morgan (John Garfield). Morgan

²⁰³ A.S. “Doc” Young, “Hollywood Digs ‘Black Gold,’” *CD*, December 17, 1949, 1. The newspaper commended Clarence Brown for advancing “the frontier of democracy.” See “Clarence Brown Cited for Making ‘Intruder,’” *DV*, December 30, 1949, 5.

²⁰⁴ A.S. “Doc” Young, “What is Hollywood’s Real Attitude Toward Negroes?,” *CD*, May 20, 1950, 21. The University of Puerto Rico also honored Hernandez with an honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts. See “Swinging the News,” *CD*, June 10, 1950, 21.

²⁰⁵ “When Hollywood Had Courage,” *CD*, January 12, 1957, 9.

²⁰⁶ *The Phenix City Story* (1955), a docudrama about the sanitation of “Sin City, USA,” starts with the kidnapping and murder of a black girl as a warning for white reformers to desist lest their children experience the same fate. *Desperate Search* (1952) features a gentle black convict who befriends a white boy and saves him in a plane crash. The educational short *Duck and Cover* (1952) shows an integrated classroom with black children front-and-center as they participate in civil defense. This inclusiveness reinforces the danger atomic warfare posed to all children and the collective need for vigilance.

²⁰⁷ Edwin Schallert, “Metro May Have Uncle Tom in Grooming Stage; Williams Bid for Italy,” *LAT*, April 22, 1949, A7.

and Parks battle human traffickers and Morgan loses an arm while Parks loses his life. In the end, a sympathetic crowd whisks the wounded star away so “the Morgan family can face the future again, secure.”²⁰⁸ Morgan trades an amputated limb for his wife’s embrace, and he has his family intact and a bright, stable future. In contrast, the last shot leaves Hernandez’s small son (John Hernandez) alone on the pier, waiting for his father who will never come back and a society that does not care to look. The lad lingers unnoticed by the mainstream crowd of movie extras fawning over the injured Morgan. The races that have and have not the public eye become the film’s final impression as the screen fades to black.²⁰⁹

The falling curtain on the social message cycle mirrored the descending iron curtain in Europe. Americans re-solidified the racial borders as a means of stability. The “victory culture” left the Double-V Campaign in the dust. The public, drawing on fifteen years of associating civil rights with “red” agitation, readily linked Hollywood’s social message cycle to communism and American weakness. One disgruntled moviegoer, Roger C. Foss, hearing of Darryl Zanuck’s *No Way Out*, wrote the producer, condemning the “government sponsored movie [that] won’t do anything but make me hate niggers and nigger lovers more.”²¹⁰ Foss called interracial mingling a disaster in the making at home and abroad: “America has always been ‘the strongest’ segregated. Now with this

²⁰⁸ “The Breaking Point,” Synopsis, “The Breaking Point [W.B. 1949],” Motion Picture Association of America. PCA records, MHL, AMPAS.

²⁰⁹ Bosley Crowther called the ending “not only a fine evidence of racial feeling, but it is the one of the most moving factors in the film.” See Bosley Crowther, *NYT*, October 7, 1950, 10. *Variety* singled out “eloquently silent bit of a small Negro boy waking in solitary terror on the deck for his father, whose murder has precipitated the gun-fight finale.” Hebe, “The Breaking Point,” *VW*, September 13, 1950, 6.

²¹⁰ Roger C. Foss to Darryl Zanuck, Letter, September 12, 1950, “Production Files-Produced,” 31.f-363, “Joseph L. Mankiewicz papers, MHL, AMPAS.

form of degeneration going on, anything may happen” and Foss questioned whether foreign nations would “respect a ‘mongrel race’ or hordes of malatoes [sic]. Is that a good advertisement for democracy? How about these thousands of black bastard babies left in Europe. That’s one good reason why democracy is making no headway in Europe.”²¹¹ In his view, breaking down the color line was simply bad for international relations, with the American mission—democracy in Europe—faltering. The final chapter examines filmic boyhood caught in the larger political upheavals in postwar Europe and its impact on American identity as the public continued to search for stability.

²¹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTERNATIONAL PICTURE

The American people have not lost the fear of insecurity caused by the last depression and are now being assailed by fear caused by the cold war.

—*New York Times*, 1949¹

...some of the people in Hollywood are Communists and some aren't. I don't know why the Communists don't admit it instead of being so kittenish about it. If that's what they believe in, why the heck don't they say so?

—Gary Cooper, 1949²

You know, Hitler really won this war—in the person of Stalin.

—historian William Henry Chamberlain, 1948³

The February 1949 cover of *Boys' Life* featured a troop of youngsters standing at attention near the Statue of Liberty's base. The color photograph depicted the group as an international melting pot with the world's flags unfurled before them. "Strengthen the arm of liberty" ran the tagline under the boy-parallel of the United Nations. The article described "a war orphan just arrived from Europe" who "was so impressed he joined a

¹ "Panel Discussions of the Cultural Conference Delegates Cover a Wide Range of Subjects," *New York Times* (NYT), March 27, 1949, 44. The Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace took place at the Waldorf-Astoria, New York. Conference panelists, many of whom were communists and/or critics of U.S. foreign policy, bemoaned the extension of a wartime economy and predicted World War III. Regarding the epigraph, the newspaper paraphrased statements from Grace F. Marcus, a social worker at the University of Pittsburgh. Outside the hotel, picketers carried signs featuring slogans such as "American, not Commie Culture."

² "Cooper Chides Kittenish Reds," *Los Angeles Times* (LAT), June 16, 1949, 11.

³ William Henry Chamberlain, "Stalin Replaces Hitler," *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), March 10, 1948, 6.

Scout Troop.” The boy fled from an unspecified “dictator’s government” that crushed its Scout program. “Boy Scouts aren’t wanted in a dictator country,” the writer explained. “They are considered enemies of the state because they represent individual resourcefulness, courage, and honesty.”⁴ By connecting common American values to its organization, the Boy Scouts implied any boy who joined its ranks became a soldier in the front lines against statist totalitarianism.

Boys’ Life portrayed the Americanization of foreign kids as a crucial step to creating a stable postwar world. The kids who came of age in the late Jazz Age and during the Great Depression saved the world from fascism. Now, the younger set in the new postwar era continued the mission. They faced an uphill battle. As described in previous chapters, dysfunctional families, juvenile delinquency, and the “race question” reflected lingering concerns from the past fifteen years. To address these concerns, Hollywood emphasized patriarchy, paramilitarism through groups like the Boy Scouts, and the “whitewashing” of social messages as means of re-creating stability after decades of economic and social uncertainty. The endpoint for this process created the citizen-soldier who protected his home and promoted these democratic values abroad.

President Franklin Roosevelt hoped the United States would serve as the chief postwar international policeman.⁵ As historians point out, a projected larger postwar American involvement abroad would sustain the wartime economic recovery and prevent the country from backsliding into the Depression.⁶ From a public standpoint, the rhetoric

⁴ “Strengthen the Arm of Liberty,” *Boys’ Life*, February 1949, 3.

⁵ See David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶ Curt Caldwell, *NSC 68 and the Political Economy of the Early Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

of the “American Way” as an ideal lifestyle and form of government justified the country’s role as an international guardian.⁷ Children played a large part as innocents who needed the protection a policeman offered. Contemporaries called the Second World War as a “war against children” due to the high involvement of youngsters in Axis and Allied mobilization and the high rate of child deaths, trauma, and other exposures to violence. The “Lost Children” of Europe became a means for the U.S. to refashion the world in an idealized American image. The result from this endeavor would ideally ensure international stability and assuage anxieties at home about future wars.

However, the war orphan’s joining the Boy Scouts did not make him an automatic American citizen, nor did Americans necessarily want to act as a global policeman. Despite *Boys’ Life*’s cover showing boys creating a symbolic world community, the public remained wary of involvement in international affairs. They rejected the “One-World Movement” and criticized the United Nations for a loss of American identity and wasting scarce resources. Journalist and writer John Gunther published observations about his fellow Americans after a cross-country tour, describing a renewed isolationism: “Once the war is over, its backwash smears over us, and the nation succumbs to greed, dear, ineptitude, fumbling of the morning hopes, shoddy dispersal of the evening dreams” as the people jealously guarded against a backslide to Depression.⁸ Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew’s staff also encountered obstacles in generating public enthusiasm over nation-building. Their efforts to create “representative governments in Eastern

⁷ Wendy Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter eight.

⁸ John Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), xii. *Inside U.S.A.*’s popularity led it to become a Broadway musical. See also O. Spurgeon English and Constance J. Foster, “A Challenge to Mothers,” *Parents’*, September 1948, 30.

Europe [are] hampered by the American public's lack of knowledge of developments there," one report read. "If the United States is to be in a position to exert its influence in this direction, it must have the full backing and understanding of the American people, who can be properly and adequately informed only by our press and radio."⁹

Although the U.S. promoted itself as the defender of the political/economic Free World, the long-term commitment to rehabilitation and reconstruction of Europe proved difficult to sell to the public. West Germany especially became a contentious battle grounds. After the massive propaganda campaign to demonize the Third Reich during the war, Americans scrambled to protect Germany from falling behind the Iron Curtain.

This chapter examines Hollywood's depiction of postwar internationalism through the rehabilitation of European youths. The wartime picture *Tomorrow, the World!* (1944) provides an early example of public apathy towards internationalism. Despite a massive publicity campaign, *Tomorrow, the World!* met box office disappointment. Internationalism, such as the One World Movement, met increasing public hostility during the late 1940s and Hollywood's visualization of American involvement in Europe mirrored the changes in public taste.

The chapter primarily focuses on *The Search* (1948), a picture in which an orphaned Czech boy reconstructs his identity with an American soldier in postwar Germany. Swiss producer Lazar Wechsler and MGM director Fred Zinnemann collaborated to specifically highlight the suffering in postwar Europe and galvanize the American public to action. In terms of filmmaking, the producers did everything "right."

⁹ Quoted in Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 255. See also Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

They crafted the rehabilitation of a lost boy into a potential American citizen, socialized to respect democratic principles under a military father figure. The film displays strong family ties through father-child bonding as the United Nations rebuilds devastated Germany. The producers inserted a happy ending and played up emotional hokum and drama to appeal to audiences. The film won praise and awards for its sociopolitical message, and the United Nations endorsed the project with enthusiasm.

But *The Search* failed to entice the public to embrace a wider American involvement. The film's initial poor reception demonstrated social progressivism did not pay off at the boxoffice, which MGM's *Intruder in the Dust*, released a year later, confirmed. As Hollywood turned defensive due to H.U.A.C., the industry embraced anticommunist sentiment as a source of social and political stability and box office. At the same time, the industry distanced its filmic rhetoric from themes of "One World" governments and brotherhood prevalent in pictures from the Great Depression and, more recently, World War II. By the 1950s, the industry's self-policing promoted internationalism, but through a political filter of containment. By the end of the 1940s, the American boy, by Hollywood standards, was firmly cast as a Cold Warrior.

Past and Present Fears—*Tomorrow, the World!*

After World War I ended in 1918, the United States largely retreated from world affairs. The Republican presidential administrations in the 1920s vowed to "seek no part in directing the destinies of the Old World" as a repudiation of Wilsonian internationalism.¹⁰ Their position drew support from popular disillusionment with the Great War as a European bloodbath, doubts whether the Versailles Treaty could prevent

¹⁰ Ronald E. Powaski, *Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism, Internationalism, and Europe, 1901-1950* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 27.

an “inevitable” war, and the perception of the League of Nations as a check on American freedoms. In 1937, Americans marked the twentieth anniversary of their entrance into World War I, with one poll announcing nearly seventy percent of the public believed entrance into the war was wrong.¹¹ “In a large sense,” one newspaper noted, “the 1929 depression may be attributed to war causes; the end is plainly not yet.”¹² Congress’s repeated Neutrality Acts (1935, 1936, 1937, 1939) gradually allowed President Franklin Roosevelt expanded powers to support the Allies, but the Acts also reflected the public resistance toward entering another war.

The “Day of Infamy” changed this outlook, as the United States declared war on Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Historian Melvyn Leffler points out “only after the cumulative impact of world depression, totalitarian aggression, and universal conflict, did American policy makers come to believe that European stability was vital to American well-being.”¹³ As early as 1942, Raymond L. Buell, former President of the Foreign Policy Association, warned the public a return to isolationism would lead to “a colossal internal depression and World War III.”¹⁴ He urged for a “tighten[ing] up” of the “war effort at home” to suppress a “natural inclination” of Americans to prefer domestic luxuries rather than extend relief to “devastated foreign countries.”¹⁵ “Postwar

¹¹ “Way of Peace Sought on War Anniversary,” *Christian Science Monitor (CSM)*, April 6, 1937, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ Melvyn P. Leffler, “American Policy Making and European Stability, 1921-1933,” *Pacific Historical Review* 46, no. 2 (1977): 209.

¹⁴ “Buell Warns Against Return to Isolationism,” *CSM*, December 3, 1942, 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

America,” he stated, must “subordinate immediate desires for enlightened self-interest.”¹⁶ The Kansas Institute of International Relations noted the “isolationist Midwest” vanished after December 7, 1941, and many citizens believed “that world events and problems growing out of this war imposed a collective responsibility on the citizens of democracy to prevent a third world war.”¹⁷

Hollywood’s wartime melodramas urged American audiences to join the Allied effort. As scholars point out, non-interventionists groups, like the America First Committee, rejected U.S. involvement and prominent members, most notably Charles Lindbergh, preferred a negotiated peace with Hitler rather than endure years of hardship, famine, and mass civilian deaths from an anticipated war. To counter isolationism, the film industry projected celluloid images criticizing the Third Reich and promoted the war as an extension of American democratic values.¹⁸ American Firsters, critics alleged, were Nazi supporters, closeted commies, and anti-Semites.¹⁹

In contrast, internationalism rebutted the legacy of isolationism from the First World War. The 1943 docudrama *December 7th*, a collaboration between the Department of War and Hollywood, glorified the postwar goal of building an international peace. In a closing conversation between a dead, disillusioned World War I doughboy and a casualty from Pearl Harbor, the elder soldier tells his younger counterpart the world

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Midwest Isolationism Gone, Kansas Institute Discovers,” *CSM*, June 27, 1942, 7.

¹⁸ The literature on Hollywood and Hitler is vast. See Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Bros.’s Campaign against Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), chapter five; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). The industry went to great lengths to maintain an open German market. See Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood’s Pact with Hitler* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Ruth Sarles and Bill Kauffman, *A Story of America First: The Men and Women who Opposed U.S. Intervention in World War II* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

learned nothing from the massive slaughter in No Man's Land twenty years earlier. The sailor disagrees, prophesying the Day of Infamy created an international coalition based on common sense, decency, and brotherhood. He allegorizes the war with the national pastime, predicting Team U.S.A. will usher in a "world series of peace."²⁰

The European war orphan became a celluloid symbol of greater U.S. involvement abroad. Americanizing foreigners not only make the world safe for democracy, but prevented future wars. The movies presented foreign children adopting American values and sacrificing themselves accordingly. Chinese (*China's Little Devils* [1945]), Filipino (*Back to Bataan* [1945]), and Russian (*The Boy from Stalingrad* [1943]; *Song of Russia* [1943]) kids battled the Axis powers to the death. European war orphans in *The Pied Piper* (1942) and *Journey for Margaret* (1942) reinforced the image of the United States as a haven for the world's tired, poor, and war-torn peoples. Reformers and charities, such as the March of Dimes, appealed to the public to help "the world and its peoples to understand the wonders of a new age," meaning the United States represented an anchor for world stability. Programs included "Nobody's Children," in which "modern science" helped abandoned kids become "normal, happy, useful citizens."²¹ Postwar media coverage of orphans did not describe the horrors they witnessed, but concentrated on the exciting possibilities of a bright future under American-led guidance.²² An American-led peace and prosperity, these programs implied, would prevent a third World War.

²⁰ *December 7th*, directed by John Ford and Gregg Toland (1943), last modified September 1, 2005, accessed February 28, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/December7th>

²¹ March of Dimes, Advertisement, *Life*, February 17, 1947, 115.

²² Beth B. Cohan, "The Last Remnant of the Holocaust: The Representation and Reality of Child Survivors' Lives," in *Children, Childhood, and Cultural Heritage*, eds., Kate Darian-Smith and Carla Pascoe (New York: Routledge, 2013), 175-189.

The rubble of European nations, then, presented an opportune moment to teach children the superiority of U.S.-styled democracy. This itself was not new; German orphans from World War I underwent similar re-education in the United States. One interwar social worker asserted the children “expected to make this their home and therefore they have to be brought up like American children.”²³ These social workers believed bolstering these values strengthened the home environment. In 1943, the *Los Angeles Times* worried, “There will be depression following this war; there will be disruption of family life and consequent broken homes.”²⁴ Preventing this “disruption” involved good citizenship; one child expert claimed the “most patriotic thing a mother can do is to rear her children to be good citizens” because “[n]o good can come from homes where neither parent is in charge for long days or nights.”²⁵ The need for good parents came in the form of strong patriarchs like *Any Number Can Play*’s Charley Kyng (see chapter two) or through military-style discipline (see chapter three).

Postwar Germany became the contested grounds between children, international stability, and rehabilitation. The Nazis propagandized their ideology as a youth-centered movement and the U.S. addressed Third Reich youngsters.²⁶ The movie *Tomorrow, the World!* (1944) played with the theme of child redemption, sparking a debate about the

²³ Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 70.

²⁴ Bess M. Wilson, “Family Life Conferees Vision Postwar Woes,” *LAT*, April 4, 1943, A10.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007).

fate of Hitler Youth.²⁷ The story centers on a German orphan Emil Bruckner (Skippy Homeier) sent to live with his Midwestern American uncle. The boy terrorizes his adopted household, but the moral melting pot—where all ethnicities assimilate into Americans—wins him over. After his uncle nearly strangles him, his classmates shun and beat him up, and officials threaten him with reform school, Emil starts to appreciate democracy. But the film’s mixed reception presents the difficulty of rehabilitation.²⁸

Critics recognized Emil as a microcosm of postwar German children and Europeans in general. Unfortunately for internationalists, rehabilitation met resistance from sensational pictures such as *Hitler’s Children* (1943), with a notorious scene featuring Nazis whipping an American school girl, and the self-explanatory *They Came to Blow Up America* (1943), based on Germany’s failed Operation Pastorius. In addition, anti-German sentiment persisted through the twentieth century, magnified largely by World War I.²⁹ *Tomorrow, the World!*’s Aunt Jessie (Agnes Moorehead) voices this sentiment, proposing a final solution for her “Aryan” nephew: “If it were up to me, I’d exterminate the entire German race!”³⁰ But she wises up when Miss Richards (Betty

²⁷ Jennifer Fay, *Theaters of Occupation: Hollywood and the Reeducation of Postwar Germany* (2008), chapter one.

²⁸ “Boxoffice Barometer,” *Boxoffice (BO)*, May 19, 1945, 40; “Boxoffice Barometer,” *BO*, June 2, 1945, 35. See Phil M. Daly, “Among the Rialto,” *The Film Daily (FD)*, January 24, 1945, 10; Bernie Kreisler, “Cowan Film Builds,” *Hollywood Reporter (HR)*, January 23, 1945, 1; Harry Brandt and Lou Brandt, “An Open Letter to Lester Cowan,” Advertisement, *Motion Picture Daily (MPD)*, February 1, 1945, 11.

²⁹ See Shannon Lynn Sturm, “Spies, Lies, and Intrigue: Anti-German Sentiment in West Central Texas During World War I” (PhD diss., Angelo State University, 2010); Ron Theodore Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Re-Educating German POWs in the United States During World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Rebecca L. Boerhling, “The Effects of Anti-German Sentiment on Planning and Policy-Making for Post-War Germany, 1943-1947” (MA thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980).

³⁰ *Tomorrow, the World!*, directed by Leslie Fenton (1944; Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2001), DVD.

Field), a Jewish schoolmarm, noted child psychologist, and Emil's prospective aunt, optimistically predicts everyone can learn from each other to become good friends.

Critics accepted the film's premise that "twelve-year-old Germans can be cured with patience and kindness" and expressed hope "if little Emil Bruckner is multiplied by 12,000,000, the venom of Hitlerism eventually may be washed away."³¹ Publicity material recognized film as a medium to replace Nazi indoctrination but left the details of such a program unstated.³² In a Los Angeles Unified school system survey, kids expressed uncertainty, with one claiming, "If we don't run the world right after this war, there will be a World War III."³³ Another echoed Aunt Jessie's outlook: "Re-educate the German people...until they can prove that they are capable of joining the family of nations. If this fails, kill them all."³⁴

The mixed review from children underscored public aversion to social "preachments," anti-German sentiment, and uncertainties about the U.S.'s role in the postwar world. A Chicago exhibitor complained, "This failed to draw," adding, "Propaganda pictures seldom do well here."³⁵ During one screening, producer Albert

³¹ Lewis Nichols, "Post-War Planning," *NYT* (*NYT*), April 25, 1943, X1. See also Wilella Waldorf, "Two on the Aisle," *New York Post*, stage files, f-1.19: "Tomorrow the World—script 1943-1946," Edit Angold papers, Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS); Bosley Crowther, "Measuring Two New Films," *NYT*, January 7, 1945, X1; Kahn, Review, *DV*, October 20, 1944, 8; *HR*, December 15, 1944, 3; "Product Digest," *Motion Picture Herald* (*MPH*), December 23, 1944, 2237; *The Exhibitor*, December 27, 1944.

³² *Hollywood Writers Mobilization Premiere and Town Meeting for Tomorrow, the World*, "Political material -- Hollywood Writers Mobilization 1945, undated," subject files-general, 46-f.815, Howard Estrabrook papers, MHL, AMPAS.

³³ *The Democratic versus the Nazi Way of Life*, Vertical File, 3-f.37: Report 1945, 588. Bureau for Intercultural Education report on TOMORROW THE WORLD, (AMPAS). Another student clarified, "Everyone has equal rights to get ahead (except negroes who should have these rights if Jews can)." 600.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 563.

³⁵ "What the Picture Did for Me," *MPH*, July 14, 1945, 36.

Margolies reported Walter Lippmann, who supported the One-World Movement and detested Nazi Germany as a moral and real threat to American security, “got up and left the room in a hurry but not before he expressed strenuous objections to the ending ... He said that the picture makes Americans all ‘look like saps,’” which caused a buzz among the other patrons “and of course there was the usual difference of opinion”³⁶

The “usual difference of opinion” became clear to child actor Skippy Homeier, who played the Nazi youth. He recalled the public confused him with his character: “It was difficult taking heat as a twelve-year-old from people on the street who would give me static for being a Nazi, which was about as far from my upbringing as you could throw a rock.”³⁷ The press also confirmed Homeier’s Americanism. “Mrs. Homier observes that her family has been talking American for 300 years,” the *New York Times* reported.³⁸ While on tour, Skippy Homeier distanced himself from his screen persona, stating, “I do hope the citizens of Springfield [Massachusetts] will not think of me as the mean kid I portray in *Tomorrow, the World!*” and claimed he would play a likeable fellow in his next picture, *Boys Ranch* (1946).³⁹ He ultimately played the villain.

Skippy Homeier’s typecasting underscored the American ambiguity towards the film’s message of postwar rehabilitation. **[Figure 22]** The film has a happy ending, but

³⁶ Albert Margolies to Bill Perice, letter, April 6, 1945, “G.I. Joe—Margolies, Albert, 1945,” production-files-produced, 8-f.96, Lester Cowan papers, MHL, AMPAS. On Lippmann, see Barry D. Russo, *Walter Lippmann: Odyssey of a Liberal* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 146-147.

³⁷ Richard Goldstein, *Helluva Town: The Story of New York City during World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 137.

³⁸ Lewis Nichols, “Post-War Planning,” *NYT*, April 25, 1943, X1.

³⁹ “Exploiting the New Films,” *MPH*, February 10, 1945, 58. He reiterated the same message in Minneapolis. See “Skippy Not a Brat,” *BO*, December 16, 1944, 130. For the war effort, Homeier served as master of ceremonies at the “American Children’s” festival, which paid tribute to Russian orphans from the Battle of Stalingrad. See “Soviet Actor Hailed at Reception Here,” *NYT*, September 18, 1943, 20.

the animosity on both sides indicated a rough, or even undesirable, healing process. The Office of War Information (O.W.I.) banned the film in North Africa and occupied Europe because officials deemed Emil's redemption "too sympathetic" and inferred a "soft peace" for Germany when many wanted revenge.⁴⁰ The O.W.I. refused to export the picture to those "who have lived alongside of Nazi terror."⁴¹



Figure 22. No match for Emil. Home-schooled rehabilitation does not come easy for former Nazi youth or his American hosts, as Emil Bruckner (Skippy Homeier, left) takes on the “soft, stupid, strange” American household.

For Americans at home, promoting internationalism also proved a challenge.

Variety reported the O.W.I. ordeal “raises the question that if an American family is unable to cope with a single Nazi-indoctrinated youngster, then what will be the approach

⁴⁰ “OWI Nixes Cowan Pic For Freed Lands,” *HR*, January 18, 1945, 1.

⁴¹ “Cowan Asks Review of ‘Tomorrow’ Ban,” *HR*, January 25, 1945, 6; “Cowan to Appeal to OWI on ‘Tomorrow,’” *MPD*, January 25, 1945, 2; “OWI Re-examining Tomorrow the World,” *FD*, February 6, 1945, 1, 8.

in handing the millions of little mobsters in Germany after the war?”⁴² Distributor United Artists countered, instructing publicity agents to enlist some “educational delegates” for the film’s San Francisco premiere: “Get a couple of representatives from European and South American countries to shoot off their mouths to the effect that the picture should be shown to all the liberated countries contrary to the O.W.I. rulings.”⁴³ The premiere had a successful opening, but failed to reverse the O.W.I.’s position or to sustain the box office.⁴⁴ Producer Lester Cowan remained dissatisfied with the first-run market and considered withdrawing the film until V-E Day.⁴⁵ With internationalism and rehabilitation stalled, to a degree, Emil Bruckner took the world after all.

The postwar years witnessed a mass exportation of American culture to rehabilitate the “twelve million Emil Bruckners.” Historians point to the “Marilyn Monroe Doctrine,” in which American movies, radios, jazz, and other forms of popular culture saturated war-torn Europe to seduce people from Soviet influence.⁴⁶ As historian Ronald E. Powaski notes, the United States intended the Marshall Plan to “constitute a

⁴² “OWI Kayoes ‘Tomorrow, the World’: Seen as ‘Too Sympathetic’ to the Nazis,” *VW*, January 24, 1945, 1.

⁴³ William L. Peirce, Jr. to Al Margolies, letter, April 13, 1945, “G.I. Joe—Margolies, Albert, 1945,” production-files-produced, 8-f.96, Lester Cowan papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁴⁴ “‘World’ in \$2300 Day,” *HR*, February 8, 1945, 1; “OWI Again Refuses to Sponsor ‘World,’” *HR*, February 8, 1945, 4; “‘Tomorrow the World’ Fails to Get OWI Okay,” *FD*, February 8, 1945, 1, 7.

⁴⁵ “Cowan Dissatisfied with Returns on ‘Tomorrow the World,’ May Hold Up Release,” *VW*, February 14, 1945, 3.

⁴⁶ The historiography concerning the “Americanizing” missions in postwar Europe is extensive. For a representative sample, see Ralph Willet, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945-1949* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization: The Cultural Mission of the United States After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina University Press, 1994); Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

new German menace to the Soviet Union.”⁴⁷ In 1948, celluloid diplomacy worked in Italy when the United States Information Services screened MGM’s anti-Bolshevik satire *Ninotchka* (1939) as a smear campaign against communist candidates and helped win a parliamentary election.⁴⁸

The rhetoric of international democracy made for good advertising as officials, including President Truman, discouraged a return to isolationism, which, they claimed, caused the “’30s Depression.”⁴⁹ Idealists, taking advantage of the same postwar enthusiasm for “social messages” prevalent among Hollywood leftists, envisioned a new One World government prioritizing global citizenship over nationalism.⁵⁰ These internationalists, notably Wendell Willkie, believed the wartime alliances could transition into a permanent world government. Willkie asserted an international goal to “unify the peoples of the earth in the human quest for freedom and justice.”⁵¹ His treatise, *One World*, sold over 1.2 million copies in the first two months.⁵²

Willkie’s idealism initially fit in with Hollywood’s postwar “social message” cycle. Willkie served as Chairman of the Board at Twentieth Century-Fox, a ceremonial

⁴⁷ Ronald E. Powaski, *March to Armageddon: The United States and the Nuclear Arms Race, 1939 to Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 49.

⁴⁸ Tony Shaw, *Hollywood’s Cold War* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 26.

⁴⁹ Edward T. Folliard, “Truman Asks Freer Trade to Aid Peace,” *Washington Post (WP)*, March 7 1947, 1; see also “Austin Stresses World Economics,” *NYT*, May 7, 1947, 41; “Henderson Scores ‘New Isolationism,’” *NYT*, October 28, 1947, 10.

⁵⁰ See Gilbert Jones, *One Shining Moment: A History of the Student World Federalists Movement, 1942-1953* (New York: iUniverse, 2001).

⁵¹ Wendell L. Willkie, “One World,” *Life*, April 26, 1943, 81; Wendell Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1943).

⁵² Simon and Shuster, “Questions and Answers about Wendell Willkie’s book *One World*,” *Life*, July 12, 1943, 9.

position he earned by defending the industry during the Nye Committee's 1941 accusations of Hollywood acting as a Jewish front to instill war fervor via the movies.⁵³ Willkie sold the rights to *One World*—the “hottest selling book,” according to *Variety*—to the studio, hoping actor Spencer Tracy would play him.⁵⁴ Twentieth Century-Fox planned to dub Willkie's opus in eight languages, reflecting the book's theme.⁵⁵

Twentieth Century-Fox never produced the picture. A former New Dealer, Willkie switched to the Republican ticket as the GOP's 1940 presidential candidate and lost. But his internationalism generated a backlash among conservative politicians who eyed the coming 1944 primaries and resented “Willkie propaganda.”⁵⁶ Twentieth Century-Fox had elected Willkie as their Chairman due to his political connections and spirited defense against the Nye Committee, and the thought of re-antagonizing Congress gave the studio pause. The Catholic Dioceses also had qualms. They labeled *One World* “Not recommended to Any Class” for its “false premise” in promoting the “obvious and criminal tyranny of an ally,” namely, the godless Soviet Union.⁵⁷ The powerful Catholic Legion of Decency devoted its resources to resisting any filming of such blasphemous work. Furthermore, Willkie's death in 1944, and the failure of the studio's

⁵³ “Willkie is Named to High Film Post,” *NYT*, April 10, 1942, 19; “Willkie Again Heads Film Company Board,” *NYT*, May 19, 1943, 35.

⁵⁴ “20th Eyes Rights for Willkie's ‘One World,’” *Daily Variety (DV)*, April 16, 1943, 1; “Willkie's ‘One World’ to 20th,” *DV*, July 20, 1943, 1; “Movie Rights of ‘One World’ by Willkie Bought by Fox for Reported \$100,000,” *NYT*, July 21, 1943, 17; Fred Stanley, “How ‘One World’ Will be Filmed,” *NYT*, October 10, 1943, X3.

⁵⁵ “Anti-Trust Head Clark Has Confidential Sessions Here to Film One World in Eight Languages,” *DV*, July 26, 1943, 1.

⁵⁶ “Wary of Willkie,” *Variety Weekly (VW)*, August 4, 1943, 3.

⁵⁷ “Catholic Dioceses Blast Adds New Hazard to Willkie Book Filming,” *VW*, October 20, 1943, 1, 16. The Catholic Diocese summarized Willkie's book as “a curious compend[um] of sophistical reasoning” and could serve a logics class as a “repertorium of bad examples.”

internationalist-themed epic *Wilson* (1944), probably also dampened production chief Darryl F. Zanuck's interest in the project.⁵⁸

Willkie's death coincided with a renewed isolation as the war ended. The threat of postwar backsliding into the Great Depression spurred industry leaders to set aside the wartime cooperation and concentrate on economic conditions back home. The American Federation of Labor, worried over the scaling-down of wartime production, turned protectionist and isolationist because, with all the attention paid to Europe, "America is now getting too little [resources for] reconversion" and "it may be too late to avoid a major postwar depression."⁵⁹ In 1947, journalist John Gunther observed the country's "somewhat faltering steps to justify its new station as a mature world power."⁶⁰ He quoted Missouri Congressman Dewey Short who denounced the U.S. subsidizing U.N. appropriations for wartime allies: "I am against it with all my heart and soul." Short accused cash-strapped London and Moscow of not selling their crown jewels, which would bring "a neat sum on any market today, enough to run any government for quite a while." Rather, the wartime Allies milked the U.S.A. for aid and Short resisted taking

⁵⁸ Zanuck produced *Wilson* (1944), a lengthy extravaganza paying tribute to Woodrow Wilson's ideals of internationalism, the League of Nations, and to support Roosevelt's fourth term. The film flopped, as moviegoers rejected Zanuck's propagandizing. Even Zanuck's old family doctor refused to see the movie, asking, "Why should they pay seventy-five cents to see Wilson on the screen when they wouldn't pay ten cents to see him alive?" See Thomas J. Knock, "History with Lightening: The Forgotten Film *Wilson* (1944)," in *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context*, ed. Peter C. Rollins (University Press of Kentucky, 1983): 88-108.

Proceeds from *Tomorrow, the World!*'s premiere at the Globe Theater went to a memorial fund for Willkie. See "Wendell Willkie Memorial Outlined in Premiere," *FD*, December 15, 1944, 2; "Freedom House will Sponsor 'World' Bow," *MPD*, December 13, 1944, 3; "To Premiere 'World' for Willkie Tonight," *MPD*, December 21, 1944, 2.

⁵⁹ "A.F. of L. Introduces Program for Speeding Up Reconversion," *CSM*, August 7, 1945, 12. As part of its protectionist agenda, the AFL withdrew from the International Federation of Trade Unions. According to the article, without the AFL's pressure, the International Federation of Trade Unions welcomed its rival, the leftist Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the Soviet Trade Unions.

⁶⁰ John Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), ix.

“bread and bacon, cornpone and sowbelly out of the mouths of my poor people.”⁶¹

Referring to the Depression and fears of a postwar depression as reasons to avoid further foreign entanglements, Short positioned himself as a defender of his constituents. Short extended his defensive posture to rejecting the Marshall Plan, asserting “the average American is not willing to bond his children and his grandchildren to save these countries that are not worth saving.”⁶² Instead, he preferred to pass the cost of rebuilding Europe to the United Nations, which would allow the U.S. to withdraw from Europe.

In the face of this isolationism, the Hollywood left clung to the social progressive messages they used to rally the public in pictures such as *December 7th*. By the war’s end, Harry Warner officially announced his studio’s position in this scheme:

The motion picture industry would be shamefully remiss if it were not looking ahead to its task in the postwar world. The essence of the task can be stated in a single phrase, “To interpret the American Way.”...One of our chief aims now in the postwar world will be to show Americans how millions of Chinese, Icelanders, Indians, Eskimos, and Russians live. I can think of no clearer, surer way to achieve a community if nations—and certainly of no clearer, surer way to show the world what our democracy means. Once the world understands the blessings of democracy, the results are beyond question.⁶³

While Warner spouted good faith, United Artists wanted to “revise [the] campaign on *Tomorrow, the World!*, dependent on the territory, when the European war is over.” The distributor wanted the campaign to “be along the angle of now that we have licked

⁶¹ Ibid., 287.

⁶² “Referendum on the Marshall Plan Urged by Republican Whip in House,” *NYT*, November 26, 1947, 12. Short did not think the Soviets would not risk war with the U.S.

⁶³ Cass Warner Sperling, Cork Millner, and Jack Warner Jr., *Hollywood be thy Name: The Warner Brothers Story* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 256. Studio chiefs echoed this statement. See Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany* (New York: Berg, 2007), 278.

Germany, what are we going to do with all the Emils that we will have on our hands.”⁶⁴

Other films focused on internationalism among children. RKO’s Dore Schary’s *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948) focuses on a boy who pleads for universal disarmament. When Schary moved to MGM, his pet project *The Next Voice You Hear* (1950) features a boy who witnesses the birth of world peace under God.⁶⁵

The Search (1948), produced by Switzerland’s Praesens-Film and distributed by MGM, demonstrates producer intent and audience antipathy concerning internationalism. The film, tagged “The Children’s Film” during production, urged the United States to commit its resources, personnel, and time to aid traumatized Czechoslovakian children.⁶⁶ *The Search* highlighted the rehabilitation of war-torn Europe under the American flag to

⁶⁴ Bill Peirce, Jr. to Albert Margolies, letter, March 28, 1945, “G.I. Joe—Margolies, Albert, 1945,” production-files-produced, 8-f.96, Lester Cowan papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁶⁵ Both *The Boy with Green Hair* and *The Next Voice You Hear* flopped at the box office. For *The Boy with Green Hair*, see Peter W. Lee, “A Green Peace Tinted Red: Cold War America in *The Boy with Green Hair*,” *Learning the Left: Popular Culture, Liberal Politics, and Informal Education from 1900 to the Present*, ed. Paul J. Ramsey (Charlotte, NC: Info Age Publishing, 2015), 49-70. *The Next Voice You Hear*, an inexpensive production about God asking humans to unite in harmonious faith, failed badly. Schary admitted, “When we were preparing and shooting the film we had no idea that we would be caught up in the Korea situation,” which changed the reception’s context from brotherhood to anticommunism—a similar shift which flummoxed *The Gunfighter* (see chapter three) and *The Search*. See Lowell E. Redelings, “The Hollywood Scene,” *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 4, 1950. Schary, a supporter of the United Nations and the “One World” movement, saw his picture as propaganda promoting “part of a larger pattern, a pattern that will eventually make one world, a United Nations World.” See: “Picture-of-the-Year Award Ceremony,” Hollywood Foreign Correspondents Association, 1950 July 27, Dore Schary papers, GA 114, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter WHS). Exhibitors advised Schary to market the picture as the studio did for *Stars in My Crown* (1951, see chapter four) connecting it to “ministerial associates, PTAs, etc,” and “tell people if they liked the former they will like the latter.” See S.F. Seadler to Dore Schary, letter, August 22, 1950; John Joseph to Dore Schary, letter, August 25 1950, “Dore Schary papers: correspondence, *The Next Voice You Hear*: 1950 Aug-September 29,” Dore Schary papers US Mss 37, Box 46, WHS. The approach did not save the picture; one North Dakotan noted the film was “a midget in comparison to *Stars in My Crown* at the boxoffice.” See “The Exhibitor Has His Say,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, September 29, 1951, 1. *The Next Voice You Hear* cost a mere \$421,000 to produce and lost \$65,000. See E.J. Mannix ledger, Howards Strickling papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁶⁶ An early publicity report boasted the United Nations held charity screenings of the “semi-documentary” to help “destitute children in the Philippines [who] will be among the chief beneficiaries.” “Manilla” [sic], “The Search—clippings and reviews 1948,” production files-produced, 57-f.775, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

refute Depression-era isolationism, but the film's production and reception showed the transition of internationalism from "One World" to anticommunism.

Hegemony as Stability: *The Search*

Director Fred Zinnemann embraced a project on postwar Germany.⁶⁷ Later known for hard-hitting movies like *High Noon* (1952), *The Nun's Story* (1959), and *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), Zinnemann started with fare such as *My Brother Talks to Horses* (1947), a family-oriented tale that, according to actor Peter Lawford, the director found beneath him.⁶⁸ In addition to his desire to make prestigious pictures, Zinnemann lost family in the Holocaust and wanted to remind audiences not to forget the Third Reich's atrocities.⁶⁹ His research files contain clippings deploring "our obsession with the Russians and our seeming disinterest in the country which has started the last two wars in which large numbers of our fellow citizens were killed."⁷⁰ As a result, leftover Nazis, "whose power is increasing more and more each month," could win the postwar ideological battle and inaugurate another world war.⁷¹

⁶⁷ For an overview of *The Search*'s production, see: Jörg Thuecke, "Flotsam and Jetsam: Fred Zinnemann's Film *The Search* (1948), and the Problem of 'Unaccompanied Children' at the End of World War II," *Modern Austrian Literature* 32, no. 4 (1999): 271-288; J. E. Smyth, "Fred Zinnemann's *Search* (1945-48): Reconstructing the Voices of Europe's Children," *Film History* 23, vol. 1 (2011): 75-92; J.E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), Chapter two.

⁶⁸ Doug McClelland, *Forties Film Talk: Oral Histories of Hollywood, with 120 Lobby Posters* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 274.

⁶⁹ Henry Gonshank, *Hollywood and the Holocaust* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 79-80. Zinnemann later directed *Julia* (1977), a movie about the Nazi rise to power and the death of the titular character in a concentration camp.

⁷⁰ William L. Shirer, "The Big Four Are Reminded that the German Peril Remains," no date. "The Search—research (clippings) 1946-1947," production files-produced, 58-f.796, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Drawing Americans into a global dialogue became Zinnemann's goal in *The Search*. In an article to screenwriters, he reiterated his intent to reconcile the "generosity innate in most Americans and their lack of comprehension of the extent of human suffering abroad."⁷² His "primary concern" was not "an artistic achievement" but to "dramatize contemporary history for the large American audience and to make them understand in emotional terms what the world outside looks like today."⁷³ He teamed with Praesans-Film A.G., a Swiss studio headed by Lazar Wechsler.⁷⁴ The American film actors—headed by newcomer Montgomery Clift and veteran Aline MacMahon—and Zinnemann's home studio, MGM, guaranteed a wide U.S. distribution.

According to Zinnemann, the producers "unanimously agreed that the picture was primarily destined for the American market and that it must reach as many people as possible."⁷⁵ To achieve their goal, Praesens hired photojournalist Therese Bonney as a technical consultant. Bonney pulled the public's heartstrings with *Europe's Children* (1943), a photo-book which visualized the war's youngest victims with clear emotional appeal for American sentiment. Screenwriter Peter Viertel stated, "To state bluntly, I should say that in many ways America is the hope of Europe today. We have food, materials, and a general welfare which exists nowhere else." But, he wrote, "We cannot

⁷² Fred Zinnemann, "The Story of the Search," *The Screen Writer* 4, no.2 (August 1948), 12.

⁷³ Fred Zinnemann, *The World is a Stage*, "The Search—publicity 1948," production files-produced, 58-f.794, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁷⁴ Praesans-Film handled the production through UNRRA, including casting the children and extras (they "must conform with existing Information Control, Military Government, and German Denazification Regulations"), attaining clearance for location shoots and technical equipment, and processing the film. "Public Information—HPI/IS3/1/ND—Liaison with MGM (Zinnemann) re: Proposed Film," S-0425-0036-10, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (hereafter ARMS).

⁷⁵ Fred Zinnemann, *The World is a Stage*, "The Search—publicity 1948," production files-produced, 58-f.794, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

be satisfied to be Sir Galahads in shining armor, who kill the dragon and then go home, to forget the battle, for we have learned that this is one world and if disillusionment and cynicism spread again the children who today scurry through Europe's gutters will become new fuhrers [sic], new scourges of humanity."⁷⁶ With this framework, Viertel created a masculine relationship between a boy and a G.I. as a public stand-in/father figure. Understanding American apathy to long European entanglements, he acknowledged the soldier was "not a permanent solution to their lives, because the soldiers are themselves impermanent. We wanted to show the tragedy of our army of occupation, how they are only a bunch of homesick children themselves, not equipped for the job that have [sic] fallen on them."⁷⁷ This father-son relationship provided an allegorical foundation for the youth's socialization into international Americanism.

Zinnemann reported to Wechsler they would "make a film about displaced European kids—and the world as it appears to them—including their friendship with a young G.I.," the latter initially "reluctant and disinterested in Europe" but "who grows to understand what is at stake through his friendship."⁷⁸ He specified the danger of repeating the isolationism after the First World War "when the first peace was sold out from under the nose of a fat, dumb, and happy America, that wanted nothink [sic] but to go to sleep again, just like today."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Peter Viertel to Lazar Wechsler, letter, June 22, 1946, "The Search—correspondence 1946," production files-produced, 57-f.779, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Fred Zinnemann to Lazar Wechsler, letter, December 2, 1946, "The Search—correspondence 1946," production files-produced, 57-f.779, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁷⁹ Fred Zinnemann to Peter Viertel, letter, December 2, 1946, "The Search—correspondence 1946," production files-produced, 57-f.779, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

A more colorful view in Zinnemann's file, undated and unsigned, reads:

Maybe we could scratch that thick, slick, complacent hide of America and ...tell them that their Allies had locked the Jews of Europe, in together with their murderers, and ask what about it. Maybe we could tell them that America is an island of prosperity surrounded by an ocean of human degradation that won't work and that the lid will blow off again unless they wake up soon. And maybe a few people here and there will sit up and take notice.⁸⁰

The memo darkly characterized the typical American as a callous ignoramus whose approach to world affairs was: "Isn't it too bad about them foreigners, how they never seem to know what they want. Why don't they get together among themselves. Well, hell, we can't do anything about it so let's go get drunk."⁸¹ Publicly, Zinnemann announced he "softened the truth" in the picture's tone because "the American audiences would have lost any desire to face it, used as they have been through the years to seeing a sentimentalized world."⁸² Indeed, one moviegoer complained about "the happy ending, which the American audience must have. Must it?"⁸³

Zinnemann's happy ending answered her in the affirmative, although he and Praesens wanted to capture the reality of a devastated Germany to justify a protracted international commitment. *The Search's* producers turned to the United Nations for

⁸⁰ Anonymous, undated, "The Search—correspondence 1946," production files-produced, 57-f.779, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS. Brian C. Etheridge attributes the note to Zinnemann but the authorship is not clear. See Brian C. Etheridge, "In Search of Germans: Contested Germany in the Production of *The Search*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 34 (2006): 40.

⁸¹ Unsigned, undated, "The Search—correspondence 1946," production files-produced, 57-f.779, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁸² Claudia Sternberg, "Real-Life References in Four Fred Zinnemann Films," *The Films of Fred Zinnemann: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Arthur Nalletti Jr. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 203.

⁸³ Katharine A. Wills, letter, "Sifting the Departmental Mail," *NYT*, April 11, 1948.

support. Even in its infancy, the U.N. already recognized the importance of film to its success. In 1947 the U.N. sent liaison Mogenn Skot Hansen to Hollywood, not to make “propaganda pictures,” but to shape dialogue and “turns of plot that might condition audience to accept the U.N. as part of their daily lives.”⁸⁴ Hansen knew he faced high odds and his best opportunities were influencing the early stages of script development, not when a production was well underway. Offering free advice, Hansen distributed pamphlets and newsletters about relief programs. He succeeded in inserting references to the U.N. in the melodramatic *Storm Over Tibet* (1952) and the comedic *Here Comes the Groom* (1951). The U.N. made occasional screen appearances; *When Worlds Collide* (1951), for instance, featured an emergency session as the Earth neared doomsday.

The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), whose displaced persons program centered prominently in *The Search*, welcomed Zinnemann’s story. According to the organization’s historian, the agency “suffered from the unreasoning and implacable hostility of nationalists and isolationists of all types who saw in international organizations at best futility and at worst mortal danger.”⁸⁵ UNRRA was painfully aware of the press’s mocking “UNRRA the Unready” and its inability to interest the public in its important, but unsexy, relief work.⁸⁶ The agency struggled to inform Americans of its humanitarian work in war-torn areas and not seem like they were stealing “bread out of U.S. mouths”—a clear reference to the fears of a postwar

⁸⁴ Richard Patterson, “The UN in Hollywood: A Lesson in Public Relations,” *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no.4 (1951): 329.

⁸⁵ George Woodbridge, *UNRRA; the History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, vol.1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 282.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

depression, which Congressman Dewey Short accused them of doing.⁸⁷ Zinnemann centered on displaced children who “had really been in a concentration camp,” including the protagonist, a Czech boy named Ivan Jandl. When the director instructed them to respond to the U.N.’s uniformed officers, “the terror that they registered on their faces was incredible.”⁸⁸ *Life* reported the setting was “convincing enough to cry about.”⁸⁹

Constructing an American Identity

The Search centered around a nine-year-old Czech holocaust survivor Karel Malik (Ivan Jandl) and his mother (Jarmila Novotna) trying to find each other. In the interim, American G.I. Ralph Stevenson (Montgomery Clift) cares for Karel. Mrs. Malik also finds her calling working with UNRRA under the supervision of sympathetic officer Deborah Murray (Aline MacMahon). The camera tracks over the destitute charges, leading to Karel Malik. The narrator comments on Karel contemplating his soup as a “little boy with the sad face and the big eyes, you have eaten with your fingers for so long you’re forgotten how to eat with a spoon.”⁹⁰

The narration itself became a point of contention. Zinnemann later recalled he hated the narration and wanted the sentimental hokum removed, but doing so would add extra cost for redoing the soundtrack in the first reel.⁹¹ Although the narrator disappears

⁸⁷ Ibid., 285.

⁸⁸ McClelland, *Forties Film Talk*, 297.

⁸⁹ “Movie of the Week,” *Life*, April 5, 1948, 75.

⁹⁰ *The Search*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (Praesens-Film, 1948), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

⁹¹ Gene D. Phillips, *Exiles in Hollywood: Major European Film Directors in America* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1998), 148. Phillips notes Zinnemann originally approved of the narration because he thought it set the tone. He later changed his mind a year later when Italian neo-realism showed Hollywood audiences did not need outside introductions to evoke the atmosphere.

after this introduction, for Zinnemann, this layer of sentiment jarred with the picture's realism. In contrast, MGM executives had concerns over the realism, especially lengthy dialogue sequences in non-English, leaving Americans in the dark. Producer Arthur Hornblow, Jr., objected to subtitles because he felt subtitles, along with the location shooting, connoted an "'education' factor into the film at an early point." Audiences, he believed, would think they were "being submitted to a lecture."⁹² Hornblow recommended deleting these passages entirely, stating there did "not seem to be much need for all the foreign length footage that is presently in the picture for the point to be established."⁹³ The scenes remained, albeit with an English interpreter included.

The "Americanization" of the film and the reeducation of Karel Malik became a contested battleground between the Americans and European filmmakers. Zinnemann intended to appeal to Americans to promote U.N. efforts and the film focuses entirely on the UNRRA as an American-led effort. Historian Tara Zahra notes the producers' casting a Czech child reflected the belief Czechs were the most "western" and "cultured" of Central Europeans, which Czech nationals emphasized as a common heritage with their American benefactors.⁹⁴ Rather than create a character who was an "exotic" Ukrainian, Pole, or even a Jewish Czech, the filmmakers settled for a rather "Aryan"-looking boy who enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle before the war to show the need to rebuild a western/American-style stability.

⁹² Arthur Hornblow Jr. to Arthur M. Loew, letter, January 13, 1948, "The Search—correspondence (congratulatory) 1947-1948," production files-produced, 58-f.787, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 179; see also Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter one.

To contextualize Karel within the U.S.-led efforts, UNRRA provided Zinnemann with statistics and studies about Czech children needing guidance to recreate a national identity. Czech kids like Karel struggled to “unlearn German, the only language they know, and re-learn Czech, the language they have forgotten.”⁹⁵ In Karel’s case, his re-education does not come from UNRRA, but from Americans directly. The boy runs away and meets Ralph “Steve” Stevenson, a G.I. on lunch break. Steve becomes the means to remake the boy as an American citizen. He gives the kid a sandwich and later takes him to his flat. The locked iron gate scares the young refugee but Steve shows him “he’s with people he can trust” and leaves the door open.⁹⁶ The boy immediately flees, but, seeing Steve not pursuing, comes back. The camera, situated behind Steve, records Karel taking the first steps as he ascends the stairs back to his American benefactors. One Londoner loved the scene: “I thought the two best sequences were the boy’s return to the Americans’ home when he realizes that he is among friends—this was so beautifully done—and, of course, the end, which I found extremely moving.”⁹⁷

The camera’s framing and anticipated audience sympathy segues into Steve raising the boy himself. His roommate, Jerry Fisher (Wendell Corey) is skeptical. Fisher, a pencil-pusher with Allied Military Government, knows adopting a child involves months of bureaucratic red tape. When Steve balks, Fisher retorts, “All of

⁹⁵ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration: Office of Public Information, *In the Wake of the Armies: Raw Material for Writers, Directors, Producers, Story Editors*, December 1945, 10-12. “UNRRA - Office of the Historian - Monographs, Documents and Publications,” S-1021-0143-09, (ARMS).

⁹⁶ *The Search*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (Praesens-Film, 1948), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

⁹⁷ David Moldon to Fred Zinnemann, letter, undated. “The Search—correspondence 1949-1990,” production files-produced, 58-f.786, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

Europe will be in America if we didn't have all the rules." His comment backhandedly supports the necessity of a prolonged U.S. presence, if only to keep "all of Europe" from swarming American shores. Fisher pointedly observes Steve "used to make cracks about all the filthy D.P.s [displaced people]." ⁹⁸ Steve admits he has wised up because the boy has awakened a renewed sense of duty to see this long mission through. Karel shakes the G.I. from the neo-isolationism and inwardness Zinnemann deplored.

The picture segues into Steve's attempts at fathering. Since he does not speak German, his only recourse is to teach him English. Starting from scratch, the private acquaints his charge with the American way of life. The soldier begins with language, explaining words like "okay" are universal: "you can use English all over the world." Steve teaches Karel that "tomato" refers to an American pinup, and, concerning historical figures, "that you must know: Abraham Lincoln," which Karel repeats. He also learns to call an image of a fawn "Bambi." ⁹⁹ **[Figure 23]** Steve, not knowing the boy's name, rechristens him "Jim," and even after Karel becomes conversant in English, Steve never asks his real name. The soldier displays New York, "the largest city in the United States of America." ¹⁰⁰ Karel repeats the name of Steve's home country, and the scene ends on the connection between the child refugee and the land of the free.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. American-occupied countries adopted Disney names into their languages. See Reinhold Wagnleitner, "The Irony of American Culture Abroad," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989): 291. By 1952 Disney's *Bambi* "already had half as many fans as the long-time [German] cartoon favorite 'Max and Moritz' in the age group of six to ten years."

¹⁰⁰ *The Search*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (Praesens-Film, 1948), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

Zinnemann's catering to American sentiment turned off foreign preview audiences. One preview card read, "I was very tired of all the American propaganda and being told what marvelous people the Yanks are—this spoilt an otherwise perfect film." Peter Loftus, "The Search Opinions – Adverse



Figure 23. Americanization at work. Karel (Ivan Jandl, center) learns a girl is a “tomato.” Steve (Montgomery Clift, left) and Jerry Fisher (Wendell Corey, right) teach the lessons. Author’s Collection.

Zinnemann’s projection of an American hegemony created a feud with his European partner. Praesens-Film clearly had a stake in displaying a sympathetic Europe determined to recover and prosper. Zinnemann, however, remained adamant on selling the need for greater American involvement abroad to its target domestic audience, not Europe. The film, he argued, required a slant favoring the U.S.: “It is my understanding that you hope this film to be primarily successful in the United States rather than Switzerland, and I am sincerely anxious to help you in this.”¹⁰¹ According to Zinnemann, Peter Viertel’s draft “lacked inner truth and strength” and was “too remote

Criticism,” 3. “The Search—screenings (London) 1949,” production files-produced, 59-f.806, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁰¹ Fred Zinnemann to Lazar Wechsler, letter, July 3, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [July-August] 1947,” production files-produced, 58-f.782, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

from reality.”¹⁰² He fired Viertel and brought in screenwriters Richard Schwiezer from Praesens to revamp the script and, since Schwiezer did not speak English, Paul Jarrico from Hollywood to authenticate the American dialogue. Jarrico wanted to Americanize the script further, much to his European counterpart’s chagrin. Jarrico wanted to focus it “for the American audience so that the collary [sic] of the theme is clear: American responsibility for the refugee children in Europe.”¹⁰³ Jarrico’s idealization of Steve as a perfect father figure was not lost on actor Montgomery Clift. Clift later characterized his role as too preachy: “I was supposed to be so damn saintly that a special prop man would have been needed to polish my halo.”¹⁰⁴

On the European end, Praesens-Film’s producer Lazar Wechsler blasted the Americans’ turning the production into standard Hollywood fare. He chastised Montgomery Clift for ad-libbing words during the “taming of the boy” sequences (Wechsler’s phrasing), such as calling Karel “Jim” and “Jack,” which the Swiss producer felt dripped with sentimentality.¹⁰⁵ He accused Zinnemann of muddling the script, including the director’s changing one line between MacMahon to Novolta from “You’re

¹⁰² Viertel served as an OSS correspondent during the war but Zinnemann believed the writer’s experience was outdated. Germany was “like an express train moving at full speed without an engineer.” Fred Zinnemann to Peter Viertel, letter, April 3, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [January-April] 1947,” production files-produced, 57-f.780, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS. Zinnemann softened Viertel’s harsh anti-Nazi tone to accommodate the Allies’ efforts to woo West Germany from the Soviet sphere. Viertel worried that his dismissal would hamper his career. See Etheridge, “In Search of Germans,” 41-44.

¹⁰³ Paul Jarrico to Fred Zinnemann, letter, June 10, 1947, 3. “The Search—correspondence [May-June] 1947,” production files-produced, 58-f.781, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁰⁴ Patricia Bosworth, *Montgomery Clift: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovabovich, 1978), 127-130. Wechsler referred to Clift as a “stupid actor.” Many of Clift’s changes made it into the picture.

¹⁰⁵ Lazar Wechsler, “Re: Mr. Clift’s Suggestions,” September 8, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [September] 1947,” production files-produced, 58-f.783, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

really over the worst. Nothing can happen to you now” to “Only good things will happen to you now.” Wechsler groused, “The prophecy of ‘only good things’ has no meaning for the European mother of today” and believed the change only satiated Americans who wanted happy endings.¹⁰⁶ In this instance, Zinnemann countered any confusion was entirely on Praesen’s part, and was “one more example of your organisational [sic] difficulties.” Since Wechsler resided in another country, the director “did not consider it feasible to stop production for several hours in order to discuss such minor changes.”¹⁰⁷

Despite Wechsler’s objections, the American director, actor, and screenwriter took over the story. Americanizing the film also heightened Karel’s development as a charge under Steve’s care. When Karel finally emerges from his shell, he implores Steve to help him find his mother, even telling him, “I don’t want to go to America. I want to find my mother.”¹⁰⁸ Steve gently persuades him to go to UNRRA and wait for clearance to go with Steve to the United States. At UNRRA headquarters, they conveniently run

¹⁰⁶ Lazar Wechsler, “Notes on Mr. Zinnemann’s Alterations to the Dialogue of the Concluding Scenes,” September 17, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [September] 1947,” production files-produced, 58-f.783, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS. Ivan Jandl’s father informed Zinnemann the sentimental ending prevented the picture from winning prizes in European film festivals. He was happy, however, that his son was a hit and was carried away on crowds’ shoulders. See Klement Jandl to Fred Zinnemann, letter, August 8, 1949, “The Search—Jandl, Ivan 1947-1949,” production files-produced, 58-f.790, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁰⁷ Fred Zinnemann to Lazar Wechsler, letter, September 18, 1947; Fred Zinnemann, “Regarding Mr. Wechsler’s notes on alterations of dialogue of concluding scenes,” “The Search—correspondence [September] 1947,” production files-produced, 58-f.783, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS. Wechsler and Schweizer shared the Academy Award for best motion picture story.

The film uses children as tools to rebuild nationalities. In a subplot, Zinnemann emphasizes Zionism. A harassed Jewish-German orphan bonds with a group of youngsters who head to Palestine to establish a country of their own. The kids march off in matching uniforms and song. Despite the controversies over the founding of the Israel, no movie critic mentioned this subplot in their reviews. Zinnemann proposed to film RKO producer Dore Schary a picture filmed on location in Palestine and “repeat in the Holy Land the technique he used on making M-G’s ‘The Search’ in Germany.” The project never materialized. See “Zinneman’s Lion Film A la ‘Search’ for RKO,” *VW*, May 12, 1948, 2.

¹⁰⁸ *The Search*, directed by Fred Zinnemann (Praesens-Film, 1948), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

into Karel's mother, who has a new calling working with children. With Steve as a father figure (since he is stationed there for the duration), Karel and his mom become a family again under the watchful guidance of American tutelage.

Postwar Reception

Despite Zinnemann's efforts, *The Search* faced an uphill battle with domestic audiences. The public's resistance to message pictures coincided with their desire to leave the Depression and war years behind. In a filmic context, by 1948, World War II largely vanished from American theaters. For example, in 1944, director William Wyler's smash documentary *The Memphis Belle: The Story of a Flying Fortress* captivated audiences. In 1947, Wyler's *Thunderbolt*, a follow-up about a different model aircraft, made it to the screen through poverty row studio Monogram. The major studios and the army shied away from what actor and Army Air Force colonel Jimmy Stewart sardonically called "ancient history" in his introduction to the picture.¹⁰⁹

For *The Search*, MGM marketed it as a continuation of wartime internationalism. In a "promotion flash" on radio, MGM aired an endorsement from Minneapolis mayor Hubert M. Humphrey, lauding the Americanization of world refugees. "Within the next two years, 205,000 people will come into this country under the Displaced Persons act of 1948," Humphrey declared. "Many of them are women and children who, for the first time, will experience the blessings of liberty which this country will give them."¹¹⁰ One

¹⁰⁹ On Wyler's two documentaries, see Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2014), Chapter two6; *Thunderbolt*, directed by William Wyler (1947), last modified January 17, 2010, accessed February 28, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWD4ITJGdTw>

¹¹⁰ Hubert M. Humphrey, Speech, "Promotion Flashes" 619, September 9, 1948, "The Search—clippings and reviews 1948," production files-produced, 57-f.775, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

endorsement touted the film's educational merit with "special tickets for children...at the request of school teachers."¹¹¹ *Boxoffice* agreed:

Get your civic organizations, service clubs, churches, Boy and Girl Scout troops and schools behind this one and tie them all in with a local newspaper on a campaign to back the United Nations' new drive to help Europe's displaced children. Set up collection boxes for clothing, money and anything else that could help. A factor in the campaign could be a contest in the lower school grades with entrants writing letters on "Why we should help our less fortunate friends in Europe."¹¹²

Social reformers asserted these Americanization programs helped displaced people "become alive" thanks to the efforts in the United States.¹¹³

Such optimism belied a less idealized reality. *Life* confessed the happy ending was pure hokum "highlight(ing) the fact that real displaced-children stories hardly ever end happily."¹¹⁴ The magazine provided a two-page spread comparing "Scenes from the Movie" with "Scenes from Real Life." One set of images noted "eating at a real UNRRA center in Vienna, these displaced children look more ragged, hungry, and hopeless than those in the movie scene at left."¹¹⁵ Zinnemann responded, reiterating it was "necessary to soften the truth," otherwise "the American audience would have lost any desire to face it, used as they have been through the years to seeing a sentimentalized world."¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ "Editorial," [clipping] April 25, 1948, "The Search—clippings and reviews 1948," production files-produced, 57-f.775, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹¹² "Exploitiips," *BO*, March 20, 1948, 126.

¹¹³ Gertrude Samuels, "DP's in America: 'We Have Become Alive,'" *NYT*, March 28, 1948, SM12.

¹¹⁴ "Movie of the Week," *Life*, April 5, 1948, 75.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 33.

As *Life* demonstrated, however, Zinnemann's film shielded a harsher reality. Isolationists warning about the "draining" of precious American resources stigmatized refugees as the "little people" in Europe who catered to American egos to keep aid coming.¹¹⁷ The movie's characterizing postwar reconstruction as a protracted process also discouraged the public. In 1946, eighty percent of Americans agreed keeping troops in Europe was "the best thing."¹¹⁸ Despite this statistic, many preferred wanting to bring the "boys" home.¹¹⁹ One reporter added, "The feeling is growing that we have been too sanguine in demobilizing not merely our troops but our wartime resolve."¹²⁰ The public wanted to "concentrate on our legitimate home-town affairs," but the projected occupation of "at least 25 and perhaps 50 years" was disheartening.¹²¹ American foster parents also expressed disappointment in war orphans. Contrary to reports about orphans "becoming alive" in U.S. homes, refugee children resisted American culture, missed their parents, and thought themselves second-class citizens in a xenophobic land.¹²²

Even worse, internationalism became a harder selling point as political stability in Eastern Europe deteriorated. In February 1948, the "fall" of Czechoslovakia—and the little Karel Maliks who lived there—signified to contemporaries "American power was

¹¹⁷ Henry S. Hayward, "Europe's 'Little People' Count on U.S. Aid," *CSM*, May 29, 1948, 13.

¹¹⁸ Henry Cantril and Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 456.

¹¹⁹ Drew Pearson, "Merry-Go-Round," *WP*, November 2, 1945, 18.

¹²⁰ William H. Stringer, "United States' Role in a Ruined World," *CSM*, February 27, 1947, 18.

¹²¹ *Ibid*; Virgil Pinkley, "Need Seen for Lengthy Occupation of Germany," *LAT*, October 17, 1945, 7.

¹²² Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 74.

not considered a match for Soviet power.”¹²³ MGM released *The Search* a month later and expressed dismay over the initial poor box office returns. Trade journals emphasized the tough sell; *Harrison's Reports* prophesized “the exhibitor who gets behind it with an intensive exploitation campaign”—with “intensive” being the key word—would satisfy patrons who “will heartily recommend to their families and friends.”¹²⁴ *The Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin* rated its box office potential as good, with the caveat “for select houses; less generally,” although the reviewer cautioned “it will take a lot of intelligent selling to achieve the grosses it merits.” He suggested exhibitors should “Hail it as a GREAT film. Play up the unusual circumstances of the first post-war feature filmed on-the-spot in occupied Germany. Bill it a stirring drama, full of throbbing emotion.” Should the dramatic buzz fail, showman could appeal to “teachers, editors and social workers interested in the rehabilitation problem.”¹²⁵

MGM responded, shifting its marketing angle to downplay internationalism. In February, 1948, as Czechoslovakia was “falling,” actress Aline MacMahon, a Hollywood vet since the early 1930s, informed Zinnemann: “MGM [is] fogging on publicity. They are intent on selling the picture as entertainment—and fearful it will be damned as a ‘cause’ documentary.” She characterized the studio’s new marketing ploy of *The Search* as a tourist excursion (in the same vein that *Ben-Hur* [1926] showcased Italy) for the war-torn locale rather than one with a social message. “Well, who am I to criticize

¹²³ Ivo K. Feierabend, *The Communist Infiltration of Czechoslovakia* (PhD diss., University of California, 1953), 17. For a typical headline, see “Czechoslovakia Seized by Reds,” *LAT*, February 25, 1948, 1.

¹²⁴ “The Search,” *Harrison's Reports*, March 27, 1948, 50.

¹²⁵ Abrams, “‘The Search’ Touching Realistic Drama of War-Torn Germany,” *The Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, April 12, 1948, 10.

MGM?” MacMahon asked rhetorically, concluding, “I hope they’re right.”¹²⁶ Evidently, the actress did not think so. Two months later, she wrote to Zinnemann again, complaining MGM was “experimenting in a dangerous way with *The Search* and that by now a potential audience is pretty much puzzled here in New York as to what *The Search* is really about. But, Fred and Renee [Zinnemann’s wife], dears, whom am I?”¹²⁷

MacMahon’s observation proved astute. Two months later, in April, 1948, *Variety* reported MGM was “fully cognizant” of the “apparent antipathy of filmgoers outside the key cities against foreign-made films, one of Metro’s chief problems is to remove the foreign-made stigma from *Search*” by “spotlighting the appearance in the cast of Montgomery Clift above others with foreign-sounding names.”¹²⁸ The new emphasis on Clift met with some derision; the *Portsmouth Herald* scoffed, “After promoting a dignified, adult sales campaign for that great picture, ‘The Search,’ M-G-M is now ballyhooing it with such incongruous lines such as “Montgomery Clift! Girls, he’s from Omaha and he’s terrific.”¹²⁹ **[Figure 24]** This ad played up Clift’s bobbysoxer appeal, conjuring a farm-boy image far from occupied Germany. The studio’s pressbook also emphasized glamour and a “search” for romance—a non-existent plotline. **[Figure 25]**

¹²⁶ Aline MacMahon to Fred Zinnemann, letter, February 22, 1948, “The Search—correspondence (congratulatory) 1947-1948” production files-produced, 58-f.787, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹²⁷ Aline MacMahon to Fred Zinnemann, letter, May 2, 1948, “The Search—correspondence (congratulatory) 1947-1948” production files-produced, 58-f.787, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹²⁸ “Metro’s Yankee-Doodle Bally on ‘Search’ to Offset Foreign Pix Hex,” *VW*, April 14, 1948, 19; see also “U.S. Film Execs Frown On idea of Plunging into British Production,” *VW*, May 5, 1948, 1, 15, which noted “foreign-mades, even when American technicians and actors have been employed, very often still have an overseas air about them. Result is that they are considerably harder to sell than the Hollywood product, even when rated tops by critics. A case in point is *The Search*. Metro has been forced to aim its whole campaign at scotching the idea this is a foreign picture.”

¹²⁹ Erskine Johnson, “In Hollywood,” *Portsmouth Herald*, May 6, 1948, 14. Johnson’s syndicated column appeared across the country, including *Bakersfield Californian*, May 8, 1948, 14; and *Kingsport Times*, May 14, 1948, 4.

Such “current advertising of *The Search*” led *The Motion Picture Herald* to mock the pressbook’s ad “Are Press Agents Liars?,” before dismissing the tactic as effective showmanship.¹³⁰ [Figure 26] Despite the misleading ads, Clift’s star power worked for some; one reader said, “I believe one reason for the failure of *The Search* was insufficient advertising. All I had heard or read was that Montgomery Clift was in it. Had he not been in it, I probably would not have seen it and missed a very good picture.”¹³¹



Figure 24. Bobbysox appeal. Detail from *The Nashua Telegraph*, August 21, 1948, detailing MGM’s marketing ploy for *The Search*, sans politics or any hint of “foreignness.” Google News Archives.

¹³⁰ Walter Brooks, “Managers’ Round Table,” *MPH*, May 8, 1948, 55. The magazine asserts agents are merely exaggerators: “Showmanship is the art of leading the burned child back to the fire.”

¹³¹ Evelyn Dotson, letter, *Life*, July 18, 1949, 6. A more bizarre advertising stunt occurred in Rhode Island, where one exhibitor held a contest for newspaper readers to “search” for misspelled words in an article. See “Round Table,” *MPH*, November 27, 1948, 43. Another promoted war bonds, corsages, and complimentary dinners for a written contest, “The Bravest Mother in Hartford.” See “Showmen in Action,” *MPH*, December 4, 1948, 43.



Figure 25. A romance. This woman is clearly not Karel Malik's mother, but romance and a racing heart sell where internationalism cannot. Image from MGM's pressbook, courtesy John Mcelwee.

**ARE PRESS
AGENTS LIARS?**

It is frequently said that press agents exaggerate. Perhaps they do. But in at least one instance they have understated.

They only said "M-G-M's *The Search* is a wonderful motion picture." The critics have gone far beyond that.

For instance, *Newsweek* says, "One of the finest films in years . . . should not be missed by anyone!"

"A truly great picture that moved us profoundly" was the verdict of the *Woman's Home Companion*. And *Liberty* magazine called it "A terrific film you should not miss."

You'd better see it for yourself!

M-G-M presents
MONTGOMERY CLIFT
ALINE MacMAHON
JARMILA NOVOTNA
"The SEARCH"
WENDELL COREY and IVAN JANDL

Produced by Lazar Wechsler who made
"The Last Chance" • Directed by Fred Zinnemann

M-G-M's
The Search
IS A WONDERFUL
MOTION PICTURE!

Figure 26. An accusation. MGM entices interest in the film by pointing to its misleading advertising, while still masking the picture's theme. Image from MGM's pressbook, courtesy John Mcelwee.

As MacMahon noted, American audiences wanted entertainment, not a “cause” documentary. Exhibitors, commenting on the poor performances of “message pictures,” demanded lighter fare. Producer Joseph Mankiewicz wrote an open letter to exhibitors, acknowledging the unpopularity of message pictures, but insisted on diversifying film offerings. “Certainly no one should expect *The Search*, for example, to be as profitable as a ‘Belvedere,’” he conceded, but Hollywood had more potential than churning out bland, uncontroversial storylines. He claimed even a “modest but encouraging profit” on unusual pictures like *The Search* encouraged experimentation and secure “a vast, varied, and discriminating world audience. We are fast losing both. When they are gone, we will not long survive.”¹³² With the television industry emerging and audience attendance diminishing, Mankiewicz feared the industry strangled itself by playing it safe.

Facing stiff competition from television, some showmen jumped on the chance to demonstrate their superiority and air their civic virtue. One small-town exhibitor in Minnesota reported, “We did a lot of extra advertising, both by newspapers, special cards to all boxholders, and lots of word-of-mouth advance boosting to the ‘solid citizens’ ... when we saw we had lots of repeats among patrons and heard them rave, we relaxed. It deserved our best playing time, some told us.”¹³³ One Canadian reported, “Why can’t Metro make a few more of this same caliber. This picture had something most MGM

¹³² Joseph L. Mankiewicz, letter, *MPH*, August 6, 1949, 8. MGM’s exhibitor contact, Mike Simons, said the same thing, urging exhibitors to use “special promotional efforts” for smaller pictures such as *Boys’ Ranch* and *The Search*. He stated if exhibitors did not make the effort, these movies “might go through your mills without any attention.” See “Urge Showmanship, ‘TV,’ at Mo. Meet,” *FD*, November 9, 1949, 6. Zanuck disagreed, advocating pictures with “popular, mass-appeal,” his *The Gunfighter* (see chapter three, and released a year later) notwithstanding. See “Zanuck Takes Exhibitor Side on Film Theme,” *FD*, July 1, 1949, 1.

¹³³ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BO* n.d., “The Search—clippings and reviews 1948-1951,” production files-produced, 57-f.776, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

productions lack. It had feeling, understanding, and a story that wasn't padded with unnecessary dialogue. This had more favorable comments than any Metro picture this year."¹³⁴ Despite critical acclaim, a September 1949 Gallup poll noted *The Search* "flopped because too few people knew about it."¹³⁵ A year and a half after its release, barely nine percent of filmgoers even heard about the picture and four percent knew something about its plot.

The majority of audiences found the film "wonderful"—to paraphrase one of MGM's tagline—but enticing audiences to see the picture proved difficult. On a different front, UNRRA was happy to cooperate. As early as 1946, the organization's Chief of Visual Media, William H. Wells reported Loew's International was "very helpful in providing Latin American distribution for films about UNRRA" and wanted UNRRA to reciprocate concerning the upcoming production of *The Search*.¹³⁶ A year later, a pleased Wells wrote Zinnemann, "We are used to knocks that a word of commendation once in a while comes about as a shock." He added "the project seems to me especially important because it stems from real international cooperation" and hoped for more.¹³⁷ Deputy Zone director Ralph W. Collins agreed, issuing a blanket directive stating, "This film will be of great value to the aims of UNRRA and it is requested that

¹³⁴ "What the Picture Did for Me," *MPH*, September 3, 1949, 41.

¹³⁵ "Inside Pictures," *VW*, July 6, 1949, 20. "The Search—clippings and reviews 1948-1951," production files-produced, 57-f.776, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹³⁶ William H. Wells to Richard Mockler, letter, December 30, 1946, "The Search—clippings and reviews 1948-1951," production files-produced, 57-f.776, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹³⁷ William H. Wells to Fred Zinnemann, letter, March 4, 1947. "The Search—correspondence [January-April] 1947," production files-produced, 57-f.780, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

every assistance and facility be accorded to Mr. Zinnemann.”¹³⁸ UNRRA’s Director of Publicity, Leo G. Margolin, also hoped publicity would pressure Congress to pass a bill “at this moment” to allow “400,000 Displaced Persons into the United States at a rate of 100,000 a year.” He urged “the assistance of every possible media, including what I consider to be the most effective—motion pictures.”¹³⁹ Herbert H. Meyer of the International Refugee Organization commended *The Search* for showing to world audiences “the true and heartbreaking story of the Displaced and Unaccompanied Children. The story of Karel...is the story of only one of the many thousands of the innocent victims of Nazism whom the ITS [International Tracing Service], Child Search Branch, is trying to locate and re-unite with their relatives.”¹⁴⁰ In January 1948, two months before the film’s release, William Wells wrote Zinnemann, beaming, “Three years ago I tried to explain to people in Hollywood that there was a great feature picture in UNRRA’s work. Now you have proved it.”¹⁴¹

Despite the prestige and accolades from the United Nations, Zinnemann doubted lightening could strike twice. In May, 1949, when Herbert Meyer asked him to consider a follow-up, the director wrote internationalism did not work and cited the film’s struggle. “It is very difficult at this point to persuade people here in Hollywood that another interesting film about European children could be made. Most people seem

¹³⁸ Ralph W. Collins, letter, March 3, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [January-April] 1947,” production files-produced, 57-f.780, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹³⁹ Leo. J. Margolin to Fred Zinnemann, letter, April 3, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [January-April] 1947,” production files-produced, 57-f.780, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁴⁰ Herbert H. Meyer, *Report Yearly for 1948*, January 1949, “The Search—correspondence 1949-1990,” production files-produced, 58-f.786, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁴¹ William Wells to Fred Zinnemann, Telegram, January 9, 1948, “The Search—correspondence (congratulatory) 1947-1948,” production files-produced, 58-f.787, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

unwilling to follow *The Search* in a film on a similar theme.”¹⁴² Zinnemann himself expressed interest in the topic of Germanized children, but he knew a fickle American public would reject it. He doubted if he could “undertake another film of this kind” and was “a bit pessimistic” about the industry’s support.¹⁴³ Meyer bowed to the director’s expertise and agreed “another picture on this subject probably cannot be produced.”¹⁴⁴ Despite MGM’s promoting support for the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, Congress selected the most desirable refugees along racial and ideological lines; very few of the 205,000 hopefuls were Jewish, Catholic, or Slavic and up to ninety percent of displaced peoples found no place on American shores.¹⁴⁵ Two years later, the Subversive Activities Control Act (also known as the McCarran Act), designed to root out unfriendly foreign agents, decreased the number further.¹⁴⁶ The stigmatization of refugees took its toll on the box office. *Harrison’s Reports* projected the box office receipts as “fair.”¹⁴⁷

1948: Revising the Postwar Narrative

Zinnemann’s belief in the insaleability for any follow-ups to *The Search* reflected the changing international politics. When he started *The Search* in 1946, the social message cycle in Hollywood, and U.N. enthusiasm, reflected the postwar optimism for

¹⁴² Fred Zinnemann to Herbert H. Meyer, letter, May 5, 1949, “The Search—correspondence (congratulatory) 1947-1948,” production files-produced, 58-f.787, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Herbert Meyer to Zinnemann, letter, May 20, 1949. “The Search—correspondence 1949-1990,” production files-produced, 58-f.786, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁴⁵ Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America’s Half-Opened Door* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 20-24.

¹⁴⁶ Susan L. Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 69.

¹⁴⁷ “Box-Office Performances,” *Harrison’s Reports*, October 30, 1948, 176.

social reform and political change. By the film's release in March 1948, the atmosphere hardened and the public shied away from the "One World" movement and international brotherhood. The search for postwar stability remained strong; reporters noted Americans were determined to avoid a repeat of World War I, when the nation's inward turn created "confusion, bitterness and disillusionment."¹⁴⁸ But the rationale for increased international engagement shifted from brotherhood to antagonism. As U.S.-Soviet relations crumbled, policymakers and the public increasingly regarded communism as an ideological enemy. Two weeks before the film's release, Secretary of Commerce W. Averell Harriman warned about "aggressive forces in the world coming from the Soviet Union which are just as destructive in their effect on the world and our way of life as Hitler was, and I think are a greater menace than Hitler was."¹⁴⁹

These tensions played out dramatically before the public. While Zinnemann filmed *The Search* on location and MGM prepared their initial marketing strategy avoiding the topic, the public scanned headlines about the U.S.-led efforts in the Berlin Airlift. In the public eye, American heroism to deliver aid to Germany's war-torn, resource-hungry population was due to Soviet obstinacy and cruelty. Stalin purged his people in the 1930s and now seemed content to starve Berliners simply for political gain. Secretary of State Dean Acheson and British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin jointly announced an Anglo-American effort "to resist the use of lawless force" and to unite the occupied German zones "under a real democratic government," which, they implied, was

¹⁴⁸ Barnet Novar, "Return of 1918," *WP*, January 1, 1944, 8.

¹⁴⁹ William Henry Chamberlain, "Stalin Replaces Hitler," *WSJ*, March 10, 1948, 6.

clearly not what Moscow wanted.¹⁵⁰ The Airlift demonstrated the superiority of western-styled democracy and earned good public relations points, especially when pilots delivered candy packages specifically for children.¹⁵¹ As Mrs. Roscoe C. O’Byrne, the president general of the Daughters of the American Revolution, proclaimed, the Airlift was proof of the need for superior airpower. “If ever America needed a strong national defense, it is now,” she told President Truman. “We want smashing air power and plenty of it” so the Cold War would not “become a ‘deep freeze.’” She concluded, “We can turn on a little heat if necessary—and we have the fuel.”¹⁵² In her view, security and strength came from a projection of military power, even if it meant applying “a little heat” and confronting the Russians.

Fittingly, actor Montgomery Clift returned to Germany for *The Big Lift* (1950). Set against the backdrop of the Berlin Airlift, the film opens with a newsreel explaining the American necessity to save the former Axis power from communism. The “Cold War reaches a new crisis” when the Reds withdraw from the joint-Allied government in Berlin, blockade the city, and try to “starve the city into submission.”¹⁵³ General Lucius D. Clay appears before the cameras to announce the western allies’ “right to be in Berlin

¹⁵⁰ Drew Middleton, “Berlin Receives Its Millionth Ton of Supplies Under Western Airlift,” *NYT*, February 19, 1949, 1; see also James Reston, “U.S. Air Lift Educates Germans and Russians,” *NYT*, September 19, 1948, E4.

¹⁵¹ “Berlin Airlift Pilots Drop Candy, Gum for the Children in Germany,” *NYT*, September 16, 1948, 14. See Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949* (Austin: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 103-107.

¹⁵² Bess Furman, “Truman Tells D.A.R. Security is Objective of All U.S. Policies,” *NYT*, April 19, 1949, 6.

¹⁵³ *The Big Lift*, directed by George Seaton (Twentieth Century Fox Film, 1951), web . <https://archive.org/details/TheBigLift1950complete>

and we intend to maintain that right.”¹⁵⁴ The newsreel establishes the political context (before segueing into a beauty contest), but this backdrop is almost irrelevant to the story. Soviets appear fleetingly, checking passports when Clift ventures into their zone, and the Airlift itself is absent. Instead, the opening newsreel serves to justify the enormous investment of resources as a check against a lurking Soviet threat in real life.¹⁵⁵ The movie said as much, with its tagline exploiting the Berlin Airlift: “Now You Can See It as You Cheered It!”

By positioning the Soviet Union as the enemy, the U.S. presented itself on the defensive, needing the home front’s continuing support to win the peace as effectively as it won the war. Indeed, some critics worried the air convoys could become another “Pearl Harbor” by inviting Soviet attacks.¹⁵⁶ Complaints about the Airlift’s high costs also echoed criticism about the relief efforts draining needed resources to prevent the country from sinking into another Depression. The Air Force countered this charge, stating the program’s \$393,000 cost was not a “pain in the pocketbook,” but an exercise in “peacemaking, propaganda and persistence.”¹⁵⁷ The money represented an investment in democracy and to safeguard against Soviet trickery. Despite public clamoring to “bring the boys home,” the U.S. rejected a Soviet proposal to withdraw all occupation

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ The movie centers on Clift’s naïve character romancing a Nazi-sympathizer who uses him to find her S.S. husband in the U.S. In contrast, Clift’s buddy, a former P.O.W. in a concentration camp, seeks revenge, but becomes enamored with a “good” German woman who adopts democracy and memorizes the Constitution. The movie supports a “middle” position, where the Allies forgive, but not forget, the legacies of Nazism.

¹⁵⁶ Drew Pearson, “An Airlift ‘Pearl Harbor’ Feared,” *WP*, November 14, 1948, B5.

¹⁵⁷ Walter H. Waggoner, “Airlift, Though Costly, Pays Off in Experience,” *NYT*, October 3, 1948, E4.

troops from Germany, seeing this as a scheme to lull the world into a false sense of security, allowing Stalin carte blanche in Europe.¹⁵⁸

International security required a permanent check against communism. Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered his Iron Curtain speech in 1946, calling for an Anglo-American “special relationship” to counter Soviet expansion. Although U.S. officials and the public had little enthusiasm about bolstering the faltering British Empire, the speech clearly worried Stalin, fearing the Allies planned to inhibit Soviet recovery and marginalize him from the postwar political hierarchy.¹⁵⁹ In 1947, the threatened “fall” of Greece to communism prompted the Truman Doctrine to contain communism and resonated among the public as a defensive measure to save American democracy.¹⁶⁰ A year later, with *The Search* still playing across the country, the “Bamboo Curtain” fell in Asia when China went “red.” This “twinning” of iron and bamboo curtains across the globe reinforced fears Americans of troubling times ahead.¹⁶¹ This fear of losing postwar stability saved *The Search*’s salability. Zinnemann wanted to bolster support for U.S. involvement abroad. Although, the public did not accept the film in terms of international brotherhood, moviegoers applauded the movie as a patriotic salute to American values against communism.

¹⁵⁸ “Reds Open Campaign to Free Germany of Occupation Troops,” *WP*, November 25, 1948, 4; “Occupation of Germany to Continue,” *LAT*, May 8, 1949, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Fraser J. Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America, and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 210; James W. Muller, ed., *Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” Speech Fifty Years Later* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

¹⁶⁰ Denise M. Bostdroff, *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms* (College Station: Texas Z&M University Press, 2008), chapter three.

¹⁶¹ Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 375.

With countries “falling” to communist oppression, the One World movement became tainted as naïve at best, a subversive movement at worst. Advocates, such as prominent New Dealer James P. Warburg, testified before Congress, stating world government was inevitable. His book, *Last Call for Common Sense* (1949), condemned American foreign policy for obstinacy against socialism and refusing to work with Russia. The book also became Warburg’s “last call”; later that year, he recanted, acknowledging Russians as “treaty breakers and that Communism is a menace.”¹⁶² Another noted progressive, 1948 presidential candidate Henry Wallace, lost credibility when he seemed to advocate a military withdrawal from Berlin, leaving the beleaguered city’s fate in Stalin’s hands.¹⁶³ One newspaper columnist observed the “capacity of Soviet Russia to ‘collect’ its neighbors” and warned, “Always the question arises: Who’s next? And the next question is, When’s our turn?”¹⁶⁴ His answer: “Americans will become more receptive to increased expenditures on national defense and to Universal Military Training” because “Russian tactics inevitably breed warmongers.”¹⁶⁵

The polemical rhetoric against the commies and the American need to rebuild Europe to protect freedoms at home found their way into *The Search*. Although the film does not mention communism (or even the Nazis), preview audiences read the movie as an exercise for democracy. Several preview cards stated as much. “What a lesson in humanity we English-speaking peoples are teaching the German and Russian tyrants,”

¹⁶² Sterling North, “Warburg is Miffed at Kremlin,” *WP*, July 24, 1949, B7.

¹⁶³ Thomas W. Devine, *Henry Wallace’s 1948 Presidential Campaign and the Future of Postwar Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 169.

¹⁶⁴ J.A. Livingston, “Business Outlook: The Bear Comes Closer and Closer,” *WP*, February 29, 1948, C3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

wrote one doctor.¹⁶⁶ Another agreed: “It should be shown to the world to teach them what Fascism and Communism really mean.”¹⁶⁷ Looking at the European map, Assistant Secretary of Labor John W. Gibson urged for greater American involvement to aid Europe and win the peace. The fall of Czechoslovakia, he asserted, fit the overall “Communist plan” to “force industrial production” in countries now in the “Russian orbit of influence.”¹⁶⁸ The “object of this plan hinges on a depression in America, an event which fellow travelers here and abroad fervently yearn for.”¹⁶⁹ The reason: “the Communist-dominated nations and their leaders are prepared to flood our country with cheap European goods,” making the U.S. an economic dependent.¹⁷⁰ Gibson ended with a “simple” choice: “either we pay higher taxes to aid European nations now, or we pay with the blood of our sons and daughters within a few years.”¹⁷¹ Another article highlighted the historical lesson from World War II. Summarizing the “fifteen exciting years” from 1933 to 1948, *Washington Post* editor Herbert Elliston emphasized the change from isolationism to world superpower. The “wide gulf” between “the lone America of 1933 and the master-building America of 1948” gave the public “a sense of

¹⁶⁶ W.W. Crofton, “The Search Opinions,” 6, “The Search—screenings (London) 1949,” production files-produced, 59-f.806, Fred Zinnemann papers, (AMPAS).

¹⁶⁷ W. Levant, “The Search Opinions,” 23. “The Search—screenings (London) 1949,” production files-produced, 59-f.806, Fred Zinnemann papers, (AMPAS).

¹⁶⁸ “Aid to Europe Underlined in Winning Peace,” *CSM*, March 5, 1948, 2.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

destiny” as the country “strove to keep a balance between their profreedom [sic] and anticommunism.”¹⁷²

This combination of anti-communism with pro-Americanism paid off in ticket sales. After a year in theaters, *The Search* finally clicked with moviegoers. Critics expressed disbelief in MGM’s disguising the film to lure in teenage bobbysoxers, but where sex appeal had mixed results, “Americanism” in the face of communism succeeded.¹⁷³ “After seeing this, one should thank God he is an American,” one Montanan smiled in December 1949.¹⁷⁴ In July 1949, *Variety* reported “Metro’s *The Search*, bewailed as an instance of an adult pic which caught on with the critics but not the public, is now proving to be a big profit maker for the company handling it.”¹⁷⁵ The grosses “sparked to a \$850,000 domestic take and is still grossing \$7,500 weekly in the U.S. after a full year’s distribution,” while, abroad, the film “is doing even better with a series of house records shattered behind it.”¹⁷⁶ The figures were “minor” compared to the studio’s typical revenue stream, but the trade journal argued *The Search* “has proven a real earner against its cost to the company of less than \$300,000” paid to Wechsler for distribution rights.¹⁷⁷ This small expenditure for the rights paid off, even if it played to

¹⁷² Herbert Ellison, “Greatest War Followed Greatest Depression,” *WP*, June 13, 1948, 2.

¹⁷³ The “Omaha” ad continued in newspapers a year after Johnson’s criticism. See *The North Adams Transcript*, May 26, 1949, 18; *The Mason City Globe-Gazette*, November 8, 1949, 10.

¹⁷⁴ “What the Picture Did for Me,” *MPH*, December 10, 1949, 45.

¹⁷⁵ “Inside Stuff Pictures,” *VW*, July 13, 1949, 20.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

small audiences. *Variety* predicted “the company will eventually capture a sensational \$1,000,000 profit on a \$300,000 investment.”¹⁷⁸

Variety’s report underscored Hollywood’s uncertainty concerning the shift in public’s attitude. The stumped writer confessed, “Metro’s homeoffice staffers are at a loss to explain what all the shouting is about,” implying even MGM’s marketers could not figure out why the picture suddenly caught fire.¹⁷⁹ But even if the studio failed to identify the public’s sudden fondness of the film, it clearly recognized the movie contained a powerful message moviegoers picked up. **[Figure 27]** *Variety* explained the movie’s initial release “was cited by film industryites [sic] as a disappointment to Metro boxoffice-wise when critics’ raves failed to bring in the customers.”¹⁸⁰ But now, “on the basis of strong word-of-mouth, film is getting plenty of dates at the present time.”¹⁸¹ According to one source, *The Search* ultimately grossed \$1.4 million, with a profit of \$609,000.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² *The Search*’s actual box office figures are elusive. The film is not listed in MGM’s E. J. Mannix ledger, possibly because MGM distributed the picture and did not produce it. Film historian John McElwee, citing a source who worked at MGM, provided the total gross and profit margins. John McElwee, “Metro Takes a Bold Postwar Step,” *GreenBriar Picture Shows*, last modified June 27, 2014, accessed May 6, 2017 <<http://greenbriarpictureshows.blogspot.com/2014/06/metro-takes-bold-postwar-step.html>>; John McElwee to author, email, May 6, 2017.



Figure 27. An apology. While MGM puzzled over *The Search*'s success, the studio recognized the old marketing scheme did not work and they "apologized" for failing to cater to the intellectual crowd, even as they still disguised the movie's international aspects. Courtesy of John McElwee.

Hollywood's puzzlement over *The Search*'s role reversal within a two year period reflected the hardening political atmosphere and the impact of anticommunism on the industry. By the 1950s, many of the leftists in Hollywood became blacklisted; of *The Search*'s personnel, Peter Viertel and Fred Zinnemann cleared themselves, while Paul Jarrico fell under H.U.A.C.'s axe.¹⁸³ In contrast, child star Ivan Jandl's role as the film's

¹⁸³ Jarrico was a proud card-carrying Communist. See his interview in Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, eds., *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 325-350. See also Ronald Raddosh and Allis Raddosh, *Red Star Over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2006), 28; Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 179-180, 259 n.64. Zinnemann did not testify before H.U.A.C., but one account says he went

Americanized child took on new meaning in an anticommunist light. As a symbol of international brotherhood, celluloid character Karl Malik did not click with audiences. As a victim of “fallen” Czechoslovakia, Jandl attracted sympathy. In May 1948, Jandl wrote to Zinnemann (in English), three months after *The Search* premiered. His fame from starring in an American production seemed like stepping stones to more work. He appeared “in a Czech film where I have a small part of a sick boy who is carried in a buggy.”¹⁸⁴ Later that year, broadcasting work kept him busy.¹⁸⁵ After two appearances in Czechoslovakian pictures, however, his movie career ended.¹⁸⁶

As trade papers noted, the newly empowered Communists shortly denied Jandl’s ability to work for American capitalism. MGM, sensing Jandl’s star potential, wanted to sign the boy to a contract. One insider noted Jandl was studying English and “would be an asset to any studio.” After *The Search* made money, the studio “thinks enough of him to be negotiating to lure him across the ocean. They’re very high on the whole picture [*The Search*] down Culver City [MGM’s home town] way because all the rest of the country seems to think it’s a wow.”¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, Czechoslovakia’s fall in early 1948 nixed those plans. As *Variety* understated, MGM encountered “international complications” because “political conditions in Czechoslovakia have grown too

to the American Legion to prove his loyalties. See J.E. Smyth, *Fred Zinnemann and the Cinema of Resistance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 256 n.16.

¹⁸⁴ Ivan Jandl to Fred Zinnemann, letter, May 2, 1948, “The Search—Jandl, Ivan 1947-1949,” production files-produced, 58-f.790, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁸⁵ Ivan Jandl to Fred Zinnemann, letter, September 19, 1948, “The Search—Jandl, Ivan 1947-1949,” production files-produced, 58-f.790, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁸⁶ Holmstrom, John, ed., *The Moving Picture Boy: An International Encyclopedia, 1895-1995*, second edition (Guildford: Biddles Ltd, 1998), 202.

¹⁸⁷ Florabel Muir, “Just for Variety,” *DV*, April 2, 1948, 4.

touchy.”¹⁸⁸ The “international project” of bringing Jandl over would meet resistance from “the political coup that brought Red control to Czechoslovakia.”¹⁸⁹ The *New York Times* noted the commies refused to send Jandl over for a promotional tour: “the political coup which brought Communist control to Czechoslovakia put an end to the plans of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s publicity department to bring him here for a visit at the hour of his triumph.”¹⁹⁰ Trapped behind the Iron Curtain, Jandl had no future in Hollywood.

On March 24, 1949, Jandl won the Academy Award for best juvenile performance. He missed the ceremony and Hollywoodites worried “Czechoslovakia’s Commie-controlled government would prevent the youth from learning of the award.”¹⁹¹ The industry relaxed when Jandl sent a cable to Zinnemann thanking him for the notice; the director had notified Jandl directly, avoiding the Red channels.¹⁹² Renee Zinnemann assured the press Jandl still received candy and toys she sent “so there’s no reason to believe he won’t get his Oscar.” Even if the communists denied him his prize, she suggested the boy might not mind so much since he wanted to train as an engineer, not an actor, much to his parents’ disappointment. She added Jandl wanted to visit the U.S.A. and see the country he promoted so much in the film, but admitted, “I don’t know if he

¹⁸⁸ “‘Search’ Moppet Stays in Czechoslovakia,” *VW*, May 12, 1948, 2.

¹⁸⁹ “Metro Stymied on Importing Moppet,” *DV*, May 7, 1948, 1.

¹⁹⁰ “The Boy Wonder of The Search” *NYT*, April 25, 1948. See also “From Behind the Iron Curtain, No Reply from Boy Oscar Winner,” *DV*, March 29, 1949, 3.

¹⁹¹ “Jandl Sends His Thanks for Award,” *DV*, April 1, 1949, 8.

¹⁹² *Ibid.* Jandl cabled, “Dear Mr. Zinnemann, I thank you very much. You deserved well for the trophy which you wire. I enjoy on it very much.”

could get a visa.”¹⁹³ Three months later, Jandl informed Zinnemann he still did not receive his trophies (he also won a Golden Globe), and described the press photos the director sent covering the ceremony: “all hold Oscars and me only a piece of bread.”¹⁹⁴ A concerned Zinnemann informed the Academy the award would brighten the boy’s life in Czechoslovakia and MPAA president Eric Johnston personally presented the award to Czechoslovakia Ambassador Vladimir Outrata in Washington D.C.¹⁹⁵ *Variety* noted Czechoslovakia, “his own country,” did not bother to acknowledge their native son’s thespian abilities at all.¹⁹⁶

Apparently Jandl’s Academy Award tainted him in Eastern Europe as a tool for the capitalist nations. Even though Jandl never came to the U.S., he seemed to prefer the idealized image Karl Malik spoke about than the troubles he experienced at home. “If I could fly to Amerika I would fly immediately,” he wrote Zinnemann in September 1948.¹⁹⁷ By November 1949, Zinnemann noted Jandl was studying Engineering in Prague, but hinted the lad wanted to change his career plans. Gossip columnist Alta Durant wrote, Jandl would “like to come to H’wood but nobody’s bidding.”¹⁹⁸ Jandl

¹⁹³ “From Behind the Iron Curtain, No Reply from Boy Oscar Winner,” *DV*, March 29, 1949, 3.

¹⁹⁴ Ivan Jandl to Fred Zinnemann, letter, August 8, 1949, “The Search—Jandl, Ivan 1947-1949,” production files-produced, 58-f.790, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁹⁵ “Presents Award to Czech,” *FD*, May 2, 1949, 2. Boy Actor’s Oscar Given Czech Envoy,” *LAT*, May 15, 1949, 10; “Presents Award to Czech,” *MPD*, May 17, 1949, 2; Ivan Jandl to Fred Zinnemann, letter, October 14, 1949, “The Search—Jandl, Ivan 1947-1949,” production files-produced, 58-f.790, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁹⁶ “From Behind the Iron Curtain, No Reply from Boy Oscar Winner,” *DV*, March 29, 1949, 3.

¹⁹⁷ Ivan Jandl to Fred Zinnemann, letter, September 19, 1948, “The Search—Jandl, Ivan 1947-1949,” production files-produced, 58-f.790, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁹⁸ Alta Durant, “Just For Variety,” *DV*, November 28, 1949, 4.

continued to perform with a boys' chorus group and on the stage.¹⁹⁹ But neither the American or Czech film industries had any use for him. In the 1980s, documentarian Oskar Reif informed Zinnemann, Jandl's "American film prize" was a "Kain's sign" prohibiting him from work. For decades, Jandl refused to surrender his awards to the state and he recalled *The Search* "with great pleasure." The former actor worked "as an auditor in Prague's grocery."²⁰⁰

Zinnemann, concerned for his former charge, asked if publicity would help: "whether this story of his misfortunes should be kept confidential or whether it could be told to some newspapers here in England [where Zinnemann was then living] or in America."²⁰¹ Jandl died in 1988 and the director later eulogized the former actor's life: "He received an Oscar [which] ruined his life" because "the Communist government considered it a disgrace that he should have accepted an award from a capitalist country."²⁰² In 1990, documentarian Dagmar Mackova Smržová confirmed Jandl was "persecuted all his life in this country." He claimed "in connection with building a socialist-communist system, it was announced by the government that he is no more allowed to travel abroad or to accept any film contract in the then so-called 'rotten

¹⁹⁹ "Walter Wanger Also Given Special Award," *DV*, March 25, 1949, 3; Mike Connolly, "Just for Variety," *DV*, August 4, 1950, 4.

²⁰⁰ Oskar Reif to Fred Zinnemann, letter, no date. "Jandl, Ivan 1985-1991," correspondence, b.105, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

²⁰¹ Fred Zinnemann to Oskar Reif, letter, December 19, 1985, "Jandl, Ivan 1985-1991," correspondence, b.105, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

²⁰² Fred Zinnemann to David Lini, letter, August 20, 1991, "Jandl, Ivan 1985-1991," correspondence, b.105, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

imperialist' countries, including the USA."²⁰³ The Soviet Union collapsed a year earlier but, for Hollywood, Oscar winner Ivan Jandl was a casualty decades earlier.²⁰⁴

Conclusion: Defining the Postwar Hollywood Manner

In 1947, the *New York Times* generated a minor publicity crisis for *The Search* when it quoted actor Wendell Corey, who played Steve's G.I. pal. The article, part of a larger story about Hollywood cowering under H.U.A.C.'s magnifying glass, printed Corey's asserting the American production crew believed "they would be free of the shackles of commercialism and come face to face with pure cinematic art."²⁰⁵ Unfortunately, Corey stated, the "Europeans soon made it plain that they had imported Americans only because they wished to make a picture in the Hollywood manner for sale at American box offices." The accusation of crass and mass commercialization at a time when the U.S. tried to keep Europe open for American consumer goods to ensure economic stability at home and abroad sent MGM's lion went into an uproar. With the industry already suffering from charges of un-Americanism (which later included several of *The Search*'s production crew) and box office decline (which led exhibitors to demand fewer "social message" pictures), MGM fought back. Vice President G. Muchnic politely demanded an explanation "since this is hardly the type of publicity which will be

²⁰³ Dagmar Mackova Smržová to Zinnemann, letter, February 2, 1990, "The Search—correspondence 1949-1990," production files-produced, 58-f.786, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

²⁰⁴ Fred Zinnemann, *An Autobiography: A Life in the Movies* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1992), 69. Jandl's ordeal became a basis for a movie plot by Hana Cielova and Stefan Uhrík called "The Oscar." See synopsis in "Jandl, Ivan 1985-1991," correspondence, b.105, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

²⁰⁵ Thomas F. Brady, "Hollywood Split by Hearings," *NYT*, October 26, 1947, X5. Corey's statement contradicted Zinnemann's assertion early in the film's production that he was not aiming for an "artistic achievement."

beneficial to the distribution of the picture in the United States.”²⁰⁶ He added, “It was certainly not our purpose in becoming financially interested in the production to ‘make a picture in the Hollywood manner,’” with the pejorative of crass commercialization implied.²⁰⁷

Two weeks later, Corey explained the *New York Times* made much ado about nothing. “There is, as you know, a feeling in part of the film industry and public that only abroad do you find art, culture, history, and freedom from the ‘shackles of consumerism.’”²⁰⁸ Defending his craft and career, Corey claimed his original comments referred to Zinnemann defying the stereotype that American-made products intrinsically lacked European flair. “In the Hollywood manner” applied only to technical aspects, he stressed, such as the slick production values and the happy ending.²⁰⁹

Corey’s interview underscored the shifting public attitudes toward postwar Europe. *The Search*’s rocky reception reflected this transition over international security from the Great Depression and World War II. Zinnemann supported the “One World” movement as a means of global stability and he targeted isolationists who, fearing a return of Depression, accused UNRRA of taking food out of American mouths. The movie trumpeted “the tortured soul of Europe to America and at the same time to reveal to Europe the true nature of America’s ‘big heart,’” the *New York Times* declared.²¹⁰ It

²⁰⁶ G. Muchnic to Wendell Corey, letter, October 30, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [October-December] 1947,” production files-produced, 58-f.784, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Wendell Corey to G. Muchnic, letter, November 12, 1947, “The Search—correspondence [October-December] 1947,” production files-produced, 58-f.784, Fred Zinnemann papers, MHL, AMPAS.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Thomas M. Pryor, “History of ‘The Search,’” *NYT*, March 14, 1948, X5.

presented a healthy father-son relationship between a handsome G.I. and a luckless orphan needing American guidance. He intended its happy ending in “the Hollywood manner” to satisfy audiences, uplifting them as they left theaters.

But Zinnemann’s idealized “big heart” failed to attract audiences. As film critic James Agee wrote for *The Nation*, *The Search* “had been made to interest American clubwomen in sending CARE packages—as indeed I wish they would,” the latter phrase suggesting the intended audience, and Agee, did no such thing.²¹¹ MGM, wary of the tensions between internationalism and depression-weary isolationism, marketed the film as a “search” for romance, especially for newcomer Montgomery Clift. This age-old tactic of Tinsel Town glamour did not work. Furthermore, the film featured no villains to hiss; *The Search* had no Soviet or Nazi masterminds, no villains like Emil Bruckner who needed a slap for wanting the world tomorrow. Instead of a climatic showdown of good versus evil, the film left viewers with Monty Clift—the “terrific” heartthrob from Omaha—stuck in the midst of a drab clean-up taking him away from home for years.

The film itself did not change, but the context did. While Zinnemann worked on the film between 1946 to the film’s release in March, 1948, tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union escalated. The public harbored isolationist sentiment, rejecting Zinnemann’s movie about international brotherhood. But when communism loomed as a threat to postwar stability, the public accepted *The Search*’s glorification of the American mission abroad as patriotic. The Hollywood Ten and anticommunism at home, the Truman Doctrine, the Berlin Airlift, and the “fall” of China placed Americans on the defensive. The “fall” of Czechoslovakia especially underscored the Soviet desire to

²¹¹ James Agee, “Films,” *The Nation*, April 24, 1948, 449 (reprinted in James Agee, *Agee on Film: Criticism and Comments on the Movies* [New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1950], 302).

undercut democracy in Eastern Europe. Pamphlets, such as “*Czechoslovakism*” versus *Americanism*, pointed to the “record” of Eastern European (in this case, particularly Slovak) resistance to “the Godless philosophy of Communism for over a hundred years” because “they firmly believe that it is the most terrible scourge on humanity.”²¹² Child actor Ivan Jandl, who took home two top prizes for his role in “American imperialist” propaganda, could share those same sentiments. By 1950, the “Hollywood manner,” like the public’s mood, equated internationalism with anticommunism.

This chapter opened with *Boys’ Life* describing an enthusiastic refugee who wanted to become an American Boy Scout. This war orphan succeeded in the end, but his “crackerjack” peers initially shunned the foreign child with a “cold freeze.”²¹³ The new kid “knew more about the Statue of Liberty...and what it symbolizes than all the rest of the Troop combined,” the article explained, which made the “native-born” boys uneasy with the war orphan’s ultra-Americanism.²¹⁴ “His fellow Scouts hadn’t had the same sort of experiences. Therefore, they couldn’t possible have such strong feelings as he had.”²¹⁵ The lads eventually warmed up to him by adapting the newcomer’s hyper patriotism and refuting tyranny. Only by forming a consensus around the rhetoric of anti-oppression (communism is not named) could they thaw their stand-off. But Scouts all over needed to duplicate this experience, as the writer asked, “Now how about your

²¹² Philip Anthony Hrobak, “*Czechoslovakism*” versus *Americanism: An Expose of the Pro-Soviet “Czechoslovak National Frontiers” in the Council of Free Czechoslovakia* (Middletown, PA: Slovak League of America: 1953), 48.

²¹³ “Strengthen the Arm of Liberty,” *Boys’ Life*, February 1949, 3.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

Troop?”²¹⁶ Director Fred Zinnemann tried to answer by glamorizing the American mission abroad under a theme of international cooperation and brotherhood, but altruistic internationalism, such as the “One World” movement, did not galvanize a depression-weary and wary public into action. Anticommunism, however, either via H.U.A.C. or various international crises, reframed the discussion over internationalism into a defensive show of patriotism. This defensive glorification of American values turned *The Search* and the rehabilitation of war orphans under the Stars and Stripes into a financial success. This red-baiting foreshadowed the formation of the Red Scare and the solidifying boundaries of containment as the United States vied for hegemony in the domestic and international Cold War.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

COMMUNISM AND “DEANLINQUENTS”

Our good neighbor policy doesn’t seem to penetrate his Iron Curtain, does it?

—Hugh Mitchell to his son Danny Mitchell, *The Son of Rusty*, 1948¹

We’ll have no more *Grapes of Wrath*, we’ll have no more *Tobacco Roads*.
We’ll have no more films that show the seamy side of American life.
We’ll have no pictures that deal with labor strikes. We’ll have no pictures
that deal with the banker as villain.

—Eric Johnston, President of the Motion Picture Association of America, 1952²

It is impossible for one to be a 100% American and a devotee of the silver
screen at the same time. Hollywood is a ‘Red’ Menace!

—Evangelist Robert L. Sumner, 1955³

In 1952, scholastic magazine *The Junior Review*’s article, “Life Under
Communism,” featured an illustration with Joseph Stalin as a puppet master with strings
tied to the church, factories, government, and mass media. The first sentence, “Dictator
Joseph Stalin of Russia wants to rule the world,” summarized the content. The writer
focused on the plight of the Potoff family in the Soviet Union, who subsisted in a room of

¹ *The Son of Rusty*, directed by Lew Landers (Columbia Pictures, 1948), VHS (Columbia Tri Star Home Video, 1995). The father makes assumptions about a new and suspicious stranger in their small town. Their suspicions heighten when they learn the new resident has a dishonorable discharge and served a stint in a federal penitentiary.

² Quoted in Lary May, “Cultural Conversion and the Hollywood Red Scare,” in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 145. Nunnally Johnson, the screenwriter for *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Tobacco Road*, also produced *The Gunfighter* (see chapter three).

³ Robert L. Sumner, *Hollywood Cesspool: A Startling Survey of Movieland Lives and Morals, Pictures, and Results* (Whetaon, IL: Sword of the Lord, Publishers, 1955), 120.

cracked walls, shared a bathroom and kitchen with four other families, and voted in a one-party system. The next issue promised a more alarming subject: “We shall discuss Russia’s world ambitions.”⁴

The Potoffs’ plight signified the horrors should Russia’s world ambitions come to fruition globally, and in the United States in particular.⁵ By the early 1950s, the Cold War rhetoric and the Red Scare firmly gripped the public. Anticommunism absorbed the postwar concerns about familial stability, social institutions, and magnified fears of backslide into a depression and hard times. Industrialist Earl Bunting, the president of the National Association of Manufacturers, warned “the peace of the world is being stalled by Russia in hopes that our country is headed for a depression.”⁶ The reason why “Uncle Joey” wanted a new American depression, Bunting explained, was his desire for “total power.” What happened to the Potoffs could, then, happen in the U.S., with Stalin presiding as the ultimate father figure over the state and family.

In contrast, the United States presented itself as a beacon of democracy and capitalism. Economist Fritz Sternberg cheerily rebutted Stalin, informing the public they “won’t be selling apples in 1949.”⁷ The U.S. will not fall into another depression,

⁴ “Life Under Communism in Soviet Russia,” *Junior Review*, February 18, 1952, 4-5.

⁵ For media examples of the Red Scare, see Michael Barson and Steven Heller, *Red Scared!; The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001); Cyndy Hendersholt, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002); J. Hoberman, *The Red Atlantis: Communist Culture in the Absence of Communism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

⁶ “Says Stalin Alone Wants Slump Here,” *New York Times (NYT)* May 28 1947, 37. Secretary of State George Marshall also told President Truman the Russians hoped for an American depression to strengthen the Soviet position in Europe and Asia. See Drew Pearson, “The Washington Merry-Go-Round,” *Washington Post (WP)*, May 3, 1947, 7.

⁷ Fritz Sternberg, “Why You Won’t Sell Applies in 1949,” *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, October 3, 1948, G5.

assured Sternberg, because “the American productive apparatus is now finding its markets in a fat foreign-aid and armament program.”⁸ The European Recovery Program and checking Soviet aggression—in which Stalin’s eager push into Eastern Europe galvanized the Americans into action—has “almost certainly eliminated the possibility of a large-scale deflationary depression in 1949,” Sternberg reported.⁹ Although the economist could not guarantee “that there will not be recessions” in the future, from his perspective, Stalin’s hopes for an American economic slump did not materialized due to the dictator’s overplaying his hand for quick territorial gain and power.

Children played key roles in ensuring American productivity would continue to protect the Free World. By the 1950s, boys took after their fathers as they trained to move up the corporate ladder, associate with peers in socially-constructive teamwork, and achieve material success. In 1949, the Business Historical Society, looking back, equated the contemporary scene as a culmination of history: “The lad who wants to engage in social service, and win the approval of his fellows, can go into business with the assured feeling that he is entering the greatest social service yet devised.” The article concluded, “He who fights for private business fights for democracy and for freedom.”¹⁰ Free enterprise and freedom of expression were synonymous with the Stars and Stripes. By following this model, boys became productive citizen-soldiers, not delinquents or “dupes” susceptible to communism.

⁸ Ibid., G28.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ N.S.B. Gras, “Behavior of Business Men in a Changing World,” *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 23, no.1 (March 1949): 65.

The postwar reconstruction of family, the workplace, and national ideals became hallmarks in anti-communism. But much of that rhetoric stemmed from concerns from earlier decades. The devastating economic crisis of the Great Depression, followed by four years of global war, made stability a paramount priority after V-J Day. The United States emerged as a superpower in 1945, empowered to lead global rehabilitation efforts, but the potential for instability remained a constant threat. By 1945, public memory included the Great War, the “Roaring Twenties,” the Depression, and the Second World War. To create a brighter future for children, Americans projected into the past to construct the building blocks leading to “cultural containment” in the Cold War.

Hollywood, with its mixed history of sex and violence on and off the screen, became one of the first battlegrounds reflecting this social anxiety. The Martin Dies committee targeted the industry in the late 1930s as a hotbed of subversion and warmongering against Nazi Germany and communism. Dies looked foolish when the U.S. entered World War II, but after 1945, the House Committee on Un-American Activities renewed their efforts. During the 1930s and 1940s, clamoring for class and race reform reflected the crises of the times, but became treasonous in postwar prosperity; in 1947, the Hollywood Ten went to jail for propagating social progressivism. In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the studios’ block-booking and vertical integration of theaters constituted an illegal monopoly, thus stripping the studios of guaranteed distribution for their products. As urban audiences started migrating to single-family homes in the suburbs, the studios retreated from risky social message pictures. Movies like *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) disappeared from the marquees. Instead, “sure-fire,” polemical anti-communist pictures took their place. The early

archetype of this picture, *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.*, highlighted the transitional relationship between fathers and sons, juvenile delinquents and discipline, and American goals in the international arena. Even by the mid 1950s, hailed films such as *Rebel without a Cause* and its brand of James Dean-inspired “deanlinquents,” did not challenge the familial and social structures in place.

Why *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.*

Boyhood during the Cold War found an early filmic representation in *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.* (1951), a Warner Bros.’s melodrama.¹¹ The real-life espionage activities of Matt Cvetic, an American counteragent/everyman civilian, became the basis of a radio series, a literary serial, and a movie, all with variations of the same title.¹² The exploitation of then-current events even led to an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary, affirming the content’s authenticity. The picture portrayed Cvetic (Frank Lovejoy) as a typical American, “an average sort of guy about thirty-eight years of age.”¹³ Originally from Slovenia, the Cvetics “came over to this country forty years ago—became citizens,” signifying their assimilation.¹⁴ Unfortunately, Cvetic’s stint as a double agent for the F.B.I. shames his family who see his subversion as betrayal of their

¹¹ Another counteragent, Herbert Philbrick, gained fame for his undercover work on behalf of the United States. His memoir, *I Led Three Lives*, became a hit television series, running for three years. See Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 140-147; Michael Kackman, *Citizen Spy: Television, Espionage, and Cold War Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 44-48.

¹² Matt Cvetic, *Conspiracy! An Expose of Soviet Agents in America; the Sworn Testimony of Matt Cvetic* (Hollywood, CA: Big Decision, n.d.); Matt Cvetic, *The Big Decision* (Hollywood, CA: Big Decision, 1959); Daniel J. Leab, *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.: The Unhappy Life and Times of Matt Cvetic* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

¹³ “Cast of Characters,” Folder 143: “I was A Communist for the F..B.I.” 13-f.145. Leo “K” Kuter papers, Margaret Herrick Library (MHL), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

¹⁴ “I was a Communist for the FBI script” December 30, 1950, Part I Rev. Final, 3, 13-f.143. Leo “K” Kuter papers, MHL, AMPAS.

adopted country. The movie notes undercover activity under the façade of normality increased for both heroic G-Men, “average citizens, well-dressed, with no hint of drama in their manner,” and the villains.¹⁵ With all the covert activity taking place in public, normality, as a form of stability, was questionable at best.

The film defines stability as Cvetic’s struggle to maintain the status quo. With clandestine operations lurking under the surface, this movie suggests any form of social reform actually helped communism. The producers depict the commies as masterminds of deception; they complain about class inequality, but enjoy champagne brunches while mocking the workers. Their greatest feat consisted of exploiting civil rights activism and Anti-Semitism, hoping the American melting pot will boil over into a race riot.¹⁶ Race-based red-baiting resurfaced in other films; MGM’s *Trial* (1955), for instance, features the commies exploiting a white girl’s alleged sexual assault and death from a Latino youth to stir up race hatred. To affirm “true” American race relations as harmonious,

¹⁵ “I was a Communist for the F.B.I.,” Part II, Rev. Final, December 30, 1950, 1, 10, 13-f.143. Leo “K” Kuter papers, MHL, AMPAS.

¹⁶ After urging African-Americans to stand up for their rights, the main villain privately refers to them as “niggers.” Cvetic, standing-in for the audience, asks, “Don’t you mean ‘negroes?’” and his boss dismisses the Soviet propaganda about race equality as bunk. *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.*, directed by Gordon Douglas (Warner Bros., 1951) DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009). See also Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-communism in the South, 1948-1968* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Clarence Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). For contemporary sources, see George S. Schuyler, *The Communist Conspiracy against the Negroes* (New York: Catholic Information Society, 1947); John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 39-40.

On anticommunism and anti-Semitism, see Jonathan Frankel and Dan Diner, eds., *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Joseph W. Bendersky, “The Jewish Threat”: *Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), chapter eleven. For a later contemporary diatribe, see Myron Fagan, *Communism, Anti-Negroism, Anti-Semitism, and CEG* (Hollywood, CA: Cinema Educational Guild, 1964).

Several moviegoers chastised the picture for its anti-Semitism: the Reds exploit American prejudice for their own advancement and their showcasing the Free World as intolerant left them queasy. See Julie S. Newman to Jack Warner, letter, May 12, 1951; Mr. and Mrs. L. Berher to Jack Warner, May 13, 1951; Mrs. L. Cohen to Jack Warner, letter, n.d., Story-Memos & Correspondence 1 of 2, “I was a Communist for the F.B.I.” files, Warner Bros Archives, University of Southern California (WBA).

Trial cast Juano Hernandez, who suffered at the hands of white supremacy in previous films roles in *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) and *Stars in My Crown* (1950), as a dignified judge who helps expose the subversive Soviet plot.¹⁷

Although *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.* contextualizes the Civil Rights movement within a framework of anticommunism, its main plot point centers upon Cvetic's family. The assimilated Slovenians call the U.S. home, and their children maintain this connection between bloodline and patriotism. The strain between a "red" dad and his "red-blooded" boy plays out between Dick Cvetic (Ron Hagerthy), "his sixteen-year-old son," who avoids his father's gaze.¹⁸ Matt Cvetic's triple life as civilian, spy, and counterspy makes him an absent father, and he comments Dick is "getting taller every time I see him."¹⁹ Pictures such as *Any Number Can Play* (1949) and *The Decision of Christopher Blake* (1948) addressed the postwar worries of the nuclear family's reconstruction. Here, the communists place party loyalty above devotion to the nuclear family. Cvetic misses his mother's birthday and later learns she died of a broken heart. Appropriately, Cvetic's siblings shun him and his ashamed son disowns him.

¹⁷ Censor Jack Vizzard recalled working on *Trial* to remove any suggestion of producer Dore Schary being a fellow traveler. Schary, branded a liberal for his advocating social reform, claimed when he takes the "side of the underdog, I'm afraid I may have let me enthusiasms carry me too far." Jack Vizzard, *See No Evil: Life Inside a Hollywood Censor* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1970), 188.

¹⁸ "Cast of Characters," Folder 143: "I was A Communist for the F..B.I.," 13-f.145. Leo "K" Kuter papers, MHL, AMPAS.

I was a Communist for the F.B.I. and *Trial* portray teachers as closet communists. In the former, Eve Merrick (Dorothy Hart) assures Cvetic his combative son will "straighten out in time." Her double entendre belies her own status as a party member; like her namesake, Eve's mission is to corrupt males by spreading "the truth about the cause" and "what better place than a high school?" On education and the Red Scare, see Hendersholt, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture*, 35-36, and other sources listed in chapter three, footnote 7. In *Trial* (1955), a brief shot of a communist rally mentions progressive teachers receiving Soviet aid to cover their court costs.

¹⁹ *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.*, directed by Gordon Douglas (Warner Bros., 1951), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

Cvetic mourns his mom, but the film places greater concerns for the young generation. An encounter with a neighborhood boy shows why. Young Jackie (Erik Nielsen) asks Cvetic how to bunt a baseball bat and the spy cheerfully complies. Jackie's dad (Roy Engel) intervenes, telling his son to go home because "baseball's an American game."²⁰ [Figure 28] An uncomfortable Cvetic retreats under the watchful eye of the boy's father. As a communist, Cvetic has no right to teach budding youths the national pastime, a character-building sport to participate in a democratic citizenry.²¹



Figure 28. Defending American childhood and pastimes from the “dirty Red” ideology: Matt Cvetic (Frank Lovejoy, left) is ostracized from mainstream Americans. The wary father (Roy Engel, center) shields his son Jackie (Erik Nielsen, right) from subversive elements. Author’s Collection.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ One viewer spotted Jackie’s father as an extra during the film’s communist rally. He criticized Warner Bros. for giving one actor “two parts in the picture. That’s what spoiled it. People notice things like that.” He never considered another possibility; Jackie’s father—who protected baseball and his son—was perhaps a dupe. See George Willis to Warner Bros., letter, January 28, 1952, “I was a Communist for the F.B.I.” files, Warner Bros. Archive, University of Southern California (hereafter WBA).

Jackie's batting average does not compare to Dick Cvetic's profound disappointment in his father. When Matt Cvetic receives a note stating his son was fighting at school, he learns Dick defended him from charges of treason. According to the script, Dick fought "one hell of a scrap."²² In addition, Dick, nearing draft age, will soon battle the ideology his father supposedly supports. Young Cvetic says, "When I was a kid, about nine or ten, I use to tell myself I want to grow up to be my dad." Now he would "rather drop dead" and tells his father to "never come near me again."²³

Torn between his son's shaken faith in him and his job as an F.B.I. agent, Cvetic places the family above patriotism. He decides to end his cover in a letter to his son. Cvetic realizes he jeopardizes his mission, but his paternal responsibilities override his personal safety. He would rather sacrifice himself than besmirch his standing in his son's mind. The script describes Cvetic's turmoil as the book "shows snapshots of his boy recently taken. As his hand turns the pages, going backward in time, each succeeding snapshot shows the boy at a younger age—and always grouped with his father—at the beach, in the park with a dog, at a baseball game."²⁴ These memories elide the Great Depression and World War II for happier scenes of family solidarity. However, such imagery also reinforces the communists as a consistent threat, attacking the fabric family unit regardless of economic or social crisis. Despite the communist rhetoric of aiding the

²² "I was a Communist for the F.B.I." script, Part II, Rev. Final, January 2, 1951, 28, 13-f.143. Leo "K" Kuter papers, MHL, AMPAS.

²³ *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.*, directed by Gordon Douglas (Warner Bros., 1951) DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

²⁴ Crane Wilbur, "I was a Communist for the FBI," story-Revised Final Draft, 34. December 30, 1950, "I was a Communist for the F.B.I.," files, WBA. Actor Frank Lovejoy was looking at images of his own son, not a child actor. See "Representative Press Comment on Warner Bros.'s 'I was a Communist for the F.B.I.'—Publicity-misc 65B. "I was a Communist for the F.B.I.," files, WBA.

downtrodden masses, their true aim is disrupting the social fabric through sacred institutions like the family and fathers-son bonds. Indeed, the movie intersperses Cvetic's photo album with shots of Dick's hurt expression.

Thankfully, Cvetic's F.B.I. stint ends before he betrays his position. When H.U.A.C. subpoenas the communist cell to testify, Cvetic seizes the moment to purge his soul before an open session of Congress. The actual Senate subcommittee caused Hollywood much grief, but Warner Bros. demonstrated the industry's submission to H.U.A.C. with H.U.A.C.'s filmic portrayal as heroic, courageous political figures. The film's commies take the Fifth Amendment, like the Hollywood Ten did in 1947, but Cvetic names names and, while his family sits in the audience, exposes the Soviet plot to turn America into a Russian slave colony. The script instructs Dick to stand up, "applauding like mad, as tears of joy run down his cheeks."²⁵ His father affirms his manliness by thrashing the lead commie in a congressional office; afterwards, Dick runs up. Dressed as a seaman, Dick is not a legal-age adult, but the teenager readily joins his father to protect American values. The script instructs: "boy is frankly crying, barely able to speak"²⁶ He begs his father for forgiveness and Dad says he is proud of his son's patriotism throughout this ordeal: "Even when you hated me, I loved you for it," Matt remarks as *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* plays on the soundtrack.²⁷ The Cvetics exit, the camera irises in on Abraham Lincoln's bust, and Americanism goes marching on.

²⁵ Crane Wilbur, "I was a Communist for the FBI," story-Revised Final Draft, 120.

²⁶ Ibid., 121.

²⁷ *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.*, directed by Gordon Douglas (Warner Bros., 1951) DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

I Was a Communist for the F.B.I. showcases the ties between fathers and sons as an American strength. The gutsy father figure, like Charley Kyng in 1949's *Any Number Can Play*, survived the Great Depression and World War II and proves his lifestyle to his doubting son. Two years later, *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.* uses the father figure as an anticommunist role model. Children (Dick Cvetic, Jackie) believe in a tough male role model as the ideal citizen-solider. **[Figure 29]** When his father seemingly fails to uphold these values and mouths the Communist line, Dick rejects him. Cvetic redeems himself by testifying in court and beating up the bad guy. Even exhibitors with poor turnouts argued the picture had cross-generational appeal. One reported, "Too bad so few showed up. This is a fine show that all adults and teenagers should see."²⁸



Figure 29. The teenager at stake in the Cold War. Eve Merrick (Dorothy Hart, center left) tries to hold on to young Dick Cvetic (Ron Hagerthy, center) while his dad, American double-agent Matt Cvetic (Frank Lovejoy, center right), as a commie, must play along.

²⁸ "The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures," *Boxoffice BookinGuide (BOBG)* supplement, *Boxoffice (BO)*, January 10, 1953, 2.

At home, buoyed by Cvetić's real-life adventures and celebrity status, *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.* enabled Hollywood to counter its critics. For Warner Bros., Jack Warner issued a statement, claiming the picture will "help halt the march of those who are trying to undermine the foundation of our democratic structure and destroy the fabrics of our lives."²⁹ Warner previously produced the pro-Russian picture *Mission to Moscow* (1943) during the war effort, which personally landed him in trouble before H.U.A.C.. Now, he redeemed himself with another look at the Soviet Union, adding, "Mr. Cvetić's activities on behalf of his country are, in my opinion, worthy of our nation's gratitude and a decoration for civilian heroism."³⁰ One reviewer agreed, "It will at once dissipate unfortunate impressions that may have been carelessly formed about the industry and at the same time enlighten the film-going public on the nature of homegrown Communism."³¹ To this extent, Warner Bros. courted the press and the government; the studio donated 16mm prints to Washington D.C. for "government use."³² The public responded positively, and one fan wrote to the Vatican, stating, "It is a picture like this that help [sic] enlighten the world" and "help us learn the truth and teach us how to better human-beings."³³

²⁹ "Warners Documenting 'Communist Expose,'" *Daily Variety* August 8, 1950, 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mandel Herbstman, Review, *Motion Picture Daily*, April 19, 1951, 6; *Hollywood Reporter*, April 19, 1951, 3, "I was a Communist for the F.B.I. [W.B. 1951]," Core Collection Files, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS; "Representative Press Comment on Warner Bros.'s *I Was a Communist for the FBI*," *I was a Communist for the FBI*—Publicity-misc 65B, "I was a Communist for the F.B.I." files, WBA.

³² Jack Warner to Henry Luce, Telegram, April 6, 1951, Story-Memos & correspondence 1 of 2; Mr. Howson to Mr. Shernow, November 1, 1951, "I was a Communist for the F.B.I." files, WBA. In 1956, Washington still had leases on five prints.

³³ John Parlow to Warner Bros., letter, October 1, 1950, Story-Memos & Correspondence 1 of 2, "I was a Communist for the F.B.I." files, WBA. Parlow's sentiment was reiterated by Nancy Olivine to

The picture's polemical anticommunism and hyper-patriotism reflected the public need to train potential troublesome children from delinquency. Governor John S. Battle of Virginia endorsed the picture, declaring, "Somewhere a youngster may be turned from thoughts of crime by the grim lessons which are portrayed here. It may well be that this picture will save the life of someone in this audience."³⁴ One showman affirmed the picture's educational value: "This is one picture that should be made in 16mm and shown in every school in the United States and Canada [for] free."³⁵ As a documentary, the film had greater value than mere entertainment. The exhibitor believed anticommunism was now requisite in the Cold War classroom.

Dick Cvetic accepts his duty to battle the Soviets, dressing as a seaman in the final scene. This militarism was an old plot device in pictures like *Johnny Holiday* (see Chapter three) as a means of battling delinquency and instilling discipline. Another picture, *Bad Boy* (1949), specifically connects militarism in youths to national defense. The film cast World War II hero Audie Murphy as Danny Lester, a hot-headed teenager who lashes out against society and displays this anger with a fascination with guns. In a last ditch effort to save him from "going straight—straight to the electric chair!," the courts ship the young delinquent off to the Variety Clubs' Boys Ranch, "forty-two hundred acres of wide open Texas space" to rehabilitate.³⁶ Danny learns to channel his

W.B., 9 June 1951 and Bernice Mertes, to W.B., September 20, 1951, Story-Memos & Correspondence 1 of 2, "I was a Communist for the F.B.I." files, WBA.

³⁴ John S. Battle, n.d. Story-Memos & Correspondence 2 of 2, "I was a Communist for the F.B.I." files, WBA.

³⁵ "The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures," *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, September 15, 1951, 2.

³⁶ *Bad Boy*, directed by Roy Neumann (Monogram Pictures, 1949) DVD (Warner Home Video, 2016).

passion for firearms to save his country; the last shot shows Danny at Texas A&M, drilling in military uniform as he and the extras around him prepare for war. [Figure 30]



Figure 30. Assimilated and socialized. Juvenile delinquent Danny Lester (Audie Murphy, center), embraces the cast in his first starring feature, *Bad Boy* (1949). The film parallels the development of a civilian-soldier, a real-life role that made Murphy famous during World War II. Among the notable cast was the film’s “good boy” (Stanley Clements; far left), who played the heavy in *Johnny Holiday* (1949; see chapter three).

Bad Boy blurs fiction with history, creating a fictional biography for Audie Murphy, the highest decorated American G.I. in World War II. Murphy launched a second successful career with this first starring role and later played cowboys and “gunfighters.” Here, the movie highlights Murphy’s embodiment as the ideal citizen-soldier model for real-life “bad” boys. As one exhibitor exclaimed, “Audie Murphy is really hot now.”³⁷ In 1950, when MGM’s Dore Schary cast Murphy to play the hero in *The Red Badge of Courage*, gossip columnist Hedda Hopper approved, commenting,

³⁷ “The Exhibitor Has His Say about Pictures,” *BOBG* supplement, *BO*, September 2, 1950, 3.

“It’s about a youth who develops courage under fire. With so many untried youths going to Korea, we can do with this kind of story.”³⁸ In a brief biographical sketch, Hopper noted Murphy started as a “poverty-stricken youth”—Murphy, born in 1925, came of age during the Great Depression—and “could easily have fallen for the Commie line. But I know of no more loyal American.”³⁹ She emphasized Murphy has “always been bitterly so opposed to everything that smacked of Joseph Stalin’s philosophy, and he who gave so much to retain our way of living is ready to go back to the front to preserve what so many of his comrades died for.”⁴⁰ As relayed in the press, Stalin hoped the U.S. would sink back to the Great Depression, but, as Hopper reported, young men like Murphy stood ready to preserve the American way of life. A genuine war hero turned movie star, Murphy reinforced the necessity for militarism among filmic boy characters. By 1954, movies like *Suddenly* fully endorsed boys playing with firearms as a form of preparation for confrontations with threats foreign or domestic.

Militarized socialization for “bad boys” like Danny Lester empowered them to protect the United States. Americans retreated from the old interwar isolationism, but they also rejected ideas about “One World” internationalism as foreign policy. Political developments, especially the Korean War, impacted the reception of many films, including *The Gunfighter* (1950) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1949). Warner Bros. originally intended to tie Korea to *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.* Screenwriter Borden Chase originally wanted to start the picture with American troops in Korea struggling to

³⁸ Hedda Hopper, “‘Red Badge of Courage’ to Star Audie Murphy,” *LAT*, August 4, 1950, A6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* On the failure of *The Red Badge of Courage*, see Chapter four, note 120.

preserve democracy with faulty supplies and weapons, thanks to communist sabotage. Chase wanted to use newsreel footage to “dramatize and bring the subject matter up to date. Should late developments in Europe or the Orient offer a better frame, a change can be made during the cutting of the picture or prior to its release.”⁴¹ He also wanted to cast H.U.A.C. Senator John S. Wood and red-baiter Richard Nixon as themselves, who help awaken Dick Cvetic to his father’s heroism. In an early draft, while Seaman Cvetic prepares to ship out, straight-shooter Nixon tells him “your father deserves a Congressional Medal of Honor—but instead he must take the heartfelt thanks of a grateful nation.”⁴² While neither Korea nor Nixon appeared, the overt patriotism’s link to the nation and nuclear family is clear. This theme of older mentor and nationalism extended to a public relations stunt, where actor Frank Lovejoy gave tours of Warner Bros. studios to San Pedro High School Students to commemorate Boy’s Week. The studio played up the filmic “Cvetic” guiding the future leaders of democracy through the studio soundstages.⁴³ This father-son dynamics paid off, as *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.*’s grossed \$1.754 million against a small \$0.684 million budget.⁴⁴

“Tearing Me Apart!”: Revising the “Deanlinquent”

Many film histories state the policies of Cold War containment were firmly in place at the end of the 1940s. They point to *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) as the first

⁴¹ Borden Chase, “I Posed as a Communist for the FBI Outline,” October 21, 1950. “I was a Communist for the F.B.I.” files, WBA. Using newsreel footage enhanced the “authenticity” and cut production costs.

⁴² Borden Chase, “I Posed as a Communist for the FBI,” Story-Screenplay, 131. November 1, 1950. “I was a Communist for the F.B.I.” files, WBA.

⁴³ Bill L. Hendricks, “Representative Press Comment on Warner Bros.’s ‘I Was a Communist for the FBI,’” September 12, 1951. Publicity-misc 65B, “I was a Communist for the F.B.I.” files, WBA.

⁴⁴ William Schaefer Ledger, WBA. The ledger does not provide profit margins, but the near tripling of the costs indicates a good-sized profit.

instance of resistance to containment, with actor James Dean as the embodiment of teenage angst chafing under adult expectations. When Dean's character, Jim Stark, famously screams to his parents, "You're tearing me apart!," this exclamation supposedly represented the first display of youth agency against the Cold War consensus.⁴⁵

However, Stark's cry says less about teenage rebellion than his parents' role reversals. His domineering mother and wimpy dad, complete with the patriarch wearing a Mary Petty apron, display more defiance of social gender roles than their son's daydreaming for a "normal," stable family life. **[Figure 31]** Worse for Jim, his parents do not see anything wrong with this role reversal and are content with their lifestyle. The family's constant moving and inability to set down roots highlights their non-conformity, but the parents prefer to leave a community than to change. Their son is different; young Stark just wants to fit in with the high-school crowd, and he, his girlfriend Judy, and a dependent son-figure Plato, attempt to rebuild a nuclear household in a decayed, isolated mansion from a nostalgic past. Their efforts ultimately fail and their makeshift family ends in tragedy, but Stark rejoices with his newly masculine father promising to do better in the "dad" department.⁴⁶ In Jim's eyes, the "rebel" was not really himself, but his father, who agrees to conform to the postwar standards of fatherhood and masculinity.

⁴⁵ *Rebel without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray (Warner Bros., 1955) Blu-Ray (Warner Home Video, 2013).

⁴⁶ In *Rebel without a Cause*, other families show shines of discomfort. In the home of the teenage heroine Judy, her younger brother brandishes a ray gun at the dinner table. Her father pats his son lovingly, observing the boy's enthusiasm with the masculine weapon as a coping mechanism for modern anxieties. The boy pulls the trigger and, as the toy lights up, the youngster screams a clarification for his father: "Yeah! The *atomic age*!" But their mother amends the statement: "The age where nothing fits." Although she refers to her husband's discomfort with daughter Judy's buxom adolescence, her statement underscored a generalization of parental anxiety troubled youths. See Mick Broderick, "'Armageddon Without a Cause': Playing 'Chicken' in the Atomic Age," in *Rebel Without a Cause: Approaches to a Maverick Masterwork*, ed. J. David Slocum (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 149-170.



Figure 31. Stability reversal. Is the “real” rebel Jim Stark (James Dean, left), who wants to fit in and urges his dad to display some guts, or a sensitive, gender-defying patriarch (Jim Backus, right)?

Stark’s being “torn apart” morbidly paralleled the real-life death of James Dean shortly before the film’s release, thereby enshrining him as a symbol of youth rebellion. But this glamorization of youth angst had precedence throughout postwar Hollywood films. The plotlines of Christopher Blake, Paul Kyng, and Johnny Holiday reflected the anxieties from the Great Depression, which Stark reworked as a yearning for stability through patriarchy and conformity. Stark and his girlfriend cannot handle the anxieties of the modern era and retreat to an abandoned mansion in Hollywood to recreate an idealized nuclear family; the “history cycle” of projecting backwards into the past was a popular motif to address social anxieties about racism and small town solidarity in films such as *Stars in My Crown*. The search for stability led directly to the formation of Cold War containment, as anxieties carried over from the Great Depression and World War II symbolically threatened to tear postwar youths (and their parents) apart. In this respect,

the Deanlinquents of the 1950s offered nothing new. They echoed older concerns about themes such as youth and family, masculinity and maturity, and the formation and projection of national identity, from the past several decades of American history.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Actor John Ashley appeared in several of American International Pictures (AIP) movies, the studio which most successfully exploited the post-James Dean “delinquency” pictures. He commented, “I personally felt that the kids never took those pictures seriously.” He explained, “I think they went to those pictures and laughed at them. They didn’t really get that involved because the pictures were not well made. They were written by men who were in their late thirties and forties.” Mark Thomas McGee and R. J. Robertson, *The J.D. Films: Juvenile Delinquency in the Movies* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1982), 61.

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