UCLA
UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
American Liberation Mythologies: Democracy and Domination in U.S. Visual Culture

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3gx7g43c

Author
Williams, Kathleen

Publication Date
2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

American Liberation Mythologies:

Democracy and Domination in U.S. Visual Culture

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Culture & Performance

by

Kathleen Michelle Williams

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

American Liberation Mythologies:

Democracy and Domination in U.S. Visual Culture

by

Kathleen Michelle Williams

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor, Allen F. Roberts, Co-chair

Professor David Shorter, Co-chair

A myth of liberation saturates the cultural landscape of the United States, structuring the collective consciousness, guiding political action, and disguising the nation's patterns of domination. This study grew out of a concern over the United States' engagement in two wars with the stated aims of liberation and the spread of democracy. Anthropological theories of myth assert a reciprocal relationship between political action and creative expression; through myths we reflect upon culture, in culture we enact myths. Popular media is a prominent realm for the creation and performance of contemporary myths. By analyzing performances of popular culture as expressions of the myth of liberation (Bruce Willis' *Tears of the Sun, American Idol,* and Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino*), this dissertation delineates the parameters of the national myth that declares an identity of the U.S. as liberator to the world's oppressed, sanctifies the democratic ideal, and valorizes consumer capital. Analyses also reveal a U.S. identity of dominator in the global community, the betrayal of the democratic ideal through the commoditization of the democratic gesture, and the implementation of segregation and

terrorization to support the exploitation of consumerism. Myths are paradoxical, and this study asserts that U.S. culture exhibits a societal tension between liberty and domination. In the form of popular culture, myths attempt to mediate this social paradox. Drawing from the methodologies and theories of cultural anthropology, folklore, sociology, media studies, performance studies, U.S. history and international relations this dissertation offers insights into four issues of vital importance: the role of the U.S. in globalization, the recent national crisis in democracy, the violence of consumerism, and the dialectical relationship between popular culture and political action. This research is grounded in the anthropological understanding that cultural products are both models of, and models for, cultural action. Following such an understanding, it concludes by asserting, through reference to the variations of the myth explored, that the producers and consumers of culture have the ability to reconstruct the myth of liberation and move U.S. culture out of its socio-historic patterns of violence and domination and toward a mythic construction of creative intervention and cross-cultural dialogue.

The dissertation of Kathleen Michelle Williams is approved.

Stephen Aron

Donald J. Cosentino

Allen F. Roberts, Committee Co-chair

David Shorter, Committee Co-chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

I offer special thanks to the mentors, colleagues, family and friends who supported me during the duration of this degree.

To David Shorter for his interest in my ideas, constructive criticism, theoretical guidance, and for reminding me of the value of topic sentences. To Al Roberts for teaching me that by examining what people create I can come to understand them better. To Don Cosentino for introducing me to post-modernism and critical theory, and for validating my interest in popular culture. To Steve Aron, for indulging my amateur interest in U.S. history and guiding me toward a more thorough understanding of cultural expansion and national development. To Behroze Shroff, for enriching my encounter with post-colonial theory, literature, and film. To Peter Sellars for inspiring me to make this work an act of love.

To the Graduate Division of UCLA for awarding me both a Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship and a Summer Fieldwork and Archival Research Fellowship. To the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance for the unparalleled community that it is.

To the many friends and colleagues who kindly cared for my children while I scratched out time for studying and fulfilled my apprenticeship duties: Waewdao Sirisook, Cedar Bough Saeji, Mathew Sandoval, Amanda Harrison, Edy Pickens Levin, Sarah Blahut, Hannah Rothblatt, Youn Mee Woo, John Orcutt, Amy Schwartz, Adam Battaglia, Jennifer Musi, Rahel Woldegaber, Carolina San Juan, Sabela Grimmes, Kingsley Irons, Eva Ayamami, Allison Wyper, and Nguyun Nguyun.

To the Collard family and the Camp Trinity community, who welcomed my family to the Bar 717 Ranch where much of this dissertation was written. To the Hyampom Arts Magnet School whose staff educated my children while I occupied their library and wrote.

To my parents who never doubted any of my abilities and always encouraged me to follow my interests and dreams.

To my husband Jeff for his devotion and constancy as we journey together.

Vita

<u>Education</u>

University of California, Los Angeles, MA in African Studies   2006
University of Kansas, BA in African & African-American Studies (Departmental Honors)   2003
University of Kansas, BFA in Design/Metalsmithing   2003
Kenyatta University, Kenya - Study Abroad   2002

<u>Teaching Experience</u>

Department of World Arts & Cultures/Dance, University of California, Los Angeles
          Culture: an Introduction   Winter 2011 & Winter 2010
                    Teaching Fellow to Aparna Sharma
                    Teaching Associate to Donald Cosentino

          Introduction to World Arts & Cultures   Fall 2010
                    Teaching Associate to David Gere

          Art as Moral / Social Action   Spring 2010, Fall 2009 & Winter 2007
                    Teaching Associate to Peter Sellars

          Introduction to American Folklore Studies   Winter 2008 & Fall 2007
                    Teaching Assistant to Kerry Noonan

<u>Publications</u>

Book Review: *Every Woman is a World: Interviews with Women of Chiapas.* by Gayle Walker
and Kiki Suárez. Edited by Carol Karasik. 2008. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Reviewed in "The Journal of Folklore Research"   June 18, 2009

<u>Exhibitions</u>

"Dear Beavers," medium: poetry. Read in conjunction with Nick Cave's *Soundsuits.*
Fowler Museum, University of California, Los Angeles   May 22, 2010

"WACtivist Demand Banners 1-4," medium: fabric. Exhibited at *It's all been done
 before but not by me.* UCLA student exhibit at the Hammer Museum,
University of California, Los Angeles   April 29, 2010

<u>Presentations and Interviews</u>

"Save a Life Tonight, Save the World Tomorrow: the Structural Mythology of Global
Poverty in *American Idol"* – Popular Culture Assoc./American Culture Assoc.
Annual Meeting, New Orleans   April 2009

"A Divided Nation, United in 'Idol' Worship," – by Kim Masters on National
Public Radio's Morning Edition   April 16, 2008

"Democracy TV: an Ethnographic Inquiry into *American Idol*" – presented at
Chew on This, Department of World Arts & Cultures/Dance Lecture Series
University of California, Los Angeles   January 2008

<u>Community Service</u>

Hyampom Arts Magnet School – Hyampom, CA
      Site Council Member, Literacy Tutor, Substitute   2011- present

Department of World Arts & Cultures/Dance, University of California, Los Angeles
      Chew on This Lecture Series – Committee Member, Outreach Coordinator   2008-2010

Los Angeles Unified School District – via K.O.R.E.H. L.A.
      Literacy Tutor   2004-2006

<u>Awards</u>

University of California, Los Angeles:
      Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship   2008-2009
      Fieldwork & Archival Summer Research Grant   2007
      Graduate Fellowship   2006-2007
      Foreign Language & Area Studies Fellowship   2005-2006
      Graduate Fellowship   2003-2004

University of Kansas:
      Undergraduate Summer Research Grant   2002
      Study Abroad Scholarship   2002
      Dept. of African & African-American Studies Scholarship   2001-2002
      College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Scholarship   2000-2001
      College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Scholarship   1997-1998
      Visual & Performing Arts Scholarship   1997-1998

Introduction

The Myth of Liberation

"We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other."

Paulo Freire

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

In the early years of this new century, a myth of liberation saturated the cultural landscape of the nation. Hollywood films portrayed a national identity of rescuer to the oppressed. National television shows expanded democratic opportunities. U.S. government officials sent military personnel and private contractors to bring freedom and democracy to the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan. Politics and entertainment are not so different in the narratives they broadcast. Indeed, a reciprocal relationship exists between these two spheres of society that derives from the dialectic of consciousness in which thought and action are intimately intertwined. In recent national experience, thoughts of liberation and democracy guided social actions as embodied through both foreign policy and popular culture. This dissertation investigates the socially prominent ideas of liberty and democracy by analyzing the associated actions as performed in popular entertainment and political affairs.

Popular entertainments serve as a prominent site for expressing the myths that reflect the structures of society. I emphatically reject a colloquial definition of myth as a fanciful tale, inherently untrue. While our own myths, in their narrative forms, are fictions; the structures of plot, the performed identities, and the sensory symbols all present particular social realities or preferred perspectives. Consider, for example, the Christian myth of Adam and Eve in which man is made in God's image, woman follows after man, and Eve is blamed for the disobedience that results in the couple's banishment. Even if Adam and Eve never lived, the myth expresses the beliefs of its adherents: God is male, women are subordinate to men, female independence (including the quest for knowledge) threatens the status quo, and paradise is not to be found on earth. In our present age, myths are no longer limited to oral traditions and two-dimensional art forms. With technological advances, our myths move and are broadcast far and wide through the apparatuses of industrial production. Despite these advances, the functions of myth remain the same; they continue to be mechanisms for cultivating socially sanctioned beliefs and correspondingly appropriate actions.

From within the breadth of academic discourse several options are available for analyzing myths. Anthropologists generally focus on the myth's construction of social binaries or paradoxes and perceive in myths a collective attempt to either mediate or resolve the inherent contradictions of society. Historians tend to look at the repetition and adaptation of plot and symbol over a given time period, and situate particular mythic expressions within their specific socio-historic context. Many scholars perceive myths to be the narrative descriptions of rituals, particularly rituals of initiation. Psychologists view myths as archetypal expressions of the human psyche. Because I am interested in myths as expressions of a collective consciousness, or ideology, and not an individual's unconscious, I have little need for psychological theory. My own approach to studying myth is primarily anthropological but includes an attention to the historic development of the nation's mythic constructions, specifically in terms of its myth of liberation.

The myth of liberation precedes the founding of the nation but continues to guide social action. This myth has its antecedents in the salvation narratives of the Judeo-Christian tradition in which God intervenes against the suffering of his people and faith in Christ promises redemption. The early European immigrants brought this tradition to the American hemisphere imagining themselves to be a new Israel, a people chosen to lead the world by example. Several centuries later, our elected officials continue to refer to the Puritans' divine mission, repeatedly describing the nation as a "shining city on a hill." The ideology of exceptionalism is certainly implicated in the myth of liberation as the nation and its mission have achieved near sacred status. Freedom, liberty, and democracy form the rhetoric of the day as the nation (or its representative) takes over the divine's practice of intervention. The salvation narrative's secularization into the myth of liberation was possible due to the democratization that followed the Enlightenment. The intertwined rejection of monarchic hierarchy and religious authority allowed for the emergence of a more egalitarian (though markedly racist, sexist, and classist) social structure. The nation, founded through a liberation struggle against the tyranny of empire, and moving more inclusively toward self-governance, interprets its historical development as justification for aiding in the liberation of other groups.

The myth of liberation expresses quite admirable qualities held by the national body. The urge to assist others demonstrates a willingness to act, compelled by a deep compassion and a global sense of community. That communal awareness manifests itself in our adherence to the democratic project. Our belief in the righteousness of democracy is a testament to the value we place on equality. The equality enshrined in our founding documents shares a privileged place with our demand for justice. Moreover, we anticipate that the realization of justice and equality will afford us the stability and security of the peace that we desire. Compassion, community, justice, equality and peace are the cherished traits and lofty goals set forth for the national character through the myth of liberation.

However, social life is full of paradoxes and myths are the arenas in which we struggle with our contradictions; for all the positive qualities offered by the myth of liberation, the opposites are also true. The compassion that incites us to aid against suffering and injustice is not uniformly extended. Some peoples are firmly excluded from our sense of community, particularly when they embody religious or economic difference. Nor is our praise of democracy universal, for our government has a long history of eschewing democratic outcomes when such victories challenge the authority of the U.S. or the supremacy of capitalist ideology. Moreover, our own performances of democracy fall prey to the logic of competition and the democratic endeavor ceases to be a project of community empowerment and turns toward the exultation of the individual. Justice bleeds into revenge and we have great difficulty in imagining any way to achieve freedom and peace but through violence.

The purpose of myth to propagate and preserve the world-view of its believers is, from a critical perspective, a tool in the maintenance of hegemony, a strategy in the domination of one group over another. In the sense employed by Antonio Gramsci, hegemony describes cultural processes through which the ruling class presents their own values and interests as normal and natural, while the dominated people, having been socialized into the reigning ideology, consent to the world-view of the elite.[1] Hegemony as described by Gramsci is insidious, tricking the masses into a social system of oppression. Written from a prison cell in fascist Italy, Gramsci's perspective has merit, particularly today given the class based control of our current media system and the production of content. Media as myth broadcasts dominant ideologies, presenting the U.S. as liberator to the world. With this dissertation I make no claims regarding a scheming plot to indoctrinate oppression; yet by analyzing media broadcasts as mythic constructions I do demonstrate the nation's ambivalence between liberation and domination. The myth of liberation is paradoxical because it expresses the belief in freedom and justice while simultaneously disguising the domination and inequality that also characterize the nation.

4

In my efforts to analyze the myth of liberation, this dissertation is organized into four parts, each with varying topics and methodologies. Part 1 reveals the motivation for the study, the methods of research, and the theoretical standards by which the data are evaluated. Part 2 offers historical background for the mythology, focuses on the prominent strategies for intervening against oppression, and implements analytic methods from the field of myth studies in order to analyze two forms of popular culture. Part 3 assesses the current state of democracy in the nation and utilizes a performance studies approach to analyze the repetition of scenarios in both politics and entertainment. Part 4 returns to a myth analysis, this time in its most recent anthropological incarnation, in order to elucidate the dimensional construction of liberation in the collective consciousness of the nation. Each section analyzes data from popular culture, situated in its socio-historical context, but approaches the analyses with differing methodological tactics. The methodological distinctions offered in parts 2, 3, and 4 are intended to demonstrate to the reader a variety of useful tools for the analysis of cultural forms.

Part 1 - Approaches, is divided into two chapters: Motivations and Methods, and Standards of Evaluation. In chapter 1 – Motivations and Methods, I offer a bit a personal background and contemporary context in order to explain my motivations for undertaking this study. I refer to three areas of academia that have greatly informed my scholarly approach and critical perspective, and I describe the research methods undertaken in my course of study. In chapter 2 – Standards of Evaluation, I present the theoretical structures that guide my analyses of media as myth, articulate the historical repetition of scenarios, and describe the dialectical construction of consciousness as performed in both politics and entertainment. Part 1 lays the foundation for the main body of the dissertation's work.

Part 2 – Myths of Intervention investigates the historic patterns of either violent or economic interventions into the lives of other peoples and their contemporary manifestations as performed in popular culture. In chapter 3 – The Strongest of Mythic Imperatives, I establish the historical precedents for the myth of liberation through reference to the work of Richard

Slotkin on frontier mythology and the narrative tradition of rescuing captives. However, I amend Slotkin's thesis by affirming that while savage warfare is the ritual of the nation, the regeneration violence achieves is aimed at advancing the privilege of consumption. Chapter 4 – Violent Interventions, interrogates the traditional use of violence to achieve liberation by utilizing the action film *Tears of the Sun* (2003). I conduct a Lévi-Straussian analysis this film, focused on the social binary of terror-security and demonstrate that within mytho-political thought, security depends upon segregation. Chapter 5 – Economic Interventions, offers an analysis of the *American Idol* charity drive, *"Idol Gives Back."* Following the methods of Roland Barthes, I demonstrate that such televised compassion for the poor serves as an alibi for the over-consumption that marks U.S. culture. Applying structuralist and critical methods of myth analysis to examples of violent and economic interventions found in contemporary popular culture, Part 2 evinces that the myth of liberation cloaks the terrorization and inequality that undergirds U.S. exceptionalism.

Part 3 – Scenarios of Democracy address the dialectic between popular culture and politics by investigating the contemporary performances of democracy in both of these social spheres. In chapter 6 – From Discovery to Democracy, I detail Diana Taylor's theory of the repertoire as the site for performing embodied knowledge through the repetition of scenarios. I describe how the merger of the hemispherically significant scenario of discovery with the scenario of democracy created the most popular television show of the era, *American Idol*. Chapter 7 – The Democratization of Television, describes the *American Idol* series as a performance of the myth of liberation and a ritual of redress for a crisis in national identity. I refer to Victor Turner's work on social dramas in order to describe *American Idol* as a performance for reiterating certain national ideals, and I utilize Katherine Meizel's ethnographic work on the series in order to detail those ideals as preferred by the culture industry. Moreover, I assert that the series' disengagement of the democratic gesture from the principle of equality prepared the public for the erosion of democratic equality in the political sphere. Chapter 8 –

Traditional Authority Intervenes, chronicles the interventions into the democratic process as performed by both the judges on *American Idol* and the judges of the United States Supreme Court in order to demonstrate the reciprocity between politics and entertainment. The analysis describes the nation's transition toward a commodified form of democracy in which authority overrides popular will and an individual's level of concern combined with their financial ability far outweighs any equality of vote. Overall, Part 3 demonstrates the repetition of scenarios between politics and entertainment and avows that the present scenario of democracy as a competition results in a nation governed by the will of a minority, who are better able to protect traditional privileges, while leaving the majority of the populace without representational governance.

Part 4 – Dimensions of Liberation turns to the theory of semiospace articulated by Lee Drummond in order to investigate the paradox at the heart of U.S. myth: liberation-domination. Chapter 9 – On Semiospace, recounts Drummond's work on the relation between myth and culture in order to elucidate the usefulness of his theory of semiospace as both an analytic tool and a tactic available for the reconstruction of myth and society. Chapter 10 – Death of the Gunfighter, implements Drummond's methodology in order to analyze another example of the myth of liberation in its filmed form, Clint Eastwood's critically acclaimed *Gran Torino*. In this chapter, I discuss Eastwood's iconic status in the mythic sphere of U.S. movies and the ambivalent attempts of his latter career to move the hegemonic masculine identity away from the use of violence for achieving liberation. Chapter 11 – Dilemmas of the Nation, continues the semiotic analysis of *Gran Torino* but draws from the work of Barry Spector on the myth of American innocence in order to identify three dilemmas of the nation subsumed within the myth of liberation: the sacrifice of war, the privilege of consumerism, and the denial of domination. With Drummond's theory of semiospace, in which culture and myth are processes through which humanity struggles with its contradictory experiences we can recognize that as

U.S. culture identifies itself as liberated and liberator it denies the reality of its status as dominated and dominator.

Through the myth of liberation, the nation professes an identity of liberator to the world's oppressed populations while simultaneously masking its status as dominator in the global community. Narratives of liberation perform acts of courage and compassion, violently or economically intervening against oppression while we proselytize the merits of democratic equality. An analysis of liberation and democracy as performed in the realm of entertainment reveals the paradoxical nature of our socially sanctioned myth. Peace and security are supported through violence, terrorization and segregation. Generosity offers an alibi for exploitation. The commoditization of democracy eschews the ideal of equality. Yet, our myths are changing; the scenarios are adapting to the transforming social reality. We seek a way out of our historic patterns of violence in the name of freedom and a path toward greater tolerance and equality. Understanding myth as a force driving the processes of cultural change opens up the possibility for reconstructing our mythic paradigms and recreating the social world to better align with our ideals. Understanding where our myths came from and the current state of their expression will make us better able to liberate ourselves from the reality of our domination.

Part One

Approaches

"A society is not simply constituted by the mass of individuals who compose it, by the land they occupy, by the things they use, by the movements they make, but above all by the idea that it fashions of itself."

-Emile Durkheim

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

Here in the land of the free, liberty is the idea most dearly identified with the nation. Citizens think of themselves as liberated, believing that the near constant state of war keeps it that way. Moreover, our history demonstrates that we also think of ourselves as liberators. The recent invocation of this self-identification to justify military invasions and occupations occurred concurrently with mass mediated narratives of liberation. Recognizing a dialectic relationship between media performances and political performances, this project investigates the meaning of liberation and the correlated expressions of democracy through an analysis of popular entertainments. In the first chapter, I describe my motivations for undertaking this project through reference to my particular cultural background and the political climate of the nation at the start of this century. I situate my own work in the fields of media studies, postcolonial studies and American studies in order to elucidate my scholarly heritage and approach. I then overview the methods of research through which data were collected for

analysis. Chapter 2 gathers together the theories that inform my scholarship and the standards by which I evaluate the data. First, I merge the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, James Fernandez, Lee Drummond and Richard Slotkin in order to assert the validity of studying myth as an entrance into understanding culture and to posit that myth is a force driving the processes of culture. Second, I combine the works of Diana Taylor, Richard Slotkin and Peter Berger in declaration that myths are historically repeated scenarios that serve to socialize citizens into culturally constructed systems of meaning with correspondingly legitimated patterns of behavior. Finally, I join Peter Berger's theory of socialization, Lee Drummond's conception of myth and culture, and Paulo Freire's theory of consciousness in order to focus this study on the mythic and cultural paradox of liberation and domination. By describing the motivations for this project, the fields of research, and the standards of evaluation, Part 1 lays the foundation for the analytic work of this dissertation.

Chapter One

Motivations and Methods

This dissertation project grew out of a desire to analyze the place the U.S. holds for itself within the international community and the way we interact with other communities around the world. In an era of wars for liberation and democratization abroad, with tumultuous democratic processes at home there seemed an urgent need to investigate the meaning of liberation in national discourse and the role of democracy in efforts toward liberty. Yet, I am not a political scientist, or even a social scientist. My fields of study have long been in the humanities and the arts; I have best been able to enrich my understanding of cultural beliefs and practices in these realms of creative expression. I developed a research project in which I investigate visuals and performances of liberation and democratization as a means to ascertain the functional meanings of liberty and democracy in U.S. culture. I followed both of Sherry Ortner's suggestions offered in the article "On Key Symbols," in that I conducted research into a clearly popular performance of liberation and democratization (*American Idol*) and I searched for other expressions of these culturally "key scenarios."[1] Moreover, investigating the nationally prominent themes of liberty and democracy, this project enacts the *consciencization* urged by Paulo Freire as, "a common striving towards awareness of reality and toward self-awareness."[2] In this preliminary chapter I describe my reasoning for embarking on this course of study, the questions that guided me, the bodies of scholarship in which I situate my work, the methods and sites of research, and hints to the insights gained. While I do not advocate for a colloquial definition of myth as falsehood, overall, this project has been an effort to, in Freire's words, "unveil the world of oppression," that underlies the U.S. myth of liberation in hopes that, as Claude Lévi-Strauss described the transformation of all myths, we might be able to rebuild our cultural paradigm from its shattered remains.

Impetus for the Study

This dissertation project has been a process of consciencization for myself as my thinking has emerged from its limited foundation to a more holistic understanding of the nation's political reality. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003 with the stated purpose of liberation and democratization, I did not give the military engagement much thought. Having been educated in a staunchly conservative state, I perceived that occupation to be just another war, relatively benevolent as all U.S. wars before it had been. Then I moved out of the Midwest; exposed for the first time to opposing perspectives, my understanding of national identity shifted dramatically. I already had a solid understanding of the history of imperialism, at least in the African context. Yet, as I began graduate studies I was naively disturbed to find congruencies between the rhetoric of contemporary politics and earlier eras of international domination. France had its "Civilizing Mission" and the British claimed to bring "Progress" with their imperial endeavors; as for the U.S., we offer "Liberation." With a growing consciousness of the U.S. as an imperial nation I began a course of study intent on understanding the dynamics by which claims to liberation shroud the realities of U.S. domination. In the following paragraphs I present the questions that provided the impetus and foundation for this project, assert the usefulness of studying visual culture as an entrance into collective ideologies, and introduce the insights this work offers in regards to the nation's myth of liberation and its current state of democracy.

Given that the U.S. was engaged in violent efforts to liberate another people and bring them democracy, I found it pressing to question this notion of liberation that guided U.S. foreign policy, and to interrogate the perceived relationship between liberty and democracy. What exactly is meant by "liberation?" How could the U.S. bring liberty to others? Why did it seem that violence and warfare were the only paths to liberty? How could democracy as an institution of popular participation be imposed upon a people? Does liberty require democracy, and vice versa? How was it that so many in the nation's population, including myself, so easily accepted

the self-identification of liberator? What role did popular entertainments play in perpetuating such identification? If U.S. culture insists upon claiming liberation as its central theme, how might we be able to foster liberation without relying on violence? To investigate and answer these questions I embarked upon a study of the ideas a liberation and democracy in U.S. culture, which is grounded in history but focuses on contemporary cultural productions.

In my efforts to understand the meaning and significance of liberty and democracy in contemporary U.S. society I turned to the nation's prominent forms of creative expression because arts and entertainment manifest ideas, and as such, ideology. Studying an idea is a difficult task because its proper home is in the consciousness of individuals; yet, as the fields of anthropology, history and psychology all assert, a community's collective ideals, world-view, preferred identity constructions, and patterns of behavior are given physical form in the peoples' arts. As art historian Sylvia H. Williams wrote, "the art of the world is filled with symbols, visible forms demonstrating the invisible. Through the exploration of such images in a particular civilization or society, we learn about the ideas and values that intrigued and informed a people."[3] Contemporary U.S. society is saturated with mediated forms of creative expression. Film and television in particular present the ideals of the nation to both its residents and the broader global community. Many of the narrative structures and images of our entertainments follow what I describe as the myth of liberation: the ability and duty of the U.S. to free others from domination. While the myth of liberation is tied to a belief in the virtue of democratic institutions, only recently have international efforts toward liberation included aspects of democratization. Given the reciprocity between creative expression and political action, we have likewise witnessed the democratization of television programming. By investigating the visualizations of liberation and democracy within popular entertainments, this study offers insight into these two guiding themes of U.S. culture.

Analyzing the myth of liberation as performed in popular media allows me to address a broad but inter-related range of social issues. In my research, I discovered that within

commercial media the notion of liberty is distinctly tied to accessing consumerism, which

derives from an unquestioned faith in the capitalist economic structure. This dominance of

capitalism has resulted in democratic processes being subsumed within the market. The

commercialization of democracy threatens this cherished national ideal and research suggests

that indeed, various aspects of media hint at democracy's fragility. Yet, the threat to democracy

is counter posed with the notion of democracy as threat; for the national history of democratic

expansion has always jeopardized the privilege of the patriarchal, androcratic and oligarchic

order, which is founded upon hierarchy maintained through various forms of violence.[4] Overall,

media reinforce the hierarchical standards of the nation, both domestically and globally as the

white, Christian, heterosexual male retains privilege above all others as the dominant identity.

The identity that dominates presents itself as the one who liberates. Analyzing myths of

liberation reveals the patterns of domination and segregation that support the socio-economic

order. However, times are changing, as are our myths; gendered, sexual, racial, and religious

restrictions continue to loosen even as a backlash from the historically privileged subjects

ensues. Merging a microanalysis of popular media situated within its macro-social context

provides insights into the nation's current state of democracy, its tendency to invoke liberty as a

disguise for domination, and its need to confess to its historic role as dominator.

  This project grew out of a shift in my understanding of political reality and drew upon

my academic training as an Africanist and an artist. The war for the liberation and

democratization of Iraq alerted me to the imperialistic tendencies of the U.S. in world affairs.

My increasing consciousness of the U.S. role of dominator inspired me to interrogate the

discourses of liberation that permeated the nation's cultural landscape. As a student of the arts

and humanities, I turned to prominent forms of creative expression in order to better

understand the meaning and significance of liberation and democracy for the national body.

Analyzing the performances of visual culture gave me insights into the patterns of domination

that sustain privilege both internationally and domestically.

Situating the Study

While this interdisciplinary study draws insights from across the academy, I primarily align my efforts with three areas of scholarship that have guided me both methodologically and theoretically: postcolonial studies, media studies, and American studies. From within postcolonial studies I continue the broad critique of domination and interrogate the power relations by which society is structured. Media studies offers strategies for investigating the processes by which such societal relations are normalized and broadcast for consumption by the general populace. American studies, particularly its myth and symbol school, have analyzed such popular discourses in their nationally particular, historical contexts. While this study on the U.S. myth of liberation does not fit neatly into any one field, by merging postcolonial studies, media studies, and American studies, this project address the dialectical relation between creative expression and political reality in order to highlight the national paradox of liberation and domination.

The works of postcolonial theorists have been central to the formation of my scholarly approach and continue to inform my analytic tactics and research goals. Postcolonial (or decolonial) studies encompass the bodies of scholarship that critique practices and discourses of imperial, patriarchal, and capitalist domination.[5] From scholars like Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and Anne McClintock I learned of the processes through which Europe and its cultural descendents constructed a global hierarchy of identities and economies.[6] While my own work is not primarily historical or psychological as are the writings of Fanon and Rodney, I have drawn much from Said and McClintock in terms of implementing literary criticism in my investigation of popular discourses of the U.S. as a self-identified liberator and the Othering of diverse populations. As argued by Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan, in "The Construction of Woman in Three Popular Texts of Empire," I recognize that "ideological struggles [are] waged in popular texts"; and I seek to conduct an urgent critique of the privileges that sustain global patterns of domination.[7] Yet my own work is better aligned with those

scholars whose focus is on contemporary discourses of identification; such as Lila Abu-Lughod, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam who exemplify the scholarly ability to navigate between a micro-analysis of popular texts and local communities on the one hand, and global social patterns with their foundational ideologies on the other.[8] With an emphasis on alterity, I echo those works in postcolonial studies that seek to intervene in the social relations of domination.

Asserting that collective ideologies are disseminated through creative expressions, I situate this project in the field of media studies. This broad body of scholarship includes research into production, audiences, and texts with analytic methods focused on demographics, textual interpretation and content statistics. Media studies often overlaps with postcolonial studies in terms of materialist investigations into the maintenance of power relations and the construction of subjectivities. Media studies began with materialists such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and follows Althusser's explication of Ideological State Apparatuses.[9] Yet, such materialist approaches to media were criticized for either disregarding or homogenizing audiences and their abilities to divergently interpret texts. Ethnographic and quantitative studies into audiences and textual content emerged to address this inadequacy. Yet scholars of late have argued that focusing too much on audiences allows academics to ignore the imbalance of power relations between production and broadcast capabilities on the one hand and audience reception on the other. For this reason, Juliet Schor has called for a revitalization of materialist criticism in media studies that merges with an investigation of consumers.[10] Because I have been trained in the humanities rather than the social sciences, and because my scholarly heritage is largely Geertzian, I adopt an interpretive approach to media texts, supplemented with ethnographic research into audience interpretation, and an inclusion of producer intent, to which I add an attention to commercial sponsorship.[11] While my approach to the media I have studied has been multi-faceted in effort to draw out the connections between particular media performances and broader social concerns, my analysis is primarily interpretive as I point to the

symbolic codification of subjective hierarchies subsumed under a myth of liberation and a culture of democracy.

With this study on the myth of liberation, I am indebted to the American studies myth and symbol school. Like media studies and postcolonial studies, the American studies myth and symbol school investigates the relationship between popular entertainments and political realities as concurrent expressions and embodiments of collective ideologies, which it terms 'myths.' Works from the American studies myth and symbol school examine thematic contents of popular literature and images situated in their historical contexts in order to identify the underlying belief systems and social practices of U.S. cultural development.[12] This body of scholarship has been criticized for lacking methodological explications, for assuming a Cartesian division between human consciousness and the physical world, for masquerading as historians, for essentializing "America," and for privileging a particular interpretation as truth.[13] However, my inclusion of Lee Drummond's *American Dreamtime* within the myth and symbol school, and my adoption of his theory and methods, allows my own project to overcome these critiques of the field.[14]

As an anthropologist of myth, Drummond outlins a definitive methodology for investigating popular media as myth that derived from anthropological theories of myth. He disavows the Cartesian distinction and asserts instead the dialectical relation between consciousness (myth) and action (culture). Moreover, his theory and methodology recognizes infinite interpretive possibilities without privileging his own interpretation. As for the criticism that the field essentializes "America," I must note that recent developments in the field have rejected the idea of "American exceptionalism" by recognizing that the nation shares its history and ideology with other colonial and capitalist states. Scholars have, therefore, attempted to position American studies within the broader range of Area studies while recognizing that the term "America" more properly denotes the totality of the hemisphere[15] In my own writing, I

avoid the term "America" except when writing of the hemisphere, or the American Dream. Rather, I assert the particular national alignment of this study and use the term "U.S."

As an effort geared toward understanding how creative expressions of liberation and democratization reflect, distort, and shape political reality, I position this study within the fields of postcolonial studies, media studies, and American studies. From postcolonial studies, I continue the tradition of critiquing hegemonic power structures and the maintenance of inequality. I adopt a materialist perspective from within media studies in order to interrogate the performances through which presentations of liberation conceal domination and patterns of democratization codify hierarchy and privilege. By positioning Lee Drummond within the American studies myth and symbol school, I assert a dialectical relationship in which an historically evolving mythic space of dominant cultural ideals both reflects and informs the cotemporaneous political existence. This investigation, grounded in the oppositional perspectives of postcolonial theory, interrogates national media as a mythic space in which dominant cultural ideals are narrated and performed in order to reveal the nationally prominent paradox of liberty and domination, and to demonstrate how democratic institutions are torn between this paradox.

Research Methods

Investigating the relationship between popular media and political action on a national level in an effort to interrogate the ideals of liberty and democracy within U.S. culture I engaged in three areas of research: film, television, and the history of foreign policy and visualized ideology. In UCLA's Film and Television Archive I researched films that depicted military engagements abroad, looking particularly at examples created during periods of warfare. I conducted ethnographic research into the popular television show, *American Idol*, which ritualized the democratic process and embodied the myth of liberation. I also deepened my knowledge of U.S. history in terms of both the nation's cultural and economic expansion and its

traditions of creative expression. These archival, ethnographic and historical research methods provided examples and data to be analyzed while also strengthening my understanding of the U.S. culture and its guiding myth of liberation.

In the academic year of 2008-2009, I received a Graduate Research Mentorship in order to study in UCLA's Film and Television Archive where I investigated the genres of action or war films. I searched for examples in which agents or representatives of the U.S. act as liberator to others. To my surprise, the overwhelming majority of films depicting liberations were rescues of other military personnel and not the liberation of other peoples. I also searched through films created during periods of military intervention. The latter searching method proved too complex considering the fact that the U.S. military has been engaged in operations for most of the 20th century and beyond. So, I searched for films set in any of the twenty-six nations where the U.S. military has intervened since World War II. This method yielded little outside of the Vietnam War era and up until the recent Iraq War; and again, the focus is overwhelmingly on the soldiers and not the citizens being liberated. While archival research was not as fruitful as I had hoped, it did allow me to perceive common mythic elements as well as to recognize divergences in plot and character. Moreover, it emphasized for me the exceptionalism of two recent films I viewed thanks to the movie watching habits of my husband: *Tears of the Sun* (2003) and *Gran Torino* (2008).

The first time I viewed these films I felt compelled to conduct a myth analysis of each. As an Africanist, I was disturbed by *Tears of the Sun*'s stereotypical presentation of Africans as incompetent, irrational and heinously violent. Yet, here was a film portraying precisely what the U.S. has generally refused to do in African conflicts: intervene.[16] Moreover, *Tears of the Sun*'s release coincided with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, offering a mythic projection that complemented contemporary political claims toward liberation. Given the correlation between the ideology manifest in *Tears of the Sun* and the rhetoric of the Iraq War as each identified the U.S. as rescuer to the oppressed, I thought that an analysis of the former would give insight into the

latter. As for *Gran Torino*, I grew up watching Clint Eastwood films and no actor represents as fully for me the mythic identity of the righteous gunfighter. The fact that Eastwood's character in *Gran Torino* abandons his gun was an unprecedented revision for this iconic mythmaker. Moreover, upon first viewing, I thought that the film's climax was attempting to position dialogue over violence as a path to resolution. Subsequent analysis disproved such a hypothesis and instead pointed to the ambivalence toward violence in Eastwood's films. While both these films employ standard mythic tropes, they also perform significant deviations that I argue are particular to the current era of liberation. Both are excellent examples for analyzing the contemporary myth of liberation because they emphasize the liberation of others as well as the self, are more inclusive of women, and in the latter example, attempt to move away from violence as the only path to liberation. By researching the history of filmed performances of liberation, I deepened my knowledge base from which to analyze contemporary creative expressions, explore the ideology of intervention, and investigate the paradoxical relationship between liberty and domination within U.S. culture.

In the field of television, no show was more popular during the first decade of this century than *American Idol*, a "reality" series that performed its own version of the myth of liberation and instigated a global wave of democratic participation through the medium of entertainment. While living in Los Angeles, it was difficult to go anywhere without being reminded of *American Idol*. The show was present everywhere: billboards, radio programs, and magazines at checkout stands. One did not need to watch the show to know something of its content and progress, so pervasive was it in the cultural sphere. Following the ethnographer's impulse to study those elements of culture that the people themselves are interested in, I began to investigate *American Idol*. Curious as to this democratization of television in which coalitions of viewer participation aided in the transformation of contestants, I found several regular viewers who were willing to watch the series with me while I recorded our corresponding conversations and interviews. I also browsed the related online forums; but when I tried to ask

questions, some posters discouraged others from answering for fear that, I, with so few comments, would accuse them of engaging in a guilty pleasure. I began to feel like a voyeur and decided to respect the privacy of this public, anonymous community. However, I did meet one viewer standing outside of the Nokia Theater before the 2007 season finale. A Jason Castro fan, she agreed to post a survey I had written on the fan forums she participated in. With 141 respondents, this was the most broad based portion of my research relating directly to the consumers.

<u>Internet Survey Questions</u>

1. How long have you been watching American Idol and how regularly do you watch the show?
2. What do you like or dislike about American Idol?
3. How often do you vote? If you don't vote, why not?
4. How do you decide whom to vote for?
5. If you couldn't vote would you be as interested in the show?
6. How do the judges' criticisms affect the show, its outcomes, your opinions and voting in general?
7. Did you give to "Idol Gives Back?" How do you think Idol Gives Back works? Do you know how they give back, to whom and why?
8. What aspects of American society (values, ideals, etc) does American Idol reflect?
9. Do you have a favorite moment/performance from this season? If so, what?
10. Please provide some biographical (but anonymous) information about yourself: age, gender, occupation, residence, etc.

While the survey gave me insights into a broad range of viewers' encounters with and opinions of the show, the results of the survey did not play into my analysis as much as did the participant observation I conducted with other viewers and from my own living room. Performing the myth of liberation and the ideology of democracy, *American Idol* contestants sought to be freed from their mundane lives in the service sector economy; a transformation only achievable through the democratic participation of the audience. By focusing on the performances of *American Idol*, I analyze the embodiment of systems of meaning that comprise the foundation of the myth of liberation, interrogate the privileging of particular identities within the national body, and discuss the tenuous state of democracy in national culture.

In order to situate these contemporary creative expressions of the U.S. myth of liberation and the ideology of democracy in their broader historical context I researched related portions of nation's artistic heritage and its history of foreign policy. Prior to my graduate studies, I had little more than the average High School graduate's knowledge of U.S. history. However limited my knowledge base was, I recognized in the contemporary rhetoric of foreign policy a reiteration of the ideology behind the era of Manifest Destiny when U.S. culture and territory expanded across the continent with the declared intent of spreading freedom and democracy. With the help of Prof. Steven Aron, I immersed myself in books on the history of continental expansion and explored exhibition catalogues that presented and analyzed the visual manifestations of 19th century U.S. ideology.[17] Through this research I gained insight into the ways residents have visually expressed their foundational ideas of progress and civilization, their relationship with the land and natural resources, and the tensions between races, ethnicities, genders, and economic classes. Overall, this research affirmed for me that narratives of liberation are ever present in mass media as an intimate part of our national heritage. Furthermore, being well versed in this body of scholarship allows me to place contemporary media in its larger historical context and affords me the ability to demonstrate that creative expressions are distinctly tied to the processes of cultural adaptation.

Combining archival research of films with participant-observation research of contemporary television and historical research into national traditions of creative expression and political ideology allowed me to conduct an analysis of popular media and its relation to political action. In UCLA's Film and Television Archive, I research the history of filmed performances of liberation and gained insights into the constituent elements of the genres of war and action films. With my research into the popular television program *American Idol,* I investigated the myth of liberation's relation to democratic processes and culled interpretations from a range of viewers. Studying historical analyses of U.S. visual culture and earlier eras of international policy afforded me the ability to situate the current political period and its

correlated forms of creative expression into their broader historical context. These three areas of research provided the foundations for this study on the myth of liberation.

Conclusion

With this dissertation, I deepened my understanding of national culture, particularly in terms of its self-identification as liberator to the world's oppressed populations, and as bearer of democratic governance. In order to achieve this goal, I researched the nation's history of international relations, particularly the era known as Manifest Destiny, and the creative representations of that ideology. Believing that a people's world-view is expressed in their arts and entertainments, I conducted archival research into films of military rescues and ethnographic research into the most popular contemporary television show. With these three areas of research, and the resulting analysis, I situate my project at an intersection of media studies, American studies, and postcolonial studies. Combining these three fields of scholarship allows me to investigate the nation's central paradox of liberty and domination in order to critique a dominant discourse of the nation as performed in popular entertainments.

Chapter 2

Standards of Evaluation

In order to weave together a body of theory with which to evaluate the material data of dominant U.S. culture as expressions of the idea of liberation I pull together threads of insight from across the academy. Though I primarily locate my work within studies of myth, both anthropological and historical; I also recognize that culture is inherently performed and intimately tied to social structures and so I depend upon theories from performance studies and sociology to support my project. An early encounter with Roland Barthes' "Myth Today" piqued my interest in evaluating what about my own culture I had taken for granted and what might an investigation into normative forms reveal about the notion of liberation that seemed to pervade the contemporary national rhetoric and visual landscape.[1] Recognizing that I needed a better base of U.S. historical knowledge in order to undertake this project, I fervently studied the period of continental expansion backed by the ideology labeled "Manifest Destiny" and the subsequent series of foreign invasions because I could see the parallel between those past periods and my current moment of military interventions. Guided by the example of scholars from the American studies myth and symbol school I investigated the repetition of symbols and scenarios performed in both expressive culture and political life. Pleased to have found that ever-practical historians also study myth I returned to myth studies intent on acquiring its anthropological methodologies of analysis in order to untangle and interrogate the semiotic dimensions that generate cultural performances and underpin the myth of liberation. Confounded by the seeming inevitability of repetition in both semiotic systems and the political actions of foreign policy I grasped for a sociological theory that could explain the apparent dialectic between the two cultural spheres in hopes of finding a way to shift out of the pattern of violence perpetrated in the name of liberty. Always the bricoleur, and staunchly interdisciplinary, I have cobbled together from diverse fields a range of standards according to

which I both evaluate performances of the myth of liberation and consider the possibilities for shifting its repeating patterns by attending to the process of myth/culture, the historical repetition of scenarios, and the paradox of liberty and domination.

The Process of Myth/Culture

Myths are much more than paradigmatic tales of a given culture for their study can take us deep into the patterns of signification that undergird social structures. From within the disciplines of anthropology and history, myth is understood as a primary part of the creative process of culture. Myth provides a frame for interpreting experience, situated from our location within those webs of signification that comprise a cultural landscape.[2] With myth, we construct our understanding of the world and set into motion a force that carries that construction forward to shape cultural expressions to come. In this section I outline the definitions of myth utilized in this study, introduce the theory of semiospace, which merges myth with culture, and expound upon the processes and purposes of analyzing myth.

With this project, I claim a particular heritage of myth analysis that begins with colonial-era ethnography and follows through to the semiotics of post-industrial capitalism. Beginning with B. Malinowski's residence among sea-faring Trobriand Islanders in the first quarter of the 20th century, we recognize a functional relationship between the myths a people tell themselves and the organization of their societies.[3] Malinowski's declaration that myths are "charters" for society, points to the relationship between stories and socialization.[4] During the mid-twentieth century, Claude Lévi-Strauss engaged in a prodigious study of indigenous American narrative traditions, in which he discerned a common composition of mediated social binaries.[5] He offers a structuralist strategy for the analysis of narrative myths.[6] During the same period, materialist critic Roland Barthes turned an analytic gaze back on Europe, insisting that myths are neither limited to narratives, nor to the colonized.[7] In Barthes' analysis of post World War II France, myths still serve to maintain the standards of social organization and daily life; however,

Barthes calls into question the status quo of imperialism and offers a theory of myth as semiotic systems of manipulation. Across the Atlantic, literary critics and historians who recognized a relationship between popular fiction and political reality undertook the study of nationalist myth. In the work of Richard Slotkin, myth is a historically derived framework for interpreting lived experience that simultaneously provides a pattern for cultural regeneration.[8] After three decades and three volumes, Slotkin's thesis of regeneration through violence demonstrates the mythic force behind the historical development of U.S. culture as well as the mythic relationship between politics and entertainment. Lee Drummond follows with a reconsideration of anthropological theories, utilizing insights from the fields of physical sciences, and posits that myths are forces driving cultural production and cultures are differential processes of human adaptation.[9] Garnering the highlights from each of these scholars I define myths as: *narratives teaching the standards of behavior, resolutions to the contradictions of society, symbols that serve to maintain/justify the status quo, standards of interpretation applied to the world around* and *creative processes tied up in ongoing cultural change*. Such a complex definition of myth gleaned from a precise heritage within a very broad history suggests both the significant cultural knowledge that can be gained through a close study of myth and the potential that said knowledge may hold for shaping a cultural future.

Myth and culture are so tightly intertwined that Lee Drummond declares them to be essentially the same thing and offers the theory of *semiospace* as a method of analysis.[10] Drummond's conception of semiospace is unusual in anthropological theory because he insists that the theories of the physical world also apply to cultures, as products and processes of human minds interacting with their environments. Drawing from theories of quantum mechanics and fractal geometry, Drummond revolutionizes our understanding of myth and culture by asserting that each are the creative processes through which people declare and transform their understanding of what it means to be human, find their place among the dimensions of experience and situate themselves along the continua of culture. By rectifying

linguistically determined theories of myth and culture, and situating humanity somewhere between particle and cosmos, Drummond redefines culture as the process of sorting out humanities' ambivalent existences and shifting identities and myth as the force behind cultural production and cultural change. Although Drummond leans heavily on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, he critiques Lévi-Strauss' structuralism and establishes in its place, with the addition of James Fernandez' *quality space*, an alternative myth/culture paradigm of paradoxical dimensions and shifting human identities labeled *semiospace*. While Drummond focuses his efforts on the most elemental and universal of semiotic dimensions (life-death, animal-machine and self-other), his alignment of anthropology with cosmology and quantum mechanics allows him to declare an infinitude of semiotic axes along which humans creatively construct the dimensions of culture and myth as they assert their identities and negotiate the ambivalences they feel toward their sentience. The significance of Drummond's theory of myth/culture exceeds the method of analysis that it offers, for its exploration of semiotic dimensions suggests a compositional tactic by which artists and citizens can creatively reconstruct myth and potentially shift the inchoate trajectory of the force that myth exerts upon culture.

Myths are an excellent source for interrogating the patterns and ideals of a given culture and each scholar that I rely on for this project offers a particular method of analyzing myth. This study draws upon the methodology developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss that charts the synchronic and diachronic structure of narrative in order to reveal both the underlying social binaries and preferred resolutions achieved by the myth's protagonist.[11] In analyzing myth according to a Lévi-Straussian method, this study notes the binary tensions presented through narrative, the methods of resolving such tensions and the final state of resolution achieved, thereby expressing the desired stability of the social world. Whereas Lévi-Strauss' methodology exposes the social world as it ought to be - the standards of behavior and the acceptable outcomes, Roland Barthes recognizes that what ought to be, as presented by myth, represents particular perspectives situated from positions of social power.[12] Like Barthes' work, this study is concerned with myth

as not merely expressions of the norm but as strategies of the dominant class in their efforts to maintain their dominance.[13] This document implements Barthes' Austrian methodology for analyzing myths as hegemonic constructions.[14] Recognizing that the myths, which dominate entertainment, are generated by the dominant class I also rely on the scholarly strategy of Richard Slotkin and give careful attention to the relationship between narrative myth and myth's political enactments in order to investigate the dialectic patterns that generate culture and regenerate the status quo. This process of "cultural generativity" through the force of myth as theorized by Lee Drummond is a conception central to my project in terms of both analyzing current myths and the potential for shifting cultural patterns through the use of myth.[15]

This study follows Drummond's methodology for interpreting myths according to the movement across semiotic dimensions as explorations of the paradoxes encountered in our sentient existences. Prevalent within myths of liberation are the paradoxical dimensions of: terror and security, liberty and domination, consumption and production, integration and segregation. By gathering together such diverse methods of myth analysis, this study offers insights into the U.S. culture and identity dominant at the start of the 21st century in which warfare abroad was justified by efforts of liberation and democratization, threats of terror brought the decline of liberty, the glorification of consumption obscured the inequalities of production and the world was segregated into a frighteningly stereotypical us and them.

While I take as my objects of analysis the performances of mythic narrative produced for film and television, be assured that neither myth nor culture are thought of here as merely products or things; rather they are processes of human thought and action. This project is therefore a study not of DVD's in their cases or television sets with their box recorders but of the ideas broadcast through such objects and embodied in performances. The ideas disseminated through specific semiotic traditions that this study aims to interpret are central to the regenerative processes of culture. Claude Lévi-Strauss applies the French term *bricolage* to the processes of cultural production in general and myth in particular in order to draw attention to

the constant flux of the human experience and the creativity of people as they cope with such changes.[16] When we make myths, we cobble together visions of the world as it has been, is, and may become. Lee Drummond notes the creativity of the human mind as well when he declares myths as our collective attempts to grapple with our cultural existence and efforts to sketch out the contours of our collective consciousness. Myth is the process by which we explore our lived contradictions and perform our shifting cultural identities. In this study, I investigate narratives of liberation present in visual media and apply the previously mentioned methods of myth analysis in order to explore the semiotics of liberty, democracy and intervention dominant in U.S. culture and to consider the possibilities for altering the composition of cultural performances and shifting the trajectory of cultural regeneration.

The Historical Repetition of Scenarios

An inquiry into the generativity of culture demands a recognition of the historical trajectory of the force of myth. Looking at U.S. history through the lenses of performance studies and cultural criticism, I analyze the nation's mythic repertoire through an attention to its repeating scenarios. Utilizing Diana Taylor's definition of scenarios as, "meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes," as well as her methods of analysis, we can understand the process of myth/culture as being embodied through the performances of scenarios in both expressive culture and political life.[17] Through their repetition across both historical time and cotemporaneous cultural landscapes, scenarios impart a natural character to social constructions, which often justifies the inequalities of social organization. In this section, I articulate how scenarios can be understood as the basic elements in the repertoire of myth, the historical repetition of scenarios between entertainment and politics, and how such repetition naturalizes dominant ideology.

The scholars mentioned in the previous section have generally focused on narratives as points of cultural analysis, yet in order to understand mythmaking as a historical force of

cultural production our analysis must move beyond the confines of plot and attend to the performances of scenarios as the basic elements of myth. Though Slotkin does not use the terminology of performance studies when he writes of the evolving myth of the frontier, what he articulates are the modifications of scenarios as they are adapted to changing socio-historic circumstances. Although Slotkin employs the folkloric term "motif" to discuss the lasting power of plots centered on themes such as capture/rescue; by using the term "scenario," as theorized by Diana Taylor, this study broadens its focus beyond the narration of literature and into the realm of performance. Whereas Slotkin declares myth as a kind of historical memory, Taylor describes the performance of scenarios as the embodiment of cultural memory. She theorizes the Archive and the Repertoire as complimentary forms of knowledge production and thereby challenges the textual emphasis of cultural analysis in favor of an attention to the adaptability and longevity of performed scenarios. Taylor insists that since scenarios are paradigmatic but adaptable expressions of social structures and behaviors, an attention to scenarios rather than scripts exposes the legacy and trajectory of cultural traditions contained within the repertoire of performance. This study focuses on scenarios of liberation as performed at the beginning of the 21st century while noting the heritage out of which the performances have emerged, and their contemporary contexts. With an attention to scenarios, we can recognize in our analysis how the past "haunts" the present while simultaneously providing a model for the future.[18]

A focus on performance rather than merely narrative allows for the recognition that scenarios, and therefore myths, repeat not only across time but also between the realms of entertainment and politics.[19] Both Richard Slotkin and Diana Taylor evince the persistence and profuseness of the scenarios they study respectively. Taylor investigates the scenario of discovery that shaped 500 years of the American hemisphere's socio-political history and performance traditions in order to assert that scenarios of both politics and entertainment transmit set patterns of behavior. Slotkin explores the myth of the frontier in which the central scenario of U.S. politics and entertainment is that of the "savage war," married to a ritually

performed pattern of regeneration through violence.[20] The archive of U.S. culture holds a history of liberation wedded to the brutality of domination while the repertoire of performance carries that selective history forward, embodied in the present, preparing us for a future of violent and economic interventions accompanied by calls for liberation and democratization. The semiotic dimension of Self-Other that structured interactions between immigrants and indigenous was repeated in the foreign policy of many a president, including G. W. Bush when he declared, "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists," and espoused the rhetoric of good versus evil.[21] The scenarios of capture and rescue so prominent in Puritan literature persist in both Hollywood films and the political explanations of dictatorial regimes and oppressed populaces. Scenarios are indeed paradigmatic for they provide familiar interpretations of social experiences and structure our responding performances, both political and theatrical, because they offer models for continuous cultural and political engagements.

The repetition of scenarios across time and cultural systems is crucial to the processes of socialization through which culture is built and maintained. In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger explains this cultural process, which he terms "nomization," as the method by which an individual's consciousness becomes saturated in culturally constructed meanings and social systems due to repetition. He points to the repetitiousness of rituals as significant to the "process of reminding" a population of its own definitions of reality and its legitimate behaviors.[22] Like Taylor's hauntology, the repetition of performances, scenarios, myths or rituals make culturally determined meanings, interpretations, and behaviors seem natural rather than constructed.[23] Slotkin notices this in regard to the use of violence as a method taken for granted throughout U.S. history for the purposes of regeneration or the resolution of intercultural conflict. It must be pointed out, however, that the culturally prominent ideas and behaviors naturalized through repetition are disseminated by the dominant class and not necessarily adhered to by society as a whole. Roland Barthes provides an invaluable method for interrogating the naturalization of dominant ideology by devising a theory of semiotics based on

the linguistic work of Saussure.[24] While Barthes uses a terminology of myth in his analysis of French symbolic culture, his methods move beyond myth analysis and into the very workings of nomization. Barthes is not only interested in how cultural symbols grow to the status of myth or how meanings are made with myths; rather Barthes is acutely interested in how symbolic systems function to maintain the inequalities and injustices of the status quo. Applying the field of semiotics to dominant ideology, described as myth, Barthes declares that myths not only naturalize certain ideas and behaviors through repetition, but they are used to justify the status quo and offer an alibi for socially structured inequalities. The repetition of scenarios which Taylor describes as a haunting of the past in the present to structure the future, Berger explains as central to the process of socialization, Slotkin observes within centuries of frontier semiotics and Barthes declares to be a tool for a conservative maintenance of social power is the central focus of this study as it aims to understand the historic trajectory of the myth of liberation while exploring the possibilities for modifying the myth away from its patterns of regeneration through violence.

The unrelenting repetition of scenarios in which the U.S., or a representative thereof, is presented as a liberating force – violent, compassionate and democratic – has naturalized military and economic interventions abroad and established an alibi for U.S. domination of socio-economic world affairs. Whether acted out on the screen, alluded to on the nightly news, invoked by elected officials, performed by soldiers and internalized by a differentially nomized public, the scenarios prevalent in the expansive cultural system of the United States naturalize military supremacy, religious conflict and the poverty of others while legitimizing the use of violence with claims to democratization and equating freedom with a high level of consumerism. Not being bound by the historically specific details of plot, scenarios are the basic building blocks of myth. Through scenarios we carry forward from the past an inherited system of meanings according to which we perform our cultural identities and structure our social actions. In both entertainment and official policy, the U.S. cultural landscape - or to use Drummond's

term for myth/culture, semiospace - prioritizes the myth of liberation as its structural ideology and justifies the persistent conditions of inequality and domination upon which the exceptionalism of U.S. liberty has been built.

Consciencization into the Paradox of Liberation-Domination

The myth of liberation is both a cultural product and a process of collective consciousness by which we explore the experienced paradox of liberty and domination in efforts to assert our cultural identities and declare our position within the semiotic dimensions of our sentience. The scenarios of liberty and domination that together comprise the myth of liberation form the foundation of this study, which aims at the dealienation of consciousness and a shift in the force of myth. In order to understand the dialectical process that occurs in an historic pattern spiraling between the political experiences of liberty and domination in social life and the presentation of that axis of meaning within the realms of entertainment I turn to theories of sociology for explication. In Peter Berger's theory of socialization, the objectivity of the social world as it appears in political life and creative expressions provides the "structures of plausibility" and the "repertoire of identities" that are subjectively internalized and then generatively recreated in the external world.[25] We are largely unconscious of this process through which social constructions are legitimized and naturalized. Yet, despite our general alienation of consciousness from the constructedness of the social order, through a process of consciencization we can come to recognize, and accordingly challenge, the structures of plausibility by which liberation in U.S. consciousness, though intimately linked to institutions of democracy, depends upon military and economic domination. In this section, I present the process of socialization that normalizes cultural patterns, discuss the paradox of liberty and domination as the most prominent of semiotic dimension within the national experience, and introduce the concept of consciencization as a first step toward reshaping the semiotics of liberation.

The process of socialization, or nomization, as outlined by Berger unfolds in a dialectical pattern of objectification, internalization and externalization through which humans attain and express their cultural being.[26] While Berger's explanation of the processes of social cultivation differs little from the understandings gained during the long history of cultural studies, his sociological theorization is especially useful because it clearly demarcates three phases of the process of cultural inculcation that in reality is rather messy. First, in objectification, when an individual is born into the world with its culturally constructed systems already in place, the physical and social world, or nomos, appears objectively real. Second, internalization occurs when an individual grows to accept the nominic structures of society as natural or given. Third, the individual takes those constructed meanings and systems of their culture, now built into their consciousness, and goes about their life recreating those learned systems and externalizing them back into the social world, back into the nomos. The historical continuity of culture is thus maintained – if with some changes – as the individual, existing in the collective, encounters the objective world, internalizes its human made structures and meanings, and then recreates those structures and meanings in the external world. Using myself as an example; as a child raised in the conservative Midwest, I was exposed to media and public discourse that presented the U.S. as the benevolent leader in world affairs. I might have gone about my life reasserting this perspective if I had not been educated into alternative narratives by studying the histories of Africans, African-Americans, and globalization more broadly. Berger insists that, in general, the individual is alienated from the processual dynamic of social recreation; that is, people are usually unaware of the role they play in recreating the world. An understanding of the dialectical process of socialization into the nominic structures of society is necessary for this study as an attempt at dealienating U.S. consciousness and reconstructing national myth. In dominant U.S. society, individuals are socialized into a nominic structure in which the liberated/liberator status of the U.S. is taken for granted, the nation's paradoxical status of dominator is disguised,

and the individual citizen is alienated from their own role in recreating the conditions of global inequality.

Peter Berger's articulation of the nomos as the socially constructed, objectively appearing world, merged with Lee Drummond's conception of semiospace as the permeable but bounded spheres of meaning that comprise both the socio-political as well as fantastical worlds of entertainment affords an interrogation of the constructed meaning of liberty in the national consciousness and its paradoxical relationship with domination. Two key aspects to the maintenance of the nomos, or semiospace, are the repetition of a society's structures of plausibility and an individual's enactment from within a repertoire of identities. Such structures and identities appear in both the social world of the nomos and the dreamtime world of entertainment in a reciprocal pattern that Berger calls "legitimation."[27] In the context of U.S. culture, this study focuses on the plausibility of scenarios in which the U.S., or a representative thereof, assumes the identity of liberator. Such scenarios have been enacted as of late in both the realms of entertainment and foreign policy. However, as Berger points out, "the less firm the plausibility structure the more acute the need for world-maintaining legitimations"; or to utilize the terminology of Drummond, the closer a bubble of semiospace is to bursting the more often a myth will be implemented to reinforce a particular position within the dimensions of meaning.[28] By such reasoning we may hypothesize that the propensity of the entertainment industry and government to broadcast performances of liberation and identities of liberators is a response to the declining legitimacy of such identity claims and the diminished plausibility of such scenarios; or perhaps that propensity is indicative a growing awareness to the paradoxical role of domination in claims toward liberty. While the U.S. may have been more easily indentified as liberators following its involvement in the Second World War, claiming such an identity in the expanding repertoire of the post-modern, post-colonial world has lost much of its plausibility and a growing body of the populace is conscious of the dominator status of hegemonic U.S. culture in global and domestic affairs. Given the recent and growing social movement against

the status quo, national myth/culture appears to be at a pivotal point in its ongoing

development with protests performing a consciencization and expressing the acute need to

reconsider the meaning and application of liberty and justice within the national community,

the functionality of our democratic institutions, and the semiotic dimension of liberation-

domination.

The paradox of liberation-domination, which in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paulo

Freire declares to be the most important theme of our time, is undergoing a radical re-

evaluation thanks to the recent occupations of common spaces and the resulting explosion of

participatory democracy.[29] The citizens protesting the status quo in city parks and in front of

banks may not realize it but they are at times performing the praxis of consciencization that

Freire outlines as the path toward dealienation and our best hope for creating a just and

equitable social system through a dialogic reconsideration of society's limiting situations.[30]

What Peter Berger calls plausibility structures, or Drummond calls axes of meaning, Barthes

calls myth and Taylor terms a repertoire of scenarios, Paulo Freire names as limit-situations.

According to Freire, limiting situations are imposed upon certain members of a society in order

to maintain the privilege and power of other members. These limit-situations appear to have the

force of instinct, like myths, and restrict individuals into a dominated social status that denies

them their ability to fully express their individual humanity. But again, these limiting situations

are social constructions, not natural conditions, though they have been naturalized through the

repetition of nomization. As social constructions, such limiting situations can be overcome and

may even be dismantled altogether. To overcome the limit situations imposed upon an

individual by society at large is to achieve a level of liberation over domination. Freire's

revolutionary pedagogy of consciencization through dialogic reflection and action is currently

surging in the general assemblies scattered across the nation as citizens' awareness of their

agency as co-creators of the social world is increasing. Freire's praxis of consciencization

through dialogue is crucial to the reconstruction of national myth/culture that is both gaining

momentum in the public sphere and acts as the primary objective behind this dissertation's explication of the U.S. semiotics of liberation.

The aim of this project, intently focused on the paradox of liberty and domination in U.S. culture and the correlated expressions of democratization, is to perform a kind of Freirian praxis: to reflect upon the hegemonic myth of liberation, to dealienate the reader from their role as cultural creator and to suggest actions that may shift some of the limiting situations and plausible structures that comprise U.S. culture. The dialogical praxis of consciencization as implemented here is a tactic trained on the possibility of recreating U.S. myth/culture. The semiotic axis of liberation-domination, with its investment in varying understandings of democracy, positions the national community firmly within the field of liberator to others and presupposes a liberated status for the self. While such representations socialize the national community into a culture of military and economic interventions and alienate the citizenry from the nation's status as dominator in global affairs, they also contradict Freire's assertion that liberation is not something that may be granted to others but can only be achieved in communion.[31] Combining Berger's theory of socialization with Drummond's conception of semiospace and Freire's pedagogy of consciencization we can interrogate the prescribed meaning of liberation in U.S. myth/culture and reposition our national identities within the dimensions of cultural expression and social action.

Conclusion

With this dissertation I utilize theories from across the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, education, history and performance studies in order to analyze performances of the U.S. myth of liberation and to assert that creative intervention into the force of myth has the potential to shift and shape the patterns of cultural generativity. From the field of myth studies I implement strategies for investigating the narrative resolutions of experienced paradoxes; the performances of which contribute to the processes of socialization that tend to have a

conservative effect upon social organization and political action. Conceiving of myth as a process through which the social collective holds onto its past by reenacting a set of privileged scenarios, we can understand why the U.S. myth of liberation normalizes violent and economic interventions while demanding the spread of democracy. Yet, our history is diverse. We have other histories from which we may draw upon; other scenarios we may choose to privilege in our social performances. The U.S. myth of liberation through which we implement violence in order to buttress a capitalist economy and an impoverished democracy of coalitional contestation need not be the myth we carry forward into this next century. While myths provide the organizing principles of culture, they become brittle when placed under the strain of an increasingly pluralized society.[32] Lévi-Strauss teaches us that myths are constantly being shattered and reconstructed from the broken shards. The refutation of hegemonic myth is already underway; this dissertation is intended to aid that process by both revealing how the myth of liberation functions as an alibi for domination and identifying pieces of the myth that we might want to salvage as bricoleurs of the cultural paradigm to come. Through creative intervention rather than violent intervention we can reconstruct the scenarios of plausibility by which we move from domination to liberation and we can re-envision democracy as a dialogic path toward consensus. By scrutinizing the semiotic dimension of liberation-domination, we can rebuild national myth, and in so doing, we can reorganize U.S. society.

Conclusion

Approaches

My approach toward investigating performances of the myth of liberation in U.S. popular and political culture draws upon insights from across academic disciplines in order to identify the disparate constituent elements that compose this myth in its current manifestations. Applying methods of myth and performance studies, I analyze particular examples from film and television while attending to their cultural antecedents and contemporary contexts in order to articulate the historical repetition of scenarios central to the process of mythmaking and cultural change. Moreover, accepting the premise that myth is where and how a people negotiate the contradictions of their lived experience, I highlight throughout this project the tendency within national myth to disavow the domination that structures U.S. society as equally as does its revered practice of liberation. U.S. myth firmly locates the national Self within a paradigmatic identity of liberated and liberator while projecting the dominated and dominator identity onto the Other. However, I demonstrate throughout this work that the U.S. is as much a practitioner of domination as it is of liberation, particularly in terms of the nation's reliance upon violence to achieve its ends and the systematic inequality of consumer culture that violence supports. Myth is paradoxical; this investigation, therefore, attends to the profound national contradictions of U.S. culture as being one of both liberation and domination.

Part II

Myths of Intervention

"Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence…To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering…is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark."

Susan Sontag

Regarding the Pain of Others

Through both politics and entertainment, U.S. culture declares an identity of liberator to the world's oppressed by repeatedly performing myths of intervention that draw upon the national heritage of frontier mythology. These National efforts of intervention toward liberation assume a strategy of either violence or economics, the performance of which masks the perpetuation of global domination and sustains historically generated inequalities through the repetition of mythic paradigms. In the first chapter of this section, I detail the tradition out of which the contemporary myth of liberation emerges through reference to the scholarship of Richard Slotkin. Here I affirm the structural relationship between violence and economics as well as amend his frontier thesis to include regeneration through consumption. Then, taking one example from the repertoire of cinematic violent interventions, I conduct a myth analysis that presents the prominent binary of terror-security as unexpectedly linked to the economic segregation of the global community. An analysis of economic intervention, in the form of a

televised charity drive, demonstrates the racialized binary of poverty-prosperity in which U.S. generosity can function as an alibi for exploitation by global capital and the consumer culture made possible through the impoverishment of others. U.S. culture's myth of liberation performs two primary functions of myth: to naturalize and to justify. Economic and violent interventions into the affairs of other societies naturalize global inequality and justify U.S. privilege within the global socio-economic system.

Chapter 3

The Strongest of Mythic Imperatives

Richard Slotkin has contributed greatly to American studies by investigating the mythic traditions of Anglo-America that have historically dominated U.S. culture, both popular and political. Through a careful examination of narratives situated in their historical contexts, Slotkin perceived an adaptive mytho-political pattern centered on the community's real and imagined experiences of the frontier. Following the adaptation of the captivity narratives of the Puritans, through to the hunter-hero epics of continental expansion, past the vigilante tales of industrialization, into the long era of westerns, disrupted by the cultural upheavals associated with the Vietnam War and into the nostalgic cowboy presidency of Ronald Reagan, Slotkin proved that the myth of the frontier is a powerful, indeed dominant, force within the culture of the United States. Four hundred years after the beginnings of the Puritan press, capture/rescue scenarios still abound in media ranging from action films (Rambo III, Taken), to children's cartoons (Finding Nemo, Go Diego Go, The Wonder Pets), to military engagements abroad (Iraq, Libya, Uganda). Citizens present and perform a mythic compulsion to rescue those in trouble, to liberate others from the snares of oppression, injustice and ill fortune. Such rescues, Slotkin notes, are overwhelmingly achieved through violence.[1] The consistency of the use of violence in both entertainment and government action to achieve the stated ends of rescue or liberation led Slotkin to declare warfare as the ritual of transformation that regenerates the body politic. Noting the mythic import of regeneration through violence is Slotkin's primary contribution to American studies. However, focusing on the history of media and politics, Slotkin's expansive effort gives little attention to the related history of economics. Despite his assertion that the two main components of frontier mythology are the logic of boom economics and savage warfare, his thesis on regeneration through violence largely dismisses the related patterns of consumption that all regeneration depends upon. Nevertheless, Slotkin's

contribution to American studies cannot be overestimated. This section describes the common constituent elements of the myth of the frontier, explains how warfare can be understood as a ritual of regeneration, and presents an amendment to Slotkin's thesis by asserting the significance of consumption in patterns of regeneration. Attending to Slotkin's contributions to American studies positions the present study within its cultural and academic heritages while adjusting our understanding of U.S. myth to include the often-effaced process of consumption.

Slotkin's Myth of the Frontier

In three expansive volumes, Richard Slotkin traces the development of a national mythology for the United States by investigating the dominant scenarios of the nation's narrative traditions.[2] His scholarship follows four hundred years of the entertainment industry's development and compares the changes in both literature and film with the cotemporaneous realms of political society. Slotkin primarily argues that myth is a kind of historical memory and that the national mythic tradition thrives under a master trope of the frontier. The nation's founding over more than two centuries of cultural and economic expansion across an unfamiliar continent, followed by a century and a half of economic and military engagement beyond geographical boundaries resulted in the concept of "the frontier" as the loci of cultural interpretations and political understandings. The frontier became a set of symbols and scenarios by which citizens have made sense of their world. Some key components of the myth of the frontier as discerned by Slotkin are capture/rescue scenarios, the hunter-hero, and the use of violence in resolving conflict. This section articulates the recurring aspects of the myth of the frontier in order to establish the heritage from which contemporary culture derives, and provides an historical context for the media that is analyzed in this study.

Slotkin begins his narrative of a developing national myth with the Puritans because their early settler experiences and their strong literary tradition left us with the mythic scenario of capture and rescue that continues to dominate mythic discourse. Having preferred the word

of God to the deeds of man, the Puritans started some of the first printing presses of New England, thereby leaving a strong mark upon the archive of U.S. culture.[3] Slotkin notes that the early literature of the Puritans expressed the group's anxiety over their emigration, their new environment and their religious worldview. He concludes that the scenario that dominated the Puritan experience was one of captivity and rescue.[4] Reflecting the physical/political realities of intercultural conflict and a stifling socio-religious order, scenarios of captivity and rescue became allegories for spiritual turmoil and renewal. Referring to John Williams' *The Redeemed Captive* and Mary Rowlandson's narrative (1682) Slotkin explains how the European female who was captured and rescued stood for the imagined moral and economic superiority of Puritan or European traditions while the Indian man came to symbolize the darker side of humanity, the temptation to sin and the forsaking of God and righteousness. As Slotkin describes it, the female captive's errand into the wilderness, into savagery, followed by her release and salvation, began the national mythology of regeneration through violence. The racist and gendered roles archived in the earliest of U.S. literature persist today in only slightly modified form; while referents change along with the times a repertoire of cultural meanings persists into the present.

Slotkin's narration of the history of the nation through an analysis of both literature and political reality offers a historical consciousness attuned to the sanctioned actions of heroes as mediators between savagery and civilization. Slotkin evinces that the narratives of James Fennimore Cooper, which were created during the period when increased emigration pushed European settlements inland from the Eastern seaboard, provided a standard out of which the heroes of U.S. mythology developed because Cooper's *Leatherstocking* acted as a mediator between the Indians as "disappearing" "noble savages" and the rising civilization of Euro-America.[5] Then, settlements expanded beyond Appalachia and the hero's quest shifted toward a frontiersman's narrative of settlement; through a close reading of John Filson's, "The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon" in *Kentucke* (1784), Slotkin demonstrates how the forests of the

eastern continent emerged in the mythology, and in society, as a site of physical and spiritual renewal for the protagonist hunter-hero who would lead the way for civilization's advance.[6] As the nation industrialized and acquired the land west of the Mississippi River, Slotkin points out within the correlated literature, that authors equated industrial labor with slavery or created the vigilante-hero of the western deserts who was willing to operate outside the bounds of law and order to achieve his goals.[7] After the Civil War, Slotkin demonstrates, national heroes became military figures endowed with an ideology of paternalism that - in an example of how mythic thought often precedes reality - found full embodiment in the military and political career of Theodor Roosevelt. While the hero as hunter and leader certainly did not originate with the developing culture of the U.S., Slotkin's scholarship, following the historical arch of the hero's transformation within national culture from Indian-fighter to frontiersman to vigilante and military man, explains the mythic prominence of certain heroic features that remain with us today.

Moving into the 20th century, Slotkin turns his attention to the film industry as the dominant form of cultural expression in order to explain the further rise, fall, and "recrudescence" of frontier mythology.[8] The Western, Slotkin asserts, was the most prominent genre in the first half-century of Hollywood production with plots that privileged the historical experiences of very few U.S. families and taught viewers to interpret conflict along racial lines. The pervasiveness of the Frontier mythology was so extensive by mid-century, evidenced by the Kennedy administration's use of its logic to both start the space program and attempt to end poverty, that Slotkin insists the myth of the Frontier lead the nation into the Vietnam War.[9] In his analysis, the failure of that war - particularly the revelation of the My-lai massacre - destroyed the legitimacy of frontier mythology and its correlated ideology of liberal progressivism.[10] However, Hollywood producers and their clientele of the general public could not easily give up the standards of their industry or their national identity as defenders of freedom and righteousness; as Slotkin demonstrates, many elements common to frontier myth

were displaced onto other genres and represented through other symbolic referents.[11] Scenes shifted from the open plains of the 19th century to the city streets and jungles of the 20th; but the demise of frontier mythology did not last long. Slotkin's analysis of U.S. history interprets the Reagan era as a classic case of postmodern nostalgia because a past that never really existed was remembered through a president who was never really a cowboy but could utilize the language of myth to reactivate the frontier logic of boom economics (this time in real estate and banking) and savage war (Grenada, Nicaragua, etc...). Slotkin's analysis of the role of frontier mythology in the political and cultural developments of the 20th century demonstrates the intimate relationship between entertainment and political action while also suggesting the fecundity of utilizing myth.

The basic formula of the myth of the frontier developed along with a set of symbols that have persisted in modified forms throughout the centuries. Captives are rescued; hunters fulfill their initiatory quests. Multi-racial regiments show courage and compassion in their last stands. Special Forces and gunfighters resist tyranny. Antagonists are portrayed as racial or religious others compared to the protagonist. While the mid-century revisioning of history from a post-colonial perspective undermined the logic of frontier mythology and knocked the western from its Hollywood pedestal the fundamental formulas of such narratives remained. Cowboys and Indians could no longer serve as metaphors for good and evil but the scenarios did not die altogether. The symbol sets changed after the Vietnam War but what was symbolized remained the same. The hero is Caucasian, mediating between bureaucratic modernity and barbarism. The heroine continues to be victimized, representing threats to civilization. She is passionate, the hero rather cold. The enemy still bears the sign of racial difference but that difference has opened up to the broader world. In a mythic revisioning, the violence continues to regenerate no matter the particularities of the plot.

Ritual of the Nation

Slotkin's thesis on regeneration through violence and the initiation narratives of frontier mythology indicates that warfare is the ritual of the nation. Although he does not expend much effort to define what he means by ritual, Slotkin's use of the term suggests a sacredness motivating war with an expected transformation as its result. Conceiving of war as a ritual of regeneration, Slotkin implies a dialectical process between structure and anti-structure in which violence is a liminal condition out of which the nation emerges into an elevated status.[12] The perennial recurrence of war and social violence enacted with a stated benevolence suggests that what is transformed through the ritual of war is not only the nation but the community of its opposition; liberation is not just for the Self, the Other must be liberated as well. In this section I define ritual, paying particular attention to the scholarship of Victor Turner, consider the meaning behind Slotkin's assertion that warfare is the repeated ritual of the nation, and overview the nation's history of violent intervention with attendant claims to liberation. Situating warfare within the mythic traditions of U.S. culture leads the way to an understanding of U.S. intervention as one phase of the social dialectic structured upon domination.

Ritual, like any other academic term, has a long and varied history; and as a third generation Turnerian, I define ritual as a dialectical process between structure and anti-structure. Victor Turner's processual conception of ritual derived from the work of Arnold Van Gennep on diverse rites of passage through which an individual experiences a separation from the normalcy of the social world, endures a period of liminality that does not conform to quotidian structures, and then is reintegrated with a revitalized status. For Turner, the most significant part of the ritual process is the liminal period because the anti-structure that it enacts both reinforces its opposite and provides an opportunity for communitas in contradiction to the olio of stratified society.[13] Liminality is therefore that period "betwixt and between" when the participants weather an interval of immediacy and uncertainty, to then emerge back into the established nomos reshaped and regenerated. The communitas experienced in the interstice of

47

the ritual process is both the source of regeneration for the participants and an occasion for mythic thought and action.[14] The dialectical performance of ritual as the fluctuation between anti-structure (communitas) and structure is the very foundation for the maintenance and transformation of society as well as the elemental progression of plot.[15]

When Richard Slotkin concludes that the preeminence of frontier mythology has resulted in savage war being the national ritual that achieves regeneration through violence, he draws upon a knowledge of the ancient ritual patterns from which frontier mythology emerged and diverged.[16] Slotkin acknowledges the myth/ritual heritage of both Europeans and American Indians in which the hunt is a liminal period, the anti-structure, aimed at achieving a union between either humanity (hunter) and nature (his prey), or humanity and god. The violence of the hunt, in both ancient European and more modern American Indian traditions brings about a kind of communitas between hunter and hunted. However, in the Euro-American context, where the earliest immigrants disdained the "blood rituals" of the Catholic communion, feared the forests for their unfamiliarity, and loathed the thought of cultural syncretism with the communities who called those forests home, Slotkin notes that with the captivity narratives the significance of the ritual hunt shifted; he states that, "the ethic implicit in the captivity myth demands that the wilderness be destroyed so that it can be made safe for the white woman and the civilization she represents."[17] In the early North-American situation, and extending into the present, the ancient myth/ritual of a fusion between humanity and the natural or divine world was rejected in favor of a marriage with civilization, a union that required the decimation of the wilderness. The immigrants' anxiety over their place in the newly encountered world and their fear of cultural syncretism, Slotkin asserts, "converts the marriage-hunt into an act of murder, violation, repudiation, or exorcism. It converts the initiation into a fall."[18] The ritual liminality of the hunt, in which killing is a necessary step toward communion through the consumption that binds the human hunter to the natural and divine world was transformed in the Euro-American mythology, which sought not a syncretism but a domination. This mythic ritual of enacting

48

destructive violence in order to preserve and expand civilization has been a prominent scenario of both fiction and politics throughout U.S. history. Warfare as the ritual of the nation engenders a communitas of violence, a rite of passage through which the U.S. emerges not into a structure of unity but into one of domination.[19]

When Slotkin calls the hunter's violence his, "act of love," he refers to the transformation within our mythic heritage away from the ritual of unity with nature and toward a defense of civilization in which individual freedom and free markets reign. Throughout the national community's history, a love of liberty has been the reason for performing the liminality of war in efforts to regenerate both culture and economy. Nationals enacted the violence of the Revolutionary War to rescue the colonial population from British political and economic dominance. The Mexican-American War was fought in order to expand the geography of Euro-American civilization and gain control over the natural resources of Northern Mexico. The Civil War, while sanctioned to end the oppression of slavery, was also engaged in as an effort to defend the industrial labor force of the North from economic degradation. Following the Civil War came the - largely ignored within mainstream history - period of the Filibusters who invaded Central and South American territories with stated aims of liberation but actual intentions of reinstituting a slave economy. The last of the Indian Wars finished clearing the continent for Euro-American settlement and finalized the segregation of the Indian population. With the Spanish-American War, citizens claimed to be liberating Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos from the tyranny of the Spanish crown while also gaining strategic ports in the ever-expanding global trade. The U.S. entered World War I in order to defend both its commercial ships in the northern Atlantic and its southwestern territories that Germany had offered to help Mexico regain. With World War II, soldiers fought off the atrocities of European fascism and kick-started their economy to end the great depression. Then began the Cold War; the U.S. as self-described defenders of the free world did everything in its power to keep the newly decolonizing nations from choosing an economic model of socialism or communism. One year

after the Cold War ended the U.S. began the first of its recent war efforts in the Middle East: first to liberate Kuwait from Iraq, then in Afghanistan to hunt for Osama bin Laden and to offer democracy to that nation's oppressed peoples, and again in Iraq where we would be greeted as liberators, execute their dictator and establish a democratic government.

Given our historic tendencies to engage in warfare for economic purposes, it has not gone unnoticed that each recent battle arena (including Libya) is blessed – or cursed, depending on your perspective – with the crude oil for which the current style of U.S. civilization has a rapacious need. Justifying war out of a love of liberty and a humanitarian desire to see the world achieve a state of freedom and democracy suggests a certain altruism. Yet the frontier mythology of savage war and boom economics that is our national heritage, with its focus on scenarios of captivity, has resulted in a ritual tradition where violence, as an act of love aimed at rescuing and spreading our own brand of civilization, comes at a high cost to the communities of opposition.

Indeed, the nation regenerates itself through rituals of violence. The military interventions that mark our collective history are the anti-structure to a civilization erected and sustained according to a structure of economic and cultural expansion. The proliferation of violence throughout U.S. history enacts a liminality, engenders a communitas, through which our civilizational values are defended and expanded. In U.S. mythology, the hero as hunter and military man enacts violence out of a desire for the dominance of his own civilization, achieved through the destruction of both others and ecologies. Our ritual hunt, which may achieve a communitas within the national corpus, rejects any union with either our mythic prey or our environment. Savage war, as the ritual of the nation, weds us to our own conception of civilization, and is but one phase in an endlessly repeating dialectic that maintains the structure of U.S. global dominance.

Regeneration Through Consumption

Understanding savage warfare as the anti-structure of U.S. society demands a recognition of the structure that violence regenerates. Turner explains that in order for any society to function there must be a dialectical play between the communitas of liminality and the structures of daily life.[20] In Slotkin's articulation of frontier mythology, he names the dialectical twin to savage war as boom economics.[21] Although Slotkin recognizes the relationship between savage war and economics to be the two fundamental elements of U.S. culture's regeneration, his focus on literature and the political history of the liminality of war gives little attention to the economic structure that violence regenerates. Slotkin's inability to fully address the economic structures that benefit from violence stems from two interrelated reasons: the effacement of consumption from cultural productions focused on the spectacle of violence and the correlated analytic attention to patterns of violence. The intense concentration upon the spectacle of violence within the cultural productions that Slotkin analyzes is linked to the effacement of the patterns of consumption that violence makes possible. Society may achieve regeneration *through* violence but violence is not what regenerates. As in the ancient rituals of the hunter – or in basic biology – consumption is what rejuvenates the body. In a modest amendment to Slotkin's exhaustive work, I assert that the body politic achieves regeneration through consumption, which violence makes possible in the U.S. mytho-political paradigm.

According to Slotkin, implicit within Frontier mythology is an ethic of economic expansion and patterns of consumption that are disguised within narratives of capture and rescue.[22] Throughout U.S. history the enactment of violence has served as a means of economic and cultural expansion aimed at consumption and justified through myth. From the beginning of European immigration to the Americas until the present day, the ardor for economic gains – largely in the form of acquiring resources and controlling trade routes – has compelled a politics of violence and allowed for an ever-increasing consumerism. The desire to consume, first in the form of land and agrarian expansion, and then in the form of industrial products and the natural

resources required for their production, found justification within frontier mythology under an Enlightenment ethic of economic development. Violence as the ritual of the nation, as the anti-structure of social organization, regenerates because it supports the economic structure of capitalist expansion and extraction aimed at an escalating consumerism.

The Capitalist impulse to control markets, expropriate resources and produce consumer goods is largely effaced within the cultural products of literature and other media, which favor the spectacle of violence over the banality of consumerism. The captive-hunter myth prominent in both entertainment and politics ignores the relation between the hunt and the material gain that is its result. Writing of Davy Crockett as both myth and man, Slotkin states, "the hunter myth sanctifies the activities of a Crockett as ends in themselves, independent of their function as part of the progressive extension of civilization and progress…it is not the pelt money or even the manufacture fur hats that prove the hunter's worth, but the killing of the animal. Such a hunter is not concerned with producing…"[23] Nor is the hunter concerned with consuming. The economic reasons underlying the practice of violence are discounted, if not merely downplayed in both entertainment and politics. In the former, the narratives of media as dramatic play hold an ancient relation to ritual and accordingly present liminality rather than structure.[24] Moreover, in politics, to invoke the desire for material gain as the cause for war, to speak of expanding the market (structure) of U.S. capitalism as reasons for violence around the world would present the U.S. as an imperialistic nation and contradict its self-identification of liberator. Rather, the captive-hunter myth is invoked while the gains to U.S. capitalism are effaced from the narrative. The spectacle of violence overshadows the consumerism that violence enables.

An imperialistic form of consumer capitalism is the structure of U.S. society that the liminality, or anti-structure, of violence regenerates. While citizens tend not to think of the U.S. as an imperial state; if we define imperialism as, "the policy and practice of forming and maintaining an empire in seeking to control raw materials and world markets by the conquest of

other countries, the establishment of colonies, etc...seeking to dominate the political affairs of underdeveloped areas," then the U.S. from its first colonies up to its current state of world-wide military bases and constitutions written for other countries has always been an imperial endeavor aimed at expropriating the resources of others to feed its ever-expanding populations and markets.[25] I use the word feed intentionally because the consumption of resources, first in the conquest of the continent and then in the domination of world markets, has invariably been the source for U.S. civilizational growth. Consumption enables regeneration: the absorption into the body of that which sustains and nourishes, the devouring of other lives and livelihoods, the depletion of resources and the destruction of the environment. The patterns of consumption upon which U.S. civilization is built regenerate the body politic and demand an imperialistic practice of violence in order to maintain its capitalist economic structure.

If violence regenerates the nation, as Slotkin insists, it is only because violence opens up the opportunity for increased consumption. Despite those early Protestant immigrants' disdain for the blood rituals by which the spirit of God or life enters the participant to rejuvenate his/her body and spirit, their cultural descendents have not escaped the consumption by which such violent rituals regenerate. The structure of U.S. society, for which war is the anti-structure, is our expanding economic system of consumer capitalism. Yet, in myth, the crass reality of expanding the culture of consumption through the implementation of violence is disregarded in favor of the heroic narratives of capture and rescue. The spectacle of violence, incessantly repeated as if it were the necessary path toward liberation, effaces the consumerism that violence supports and disguises the imperialist adventures as altruism. The dialectic through which U.S. civilization feeds and grows has as its base an economy of increasing consumption made possible through violence.

Conclusion

Myth is part historical memory, allowing the communities to interpret the present in terms of past experiences. While the history of the U.S. frontier is not a past that belongs in a biological way to most citizens, the mythology of the frontier is our collective inheritance. From frontier mythology, we derive an ethical compulsion to rescue those in need, we expect the hero to enact violence as the means of rescue, and we insist upon the perpetual advancement and expansion of our own brand of civilization. Postcolonialism, as an intellectual and political movement of the 20th century forced an transformation within our national mythology away from the perpetual replaying of the Indian Wars that stain the nation's past; but it could not displace savage warfare as the national ritual for regeneration. War remains the anti-structure of society and serves to regenerate a structure of imperialistic consumer capitalism. The spectacle of violence effaces the consumption that violence makes possible. Liberation, represented as the rescuing of a captive, is our "strongest mythic imperative" and the rationale given for performing violence in both the plots of entertainment and the political realm of foreign policy.

Chapter 4

Violent Intervention – *Tears of the Sun*

Violence and warfare, as the ritual of the nation, is performed within a mythic paradigm in which the U.S. acts as a rescuer to a person or community held captive by an agent of evil oppression. The liberation of a captive, either existential or metaphorical, is a primary action in the performance of national identity. While such performances are enacted on the global stage of politics, they also make up a significant body of popular entertainment. Movies ceaselessly repeat the scenarios of capture and rescue and provide an invaluable set of data with which to analyze national myth because they present the ideals and identities prominent within the national community. As expressions of mythic thought, films provide an opportunity for interrogating the binaries by which we construct our understanding of the social world and the resolutions to conflict that we find both plausible and acceptable. In this section, I apply the analytic strategies of Claude Lévi-Strauss to one such film of capture/rescue, *Tears of the Sun* (2003). Attending to the gross constituent units of this film, we can recognize two binaries significant within U.S. sentience: terror–security and segregation–integration. Investigating how these binaries are explored and resolved within *Tears of the Sun* reveals a disturbing pattern underlying the development and maintenance of U.S. culture and its economic structure of global capitalism. Through a Lévi-Straussian analysis of *Tears of the Sun*, supplemented by the ethnographic work of Anna Tsing on global capitalism and the neo-liberal economic theories of W. W. Rostow, this section demonstrates that performances of violent intervention support the social structure of global capital by creating frontiers of terror and enforcing the segregation of the global community.

An Example From the Genre

While the myth of liberation that is the focus of my work broadly consists of all its variants I chose *Tears of the Sun* for analysis because of the two narrative elements that distinguish the film from others in its genre: rescuing others and defending democracy. Filmed shortly after 9/11, *Tears of the Sun's* cinematic release coincided with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and was described by its producer, Arnold Rifkin, as "a metaphor for what's happening today in the world."[1] Set in Nigeria, the narrative follows the historic pattern of capture/rescue; yet, it adds the rescue and liberation of unaffiliated peoples, the indigenous Africans, to the tradition of rescuing a white female. Secondly, the film includes a representative of democracy whom the hero chooses to rescue in addition to the representative of civilization. Focusing on violent intervention as the standard method of rescue, this section overviews the broad genre of contemporary representations of the captivity myth, discusses *Tears of the Sun's* protagonist, Bruce Willis, as one of the genre's mythic heroes, and summarizes the plot of the film.

The genre of capture and rescue is so profuse within U.S. culture that when friends and acquaintances would ask me about my dissertation project they would offer their own suggestions for films that fit into the pattern I was analyzing. "Oh, you mean like *Commando*. I just watched that last Saturday while I lay on the couch." Indeed, I had a chance encounter with this 1985 Schwarzenegger film in a hotel room as I traveled across the country. In *Commando,* the daughter of a U.S. military operative must be rescued from a vengeful Latin-American warlord. Or I would hear, "Ah, you've got to watch *Delta Force* (1985)," in which a team of military specialists rescues a plane and its passengers from a group of Lebanese terrorists. The *Rambo* saga is iconic within the genre. In the second film (1985), Rambo frees POWs from Vietnam, then (1988) rescues his former commander from a Russian prison in Afghanistan, and (2008) goes on to save U.S. missionaries from the terrorizing Burmese military. The recent spat of comic books turned into movies is no exception. Particularly prominent are the *Spider-man* films (2002, 2004, 2007) that present the perennial capture and rescue of Peter Parker's life-

long love, Mary Jane Watson. Such pervasiveness in media includes the creation of farce such as *Tropic Thunder* (2008), which tells the tale of a war-movie production gone horribly wrong in Southeast Asia when a local drug lord captures one of the actors, and *Team America: World Police* (2004). Across centuries of narrative, the scenarios of capture and rescue remain prominent in the construction of U.S. myth, continually adapting to changing social circumstances but always presenting the defense of civilization and generally disparaging a racial and/or religious other.

Within the genre of capture/rescue, certain actors have found their niche, including Bruce Willis. Perhaps best known as the hero of the *Die Hard* movies, Bruce Willis performs time and again the role of mediator, battling threats and bringing salvation through violent intervention. In each of the four *Die Hard* films, Willis plays the role of a cop, John McClane, who alternately liberates: a group of hostages at a corporate Christmas party (1988), an airport terminal full of travelers (1990), the whole of New York City from a series of bomb threats (1995), and the United States from a cyber attack (2007). With each film, the stakes are progressively higher. Take for example *Armageddon* (1998) in which Willis plays the role of a deep-sea-oil-driller-turned-astronaut who must save the whole planet from a fast approaching asteroid. Appearing on *The Daily Show* to promote his movie *Red*, Willis spoke of his career as an action star, "who doesn't like shooting weapons...on camera. I look good in the dark, dirty, a little blood on me, and a weapon in my hand." Willis as film hero mediates between terror and security, implementing the force of violence to achieve his ends of rescuing civilization.

In the 2003 film, *Tears of the Sun,* directed by Antoine Fuqua, Willis maintains his standard role of hunter hero, enacting another manifestation of the U.S. myth of liberation. A Lieutenant in the U.S. armed forces, Willis' character (A. K. Waters) is assigned a special mission. A military coup in Nigeria has destabilized the security of the nation. Armed rebels are terrorizing the population. Lt. Waters flies to a remote Christian mission where a European-American doctor has been treating the impoverished residents. His mission is to extract the

doctor and staff, leaving the "indigenous personnel" to face the approaching terror alone. Yet, the female doctor, U.S. by marriage, European by birth, challenges the discompassionate military plan, thereby altering the course of the mission. The mission residents who can, flee, being guided by the U.S. troops who have parachuted into the area. The film progresses into the forest wilderness of tropical Africa, where their efforts to reach the national border are punctuated by anxious close calls and violent encounters. At one point, the lieutenant forces the doctor to evacuate by helicopter, abandoning the Africans in the wilderness. The doctor's grief pierces the Lt. with guilt, and when they fly over the mission and witness the aftermath of a massacre, he rejects the callous orders to abandon the indigenous and returns to the wandering Africans, resuming his leadership role. In the final fight of the film, the terror is obliterated in a massive show of military firepower just as the people reach the secured border of Cameroon. The security achieved is two-fold, and this mythic showing reveals much about the preferred structure of global society. For while the Lt. and Dr. are airlifted out of the troubled area, they look down on the "indigenous" Africans who sing in praise of their rescue from behind the razor-wire fence of a desolate refugee camp. The Lt. did indeed accomplish his mission to rescue the doctor, symbol of civilization and progress, while abandoning the indigenous to a life of segregation and poverty.

The displaying of *Tears of the Sun* in theaters coincided with the start of the Iraq War and presented a narrative in which the U.S. acts as rescuer to a brutalized and terrorized Other while also saving the local representative of Democracy. As Willis phrased it, "I don't think you can tell enough of these stories."[2] Fuqua declared the film to be about, "man's inhumanity to man [and] good men doing something about evil." So while the U.S. military began an intervention in Iraq against the "axis of evil," Fuqua sought to "bring awareness to the problems of Africa, the suffering of the people [because] there are some profound evil things happening there that we need to seriously look at...sometimes the strong have to protect the weak."[3] But the producer did not think the film should look too closely, and stated that, "It's not our

[filmmakers'] responsibility to explain the behavior of people. Our responsibility is to perhaps

depict it in a way where there's a truth to it and not necessarily to answer why." With this film

representing what Willis called, "the harsh reality of what tribal warfare looks like,'" we are not

supposed to ask why people are waging war. It should be enough that Lt. A.K. Waters (Bruce

Willis) mediates between the most urgent binary of US society at the start of the 21st century:

battling terror and achieving security.[4]

Mediating Between Terror and Security

      As a performance in which other peoples are liberated and democracy is saved, *Tears of*

the Sun offers a point of analysis through which we can investigate the most significant social

binary in this new century of U.S. myth: terror vs. security. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss,

myths are meant to address the urgent or persistent contradictions of a given society while

offering socially sanctioned paths toward resolution or mediation.[5] Lévi-Strauss notes the

reflexive relationship between the structure of myth and that of larger society. With his

structuralist theory, he offers a methodology through which scholars can analyze the complexity

of both mythic plots and the societies from which they come. Believing that myth is a kind of

language and following Saussurean linguistics, Lévi-Strauss asserts that the meaning of myth

can be discerned by exploring the relation of its parts, termed gross constituent units.[6] His

methodology charts the diachronic and synchronic organization of narratives in order to reveal

the underlying binary tensions that the myth is meant to address.[7] In this section I present an

overall analysis of the gross constituent units that comprise the myth/film *Tears of the Sun,*

focus on the relation between the binaries of terror-security and segregation-integration, and

discuss this myth's relation to the historically predominant binary of civilization-savagery.

Analyzing *Tears of the Sun* according to the methodologies of Claude Lévi-Strauss highlights the

predominant social binary of terror-security within U.S. culture and reveals that the film

presents a structural myth of Western civilization in which security depends upon the segregation of the global community.

Five gross constituent units support the film's resolution of the over-arching social contradiction of terror-security and reveal specific thought patterns within national culture.[8] As Lévi-Strauss asserts, the meanings of myths are comprised through the relations of their parts and so we must attend to the ways in which progression through each theme is tied to the performance of another gross constituent unit (GCU). Within the GCU of "the authority of technological-patriarchy," Lt. Water's success over the less technologically advanced African rebels asserts the cultural belief that salvation comes with technological superiority. However, that technology is tied to a bureaucratic and patriarchal institution, toward which the Lt. performs ambivalently by following orders, defying orders and finally reconnecting with his superiors.[9] Mediation away from the callous bureaucratic order to "drop the excess cargo" depends upon two other GCUs: "the compassionate feminine" and "the witnessing of violence"; for only when the Lt. bears witness to the pillaged mission and the suffering of the female characters does he reject his superior's order and commit to rescuing the terrorized Africans. After forcefully removing the Euro-American doctor from the group of refugees, the rescue team's helicopter flies over the mission, now in flames, with bodies strewn around the grounds. During the doctor's anguished cries, the military men look at each other and Lt. Waters orders the helicopter to turn around. Moreover, his transition from callous extractor to compassionate guide is linked to the GCU of "relations with the divine," which progresses from a declaration of God's absence toward an assertion of divinity's eternal presence.[10] Each gross constituent unit presents a culturally specific theme (feminine compassion, technological prowess, righteous violence) and suggests, through the actions of the hero, acceptable mediations within social binaries or preferred patterns of personal growth.

To elaborate on the synchronic category of segregation-integration, the narrative follows the changing plan of escape and the Lt's intentions. The film begins with an attempt at

segregation when the Lt. follows his orders to extract the "non-indigenous personnel" from the volatile region and abandon the Africans to their doomed mission residence. His reconsideration, affected through a combination of compassion and guilt, brings about an integration made most evident by the Lt.'s transfer of some authority to his African-American subordinate. In an example of democracy overriding bureaucratic authority, the military team decides to reject their superiors' orders and lead the refugees to safety. The second in command says to the Lt., "Those Africans are my people too. For all the years that we were told to stand down and to stand by...you're doing the right thing." To which the Lt. replies, "For our sins." Yet such integration is not sustained, for the film ends with the assent of the U.S. nationals and the segregation of Africans behind the chain-linked, razor wire topped fence of a refugee camp. The security achieved depends upon segregation, a segregation enforced through terror.

Being based on principles of cinematic suspense, action films are bound to present the social binary of terror-security; in *Tears of the Sun* this binary draws upon the heritage of the civilization-savagery divide and related deep-seated representations of Africans. A reviewer notes two prominent stereotypes in his criticism, writing that the film, "...divides Africans into snarling villains and wide-eyed, childlike innocents."[11] The terror that the characters in *Tears of the Sun* face, and flee, is incomprehensibly malicious; the refugees, incompetent in their passivity. When the former mission residents led by the Navy Seals come upon a village being attacked by rebels, the Seals intervene to halt the bloodshed while the refugees hide in the bush. In one of the homes, the soldiers find a crying baby and its mutilated mother. One of the refugees explains, "this is what they do... they cut off the breasts of nursing mothers so that they'll never again feed their own babies...*This* is what *they* do." Implementing the unenlightening power of tautology, the scene, indeed the entire film, presents the African conflict as a case study in ethnic hatred and barbaric violence. Whereas the violence enacted by the U.S. force is defensive and righteous, the rebels' aggression is savagely cruel and the rescued Africans play no role but follower in their own liberation. While the film avoids the

61

anachronistic discourse of savagery-civilization, the imagery and plot re-present the colonial era myth of "the white man's burden."[12]

   Tears of the Sun offers an allegory for the global social order according to the national myth in which the U.S. acts as both liberation and guide to the simultaneously naïve and vicious Other. Yet, the liberation that the U.S. is able to provide is paradoxically related to the domination of segregation. Dr. Lena Kendricks sits on the deck of a helicopter, comforting her rescuer. The helicopter ascends and the Dr., symbol of civilization, looks down upon the African refugees. Exiled and fenced in, they dance and sing in praise and thanks for their rescue from inside the security of desolate and impoverished camp. Having escaped the terror and destroyed it with the firepower of an airstrike, *Tears of the Sun* offers two very different kinds of security: the assent of Euro-America and the segregation/abandonment of indigenous Africa. Such a strategy has been part of Western culture from the start of its global expansion.[13] The two-tiered system of security manifested in the film, *Tears of the Sun,* makes a clear reference to the socio-political reality of the global order in that the liberation of some is tried to the segregation of many and that such segregation is implemented through the force of terror.

Terror and Economic Segregation

   The force that stalks the mission residents, the terror from which they flee is presented as merely evil while their violence is attributed to religious or ethnic prejudice; such essentializing is common, particularly in regards to Africa, and ignores the economic foundations for conflict around the world. The routine effacement of economic reasoning within our cultural representations of how the world works is connected to the devaluing and displacement of the processes of production in the neo-liberal economic structure of U.S. society. In the U.S. capitalist system, the liberation purported to come with an economy of high-consumption is dependent upon a vast network of resource extraction and outsourced labor; an arrangement of economic and social domination. In this section, I challenge W. W. Rostow's

theory of modernization in order to assert that global capital does not engender a teleological

path of economic development but segregate the world into cotemporaneous and unequal

economic sectors. I refer to the ethnographic work of Anna Tsing as an example of the

terrorization and displacement of local communities that is intrinsic to global capital and the

creation of Rostow's second stage of development. The violent intervention performed within

Tears of the Sun unwittingly represents this process of terrorization and segregation performed

toward neo-liberal modernization; by representing the U.S. as rescuer the film implements the

myth of liberation, which obscures consumer culture's role as dominator in the global economy.

     In order to defend the assertion that the security of the global order is dependent upon

segregation I refer to the work of W.W. Rostow, who articulates the persistent model of neo-

liberal economics. In *The Five Stages of Economic Growth: a Non-Communist Manifesto,*

Rostow outlines the path for economic progression that the western world offered to, or

imposed upon, the decolonized territories as an alternative to communism.[1] As an advisor to

both Kennedy and Johnson, Rostow's plan for development has had a lasting impact on global

politics and economics. Through his stages of growth, traditional societies would move into

modernity.[14]

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Traditional	Transitional	Take-off	Drive to Maturity	High Mass Consumption
Agrarian Subsistence economy	Surplus for trading	Industrialized and mechanized economy	Technological economy	Service economy and mass consumption

Yet, what Rostow offers as a pattern of historical development became a method through which

capital investors could portion the world into economic sectors. Although Rostow presents his

theory of modernization as a model for everyone to attain the blessings of consumerism his logic

is flawed in that the types of production he separates into teleological and hierarchical

categories are not sequential but cotemporaneous.[15] In the global economy, metropolitan elites

mass-consume smart phones (Stage 5), developed by Silicon Valley residents employed in

technological industries (Stage 4), produced by Chinese manufacturing laborers (Stage 3),

utilizing minerals extracted from a Congolese war zone (Stage 2).[16] Rostow erroneously believes

that all people's can attain the age of *high mass consumption* because he fails to acknowledge

that an economy of consumer goods and services is dependent upon the production

compartmentalized within his other outlined stages.[17] Although Rostow intends to describe five

stages of economic development as historical progression, he actually articulates the

hierarchical organization of global capitalism that creates and maintains the segregation of the

global population into various sectors of production and consumption.

The segregation of the global economy following the neo-liberal strategies described by

Rostow is implemented through global capital's creation of frontiers, often developed through

the force of terror. Ethnographer Anna Tsing describes this process of the creation of frontiers in

her book, *Friction*, on the destruction of the Indonesian rainforests of Kalimantan.[18] For Tsing,

the frontier is a "traveling theory," an "imaginative project" that creates confusion between

public and private, instills a sense of lawlessness and results in the erasure of the rights of local

residents if not their displacement from their traditional lands.[19] The resources required for

global capital, for the production of consumer products, are made through such violent

upheavals in the creation of what Tsing calls "sacrifice zones."[20] In the case of Indonesia, in an

effort to extract gold, lumber and birds nests, the Kalimantan forest was turned into one such

"sacrifice zone." Mountainsides were cleared, village fields were burned, and biodiversity

plummeted to be replaced by logging roads, rubber plantations and hyper-masculine migrants.

Tsing writes poignantly of the despair that such transformations into the neo-liberal plan for

development wrought on the Dayaks of Indonesia. The case study presented by Anna Tsing

demonstrates the terrorization of the local communities and their segregation into Rostow's

second stage of development as strategies typical within the order of global capital.

Like Tsing's ethnography of the Dayaks entrance into the global economy, the film *Tears of the Sun* expresses what happens when global capital creates Rostow's pre-take off stage, focused on the extraction of natural resources and raw materials. In the very beginning of the film, as the scene of political discord is set, a newscaster mentions the vast oil reserves of the southeast section of Nigeria. This fictional news commentary is the film's only mention of resource extraction as a cause for violence; rather the film favors the abstraction of evil over the concrete realities of global capital. While my Nigerian friends abhorred this movie for the way it portrayed their nation the film did get one thing right. Southeast Nigeria is blessed, or cursed, with oil; the indigenous populations have for decades suffered under the politics of extraction.[21] The film disregards this reality in favor of ethnic and religious hatred as the cause for violence, effectively effacing the binary of production-consumption from the reality of its relation to terror and segregation. The abandonment of the indigenous Africans displayed in *Tears of the Sun* is an allegory for global capitalism's rejection of indigenous societies (as evidenced by the unquestioned need for modernization) and the segregation of the world's populations into varying sectors of economic production.

Indeed, capitalism creates frontiers to fulfill its needs for production. These frontiers are not that different from those of Frederick Jackson Turner and the continental expansion of the U.S.; for the frontiers of opportunity and "spectacular accumulation" for the capital investor have always been the homes of someone else, transformed through violence, transformed through terror. While Rostow presents his capitalist model of development and modernization as a path toward the supposed blessings of modern consumerism, his outline proves to be a program for the terrorization of certain populations, segregated into divergent economies. The dominance of the Western world, as represented by Lt. A.K. Waters' and Dr. Kendricks' helicopter assent, is unequivocally linked to the segregation and abandonment of the world's indigenous and poor, as represented by the mission's African residents' displacement, caged behind chain link and razor wire.

Conclusion

Films as myths offer tremendous insight into the way the communities of their construction view the world. *Tears of the Sun* presents a world-view in which the U.S. acts as rescuer to the threatened or terrorized communities of the world. However, a structuralist analysis of this film reveals that liberation is not intended for all, but depends upon the abandonment or segregation of others. Drawing upon the heritage of the savagery-civilization binary, *Tears of the Sun* effaces the role of economics and resource extraction from the contemporary social binary of terror-security. A critique of W. W. Rostow's theory of modernization describes the segregated structure of global capital; reference to the ethnography of Anna Tsing supports the assertion that such segregation is often achieved through the creation of frontiers and the terrorization of local communities. Violent intervention bolsters the system of global capital by creating frontiers of terror and enforcing the economic segregation of the global community.

Chapter 5

Economic Intervention – *Idol Gives Back*

In the dialectic of U.S. society, the anti-structure of violent intervention has as its counterpart a structure of economic intervention. As with violent intervention, when we practice economic intervention we claim the altruism of compassion regarding the suffering of others and assume a benevolent stance with our aid while simultaneously ignoring the reasons behind such suffering as well as our own implication in the tragedies we seek to alleviate. Economic intervention, whether of an individual or social sort, tends to focus on the effects of suffering rather than the causes, often confusing the two.[1] Charitable endeavors often act as an alibi for the structural violence that makes charity a necessity.[2] To clarify, charity is not an alibi for the citizen donors who are largely unaware of their tangential role in perpetuating suffering and inequality. Rather, such economic interventions are alibis for corporate capital and the culture of consumption it coaxes the U.S. populace into. In this section I provide a thick description of one charity drive, American Idol's *Idol Gives Back* (2008) in order to analyze its presentation of the binary of poverty and prosperity, and to assert that the altruism expressed through economic intervention is an alibi for the culture of consumption and the global structure of poverty it breeds.

Performing Compassion

Pop/rock icon and charitable ambassador, Bono, is in an unspecified location in Africa. He has met an angel named Usabia. She volunteers her time taking care of orphans living with HIV. Together they walk down a hillside shaded by broadleaf trees to a small rectangular home with a slanted roof. There they find fourteen year-old Sophia sitting on the floor doing her schoolwork. Having taken a seat on a bench below an open window, Bono tells Sophia to look into the camera, "that's America," and he asks her what she would like to tell the viewing

67

audience. Her subtitled Kiswahili reads, "I'd like you to continue watching this, and to watch me. And I'd like you to help me as well." The shot cuts to her lap where her hands rest on her notebook and pen while cradling a box of medicine. Usabia wipes a tear from Sophia's face and we are told that the child is just one of sixty patients whom she cares for. Moving from a close-up of Usabia's face, a street scene flashes briefly before the image quickly transitions back to Usabia, now walking through a cemetery crowded with tombstones and crosses. U2's song W*alk On* plays in the background echoing this woman's fortitude for she herself has lost three children to AIDS. She tries to speak of the unspeakable but knows that she cannot. Bono stands with his arm around her shoulders in front of a wall with a red AIDs ribbon painted on it and he encourages, "everybody at home, this is your chance to be a part of this incredible lady…fighting for the life of her community." He thanks her and they kiss each other on the temple and cheek, respective to height. The image then abruptly switches to the transformed *American Idol* logo and we are reminded that all of this is brought to us by Coke©.

After a commercial break and the relief from sorrow that upbeat performances can provide, supplemented by the antics of currently fashionable comedians, Bono returns to the screen to transition us from Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania to somewhere in South Africa where singer Annie Lennox will introduce us to more sorrow. Sitting close together, four brothers answer questions about their family. They have no father, their mother is dead, no grandparents either. The images of their faces fade and reappear, revealing the quick editing between their answers. When asked if they have an auntie the look of pain on the eldest boy's face is palpable as he turns his head away and down, providing no response. These brothers are alone in this world. Sebo, the eldest, is fifteen and we are given a close-up of him just before the view shifts to show him tenderly wiping clean the face of his youngest sibling. A voice-over gives him an English accent and explains to viewers, "we sometimes don't have the means to survive and one of the little ones gets sick and needs medical care. I can't get them to the hospital." The image fades out. Riding in a van, Annie narrates that they are taking the boys to a clinic to be tested for

HIV. With the two youngest sitting on Sebo and Annie's laps, her voice dreads the possibility of a positive result as she wonders how Sebo will manage to care for the others. Inside the clinic, the little ones cry. Annie reminds us that they could face loosing each other and we watch Sebo's morose face. "Any one of them could be infected with the AIDS virus," mourns Annie. Blood is squeezed from a pipette onto a plate. A plastic rectangle with just a sliver of a window in the center incomprehensibly reveals the results. They are all negative. They are all smiling. But for Annie, "its impossible to take in. They're just children. They should be carefree."

The camera takes us back to the yard outside their round house with whitewashed walls and a thatched roof where Annie plays ball with the two middle boys. Her voice shares with us the thought that haunts her. As the boys happily climb on their large bed she thinks of their mother and what it must have been like to know that she was dying, leaving her children to take care of themselves. We watch her hug the oldest boy. "Across Africa, children are living like this." She kisses the second eldest on the head. "Their parents could still be with them if they'd only been diagnosed and given the treatment they need." Fighting off tears she tells them bye-bye. No more than 50 feet from their door, she pauses. Overcome with emotion she struggles with her limbs and her words, "you know, the oldest boy is so dignified." She holds her hand over her heart. "He said how he has to hold his feelings in so much because it's such an impossible situation…" Wiping the tears from her eyes she cannot continue, "Okay, let's go. It's really hard." As the segment ends her voice reminds us that people do not have to die from AIDS and encourages donations just as she appears seated at a grand piano in a Los Angeles theater and performs the song *Many Rivers*.

Personal stories of tragedy continue throughout the episode. Forrest Whitaker visits a clinic in Angola and stands over an infant being treated for malaria. A mosquito net could have prevented this and that costs just $10. But for the child's mother that is an impossible sum to save. He also visits with another family in Angola. Their mother is dead; their father blinded by a leftover land mine. The eldest son spends his days in the streets begging as the family's sole

means of support. Whitaker surveys the empty house and when he asks where they sleep the three children demonstrate by laying a piece of cardboard down and cuddling with each other on the floor.

Back in the United States, Judges Randy Jackson and Paula Abdul visit a California community where the children "don't even have parks to play in or public swimming pools." They also lack access to medical care. Poverty is linked to obesity. "The money you're donating tonight will change lives forever." "Even one dollar can save a life." "American's have an unprecedented opportunity to make poverty history." "Any donation you make will make a real difference." Judge Simon Cowell travels to New York and meets a family "crowded into 2 rooms." The son is in a wheelchair; the daughter has rheumatoid arthritis, the mother, lupus. "You can do your part by simply picking up the phone and donating as much as you can." Singing daughter and father, Miley and Billy Ray Cyrus, return to the latter's home state of Kentucky to meet the Hensons who live in what Miley calls, "very difficult conditions." The camera, having positioned itself in the doorways of the Henson's home, shows peeling paint and broken cabinet doors. The accompanying music asserts that "there ain't no reason things are this way…I can't explain why it is this way, we do it everyday." Three different celebrities appear in New Orleans and point to the continued suffering following Hurricane Katrina's devastation three years prior. "With your help more kids can begin to rebuild a future." "$1 can make a world of difference." Host Ryan Seacrest thanks the sponsors News Corp© and Exxon-Mobil© for their generous support.

Representing Poverty and Charity

'Idol Gives Back' offered several narratives with which to construct an analysis of national mythology as it explains poverty and dictates a culturally appropriate response. With its call to "save a life tonight, save the world tomorrow," *'Idol Gives Back'* presented stories in which human suffering can be alleviated through the economic intervention of the private

citizen matched with corporate donations. This charity drive televised images of poverty as a result of individualized deficiencies, which were contrasted by the wealth standardized within the culture industry. The imagery signified poverty largely through the portrayal of black and brown subjects while asserting the compassion of the national public and the show's corporate sponsors. Utilizing the analytic methods of Harold Scheub, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes this section explores the mythic understanding of poverty within U.S. culture and the responsibility of the populace to intervene.

Attending to the *parallel and expansible image sets* presented through '*Idol Gives Back'* we discover the meaning of poverty as a deficiency of the benefits of modern consumerism while the alleviation of these inadequacies is afforded through the generosity and compassion of the U.S. populace. Harold Scheub, a scholar of African myth, described narrative myth as being composed through the repetition of *parallel* and *expansible image sets*.[3] The former are thematic structures that reveal the problem while simultaneously connecting the audience emotionally to the narrative. In each segment of '*Idol Gives Back',* we were shown images that exhibited a thematic lack in the lives put on display. Housing that lacked space, electricity, or furniture. Families that lacked parents, parents that lacked jobs, incomes that lacked disposability, bodies that lacked healthcare. The *expansible image sets* are the plot structures that move from conflict to resolution: a hug here, a kiss there, the reading of a story, the participation in a game, the distribution of mosquito nets, trips to clinics for HIV testing, boxes of medicine, children's books and playground equipment. Scheub tells us that, "form and content are inseparable, the members of the audience absorbing the ideals of the society through these complexes of images."[4] Within the imagery of '*Idol Gives Back',* the audience was conditioned to understand impoverishment as dispossession (particularly attributed to black and brown subjects), while also being prepared to express their compassion for the suffering of others through the material generosity of economic intervention.

71

A Lévi-Straussian analysis of *'Idol Give Back'* reveals the underlying binaries of poverty-privilege and despair-compassion, where financial charity acts as mediator yet resolution is not achieved. Typically, a narrative myth will follow the basic outline of a rite of passage beginning with a separation, followed by a period of liminality, and ending in a reintegration. *'Idol Gives Back'* however, forgoes a final transformation in order to plea for the donations of viewers. The simplified narratives involved only two phases. First, the protagonist faced a daunting challenge that he/she is either a) born into or b) arose later in life. Significantly, the conditions of the challenge faced were brought on entirely by negative forces external to the protagonist such as disease or disaster; therefore assuring their innocence and worthiness of intervention. Then, the positive external forces of compassionate people intervene and aid in coping with such difficulties. Indicatively, resolution is not actually achieved, but only suggested as a possibility. A young girl in New Orleans *may* be able to escape the cycle of poverty and violence with the help of an after-school program but the impoverishment of her overall community is not addressed. The Angolan child *may* avoid malaria with a bed net, yet the mother remains unable to afford its replacement should it become torn. Economic intervention, while mediating between the displayed binaries of global society offers no resolution to inequality. Without such resolution it becomes clear that the economic intervention is not able, or intended, to "save the world tomorrow."

Implementing the tools of semiology, Roland Barthes' complex technique for analyzing myth exposes the racialized understandings of poverty presumed within national culture as well as the assertion of U.S. generosity and compassion. Within Barthes theory of myth, the process of signification is tools implemented by the ruling class for the maintenance of the status quo, effected by making historically generated paradigms appear as natural conditions. Drawing upon Saussurean linguistics, Barthes theorized that with myth, a form (the signifier) is emptied of its history, and placed upon it instead is a concept (the signified). These two processes

together result in a signification that reinforces the status quo of social myth. In the case of *'Idol Gives Back',* we see a dual order semiotic construction:

(Signifier)		(Signified)	
Black/Brown bodies		Poverty	
	Donations		Compassion
U.S. Generosity			

(Signification)
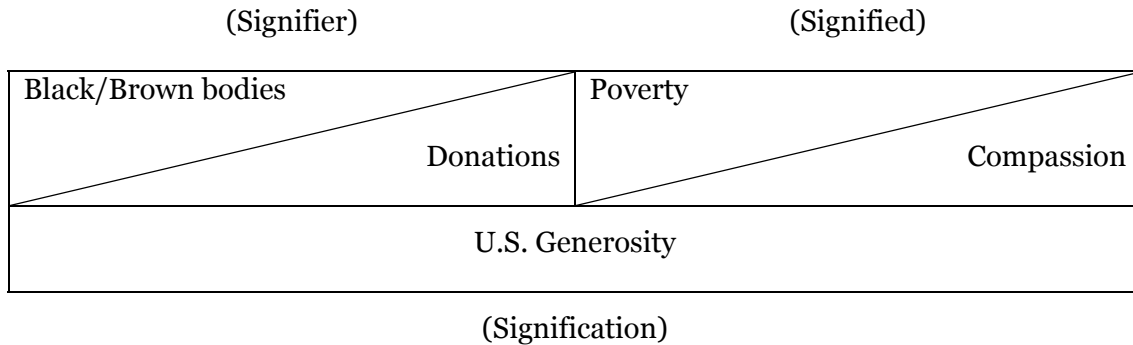
Though signifiers were not limited to Africans, African-Americans and Latinos (Southern whites were also included through the Cyrus family's trip to Tennessee), *'Idol Gives Back'* overwhelmingly presented poverty in a racialized manner standard within broader national culture while simultaneously asserting the generosity and compassion of the overall U.S. populace. As Barthes wrote, "the principle function of myth is to transform history into nature." Stripped out of the narrative presented on *'Idol Gives Back'* was any historical understanding of the centuries of oppression and exploitation that pushed some populations into poverty while privileging other populations. The audience was afforded no insight into how black and brown (and to a far lesser extent, Southern or rural white) bodies came to signify the blighted 'Other.' Most assuredly, *Idol Gives Back* made no reference to the historic correlation between impoverishment and the audience's economic ability to intervene against it.[5] Rather, global inequality was presented as natural. *"There ain't no reason things are this way...I can't explain why we live this way / we do it every day."*[6]

Three techniques of myth analysis regarding *American Idol's* charity drive, *'Idol Gives Back',* revealed the mythic understanding of poverty within national culture as well as the culturally sanctioned responses to this social problem. With Harold Scheub's parallel and

expansible image sets, we recognized poverty as an individualized lack, while compassion was presented as the motivation for objectively fulfilling the needs of the impoverished. Yet, the economic mediation of charity between poverty and prosperity precludes any final resolution. Conducting a Lévi-Straussian structural analysis we acknowledged that the despair is balanced with compassion but only insofar as to address the effects while distinctly ignoring the causes of suffering. Moreover, *'Idol Gives Back'* presented highly racialized images of poverty, which according to the theory of semiology normalizes the racist signification of poverty that pervades U.S. culture by dismissing the related histories of oppression and inequality. The call to "save a life tonight, save the world tomorrow" that was repeated by Ryan Seacrest may have arisen from the altruistic and compassionate impulses behind the myth of liberation; yet the charity drives' reliance on mythic understandings of poverty thwarted any possibility of aiding in its eradication.

Consumerism's Alibi

If the total signification of *'Idol Gives Back'* was the assertion of U.S. generosity in the face of global poverty then the charity drive was even more so an alibi for the overall consumer culture of which *American Idol* is a crown jewel. The night's performance offered an unusual juxtaposition of cardboard beds and glittering threads, of broken homes and diamond encrusted microphones. The binary of poverty and prosperity was displayed in all of its spectacular opposition; mediated by the flow of finances from one polar extremity to the other. These periodic mediations through which the prosperous intervene, if only momentarily, against the impoverishment of the 2/3 world declare an atonement while disguising the relations according to which the prosperity of post-modern consumer culture is attained by some through the correlated dispossession of others.[7] Charity, and other forms of economic intervention (World Bank, IMF) act as alibis, in the Barthesian sense, for the global social order of exploitative consumer capitalism. In this section, I point to the gross consumption of U.S. culture as glorified

in commercial media by contrasting the heavenly hope of a young Hurricane Katrina survivor with the vision of "heaven" presented on *American Idol*. Then, by attending to the show's corporate sponsors I describe how consumer culture is in large part responsible for the suffering that the show's charity drive was meant to alleviate. Economic intervention, in the service of the myth of liberation, functions to maintain global inequality by disguising exploitation while declaring compassion.

'Idol Gives Back' ended with Brad Pitt in New Orleans talking with people about their desire to return home and rebuild their communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the equally disastrous governmental response. One young boy, when asked what it would be like to have his home again, enthusiastically responded, "That would be heaven!" A few weeks later, *American Idol's* weekly Ford© commercial displayed a very different idea of heaven. In a pre-produced music video, the three remaining idol contestants walked into a fortune-teller's tent. Pulling back the red brocade fabric, the lyrics began, *"I've been locked up way too long in this crazy world."* Inside the tent a mechanical fortune-teller, top-hatted and ghostly white, held a small vintage television between his hands. *"How far is heaven?"* On the screen, we watched each of the idols' futures. Mansions of opulence and luxury, designer clothes and recording awards... *"how far is heaven?"* A grand piano, stone garden statues, a tiled swimming pool... *"I'll just keep praying lord, and keep on living."* A circular drive filled with shiny new cars... *"how far is heaven?"* While a little boy in New Orleans longed for his community's return to their modest homes, each week *American Idol* broadcast contestants striving for celebrity, wealth and the excesses of consumerism.

The glut of consumerism propounded by *American Idol* and other forms of commercial media may exceed the financial ability of most residents but over-consumption is in fact standard within U.S. culture. With less than five percent of the global population, the U.S. consumes more than 25% of global fossil fuels.[8] We have more private cars than licensed drivers.[9] Our homes have increased in size by nearly 40% over the last 30 years despite a

decrease in family size.[10] To support our living habits, the average resident requires 15 times as much land as the average Mozambican.[11] A majority of residents pay more a year in finance charges on their credit cards than the average per capita income in at least 35 countries.[12] The high level of consumption that Rostow venerated and that continues to structure the contemporary U.S. way of life is made possible through the economic policies and corporate practices that disposes the majority of the world's population.

Recognizing the role of international capital in privileging the U.S. consumer at the expense of other populations makes the corporate and celebrity sponsorship of *'Idol Gives Back'* painfully ironic while clarifying the idea that such economic interventions are in fact alibis for over consumption. Exxon-Mobil helped send Forrest Whitaker to Angola where he met a family devastated by an exploding landmine - a residual from a conflict over oil, much of which was shipped to the U.S. to fuel our Fords.[13] Coca-cola was a sponsor of the series as a whole and a well-known violator of human and environmental rights.[14] Actress Jennifer Connelly lamented the severe lack of clean drinking water throughout the world but made no mention of Coke's history of polluting the waterways surrounding its bottling plants. Mariah Carey and Snoop Dog sang through diamond-studded microphones in an effort to raise funds for AIDS medication. One can only assume their ignorance of the relationship between migratory labor such as found in South Africa's diamond mines and the rapid spread of HIV. The patterns of consumption that comprise so much of U.S. culture, particularly as propagated by commercial media, are driving forces behind the impoverishment and suffering of the world majority. Our charity provides an alibi for our complicity in the suffering we seek to alleviate without having to alter our patterns of consumption.

Buried within '*Idol Gives Back'* were the social relations and economic structures that pair the exploited with their exploiters. The consumer products of commercial breaks bind the average resident to the impoverished factory worker in what Chandra Mohanty called the 2/3 world.[15] Mohanty's labeling of global populations as 1/3 and 2/3 world is intended as a

replacement for the previous categorical divides such as North/South or 1st world/3rd world. Such a fractioning of the world's population does not falsely rely on national boundaries or modernist hierarchies. Rather it reflects a more democratic principle by pointing out the exploitation of the majority of the world's inhabitants by the minority. The sparkling accessories of celebrities and the citizens who celebrate them tie us all to the miner and his family desperate to survive the plague of HIV. Our reliance on cars is made possible by those sacrificed to land mines planted in a battle, in part, over oil revenues. To be sure, when all that we as consumers and concerned citizens are confronted with is a seemingly endless cycle of suffering, how are we to believe in the prospects of hopeful change, of salvation, of liberation from torment? These "complexes of images" do indeed present a global social order plagued not only by disease and natural disaster but by an inherent and inexplicable, call it mythical, inequality that separates "us" from "them." The binaries of the structure are reasserted as the dialectical relationship between the 1/3 & 2/3 world is naturalized. The myth holds and offers up as mediator an ideology of charitable intervention to provide an alibi for a culture of exploitative consumption.

Conclusion

Economic intervention against the suffering of impoverishment through charitable endeavors (and through political policy) functions as an alibi, in the Barthesian sense, for the exploitation of the world's majority by the minority entrenched in consumer culture. I provided a thick description of the charity drive *Idol Gives Back* in order to apply the analytic methodologies of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Harold Scheub, and Roland Barthes to the presentation of poverty and the performance of compassion. I thereby demonstrated that poverty is understood as an individual rather than a social condition; and the economic intervention by private individuals (rather than the public state) serves to address the symptoms without effecting the causes. Moreover, poverty is racialized and normalized by an absence of historical consciousness regarding the legacy of systemic oppression and inequality. This ahistorical

77

understanding of impoverishment naturalizes a socially constructed binary of poverty –
prosperity and disguises the role of global consumer culture in creating poverty. When the 1/3
world demonstrates its compassion by sharing a bit of its prosperity with the 2/3 world it enacts
a mythic alibi for the exploitation that makes such prosperity possible. Economic intervention,
like its twin violent intervention, proves to be a ruse for further domination.

Conclusion

Myths of Intervention

Overviewing the nation's myth heritage and the heroic violence that both maintains and expands U.S. civilization, I demonstrated that such rituals of violence regenerate because they abet the imperialism of this capitalist economy. A Protestant ethic may have stripped consumption out of the nation's rituals, but consumerism, broadly defined, remains the structure regenerated through the liminality of war. Investigating one mythic representation of violent intervention on film demonstrated that mediation of the social binary of terror-security is the contemporary hero's primary task, as well as a predominant rhetoric of political discourse. Yet, analysis of violent intervention revealed that resolution between terror and security is achieved through the segregation of the majority of the world's population into subjugated sectors of the global economy. Analyzing economic interventions into the poverty-prosperity binary demonstrated the racialized patterns of signification and evinced that the performance of generosity functions as consumerism's alibi for the gross inequality of global capital. The myth of liberation in its current media manifestation disavows the historical patterns of domination in order to naturalize U.S. consumer culture and present it as liberty. Consumerism is a recurring theme in the myth of liberation as performed in commercial and political culture. The consumerism that I argued is the structure supported by the anti-structure of war infiltrates the nation's political system. Democracy, which validates the myth of liberation and promises equality and representation, is increasingly commoditized in the nation's consumer culture. The scenarios of democracy, explored in the next part, point to this commodification's contradiction to the nation's democratic ideal in which privilege supersedes equality and representation excludes the majority.

Scenarios of Democracy

"Democracy is more a verb than a noun – it is more a dynamic striving and collective movement than a static order or stationary status quo. Democracy is not just a system of governance…but a cultural way of being."

Cornel West

Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism

Central to the U.S. myth of liberation is a belief in the necessity and maintenance of democracy, for such an organization of political life promises the egalitarianism of the national ideal. Yet, any inquiry into contemporary performances of democracy demonstrates an overall ambivalence toward this essential element of culture. While one cannot conceive of the nation without the process of democracy, we often doubt the impact of our participation. Such an ambivalence derives from the history of electoral idiosyncrasies that have long challenged the nation. In the first decade of the 21st century, citizens experienced particular disturbances in the application of electoral politics when the Supreme Court intervened first in the presidential election of 2000 and then with their 2008 ruling commonly called *Citizens United*, which altered the financial regulations of campaign finance. The intervention of traditional authority into the functioning of elections, combined with the terrorist attacks of 2001, resulted in a national crisis for U.S. culture and democracy. Any society faced with such an existential crisis

will enact a ritual to redress this crisis and reassert their standard values and beliefs. In this chapter, I assert that such a ritual of redress was performed through the most popular television show, *American Idol.* Drawing upon the long history of scenarios of discovery, *American Idol* democratized television and countered the crisis in political culture by reaffirming the American Dream and amplifying the popular vote. Moreover, while *American Idol* provides a point of analysis regarding scenarios of democracy within the myth of liberation, the show also serves as an example of the reciprocity between politics and entertainment since both cultural fields embody the same mythic thoughts regarding the potential of democracy and its limitations. This section begins with an explication of Diana Taylor's theory of the repertoire as the embodiment of cultural memory and identity, paying particular attention to the culture industry's merger of the hemispheric and historically prevalent scenario of discovery with the democratic ideal. Chapter Seven posits that this merger between discovery and democracy within the nationally broadcast repertoire functioned as a ritual of redress for a crisis in national identity, reaffirmed a particular version of the American Dream, and embodied a democratic practice of electoral commoditization. In Chapter Eight I consider the recurrent political trend in which democratic legitimacy has been undermined by the interventions of traditional authority, leaving the nation as an oligarchy dominated by commoditized speech. Interrogating contemporary scenarios of democracy reveals the extent to which national rule is haunted by its plutocratic past, and democracy's centrality to the myth of liberation appears as an alibi for political inequality.

Chapter 6

From Discovery To Democracy

Diana Taylor's theory of scenarios serves as the theoretical foundation for this chapter on democracy because of her focus on the embodiment of cultural identity. As a scholar of performance studies, Taylor is particularly attuned to the agency of individuals as they enact or re-enact culturally significant gestures and historically derived scenarios. Within the national community, elections are a particularly salient gesture of collective identity. In order to analyze contemporary scenarios of democracy I first elaborate on Taylor's theory of the repertoire as a storehouse of performed knowledge as well as a method of transmitting cultural memories and identities. Referencing Taylor's focus on the scenario of discovery in the Americas leads this discussion into Hollywood as the primary site for the performance of the U.S. repertoire. I thereafter overview the complexities of media theory and materialist contributions to that field in order to assert that through the culture industry's blending of the tradition of discovery with claims to democracy, a key scenario is performed that reinforces the dominance of particular identities and normalizes a commoditization of the vote.

Taylor's Repertoire of Performance

Diana Taylor offers students of culture an invaluable perspective on the production and dissemination of knowledge with her theorizations of performance set forth in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*.[1] She declares that the academic focus on writing prioritized narrative as the loci of cultural analysis, which in turn denied embodiment as a way of being in and knowing of the world. She challenges this narrative emphasis of cultural analysis by outlining a methodology focused on performances and the expression of embodied culture. In this section, I articulate Taylor's formulation of the archive and the repertoire as co-existent systems of knowledge retention and transmission, emphasize

the concept that culturally specific knowledge is embodied within performances, and reference Taylor's assertion that performance transmits cultural memory and identity. By attending to Taylor's theory of performance, we gain a more complex understanding of human agency in the transfer of cultural patterns and practices.

When Diana Taylor theorizes the archive and the repertoire she dislodges the epistemological prioritization of the text in order to call attention to the significance of performance in systems of knowledge production and transmission. For Taylor, the traditional western perspective, according to which written communication having developed after orality holds a status above performance, is both arrogant and disingenuous. Referring to the archival record of Columbus' "discovery" of America, Taylor points out the role of performance through which Columbus claimed land for the Spanish crown.[2] The ritual performance of discovery and claiming possession had its antecedents in European culture and was repeated for centuries to come across the American hemisphere.[3] With the example of the Conquest, Taylor is careful not to position the archive and the repertoire as opposing systems of knowledge transmission. The archive, as a collection of written or recorded knowledge does not exist in a binary with the embodied and performed knowledge of the repertoire.[4] Rather, the archive and the repertoire are coexistent systems of epistemological production and transmission that work together to create cultural meaning. By focusing on the repertoire in addition to the archive, scholars and students of history and culture gain knowledge both broader and more precise because within the repertoire the limits of language give way to the full potentiality of the human subject.

As a performance theorist, Taylor focuses on the physicality of the repertoire in order to attend to the systems of knowledge enacted through the human body. As a collection of culturally specific scenarios, the repertoire requires the presence of social actors to embody the prescribed roles and enact the preferred structures of meaning. Referring to the scenario of discovery, Taylor explains how the conquistadors performed the presumed authority of Europeans, the objectification of Indians, and the possession of the land. By planting flags and

83

reading proclamations, Europeans performed the domination and dispossession that has comprised so much of the history of the hemisphere. Embodied performances, Taylor writes, "make visible an entire spectrum of attitudes and values…" prevalent within a cultural paradigm.[5] Culturally significant performances embody shared systems of meaning as actors produce and reproduce the knowledge stored within the repertoire.

Taylor describes performances as "acts of transfer" because the knowledge embodied by social actors transmits cultural memory and identity between the participants and the spectators. Regarding the intercultural contact of the American hemisphere, Taylor evinces the often-antagonistic transfer of cultural memory and identity of both the Spanish and Indians. Whereas the Spanish performed their identity as Christians endowed with a supreme authority, Indians often found ways to continue their own cultural memories and identities through performance. In order to evince the transmission of embodied knowledge Taylor points to the case of the Mexica and how their pilgrimages to the shrine of Guadalupe were a continuation of the cultural practices surrounding devotions toward the pre-Columbian goddess, Tonanztin.[6] Moreover, Taylor posits that the Spanish enforced prohibitions of traditional Indian performances not only because the former viewed such rituals as devilry but also because they recognized that the pre-Columbian performances transmitted pre-Columbian beliefs. Through her scholarship of the American Conquest and its cultural interactions, Taylor demonstrates the deep cultural significance for both participants and spectators when performances transmit memory and identity.

Diana Taylor enacts an epistemological and ontological shift in her text, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, by emphasizing performance as a focus of cultural analysis and embodiment as a primary method of cultural transmission. She usurps the analytic attention away from narrative in order to offer instead a theoretical paradigm of performances as repeated but adaptable, culturally specific patterns of behavior. By concentrating on performances rather than texts, Taylor challenges the long tradition of prioritizing written knowledge over embodied knowledge.

She denies the dominance of writing by conceptualizing the archive and the repertoire as coexistent if not complimentary modes of knowledge retention and transmission, avowing that meaning is made in the interaction between the two. Because she focuses on the repertoire as embodied knowledge she performed a scholarship geared more toward the agency of social actors then a textual analysis is able to offer. Taylor develops a theoretical framework for performance studies in order to recognize the embodiment and transmission of cultural identity as a research lens capable of analyzing shifting or persistent patterns of behavior and meaning.

Discovery in the Culture Industry

When we understand performance to be the very embodiment of cultural identity as described by Taylor, we then recognize that within the U.S., the repertoire of culture is dominated by the industry of mass media. While performance is a nearly infinite category of being in and knowing of the world, no performances of contemporary U.S. culture have as broad a reach and influence as those distributed through the apparatus of mass media. Film, television, and the Internet all broadcast a repertoire through which are performed the memories and identities – often contested – of America.[7] The mass media, which provides and perpetuates the repertoire by which U.S. culture is performed, the acts of transfer through which identity passes from one generation to the next, from performers to audience and back again, is an industry disseminating an ideology attuned to the capitalistic culture that propels the nation. Like the religious ideology of the conquistadores, the culture industry performs scenarios of discovery through which are embodied the beliefs and ideals of the mass mediated consumer culture of contemporary U.S. society. In this section I provide an overview of media theory as it wrangles with the complex dynamics of production and reception, blend the materialist perspective regarding the role of media in society with Taylor's theory of the repertoire, and assert that the culture industry's adaptation of the historic scenario of discovery with the societal ideal of democracy results in a key scenario with which we can analyze nationally significant

structures and meanings. Interrogating media as the prominent site for performances from the repertoire reveals the dominant scenarios and the preferred identities that embody the structural order of society.

The focus on text and narrative that Taylor challenges through her theorization of the repertoire of performance plagued early scholars of media who were criticized for conceiving of the media phenomena as a one-way transmission from production to consumption; yet more recent media theorists recognize a much more complex relationship between producers, performers, audiences and advertisers. Whereas early analysis of media tended to present audiences as passive and homogenous consumers, later scholars such as Stuart Hall acknowledge that the encoded messages of media are necessarily decoded differentially depending on the subjective position of each audience member.[8] Yet, even Hall's influential encoding/decoding model of broadcast structures cannot fully explain the messy interrelations of media today as the dominant expression of our cultural repertoire. Media theorists' articulation of the "hermeneutic circle" is an attempt to explain the multiple interpretations surrounding any media event.[9] As Hall points out, the audience members interpret the messages of media performances; but the creators and performers also interpret the audience in their efforts toward producing marketability. Current theories of media demand a recognition of the convoluted dynamics involved in the broadcasting of a culture's repertoire; however, the more recent academic attention on consumers of media threatens to disregard the imbalance of power between broadcast productions and receptions.

While media theory has evolved over the course of the last century toward an awareness of the diverse agencies of all involved parties, materialist theorists and critics of mass media present insights into the role of media in broader society that remain pertinent today because they recognize the social power wielded through the industrial production of culture. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno rather pessimistically describe the industrial nature of mass media as an "infection" of capitalism upon the artistry of society, believing that the rationality of

efficiency and reproducibility diminish creativity.[10] They avow that industrialized culture's focus on marketability results in a reliance upon the repetition of the most common denominator, writing that, "...the bread on which the culture industry feeds humanity, remains the stone of stereotype."[11] On the one hand, the use of stereotypes, as preconceived constructions of identity, appeals to the efficiency exulted by capitalist culture. Stereotypes are easily performed and easily recognized because of the shallow subjectivities they invoke. Contrarily, complex identities that challenge stereotypes require the investment of more labor from writers, performers and audiences, which is counter to the efficiency goals of capitalism. Yet, the reduced labor involved in the reproduction of stereotypes is a benign motivation compared to the underpinnings of the culture industry as a mechanism for maintaining hegemonic power through the dissemination of dominant ideologies.

Though Horkheimer and Adorno lament the proliferation of stereotypes, their arguments against the culture industry are primarily concerned with the manipulation of audience consciousness that compels the masses into the logic of the market; Louis Althusser picks up this argument in his articulation of media as an "ideological state apparatus."[12] Comprised of social systems such as the family, the church, schooling and mass media, ideological state apparatuses serve to reinforce the dominant ideology of a given society. In this sphere of the superstructure, ideology finds "material expression:" in a wife's subservience to her husband, in a church steeple pointing to heaven, in the forward facing organization of classroom seating, in the vilification of ethnic minorities.[13] In performance studies, we call this "material expression" of ideology, "embodiment." Althusser's materialism posits, though with differing terminology, that ideology is performed, enacted by an interpellated subject. The identities that we take for granted and the actions sanctioned by society are learned through the ideological state apparatuses; or as Taylor would put it, are learned through the performances of the repertoire.

Media, as one of these apparatuses, is particularly well suited to the dissemination of dominant ideology given the fact that the means of production and broadcast are primarily controlled by the upper class. Media serves as a platform for encouraging the masses to adopt the ideology of the dominant class. The class-based analysis of materialists posits that ideological state apparatuses such as the media institute a "false consciousness" within the collective population. Such an assertion is cynical, and for this pessimism, materialist critics have rightly been criticized. However, recognizing that materialists' theories grew out of these scholars' experiences with European fascism and the propaganda of the Nazi party, we can forgive them some of their detraction. Today's scholars, largely freed from the horrors of totalitarianism, perceive audiences as free to interpret media from their own perspectives and able to reject or adopt the disseminated ideology as they see fit. Reality lies somewhere in between; interpretations are multiple and consciousness is impressionable. Approaching materialist theories from a performance studies lens, we can reject any truth or falsity of consciousness and recognize instead that ideological state apparatuses are platforms for performing the repertoire of socially sanctioned actions and identities. In the family, church, school and media, "acts of transfer" are performed through which significant cultural memories, identities and scenarios are reinforced for the perpetuation of the community and the collectively held ideals. Rejecting materialist critics overt judgment against media as a mechanism for deceiving the masses, I accept their assertion that media broadcast dominant ideologies, yet modify this theory through an appeal to Taylor's theorization of the repertoire.

With its broadcast performances, the mass-mediated culture industry of a narrowly defined America highlights particular scenarios from within the repertoire of U.S. culture, which embody dominant identities, values, and systems of meaning. These preferred performances of the repertoire, broadcast through the ideological state apparatus of the media, are what Sherry Ortner referred to as "key scenarios" because their performed structures reflect the very organization of society and the ideal actions within it.[14] By embodying a culture's core beliefs,

prominent goals, and approved of actions, key scenarios, Ortner wrote, "rest upon certain assumptions about the nature of reality," and are, "valued for their contribution to the ordering or 'sorting out' of experience."[15] From the culture industry of mass media, we can recognize the merger of the key scenario of discovery with the embodiment of the democratic ideal. Horkheimer and Adorno identify this confluence, noting that the culture industry, by discovering the starlet in the secretary, propagates a world-view of egalitarian potential that simultaneously rationalizes an inequality of wealth and visibility.[16] Sixty years after Horkheimer and Adorno's writing, the culture industry continues to, "present itself as ceaselessly in search of talent."[17] *American Idol* draws its pool of talent from average citizens, giving enough viewers the impression that the next idol might be them as to ensure a following season. The format of the show presents society as open to infinite possibilities and reinforces the notion of the American Dream: anyone can transcend their class background with hard work, determination, and a little bit of talent. It emphasizes competition, describes success as an achievement of fame and fortune, and perhaps most significantly, reinforces the importance of democracy as a central national gesture. By analyzing the culture industry's darling scenarios of discovery and democracy as performed on *American Idol* we can observe the dominant ideology of U.S. society, its preferred structures, identities and actions.

The culture industry, as a primary platform for the performance of the U.S. repertoire is an excellent site for interrogating the dominant, or at least sanctioned, beliefs and behaviors of the national community because it broadcasts key scenarios that embody the structural order of society. Significant for our purposes is the way that the scenarios of discovery and democracy are combined to perpetuate national beliefs, attitudes and actions regarding the "nature of reality."[18] However, if we accept the materialist perspective, according to which mass media is a means by which the dominant class disseminates its own world-view, we must recognize that the beliefs performed are those of the dominant class. Moreover, as media theorists assert, the perspectives presented by media producers are not necessarily adhered to by society as a whole;

rather producers, consumers, performers and sponsors are all wound up in a complex web of interpretation. Therefore, as we analyze the scenario of democracy in order to gain a grasp on the practice as the material existence of U.S. ideology we must attend to both the performed power relations and the acts of agency as methods for the transfer of meaning and identity.

Analyzing Scenarios of Democracy

In preparation for an analysis of the current state of democracy in America, utilizing the television series *American Idol* as a point of analysis, I invoke Taylor's six-pronged approach regarding the performance of scenarios. (1) Scenarios have a metonymical relationship to the scene of their enactment; (2) Scenarios are historically repeated, though never a complete imitation; (3) Scenarios present a framework for understanding the social world; (4) Spectators are implicated within the framework of the scenario; (5) Scenarios are performed by social actors who retain individual agency; (6) Scenarios, because they are performed rather than merely narrated, include embodied gestures that exist outside of language. In this analysis of scenarios of democracy I attend in turn to each point of Taylor's scholarly methodology in order to describe the scene on which *American Idol* was played out, the social framework it presented, the patterns it adapted and repeated, the converging agency of spectators and performers, and the gestures embodied within it. Such an analysis of *American Idol*, introduced here but elaborated upon in the following chapters, will demonstrate the connections between this icon of popular entertainment, the preferred identities of the national community, and the patterns of domination played out through electoral politics.

The performance of a scenario is always a repetition, though not mere mimicry, and through its repetition, offers a framework that explains the world and its patterns of social organization and action. As a preeminent product of the culture industry, *American Idol* follows the historic interest, noted by Horkheimer and Adorno, of Hollywood to "discover" new talent and present the transformed individual as an example of the democratic potential for success

defined through fortune and fame. Yet *American Idol* does not merely repeat "Star Search"; rather, its brand of repetition implements an electoral process that is indicative of the expanding practice of democracy in U.S. culture – and the broader world – made possible through the technological innovations of cell phones and the Internet. As a more pointed example of repetition, in the 2009 season, *American Idol* producers altered the show's organization of discovery and democracy when they repeated, in their own way, the judicial intervention of the Supreme Court of the United States regarding the 2000 presidential election. The innovation of the Judges' Save on *American Idol* (which will be further addressed in Chapter 8) offered an "explanatory formula" according to which the popular vote can discretionarily be overruled by the authority of experienced professionals.[19] By dismissing the popular vote, both *American Idol* and the Supreme Court reiterated an age-old ideology that rationalizes electoral inequality through claims to traditional authority. But this explanatory formula is only occasionally invoked. Overwhelmingly, the scenario performed on *American Idol* offers a framework for affirming the ideology of class mobility and the necessity of democratic action. In attending to these repetitions performed through *American Idol* and the explanations its scenarios offered we can recognize key elements in the culture industry's version of the American Dream and the declared limits of democracy in national culture.

An analysis of scenarios must recognize the metonymical relationship to the enacted scene as well as the role of the spectator. With *American Idol,* we can notice two levels on which the scene of the series is played: the culture industry of Hollywood and the larger culture of the nation as experienced in the opening decade of the 21st century. First, the physical stage of a Hollywood theater, following the auditions in coliseums and convention halls, provide the scene for enacting the industry's token scenario of the transformation into stardom made possible through the discovery by industry authorities. Yet in this analysis we will look beyond the micro-scene of the staged production with its back-up bands, lighting effects and Coke© sponsored interview segments in order to place the series on the macro-scene of broader national culture.

There we can position the series on a post 9-11 and post Gore v. Bush national scene in which national identity was rattled by both a terrorist assault and a presidential election that undermined democratic legitimacy (elaborated in Chapter 7). Given the upset of democracy in 2000, *American Idol's* repetition of the scenario of talent discovery merged with a democratic gesture brought the spectator's into the center of the performance. Exemplifying Taylor's point that, "the scenario places spectators within its frame, implicating us in its ethics and politics," *American Idol* not only drew contestants from a pool of spectators but viewers accepted a certain amount of control over the show's progression through their participation in a weekly electoral process. Such weekly voting mimicked the electoral process of political primaries through which the selection of a representative is whittled down over time. Yet, the television series rejected the notion of electoral equality in favor of a paradigm in which a spectator's level of concern and financial ability increased their influence and advantaged their particular preference. Such a democratic equation in which the individual interests of those with greater financial resources overriding the ideal of citizens' equality suggests another instance of the repetition of scenarios and will be further addressed in Chapter 7. By attending to the multiple scenes of *American Idol's* performed scenarios as well as the role of the spectator, we can recognize a reaffirmation of national identities while hypothesizing a transformation in the meaning and applicability of democratic action.

We must also attend to the embodiment of the scenario by social actors and the gestures that speak without reliance upon language. *American Idol* draws performers from its audience and positions them within a transformative scenario of democracy and discovery in order to embody several regional and ethnic stereotypes that supposedly comprise the multiple identities of the national body. The judges perform a significant amount of the series' content as they attempt to shape the identities and personas of the contestants in order to conform to the ideals of the culture industry and invoke the preferred composition of U.S. multi-culturalism (elaborated in chapters 7 & 8). Yet, as Taylor declared, the social actors seated within the

scenario retain their individual agencies and a related ability to either accept their prescribed roles, or to challenge them. A significant way in which they enact their roles is through what Taylor calls, "the multiplicity of forms of transmission"; which works beyond the confines of narrative by invoking memory and identity through the performance of socially significant gestures.[20] With culturally specific gestures such as the vocal stylings of melisma, shaka hand movements, carefully selected outfits, or pointed song choices; contestants perform their identities on a national stage. Moreover, we will recognize the embodiment of spectators and the gesture of voting as performed in relation to *American Idol* in order to interrogate the meaning of democracy to U.S. identities. Attendance to the embodiment of the many social actors engaged in the performance of *American Idol* as well as the multiple gestures utilized is necessary in this analysis of *American Idol* as a scenario of democracy because it will reveal the contested national identities and the ambivalence felt toward the shifting meaning and performance of democracy as an identifying gesture of the nation.

Utilizing Taylor's six-point methodology for analyzing scenarios allows this study to recognize the embodied nature of myth and culture as a performance repeated and modified. Acknowledging that cultural heritage is transmitted through performed and embodied action shifts the focus of analysis off of mere characters and narratives; demanding instead a recognition of the agency of social actors and the contributions of spectators. With *American Idol,* we will witness the construction or presentation of multicultural stereotypes, but we will also observe the contestants/audience as they adopt or resist the pigeonholed personas. Moreover, Taylor's insistence on attending to embodied gestures provides footing for an assertion that the democratic gesture is merging with commoditization; not just on *American Idol* but in culture at large. Following Taylor's challenge to identify the scene as the site of intentionality, this study of *American Idol* looks beyond the Hollywood stage to the broader national scene in order to interrogate the shifting meaning and application of democracy to U.S. identity. Also, insisting upon the cross-generational repetition and adaptation of the repertoire,

Taylor's scholarly approach provides a scaffolding from which to investigate the socio-cultural framework and formulas of action put forward through scenarios, including: the adaptation and affirmation of the American Dream, the negotiation between egalitarianism and hierarchy, and the expansion and contraction of democracy.

Conclusion

This first chapter of Part 3: Scenarios of Democracy laid the groundwork for conducting an analysis of the nation's most popular television show situated in its particular socio-historic context. In referring to Diana Taylor's work on the hemispherically significant scenario of discovery and describing her theory of the repertoire as the performed transmission of cultural memory and identity I expanded the analytical methods of this study beyond the confines of our narrative tradition and into the enriching realm of embodied culture. Furthermore, I asserted that mass media is the dominant site for performing the repertoire of U.S. culture. Acknowledging the insights offered by media studies, I recognized the complex and shifting relationships between producers, performers and audience. Yet I found great validity in the early materialist arguments that mass media, as industrialized culture, is a product of the industrial class and an apparatus that disseminates dominant ideology. While I rejected the cynicism of materialist theories of media, by merging such theories with Diana Taylor's description of the repertoire, I affirmed the conception that mass media is an ideological state apparatus transmitting embodied knowledge regarding society's preferred structures, identities, and memories. Following this, I outlined Taylor's six-point analytic methodology and applied it to *American Idol* in preparation for an examination of this television series as the culture industry's most popular production. *American Idol*, having adapted the historical scenario of discovery to the democratic ideal, draws upon a repertoire of U.S. music and myth in order to present the diversity of national identities, affirm the framework of the American Dream, and offer the public an additional opportunity for democratic action in an era of democratic

uncertainty. We have thus moved from discovery to democracy by considering Diana Taylor's theory of the repertoire, describing mass media as an ideological apparatus and prominent platform for performing scenarios, and initiating an analysis of the culture industry's most popular production.

Chapter 7

The Democratization of Television

   American Idol was for many years the most popular show on television with broadcasts from January through May on first three and then two nights every week. The series was clearly organized as a ritual of transformation, a rite of passage from mundane citizenship to celebrity. While *American Idol* was certainly not the first in the wave of "reality television" with performers are not professional actors and dialogue that is not "scripted"; the show was the first to invite the audience into a system of voting in order to determine the progress/elimination of contestants. The inclusion of the democratic gesture into the organization of this television ritual authenticated the series' claim of representing the national community. This icon of entertainment did more than function as a "hold between" – to invoke Turner's etymological tendencies – for viewers as they pause from one workday to the next. As a public performance highlighting particular national identities and reiterating electoral gestures, *American Idol* functioned as a ritual of redress for a crisis in national identity. The following examination of this television series articulates this national crisis and the role of theatrical entertainment in addressing such social upheaval. I then refer to the ethnographic work of Katherine Meizel in order to present some of the core discourses of the series as it constructed the national community, and I consider the implications of the series' voting process as it disavowed voter equality in favor of a commoditized democratic process. By investigating *American Idol* as a significant performance within the repertoire of U.S. culture, I lay the groundwork for an articulation of the relationship between entertainment and politics as performers in both sites enact a transfer of national identity.

A Ritual of Redress

The format of *American Idol* enacted both a rite of passage for individual contestants and a ritual of redress for the national community. As a rite of passage, *American Idol* followed the standard process of ritual. Contestants were separated from their ordinary lives, entered into a liminal phrase of uncertainty during which they were guided by authoritative figures, and if their transformation was successful, they were reintegrated into a new social status. As a ritual for the individual, *American Idol* provided the opportunity to embody a particular version of the American Dream as a scenario of class transformation. Yet, rituals are not limited to rites of passage; when the performance of ritual is as public as that of *American Idol*, the significance exceeds the individual participant. Enacted collectively, rituals reaffirm the significant structures and ideologies of a society. During times when the normal structures and identities are disrupted by what Victor Turner calls "social dramas," public rituals are performed as an attempt to reestablish the social order. U.S. society experienced such an upheaval in the first decade of the twenty-first century when the security and democratic legitimacy of the nation were undermined. In this section, I describe the crisis of national identity as the political scene upon which *American Idol* was staged. I then reference Turner's theory of social dramas in order to declare *American Idol* as a ritual of redress for the crisis in national culture. Then, drawing from Turner's use of Richard Schechner's theory, I articulate the dynamic according to which a stage drama such as *American Idol* can provide a redress for political difficulties by reaffirming the nation's preferred identities and core beliefs. By describing the national scene during which *American Idol* gained popularity as a social drama, in the Turnerian sense, and accepting Schechner's theory of the dynamic braiding between ritual and theater we can recognize the significance of *American Idol* as a mechanism for reestablishing the structure of U.S. society.

Two events initiated a crisis in national identity because their unfolding caused residents to question deeply held beliefs and assumptions regarding the role of the U.S. in global society

and the legitimacy of its democratic process: the 2000 presidential election and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. First, Florida's contested election results in the presidential race of 2000 involving hanging chads, confusing butterfly-ballots and racialized voter disenfranchisement highlighted the gross inconsistencies in our democratic process. Moreover, the candidates' disinclination toward a statewide recount revealed a disturbing partisanship in which citizens' votes mattered only if they were expected to add to a particular candidate's totals.[1] This disinterest in the validity of the total popular vote was reinforced by the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Gore v. Bush* to stop the Florida recount and award the state's delegates, and therefore the presidency, to George W. Bush. Less than a year later, the attacks of September 11, 2001 rattled the nation to its core. Many citizens had difficulty understanding the reason for that peacetime terrorism; our recently inaugurated leader offered the simple explanation that the Saudi Arabian hijackers "hate our freedom."[2] Such was the national scene upon which *American Idol* was staged as a reiteration of the nation's core values and a reaffirmation of the power and importance of the democratic gesture.

In order to posit *American Idol* as a performance redressing a crisis in national identity I invoke the theory of Victor Turner regarding the processual dynamics of social dramas. For Turner, a social drama is instigated by a "breach" (phase 1) of norms or customs that leads to a "crisis" (phase 2) of social structure and collective meaning.[3] At the start of the 21st century, the U.S. experienced a breach in the norms of our democratic institutions and a crisis in the meaning of our role in the global community. Turner asserts that a community will attempt to resolve such crises through, "the performance of a public ritual."[4] As discussed in Chapter 3, Turner's processual social theory centers on a dialectical rotation between structure and anti-structure; the breach and crisis of a social drama initiate a period of anti-structure, thereby requiring the liminality of ritual through which structure is re-established or re-ordered. Redress, as the third phase of a social drama is the most dramatically ritualistic because within it, the relevant social actors, or "star groupers," as Turner calls them, undergo a period of

liminality out of which transformation and/or reintegration will occur.[5] By labeling the

performers of social dramas as "star-groups" Turner highlights the visibility and influence of

involved individuals as representatives of deeply held identities, desires and belief systems.[6] The

social drama ignited in the first decade of the 21st century in the U.S. was brought about by the

star groups of second generation politicians (i.e. George W. Bush and Al Gore, whose fathers

both served in federal government), federal judges, and jihadists who all challenged U.S.

identities and illegitimated our democratic institutions. The redressal initiated a new crop of

star groupers: the *American Idol* contestants discovered among ordinary citizens and the

American Idol judges drawn from places of authority within the culture industry. Their

performances in the ritual of *American Idol* redressed the crisis in national culture by declaring

an egalitarian potential and appeasing our desires for meaningful democratic gestures while

affirming exceptionalism and glorifying consumerism.

If it seems unusual that a crisis in political identity could be redressed through a public

ritual performed within the industry of entertainment, consider the scholarship of Turner,

following Richard Schechner's assertion of a definitive relationship between a society and its

theatrical stages.[7] In his articulation of social dramas, Turner utilizes a diagram of Schechner's

in order to demonstrate the processual flow from an overt social drama to a staged performance;

yet Turner was quick to assert that the closed cycle of this visualization distorts Schechner's

theory of the dynamic braiding between political life and theatrical entertainments.[8]
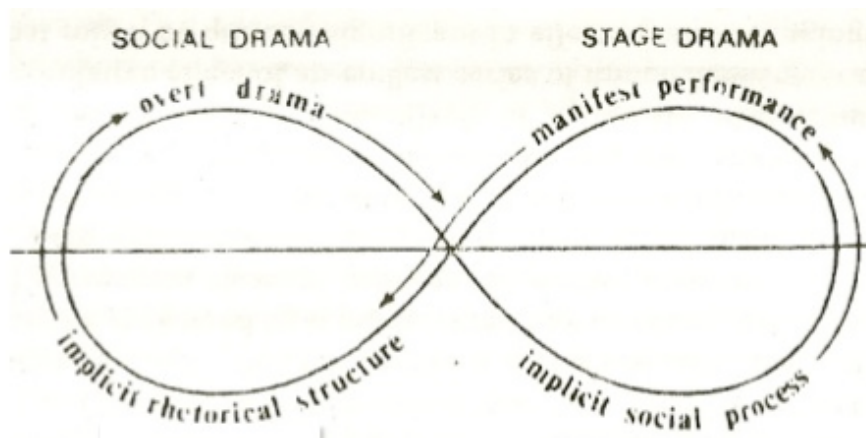
Applying Schechner's model to our discussion, I posit that the overt social drama played out through electoral politics and the experience of terrorism rattled the implicit rhetorical structure of the U.S. as beloved world leader and paramount of democratic governance. The breach and crisis were redressed, in part, through the implicit social process of electorally selecting representatives who embodied ideal personas and enacted the nationally preferred scenario of class transformation through the manifest performance of *American Idol*. Applying Turner's theory of social dramas along with Schechner's theory of the relationship between political life and theatre, I assert that the staging of *American Idol* served as a public ritual of redress for the social dramas that disturbed national political life at the start of the twenty-first century.

Following the theories of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, this section demonstrated the reciprocal relationship between political life and the creations of entertainment in regards to the performance of scenarios of democracy on the national stages. At the start of the 21st century, the national community experienced a social drama, initiated by a breach in our democratic practices and followed by the crisis of international terrorism. The national community's imagined ideals and identities were damaged. This social drama required a public ritual to reestablish the defiled ideals. *American Idol* performed the redressal for this crisis in national identity through a manifest performance that expanded the possibilities for enacting the democratic gesture, presented a diversity of identities, and reaffirmed the implicit rhetorical structure of the American Dream.

Performing the Nation

In *Idolized: Music, Media and Identity in America Idol,* Katherine Meizel recognizes that this most popular television series addressed a crisis in national identity, writing that, "the show reflects a range of socio-culturally significant concerns at this crucial point in the nation's history. In the wake of Sept. 11, 2001, and the subsequent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, interest in the redefinition and reaffirmation of U.S. culture has been very much at the forefront

of public attention."[9] Drawing on several years of participant observation research, Meizel offers

a comprehensive analysis of *American Idol* in order to describe the various discourses of

national culture at play in this media phenomenon.[10] Meizel argues that on *American Idol*, a

musical repertoire was utilized in order to perform and reaffirm a collection of identities and

narratives that coalesce around the American Dream as a definitional myth of the nation.[11] She

points to several discourses of binary construction; the performance of which upon the

American Idol stage served to buttress the notion of the American Dream and the preferred

meanings of U.S. culture: success-failure, civil-sacred religion, urban-rural, authenticity-

inauthenticity, rock-folk, individualism-communitarianism, production-consumption, and

multiculturalism-assimilation. For our purposes, in which *American Idol* is understood as a

ritual of redress for a crisis in national identity, I first focus on Meizel's articulation of the civil

religion performed through the series. Then, I consider the scenarios of mobility and class

transcendence that serve as the linchpin of the American Dream and the myth of liberation.

Finally, I discuss the confluence of authenticity and commoditization in order to describe the

production of stereotypes in the maintenance of a pluralistic U.S. identity. While Meizel's

ethnographic research and analysis offers many insights into this significant cultural

performance, my own contributions focus on the show's commoditization of democracy and the

privileging of particular identities. By exploring Meizel's theses regarding *American Idol,* we will

gain a richer understanding of the series as a scene for the performance of our democracy's

prominent scenarios.

Meizel utilizes Robert N. Bellah's definition of civil religion as "the articulation of sacred

thinking about the nation through 'a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals,'" in order to posit that

American Idol performed the civil religion of the nation in which individualism is balanced with

communitarianism and materialism is tempered by morality. Citing speeches of President G. W.

Bush in which he referred to the U.S. as "chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a

model for the world," and rationalized the 9-11 attacks by stating, "America was targeted...

because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world," Meizel recognizes the historical reiteration of a civil religious belief in exceptionalism and the leadership of the nation within the world community.[12] She perceives this historically repeated belief system to be an example of a morality and communal responsibility underlying U.S. civil religion, which she sees reflected on the *American Idol* stage regarding the discourse of individual contestants as role models, as well as the periodic philanthropy culled from profits.[13] Moreover, Meizel invokes Max Weber's thesis regarding the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism in order to connect this sense of leadership with the notion of "a calling," in which secular/economic pursuits are afforded a sacred/religious quality, thereby diminishing any discord between materiality and morality.[14] *American Idol* contestants complied with this convergence of morality and materiality, Meizel assures, by invoking the God given nature of their talent and attributing their individual success to both divine will and the national community's democratic choice. Meizel recognizes the ritualistic nature of the *American Idol* series as a performance of liminality that allows, "America to rehearse one of its most defining rituals – the election"; while reaffirming the civil religion of individual exceptionalism and material pursuits that validate a sense of leadership built upon a moral authority claimed through divine will.[15] Though the entirety of my own study aims to challenge civil religious claims to communitarianism, Meizel rightly discerns the ritual of *American Idol* as a profane performance repeating the nationally sacred ideal of exceptionalism.

In keeping with the pursuit of a calling propelled by the Protestant ethic, Meizel observes that *American Idol* repeated the national tropes of Western/urban migration while clinging to an identity of Southern/rural authenticity despite constructing a multi-cultural portrait of the nation. When contestants auditioned successfully they were given a "golden ticket" to Hollywood that simultaneously invoked the nation's expansionist past while positioning Hollywood (and California) as the realization of the American Dream.[16] Meizel avows that this situating of Hollywood as the locale of transformation assigned the South to the role of binary

opposite in a broadcast schema of national identity that intertwined with a dialectic of authenticity and inauthenticity.[17] Hollywood and the South were thus pitted against each other as geographical and ideological opposites; and with this constructed opposition, participants in the *American Idol* phenomenon performed the transition from the South as site of socio-economic struggle to Hollywood as dream factory of fortune and fame where their authenticity would be tested.[18] For while Hollywood was where contestants went to fulfill their dreams and realize their calling, such a cosmopolitan cultivation threatened to undermine their authenticity with the "fakeness" of the culture industry.[19] Meizel posits that the prominence in *American Idol* of symbols of Southernness stemmed from two historic yet opposing associations of the region as being impoverished and dysfunctional, yet also the moral center of the nation.[20] Thus, the scenario put forward by *American Idol* performed an explanatory formula of class transcendence through the contestants' embodiment of geographic mobility while maintaining Southern or rural identities as nationally authentic.[21]

The performance of Southern personas on the *American Idol* enterprise may have provided the preferred point of balance to the ritual goal of Hollywood success but in each season the contestant pool was rounded out in a multicultural collage of U.S. identities. Citing the case of Season Four contestant Bao Viet Nguyen (a first generation citizen, born and raised in Southern California), Meizel, along with Mr. Nguyen himself and viewers, recognize the producers' emphasis on his immigrant roots as a paradigmatic storyline within the larger narrative of the American Dream and a reiteration of stereotype. Meizel quotes Mr. Nguyen's reflection on the edited footage of his Idol experience in order to highlight the recognizably manipulated construction of identities on *American Idol*; "they made it seem as if I just got off the boat yesterday and decided to become an R&B star…It was just like, oh the ethnic, 'This is our Asian story.' Because we have a lot of Black stories, Latino stories, and so this is to show multicultural America."[22] Given the commercial nature of the show, such accumulated representations of diversity were likely intended to appeal to multiple audience demographics.

Yet as Mr. Nguyen notes (and could not easily be missed by anyone who watched the show), the edited stories of contestants' lives assuaged individual agency in favor of regional, ethnic, class and gendered stereotypes; which privileged Southern/rural Caucasian and then African-American contestants as Idols of authentic American culture.

Referring to Katherine Meizel's research we can recognize how *American Idol* redressed a crisis in national culture by enacting a ritual of civil religion, repeating the historic scenario of class transcendence, and emphasizing the preferred identities of a diverse U.S. society. With its ritual of transformation, this popular television series affirmed the civil religion of exceptionalism; not just in terms of singing ability but also an exceptionalism of morality and materiality, which Meizel recognizes as a reiteration of historically cogent thinking about the nation and its role in global society. By encouraging contestants' pursuits toward a calling, *American Idol* enacted a formula for class transcendence that, as Meizel evinces, relied upon the establishment of a geographical and ideological dichotomy between Hollywood and the South. Citing the data on contestant success, Meizel avows that this dichotomy privileged Southern or rural personas as authentic U.S. identities despite the series' overall construction of a multicultural, and stereotypical, cast. Meizel's analysis of *American Idol* offers many insights into the series as having drawn from the repertoire of national memory and identity in order to perform a ritual for redressing the cultural crisis of the early twenty-first century by reaffirming a national culture of individual exceptionalism, financial success, and diversity.

While Meizel's observation of this popular series insightfully attends to the dichotomous constructions of national society as disseminated through mass media, my own analysis of this media event is particularly focused on its assertion of capitalistic and patriarchal ideologies, and its performance of the democratic gesture. Whereas Meizel posits that contestants' audition in order to realize their "calling," such a moralistic assertion threatens to overlook, or misinterpret, the economic rationale for participation. In their statements and personal stories, I recognize in the contestants a desire not focused on the fame and fortune that would be their reward (such a

desire, after all, would tarnish their claims to authenticity), but aimed at escaping the plight of their location within the service sector of the economy. In praising the opportunity provided to them, contestants repeatedly described the show as, "really making a difference," for themselves and their families. Herein lies the paradox of the capitalistic myth of upward mobility. Ideology posits that it is good to transcend one's class background and that this path is open to everyone. Yet, a persistent focus on the goal of residing in the upper class barely conceals the suffering and discontent of the lower classes. By allowing some members of society into the upper class, capitalist ideology justifies itself while dismissing the masses subjected to its social systems of inequality. For the contestants who sought to be liberated from their lowly positions within this capitalist society, the form of rescue offered by the capitalist class through *American Idol* was, fittingly, to turn contestants into commodities. Moreover, the show's acquisition of the democratic gesture also took on a commoditized form; and with my firm assertion of the dialectical relationship between entertainment and politics I avow that *American Idol's* commoditization of democracy paved the way for a shift in the political application of the democratic gesture and the meaning of political speech. Within this section, I referred to Meizel's in-depth ethnographic work on *American Idol* because of her revealing discussions regarding the dichotomous discourses that the series constructed in its performance of national identity. In the following section, as well as in Chapter Eight, I present my own analysis of the series, particularly attuned to the commoditization of democracy and the affirmation of capitalistic hierarchy.

Commoditizing the Vote

While the scenarios presented on *American Idol* pulled from the repertoire in order to transmit a collection of cultural memories and identities, the series also embodied the commoditization that characterizes contemporary U.S. society. The commoditization of contestants was to be expected from a commercial enterprise aimed at selling songs, albums and

advertising. Yet, the desire of so many citizens to achieve the opportunity to escape his or her menial job and download him or herself as a ringtone pointed to a broad-based dissatisfaction with the overall economic structure of the nation. Hollywood, through *American Idol*, took on the hero's role as the show replayed the strongest of mythic imperatives. Yet, Hollywood could not rescue the aspiring working class-singer alone. Host Ryan Seacrest continually called on viewers to enact their democratic gesture, "decide [contestants'] fate," and determine, "who will be safe."[23] By implementing an electoral process in this televised competition, *American Idol* mimicked broader social structures in which coalitions compete for a simple majority in order to legitimize the dominance of their representation. However, where *American Idol's* democratic structure differed from the process of political representation was in the show's system of suffrage, limited only by aesthetic interest and the finances of phone plans, which allowed for an unequal amplification of concerned voices through the commoditization of votes. In the following paragraphs I discuss *American Idol* as a scenario for the rescue of working-class citizens ironically achieved through their commoditization, relate how coalitional competition in this liminoid endeavor subdued multiculturalism in favor of assimilation, and suggest that a structure of democracy as unregulated competition undermines the principle of citizen equality in representational government. By interrogating *American Idol* and the democratization of television, this section demonstrates the current condition of the national democratic ideal as moving toward a system of commoditized voting.

The transformation of individual identities, or more pointedly, the reaffirmation of a collection of identities, performed on *American Idol* revealed a broad-based discontent with the economic relations of the nation in the age of high-consumption. The focus of the show as it performed the scenario of the American Dream's upward mobility belied the dissatisfaction of citizens employed within the service-sectors of the economy. As co-creator Simon Cowell describes it, the show presents, "the great American Dream, which is somebody could be a cocktail waitress one minute, within sixteen weeks could become the most famous person in

America."[24] While the element of fame is not always included in narratives of the American Dream, the culture industry's version inherently embraces celebrity as attached to the goal of success and class mobility. Overwhelmingly, contestants on the show are members of the working class, particularly employed in positions of service: nannies, bartenders, security guards, taco-stand clerks, or sometimes students. Judging from the hundreds of thousands who auditioned each year across the country, while they surely desired the fame and fortune of Cowell's American Dream, their strivings simultaneously revealed a discontent as to their position within U.S. civilization.[25] Such broad discontent suggested that *American Idol* was but one more enactment of the nation's strongest mythic scenario; in this iteration Hollywood is the hero who rescues a captive to the age of high consumption.[26] Yet, the great irony of this mythic performance is that citizens seeking rescue from their confines within neo-liberalism's highest stage of economic development, the age of high consumption, can only successfully "escape" their position in the service-sector by becoming commodities themselves, thus reinforcing the dominant economic model of consumerism.

The transformation from citizen to commodity reflects the liminoid nature of the reality show through which are developed coalitions of aesthetic and ethnic communities that compete for the dominance of their identities. Meizel rightly describes the *American Idol* stage as liminal due to the rite of passage contestants undertake. Yet, a more nuanced understanding of Turner's ritual theory must recognize the optional nature of participation by both contestants and viewers. Turner explicitly distinguishes between liminal rituals as socially obligated and liminoid rituals that are optional, by writing that while, "both types coexist…the liminoid is more like a commodity – indeed, often is a commodity which one selects and pays for."[27] Whether liminal or liminoid, transformative rituals tend to produce a sense of "communitas" among participants who feel a "generalized social bond."[28] As Meizel describes it, "not only does the act of watching *American Idol* help create a sense of nationally coherent community, so too does the mutual experience of listening to nearly exclusive American music performed by young

American singers."[29] Moreover, those young singers are selected to represent the multicultural demographics of the nation. Coalitions arise in support of certain contestants due to what Meizel terms, "shared identity factors," with the contestant pool shrinking weekly until one Idol remains. Such a narrowing field of representatives in this liminoid democratic endeavor from the plurality of multiculturalism to the singular ascendance of one representative (almost always Christian and either Caucasian or African-American) reinforced the broader democratic structure of the nation in which coalitions of identity and ideology compete for votes and the thinnest margin of victory legitimizes the dominance of one representative; thus multiculturalism succumbs to assimilation and plurality gives way to majority.[30]

When democracy is thought of as a competition for scarce access to representation, voting becomes a surrogate from one's choice and concerned citizens seek an amplification of their voice. In an era when national politics turned further away from an equal consideration of each citizen's vote, Meizel writes, "*American Idol* offer[ed] Americans a new brand of universal suffrage," by unrestricting both eligibility and quantity.[31] As an entertainment enterprise known for appealing to an audience that crosses generations, *American Idol* solicited the electoral participation of each audience member.[32] Moreover, the series' relationship with phone service providers delimited the number of votes an audience member could cast. American Idol erased all notion of electoral equality, as viewers were encouraged to "vote their fingers off."[33] Meizel quotes one viewer's comment that she had "worn out two phones" voting for her preferred contestant; while Meizel uses the quote in order to demonstrate the dedication by which viewers endorse their preferred role model, the statement alerts us to a distinctive shift in performing the democratic gesture. When voting commenced each week, viewers were given a time window in which to cast as many votes as desired or possible. On the forums, audience members would argue about the results when their one-hundred-plus votes failed to advance their chosen Idol. One informant told me he spent twenty minutes texting his vote for the Season 8 finalist. My one foray into *American Idol* suffrage resulted in three votes; after inadvertently calling the

wrong contestant's phone line I felt compelled to cast two more votes for my preference in order to correct for the dialing error. I was not concerned enough over the outcome to expend more effort; and despite the tens of millions of votes cast each week, many viewers do not participate in the show's electoral process. The opportunity *American Idol* afforded viewers to vote to their hearts', or phone plans', content enacted a form of democracy in which both an individual's level of concern and financial resources outweigh the principle of democratic equality.

The commercial endeavor of *American Idol* centralized the principles of commoditization within each season's progression as contestants developed their marketability, coalitions competed for an ascendance of representation, and votes were purchased through phone-plan contracts. When we consider contestants as artists entering a professional industry, the commoditization of their skill was necessary and appropriate in this capitalist culture. Yet, the transformation from amateur to professional ritualized on *American Idol* highlighted this process of commoditization as the path of rescue from the confines of the working-class. In this democratic ritual through which only one contestant could achieve full transformation and attain the status of Idol, coalitions of electoral support developed to propel their aesthetic preference into the winner's seat for total representation. In this way, *American Idol* mimicked the national style of representational government in which a simple majority of participating individuals elect their own preference who is then authorized to represent the whole of a diverse constituency. While *American Idol* repeated the scenario of political elections, it also paved the way for a shift in the meaning of democracy and political speech by delimiting the number of votes cast and favoring a system in which a citizen's level of concern combined with access to financial resources superseded any notion of an equality of vote. Thus, *American Idol*, as the most popular television show further propagated the dominant ideology of consumerism, turned the nation's democratic gesture into a spectacle for the market, and undermined the principle of voter equality.

Conclusion

The democratization of television, as performed through the series, *American Idol*, appeared on the screen just as the U.S. had entered a period of crisis regarding the nation's identity and democratic processes. The social drama precipitated by "star-groupers" of electoral candidates, federal judges and international terrorists was redressed through this televised ritual, which reiterated the centrality of the democratic gesture and displayed a diversity of identities. The culture industry's redressal of this crisis in national identity seized upon the historically prominent scenario of discovery in order to validate the American Dream narrative of class transformation and to substantiate a civil religion of exceptionalism. Yet, *American Idol* achieved this remuneration through a collage of stereotyped ethnic and gendered identities. Moreover, the commoditization of contestants was exceeded only by the commoditization of the vote as *American Idol* implemented its own form of electoral inequality. While *American Idol* served the social function of affirming some of the nation's core beliefs and values, the deregulation and commoditization of democracy on *American Idol* set the stage for the erosion of democratic equality within the nation.

Chapter 8

Traditional Authority Intervenes

Given Diana Taylor's assertion that scenarios are repeated, though not mimicked, this study aims to point out the repetition between the performance of democracy within media entertainment and the performance of democracy on the political stage as each embody traditional authority's rule over the rights of citizens. In recent enactments within these two fields of social life (entertainment & politics), democratic possibilities and outcomes have been shaped and influenced by the intervention of individuals whose agency is aligned with their membership in a class that has traditionally held authority. On the one hand, the Supreme Court Justices share along with the other two branches of government an authority over the national community; yet Justices' authority is more supreme thanks to their traditional claim to lifetime appointments. As for the judges on *American Idol*, though their authority does not approach the height of the law, nor are their appointments irrevocable, there is a tradition to their authority as members of the entertainment industry's managerial class, which has its own tradition of claiming authority over the general populace. In this chapter, I present recent performances of the intervention by traditional authority into the democratic processes of the nation in order to highlight the repetition of scenarios across the socio-political landscape. From *American Idol* I describe Season Eight's innovation of The Judges' Save as an example of the managerial class' electoral intervention for the benefit of traditionally privileged personas. I then discuss recent interventions by the Supreme Court into the process of electoral politics that asserted a national tradition that privileges the monied class over the general population. These examples from the dual realms of politics and entertainment provide a point of analysis from which to interrogate the current state of democracy within the national community as ambivalently felt for the possibility it promises and the tyranny it imposes.

The Judges' Save - Entertainment

In the eighth season of *American Idol,* with the modification of the Judges' Save, representatives from within the music industry laid claim to a resurgent political trend: the discretionary usurpation of democratic legitimacy by traditional authority. Midway through the season, *American Idol* judge Simon Cowell declared, "May I remind you, on this show we do not allow democracy." This proclamation came in response to boos from the audience that arose after Cowell described a performance by a contestant as, "like a hamster trying to be a tiger." While the audience frequently booed Simon for his cruel metaphors and blunt criticisms, such critiques were an important part of the show because even after voting commenced, judges' criticism helped shape contestants' performances and personas. After each performance, the judges would critique the contestants. Simon's criticisms were by far the most accurate, insightful and potentially useful to the contestants and the audience because he used metaphors to relate his interpretations and experiences.[1] Through metaphor, Simon strategically repositioned contestant's skills, swayed audience reception and voting practices, and influenced contestants' future performance choices. Simon's job on the show as ritual leader, as expert advisor and industry authority, was to help contestants transform into pop stars, commercially viable recording artists, and stage performers. His metaphors, along with the other judges' critiques, were one method of intervention into the progression of the competition. In this section I describe portions of Season Eight in regard to the use and withholding of the Judges' Save in order to assert that while *American Idol* portrayed a multiculturalism in depicting the nation, a persona of white-heterosexual-male dominated. Additionally, the following thick-description supports Meizel's suggestion that *American Idol* highlighted African-American music as emblematic of the nation but privileged white appropriations of blackness.[2] Moreover, such appropriations became part of a scenario in which transformation was not merely a ritual endeavor of the contestant's self, but a performative tactic especially successful when applied to the artistic medium of a song. Through describing the Judges' Save of Season Eight, I articulate

both an authoritative strategy aimed at manipulating an electoral process and introduce an artistic tactic successful in achieving transformation.

Alexis Grace was the contestant whom Simon likened to a "hamster trying to be a tiger." She came to the *American Idol* auditions from her hometown of Memphis. The daughter of a musician, she had a strong control of her voice that had certainly been influenced by the legacy of blues and rock that her hometown is known for. In that hotel conference room this petite blonde twenty-one year old wore a pink sleeveless v-neck shirt with jeans and belted out an a cappella version of Aretha Franklin's *Dr. Feelgood*. The judges liked her voice and Simon said that she had "a very commercial face." They passed her through to Hollywood but Kara gave her very important advice, "don't wear pink, just dirty up...go home, make love to your fiancé..." Embarrassed and awkward, Alexis responded, "O...kay, is that gonna be on TV?" When she got to Hollywood, her performance of Franklin's *Never Loved a Man* acquired her a position in the top 13. As the show progressed and moved into the live broadcast stage complete with a voting public, Alexis showed that she had taken their advice as best she could. She wore little black dresses, painted her lips red, and chose songs about love gone wrong and elicit sexuality. During Michael Jackson tribute week, she performed *Dirty Diana*; Judge Kara commented, "you're a naughty girl and I liked it." This young single-but-engaged mother had been guided toward a stage persona of overt sexuality. But Alexis would not follow through with the transformative path that she had been lead toward. Perhaps Simon was right and she was more like a hamster than a tiger, more cuddly and sweet than ferocious and man-eating. From one week to the next, she moved from the temptress groupie of *Dirty Diana* to the pleading lover of Dolly Parton's *Jolene*.[3] Alexis Grace had given up the black wardrobe and the red lipstick in favor of a pink shirt with small print flowers and a set of ruffles up the front, a wide brown leather belt, denim skirt and cowboy boots. Kara was disappointed and told Alexis and the viewing public, "we miss the dirty." Alexis was eliminated from the competition that week and the judges declined to "save" her.

Having quickly excised the sexualized femininity from the contestant pool, the show progressed through the stereotyped multiculturalism toward the preferred personas. Lil Rounds was an African-American mother of three whose Memphis home had been destroyed in a tornado. The editors highlighted her family's story of struggle because it presented an opportunity to maximize the potential of her ritual transformation. Yet, Lil resisted the judges' advice and insisted on singing songs from outside the genre of R & B. Anoop Desai was a North Carolinian Master's student of Folklore, a first generation citizen of East Indian descent who seemed particularly fond of the 90's group Boyz to Men. At his audition, Paula Abdul said, "I did not expect that soulfulness to come out of you." In the wildcard round which won him a place in the top 13, Simon Cowell likened Anoop to, "an enthusiastic dog," and declared that although he wasn't the best singer they were going to hear, "we've got to cast this thing and people like you." In the first week of the top 7 contestants, these two singers were in the bottom three along with Matt Giraud, a Caucasian twenty-three year old dueling piano player from Michigan. Matt often performed on the show from behind a piano and expressed a style invoking a blues tradition. When it was revealed that Matt had placed last, behind Lil and Anoop, the judges finally chose to implement their "save." The following week both Lil Rounds and Anoop Desai were eliminated from the show, leaving five contestants: Danny Gokey (outwardly Christian, Caucasian, and a young widower from Minnesota), Alison Irahita (teenage daughter of El Salvadoran immigrants with a rocker style), Kris Allen (young, Caucasian, married college student from Arkansas who could play guitar), Adam Lambert (Caucasian, glam-rocker from San Diego with a stage presence far more theatrical than generally seen on the series), and Matt Giraud. With the Judges' Save, the industry leaders, representative of traditional authority, intervened in the electoral process of the show in order to further shape the range of contestants to traditionally preferred identities: white, male, Christian, or (sexually non-threatening) female.

The two finalists of Season Eight played out perfectly the primary dualism of *American Idol* that Meizel identified: Hollywood versus the South. When Ryan Seacrest introduced the final sing-off, he described it as "guy-liner versus guy-next-door." Adam Lambert had moved to Hollywood as soon as he finished high school to pursue a life as a performer. His song choices were consistently thoughtful while his performances of familiar songs demonstrated an astounding ability to be innovative. He had a pleasant and friendly demeanor that evoked his gratitude for the experience, his respect for his co-competitors and his deference to the judges' critiques. Kris Allen also portrayed a respectfulness to the authority of the judges, quietly taking in their criticism. For example, during Rat Pack Week Kris donned a suit and tie to perform *The Way You Look Tonight.* Editors played up his sweet demeanor with shots of his wife in the audience. Simon said it was, "like taking a well-trained spaniel for a walk, nice but uneventful." Kris merely nodded, but Simon's metaphor led to a performance that changed the course of the show.

Two weeks later Kris appeared on stage, back in his jeans and unbuttoned henley shirt, with a microphone in its stand and an acoustic guitar over his shoulder. The show's announcer, Ryan Seacrest, interviewed Kris just before his performance and asked what he would be singing. When Kris replied, "*Heartless,* by Kanye West" Ryan was taken aback, physically moved by the disjuncture of the idea. *Heartless* was an extremely popular hip-hop song, highly produced and complete with the digital voice modulations that had recently swept the genre. Kris simplified it and gave it a bit of a Country feel. A single strum of the guitar, "*In the night / I hear them talk / the coldest story ever told / about a man who lost his soul / along the road / to a woman so heartless."* The strumming picked up with a bit of syncopation. He was passionate, fully engrossed in his performance. Simon sat back in his judge's chair with a look of satisfaction on his face as he drank from his red plastic Coke© cup. The audience had gone wild and was clapping to the beat in accompaniment, pleased with both the change in Kris and the pop tune. As Paula put it in her critique, "difference keeps you relevant." Simon had written Kris

off as dull and uninspired but after this performance he said, "that has all changed." Kris

changed the song and changed himself as a performer.

As a contemporary ritual of nationality and democracy, *American Idol* was bound to

broadcast a scenario of transformation and present contestants as they passed through the anti-

structure of liminality and into the structure of commercial culture with its privileging of the

white, heterosexual, Christian male.[4] A brief interrogation of Season Eight and The Judges' Save

validates Meizel's assertion that African-American music holds a prominent place in the

national repertoire as presented by *American Idol*; yet the evidence of performances

demonstrates that minority singers who stepped out of their ethnically associated genres where

excised while white singers who could perform songs originating from African-American artists

were praised. This confinement of minority identities had its parallel in the presentation of

femininity. Whatever Kara's intention, her guidance of Alexis toward a femininity of overt

sexuality was indicative of a curious ambivalence within broader society that combines the

objectification of the female body with the repression of female sexuality.[5] Of course, discomfort

with presentations of sexuality on this family-friendly show was not limited to the female

gender. Homosexual men such as Adam Lambert have been successful on *American Idol* but

that success is accompanied by a silence regarding their sexual orientation. While Alexis' failure

likely had a lot to do with her attempt at a sex-kitten persona, Adam's success was a result of his

incredible ability to innovate familiar songs, for as Victor Turner wrote, "great public stress is

laid on the individual innovator, the unique person who dares and opts to create."[6] Innovation

was a prominent strategy and tactic in this season of *American Idol*.[7] The Judges' Save

implemented by producers was an innovative strategy for intervening in the electoral progress of

the show while augmenting the opportunities for suspense. Moreover, both finalists practiced

innovation as a tactic in this liminoid endeavor. Whereas Adam Lambert transformed each song

he sang, Kris Allen was able to transform himself through his innovation of one song. As is

stereotypical, the white, Christian, southern, heterosexual male dominated.[8]

The Judges' Save - Politics

In the cotemporaneous political sphere, the nation experienced another form of intervention by the traditionally authoritative class into the workings of our democracy. While electoral law in the United States has always shown a preference for those with access to power and capital, the start of this new century brought to light the extent to which the will of the electorate can be circumvented by the agency of the bearers of traditional authority. In this section I relate the events that lead up to the inauguration of George W. Bush as president in 2001, summarize the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*, and articulate the subsequent transformation in the electoral process toward a further favoring of the monied class over the principle of equality. Through this interrogation of the scenarios of democracy as performed in electoral politics I advance the thesis that democracy in America is haunted by the nation's oligarchic past.[9]

The contested presidential election of 2000 and the subsequent Supreme Court decision in *Gore v. Bush* undermined both the legitimacy of the nation's democracy and the ideal of democratic equality. The squabble began when Fox News Channel converted the prediction offered by Bush's cousin John Ellis into fact and all the other 24-hour news networks followed suit despite a lack of any official results.[10] Then, complaints surfaced of irregularities and disenfranchisement from across the state of Florida where candidate Bush's brother was governor. Particularly striking were the difficulties faced by African-American voters who encountered police road blocks on route to polling places, insufficient and faulty voting machines, disqualifications due to a name too closely resembling a felon's, improper omission from voter rolls, intimidation by poll-workers, etc.[11] Across the state, ballot forms were inconsistent and confusing. Yet what really delegitimized the democratic process was the State's and the candidates' resistance to a full and fair recount. Secretary of State Katherine Harris discouraged counties from conducting a recount; and Vice President Gore's lawyers settled for a recount of just four counties, thus foregoing thoroughness for expediency.[12] But even this was

halted by the Supreme Court decision of *Gore v. Bush*, which was described as, "a scandalously partisan intervention that robbed the voters of the very notion of democratic accountability."[13] In its majority opinion, the Supreme Court noted that the Constitution does not grant individuals the right to vote for the President, declaring instead that by law, state legislatures retain authority over which electors will represent the state in the Electoral College (initially instituted as a compromise with southern/rural/slave-holding states) where the presidency is decided.[14] Thus, Florida was awarded to George W. Bush by a margin of 537 votes (.01 percent), despite a margin of error of at least 3 percent.[15] While Al Gore won the national popular election by half-million votes, George W. Bush ascended to the presidency thanks to manipulations by partisan elections officials, the strict constructionists on the Supreme Court as bearers of traditional authority, and a revitalized ideology distrustful of full democracy.

A decade later, following two Supreme Court Justice appointments by President Bush, the nation suffered a further imbalance in its democratic system with the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. the Federal Elections Commission*. The case was brought to court by the non-profit corporation Citizens United regarding a film it made and broadcast about 2008 presidential primary candidate Hilary Clinton. Citizens United lawyers challenged the regulations regarding the use of corporate funds for electioneering by appealing to the doctrine of corporate personhood and arguing that FEC regulations violated First and Fourteenth amendment rights. With its long history of regarding corporations as "people," the Supreme Court agreed by a 5-4 vote with the plaintiff. Through this ruling in which the Supreme Court overturned its own precedent, corporate contributions to political campaigns are protected under every citizen's right to free speech and corporations are free to spend unlimited amounts of money on electioneering.[16] Whereas previous rulings of the Court had recognized that corporate funding of campaigns unduly influenced elections and politicians, and that regulation of corporate financing could prohibit corruption while equalizing access to the political process, the *Citizens United v FEC* majority opinion stated that, "ingratiation and access...are not

corruption," and that financial regulation prohibits the exercise of free speech.[17] In his dissent, Justice Stevens mocked the doctrine of corporate personhood when he wrote, "under the majority's view, I suppose it may be a First Amendment problem that corporations are not permitted to vote, given that voting is, among others things, a form of speech."[18] Setting aside the irrationality that corporations are entitled to the same rights as citizens without sharing the same responsibilities or liabilities; the Supreme Court's decision that financial contributions amount to political speech severely undermines efforts toward equality within the electoral process because the vast majority of citizens will never have the amount of capital-as-speech available to a corporation as *it* voices *its* political opinions.

The Supreme Court decision of *Citizens United* that equated financial expenditures with political speech came in the wake of the unprecedented presidential campaign of 2008 and resulted in a scenario of democracy in which the greatest financial speech amounted to a victory of representation. The election of Barack Obama in 2008 was unusual not only because of his status as the first African-American president, but because of the massive grassroots effort, his campaign engendered and the exorbitant coiffeur it garnered. Of his $640 million in campaign contributions, 2.7 million individuals donated less than $200.[19] The advent of online organizing appeared to have reshaped politics and 2008 was considered to be the "year of the small donor."[20] Yet the *Citizens United* ruling changed campaign finance regulations just in time for the 2010 midterm elections, in which conservative candidates swept the House races after their corresponding (but not coordinating) super-PACs greatly outspent their Democratic counterparts.[21] Super-Political Action Committees were the result of the Supreme Court's deregulation of electioneering; so long as their managers do not coordinate directly with candidates they can raise unlimited amounts of capital, refrain from identifying donors, and broadcast their political speech as far and as wide as their money can buy. Television stations cashed in on the newly deregulated campaign environment, allowing largely negative campaign ads to frame the political debates; which results in an increase of overall voter torpor.[22] In the

current presidential race (2012), as of February, eighty percent of all the money donated to super-PACs was given by a total of 196 people.[23] In contrast to 2008, when vast numbers of ordinary citizens were engaged in civic action and the internet promised to displace television as a primary site for electioneering, in the post-*Citizens United* era the television market has asserted its decades-long tradition as host to political contestation while allowing .0000067% of the population to dominate political discourse. Thus, with the capital-political speech of corporations and wealthy individuals freed from the bonds of equalizing regulations, the nation's process of electoral representation privileges the speech of the monied-class over the average citizen and reasserts the ideology of the free-market over the principle of democratic equality.

Intervention into the electoral processes of the nation by the Supreme Court of the United States, as the highest legal authority, has undermined the democratic strivings of the people and reasserted the political domination of the monied class over the general populace. The Supreme Court decision in *Gore v. Bush* set a precedent for the nation as a whole, according to which, the bearers of traditional authority could overrule the will of the populace; thereby authorizing conservativism to the exclusion of progressivism. In the aftermath of this decision political participation grew, history was made, and access to the democratic process was expanding. Yet, one year after the inauguration of President Barack Obama the Supreme Court intervened again, and with their decision in the *Citizens United* case, reestablished the privilege of the wealthy to dominate the democratic process by equating capital expenditures with political speech. Oftentimes, Diana Taylor explained, with the repetition of scenarios, the present is "haunted" by the structures of the past.[24] A definitive portion of the history of the United States is marked by persistent efforts to expand democratic access in the face of resistance from the traditional bearers of democratic privilege (white-male-property owners). Two hundred and thirty years after the establishment of our democracy, the wealthy-white-male

may have lost the highest office in the nation but the capitalist gentry have reasserted their domination over the electoral process.[25]

Paradoxes of U.S. Democracy

Democracy is a near sacred tradition in the United States, with a gesture central to national identity and the guiding myth of liberation; yet, the organization of that democratic gesture suffers from two paradoxes of our own construction. In this section, I reference the work of Robert Dahl in order to explain the paradoxical relationship between market-capitalism and democracy. I then expound upon how this historically persistent paradox is manifest contemporarily, serving as the foundation for the current antagonism between expanding the vocality implicit in electoral politics and the eschewing of political equality, now that political speech has been commoditized. Finally, I evince that the majoritarianism by which U.S. democracy is organized presents another paradox that further represses political equality by breeding an exclusionary form of representative government. These two paradoxes of democratic expression result in a national form of democracy in which those who acquire a minority of support achieve legitimate governance.

In *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, Robert Dahl references cross-cultural historical data and political theory in order to assert that capitalism and democracy enjoy an "antagonistic symbiosis."[26] Dahl explains that market-capitalist economies "support" democracy because individuals or groups of individuals make economic decisions based on their own self-interest, resulting in economic growth, especially for the middle-class, who in turn, "seek education, autonomy, personal freedom, property rights, the rule of law, and participation in government."[27] Most importantly, Dahl argues, market economies evade authoritarian governments because economic decisions are decentralized, being shared by a diverse array of independent citizens rather than concentrated among government leaders. However, when decisions are made according to self-interest and individual profit, the benefits of some citizens

occur at the expense of others, thus necessitating the intervention of and regulation by government.[28] Moreover, the unequal distribution of economic resources in a capitalist economy has a parallel inequality in the allocation of political resources (including but not limited to: wealth, status, information, communication, law, and votes), which results in unequal influence over government as society's regulatory body.[29] When citizens are politically unequal as is habitual under capitalism, Dahl declares, "the moral foundation of democracy...is seriously violated."[30] The paradoxical relationship between capitalism and democracy is that while market economies encourage the formation of democratic societies, democracy is hindered within capitalist economies because such economies generate economic and political inequalities.

The inequality of political resources under capitalism has become particularly salient in this post-*Citizens United* era due the Supreme Court's equation of corporate financial contributions with the citizen's right to free speech. Prior to *Citizens United*, it seemed that the general populace had made headway toward an equalizing of political resources thanks to the innovative use of the internet for campaigning and fundraising. As one commentator put it in 2008 regarding the abundance of small campaign contributions, "money [is] a legitimate expression of enthusiasm and a form of participation."[31] Two years later the majority opinion of the Supreme Court validated this sentiment when it granted free speech rights to corporations and deregulated corporate campaign contributions, which in turn engendered gross political inequality by violating three of the five criteria for democracy: effective participation, gaining enlightened understanding, and control over the agenda.[32] The exponential increase in political advertising by super-PACs diminishes the average citizen's ability to participate, manipulates understanding of political issues, and forwards an agenda of special interests. As Dahl explains in defense of his criteria for determining a politically equal democracy, "if some members are given greater opportunities than others for expressing their views, their policies are more likely to prevail."[33] The United States in this post-*Citizens United* era is such a democracy because an inequality of political resources has been enshrined by the traditional authority of the Supreme

Court with their logic of equality in which corporations are equal to people and money is equal to speech.

Recent interventions of law that codify an inequality of political resources by privileging financial participation are possible because of the nation's traditional belief in the validity of majority rule; a belief that severely distorts the principle of equality and equal representation by granting legitimate decisive authority to a minority. Since *Citizens United,* the Supreme Court has at least seven more times ruled 5-4 in favor of the rights of corporations over the rights of citizens.[34] Such a decisive system is justified by what Dahl terms a "strong" argument for majority rule, according to which majority support is not only "necessary" but also "sufficient."[35] Through a Socratic dialogue, Dahl explores the arguments for and against majority rule as an appropriate and effective strategy of democratic governance. In favor of majoritarianism, Dahl's dialogue posits quantitative arguments according to which majority rule: affords greater self-determination, increases the probability of coming to a "correct" decision, and maximizes satisfaction ("utility" in the classical sense).[36] However, the critic in Dahl's dialogue rejects the assumptions upon which a "strong" majority argument is made: bipartisan competition unjustifiably simplifies the complexities of social possibilities, systems of representation can result in minority groups winning a majority of seats, and low voter participation results in de facto minority rule.[37] In the United States, the democratic process is decided by a "plurality majority," in which the position or person with the largest number of votes wins. Given the nation's relatively low voter turnout, candidates claim total representation by acquiring minority support. Consider the following examples from the 2010 national senate races.[38]

- Lowest margin of victory (3 candidates)
  Alaska – Lisa Murkowski won 39% of the vote with a 48.4% turnout rate
    Meaning - 18.8% of Alaska's voting age population chose Murkowski to represent them, allowing her to represent a total voting age population of 529,804.

- Lowest margin of victory (2 candidates)
  Illinois – Mark Kirk won 48% of the vote with a turnout rate of 38.3%
    Meaning – 18.3% of Illinois' voting age population chose Kirk to represent them, allowing him to represent a total voting age population of 9,736,803.

- Highest margin of victory
  North Dakota – John Hoeven won 76% of the vote with a turnout rate of 45.4%
    Meaning – 34.5% of North Dakota's voting age population chose Hoeven to
    represent them, allowing him to represent a voting age population of 526,344.

Not even in the state with the highest voter turnout (Maine, 54.4%) did a 2010 elected official acquire the support of a majority of citizens, and yet, such politicians claim to represent the whole of their constituencies. In our system of plurality-majority, when large portions of the electorate decline to participate, the result is a representational government run by officials who express the views and interests of a minority of the citizenry. This is not to suggest that higher voter turnout would necessarily result in a more accurate representational government considering the inequality of vote enshrined within the Constitution. Note the difference of representation within the Senate. While each of the above Senators are given one equal vote in the governance of the nation, the Senator from Illinois represents 18.5 times as many people as the Senator from North Dakota. The Senate's establishment to ensure equality between the states comes at the expense of equality between citizens and further contributes to the U.S. as a nation governed by the will of minorities. The United States democratic system, believing in the logic of plurality-majority, enacts a political system where minority support is sufficient and the majority of the population is left without representation in government.

The divisiveness of recent Supreme Court interventions into the democratic process is indicative of a dual-order democratic paradox that governs the nation. First, as Dahl points out, democracy shares an uneasy relationship with capitalism because the decentralized nature of economic decisions encourages citizens to seek personal freedom and a voice in government while the attendant unequal distribution of financial capital tends to bring an unequal distribution of political capital. This paradoxical relationship between democracy and capitalism may be felt by every democratic nation; but in the U.S., another democratic paradox is created

by the nation's system of majority rule. U.S. representative government functions according to a logic of plurality-majority by which the greatest number of votes is sufficient rationale for a person or position to succeed. However, in every instance, that sufficiency fails to gather the support of a majority of the population. U.S. democracy creates its own paradox in which claims to majority rule result in the rule of minorities who commandeer total representation.

Conclusion

An examination of authoritative interventions into the scenarios of democracy as performed in the related cultural spheres of entertainment and politics revealed the extent to which the electoral process has been commoditized to the diminishment of political equality, while in turn favoring traditionally privileged identities. Electoral rights were constricted under *Gore v Bush* in 2000. *American Idol,* beginning in 2001, offered universal suffrage toward selecting a national representative. With its text-message voting, *American Idol* conditioned the public toward a paradigm in which voter concern combined with access to financial capital overrides any notion of electoral equality. The Supreme Court in 2010 made this paradigm of commoditized democracy into the law of the land. Such is the dialectical rotation between politics and entertainment.

In 2009, the judges of *American Idol* performed their own intervention into the process of democracy; an intervention that propagated ethnic and gendered stereotypes in order to privilege an identity of white, Christian, heterosexual, rural/southern male. The young single mother (Caucasian), guided by the judge's suggestions, attempted to embody an overtly sexual identity for which she was harshly criticized. Women face a paradox in this culture, which *American Idol* is not exempt from performing: they are at once made into sexualized objects and simultaneously repressed as sexual beings. This repression has become increasingly apparent with recent legislative attempts to control women's reproductive lives. In terms of male sexuality, entertainment again reflects the socio-political sphere. Whereas Kris Allen and Danny

Gokey's heterosexual marriages were frequently referred to, Adam Lambert could not discuss his homosexuality until the season concluded. While the movement for the rights and recognition of the LGBT community makes cultural and political gains, the tradition of privileging heterosexuals remains strong. Ethnic privileges persist as well. On *American Idol*, when the judges invoked their "save" in Season Eight, they forced the elimination of the African-American woman (she was also a mother but had a husband) and the East Indian-American man. Lil Rounds and Anoop Desai both challenged the stereotypes of the judges through song choices and singing styles that defied generic expectations. Whereas the judges were uncomfortable with Lil singing a Bette Midler song and Anoop singing soft rock, Matt Giraud (Caucasian) was praised for the slight blues timbre in his tone. Moreover, the season's winner, Kris Allen gained wide approval for adapting a Kanye West song (who famously said on live television just after Hurricane Katrina that George Bush doesn't care about black people) to evoke Kris' southern/country roots. Cultural appropriation is apparently a one-way street. While it is true that the cast selected for *American Idol* reflected some of the diversity of the nation's public, and though many of the contestants themselves performed their individuality, the judges' molding of contestant personas to the demands of the culture industry tended toward stereotyping. Moreover, the *American Idol* judges' arbitrary revocation of electoral choice served to further undermine the principle of democratic equality in the nation.

One year after the *American Idol* Judges' Save, the judges of the Supreme Court intervened again in the nation's democratic process by equating commercial speech with political speech, which violated democratic equality by privileging the ideology of the free-market. The decision in *Citizens United* imbalanced the paradoxical relation between free-market capitalism and democracy by privileging the rights of corporations over those of citizens, thereby allowing minorities from the capitalist class to dominate political discourse. Yet, this judicially decided aggravation of political equality is a mere symptom of a deeper paradox in our democratic governance. The electoral system of plurality-majority provides the nation with

126

elected officials who fail to gain the support of a majority of their constituents, leaving us with a representational government geared toward the will of a minority of the citizenry whom, thanks to *Citizens United*, have the financial capital to exercise and amplify their own political will.

  American Idol and the concurrent Supreme Court cases referred to here demonstrate the extent to which the nation's understanding and experience of democracy is subsumed within the market logic of capitalism. The democratic crisis initiated with the 2000 presidential election and the subsequent Supreme Court intervention required a ritual of redress. Yet enacting that ritual in the sphere of commercial culture resulted in a commoditization of the democratic gesture. *American Idol* performed a version of democracy in which an individual's ability to participate was limited only by the resources allocated into their phone plan. Capital plus concern came to define electioneering. With *Citizens United*, the Supreme Court enshrined into law this delimiting of capitalized speech. Democracy has been commoditized. Through a comparison of the scenarios of democracy played out on the stages of entertainment and politics we have witnessed the most recent repetition of the bearers of traditional authority's (monied, managerial, legal) disregard for the principle of democratic equality and a perpetuation of the privilege traditionally granted to the white, heterosexual, Christian male.

Conclusion

Scenarios of Democracy

The nation's scenarios of democracy demonstrate the ambivalence of this cherished cultural gesture and institutional practice. Situating these scenarios within the scenes of their production, I pointed to their performances as formulae for explaining the organization of social and political life that validates competition, individualism and unequal representation. Moreover, I evidenced that the repetition of these scenarios in the dual social spheres of entertainment and politics increased the commoditization of the democratic gesture while reasserting the prominence of traditionally privileged classes. The class transformation performed on *American Idol*, which is central to the American Dream and correlated to the myth of liberation, hints at the inequality of the U.S. social system and the domination felt by low-wage workers who strive to realize their full creative potential. The ritual of redress offered by *American Idol* reaffirmed the American Dream, but did so by commoditizing the U.S. citizen and the vote. The commodification inherent in capitalist culture threatens the nation's ideal of democratic equality, just as the emphasis on individualism and competition discourages the communitarianism that democratic governance might otherwise endorse. Yet, myth is ambivalent in its approach to the contradictions of society. As we shall see in Part Four, though materiality is distinctly tied to a liberated identity, and the hero asserts his individuality, the importance of community is affirmed as identities included in the mythic notion of the Self diversify beyond the nation's traditionally established bounds.

Dimensions of Liberation

"If you've come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Lilla Watson *and*

Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970's

The notion of liberation is a guiding force in the movement of U.S. culture. An investigation into the contemporary representations of liberation yields insights into our current, and perhaps coming, cultural experiences. The following chapters delve into the semiotics of liberation in contemporary U.S. culture and investigate liberty's paradoxical relationship with domination. First, I untangle Lee Drummond's theory of semiospace as the bounded but permeable cultural sphere comprised of paradoxical dimensions of meaning. For Drummond, myth and culture are inexorably entwined; in myth we reflect upon culture, in culture we enact myth. The productions of Hollywood, which Drummond called the "American Dreamtime," are the pre-eminent site of mythic projections for our time. Understanding Drummond's theory of myth and culture provides a foundation for analyzing the paradoxical dimensions of celluloid expressions and yields insights into current systems of meaning and

preferred identity constructions. Following an explication of Drummond's theory of semiospace, I implement his analytic strategy in order to interrogate one recent and prominent film that invokes the myth of liberation. Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino* (2008) won several awards, was monetarily successful, and gained critical praise; combine this with Eastwood's iconic cultural status and the film merits an investigation of its semiotic parameters. Chapter 10 reviews Eastwood's iconic role in the American Dreamtime, describes his final film, and conducts a semiotic analysis of its mythic dimensions in order to highlight certain shifts in the semiotics of U.S. culture. Chapter 11 continues the analysis of *Gran Torino* but does so by drawing from the recent work of Barry Spector on the myth of "American innocence." Spector's book, *Madness at the Gates of the City*, is the most recently published investigation into the mythic patterns of U.S. culture, and Western civilization more broadly; in it, he argues that a myth of innocence serves to conceal the guilt of U.S. patterns of domination. In the final chapter of this dissertation I iterate how the myth of liberation converges with the myth of innocence and assert that *Gran Torino* serves as a projection of the possibility for moving U.S. semiospace out of its historic patterns of violence by acceding to guilt and embracing the Other. After all, Drummond's conception of semiospace is more than a theory for analyzing film as myth; in describing the reciprocity between thought and action, between myth and reality, Drummond's work suggests that when we reconstruct the dimensions of myth and re-plot the expressions of the Dreamtime, we will reshape reality.

Chapter 9

On Semiospace

In *American Dreamtime: a cultural analysis of popular movies and their implications for a science of humanity,* Lee Drummond transforms our understanding of myth and culture by conceiving of the theory of semiospace in which culture is a process of specious evolution dialectically intertwined with myth as a process of human consciousness.[1] Decimating previously established anthropological theories; Drummond reconstructs a semiotic paradigm, bolstered by an alignment with mathematical physics. He attacks structural-functionalist and materialist theories for approaching myth and culture as linguistically determined and structurally static while chastising the discipline of anthropology more generally by asserting that the anthropocentrism of the field negates claims to scientific inquiry. Drummond resituates humanity as the object of anthropological inquiry by placing people somewhere between particle and cosmos. Drawing from scholarship in the fields of primatology, quantum mechanics, fractal geometry, and cosmology Drummond presents a scientifically supported theory of culture as a conceptualized space of infinite dimensionality, and myth as its virtual counterpart. Declaring mass media the primary site of mythic production for industrial cultures, Drummond valorizes the study of globalized forms of popular culture. Drawing from the Australian Aboriginal concept of the Dreaming as the mythic world of past and present, Dreamtime is the name he gives to that part of a culture's semiospace in which mythic thought is given narrative manifestation. In analyzing the Dreamtime of Hollywood as dream-factory, Drummond offers insights into the semiotic dimensions of a broadly defined "America." In this chapter, I explain how Drummond revolutionizes theories of myth and culture by reconsidering the science of humanity. I clarify his conception of the semiotic dimensionality of culture and myth as generative processes tied up in the creation of perpetually shifting human identities. With his

theory of Semiospace, Drummond blends the concepts of myth and culture into one theoretical paradigm that recognizes the creativity and curiosity of human thought and action.

Revolutionizing Theories of Myth and Culture

Lee Drummond criticizes preceding theories of myth and culture for not adequately taking into account human agency and cultural generativity, and in doing so, revolutionizes the study of humanity. Drummond's criticism mirrors Diana Taylor's irritation with the privileging of language and text within the Western tradition.[2] For Drummond's part, he sees Anthropology's major failures as resulting from a disciplinary preoccupation with language and what he terms a "Ptolemaic conception of humanity."[3] Always conscious of the long evolution of human speciation, Drummond asserts that a theory of "man" cannot privilege linguistic expressions for the simple evolutionary fact that humanity predates language.[4] Nor should scholarship privilege people as some exceptional creature existing outside of the laws of physics and biological evolution. Therefore, anthropology needs to express a theory of humanity that recognizes the ever-changing, indeed generative, sentience of our peculiar speciation. In this section, I outline Drummond's criticism of anthropological theories of myth and culture as well as the portions of scholarship he did retain in developing his theory of semiospace. I will then introduce semiospace as the revolutionary merging of culture as a process and myth as its driving force. With Drummond's conception of semiospace, myth and culture are nearly synonymous, for together they comprise the dialectical process by which homosapiens make meaning out of the chaos of their existences and in doing so make themselves human.

Drummond deconstructs preceding theories of myth and culture because such theories present human organization as far tidier than reality merits. He criticizes the rigidity of structural-functionalism by pointing to the irony that such a theoretical construction was developed during the cultural chaos of the 20th century.[5] He disagrees with Lévi-Strauss' description of myth as narrative resolutions of socially structured yet fixed binaries by denying

the prominence of narrative, the possibility of resolution, and the fixedness of any society's

binary oppositions.[6] Drummond's criticisms are a reaction against anthropological tendencies to

consider language as the foundation of culture and to therefore situate myth inside of language -

most notably Roland Barthes materialist theory in which myth is built up on top of language.

Yet, Drummond demonstrates the grave mistake of such an approach by asserting that myth

stretches farther back into the species' primordial past than our ability to speak.[7] Drummond

also corrects James Fernandez' theory of culture as a "quality space" by noting that the linguistic

device of metaphoric predication is a clumsy utterance following the visceral/perceptual

experience that is at the heart of myth.[8] Moreover, Drummond criticizes Victor Turner, who

moved cultural theory away from "texts" and towards "processes," for theorizing an orderly and

predictable transition from structure to anti-structure and back again.[9] In all, Drummond's

objections to the ideas of preceding scholars stem from his insistence that a theory of humanity

needs to recognize the exceedingly long and tumultuous evolution of human thought and action.

 While Drummond levies many criticisms against anthropological theories he also praises

the respective scholars for at least a portion of the theory he assess and thereby gathers

disparate elements from which to build his own theory of culture and myth. Drummond is

intrigued by Edmund Leach's call for anthropologists to approach culture in a mathematical way

so as to discern cultural patterns as an "assemblage of variables" rather than an "assemblage of

things."[10] Moreover, Drummond recognizes a latent mathematical construction in the spatial

and geometric models of Lévi-Strauss and regrets the tendency of anthropologists to view these

models as mere "heuristic devices."[11] Freeing Lévi-Strauss' binaries from their linguistic bounds,

Drummond perceives a cultural theory of semiotic dimensionality. In conceiving of culture as

inherently dimensional, Drummond aligns his thought with that of Fernandez's "quality space,"

which he calls the "cornerstone" of his own work.[12] Although he disagrees with Fernandez'

prioritization of language, he adamantly embraces the theory of culture as, quoting Fernandez,

"a quality space of 'n' dimensions or continua, and society is a movement about of pronouns

within this space."[13] This conception of culture as being comprised of an unspecified number of interrelated continua is affirmed by Turner's dynamic processual analysis, given its focus on the movement between structure and anti-structure.[14] Furthermore, Drummond advances Turner's interest in ambiguity and paradoxes by insisting that such contradictions are not limited to liminality but are the very continua upon which the semiotic space of culture is composed.[15] Additionally, Drummond embraces the interstitial nature of Turner's liminality, and applies this "betwixt and between" to his conception of the Dreamtime as the mythic realm of virtual realities. Finding the confluence in the ideas put forward by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner and James Fernandez, Lee Drummond acts as a bricoleur for theories of culture and myth, establishing a solid disciplinary foundation for the theory of semiospace.

In order to understand Drummond's declaration that culture is a semiotic space, hence semiospace, each of these terms requires further explanation. Semiotics is the name given to the study of signs and symbols. Drummond adopts this term for his scholarly approach, anthropological semiotics, as "the search for patterns of meaning in cultural productions."[16] The prefix "semio-", for Drummond, refers not so much to the signs and symbols as to the meanings they represent, for he is only interested in specific representations in so far as they generate meaning within a given culture. "Space" for Drummond has a dual definition. Fundamentally, it refers to the experienced physical reality that phenomenologists call the *Umwelt* (the world around).[17] Drummond's interest in this mundane definition of space centers on his assertion that the *Umwelts* of human cultures are composed of conceptually meaningful dimensions. Semiospace is of both body and mind. The "space" of the world around is ordered according to patterns of meaning derived from the processes of human consciousness. The mind, as "endowed with a classificatory force," attempts to order into a "quality space" its experiences of the world around.[18] In each case, space is dimensional; but the dimensions of culture and myth are far more complex and malleable than a basic understanding of physics and geometry would suggest. The dimensions of consciousness and culture that Drummond calls "axes of meaning"

are comprised of the paradoxes of existence that each human encounters and each culture defines in its own variation; the most elemental of which are: Life – Death, Self – Other, and Animal – Machine.[19] Culture and myth, as processes and products of human thought and action, are collective attempts to wrangle with these paradoxical dimensions of sentient existence. Semiospace is the name given to these meaningful dimensions of experience as they are both conceived of in the human mind (myth) and enacted by the human body (culture). According to Drummond's theory, through the semiospaces of myth and culture humans engage in a dialectical process, a kind of Freirian praxis, in which reflection on the world around (myth) drives human action within the world (culture).

Lee Drummond's theory of semiospace revolutionizes our understanding of myth and culture by theorizing the dialectical process behind cultural transformation. In conceiving of semiospace, Drummond draws from and adapts preceding theories of myth. While he accepts the near-geometric constituent units of Lévi-Strauss, he disavows the resolution of static binaries, positing instead that myth and culture are semiotic attempts to wrestle with the irresolvable paradoxes of human life. From Victor Turner he avows the processual nature of human culture as well as the interstitialness of liminality as crucial concepts in his theory of semiospace, even though he denies an application of ritual's orderliness to culture in general. The essential factor in Drummond's cultural theory is his co-optation of Fernandez's notion of culture as spatial, or dimensional, in which movements upon and among continua are central to the dynamic processes through which meanings are made. Overall, Drummond discredits the tendency in prior theories to approach myths and cultures as "texts" with well defined structural boundaries. Instead, he offers the theory of semiospace in which myth and culture are the processes of thought and action undertaken by humans as we attempt to order a rather chaotic and uncertain world.

The Science of Consciousness and Culture

While Drummond reconsiders anthropological theories in building his notion of semiospace, he finds further support for his description of the processes of myth and culture in the far more scientific disciplines of biology, physics, and mathematics. Eager to revitalize anthropology, which he views as floundering in irrelevance, Drummond encourages his disciplinary fellows to look to the physical sciences where decades of research offer potential insights into the processes of culture.[20] Engaging with theories from the fields of geometry, quantum mechanics, cosmology and primatology, Drummond evinces that myth and culture, as processes of human thought and action, function according to the same principles as the physical world. Fractal geometry buttresses his notion of semiospace as comprised of an infinite array of shifting dimensionality. Quantum mechanics and cosmology verify his description of the virtuality and multiplicity of semiospace and its mythic sphere of the Dreamtime. Primatology validates the universal dimensions he identifies and supports his assertion that culture makes us human and that myth will lead the way as we evolve into "Something Else."[21] In this section, I articulate the ways in which Drummond utilizes scientific theories to rethink the "science of humanity" and develop the concept of semiospace. In describing semiospace Drummond offers a few compelling parables; one of which I will summarize in order to round out Drummond's vision of myth and culture as driving the evolutionary project of humanity. By finding support from research within the physical sciences, Drummond articulates a theory of both culture and consciousness that moves away from the humanism of anthropological theory.[22]

Throughout *American Dreamtime*, Drummond reminds the reader of the long trajectory of sapience and the relative recentness of the current sentience that we call *homosapien sapiens* in order to posit that culture and myth, rather than being merely products of humanity, actually precede humanity, and indeed, are indispensible aspects of the evolutionary processes that have made us human.[23] In support of his anti-humanistic theory of culture, Drummond references

research on our mammalian relatives. Citing Erving Goffman's description of the mammalian surround (an elliptically shaped area around an animal that offers a field of security as well as a path for flight when breached), Drummond avows that a dimension of predator-prey remains a keenly felt paradox of human experience.[24] While Drummond uses this bit of knowledge to explain the prominence of chase scenes in movies such as *James Bond*; more significantly, with the mammalian surround, Drummond finds ethological corroboration for his conception of semiospace as a cultural surround (Umwelt), a permeable and flexibly bounded sphere of everyday existence, cognitively defined.[25] Drummond also utilizes the work of primatologists to evince that conceptualization and symbolic awareness were present in our earliest hominid ancestors. He references studies by Vernon Reynolds and Katherine Milton that describe the "open-group" system of some primates' social organizations in which (thanks to omnivorous eating habits and the correlated foraging) group members are cognizant of other group members who are not immediately present.[26] Drummond draws two important points from this organization of primate thought and action. First, this research supports his articulation of the self-other (kinship-ethnicity) dimension of consciousness as fundamental to the process of human adaptation. Humanity evolved already possessing a consciousness geared toward sorting out just who is and who is not a member of the community. Moreover, he notes that the open-group primate ability to conceptualize that which is not present is profoundly significant because it points to a recognition of absence and the inherent ambivalence of human sentience. The spider monkey or chimpanzee, aware of its absence from its group, will gather food to share when absence becomes presence. The ambivalence experienced here gives further credence to Drummond's declaration that humanity is a void, an absence at the center of things, which the process of mythic consciousness fills with meaning.[27] This premise, supported in far greater detail than this example from primatology affords, furthers his anti-Cartesian perspective in which he subverts Descartes' famous *cogito,* declaring instead "I am not, therefore I think."[28] I am not with my group, therefore I think of them. Or, I am not an animal, but I'm like an animal,

therefore, what am I? Paradox marks our existence and has done so since before we became human. In referencing zoological scholarship, Drummond thoroughly disavows a humanistic approach to the study of people while insisting that the more than four million years of human development were a result of culture as an evolutionary process of cognition and action aimed at sorting out existential paradoxes.[29]

Drummond crafts an analytic paradigm in which humanity is positioned between particle and cosmos, cultures are comprised of an infinite array of shifting dimensions, and myth affords us a realm of multiple existences and virtuality. Drawing from the writings of Benoit Mandelbrot, Roger Penrose and James Gleick, Drummond presents a view of both the physical world and the world of myth/culture as infinitely and unpredictably evolving. He utilizes Penrose's description of "phase space" to certify his presentation of culture as a space composed of shifting dimensions or vectoral fields; mathematical theory therefore validates Fernandez' description of culture.[30] Drummond refers to Mandelbrot's work in geometry in order to deny any clear-cut boundaries between dimensions; rather one seemingly solid object (or a firm ideology) blurs into the next due to a series of transitional (fractional or fractal) dimensions.[31] Furthermore, he asserts that the parameters of said dimensions will change along with a change in perspective, a concept also central to Quantum Mechanics and Chaos theory. Particles (the basis of all matter), Drummond relates, are sometimes solids, sometimes waves, and sometimes, in two places at once. Quantum Mechanics teaches that the physical world, far from being what it appears to be, is full of multiple realities and virtuality.[32] Drummond utilizes Gleick's work on Chaos theory in order to assert that cultures, like particles and baby universes, are inherently unfixed and unpredictable.[33] Intriguingly aligning the properties of sub-atomic particles and celestial bodies with those of human cultures, Drummond affirms what anthropology had generally rejected: there are multiple possibilities of existence, contradictory states of being, virtual realities and infinite dimensions.

In order to elucidate his view of culture as an evolutionary process and a space of cognitive dimensions, Drummond offers the parable of an ant named Rene.[34] Imagine a stadium filled to the brim with bubbles of all different sizes: house-sized, kitchen soap-sized, shaving cream-sized. Some bubbles are inside of other larger bubbles. Some bubbles collapse and break into smaller bubbles, small bubbles merge to make larger bubbles. On the grassy floor of this stadium of churning bubbles is an anthill. One ant emerges, Rene (irreverently named after Descartes), and proceeds on its characteristically ant-like, inexplicably winding path from one bubble to the next. Rene's emergence and meandering through a frothy physical world represents the sentient speciation of what became humanity. Each bubble stands for a permeable and fuzzily defined sphere of cultural expression.[35] From one bubble to the next, Rene (that is to say our species) moves from one cultural surround, one *Umwelt*, one semiospace to the next. Yet, there is one more crucial element to this parable that makes these bubbles semiotically significant and therefore representations of semiospace. Drummond describes this bubble-filled stadium as being transected by three immense cables or poles, each labeled at their respective ends as: "life" and "death," "self" and "other," "animal" and "machine." These are Drummond's elemental dimensions of meaning, the fundamental paradoxes of sentient existence, the essential dilemmas that each culture attempts to sort out, the continua upon which each culture situates itself as it struggles to make meaning out of a world it both inhabits and creates. While Drummond positions these poles across the stadium in his parable of Rene, it would be more accurate to state that each bubble (semiospace) contains these dimensions but conceives of them and expresses them differently. If the stadium is the universe, or at least the physical world, and that ant is humanity, then each bubble represents a different cultural sphere, a "quality space" of differentially expressed meanings, one of many semiospaces. Then, imagining multiple ants leaving their anthill for the bubbles of the stadium down their own winding ant paths, Drummond offers a vision of cultural variation. With the parable of Rene, Drummond constructs an allegory for the evolutionary trajectory of human

existence as well as a description of semiospace as a theory accounting for the immense diversity and complexity of human thought and action.

In his efforts to correct anthropology's "insupportable conceit" that distinguished humanity apart from the rest of the world, Drummond turns to the physical and biological sciences in order to develop his theory of semiospace as both the processes and products of our human evolution.[36] Citing primatologists, Drummond evinces that conceptualization, particularly of an absence, was a significant part of consciousness prior to our current speciation, and that such cognitive awareness along with our "artifactual intelligence" (our ability to make things), made us human. The mammalian surround evidences an innate relation between the physical environment and the mind, with the latter constantly surveying the former and delimiting a physical space of comfort and security; this gives credence to Drummond's conception of semiospace as a cultural surround. Drummond depicts that cultural surround, in his parable of Rene, as a permeable but bounded sphere comprised of at least three semiotic dimensions. The unfixedness of boundaries is affirmed through reference to fractal geometry, which also validates an infinite array of possible dimensions of meaning. Asserting that such spheres are overlapping, collapsing and converging, Drummond offers a view of both cultural variation and transformation. Through reference to quantum mechanics, he certifies the reality of multiple realities and virtualities; which while further explaining cultural variation, more significantly supports his notion of the Dreamtime (the semiospace of mythic consciousness) as a world of virtuality existing concomitantly with the world of experience. As a post-Cartesian anthropologist, Drummond intriguingly turns to the fields of biological and physical science in order to assert that humanity is bound by the same laws and properties as the physical world; therefore, consciousness as the expression of the human mind functions in the same manner as the rest of creation in its effort to process the paradoxes of experience.

The Processing of Paradoxes

With semiospace, Drummond presents a theory in which myth and culture are dialectical processes of thought and action through which we orient ourselves within the paradoxical dimensions of our sentient existences; Dreamtime is the term he gives to that mythic part of a culture's semiospace, the virtual reality where people explore their existential dilemmas and generate their culture to come. He adapts this term, Dreamtime, from W.E.H. Stanner's writings on the Aboriginal Australian concept of "The Dreaming," a mythic realm of simultaneous past and present that exists in parallel with the physical world of experience.[37] As a scholar of South American myth and culture, Drummond insists that the concept of the Dreaming and other indigenous forms of myth-making differ little from the industrialized world's preoccupation with the image-making industry of Hollywood.[38] He asserts that narratives of either Hollywood films or indigenous storytelling are both culturally specific expressions through which people question the circumstances of their existence, explore the issues at the center of their daily concerns, and try out scenarios for the future. Whether told around the hearth in a rural village or projected before the folding seats of an urban movie house, Drummond insists that narrative myths pose alternative realities in which people play with the possibilities of their existence and explore the ambivalence of their identities. In *American Dreamtime*, Drummond turns his attention to a broadly defined and distinctly non-nationalistic America that he describes as, "an emergent global cultural system of consumer capitalism."[39] In conducting a cultural analysis of this post-modern, post-industrial semiospace called "America" he analyzes "supergrossers," those exceptionally successful films that seep beyond their theater screenings and into quotidian culture: *Star Wars, E.T., Jaws,* and *James Bond.*[40] Drummond's analysis of each of these films-as-myth relates "American" culture's exploration of the existential dilemmas represented by the three basic semiotic dimensions (life-death, self-other, animal-machine). In the following paragraphs, I will clarify these three axes of meaning and suggest a host of related dimensions significant within the consciousness of U.S. commercial culture. By analyzing the semiotic

141

dimensions of the Dreamtime, Drummond offers a methodology for investigating cultural ambivalence and our attempts to define our identities.

We are animals who make artifacts that remake the world; therefore, where we position ourselves upon the continua of Animal-Machine is essential to our cultural constructions. The artifacts or machines we make are central to the organization and expression of culture. Our relationships with animals and machines are ambivalent; they support us but they also threaten us. In his analysis of *Jaws* (great white shark threatens sea-side town), Drummond notes that the film was released along with the growing environmental movement and the Endangered Species Act; he purports that Spielberg's film was a mythic clarification that not all animals need our support.[41] Similarly, Drummond points out that while machines greatly enhance our lives they are also dangerous inventions of our artifactual intelligence. Cars may give us mobility but a huge number of us die in them every year. Drummond's analysis of *James Bond* and *Star Wars* describes a semiotic paradigm in which machines of the state (the death star) or international corporations (*Bond* villains) are threatening, but machines in the hands of proficient individuals aid in liberation or escape from the oppressive apparatuses of the corporate state.[42] Films-as-myths guide our understanding of our ambivalent relationships with animals and machines and are explored in conjunction with an array of related dimensions of meaning.

- Predator-Prey: This ancient dimension of consciousness is generally played out closer to the semiotic pole of Animal. For Drummond, *James Bond* is the prey forever getting the better of his pursuer.[43]
- Primitive-Civilized: Until recently - if not concurrently - civilizational standing has been determined (by the "civilized") in terms of the complexity of a peoples' artifactual life. Moreover, when the term savagery is used in place of primitive, it implies an animalistic nature, violent and irrational.

- Production-Consumption: Production (apart from reproduction) is not a uniquely human activity but a vastly significant one, while consumption is essential to all life forms. Curiously, as we saw in Part 2, production is displaced as a societal ideal in favor of consumption. Of course, films-as-myths can present a different perspective than that of dominant economic ideology. James Cameron's supergrosser, *Avatar*, signified the injustice of unrestrained consumption.[44]

The dimension of Self-Other characterizes the paradoxical nature of our cultural experiences as social beings. We are simultaneously ourselves, and the Other to someone else. When this axis is explored in the Dreamtime, the multiple-realities or our identities are given expression. Moreover, unexpected positionings challenge our conceptions of who can count as members of our communities. Drummond analyzes *E.T.* to be a reframing of the Self-Other axis, with the alien being positioned right in the middle of the domestic space, while representatives of state authority are firmly held outside as Other.[45] Here, the Self-Other dimension reveals its entanglement with other axes.

- Individual-Community: This dilemma is at the heart of many political struggles. What impositions can the community make upon the individual? Can the individual find his/her place in the community or must the individual pursue his/her identity outside of communally sanctioned ideals? The struggle between Capitalism and Communism/Socialism was, in part, a wrestling over this dimension of meaning with the former celebrating the individual and the latter prioritizing the collective. In contemporary politics, Conservatives and Liberals argue over how to balance personal freedom with social responsibility.

- Female-Male: For many people, gender is a clear-cut distinction; yet, thanks to Queer theory, this axis of meaning is recognized more as a continuum than a binary opposition.

- Kinship-Ethnicity: The Self-Other distinction is also thought of in terms of group identities. In Drummond's parlance, Kinship need not be limited to biological kin but extends to any identity of the Self associated with a group such as nationality or religion. He positions Ethnicity against Kinship as a term for any group distinction of Otherness.[46] As Drummond notes, the Kinship-Ethnicity axis of meaning is a dimension of experience far too tied up with the third elemental dilemma of human existence.

Matters dealing with the Life-Death dimension of our humanity truly confound us and we have generated an infinite diversity of cultural patterns that give meaning to this passionately contested paradox. As central as this semiotic axis is to existential reality, its manifestations within the Dreamtime are equally profuse. Drummond posits *Star Wars* as a quintessential example of the Life-Death dimension in film with its opposition between the *Force* and the *Dark Side*.[47] As is always the case, this dilemma is performed in relation to other semiotic dimensions: Gift-Theft, Privilege-Exploitation, Wealth-Poverty, Growth-Decay, War-Peace.

The dimensions of culture through which we make meaning out of the chaos of lived reality are similarly constructed in the virtual world of the Dreamtime, that semiotic space of mythic consciousness. Drummond's assertion that films are the manifestations of mythic thought for a post-industrial, post-modern world validates the study of popular culture within anthropology and offers an analytic methodology for investigating these profuse performances of myth. Through film, we explore the semiospace we inhabit, pushing the boundaries of its multiple dimensions. For Drummond's part, he focuses on the three universally experienced paradoxes of Life-Death, Self-Other, and Animal-Machine. Yet, by supporting his theory of

semiospace with ideas from fractal geometry and quantum mechanics he recognizes the infinite range of cultural dimensionality. By analyzing dimensions of the Dreamtime, we gain greater understanding of the mythic meanings behind cultural generativity.

Conclusion

Drummond's description of myth and culture as semiotic processes of human evolution is so appealing because it recognizes the profound creativity of the human species while whole-heartedly rejecting a humanistic arrogance. Rather than declaring meaning making a distinctly human activity, Drummond demonstrates that semiotic operations preceded humanity and brought our speciation about.[48] Drummond's application of theories from the physical sciences to the study of humanity disavows the nature/culture divide that lay at the foundation of the anthropological discipline. Culture does not exist apart from the natural world and myth cannot be confined to language; myth and culture are two sides to the dialectical process of human thought and action. While myth and culture are inseparable, Drummond distinguishes between the two, writing that "myth has primacy because it is our means of working through and of situating ourselves within a cognitized world, or *Umwelt*, which we construct and continually modify through our invention and use of artifacts…Culture is the accumulating, shifting residue of ongoing conceptual *and* artifactual systems people have developed over the ages, on their way to becoming people and, quite probably, something other than people."[49] Through myth, we think about culture; through culture, we enact myth. This dialectic between myth and culture is the process through which the semiospace of culture is generated. In our present semiospace of "America," Hollywood films provide us with the mythic virtual worlds in which we work through our paradoxical existences. Given Drummond's affinity for Chaos theory, he advocates for the "indeterminacy" of cultural change, writing that culture, "will take a turn, and one that we cannot foresee."[50] Yet, that which is indeterminate is not uninfluencable. If myth is a force behind cultural generativity, then changes in myth will bring about changes in culture. Here in

145

lies Drummond's most remarkable contribution: for those of us interested in artistic activism and cultural change, Drummond's theory of semiospace suggests a compositional tactic. Purposefully altering the semiotic dimensions of the Dreamtime could change the semiotic structures of the real world. Drummond's theory of semiospace not only revolutionizes our understandings of myth and culture while aligning the properties of human consciousness with those of particles and cosmos; he also offers a theory of cultural transformation.[51]

Chapter 10

Death of the Gunfighter

In the Dreamtime of Hollywood films, the identity of the gunfighter takes priority, and he resolves the dilemmas of semiospace through the implementation of violence. However, an examination of recent productions by one of the film industry's pre-eminent mythmakers alerts us to the demise of this dominant identity and the reconfiguration of semiospace. Clint Eastwood is an iconic Dreamtime figure with performances that embody the preferred masculinity of U.S. semiospace. But Eastwood's films of late have attempted to move masculinity away from violence. For this reason, many scholars and critics have praised Eastwood as a re-visionary. In the first section of this chapter, I investigate the ambivalence in scholarly critiques of Eastwood's more recent films in order to assert that the revisions seen in his Dreamtime constructions present an uncertainty over how to move masculinity away from violence. *Gran Torino* (2008) was most successful at reimagining the hero's relationship to violence; therefore, I focus my own semiotic analysis on this final Eastwood film. In order to conduct this analysis I follow Clifford Geertz's advice and present a "thick description" of the film.[1] Finally, I utilize Drummond's theory of semiospace in order to explore the axes of meaning constructed in *Gran Torino* as both revision and reiteration. While a lot of our Dreamtime heritage remained intact in *Gran Torino*, the film offered striking transformations to semiospace that include the acceptance of the ethnic other, the gradual but final abandonment of violence by the hero, and the death of the gunfighter.

Eastwood as Icon

With a career spanning six decades, multiple genres, a generous cache of awards, and a political office, Clint Eastwood is an icon of U.S. culture and its Dreamtime realm. An actor, director, producer and composer, Eastwood's creations have dominated the box office and

permeated popular culture with performances of a persona that has acted as a synecdoche of U.S. manhood through the cultural shifts of the post-modern age. Accepting Drummond's contention that films are mythic versions of semiospace in which we explore our culture's axes of meanings and embodied identities, and acknowledging Eastwood's iconic status as representative of hegemonic masculinity, a studying of Eastwood's films reveals the semiotic movements of national culture over the past half-century. While this chapter can not embark on such a thorough and daunting analysis I will point to the vectoral shifts in this filmmaker's semiotic constructions and refer to the critical debates surrounding the ambivalence of Eastwood's Dreamtime visions that contain an overall thematic arc in which the definition of masculinity struggles to break free from its association with violence.

Certain films in Eastwood's career have been praised as revisionistic; they break with standard genre points and reorganize the semiotic dimensions into something unexpected. The "Spaghetti Westerns" directed by Sergio Leone that propelled Eastwood into stardom instigated this revisionist career path by transforming the Western hero into an opportunist motivated by money rather than altruism.[2] When later Western films of Eastwood's returned a noble purpose to the hero's quest, the antagonism was not a mere reiteration of ethnic difference so common in the genre, but demonstrated class conflict instead. In *Pale Rider* and *High Plains Drifter*, the hero approached divine status as a "preacher" defending miners from a dominating capitalist, and an avenging angel of death exacting retribution on a corrupt Caucasian town. Eastwood's developing persona of the righteous gunfighter continued as his Dreamtime environment shifted to *Dirty Harry's* urban streets, performing a masculinity unambiguously tied to violence. When Eastwood as director did manage to portray divergent gendered identities (i.e. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*), Eastwood as actor was notably absent, which Luis Mainar suggests was because his screen persona of hegemonic masculinity was too at odds with the subordinated identities being performed.[3] The final decade of his career brought Eastwood immense praise for his films' questioning of the relationship between violence and masculinity. In *Unforgiven*,

Eastwood returned to the Western genre and subverted many of its semiotic codes.[4] The aging anti-hero, Will Munny, was unpracticed and inept at both shooting and horsemanship. Women played a central role in the plot as prostitutes holding moral authority while Munny, drawn to the cash reward that accompanied a call for justice, was full of moral doubt. The violence in *Unforgiven* was brutal and shameful. The audience was led to question the social value of violence and the role of storytelling (and filmmaking) in society's unrealistic and unhealthy glorification of violence.[5] While Eastwood's overall career has displayed shifts in the American Dreamtime, the final decade of films present a distinct interrogation of the dominance of a violent masculine identity.

However, not all scholars and critics agree that Eastwood's attempts to move away from violence have been successful. While *Unforgiven* was the most clearly revisionistic of Eastwood's latter films, many scholars interpret the narrative as eventually reinscribing the hegemonic culture of male violence. Though the film displays violence as agonizingly brutal and largely ineffective, it still climaxes with a mythic shootout of remarkable skill and vengeance; and women remain dichotomized into faithful wives (bearers of civilization) and whores.[6] A Classics analysis of Eastwood's *Unforgiven* as reinscription rather than revision described the film as a repetition of Homer's epic, *The Iliad*; Blundell and Ormand pointed to the many similarities between the two stories.[7] In each instance, the plot is instigated by a woman's insult to a man's masculinity, drawing an aging warrior back to his long-renounced violent ways. His relinquished skills are only regained after imbibing "spirits" (whiskey, in the case of Will Munny), and the full wrath of his vengeance is not enacted over a woman but in response to the death of his beloved male friend. In comparing the two narratives, the scholars describe the continuity of the Western tradition presented in this purportedly revisionistic film, writing that the, "Western/epic reaffirms Western values that rests on a foundation of violence."[8] Kupfer, who interprets the film as a critique of the mytho-historical dialectic, recognizes the seductiveness of the final shootout and the satisfaction audiences felt when their expectations of

violent resolution were fulfilled.[9] While Eastwood has suggested the moral of his most recent films to be, "violence is ineffective in solving conflicts," his works have continued to rely upon violent action to move the plot forward.[10]

The interpretive debate over Eastwood's shifting career demonstrates the ambivalence presented in his films and alludes to the changing cultural dynamics of the post-modern era. Such vacillation is not surprising given Drummond's assertion that ambivalence is the "stuff" of myth. Eastwood as icon of U.S. culture performed the dimensional tensions of U.S. semiospace. Mainar analyzes Eastwood's authorial presence as a representative of white-American masculinity in order to articulate the arising contradictions of this hegemonic identity.[11] The early characters of Eastwood's career display a traditional white male identity of individuality and violence, embodying the contradictions of "control and spontaneity" and "serenity and power."[12] Yet Mainar argues that later shifts in Eastwood's film personas acknowledged changes in broader culture, writing that, "the traditional models of personal identity so effortlessly embodied by Eastwood...have been deeply revised at the hands of the civil rights, feminist, homosexual and ecological movements."[13] These liberation movements of the unfolding post-modern era with its preference for multiplicity challenged the hegemonic order and altered the dimensions of U.S. semiospace. Dreamtime dimensions necessarily responded in kind. In Eastwood's film personas, masculinity gained some fragility and flexibility while representations of the feminine progressed from "absence to anxiety to fear," and on to friendship.[14] Self-assertion became self-critique, but continuity would not fully yield before revision. The greatest contradiction explored in Eastwood's Dreamtime has concerned the value of violence. What some scholars have seen as revision and others as reinscription can accurately be described as an attempt at *movement* upon the semiotic axes of meaning. Ambivalence is highlighted in these semiotic movements, both across career and within a single film. Eastwood's career represents a larger social movement from the celebration of – or easy acceptance of – patriarchal violence to a critique of such violence. Yet, the critiques themselves are ambivalent. Try as they might to

150

distance masculinity from violence within the dimensions of meaning, Eastwood's latter films' fail to envision a way toward resolution, or regeneration, but through violence.

The relationship between masculinity and violence is so pervasive in the Dreamtime that it goes largely unquestioned; therefore, the profundity of Eastwood's contributions derives from making that relationship an uneasy one and attempting to move male identity away from the violent dimension of semiospace. Eastwood's Dreamtime movements have corresponded with shifts in the broader semiotics of U.S. society, which arose through the post-modern, post-colonial demands of marginalized identities for greater recognition and acceptance, and for a more accurate and inclusive revisioning of U.S. culture and history. The impulse to revise culture and history is often derided, particularly by those who wish to retain the privileges of hegemonic white patriarchy. But traditional identities have been unable to fully resist recent cultural changes because cultural change is inevitable. We wrestle with those changes in semiospace by constructing narratives in the Dreamtime. Eastwood as icon of the American Dreamtime, as "cowboy of cathartic change," offers a corpus of films that explore the shifts and contradictions of U.S. culture, with latter films performing a masculine identity struggling to move away from its "pathological connection" to violence.[15]

Describing 'Gran Torino'

An elderly man stands next to a closed coffin in a Catholic church. His grandchildren enter the pews immodestly dressed and disrespectful of church rituals. His sons discuss the inevitability of their father's disappointment in them. A chubby cheeked youthful priest stands behind the pulpit and delivers a reductionist sermon about life and death being "bittersweet."

At the widower's house, the funeral attendees mingle in subdued voices and eat. Walt Kowalski, the aging widower, avoids the company by finding more folding chairs and stepping outside.[16] From his lawn, Walt sees guests arriving at the neighbor's house and mumbles a racial slur. As Walt asks, "how many swamp rats can you get in one room," the audience views Walt

and his own house filled with mourners. Walt finds his granddaughter hiding in his garage, smoking. She admires the 1972 Gran Torino and asks what he'll do with it when he dies. Disgusted, he does not answer, and returns to the house. Answering a knock at the door, Walt is disturbed to find the neighbor, an Asian teenage boy, who asks to borrow jumper cables. Walt insultingly turns him away. The young priest finds Walt and delivers his deceased wife's last wish that Walt attend confession and attain salvation; Walt bitingly rejects him. As mourners leave, Walt is required to jump-start a guest's car and admonishes his own son to "buy American." From his back porch, Walt sees into the neighbors' yard where a party is gathered. He calls them "barbarians" when he watches a chicken being slaughtered.

The story shifts to the neighbors; their speech is subtitled. In a house full of people, the boy who had asked for jumper cables stands at the kitchen sink doing dishes while an elderly woman says he'll never be the man of the house and a middle-aged man says to be patient and he'll become a man. In the living room, the community is gathered to recognize a new baby. In a ritual of welcome, a shaman says (subtitled), "...Oh spirit of this child return home and do not wander anymore." The scene immediately shifts to Thao in the spotlessly cleaned kitchen, tossing down a towel and rushing out the screen door.

Thao walks down a rather deserted sidewalk, reading a book. A car pulls up. The Latino teenagers inside harass Thao, "is you a boy or a girl, man? I don't know." Another car comes around the corner. The driver recognizes Thao as his cousin and pulls up next to the first car. From the two cars, the Asians and Latinos argue, displaying their guns. When the Latinos drive off, Thao's cousin tells him to get in the car. He ignores them, walking on as he did during the confrontation.

Back at his house, Thao is in the front yard gardening and his sister Sue sits on the steps reading. The cousin and his friends approach and ask Thao, "Why are you doing women's work?" Thao tries to ignore them while Sue makes assertive but snide comments and retreats into the house. The cousin and friend's persist in drawing Thao into their community (gang).

Standing up he asks, "What do I have to do?" Joyfully, the cousin responds, "yeah, my little cousin be a little man." They all stand at the end of the Walt's driveway, looking into his garage at the 1972 Gran Torino.

The priest has tracked Walt down in a bar to talk to him more about confession. He promised Walt's wife; to which Walt responds, "you're kind of fond of promising things you can't deliver on, aren't you father." Walt chides the priest for his pathetic funerary sermon. The priest asks Walt what he knows about life and death. Walt relates some of the atrocities he experienced in Korea during the war. The priest responds, "You seem to know a lot more about death than you do about living." Walt accedes, "maybe so."

Walt is woken during the night to the sound of shattering glass. Looking out the window he sees a flashlight moving through his garage. He grabs a rifle from his bedroom. He catches Thao in the garage; a swinging lamp shifts the light around the room. With the gun pointed at him, Thao backs up with hands raised and stumbles over a toolbox on the floor. Walt slips in the commotion, a shot fires and ricochets as Thao hurries out the door. Walt struggles to get up as Thao runs down the alley, past his cousin's waiting car.

Following his failed initiation, Thao's cousin and friends show up at his house and try to abduct Thao. The grandma starts yelling. Sue and her mother fight with the young men as they try to drag Thao away. The fight moves onto Walt's lawn and his garden gnomes are broken. Walt appears with a rifle. The cousin's friend tries to threaten Walt but he references his time in Korea, how he killed kids that looked just like them, and that he'll do it again and sleep just fine. They retreat. Sue thanks Walt. He tells her to get off his lawn.

The next morning Walt is in his kitchen, his gun leaning against the lower cabinets. Answering a knock at the door, he finds his porch and stairs covered with gifts and flower arrangements. He questioningly approaches Sue, Thao, and their mother who are also bringing gifts. Sue tells him that he's a hero to the neighborhood, "because you saved Thao." Walt responds, "I'm not a hero." Sue says, "Too bad, they think you are," and introduces her family to

Walt, presumably for the first time. Thao apologizes to Walt for trying to steal his car. Walt throws the gifts in the trash.

The priest talks to Walt about forgiveness, entreating him to confess guilt and find peace. Walt gets a haircut and exchanges playfully insulting and crass banter with the barber.

Sue walks down a nearly deserted sidewalk with a white teenage boy. The two come upon three black teenage boys who interact with Sue misogynistically. The white youth, who bears the same markers of disenfranchised urbanity except skin color, tries to diffuse the situation but is further insulted and rejected by the black teenagers. Walt has been watching this scene from his truck and pulls up next to the youths. The young black men find it comical that an old white man would confront them. He mimes shooting each of them with his fingers making the shape of a cocked gun. Sue's harassers think he's crazy, but when Walt reveals a real pistol, they retreat. Sue gets into Walt's truck. Thus begins his cross-cultural education as Sue relates the history of how a Hmong community came to live in Detroit. She mocks his prejudice and ignorance, laughing it off; and tells Walt that Thao just doesn't know what direction to go in.

At Walt's home, he sits on the porch and watches as a neighbor's grocery bag breaks, spilling its contents on the sidewalk. Three teenage boys step over the wreckage before Thao walks across the street to help.

Walt's children come over for his birthday. They give him unwrapped gifts that point to his aging body and are kicked out after showing him pamphlets for retirement communities. The grandchildren refused to come and as Walt's son storms to the car, he says to his wife, "goddamn kids have more sense than we do."

Sue walks over to Walt's and invites him to a bar-b-que. He is reluctant but her playful insults make him comfortable and so he says, "might as well drink with strangers as drink alone." Inside she instructs him in proper Hmong etiquette. The family's shaman offers to do a reading of Walt and tells him, through Sue's translation, "People do not respect you. The way you live, your food has no flavor. You made a mistake in your past; you're not satisfied with it.

You have no happiness, it's like you're not at peace." Shaken, he retreats to an upstairs bathroom, coughs up blood and says, "I have more in common with these gooks than with my own spoiled rotten family." He goes back downstairs with Sue. She finds him later at the kitchen table surrounded by women who continually fill his plate with food and Sue takes him to the basement where the teenagers have gathered. He fixes a wobbly dryer, chats with a young girl, and admonishes Thao for not knowing how to talk to women.

Mowing his lawn, the neighbors bring more gifts to Walt. Now recognizing the food, he accepts. Sue, Thao and their mother come over and insist that Thao work off the dishonor of the attempted theft. When he comes back in the morning Walt has him count the birds on a tree. But Thao wants Walt to find something for him to do so Walt has Thao make repairs on the house across the street from him and paint Thao's own house. The neighbors begin to come to Walt with requests for Thao's help. The street looks better tended as Walt sits on his porch, and when Thao's cousins drive by, he gestures at them with gun-shaped fingers.

Walt helps Thao fix his faucet and ceiling fan, invites him into his garage, gives him some simple tools and tells Thao he can borrow anything else. They talk about how the gang is angry that he blew his initiation and failed to steal the Gran Torino.

The friendship continues to grow between Walt and his Hmong neighbors. Sue notes the irony of Thao waxing the Gran Torino and tells Walt that he's a good man; a claim he rejects. As Thao is working in Walt's garden, Walt offers to help Thao get a job in construction, "man you up a little bit." He takes Thao to the barber, with whom he has a friendly but crass relationship, so as to teach Thao how to talk like a man. He takes Thao to the hardware store and buys him tools, to be paid back out of his first paycheck.

Thao's cousin and friends find him walking in the alley, attack him, break his measuring tape and burn his check with a cigarette. When Walt finds out he retaliates by waiting outside the gang members house until only one is left inside, beats the young man up and tells him to stay away from Thao.

Sue, Thao and the lovely girl from the party, Yule, whom Walt calls "miss yumyum," are having dinner in Walt's backyard. Walt discovers that Thao and Yule have a date and insists they take the Gran Torino.

Walt sits in his living room and hears gunfire outside. Thao's house is full of bullet holes. Running inside, the grandmother and mother are screaming and Thao is bleeding from the neck. They discover that Sue is missing. When she does come home, her face is swollen and bloody. She collapses among her family who sit her in a chair. Her dress is torn and blood runs down her legs.

Walt retreats to his kitchen and smashes the glass cabinets with his fists. With blood on his hands, he sits in his living room and sheds one tear. The priest walks in the door. He looks at a photograph of a young Walt and his wife as Walt says, "Thao and Sue are never going to find peace in this world as long as that gang's around…until they go away, you know, forever."

Thao wants to attack the gang but Walt convinces him to remain calm and come back later. Walt mows his lawn, takes a bubble bath, goes to the barber, gets a suit fitted and meets the priest at the church for confession: kissing another women once, cheating on his taxes once ("it's the same as stealing"), and not being very close with his two sons. The priest asks, "is that it?" gives him ten Hail Mary's and five Our Fathers and absolves him of his sins. The priest tells him to "go in peace," and Walt responds, "Oh, I am at peace."

Thao comes to Walt's house at the appointed time. Walt leads him to the basement, pulls a small box out of a chest and pins his medal from the Korean War to Thao's shirt. Thao asks what it was like to kill a man but Walt tells him he doesn't want to know. Walt asks Thao to close the chest as he walks up the stairs. He locks Thao in the basement. Thao screams at Walt furiously. Then Walt tells him what it's like to kill a man, "goddamn awful, that's what it is. The only this worse is getting a medal of honor for it, for killing some poor kid…who just wanted to give up. I've got blood on my hands, I'm soiled…"

He takes his dog to Thao's grandma. The priest, suspicious, had taken police to the gang members' house but after waiting all day, they leave. At dusk, Walt stands outside the gang's house. One notices him from the window and they all come outside. He begins a monologue that chastises them, especially for the rape of Sue. He slowly reaches for his pocket; his adversaries all bring out guns. Walt pulls out a cigarette and pretends to slowly shoot them all with his gun-shaped hand as the neighbors look on. He asks if anybody has a light, reaching for his pocket again he begins to say a Hail Mary. He is shot countless times. His body falls on the ground, lighter in hand, blood dripping down his wrist. Thao and Sue arrive in the Gran Torino and find all of the gang members on their knees, hands behind their backs.

The brother and sister get into a cab wearing traditional Hmong attire. At the church, Walt's casket is open and half of the attendees are Hmong, sitting across the aisle from Walt's family. In the priest's sermon he says, "I knew really nothing about life or death, until I met Walt."

Thao and Sue stand in a room with Walt's family as his will is read. The house goes to the church and the Gran Torino goes to his friend, Thao. The film ends with Thao driving the Gran Torino as Walt's dog Daisy sits in the front seat.

Axes of 'Gran Torino'

Eastwood's film, *Gran Torino*, demonstrates some of the same ambivalences seen throughout his later career with performances that attempt to reposition the male hero within the Dreamtime dimensions of meaning: from hatred to friendship, violence to non-violence, and guilt to forgiveness. Previously, the hegemonic masculine hero was firmly situated in opposition to both females and an ethnic other, embodying rationality and a moral certitude behind violent actions. Eastwood films of late have undermined such assuredness and replaced it with a Dreamtime ambivalence that stems from an uncertainty of place within the semiotic dimensions of experience in this rapidly transforming world. *Gran Torino* is characteristic of Eastwood's

Dreamtime attempt to reposition the hero and reconstruct the cultural heritage of regeneration through violence. In this section, I consider the paradoxical axes identified by Drummond, as well as other related dimensions, that are explored through the film in order to demonstrate key revisions to the Dreamtime as well as the mythic elements it perpetuates. Such an analysis points to both a desire to re-envision semiospace and an inability to do so.

The dimension of Self-Other is primary in mythic thought and *Gran Torino* makes a radical break with traditional presentations of this axis. In *Madness at the Gates of the City: the Myth of American Innocence*, Barry Spector insisted that throughout the 5,000 years of Western civilization, and particularly in the U.S. context, the Self has been defined in opposition to the Other. First, women were the Other to the male Self. Then, monotheism's intolerance of diversity left us with a legacy of demonizing a religious or ethnic other. People have carried this legacy, which Spector called, "the paranoid imagination," into the present.[17] Yet in the past several decades we have experienced the unraveling of this dominant perspective, of which Eastwood's films are one loosening thread. Recall that Drummond likened the Self-Other axis to one of Kinship-Ethnicity. *Gran Torino* inverts this paradigm by presenting Walt Kowalski as alienated from his own kin while developing a familial relationship with the ethnic Other next door. Walt's emotional distance from his biological family living in the suburbs points to a related repositioning along the axis of individual-community. The hero, so often resigned to exemplify individualism, finds community not with his kin but with his immigrant neighbors in a relationship so strong that inheritance forsakes biology and is gifted to the "model-minority."[18] Whereas *Gran Torino* subverts the Self-Other paradigm in terms of ethnicity (though Blacks remain the Other) the film fails to re-envision the gendered Other. On the one hand, Walt develops a close friendship with Sue, and Thao willfully does what other men in the film call "women's work." Yet, significant portions of the film's plot are spent on masculating Thao into "men's" labor and culture (construction and crass bigotry) while the event that leads to the

158

climactic shootout is the kidnapping and rape of Sue. Woman remains the ultimate Other against which man is defined; even as the ethnic Other is, at least in part, merged with the Self.

The issue of Thao's masculinity is a central theme of the film and gets played out on the axis of Animal-Machine. With the exception of Walt's yellow Labrador, Daisy, references to animals are derogatory and dehumanizing: women are "like badgers," the neighbors are "swamp rats," and the gang members are "shrimp dicks." Machines, however, are a necessary condition of identity construction and Thao must improve his relationship with artifacts in order to develop his male identity. Walt, as the model male, is constantly attending to artifacts: ceiling fans, faucets, lawn mowers, washing machines, and of course, guns and cars. The entire motivation of the plot begins and ends with the Gran Torino - symbol of freedom, mobility, progress, and muscle. Guns on the other hand serve a more ambiguous role. This last of Eastwood's films is perhaps the first when the hero abandons his gun.

If *Unforgiven* presented an anti-hero reluctantly picking up the gun again, *Gran Torino* presents one who final gives it up. Early in the film when Walt threatens the neighborhood Hmong gang with his weapon, the community celebrates him. In the confrontation on the street with the Black youth, Walt mimes a gun with his index finger and thumb before revealing a real pistol. He repeats this gesture twice more, symbolically referencing the gun without turning to the real artifact. If Eastwood's latter creations have attempted to show, in his own words that, "violence is ineffective in solving conflict," then *Gran Torino* offers the most successful presentation of this value. But again, the performance is ambiguous. Walt may keep Thao out of the final fight, suggesting that the new model of masculinity can – or should – break from its traditional identification with violence; and Walt himself may not inflict violence in the end, but the conflict is still resolved through the shootout. The hero remains the "master of machines," to use Drummond's phrase; and desperate as he may be to break away from a masculinity linked to violence, he still cannot envision life without it.

Life and Death, the final of Drummond's three universally human semiotic dimensions bracket the entirety of the film; but the emphasis, as Spector demonstrates is characteristic of U.S. culture, is on death.[19] The film overtly questions this cultural emphasis through the character of the priest who admits that Walt knows a lot about death but suggests he knows little about life. The arc of the plot, particularly through Walt's developing relationship with his neighbors, is meant to move the hero into a more fulfilling life; and it is for the benefit of the living that he sacrifices himself. Walt's confession, which the priest presents as his wife's dying wish, is the necessary precursor of his self-sacrifice into redemption. Laid out on the lawn with arms spread like the sacrificed Christ, Walt's corpse symbolizes the death of the dominant masculine persona and its attachment to violence. Spector rightly points out that though we construct a paradox of life and death, life more accurately refers to the totality of the dimension, while the opposite of Death is Birth.[20] "The hero dies," writes Spector, "in order for something else to be born."[21] In the beginning of the film, we attend the funeral of Walt's wife and the welcoming of a Hmong baby. Then Walt as redemptive hero dies and Thao drives off not into the sunset but into a bright afternoon. At the end of the film we are left with a hero separated from violence and respectful of women, connected to his ethnic or tribal past in the midst of urban post-modernity, who labors productively in both the domestic space and in the larger community.

Analyzing the axes of *Gran Torino* allows us to explore both the shifts and continuities in the nation's semiotic constructions. Along the Self-Other dimension, the film offers a convergence of the ethnic Other with the dominant white male identity, and while the male identity incorporated some of the traditionally feminized chores, the primary female in the film remains violently abused. The Animal-Machine axis provides an opportunity for both identity construction and dehumanization. By requiring Thao to familiarize himself with artifacts, especially his acquisition of the Gran Torino, the film clearly demarcates the necessity of artifactuality to proper masculine sentience. Bracketed by Life and Death, Eastwood's final film

160

both reiterates a cultural emphasis on death – due to our love of violence – and suggests the potential for the birth of a new kind of hero. Walt's final abandonment of the tool of violence to which the hero has been so resolutely tied in our tradition, and his willing of the Gran Torino to Thao suggests the possibility of a new hero as bearer of the values of progress, mobility, and strength (muscle), comfortable in the domestic and communal spheres, and separated from the use of violence. The gunfighter dies and a new masculinity is born.

Conclusion

As an icon of U.S. culture's Dreamtime, Clint Eastwood's films have accompanied the fluctuations in U.S. semiospace over the past half-century. His initial films of the 1960's propelled him into stardom by rebuking the gunfighter's moral authority during a period when culture at large questioned the morality of war. Then, with the revival of conservativism, Eastwood performed the righteous defender of law and order with the character, Dirty Harry. Yet in the last two decades of his career, Eastwood reconsidered the relation between the hero and the value of violence in a series of revisions for which he was highly praised. Eastwood's latest films have largely been viewed as attempts to disrupt the hero's traditional relationship with violence. Yet, scholars have argued about the success of these revisions, with many asserting that his Dreamtime efforts reinscribe more than they revise. Tania Modleski critically pointed to how in *Gran Torino,* the white man saves the Hmong community, contrary to the historical reality that many Hmong died saving U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War.[22] Overall, *Gran Torino* retained the basic scenario of "the white man's burden" that structures the myth of liberation, including the rescue and brutalization of women. However, Walt's acceptance of his Hmong neighbors is quite a transformation, as is Thao's embodiment of so-called feminine traits (cultivation and domesticity). Moreover, in this final film of Eastwood's, the hero finally realizes that violence only brings more violence and so abandons his weapon. The gunfighter

confesses and dies; given the dialectical relation between myth and reality, perhaps this

Dreamtime expression bodes well for continued shifts in U.S. semiospace on the whole.

Chapter 11

Dilemmas of the Nation

The nation faces serious dilemmas; entangled in profound contradictions of its own making. Wars are waged in efforts to bring peace. The blessings of consumerism are praised while the curse of exploitation is ignored. This self-sustained ignorance allows the nation to act out what Barry Spector calls the "myth of American innocence"; "a mythology of divinely inspired new beginnings, heroic destiny and good intentions."[1] In *Madness at the Gates of the City*, Spector argues that with a myth of innocence, the nation suppresses a profound national guilt, which it then projects onto the Other through "alienation, prejudice and violence."[2] Combining a knowledge of U.S. history, Greek mythology, archetypal psychology, and various indigenous rituals and wisdoms Spector describes the pathological psychology of the U.S. as growing out of Western cultures' traditions of domination. According to Spector, the ancient indigenous myths of Europe were eroded through androcracy, monotheism, imperialism, scientific rationalism, and secularization. Western civilization became "demythologized," which is to say that mythic thinking was disconnected from ritual symbolism and became literalized in political action. Spector avows that as Western civilization lost its "indigenous soul" the creative imagination became paranoid and predatory, a repression of *mater* resulted in excessive materialism, and war became a "toxic mimic" of initiation's sacrifice.

This chapter draws from Spector's insights regarding the "myth of American innocence" in order to continue a micro-analysis of *Gran Torino* and a macro-analysis of national semiospace. Recall that in *Gran Torino*, the impetus of the plot is Thao's failed initiation into the manhood of a Detroit gang culture, that Walt draws Thao into an alternate identity conditioned on materiality, and that Walt's redemption comes through a connection with and confession to the Other. Organized according to three significant themes within the film:

sacrifice, materialism, and confession, this chapter points to particularly tenuous dimensional dilemmas of U.S. semiospace.

Sacrifice

The sacrifice of the redemptive hero has an ancient connection to myth and ritual that stems from the act's paradoxical nature of being both a loss and a gain, a penalty and a reward; however, Spector notes that in the demythologized U.S., the ritual act of sacrifice is literalized through scapegoating (which will be addressed in the section on *Confession*) and war. In the U.S., the soldier's sacrifice is understood as part of the long tradition of the redemptive hero who gives his life for the benefit of the community. Yet, true to paradox, the gift of sacrifice can also be seen as theft.[3] Soldiers may give their lives, but the politicians who send them to war also take their lives. According to Spector, war is patriarchy's poor imitation of initiation, a sacrifice of children by uninitiated men. Youth die, not symbolically in order to become adults, but literally in order to preserve the patriarchal order. Eastwood is a vocal critic of this tendency for one generation to sacrifice the next. I propose that *Gran Torino* is both Eastwood's attempt to revision the patriarchal sacrifice, and a Dreamtime expression of the existential desire for initiatory transformation. In this section I elaborate on Spector's declaration of war as initiation's "toxic mimic," present a piece of military folklore in order to bolster Spector's assertion that war is patriarchy's sacrifice of children, and discuss the attempt within *Gran Torino* to re-invert the sacrifice.

A significant strand of myth studies perceives myth as the narrative form of ritual, particularly rituals of initiation; but in this demythologized world, we find initiation's "toxic mimic" in the reality of war, or what Spector calls, "the killing of the children."[4] In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes mythic epics as narrations of ritual transitions from adolescence into adulthood. Drawing from Campbell, Spector generalizes the process of initiation as the symbolic death of the childish self so that an individual, matured

164

through an incorporation of the Other, can be born into its adult role in the community. However, as Spector argues, in the demythologized Western world, the symbolic sacrifice of childhood became the literal "killing of the children." Spector avows that patriarchy, as a system of domination, "inverted the sacrifice" of initiation.[5] With war, youths experience the liminality and communitas that ritual initiation once offered; but those who return find reincorporation into their communities difficult if not impossible and the confrontation with the Other leads only to further alienation.[6] War correspondent, Chris Hedges wrote of the "narcotic" of war and the inauthentic communitas it generates in his book, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*.[7] Regarding the aftermath of the Bosnian War he wrote,

> "Peace had again exposed the void that the rush of war, of battle had filled. Once again, as perhaps we all are, alone, no longer bound by that common sense of struggle, no longer given the opportunity to be noble, heroic, no longer sure what life was about or what it meant. The old comradeship, however false, that allowed them to love men and women they hardly knew, indeed, whom they may not have even liked before the war, had vanished. Moreover, they had seen that all the sacrifice had been for naught."[8]

Because war only mimics initiation without providing the needed transcendent growth, Spector suggests, and Hedges confirms, war becomes addictive.[9]

A piece of folklore from the U.S. military serves to illustrate the national addiction to war and the mythology of patriarchy's sacrifice of the youth.[10]

> A mother asked President Bush: "Why did my son have to die in Iraq?" / Another Mother Asked President Kennedy: "Why did my son have to die in Vietnam?" / Another Mother Asked President Truman: "Why did my son have to die in Korea?" / Another Mother Asked President Roosevelt: "Why did my son have to die in Iwo Jima?" / Another Mother Asked President Wilson: "Why did my son have to die on the battle field of France?" / Another Mother Asked President Lincoln: "Why did my son have to die at Gettysburg?" / Another Mother Asked President Washington: "Why did my son have to

die near Valley Forge?" / Then a long, long time ago a mother asked: "Heavenly Father, why did my son have to die on a cross outside of Jerusalem?" / The answer to all these are similar: "So that others may have life and dwell in peace, happiness and freedom."

This lore points to several prominent aspects of U.S. culture. First, we notice the near constant state of war, which can lead one to question - just what peace, happiness and freedom does the included answer refer to?[11] More to the present point though, the soldier is aligned with the sacrificed Christ. The death of the son brings redemption for the community as a whole; but the son can never return to the community. War may be the closest thing we have to initiation, but it is not initiation.[12] War's sacrifice of the child does not result in the birth of an adult. Herein lies another profound misunderstanding of U.S. semiospace; we conceive of life as the opposite of death when in fact Life is the totality of that dimension that spans from birth to death. War, as initiation's "toxic mimic" kills the child but disallows the birth into adulthood, therefore, the rule of the father (patriarchy) is maintained.[13] Also, notice that while the soldier is aligned with Christ the President is aligned with God. In the patriarchal society of the U.S., the state usurps divine authority; sometimes even claiming communication with the divine.[14] When the Father kills his children, he maintains his own power and denies the next generation its due.[15]

The intergenerational sacrifice of war is something that Eastwood expresses concern over and, I assert, attempts to revise with his performance in *Gran Torino*. In an interview with Charlie Rose following the release of Eastwood's two war films, *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters From Iwo Jima*, the filmmaker said,

> "It boils down to the same thing, a lot of young men who'd rather be home in the comfort of a mom and dad...loved ones...and not having that opportunity...Old men telling young men how noble it is to blow themselves up...And nobody goes, doesn't anybody ask the question, 'you're older now, why wouldn't you want to go and have seventy-two virgins waiting on you?' Nobody asks that question. But that's why they pick young men, they haven't quite gotten to that point yet."

When Eastwood made *Gran Torino* three years later, he deliberately challenged patriarchy's "killing of the children" through this Dreamtime performance. The widower, Walt, accepts the role of redemptive hero so that the teenagers, Thao and Sue, can "find peace in this world." But as we saw in the last chapter, Eastwood's mythic revisions leave more changes to be desired. The old man sacrifices himself for the benefit of the young but he is still "going it alone," and he still leaves. As Spector writes of the national hero, "after restoring innocence to Eden, [he] either…rides away or he dies, which is also to leave and return to the spirit, the realm of the distant fathers. Either way, he chooses union with the father over the tedium (or anxiety) of life among the women and children."[16] With *Gran Torino,* Eastwood rejects patriarchy's sacrifice of the children, but he retains the hero's individualism. Walt's self-sacrifice may have redeemed the community and Thao may have inherited the hero's role; but in the end, Thao still rides away alone and uninitiated.

An essential component of Spector's text is that the demythologized Western world of patriarchy lacks authentic rituals of initiation in which the childhood identity of innocence is symbolically sacrificed so that an adult identity, having suffered into wisdom, can be born. Instead, he asserts, we have the "toxic mimic" of war that literalizes initiation's symbolic killing of the child. The soldier and the redemptive hero alike suffer a transformation, but their sacrifice leads only to death, offering no reintegration that would conclude the ritual. Nor is there the incorporation of the Other, particularly the feminine Other, that Spector avows is central to the initiatory transformation. Such transformations are undesirable under patriarchy, which sustains itself through the domination of women and children. Spector avows that in ancient and indigenous myths that express the rituals of initiation, the hero returns to the community with his gifts of acquired wisdom to stand at the side of a female goddess or consort. *Gran Torino* teases us with the imagery of Thao and Sue standing side by side at the reading of Walt's will, wearing traditional Hmong dress. The film offers an inclusion of the ethnic other into the self, but not the gendered other. Sue gains no inheritance from Walt; rather, she is raped and

effectively silenced. Thao is the sole inheritor of the myths of mobility and progress, symbolized with the Gran Torino. The film may have challenged patriarchy's killing of the children, but this is not the "funeral of patriarchy" that Spector writes, "we are called to attend."[17] Nor did it offer Thao an initiation, for a job interview can hardly compare to the communitas of liminality. Walt's redemptive sacrifice kept Thao from sacrificing anything and the newly born hero thus retained his innocence.

Consume

When Thao's familial initiation failed, Walt inducted the youth into an identity based upon an intimate relationship with artifacts. To be a man Thao needs to use tools, fix machines and take his place in commodity culture. Recall Drummond's stated existential dilemma of humanity being conditioned by our artifactual intelligence.[18] In U.S. semiospace, our collective identity is firmly located within the vector of artifacts. While every culture has its own kind of materiality, the logic of capitalism overwhelms the artifactual pole of semiospace and constructs a series of intersecting paradoxical dimensions: production-consumption, profit-loss, surplus-scarcity, gift-theft, privilege-exploitation, creation-destruction, growth-deficit, and liberate-dominate. In previous chapters, I demonstrated that U.S. semiospace presents the conditions of consumer capitalism as the high point of civilization and a significant mark of liberation. *Gran Torino* is no exception. But even capitalist apologists admit the paradox of this economic structure. In *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality and Liberty*, Peter L. Berger assures, "it liberates and oppresses at the same time...liberation and alienation are the reverse sides of the same capitalist coin."[19] In this section, I address the existential dilemma that we have constructed for ourselves under capitalism's consumer culture while continuing to draw from Barry Spector's work on the "myth of American innocence." The materialism of our consumer culture confines us all to an existential paradox of privilege and exploitation, grounded in a dysfunctional relationship with *mater*.

At one pole of the paradoxical dimension of capitalist materiality is liberation. Berger describes the historical process by which bourgeois culture freed itself from the old aristocratic order through capitalist economics. From his apologetic perspective, the ability to "buy status and status symbols" allowed, and continues to allow, an individual to leave behind the class constraints s/he was born into, "provided of course, [s/he] acquires the money to do so."[20] If we assume the individual does have the financial resources to participate in commodity culture, we can recognize that such participation is merely a particular form of our existential nature as artifactual beings. As Juliet Schor wrote, "consuming has become the privileged form of identity construction"; but aligning our identities with artifacts is not a new condition of our sentience.[21] Materiality has an ancient connection to the gift economy through which communal relations are built and maintained.[22] Scholars of consumption insist that we create community through the products of the market.[23] Christmas season shopping aside, consider the unprecedented transformation brought by the digital revolution as it has increased the recognition of a global community and allowed us to engage in near-perpetual communication. Consumer culture does indeed bring blessings, which accounts for the propensity within U.S. semiospace to position consumer capitalism in the vector of liberation.

At the other pole of our material paradox is domination. We may build community with our materiality but those benefits come at a high cost. Berger and Marxist critics alike saw in capitalism the tendency toward alienation; the former was concerned with the individual's severance from traditional communal and cultural ties, while the latter took issue with the worker's exclusion from the means of production as well as the fetishism that the market creates.[24] But these alienations are only part of commodity culture's negative effects. The dilemma of consumer culture is what Craig Thompson calls the, "excretory economy" of resource extraction, labor exploitation, and environmental degradation.[25] Capitalists refer to these aspects of production as "externalities" in efforts to dissociate their commerce from the "shit" of production.[26] All consumption leads to defecation, such is the paradoxical nature of

human existence. But capitalist culture tends to ignore the reality that the material gain of some derives from the dispossession of others. Berger fell prey to this blindness, focusing on the improved materiality of Western societies under capitalism while disregarding the cost paid by the colonies whose resources supplied that material revolution. Or as Spector put it in regard to the history of the U.S., "the American Dream is equal part nightmare...in reality, slavery, genocide and 'free' land created the economic foundations...Without these protracted, unresolved (and unmourned) crimes there would be no affluence, no optimism and no innocence in America. And no white privilege."[27] By ignoring the relation of our particular form of materiality – consumer capitalism – to domination, we retain our myth of innocence.

Spector insists upon a mytho-historical reason for the extreme paradox of our materialism; it is the pathological consequence of a seven thousand year old repression of *mater*. Materialism has at its root the Latin word "*mater,*" which literally means 'mother' and refers to all physical things crucial or significant, things of the earth, things that really *matter*. Specter references Riane Eisler and Marija Gimbutas' works on the rise of androcracy in ancient Europe in order to pinpoint the beginning of Western civilization's dysfunctional relation with *mater*.[28] In 'old Europe,' cultural transformations away from gylanic societies with their earth goddesses toward male sky gods and male-rule instituted an era of feminine repression and the domination of the earth: *mater*. Monotheism compounded that oppression through institutionalized hierarchies, many of which remain with us today: masculine over feminine, spirit over matter, light over dark, heaven over earth. Early European immigrants brought these dualisms to the 'new world.' With their rejection of the body and their anxiety over their spiritual future, they enacted a curious mix of asceticism and accumulation. As Spector puts it, "the paradox of the British conquest of North America is that Puritanical asceticism eventually produced the world's most materialistic society...they began by enshrining gain without pleasure and ended up addicted to 'stuff.'"[29] Conspicuous consumption became proof of divine blessings and white men claimed dominion over the whole earth. Imperialism extended European

androcracy's violent hierarchies, positioning all other peoples as children under the patriarchal West and all of the earth's resources as available for their possession. This pathological possessiveness of consumer culture in which desire is affixed to "inaccessible, nonexistent or irrelevant objects," Spector asserts, veils the West's dysfunctional relationship with *mater*: body, earth, and mother.[30]

Our particular brand of materialism creates a striking dilemma with its extreme paradox of liberation and domination. While every culture has its own form of materiality, through which its inhabitants express themselves, alter and negotiate their environment, and exhibit communal relations, the material freedoms of U.S. consumer capitalism are built upon engrained systems of oppression. According to the myth of liberation, freedom comes with access to material goods. Thao's liberation from the domination of urban gang culture is brought about in part by Walt's gifts of tools, techniques, and finally his own car. Similarly, Walt's redemption begins with the Hmong community's gifts to him of food, flowers, and friendship. The significance of the gift economy reminds us not to judge our materiality too harshly for artifacts are a necessary condition of our humanity. Consumption is an inescapable part of who we are.[31] But in our particular semiospace, we tend to ignore consumption's dialectical tension with the "excretory economy."[32] We position our culture and economy firmly within the vector of liberation while ignoring, or at least "externalizing," the domination that supports our material gain. The gifts of materialism, at least in the semiospace of U.S. capitalism and the preceding eras of Western civilization, result from the theft of *mater*. Repression of the body, of the earth, of women, and of those races and classes whom Western patriarchy deemed its "dependents" has made possible our current form of materialism.

Confess

The greatest dilemma of not just our nation, but as Paulo Freire put it, of our "epoch," is the paradox of liberation-domination; when the U.S. focuses so resolutely on its status as

liberated/liberator it denies its existential reality as dominator and dominated.[33] With a history in which our forbearers freed themselves from the constricts of monarchy, abolished slavery, recognized women's rights (at least some of them), and ended legal segregation, we take pride in our collective movements toward liberation. But such transformations toward liberation belie the patterns of domination built into the U.S. social structure in the form of economic, gendered, racial, religious, and sexual privilege. "Privilege," Spector argues, "is the advantage of having views that define the norm for others." (249) Stated otherwise, privileged individuals have their perspectives prioritized; and in being allowed to declare their identity as 'normal' they reduce everyone else to the status of Other, whom they denigrate and/or exclude. Privilege is the antithesis of equality and a method of domination. The privilege derived from the domination of the Other casts a sorrowful shadow on the history of the U.S. Yet, the myth of liberation converges with the myth of innocence to deny a great national guilt. In this section, I assert that the privileged have commandeered the nation's myth of liberation in order to protect their own privilege. I discuss how such privilege is protected through the practice of scapegoating, a ritualized method of projecting guilt onto the Other. Then, concluding the analysis of *Gran Torino*, I draw attention to the significance of confession for moving U.S. semiospace out of the myth of innocence. Without confessing to our status as dominators, we have little hope of atoning for our guilt, which at its foundation is based on fear and exclusion of the Other.

Hegemony co-opts our history of liberation in order to cover up our guilt of domination. Myth is "stolen language," Roland Barthes writes, because it deprives its objects of history and distorts reality.[34] Despite liberative movements being the result of efforts enacted by the oppressed and those sympathetic to their suffering, those who are privileged in our dominator-model society (men, whites, heterosexuals, Christians, capitalists) identify as liberators/liberated.[35] "From the start," Spector declares, "our stories of domination came packaged in the language of liberation."[36] The nation's imperialistic encroachment across the

North-American continent, indeed the entire globe, has always been described as the spread of liberty.

Of note is the fact that the final goal of the architects of Manifest Destiny was to circumvent the earth and "liberate" Babylon from barbarism. Intellectuals and politicians thought that U.S. civilization was should progress across the North American continent, influence Pacific cultures toward Christianity and capitalism, and continue on through Asia until the U.S. could restore civilization to Mesopotamia (Iraq), where (in a 19th century understanding that is still taught in many schools) civilization had first developed, but had since been degraded by Muslims. At the time, politicians and public figures debated whether or not the gained territories should be included into the republic of the United States. However, the argument that integrating religious and ethnic others into the body politic would corrupt the nation, won out.[37] More than 150 years later, Vice President Dick Cheney invoked this history with the invasion of Iraq, of which he stated he was, "confident that we [would] be greeted as liberators."[38] Cheney's political party holds firmly to the myth of liberation that is the legacy of Manifest Destiny; constituents praise the U.S. as a bastion of individual freedom while the most recent Republican platform, called by one of its creators as the "most conservative in modern history," includes a full section on "American exceptionalism," and aims to restrict the rights of women, same-sex couples, and immigrants.[39] By invoking a love of liberty, citizens can claim innocence from the guilt of domination.

The U.S. is also guilty of attempting to purge its guilt through the practice of scapegoating. Spector references ancient European rituals of sacrificial expiation in order to draw attention to how in the demythologized U.S., projecting our guilt onto an Other regenerates innocence. In ritual, scapegoating was a practice by which the sins of a community were symbolically laid upon a figure, often an actual goat, which was then either exiled or sacrificed as a symbolic purification. Spector asserts that we literalize this ritual when we project our guilt onto the Other (not male, not white, not straight, not Christian, not citizen, not

173

wealthy). "Purification by dissociation," is how Kenneth Burke describes the process of scapegoating, in which, "the symbol of a common enemy is a unifying power."[40] As, "the representative or vessel of certain unwanted evils," the dominators of the U.S. assign scapegoat status to a variety of identities: women, American Indians, Blacks, Latinos, Asians, communists, workers (unions), Muslims, the poor, and the mentally ill.[41] Each of these Othered identities has alternately been decried as weak, manipulative, licentious, lazy, violent, savage, or barbaric among other adjectives. Yet, what could be more barbaric than the lynchings of Black men by Whites common in the U.S. South until the early 20th century? A particularly horrifying manifestation of the practice of scapegoating as purification, these human sacrifices served the dual purposes of ridding the community of unwanted elements and ensuring the privilege of some through the terrorization of others. Today, we project our guilty history as terrorizers onto Muslims and Middle Easterners while claiming innocence for ourselves.[42] Displacing our guilt onto Others allows residents to live under the myth of innocence, protects our privilege, and prevents us from atoning with the Other.

The nation suffers from the extreme losses generated by its status as dominator, inducing a psychological state that many scholars have described as melancholia. Tania Modleski declared Clint Eastwood to be, "one of the preeminent melancholics of our culture."[43] Her work focuses on the film genre of melodrama, which presents performances of loss and grief. She analyzes *Gran Torino* as a film that, "expresses a melancholy sense of America's economic decline, the defeat of its recent imperialist ventures, the waning of its influence as a superpower, and the failure of traditional male warfare in the wake of 9/11," in order to critique what she describes as "hierarchies of privileged suffering."[44] In the melodramas of Eastwood's later career (*Unforgiven, Million Dollar Baby, Gran Torino*) the white male protagonist accedes the suffering of the traditionally Othered characters (Women, Blacks, Asians), and in doing so is absolved of his own guilt.[45] Modleski is critical of this absolution of guilt through the co-optation of suffering because, as in society at large, such appropriation is one more manifestation of

174

white male privilege, for whom, she wrote, "forgiveness comes so easily."[46] Regarding *Million Dollar Baby*, she states that the film, "forgive[s] the white man for sins it gives him no reason to cop to," for Eastwood's character in that film suffers guilt over incidents that were either beyond his control or that the audience is never informed of.[47] She then blasts *Gran Torino* for sentimentalizing Walt's death and encouraging the audience to sympathize most strongly with the character who has suffered the least. Yet in her description and criticism of *Gran Torino*, Modleski overlooks the white male's two confessions: first to the priest regarding infidelity, greed, and poor parenting, and then to Thao for the violence of Othering and war's killing of the children. I agree with Modleski that "hierarchies of privileged suffering" are indeed problematic for they reiterate the privilege structure of our dominator society. However, if Eastwood is "*the* man," the model white male, the fact that the characters of his later career all express profound guilt and grief is significant, for such Dreamtime constructs point to a shift in U.S. semiospace by which the dominators are beginning to admit to the guilt of their domination while recognizing, at least vaguely, that they also suffer from the losses inflicted upon Others.

Walt Kowalski confesses to his crimes and volunteers as scapegoat, thereby purging the neighborhood of its "unwanted elements," who had accepted for themselves the role of dominator. Following Sue's beating and rape, Walt is shown with blood on his own hands, a symbol of his ancillary guilt. Most citizens are party to the guilt of U.S. domination, for even if they are dominated within the constructs of the nation, the U.S. positions itself at the apex of a global hierarchy of its own creation. Despite our myths of liberation and innocence, we are guilty of dominance, at the very least through the privilege of association. Modleski identifies a "danger" in Walt's suffering and sacrifice because it "*passes itself off as a 'socially transformative' act*" in which the death of the white man "gives the racialized other permission to live and, ostensibly, to thrive."[48] However, I argue that the transformation of the film precedes Walt's self-sacrifice. The neighborhood (society) begins its transformation when Walt and is Hmong neighbors begin to be friends. The U.S. history of domination depends upon the

processes of Othering in which those who are different are seen as strangers and enemies. When

Walt accepts Sue and Thao as friends, when theft shifts to gifts, these are the socially

transformative acts. Walt's death is not what transforms society, though it rids the

neighborhood of a few gang members (thanks to the neighbors' willingness to bear witness).

Walt's acceptance of the Other is the transformation that the film offers; his sacrifice is a

redemption of the self; but even this is only possible after he confesses.

Conclusion

The national dilemmas of violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, religious persecution

and environmental degradation all serve to challenge the myth of liberation by revealing the

nation's status as dominator. In this chapter, I referenced Spector's description of warfare as

patriarchy's "killing of the children" and suggested that in *Gran Torino*, Eastwood attempted to

invert that tradition through the sacrifice of the old man, Walt. I then discussed the

unquestioned importance of materiality to our identity constructions, evinced the paradoxical

nature of consumer culture as both liberatory and domineering, and drew from Spector's work

in order to assert that the imbalance of our materiality results from a civilizational oppression of

mater as woman, body, and earth. Finally, I avowed that the myth of liberation serves to

disguise the nation's history of domination, perpetrated through the scapegoating of Others.

Moreover, I suggested that *Gran Torino*, as a melodrama of national guilt and grief, offered a

Dreamtime confession to the reality of domination and proposed friendship with the historically

Othered as a path to atonement. Walt's redemption came not just from his sacrificial death, but

also through his connection with the Other, through his shifting perspective on his Asian

neighbors from enemies to friends. Spector notes that the Greek word *xenos*, from which we

derive the term xenophobia, can mean either stranger and enemy *or* guest and friend.[49] Walt's

friendship with Thao and Sue, his confession to his guilt, and his own sacrifice for their benefit

brings atonement (the state of being at one with). If the nation confesses to its crimes, sacrifices

its systems of privilege, and grieves for the losses suffered through its practices of Othering, then

perhaps it can atone for the guilt of its domination.

Conclusion

Dimensions of Liberation

The cultural continuum of liberation-domination intersects notably with the dimensions of gender, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality and artifactuality; these are the axes of meaning with which U.S. semiospace is built. Much of the nation's history has been spent privileging certain identity constructions to the exclusion of others. This privileging is particularly true of the Dreamtime with its overwhelmingly white-male protagonists, its persistent performances of violence against women, its tendency to cast ethnic minorities into subordinate character roles, its unproblematized display of an opulent materiality, and its preference of scenarios of liberation through violence. The Dreamtime is not a full reflection of society. Rather, its products are limited to the visions conceivable by a relatively homogenous group of creators. The limited perspective offered by mythmakers and broadcast for mass consumption, influences the construction of consciousness for society as a whole. Yet, rest assured that the function of myth is not merely to preserve the unequal privileges of the social order, but is a strategy for understanding societies contradictions. While the myth of liberation has historically celebrated the ability of the U.S. to liberate the Other, the semiotic analysis offered of *Gran Torino* affirms the sentiment in the epigraph of Part Four that liberation is a mutual endeavor. Eastwood's performance of confession and his character's rejection of violence offer significant transformations to the myth of liberation. Given the dialectical relationship between myth and cultural reality, in which myth takes primacy for shaping the contours of our collective consciousness, such revisions to the Dreamtime as the inclusion of the Other and the liberation of the Self bode well for further shifts in U.S. semiospace.

Conclusion

American Liberation Mythologies

"Life, after all, is as much an imitation of art, as the reverse."

Victor Turner

From Ritual to Theater

Throughout this dissertation I investigated the generative theme of liberation as performed in U.S. popular and political culture in an effort to assert the reciprocity between mythic thought and public action, and to expose the paradoxical reality of domination. Utilizing anthropological theories of myth and culture, applied through a performance studies lens, I analyzed three popular performances of liberation in order to identify prominent dimensions of consciousness that guide the social structures of the nation. Performances of the myth of liberation socialize the national body into a self-identification of liberator/liberated, buttressed by a belief in the exceptionalism of our democratic processes, economic possibilities, and military strength. Yet the evidence shows that the commoditized state of our democracy diminishes equality, that such inequality is inherent in the economic order, and that our willingness to enact violence in the name of liberty supports global systems of domination.

Part two, Myths of Intervention, described the two socially sanctioned methods for intervening in the oppression and suffering of other peoples: violent and economic. First I described the heritage of the nation's mythic constructions through reference to Richard Slotkin's thesis on regeneration through violence but modified his argument by asserting that savage warfare, as the ritual of the nation, supports the patterns of economic consumption that are the actual means of regeneration. I then analyzed the 2003 film *Tears of the Sun* to validate my claim that violence, rather than being a means to liberation, supports a global economic order of terrorization and segregation. In regards to the cultural strategy of economic intervention I analyzed the 2008 charity drive of the popular television show *American Idol*, demonstrating that efforts to alleviate poverty focus on its effects rather than its causes. Understanding poverty as a lack of access to financial resources and consumer goods ignores the systemic and historic social structures that create impoverished communities through economic inequality. I demonstrated through reference to the charity drive's corporate sponsors that the privileged patterns of consumption for U.S. society are made possible by the exploitation of other populations. Charity then serves as an alibi for the dominating practices of our consumer society. With our mythologies that espouse the validity of violent and economic interventions, we justify our patterns of domination.

In part three, Scenarios of Democracy, I described the reciprocity between entertainment and politics by analyzing *American Idol* as a ritual of redress for a crisis in national identity and democratic practice. I utilized Diana Taylor's theory of the repertoire to assert that mass media's merger of the scenario of discovery with the democratic gesture reiterated historic structures of privilege and conditioned the public for the commoditization of democracy. Through *American Idol,* the nation verified its diversity while reinforcing ethnic, gendered and regional stereotypes. Moreover, the show's expansion of electoral practice disavowed any equality of vote. I juxtaposed the interventions of the *American Idol* judges with those of the United States Supreme Court justices in order to demonstrate that the ideal of democratic equality suffers

under a system of representation that accepts minority rule, justified by the logic of plurality-majority. In the current state of democracy in the nation, effected by a tenuous relationship with capitalism, we prefer competition to consensus or dialogue, those with greater financial resources have their perspectives privileged, and our system of representational governance is dominated by the will of the minority. Our scenarios of democracy disguise our systems of inequality.

In part four, Dimensions of Liberation, I explained Lee Drummond's theory of semiospace and applied his analytic methods to another expression of the myth of liberation, Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino,* in order to identify particularly pressing dilemmas of national consciousness and action. Drummond avows that mythic projections of film provide systems of meaning and identification in regard to society's existential contradictions. I referenced scholarly work on Clint Eastwood's career in order to articulate the ambivalence of this mythmaker's cultural revisions, particularly in regard to the use of violence and representations of the Other. The analysis offered of *Gran Torino* evinced a recognition that inclusion of the ethnic Other brings liberation for the self, yet an Othering in terms of gender remains strong. Liberty, again, is tied to consumerism. And while the protagonist ultimately rejects violence, it remains the means of resolution. The most significant revision to mythic thought offered by *Gran Torino* was the protagonist's confession. Analyzing the dilemmas of the nation, I asserted the need to abandon the myth of innocence and confess to the guilt of domination derived from the violence of war, the exploitation of consumerism, and the scapegoating of the Other. While in our semiospace we attempt to position the self firmly within the vector of liberation, we cannot deny the paradoxical reality of our own domination.

Mythic scenarios structure our consciousness by providing the dimensions of meaning that compose our cultural world and suggesting appropriate actions in the world. Several scholars in diverse fields support this assertion. From anthropology, both Claude Lévi-Strauss and Lee Drummond note the paradoxical or binary construction of consciousness propagated

181

through the telling of myths.[1] Performance theorist Diana Taylor asserts a related idea in which scenarios are enacted from one generation to the next, transmitting collective identities and acceptable behaviors.[2] Richard Slotkin's work validates the historical repetition of scenarios as a framework for interpreting both history and contemporary realities.[3] The performed narratives of myths act as methods of socialization for the residents of a cultural sphere (an Umwelt or semiospace). Myths provide the "structures of plausibility" that sociologist Peter Berger asserts are a necessary component in the processes of socialization.[4] Educator Paulo Freire terms these structures of plausibility "limit situation" out of a recognition that the systems of meaning and the possibilities of identification tend to be restrictive in their repetition, particularly when they are propagated by a dominating class.[5] In our own semiospace, our mythic scenarios are disseminated through mass media, which are overwhelmingly controlled by oligarchic and patriarchal classes. They offer to the populace of the U.S. a myth of liberation that structures our consciousness into a self-identification as liberator to the oppressed, enacting violent and economic interventions in the name of peace and prosperity, validated by our economic success and a self-righteous glorification of our democratic systems. We are socialized into mythic patterns that limit recognition of our own oppression, the oppression we enact through violence and economic exploitation, and the injustice of our democratic order.

However, myths change, and when they do, so change the structures of consciousness, which in turn changes culture at large. According to Riane Eisler's cultural transformation theory, social structures and cultural patterns can change quite rapidly when the semiotic systems of a community are altered.[6] While her work draws from archeological evidence, more recent history also verifies her assertion. Western imperialists sought to destroy significant cultural artifacts and prohibit meaningful performances because they recognized in creative culture a challenge to their dominating worldview and a source of colonial resistance. Decolonial leaders were aware of this strategy of imperial domination; as Amical Cabral articulated, "History teaches us that, in certain circumstances, it is very easy for the foreigner to impose his

domination on a people. But it also teaches us that, whatever may be the material aspects of this domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent, organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned."[7] Though Cabral's advocation for the maintenance and development of indigenous cultural forms as necessary for national liberation does not specifically reference myth; his consideration of culture as historically grounded and evolving expressions of a people's "ideological or idealistic characteristics" is akin to the definition of myth utilized throughout this dissertation.[8] As Drummond argues, myth and culture are virtually synonymous, being as intimately bound to each other as thought is to action. Whatever the goal of transformation may be, either repressive or liberative, such changes cannot be effected in a culture without a transformation of myth.

Our mythic possibilities are diverse, as diverse as our population and our history. Throughout this dissertation, I have analyzed performances of the myth of liberation as propagated by the dominant class, which is largely Caucasian, male, Christian, and capitalist. While this segment of society enjoys an historical privilege, their myths analyzed here present a limited perspective from within the dimensions of meaning that comprise the totality of U.S. culture. Other strains of the myth of liberation exist from which our mythmakers could pull threads with which to weave an adapted myth that accedes to the diversity of the national body. From my own perspective as a woman educated in the histories and ideologies of the Civil Rights movement and de-colonial struggles, acutely aware of the ongoing feminist and labor movements, and conscious of the difficulties faced by communities subjected to the "externalities" of the global capitalist system, I assert that the repertoire from which we could draw upon is much more diverse then what the media typically offers. As co-creators of culture, we could choose to draw from our histories of civic participation aimed at increasing inclusion into systems of decision-making and representation. If mythic thought is a matter of bricolage as Lévi-Strauss, citing Franz Boaz, asserts, a piecing together of disparate elements in an effort

183

to find meaning in events, then perhaps our mythmakers could pull more broadly from the expansive repertoire that comprises our diverse cultural heritage.

If we, the mythmakers of mass media, the creators of industrial culture, and the citizen consumers, desire to free each other from the domination that our myth of liberation enshrines, then we must be the bricoleurs of our own mythic consciousness. From the remains of our shattering mythologies, we can re-imagine the dimensions of meaning and recreate the continua of culture. Mythmakers can further shift our conception of the Other from stranger and enemy to guest and friend. They could devise new scenarios in which we retain our individualism while acceding greater respect for the importance of community. The creators of culture could help to diminish our society's inclinations toward competition by constructing paradigms that value cooperation. Since the dimensions of semiospace are paradoxical we need not seek to disregard either side of our semiotic binaries; for the failing of the myth of liberation is the disavowal of domination, just as the fallacy of the myth of innocence is its ignorance of guilt. Rather, we could strive to balance the paradoxes of lived experiences. Mythmakers could seek to establish equanimity between grief over our history of domination and joy for our liberation. Through myth, we could form scenarios that stabilize our patterns of production and consumption to minimize waste and the exploitation of the capitalist doctrine of surplus extraction. Indeed, we could reject entirely with the persistent binary of privilege-exploitation; but we would need to sacrifice our historic prerogatives of white privilege, male privilege and the privilege of consumption. Then we could experience the equality we claim to revere. We could do all this through the recreation of myth. Since our mythic scenarios are hauntings of the past, as Diana Taylor evinces, as well as forces driving cultural change, as Lee Drummond declares, then we could enact a creative intervention and revision mythic scenarios with which to haunt the future and guide the development of culture, not with our acquiescence to the status quo, but with the courage to consciously shape the world to come.

Notes and Citations

Introduction

[1] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 1st ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 20.

Chapter 1 – Motivations and Methods

[1] Sherry B. Ortner, "On Key Symbols," in *Reader in Comparative Religion*, ed. William Lessa and Evon Vogt (Hew York: Harper, 1979).

[2] Paulo Freire, *Pedegogy of the Oppressed*, trans., Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th Anniversary Edition ed. (New York: Continuum, 2009), 54.

[3] In H. M. Cole, *Icons: Ideals and Power in the Art of Africa* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

[4] Noting the history of expanding suffrage in the nation, we can see the diminishment of electoral privilege in favor of democratic equality. First only adult propertied white men were allowed to vote, then voting was expanded to all adult white men, then adult men regardless of race, then adult women, then American Indians. Expanding suffrage diminished the political privilege of the monied male. Yet in today's democratic climate, legal privilege favors the the political opinions of the wealthy, and male politicians attack the rights of women to make decision regarding their own well-being. Patriarchy and oligarchy assert their historic privilege. The use of violence to support such a capitalistic hierarchy will be further addressed in chapter three. For an interesting discussion of privileged usurpations of democracy, see Andrew Gumbel, *Steal This Vote: Dirty Elections and the Rotten History of Democracy in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2005).

[5] Feminist scholarship is linked to postcolonial studies in its critique of domination and power relations. Indeed, many scholars overlap these two fields. I, however, am not well versed in Feminist theory and therefore cannot adequately situate my own work within that field.

[6] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972). Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[7] Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan, "The Construction of Woman in Three Popular Texts of Empire: Towards a Critique of Materialist Feminism," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 466.

[8] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Egyptian Melodrama - Technology of the Modern Subject?," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larkin, and Faye D. Ginsburg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Sightlines (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994).

[9] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006). Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, ed. M. G. Durham and D. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

[10] Juliet B. Schor, "In Defense of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, no. (2007): 28.

[11] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[12] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, 1st paperback ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1974). Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*, 1st ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1985). Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992). Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975). Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, eds., *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993).

[13] Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 24, no. (1972).

[14] Lee Drummond, *American Dreamtime: A Cultural Analysis of Popular Movies, and Their Implications for a Science of Humanity* (Lanham, Maryland: Littlefield Adam Books, 1996).

[15] Jane Desmond and Virginia Dominquez, "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism," *American Quarterly* 48, no. (1996)., Kaplan and Pease, eds., Jose David Saldivar, *Dialectics of Our America: Geneology, Cultural Critique and Literary History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

[16] While a master's student in African Studies I attended a lecture by a lawyer from Human Rights Watch who discussed the U.S. refusal to get involved during the genocide in Rwanda. She spoke of how the violence was coordinated through radio broadcasts and how several African leaders and human rights advocates pleaded with the U.S. military to block the radio transmissions in hopes of reducing the violence, yet the U.S. military thought that the $800 a day price tag for such a tactic would be too costly.

[17] Neil Campbell, *The Cultures of the American New West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2000). Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985). Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). Emily Ballew Neff, *The Modern West: American Landscapes, 1890-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006)., Jules Davis Prown, *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, Yale Western Americana Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). William H. Truettner, ed. *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

Chapter 2 – Standards of Evaluation

[1] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

[2] Geertz.

[3] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1984).

[4] Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Role of Myth in Life," in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[5] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Claude Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[6] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Myth: Symposium*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).
[7] Barthes.
[8] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.
[9] Drummond.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth."
[12] Sometimes, Levi-Strauss asserted, myths present negative truths when the protagonist behaves contrary to accepted norms and is thus punished.
[13] Dominance may or may not refer to a numerical majority but does refer to the cultural subgroup with access to the means of production and dissemination as well as the subgroup receptive to such mythic narratives.
[14] Gramsci.
[15] Drummond, 27.
[16] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth."
[17] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 28.
[18] Ibid., 133-160.
[19] See Richard Schechner's theory of the dynamic braiding between ritual and theatre. Richard Schechner, *Essays on Performance Theory, 1970-1976*, 1st ed. (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977).
[20] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*.
[21] See President George W. Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, and his State of the Union address from January 29, 2002.
[22] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 40.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Barthes.
[25] Berger, 45, 14.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 29-51.
[28] Ibid., 47. Lee Drummond actually does describe semiospace as a bubble. Drummond, 99.
[29] Freire.
[30] The autumn of 2011 brought a distinct shift in popular understandings of the dimension of liberation-domination evidenced by protesters assertion that 99% of the populace is currently dominated by the other 1%.
[31] Freire, 66.
[32] See Peter Berger's discussion on secularization. Berger, 105-174.

Chapter 3 – The Strongest of Mythic Imperatives

[1] Children's cartoons may not always use violence as a rescue strategy but violence is not uncommon, even G rated cartoon such as Disney's *Cars 2* display violence.

[2] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*. Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*.

[3] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, 65, 19.

[4] Ibid., 94-115.

[5] According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the heroes role is always to act as mediator between two social or physical binaries. Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth."

[6] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, 268-312.

[7] Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*, 109-158.

[8] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, 643-654.

[9] Myth is not only a kind of historical memory and a symbolic system for interpreting the social world; as will be demonstrated in the chapter "On Semiospace" with reference to the theories of Lee Drummond, myth is also a force of collective consciousness and social action.

[10] The Vietnam War coincided with decolonization movements around the world as well as the American Indian Movement, Feminist and Queer movements, and the Civil Rights movement at home which all challenged the ruling presumption of European and U.S. benevolent superiority that had characterized the era of imperialism.

[11] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.

[12] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, 557.

[13] Further attention will be given to Turner's theorization of ritual, liminality and communitas in Part 3: Scenarios of Democracy.

[14] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1969), 128-29.

[15] Performance theorist Richard Schechner described a dynamic braiding between ritual and theater. Schechner.

[16] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, 503.

[17] Ibid., 554.

[18] Ibid., 559.

[19] Who could doubt the communitas of the military establishment? Turner describes neophytes as "being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life." Turner, 95.

[20] Ibid., 129.

[21] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, 16-21.

[22] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, 652.

[23] Ibid., 556.

[24] Schechner.

[25] *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, s.v. "Imperialist."

Chapter 4 – Violent Intervention – *Tears of the Sun*

[1] Jeffrey Schwarz. Journey to Safety: The Making of *Tears of the Sun*. Jeffrey Schwarz, 2003.

[2] Ibid.

violence & voverism	God's favor	techno-patriarchy	feminine compassion	segregation/integration	transition
news footage: reporting the facts ethnic religious conflicts		battle ship in the water legitimate violence Truman/h-bomb A successful mission		outline the plan: extract the doctor and clergy (westerners)	transition: nightvision, freefall apply safety gear, descend
			make-shift hospital, Dr. in surgery, soldier will assist	outline plan: she won't leave w/o indiginous personel "my people", they'll hike	
terrorize woman, walk through Hospital, witness suffering					
inside the chuch, a shining cross wounded everywhere priest walks through baffled	"Go with God" "God already left Africa"				transition: help hike through jungle/mountain
			stop for rest and medicine		
ellude rebels barely due to doctor's carelessness - Willis had to kill one.			rest and treatment of wounds		
rebels attach the mission start by killing the priest	doves fly off a tree				
		Helicopters in a clearing kidnap the doctor,		indiginous abandoned pulled from villages but not brought along (underdevelopment)	
view of the mission from the air carnage,			Weeping and cleavage of Dr. Kendricks		
		flying back to ship glances question morality has a change of heart.			
		helicopters touch down technology will come to your aid.	women embrace, comfort	the plan: twelve elderly and children on the choppers meet again in Cameroon	
	friend offers thanks god will bless you	a subordinate questions AK Waters authority to change plans			Back on the trail, rain drizzles mountains
		radios to his commanders on the ship they won't send helicopters, He's on his own		rebels find the smoke caniste,r they're tracking the group	
			resting, sharing food		
		computer alerts them that they are being followed			walking, baboon, rain cross a river, swirling mists
another village being attacked watch through binoculars troops assist, refugees watch				split into teams, black soldier is second in command	
confrontation with rebels fire everywhere- see notes for suffering inflicted upon the villagers			"this is what they do..." cut breasts		
			resting, treating wounds willis pours water on his head women offer background stories histories of violence		Thunderstorm approaches dreaming - a lament cloud wisps over the moon
		computer shows that rebels are gaining on them - "find the rat"			
threatens assasination to get information		Pres. Son & hier to Igbo nation tells of his families murder	trust issue between dr & willis		move on
rebels view dead bodies in village through binoculars					
two explosions an ambush					cross a river, blend in with rocks
		on the phone with superiors "drop excess cargo"	Lt. makes humanistic appeal		
		Lt. Rejects orders		the plan: get the people to Cameroon thanks from black soldier apologies from doctor	hiding in the jungle waiting, camoflauge looking into the dark
the choreography of battle trees down, explosions bodygaurd and soldier dead face like a rainbow		cowboy the fuck up get your people together walk backwards, protecting as they flee			
		on the ship, two jets take off and move over the landscape			
two women are down, including Dr. Lt. carries Dr. over his shoulder, holds her ass					
Lt. shot, Dr. revives when dropped		Jets over the plains/mountains			
approaching the refugee camp, abandoned vehicles at the gate			dr. demands they open the gate		
		jets over refugee camp			
jets blow the hell out of the rebels, explosions		helicopters follow, soldiers and son struggle from smoke	dr comes to their aid		
	friend - thanks "god will never forget you"	superior from ship is inside camp - gets the gate to open	friend finds her daughter embrace		
		people recognize Igbo leader		Africans rejoice inside refugee camp	
Dr. & Lt. on the helicopter his head on her breast look down on rejoicing africans					

[9] Notice that when the Lt. turns away from the hierarchical authority of the military system he implements a more democratic form of decision-making. Here we see a struggle between a

189

conception of traditional authority as callous and the righteousness of democratic egalitarianism when it achieves consensus.

[10] See the gross constituent unit in the chart above, "God's favor."

[11] A. O. Scott. "*Tears of the Sun* (2003) Film Review; Americans Atoning for African Slaughters." The New York Times, March 7 2003 http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9804E4DC133FF934A35750C0A9659C8B63 [accessed April 1, 2010].

[12] Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden: A Poem* (New York: Doubleday and McClure Co., 1899).

[13] The enslavement of Africans facilitated the freedoms and economic development of Europe and America. The forced migration of Native Americans into the isolation of the reservation system made possible the expansion of Euro-American culture and populations. Jim Crow segregation allowed for the terrorizing of African-Americans while privileging Euro-Americans economically and politically. The historical development of Western civilization has been built upon the terrorization and segregation of other peoples.

[14] W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

[15] Because Rostow based his model largely on the historical development of Britain, while ignoring as capital growth factors the exploitation of slavery and colonialism, he failed to realize that within his model, the development of one society is dependent upon the repression of another.

[16] Charles Duhigg and David Barboza. "In China, Human Costs Are Built into an Ipad." The New York Times, January 25 2012 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/business/ieconomy-apples-ipad-and-the-human-costs-for-workers-in-china.html?pagewanted=all [accessed June 30, 2012]. Jeffrey W. Mantz, "Improvisational Economies: Coltan Production in the Eastern Congo," *Social Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (2008).

[17] World-systems theory understands the global social organization in terms of *center* and *periphery*, in which metropolitan areas are supported by the extraction of resources from rural locales; or imperial states are privileged by the exploitation of resources within their seized colonies. Advancement and modernization at the center is dependent upon the extraction of resources and labor from the periphery. I. Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis.," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, (1974).

[18] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[19] Ibid., 31-32.

[20] Ibid., 42.

[21] Michael Watts, "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geopolitics* 9, no. 1 (2004).

Chapter 5 – Economic Intervention – *Idol Gives Back*

[1] Craig N. Murphy, "Global Governance: Poorly Done and Poorly Understood," *International Affairs* 76, no. 4 (2000). Peter Wilken, "Global Poverty and Orthodox Security," *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2002).

[2] Paul Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below," *Daedalus* 125, no. 1, Social Suffering (1996).

[3] Harold Scheub, "Parallel Image Sets in African Oral Narrative-Performance," in *Review of National Literatures* (New York: St. John's University, 1971).

[4] Ibid., 222.

[5] Rodney.

[6] While the verses of Brett Dennon's song, "Ain't No Reason" suggest an awareness of the relationship between U.S. consumer culture and gross global inequality, only the chorus was repeated on *'Idol Gives Back;'* though editing excluded the second line which dismisses the possibility of saving the world tomorrow.

> *"There ain't no reason things are this way* **/ It's how they've always been and they intend to stay** */ I can't explain why we live this way / we do it every day.*
> http://www.songmeanings.net/songs/view/3530822107858632031/

[7] Chandra Mohanty, "'under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," in *Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[8] Environmental Literacy Council, "Fossil Fuels", The Environmental Literacy Council http://www.enviroliteracy.org/subcategory.php/21.html (accessed June 30 2012).

[9] "Passenger Vehicles in the United States", Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passenger_vehicles_in_the_United_States (accessed June 30, 2012).

[10] Margot Adler. "Behind the Ever-Expanding American Dream House." National Public Radio, July 4 2006 http://npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyld=5525283 [accessed June 30, 2012].

[11] "Footprint for Nations", Global Footprint Network: Advancing the Science of Sustainability http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/footprint_for_nations/ (accessed June 30 2012).

[12] "The State of Consumption Today", Worldwatch Institute http://www.worldwatch.org/node/810 (accessed June 30 2012).

[13] Blaine Harden. "Angolan Paradox: Oil Wealth Only Adds to Misery." The New York Times, April 9, 2000 [accessed

[14] See Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005).

[15] Mohanty.

Chapter 6 – From Discovery to Democracy

[1] Taylor.

[2] Ibid., 55-64.

[3] Anna Tsing analyzed the use of the scenario of discovery by Canadian capitalists in the late 20th century to fund a gold extraction enterprise in the Kalimantan rainforest. Tsing.

[4] Taylor, 22.

[5] Ibid., 49.

[6] Ibid., 47.

[7] The title "America" is narrowly co-opted by the U.S.

[8] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, ed. M. G. Durham and D. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

[9] Tejaswani Ganti, "'and yet My Heart Is Still Indian:' the Bombay Film Industry and the (H)Indianization of Hollywood.," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larkin, and Faye D. Ginsburg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 283.

[10] Horkheimer and Adorno, 41.

[11] Ibid., 59. Also, Max Weber noted that efficacy is a central tenet of the Capitalist model; which I assert results in a dependence upon the reproduction of stereotypes. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Geunther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

[12] Althusser.

[13] Ibid., 83.

[14] Ortner.

[15] Ibid., 96, 98.

[16] Horkheimer and Adorno, 57.

[17] Althusser, 57.

[18] Ortner, 96.

[19] I'd like to note here a reprisal of the old progressive republican paradigm in which the managerial class could rule but the ordinary citizen was not evolved enough for self-rule. This was the same rational behind European and U.S. political control over colonized territories in the decades of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*, 281-300. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, 29-87. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 123.

[20] Taylor, 31.

Chapter 7 – The Democratization of Television

[1] Vice President Al Gore's campaign initially only wanted four Florida counties to be recounted, the heavily democratic counties. Gumbel, 217.

[2] President George W. Bush addressed a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001. www.c-spanvideo.org/program/166196-1

[3] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 70.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 69.

[6] Ibid., 72.

[7] Schechner.

[8] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, 73-74. Schechner.

[9] Katherine Meizel, *Idolized: Music, Media and Identity in American Idol* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 9.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 82.

[12] quoted in Ibid., 107.. The contemporary expression of the U.S. civil religion of exceptionalism and leadership has its historical antecedents in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the Puritan's New Covenant.

[13] Ibid., 106.

[14] Ibid., 110.

[15] Ibid., 113.

[16] Ibid., 134.

[17] Ibid., 36, 37, 147.

[18] Ibid., 142.

[19] Ibid., 137.

[20] Ibid., 149-158.

[21] This dichotomy between urban and rural, authentic and inauthentic was most explicit in the contemporary rhetoric of 2008 GOP Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin when she championed the "real America" as rural, Christian and conservative compared to an urban, secular, pluralistic and liberal America as inauthentic to national identity.

[22] Nguyen quoted in Meizel, 136.

[23] Ryan Seacrest spoke these phrases nearly every week of the show.

[24] Cowell quoted in Meizel, 81.

[25] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961).

26 See chapter 3 regarding the work of Richard Slotkin, and chapter 4 regarding W.W. Rostow.

27 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, 20-59, 55.

28 Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 96.

29 Meizel, 117.

30 Indiana republican Senator Dick Lugar recently lost a primary bid against Tea Party candidate Richard Mourdock; whose statements are indicative of an overall disregard for compromise in representative government. Luke Johnson, "Richard Mourdock: Bipartisanship Ought to Be Democrats Siding with the G.O.P.," *The Huffington Post* (2012). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/09/richard-mourdock-bipartisanship-indiana-senate_n_1502718.html (accessed May 9, 2012). Michael McAuliff, "Dick Lugar Loses to Tea Party's Richard Mourdock in Indiana Republican Senate Primary (Update)," *The Huffington Post* (2012). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/08/dick-lugar-richard-mourdock-lugar-loses-indiana-republican-senate-primary_n_1501416.html (accessed May 9, 2012).

31 Meizel, 114.

32 Kim Masters. A Nation Divided, United in 'Idol' Worship. Morning Edition, National Public Radio, April 16, 2008, 2008.

33 This quote was taken from a fan forum for Season Eight contestant Anoop Desai.

Chapter 8 – Traditional Authority Intervenes

1 James Fernandez defined metaphor as, "a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun that makes a movement and leads to performance." James W. Fernandez, "Persuasions and Performances: Of the Beast in Every Body...And the Metaphors of Everyman," in *Myth, Symbol and Culture*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. , 1971), 43. An inchoate pronoun is one that is about to become something else (a hamster, a tiger, a well trained spaniel). Or it can refer to an action about to happen, a change about to occur, and a process in motion. Inchoate is an apt adjective for cultural studies because we are all enmeshed in the processes of becoming.

2 Meizel, 63-65.

3 *Dirty Diana* lyrics: "*she likes the boys in the band...she waits at backstage doors / for those who have prestige / who promise fortune and fame...she's sayin' that's okay/hey baby do what you want/I'll be your night lovin' thing...I want to go too far/ I'll be your everything/ if you make me a star...*"

4 B. E. Denham and R. N. Jones, "Survival of the Stereotypical: A Study of Personal Characteristics and Order of Elimination on Reality Television," *Studies in Popular Culture* 30, no. 2 (2008).

5 During the auditions of this season, a young woman from the Southwest came before the judges wearing only a bikini. She became known as Bikini Girl. At that audition, Kara seemed to take issue with the girl's confidence and singing ability. In an unprecedented move, Kara sang the same song phrase Bikini Girl had just sung in order to 'show her how it's done.' Simon called the conflict, "a cat fight." In the season finale, bikini girl returned, having clearly had breast augmentation surgery. She and Kara sang a song together, competitively, and then Kara tore off her snap-up-the-front dress, revealing her own bikini-clad body. She very quickly covered herself again, obviously uncomfortable with the exposure.

6 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, 43.

7 Michel de Certeau distinguished between a strategy (implemented by official authority and from a place of power) and a tactic (implemented by everyday citizens utilizing available space). Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

8 Denham and Jones.

[9] Diana Taylor used the term "Hauntology" to describe the way in which scenarios bring the past into the present. Taylor.

[10] Gumbel, 204.

[11] Ibid., 205.

[12] Ibid., 214, 218.

[13] Ibid., 219.

[14] Ibid., 37.

[15] Ibid., 208.

[16] Heather K. Gerken, "The Real Problem with *Citizens United*," *The American Prospect* (2010). http://prospect.org/article/real-problem-citizens-united (accessed May 27, 2012).

[17] quoted in Lyle Denniston, "Analysis: The Personhood of Corporations," *SCOTUSblog* (January 21, 2010). http://www.scotusblog.com/2010/01/analysis-the-personhood-of-corporations/ (accessed April 23, 2012).

[18] quoted in Ibid.

[19] Mark Schmitt, "Can Money Be a Force for Good?," *The American Prospect* (2008). http://prospect.org/article/can-money-be-force-good (accessed December 12).

[20] Ari Berman, "The .0000063% Election," *Truthdig: Drilling Beneath the Headlines* (2012). http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_0000063_election_20120218/ (accessed February 18).

[21] John Nichols and Robert W. McChesney, "After 'Citizens United': The Attack of the Super Pacs," *The Nation* (2012). http://www.thenation.com/article/165733/after-citizens-united-attack-super-pacs?page=0,1 (accessed February 6).

[22] Stephen Ansolabehere and others, "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?," *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 4 (1994).

[23] Berman.

[24] Taylor, 141-146.

[25] While evidence from the 2012 election cycle is not included in this dissertation, it is interesting to note that despite the conservative super-PACs having greatly outspent liberal ones in campaign advertising, President Obama was re-elected and Democrats gained several seats in Congress.

[26] Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 166.

[27] Ibid., 168.

[28] Ibid., 173.

[29] Ibid., 177.

[30] Ibid., 178.

[31] Schmitt.

[32] Dahl, 38.

[33] Ibid., 39.

[34] Jamie Raskin, "The Citizens United Era: How the Supreme Court Continues to Put Business First," *People For the American Way* (2012). http://www.pfaw.org/media-center/publications/citizens-united-era-how-supreme-court-continues-put-busines-first (accessed May 27, 2012).

[35] Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 135.

[36] Ibid., 138-144.

[37] Ibid., 144-149.

[38] Statistics and analysis derived from Michael McDonald, "2010 General Election Turnout Rates", George Mason University http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html (accessed May 27 2012). And "Election 2010: Senate Final Results", Real Clear Politics

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/elections/2010/senate_final_results.html (accessed May 27, 2012).

Chapter 9 – On Semiospace

[1] The sense of "evolution" employed by Lee Drummond is in no way akin to the misuse of "evolution" in the late 19th century that degraded non-European peoples. Rather, when "evolution" is used in this document it merely refers to the processes of adaptation that are inherent in the chronological changes of a given culture.

[2] See chapter 6 – From Discovery to Democracy. Taylor.

[3] Drummond, 94.

[4] Ibid., 45.

[5] Ibid., 71.

[6] Ibid., 35-44.

[7] Ibid., 37-39.

[8] Ibid., 57.

[9] Ibid., 78.

[10] Leach, quoted in Ibid., 55.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 56.

[13] Fernandez, quoted in Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 72.

[15] Ibid., 75.

[16] If anthropological semiotics differs at all from symbolic anthropology then I would suggest the latter is focused on the symbols themselves while the former attends to the systems of meaning. But really, the difference seems semantic. Ibid., 36.

[17] Ibid., 46.

[18] Ibid., 104.

[19] Ibid., 103-125.

[20] Ibid., 52.

[21] Ibid., 27.

[22] Ibid., 94.

[23] Ibid., 103.

[24] Ibid., 141-144.

[25] Ibid., 54.

[26] Ibid., 110.

[27] Ibid., 94.

[28] Ibid., 95.

[29] Ibid., 93.

[30] Ibid., 59-60.

[31] Ibid., 64.

[32] Ibid., 52-53.

[33] Ibid., 67-68.

[34] Ibid., 96-102.

[35] Each bubble could also represent a varying ecological sphere.

[36] Drummond, 94.

[37] Ibid., 5.

[38] Ibid., 6-21.

[39] Ibid., 28.

[40] Of course, with our ever-evolving artifactual existence, we can also recognize a mythic semiospace as expressed through television and the internet.

41 Drummond, 199-240. Additionally, *Jaws*, released during a wave of feminist activism, can be interpreted as an invocation of the threat to patriarchal society posed by feminism because of the archetypal representation of feminine energy as a monster rising out of the sea. Barry Spector, *Madness at the Gates of the City: The Myth of American Innocence* (Berkeley: Regent Press, 2010), 206.

42 Drummond, 185-195.

43 Ibid., 139.

44 James Cameron. Avatar. James Cameron and John Landau, United States: 20th Century Fox, 2009.

45 Drummond, 241-260.

46 Ibid., 118-119.

47 Ibid., 20.

48 Ibid., 116.

49 Ibid., 90-91.

50 Ibid., 86.

51 Riana Eisler's cultural transformation theory posits that cultural paradigms can change abruptly, particularly when alternate symbolic systems are imposed upon a community. Merging Eisler's ideas with Drummond's description of cultural generativity suggests that a thoughtful reconstruction of the semiotic dimensions in myth could lead to a reconfiguration of the semiospace of culture as lived reality. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987).

Chapter 10 – Death of the Gunfighter

1 Geertz.

2 Joseph H. Kupfer, "The Seductive and Subversive Meta-Narrative of *Unforgiven*," *Journal of Film and Video* 60, no. 3/4 (2008): 104.

3 Luis M. Garcia Mainar, "Authorship and Identity in the Cinema of Clint Eastwood," *Atlantis* 29, no. 2 (2007): 32.

4 Armando J. Prats, "Back from the Sunset: The Western, the Eastwood Hero, and *Unforgiven*," *Journal of Film and Video* 47, no. 1/3 (1995).

5 Kupfer.

6 Gail Jardine, "Clint: Cultural Critic, Cowboy of Cathartic Change," *Art Journal* 53, no. 3 (1994). and Kupfer.

7 Mary Whitlock Blundell and Kirk Ormand, "Western Values, or the Peoples Homer: "Unforgiven" As a Reading of The "Iliad"," *Poetics Today* 18, no. 4 (1997).

8 Ibid.: 536.

9 Kupfer: 112-113.

10 quoted in Jardine.

11 Mainar.

12 Ibid.: 30-31.

13 Ibid.: 32.

14 Jardine.

15 Ibid. and Kupfer: 107.

16 Eastwood's films have a lot of dead wives, as Tania Modleski noted. If the female as representative of civilization is always captured or threatened, perhaps it is because the goddess has been pushed to the underworld, the feminine has been turned into the Other. Perhaps the centuries of rescuing the female 'victim' were an expression of the desire to rescue the repressed from its exile, from the shadowy realm of the unconscious. Tania Modleski, "Clint Eastwood and Male Weepies," *American Literary History* 22, no. 1 (2010). Spector.

17 Spector, 108-109.

[18] The hero finding community among the Other is not unprecedented but it is a motif that finds expression in periods of cultural revision. We have seen this before in films such as *Little Big Man* or *Dances with Wolves* but in these films, the white male hero moves from stranger to guest. In *Gran Torino*, the hero's place remains the same and the surrounding community shifts in his perception from enemy to friend.

[19] Spector, 39, 262.

[20] Ibid., 231.

[21] Ibid., 39.

[22] Modleski: 152.

Chapter 11 – Dilemmas of the Nation

[1] Robert A. Johnson in Spector, forward.

[2] Ibid., 71.

[3] A student of mine who served in the Navy during the War on Terror was adamant that military deaths are not gifts from the soldiers but the theft of politicians.

[4] Spector, 107-120.

[5] Ibid.-117

[6] Suicide is now the leading cause of death in the military. Amy Goodman. "The Invisible Wounds of War: Numbers of Soldiers Committing Suicide Reaches Record High." Democracy Now!, August 21, 2012 http://www.democracynow.org/2012/8/21/the_invisible_wounds_of_war_number [accessed

[7] Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).

[8] Ibid., 7.

[9] Spector, 293.

[10] A student in a course I taught on American Folklore collected this piece of lore. A friend of hers had enlisted in the military after 9/11/2001, and according to her report, his recruiter had told him this tale.

[11] This piece was collected around the same time as an incident referred to as "the Jena six" when three nooses were hung from a Louisiana schoolyard tree, racial tension in the community escalated and six black youths were jailed. Given the U.S.'s systematic discrimination against minorities, the near perpetual state of war, the absurd incarceration rate, and the disturbing amount of gun violence, the claim of peace and freedom is disingenuous. The lynching incident in Jena, LA, and all of its historical antecedents (not to mention more recent incidents of violence against black men in particular) are part of the sacrificial theme of scapegoating addressed in the section on confession.

[12] Spector, 116.

[13] Ibid., 278-79.

[14] Ewen MacAskill. "George Bush: 'God Told Me to End the Tyranny in Iraq'." The Guardian, October 6 2005 [accessed Sept. 21, 2012].

[15] Spector included an extended discussion of the Greek god Kronos (as in chronology). Father time consumes everything, including his children, who he fears will come to "claim their inheritance." Spector, 109-110.

[16] Ibid., 278-79.

[17] Ibid., 395.

[18] Drummond.

[19] Peter Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 105, 113.

[20] Ibid., 109-110.

[21] Schor.

[22] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000).

[23] Eric J. Arnould, "Should Consumer Citizens Escape the Market?," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, no. (2007).

[24] Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty*, 105-110. Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1955).

[25] Craig J. Thompson, "A Carnivalesque Approach to the Politics of Consumption (or) Grotesque Realism and the Analytics of the Excretory Economy," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, no. (2007).

[26] Ibid.: 117.

[27] Spector, 249, 418.

[28] Ibid., 71, 232.

[29] Ibid., 137-38.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Arnould.

[32] Thompson.

[33] Freire, 103.

[34] Barthes was specifically opposed to the hegemonic myth of the Right. His definition of myth is not equal to Lee Drummond's broader definition in which myth is an inescapable process of human consciousness. Barthes, 131.

[35] I refer to Riane Eisler's theory of dominator-model societies as being hierarchical, authoritarian and violent. Eisler.

[36] Spector, 142.

[37] Horsman. Hietala. Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995). David Stephen Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Manifest Destiny*, Greenwood Guides to Historic Events, 1500-1900, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003). Greenberg.

[38] Dick Cheney. "My Belief Is, We Will, in Fact Be Greeted as Liberators.". Meed the Press, Tim Russert, United States: National Broadcasting Company, March 16, 2003. A coworker of mine at the time said of the Iraqis, "they're so barbaric. They don't even have shopping malls."

[39] Ralph Z. Hallow. "Gop Takes Tough Platform Approach." The Washington Times, August 21 2012 http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/aug/21/gop-takes-extreme-platform-approach/ (accessed November 15, 2012). Clint Eastwood spoke at the 2012 Republican National Convention just before the appearance of Presidential candidate Mitt Romney and delivered a surreal performance in which he conversed with an empty chair meant to represent President Obama. The crowd coerced him into saying the famous line from his *Dirty Harry* films, "go ahead, make my day." This bit of script is a semiotic code referencing a willingness to execute violence in the interest of protecting the social order and authority; or as the Republican Party Platform describes it, "peace through strength." Republican National Committee, "2012 Republican Party Platform," (2012). http://www.gop.com/2012-republican-platform_home/.

[40] Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 218.

[41] Spector, 294.

[42] Please note that the history of U.S. citizens as terrorizers is not limited to lynchings. As another example, though Native Americans were often depicted in novels, films, and paintings as terrorizing the white settler population, the reverse is actually true. As I type these words, I sit near the Hyampom valley of Northern California where U.S. army Captain Jedediah Smith

forced the evacuation of three Indian tribes; and approximately 20 miles to the East, white settlers massacred an entire village of indigenous people.

[43] Modleski: 142.

[44] Ibid.: 138, 155.

[45] Ibid.: 154, 146.

[46] Ibid.: 146.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.: 154.

[49] Spector, 372-73.

Conclusion

[1] Drummond. Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth."

[2] Taylor.

[3] Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.

[4] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*.

[5] Freire.

[6] Eisler.

[7] Amilcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 53.

[8] Ibid., 55.

Bibliography

"Election 2010: Senate Final Results", Real Clear Politics http://www.realclearpolitics.com/elections/2010/senate_final_results.html (accessed May 27, 2012).

Webster's New World College Dictionary. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2010.

"The State of Consumption Today", Worldwatch Institute: Vision for a Sustainable World,, Worldwatch Institute http://www.worldwatch.org/node/810 (accessed June 30 2012).

"Footprint for Nations", Global Footprint Network: Advancing the Science of Sustainability http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/footprint_for_nations/ (accessed June 30 2012).

"Passenger Vehicles in the United States", Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passenger_vehicles_in_the_United_States (accessed June 30, 2012).

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Egyptian Melodrama - Technology of the Modern Subject?" In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larkin and Faye D. Ginsburg, 115-33. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Adler, Margot. "Behind the Ever-Expanding American Dream House." *National Public Radio*, July 4 2006 http://npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyld=5525283 (accessed June 30, 2012).

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, 79-88. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 4 (1994): 829-838.

Arnould, Eric J. "Should Consumer Citizens Escape the Market?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611 (2007): 96-111.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.

Bercovitch, Sacvan, and Myra Jehlen, eds. *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Berger, Peter. *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books, 1990.

Berman, Ari. "The .0000063% Election." *Truthdig: Drilling Beneath the Headlines* (2012). http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_0000063_election_20120218/ (accessed February 18, 2012).

Blundell, Mary Whitlock, and Kirk Ormand. "Western Values, or the Peoples Homer: "Unforgiven" As a Reading of The "Iliad"." *Poetics Today* 18, no. 4 (1997): 533-569.

Burke, Kenneth. *On Symbols and Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Cabral, Amilcar. "National Liberation and Culture." In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Cameron, James. *Avatar*. James Cameron and John Landau, United States: 20th Century Fox, 2009.

Campbell, Neil. *The Cultures of the American New West*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2000.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Cheney, Dick. *"My Belief Is, We Will, in Fact Be Greeted as Liberators."*. Meed the Press, Tim Russert, United States: National Broadcasting Company, March 16, 2003.

Cole, H. M. *Icons: Ideals and Power in the Art of Africa*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

Committee, Republican National. "2012 Republican Party Platform." (2012). http://www.gop.com/2012-republican-platform_home/.

Council, Environmental Literacy, "Fossil Fuels", The Environmental Literacy Council http://www.enviroliteracy.org/subcategory.php/21.html (accessed June 30, 2012).

Dahl, Robert A. *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University, 1989.

_____. *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Denham, B. E., and R. N. Jones. "Survival of the Stereotypical: A Study of Personal Characteristics and Order of Elimination on Reality Television." *Studies in Popular Culture* 30, no. 2 (2008): 79-99.

Denniston, Lyle. "Analysis: The Personhood of Corporations." *SCOTUSblog* (January 21, 2010). http://www.scotusblog.com/2010/01/analysis-the-personhood-of-corporations/ (accessed April 23, 2012).

Desmond, Jane, and Virginia Dominquez. "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism." *American Quarterly* 48 (1996): 475-90.

Drummond, Lee. *American Dreamtime: A Cultural Analysis of Popular Movies, and Their Implications for a Science of Humanity*. Lanham, Maryland: Littlefield Adam Books, 1996.

Duhigg, Charles, and David Barboza. "In China, Human Costs Are Built into an Ipad." *The New York Times*, January 25 2012 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/business/ieconomy-apples-ipad-and-the-human-costs-for-workers-in-china.html?pagewanted=all (accessed June 30, 2012).

Eisler, Riane. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Farmer, Paul. "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below." *Daedalus* 125, no. 1, Social Suffering (1996): 261-283.

Fernandez, James W. "Persuasions and Performances: Of the Beast in Every Body...And the Metaphors of Everyman." In *Myth, Symbol and Culture*, edited by Clifford Geertz, 39-60. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. , 1971.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedegogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th Anniversary Edition ed. New York: Continuum, 2009.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, edited by James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961.

Ganti, Tejaswani. "'and yet My Heart Is Still Indian:' the Bombay Film Industry and the (H)Indianization of Hollywood." In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larkin and Faye D. Ginsburg, 281-300. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gerken, Heather K. "The Real Problem with *Citizens United*." *The American Prospect* (2010). http://prospect.org/article/real-problem-citizens-united (accessed May 27, 2012).

Goodman, Amy. "The Invisible Wounds of War: Numbers of Soldiers Committing Suicide Reaches Record High." *Democracy Now!*, August 21, 2012 http://www.democracynow.org/2012/8/21/the_invisible_wounds_of_war_number (accessed August 30, 2012).

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. 1st ed. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Greenberg, Amy S. *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Gumbel, Andrew. *Steal This Vote: Dirty Elections and the Rotten History of Democracy in America*. New York: Nation Books, 2005.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, edited by M. G. Durham and D. Kellner. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

Hallow, Ralph Z. "Gop Takes Tough Platform Approach." *The Washington Times*, August 21 2012 http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/aug/21/gop-takes-extreme-platform-approach/ (accessed November 15, 2012).

Harden, Blaine. "Angolan Paradox: Oil Wealth Only Adds to Misery." *The New York Times*, April 9, 2000 (accessed May 21, 2012).

Hedges, Chris. *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

Heidler, David Stephen, and Jeanne T. Heidler. *Manifest Destiny* Greenwood Guides to Historic Events, 1500-1900,. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003.

Hennessy, Rosemary, and Rajeswari Mohan. "The Construction of Woman in Three Popular Texts of Empire: Towards a Critique of Materialist Feminism." In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 462-79. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Hietala, Thomas R. *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, edited by M. G. Durham and D. Kellner, 41-72. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

Horsman, Reginald. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2007.

Jardine, Gail. "Clint: Cultural Critic, Cowboy of Cathartic Change." *Art Journal* 53, no. 3 (1994): 74-75.

Johnson, Luke. "Richard Mourdock: Bipartisanship Ought to Be Democrats Siding with the G.O.P." *The Huffington Post* (2012). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/09/richard-mourdock-bipartisanship-indiana-senate_n_1502718.html (accessed May 9, 2012).

Kaplan, Amy, and Donald Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993.

Kipling, Rudyard. *The White Man's Burden: A Poem*. New York: Doubleday and McClure Co., 1899.

Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

Kuklick, Bruce. "Myth and Symbol in American Studies." *American Quarterly* 24 (1972).

Kupfer, Joseph H. "The Seductive and Subversive Meta-Narrative of *Unforgiven*." *Journal of Film and Video* 60, no. 3/4 (2008): 103-114.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Structural Study of Myth." In *Myth: Symposium*, edited by Thomas Sebeok, 81-106. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965.

_____. *From Honey to Ashes*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

_____. *The Origin of Table Manners*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

_____. *The Raw and the Cooked*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

_____. *The Naked Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

MacAskill, Ewen. "George Bush: 'God Told Me to End the Tyranny in Iraq'." *The Guardian*, October 6 2005 (accessed September 21, 2012).

Mainar, Luis M. Garcia. "Authorship and Identity in the Cinema of Clint Eastwood." *Atlantis* 29, no. 2 (2007): 27-37.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1984.

_____. "The Role of Myth in Life." In *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, edited by Alan Dundes, 193-206. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Mantz, Jeffrey W. "Improvisational Economies: Coltan Production in the Eastern Congo." *Social Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (2008): 34-50.

Marx, Karl, and Friederich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1955.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Masters, Kim. *A Nation Divided, United in 'Idol' Worship*. Morning Edition, National Public Radio, April 16, 2008, 2008.

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000.

McAuliff, Michael. "Dick Lugar Loses to Tea Party's Richard Mourdock in Indiana Republican Senate Primary (Update)." *The Huffington Post* (2012). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/08/dick-lugar-richard-mourdock-lugar-loses-indiana-republican-senate-primary_n_1501416.html (accessed May 9, 2012).

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

McDonald, Michael, "2010 General Election Turnout Rates", United States Elections Project, George Mason University http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html (accessed May 27 2012).

Meizel, Katherine. *Idolized: Music, Media and Identity in American Idol*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonizing Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Modleski, Tania. "Clint Eastwood and Male Weepies." *American Literary History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 136-158.

Mohanty, Chandra. "'under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles." In *Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, 221-273. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Murphy, Craig N. "Global Governance: Poorly Done and Poorly Understood." *International Affairs* 76, no. 4 (2000): 789-803.

Neff, Emily Ballew. *The Modern West: American Landscapes, 1890-1950*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

Nichols, John, and Robert W. McChesney. "After 'Citizens United': The Attack of the Super Pacs." *The Nation* (2012). http://www.thenation.com/article/165733/after-citizens-united-attack-super-pacs?page=0,1 (accessed February 6, 2012).

Ortner, Sherry B. "On Key Symbols." In *Reader in Comparative Religion*, edited by William Lessa and Evon Vogt. Hew York: Harper, 1979.

Prats, Armando J. "Back from the Sunset: The Western, the Eastwood Hero, and *Unforgiven*." *Journal of Film and Video* 47, no. 1/3 (1995): 106-123.

Prown, Jules Davis. *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Raskin, Jamie. "The Citizens United Era: How the Supreme Court Continues to Put Business First." *People For the American Way* (2012). http://www.pfaw.org/media-center/publications/citizens-united-era-how-supreme-court-continues-put-busines-first (accessed May 27, 2012).

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972.

Rostow, W. W. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Saldivar, Jose David. *Dialectics of Our America: Geneology, Cultural Critique and Literary History*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991.

Sandweiss, Martha A. *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* Yale Western Americana Series. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Schechner, Richard. *Essays on Performance Theory, 1970-1976*. 1st ed. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977.

Scheub, Harold. "Parallel Image Sets in African Oral Narrative-Performance." In *Review of National Literatures*, 2, 206-223. New York: St. John's University, 1971.

Schmitt, Mark. "Can Money Be a Force for Good?" *The American Prospect* (2008). http://prospect.org/article/can-money-be-force-good (accessed May 21, 2012).

Schor, Juliet B. "In Defense of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611 (2007): 16-30.

Schwarz, Jeffrey. *Journey to Safety: The Making of Tears of the Sun*. Jeffrey Schwarz, 2003.

Scott, A. O. "*Tears of the Sun* (2003) Film Review; Americans Atoning for African Slaughters." *The New York Times*, March 7 2003 http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9804E4DC133FF934A35750C0A9659C8B63 (accessed April 1, 2010).

Shiva, Vandana. *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005.

Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* Sightlines. London ; New York: Routledge, 1994.

Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. 1st paperback ed. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1974.

_____. *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*. 1st ed. New York: Atheneum, 1985.

_____. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum, 1992.

Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.

Spector, Barry. *Madness at the Gates of the City: The Myth of American Innocence.* Berkeley: Regent Press, 2010.

Stephanson, Anders. *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*. 1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003.

Thompson, Craig J. "A Carnivalesque Approach to the Politics of Consumption (or) Grotesque Realism and the Analytics of the Excretory Economy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611 (2007): 112-140.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Truettner, William H., ed. *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920.* Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1969.

_____. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play.* New York: PAJ Publications, 1982.

Wallerstein, I. "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16 (1974): 387-415.

Watts, Michael. "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria." *Geopolitics* 9, no. 1 (2004): 50-80.

Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*, edited by Geunther Roth and Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

Wilken, Peter. "Global Poverty and Orthodox Security." *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2002): 633-645.