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Antebellum, Inc: Hollywood and the Construction of Southern Identity, 1920–1940

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Cameo Lyn West

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The Dissertation of Cameo Lyn West is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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2018

EPIGRAPH

Reality is not a function of the event as event, but of the relationship of that event to past, and future, events.

Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Antebellum, Inc: Hollywood and the Construction of Southern Identity, 1920–1940

by

Cameo Lyn West

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California San Diego, 2018

Professor Daniel Widener, Co-Chair
Professor Rachel Klein, Chair

During the first half of the twentieth century, Americans understood the history of the South as singularly significant in the construction of the modern U.S. nation-state, due to an intense revival of popular interest in the Civil War, the development of a public discourse around the socio-political idea of the “New South”, and a cultural zeitgeist that valued both nostalgia and authenticity. “Antebellum, Inc.: Hollywood and the Construction of Southern Identity, 1920 - 1940” explores the process by which Hollywood crafted a mainstream socio-political narrative of “the South”, by using what I describe as the Southern genre of film as the primary lens to understand the formation of a collective cultural knowledge and historical memory of that region. American audiences eagerly consumed the fictionalized antebellum and gothic narratives that were a hallmark of the Southern genre, as evidenced by the popularity of Faulkner as a screenwriter, and the watershed moment in popular culture that occurred around release of *Gone with the Wind's* 1940 film adaption. Crucially, that

interest extended beyond the movie theatre, as Americans also engaged in discoursing about distinctly contemporary “southern” issues, like prison chain gang labor, and a partial and unjust court system. The Southern genre was crafted through the cooperation of producers (film studios), consumers (audiences), and interpreters (academics), and “Antebellum, Inc.” evinces its parameters by pressing the primary source material to reveal a mutually-dependent relationship between movie studios, audiences and scholars. The repercussions of this national moment, and of the Southern genre, have been retained in the way Americans talk about the South and southerners as homogenized, anachronistic, and predictable while still seeming strange, unknowable, and just foreign enough to be palpably different and separate from the rest of the Union.

Introduction

“Antebellum, Inc.: Hollywood and the Construction of Southern Identity, 1920 - 1940” explores the process by which Hollywood crafted a vision of the South that resonated with audiences during the interwar period. Those decades saw an explosion of popular movies that centered on the South and, in the process, created what might be called a distinctive *southern* genre of film, comparable in some ways to the western. This dissertation explores how these southern films interpreted southern history and considers the significance of their many mystifications. During the interwar era, around 50 films about the south were released; this is keeping with an overarching trend toward favoring history pictures and movies representing social issues—most southern films fit into one of these categories.¹ The most central intention of the southern film is a preoccupation with educating the viewer, rather than simply entertaining them; educating the audience about the minutiae of antebellum clothes and homes, and selling the racist histories of the Dunning school as part of that authenticity. Or, alternatively, educating the non-southern spectator about the social ills of the South as a kind of communal nation-building dialog made possible only by the new technology of the narrative motion picture. That the southern genre produced some of the most successful films of the first half of the twentieth century is no coincidence; Hollywood producers were not uncritical about the quality of movies being released, because the issue of legitimacy loomed large for politically-engaged artists and producers hinging their reputations on the success of the movies as a commercial enterprise.

¹ Total number of films released between 1920 and 1940 depicting the American South and/or southerners primarily, according to intact AFI release and distribution records: 49 titles. See bibliography for detailed notes.

Southern films most broadly fall into one of two categories: the history picture, or the issue picture. This dissertation examines 26 of these films broadly, focusing on 13 as case studies.² 6 of those 13 of those fall into the former category, with the rest falling into the latter. For example, *The Santa Fe Trail* is a history picture that explores themes of white nationalism and imperialism in the guise of an action film, while *The Grapes of Wrath* tackles the hardships faced by displaced, white tenant farmers during the Great Depression. Movies like *The Little Colonel* and *Hearts in Dixie*, while not strictly either issue or history pictures, do not pose a direct challenge to this dichotomy, because they nevertheless rely on the audience buying into either the worldview pushed by antebellum nostalgists, or progressive activist rhetoric. Even black-produced narratives relied on this formula, with Oscar Micheaux's social commentary-driven *Within Our Gates* exploring the residual trauma imparted by being from the South in his middle-class, migrant, mulatto protagonist, and Noble and George P. Johnsons' *Trooper of Company K*, about the "fighting 10th" all-black regiment fighting the Mexican imperial army in Texas, presenting the historical perspective. The purpose of the history picture was to romanticize the American past in a manner that encouraged national reconciliation during a period when white solidarity was at the forefront of the cultural discourse shaping the historical memory of the Civil War. History pictures also offered an alternative perspective on the history of the South that flattened all race, class, and gender conflicts as secondary to the *real* drama: that which happens between families. Oppositely, issue pictures encouraged the spectator to practice empathy—and pity—toward southerners who were locked out of the

² See filmography for notes.

opportunities afforded to other Americans. On whom the blame for this situation was placed varied from film to film, but in some way the setting of the south was responsible; the environment bred laziness and ignorance in its denizens, or corruption in its bureaucracy, or was abandoned by a feckless and indifferent federal government that it sorely needed for direction and guidance.

Southerners operated within the limits of not only the popular imagination and discursive themes present during the interwar era, but also the mounting constrictions of the studio system. The Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC, Code), written by officials with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), was officially adopted by the Association of Motion Picture Producers on the 31st of March in 1930. The motto of the newly enforceable code was to “maintain social and community values in the production of silent, synchronized and talking motion pictures.” Although the Code was technically established in 1922, it was rarely used to censor movies outright, and was instead intended as a set of moral guidelines—rules for all godly filmmakers, rather than the law of the land. The impetus to reaffirm the MPP’s theocratic oversight of Hollywood was a number of moral panics that took place during the 1920s, coinciding with the releases of particularly racy films. The most prominent of these films was *The Story of Temple Drake*, an adaptation of William Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* that lured audiences in with the promise of sex and violence—and made good on that promise. Critic P.S. Harrison of *Harrison’s Reports* was so disgusted by Paramount’s decision to adapt that novel that he blamed the studio for actively contributing to the moral decay of the nation with “filthy and vile” pictures.³

³ Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New Haven: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 95.

The MPPDA moved immediately to attempt to prevent the film's release, with powerfully Fox Film Corp executive Lamar Trotti and chairman Will Hays both describing Faulkner's work as "sickening" and "utterly unthinkable."⁴ The effort to halt the distribution of the movie failed, but the public discourse that developed around the film allowed the MPPDA to leverage their once-limited power over the film studios by claiming that the American people were opposed to Hollywood, en masse, and if studios continued to release pictures that "lowered the standard of the race", audiences would dry up.⁵ All major Hollywood producers, for a number of reasons that will be discussed—and with varying degrees of sincerity and willingness to cooperate—adopted the Code for their studios, and voluntarily submitted all films before release to be assessed by the censors. Joseph Breen, whom Will Hays appointed as chief executive of the newly revamped Code authority, was a staunch Catholic, and his tenure as head of the bureau is characterized by the outsized influence of the church on Hollywood. While every director discussed in this dissertation was either Protestant or Jewish, and the United States had yet to send a Catholic to the White House, this demographic was not marginalized in the film industry. The central role the Catholic Church played in the creation and deployment of the MPPC is partially due to luck, but is mostly reflective of the incredibly tenacity of grassroots organizers. When the major studios sought out the advice of the censors at the MPPDA President Will Hays - a controversial figure who was mostly known for his role in the Teapot Dome scandal⁶ -

⁴ Black, 96.

⁵ The Motion Picture Production Code (1930 version).

⁶ Kerry Segrave, *American Films Abroad: Hollywood's Domination of the World's Movie Screens from the 1980s to the Present* (New York: McFarland, 1997), 22.

and Breen worked closely with the Catholic National League of Decency (NLD, c. 1933) to establish hard-and-fast guidelines for all major studio releases. Breen wrote most of the Code himself, and his authorial voice is apparent all over the document, from the opening salvo about “bodies and souls” to the final notes against religious ridicule.⁷

One of the central themes of this dissertation is the contradiction between the producer’s interest in historical accuracy, and their investment in myth-making. This is perhaps best illustrated by exploring the way southerners elided the most pressing social issue of the time: the rise of the second Klan. During the 1920s, when the second Ku Klux Klan was the nation’s most widespread and energetic social movement, and history pictures about the South told stories that celebrated slavery as a time of social stability and racial harmony.⁸ D. W. Griffith’s 1918 *Birth of a Nation*, which is widely accepted as the very first long-form narrative film, sought to redeem the legacy of the first Klan and to highlight what he perceived as the prosecution of white southerners during Reconstruction. There is some evidence that Griffith’s redemptive, alternative history of a viciously racist terrorist organization that was responsible for the near-total disenfranchisement of the black man in the South, was integral not only to the rehabilitation of a historical memory, but—more crucially—the popularity of the so-

⁷ The three overarching guidelines that broadly describe the ethic that characterizes the Production Code are: (1) No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin; (2) Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented; (3) Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

⁸ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1994).

called 'second' Klan.⁹ The Klan of the 20s was concerned with more than terrorizing black citizens and preventing them from engaging in political life—the goals of the organization ranged from temperance, to the so-called protection of Christian morality through the policing of female bodies and movement in both public and private spheres. Yet the goals of the second Klan—much less the Klan itself—were conspicuously absent in issue pictures. Instead, the real work of promoting the conservative worldview espoused by the Klan was performed by filmmakers of history pictures, like *So Red the Rose* director and noted social conservative King Vidor¹⁰, who also directed the minstrel show masquerading as race film *Hallelujah*. While *Birth of a Nation* and *The Santa Fe Trail*¹¹ depicted the first Klan as reluctant heroes, the second Klan is entirely absent from southern past that mythologize a utopian southern past. Indeed, the only films discussed in this dissertation that reference the Klan are two issue pictures—*The Black Legion* and *They Won't Forget*, which both depict Klan-esque fraternities as violent crime families, akin to the mafia.¹²

⁹ Will Alexander, a representative with the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, wrote to Will Hays on July 23rd, 1930 to express his disappointment that *Birth* was being re-issued, specifically because he claimed that his organization had found that the film sowed empathy for Klansmen and interest in joining their ranks: "I am sure that the showing of this film has helped to intensify the feeling out of which lynching grow and that it has also been very useful in promoting the Klan in the South."

¹⁰ Margaret Hrezo and William E. Hrezo, "The Politics of the "Open" Self: America in the Cinema of King Vidor and Robert Altman." *Studies in Popular Culture* 32, no. 2 (2010): 69.

¹¹ On December 30th, 1937, PCA president and primary Censor, Joseph Breen wrote to the primary screenwriters of *The Santa Fe Trail* that, "[C]are should be taken, throughout, to avoid offending southern sensibilities in characterization or dialogue. In this connection, we call your attention to the reference, in scene K-55, to the Ku Klux Klan, and suggest that you assure yourselves that there will be no objection to such reference."

¹² See Chapter 3 for more about the Klan.

Southerners also responded to mounting anxiety about sex, morality, and gender roles. One of the foundational tenants of the second Klan centered around preserving the perceived purity of the white woman, and valorizing white motherhood. That nostalgia for conservative Victorian womanhood is reflected in some southerners, like *The Little Colonel*, but in other movies like *The Story of Temple Drake*, and even—to an extent—plantation pictures like *Jezebel*, *So Red the Rose*, and *Gone With the Wind*, women challenged traditional gender roles and reflected a burgeoning sense of independence, rather than simple separation, from male control. *Gone* was the right movie for the right moment, and Scarlett was a heroine who embodied the gumption and resourcefulness that became expected of women on the home front. Feminism during the early 20th century was characterized by an emphasis on the political agency of women, and their rights, privileges and responsibilities as Americans. The (ideally) full participation of female citizens in the political arena suggested further integration of women into the public sphere. The narrowing of the domestic sphere—which was re-widened after WWII—affected southern women differently from their northern counterparts. Most working poor white families in the South were supported by at least two household incomes, with women and girl children making wages in the field or at the mill next to their male counterparts.¹³ White southern women of the middle and landed classes were more politically active than the working poor, a tradition which characterizes much of southern history, even during the pre-antebellum era. Wealthy women were not only patrons of the arts and philanthropists, they were also active

¹³ Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd; Leloudis, James L.; Korstad, Robert; Murphy, Rodger; Murphy, Mary; Jones, Lu Ann; and Christopher B. Daly. *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 80-82.

lobbyists for social change that benefitted their class and the ideals associated with planters and the industrial and military elite. Famously, the United Daughters of the Confederacy were integral to the promotion and practical deployment of the Lost Cause mythos.¹⁴ This meant fundraising for monuments, authoring pro-Confederacy textbooks, and organizing public holidays in honor of the CSA. With the right to vote, southern women moved away from solely engaging in local activism, to networking with other concerned women voters to promote conservative—often reactionary—issues on the ballot.¹⁵ By the 1970s, the voting bloc of the white, southern woman was so powerful that Nixon’s Silent Majority rhetoric specifically targeted these voters to support their busing campaigns. At the same time these women were insistent upon maintaining traditional roles, they were advocating and voting in a manner historically associated with landed men. Feminism for white, conservative southern women meant placing their beliefs in the common good and the maintenance of the sociopolitical hierarchy in which they lived. Indeed, they did engage in consciousness-raising during the interwar era, although this was in service to making sure all white women were willing to reinforce the status quo, rather than promoting gender role transgression.

The first Great Migration of black folks out of the American South was also crucial to the formation of the southern genre, as well as the prominence of southern themes in black cinema, in general. In Chicago, movie theaters were a big, growing

¹⁴ Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 50.

¹⁵ Blee, Kathleen, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), introduction.

business.¹⁶ The Great Migration and subsequent urbanization of black Americans impacted the demographically and political nature of the south, north, west and center of the nation. As rural black folks moved into northern hubs of culture and commerce, like Harlem, the process of cultural exchange was marked by a symbiosis where the erudite artists of the Harlem Renaissance found inspiration in the so-called primitive arts of the emigrant population, and vice versa. From this fusion of Dixieland and European classical music training came the art of jazz, which recalled the hard-living themes of blues music and amalgamated that ethic with the desire to make danceable music; the perfect expression of emotion and aesthetic. With film, too, Oscar Micheaux explored themes from the old country, as it were, and translated them to the most universal medium of storytelling—narrative movies. There were white emigrants, too, moving to the emerging metropolises of Atlanta and Nashville, or reconnecting with some thoroughly mythologized location like New Orleans or Richmond. Faulkner and Caldwell penned their transgressive, amalgamative works of gothic fiction from these urban centers, reflecting upon and drawing from the plantation while bodily—and mentally—freeing themselves from the plantation mindset.

The South was a cite of widespread poverty and retarded economic growth during the 1920s.¹⁷ This situation was exacerbated by the Great Depression, and southerners both at home and in migration were made central to the national discourse around welfare and the social responsibilities to, and of, the poor. This discourse aligned with the larger sociopolitical conversation around American's imperial

¹⁶ Jacqueline Stewart, "Negroes Laughing at Themselves? Black Spectatorship and the Performance of Urban Modernity," *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 651.

¹⁷ Natalie J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), introduction.

expansion and ‘civilizing’ colonial endeavors. For example, in *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang*—formerly *I Am a Fugitive From a Georgia Chain Gang*—the poor nutritional quality of the food that is given to the prisoners is highlighted when the protagonist refuses to eat the foul-smelling slop, and demands to know what is in it. A fellow inmate answers him: “grease, fried dough, pig fat, and sorghum”. This recalls the national interest during the 1920s around the pellagra epidemic among tenant farmers in the South.¹⁸ When the stock market crashed and the repercussions reached into the urban centers of the North, images like “Migrant Mother” singled out the southern migrant experience, commodifying and even fetishizing the anonymous suffering of *those poor people*. Movies like *White Bondage* showcased this suffering for the American public with language that kept the issue at arm’s length—poverty in the South is the fault of the southerners themselves, and of the bad actors in state-level government. Populist and even collectivist political messages were ascribed to *The Grapes of Wrath* and *White Bondage*, but in the end the films were relatively apolitical, which was extremely purposeful on the part of the producers. Collectivist movements and anti-prohibition activism appealed tremendously to very similar demographics in the South. Radical-minded progressives in the vein of John Brown, like the teetotal Kansan firebrand Mother Jones, worked toward their vision of a greater good, a world without vice and with greater obedience to god. Their social activism was at once reactionary—promoting the reinstatement of Christian family values, wherein women and men lived separately—while also advancing causes that can be read as socialist-

¹⁸ James G. Thomas and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 22: Science and Medicine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 235-238.

adjacent, such as a welfare state for army widows and the working poor. In *All the King's Men*, Robert Penn Warren's southern populist politician Willie Stark aims his criticisms directly at the wealthy in the government, and his words reasonable exactly because he is seen as an everyman with no legible associations with the men in power. He becomes the avatar for all their rage and hopelessness, while they become less and less likely to engage in activism themselves as the New Deal wound down. Warren highlights this toxic disassociation with and subsuming of ones needs and wishes by exposing Stark as a false messiah, even as most Americans came to view Franklin D. Roosevelt as their god-king, granting him executive power hitherto unheard-of. There is an Academy Award-winning film adaption of *All the King's Men*, released in 1949—which is beyond the scope of this study—which is perhaps the last, great film of the southern genre. It is fitting that, little more than ten years after the novel's timely release, Warren's perceived no-account southern populists are already seen as dated and foolish, a cautionary tale against mass hysteria and organizing around an idea as communist-adjacent as social collectivism. In the American popular imagination populists agitators were not Marxist, exactly, because they were too ill-informed and un-cosmopolitan to be associated with socioeconomic theory. Instead, they were the lumpen proletariat, the masses waited to be formed into something else, in service to whoever could best manipulate them.

The southern genre was very much a product of its time, and unlike the western, which has always been present in Hollywood in one form or another—black hats versus white hats, good versus evil—the tensions inherent to the central themes of these films are not necessarily universal enough for them to transcend the

particularities of the early-mid twentieth century. To be sure, the American South remains a topic of some interest for Hollywood and the popular imagination, but more often than not this setting becomes shorthand for tropes that have become associated with the South through the enduring popularity of the gothic. But for filmmakers working during the 1920s and 1930s, making movies about the South presented to them the opportunity engage in conversations about race, gender, morality, and class without directly implicating the American people; because the South was set apart from the rest of the United States, and southerners were citizens, certainly, but of a different, separate class. Some directors saw this separateness as an opportunity to highlight the perceived shortcomings of the region, while others mourned the loss of the racial and gender hierarchy of the antebellum, eulogizing and paying homage to an America 'before' social unrest. By investigating the origins and qualities of the southern genre, we can come to better understand the processes by which historical memory and popular culture work in tandem to create authenticities from falsehoods, and shape the identities of real people in the spaces carved out by fictional ones.

Chapter I

The Southern Genre

Sometimes I'm cramped and I'm crowded here

and long for elbow room

I long to reach for altitude

where fair flowers bloom

It won't be long till I shall pass

into that city fair

With fifty miles of elbow room

*on either side to spare*¹⁹

The central tension in westerns is between man and nature. The cowboy is locked in battle against the natural world, seeking to strike a balance amid taming the elements and preserving wildness. He also stands in struggle against himself, and the unknowable intentions of other men. He is not a hero any more than he is a villain; he simply exists, a self-made Adam, particular to a place and time both tied to and beyond temporal boundaries. His life is one of leisure and hard work at once. The fetishes Americans associate with cowboys - hats, guns, horses, lassos - are all symbolic of man's ability to respond to challenges and adapt accordingly. The cowboy hat is a response to the unforgiving western sun that damages skin and dehydrates the body, the lasso and horse illustrative of man's rightful position at the apex of the animal

¹⁹ Anonymous, "Fifty Miles of Elbow Room." Traditional southern folk song.

world, and the gun a promise, a warning, and a curse. Americans see themselves in the figure of the cowboy via his independent spirit, his tenacity, his singular moral compass, his desire for land and time spent for himself. It is these qualities that are mirrored, too, in the planters and belles of southern films. The Southern genre, which enjoyed tremendous popularity throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and peaked with *Gone with the Wind* mania in 1941, is not always neatly analogous to the western. The themes are less universal, and the topics are more inherently political and specific to a time and place in history (the Antebellum and Civil War eras). Yet the planter and the belle were cowboys in their own right, fiercely individual, showing mastery over nature - and by extension those races considered less civilized - and guided by an uncompromising, if not always correct, morality. Protagonists of westerns and southerners are culturally protestant, but their actions are deeply agnostic, guided more significantly by selfish principles than a desire to obey the Lord.²⁰ The traditional “Fifty Miles of Elbow Room”, which has roots in Tennessee and became popular as a campfire song in the west, expresses that shared southern/western ethos. In the final verse, the singer longs for death, not to be by Christ’s side, but so he can live in solitude amongst the “fair” beauty of heaven. This emphasis on seclusion and

²⁰ The Southern as a bellwether for the state of the nation will be discussed in detail further later in Chapter IV. This idea is also conceptualized particularly well by Natalie Ring in *The Problem South*, in which she argues that Americans came to understand imperialism abroad by comparing expansionist efforts to those in the impoverished post-Reconstruction south.

The South serves as a shorthand for a set of ideas and associated feelings: politically conservative, Christian-oriented, racially mixed, tradition-obsessed, under-educated, somehow foreign. Accordingly, people who identify with those ethics look to the South as an exemplary region, the last frontier of a “True America”, symbolizing gentility, self-subsistence, and god-fearing social values. For those critics of social conservatism and religious fundamentalism, the South is shorthand for the past, a cautionary tale, the “bad old days” of racism and poverty, all that America was and could become again, if progressive values do not prevail.

pulchritude can be found in the long, still lapses of cattle grazing, and in the sweeping of the camera over placid slaves bent away from the sun. The white man civilized these wild creatures, movies tell us, so his leisure is earned. And this was long ago, we are reminded, and far away; that way of life is forever vanished, gone with the wind.

Cultural critic and historian Robert Warshow probed the western for meaning during a time when the genre still enjoyed substantial cultural currency. In his seminal essay, “The Westerner”, Warshow challenges the idea that American audiences were drawn to westerns as a reaction to implicit themes of imperialism and racial dominion over the west.²¹ Instead, he argued that the appeal of the western was not in violence in-and-of-itself, but as heroic actions deploying violent methods as a means-to-an-end. This is not a pedantic distinction. For Warshow, the movies are a visual medium, and therefore must be understood by primarily visual modes of analysis. This means that his work is largely skeptical of theory-forward film criticism, or Marxist-materialist methodology. When an historian approaches a project from a theoretical framework that is politically motivated, then their modes of analysis operate within higher executive functions that link critical theories of race and class to neutral sensory inputs. In other words, the viewer sees what they want to see when they bring their preconceptions with them.

Obviously, there are issues with this approach. First, characterizing the utilization of theoretical frameworks as a form of preconception is troublesome, because that implies some forms of academic discourse are value-neutral, while some are so essentially politicized that they constitute a bias. It is obvious which categories of

²¹ Robert Warshow, “Movie Chronicle: The Westerner” in *The Western Reader* (Montclair: Limelight Editions, 1999).

discourse are vulnerable to the bias label: critical race theory, materialist lenses, gender studies - basically, the categories of what is now commonly known as identity politics. That means the truly unbiased or value-neutral theories are those that treat history and film criticism as an objective social science, rather than an art: content analysis, visual decoding, and cognitive science methods of measuring physiological responses to stimuli. This classification - stratification - of theory further antagonizes the elitism which plagues academia, where science and science-adjacent disciplines are valued over more humanistic approaches to scholarship.

Second, the claim that a spectator - be they an academic or a layperson - can watch a movie without thinking critically about what they are seeing is questionable. It precludes another form of academic snobbery, which is that the untrained citizen consumes unconsciously, gently guided by the invisible hand of the market or the capitalistic culture-makers. This argument is prevalent not only among Adorno-loyalists, but within humanities scholarship in general. It is much easier to analyze a non-person with blank subjectivities than it is to take into account an actual person's intersectionalities, and related countless complications to a scholar's thesis. Lacanian theory attempts to understand spectatorship as a universal mode, as a sensory experience that is more shared than subjective, but it is so couched in barely-accessible philosophical and psychological jargon that it is difficult to parse for the purpose of interdisciplinary scholarship. So, if we assume that most academics who write about the movies are not engaging with Lacan, then we must assume that their views are informed by more mainstream frameworks, which involve the aforementioned distinctions of scholar-versus-layman. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that any trained

critic would resist the urge, or indeed even be able to resist, making connections between their learning and their seeing.²² Warshow's own description of his process as an audience member challenges this, as he admits to feeling nostalgia for his fascination with gunslingers as a child, so he makes connections between the perceived innocence of his youth and the images in westerns.²³ Children with native or black or latinx blood viewed those same images as well, but did they feel those same kinds of feelings? Or did they feel threatened by the image of a man who looked like them, staring down the barrel of a man who very much does not?

Feelings are complex, and often ugly. Affective theory categorizes and defines - or undefines - the range of emotions that characterize the human experience. In the highest order of those emotions is empathy, or the ability to contemplate and sympathize with expressions and actions of others. A lack of empathy characterizes much of the revisionist history that was so prevalent in the literature of the post-reconstruction south. A lack of empathy characterizes political speech in the era of the New south. A lack of empathy, too, I would argue, led to the creation of *Birth of a Nation* and countless movies like it, which foreground and champion the experiences of one group of people at the expense of another. Crafting narratives around antagonisms is not unavoidable, just as avoiding dichotomous discourse in any aspect of life is not unavoidable. But the movies tell a story, and therefore appeal to pathos, and it is much easier to elicit strong negative or positive emotions than it is to draw out the nuances of empathy. Reflect on your own experiences, for a moment, and confront

²² Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 26.

²³ Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 105.

a time when you were unable to muster empathetic sympathy for another person's situation or actions. What did they do that was so unknowable to you, so grotesquely alien that they were removed, in your mind, from their humanity that you found yourself unable to relate? What could lead a person to act with such hatred or deprivation or callousness? What lived experiences have you had that lead you to judge the actions of another and find them without redemption?

An historian's work is not to empathize with historical persons, but rather it is to make meanings from primary sources, describe change over time, and ensure that the agency of those narratives is protected. Yet historians are people, too, and their research interests and chosen frameworks reflect their lived experiences. 19th century white, southern historians were exceedingly honest about this, and frankly discussed their work as an expression of themselves, as a relation of the experiences of people they care about. D.W. Griffith made movies that reflected his vision of the past, and what he believed were the lived realities of his ancestors and countrymen. Getting back to Warshow, understanding and acknowledging this is crucial to the work of cultural critics. Films are created for a purpose, be it to make money or make meanings. Therefore, there are indeed implications in movies that are present and waiting to be drawn out by audiences. These themes are not always political, and movies made under the studio system were perhaps the least political of all, as Hollywood focused more intently on industrial light and magic and creating an economy on the backs of artists. But history films drew on scholarship, even superficially, and that scholarship was created by historians both professional and amateur who wrote with a purpose in

mind.²⁴ That ethic cannot be totally lost in translation, in the transfer from page to screen.

Westerns, and southern, needed to be seen as plausible, if not authentic; as depictions of a certain ethos of the past, if not to-the-letter realism. So filmmakers relied on the past to build their movies in the present and shape the future of the picture industry. Still, Warshow's work is invaluable to understanding the singular place the western occupies in American popular culture. Just as Morris Dickstein's *Dancing in the Dark* outlines a cultural history of the Great Depression through the rather myopic lens of nostalgia, so does Warshow - and that is absolutely appropriate. The desire to experience the past is not uncommon, and indeed the prevalence of witticisms like, "I was born in the wrong era" reflect this in colloquial language. Not everyone has a nostalgia for the past (read: Black Americans, discussed further in Chapter III), but those that do are willing to suspend their disbelief enough to envision themselves or someone like them in the situations on-screen. Empathizing with the protagonists (and the villains, if the filmmaker is a particularly adept storyteller) is perhaps the central tenet of the movies. A person can watch a movie about someone they hate, but their empathy must be drawn out by the way that person is framed, or by those who are affected by their hatred - otherwise, the film is propaganda, flat and uninteresting. Not everyone who experienced *Birth of a Nation* was awed by the spectacle; some were bored by the overly-long narrative or un-relatable characters. Others describe watching *Birth* for the first time as a high point in their lives. Warshow calls for academics to bring an open-mindedness to watching westerns, for acknowledging the power of

²⁴ J.E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema: From Cimarron to Citizen Kane* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), Introduction.

visual pleasure as a motivator as much as, at least, as the desire to have unspoken socio-political beliefs confirmed. As Warshow argues, Gary Cooper was a handsome man, stoic and principled, and he found himself in situations where the only resolution was through firing his revolver. The visual pleasure of watching an attractive man calmly fire a gun is tremendous, he claims, and it is that argument which is not so foreign at all to even the most theoretically-couched scholar. Laura Mulvey's visual pleasure is derived from images understood at face-value, motivated by basic instincts and socially-constructed titillations. A beautiful woman being graphically raped on-screen is arousing to opposite-sex attracted men out of context, because the image is still of a beautiful woman in a sexual situation. The crux of Mulvey's argument has little to do with valid but unrelated arguments of rape and power and desire and sexual politics. Instead, her argument was radical in the 1970s and is radical still because she links seeing to feeling, alone. Warshow does the same.

Again, we are back to examining terms like 'seeing', and 'feeling', and 'knowing'. These concepts are nebulous, and discursively dangerous, but also accessible, and knowable on a human level, outside of jargon and conceptions of spectatorship. Undoubtedly, some people watch movies and fail to make critical connections beyond their own experiences and sensations, and then immediately push the stories out of their mind. There is even an argument that cultural artifacts like movies do not significantly shape a person's beliefs. But it is undeniable that most people are at the very least capable of thinking critically during movies, so the possibility that some enjoyed westerns actively for the purpose of empathizing with perceived imperialist themes or implied racial domination. If we accept that, then we

must also except that some people simply enjoyed westerns at face value, as a form of visual pleasure, as the opportunity to watch violence enacted on bodies, or the chance to gaze at the expansive scenery of an imagined west. It is the latter theme that I want to draw out here; the desire to see and inhabit wide open spaces as an essential part of the American psyche. This assumption characterizes the western genre more significantly than more overtly political themes, although I do acknowledge that manifest destiny is a brutal, racialized conception of native and latinx lands as rightfully anglo or essentially uninhabited. Still, the visual pleasure of seeing endless skies, and of feeling limitless in wide open spaces, and of “knowing” that such a place existed, or perhaps still does, is undeniable and undeniably American.

The western symbolizes the agency of the individual, while the Southern symbolizes the power of shared identity. In the old west of movies, men (and women, to an extent and dependent upon the film) were not constrained by rule of law or de facto modes and mores. Cowboys lived by an ethic of their own, and their morals were black-and-white, good-and-evil, easily decoded and understood. Class, like race and gender politics, was relegated to sub plots. Ranchers weren't the epitome of western-ness like planters were for southern-ness; instead, the only status symbol that applied to a cowboy was that of his hat, and his gun, and his horse. Men were punished to death for murder, of course, but also for stealing horses, and therefore a man's means or independence. The particularities of Americanisms are peeled away in the favor of the individual's idiosyncrasies. All cowboys are smart, and stoic, but some are quiet while others quip, some are compassionate while others are less forgiving, and there are no hard-and-fast rules about how to act, beyond staying true to one's self-defined

moral compass. Historian Peter Boag's work describes how sexual and gender nonconformity lay at the heart of the Old West; a mining camp description from 1852 says, "Dancing parties such as these [all-male miners' dances] were very common, especially in small camps."²⁵ There was a feeling, during the gold rush era, that "settling" the west was manifest destiny, yes, but perhaps even more compelling was the largely unspoken draw of being left alone, either by all others or by all other *unlike you*.²⁶ The desire to be left alone is labeled as anti-social, as ugly, as guilty hiding, but the context of the west reoriented those feelings into something Jeffersonian or even protestant; a man and his own free will. Westerns depict a man and his free will to be done or a black or white hat and work in teams or alone and live with a woman or by himself. This is the opposite of Victorian societal hyper-stratification; this is the manliness of a Daniel Boone, a fellow who knows what he is about, and does not concern himself with the feelings others have towards him. And, for the man of the rapidly industrializing and modernizing mid-early 20th century America, perhaps he too felt those same kinds of feelings.

There has been much talk of men here, but women have these desires, too, and perhaps even more so. southerners appealed to white women for the same reasons westerns appealed to white men. The images of women in westerns were less aspirational than they were voyeuristically pleasurable. The role of women in genre films during the interwar era is typified by the lead actresses in *Santa Fe Trail* and *The Texans*. In both films, women occupy the spatial margins of the movie, as well as the

²⁵ Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 214.

²⁶ Stephen Schwartz, *From West to East: California and the Making of the American Mind* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 114.

center-adjacent to the male lead. While outright depictions of prostitutes were made impossible by the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC), filmmakers made good use of costuming and dialogue to allude the role of some women in the old west. These women are more-or-less free from male influence in their personal lives. This is, obviously, not an entirely accurate depiction, as women who work within the sex industry are either implicated in the perpetuation of the patriarchy by their work, or made the victim of it - or both. Yet the western trope of the whorehouse typically depicts it as space where women live on their own terms, answering only to one person - the Madam. It is telling that these enterprises are overseen by women, who are made complicit in the objectification and commodification of female bodies. Our male heroes do not interact with the whorehouse directly. Often, the only time a white-hat steps into that place is when he must confront his equal and opposite, the black-hat. This villain visits the house of ill-repute almost immediately upon arriving, and usually only after he has threatened the Marshall or menaced innocent bystanders. So, male involvement in this female space is either transactional, violent, or heroic. There is no oversight by men, no long-term relationships with boyfriends or husbands, no meddling or managing or lobbying or policing. And indeed, the philosophy of “separate spheres” was commonplace among both the elites and the working women of

Victorian America.²⁷ If the price to live separately from men was selling ones body, then Hollywood suggested the choice was clear for many women.

As the black-hat is equal and opposite the white-hat cowboy, the fiery love interest is the reflection of the prostitute in westerns. The viewer can imagine that this spitfire of a woman, the only person brave enough to tell the cowboy he is full of shit and live to tell the tale, overcame significant odds. Her attitude, as exemplified by Ivy Preston in *The Texans*, is like that of Scarlett O'Hara - clever, impetuous, and more than a little mean-spirited. She is the belle in trousers, the huntress who captures the white stallion. And it is this very uniqueness that has protected her. She does not sleep with men if she does not want to; in fact, she probably does not sleep with men at all (for more, see: the redeemed virgin trope particular to plantation films, as discussed in relation to *Jezebel* in Chapter IV). But this refusal to lie with men is not lesbian-coded as much as it is chastity-coded, indicative that her very good nature is sufficiently inherent that she carves out her own space in a world that is hostile to her. In this, she is very much like our manly frontier heroes. As they are the pinnacle of civilized manliness, she is the pioneer woman staking her claim in the west. Of course, these tropes all carry the baggage of gender conventions with them. First, the pioneer

²⁷ In *Cradle of the Middle Class*, Mary Ryan deploys a case study of families in Utica, New York, during the 19th century to trace how the concept of family changed over time, culminating in the sharp divisions between men and women that characterize Victorian America. She argues that there was a hardening of sexual divisions and divisions of family labour, as well as what she calls the feminizing of religion (i.e. transforming evangelical religion from one of regimented practice into an opportunity to express an outpouring of feeling). She writes, "The American middle class molded its distinctive identity around domestic values and family practices" (15). The all-encompassing totality of the family is a familiar trope in southern movies, which emphasize the benefits and deficits of close familial bonds.

Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

woman may remain single only until it becomes unseemly for her to do so. Ugly singleness - spinsterhood - is reached sometime after 30 and well before 40. That is, unless the woman is a widow. Then, she may remain mournful - but attractive - until she meets her cowboy; remaining single for too long suggests lesbianism or spinsterism. Second, the pioneer woman must be brave, and forthright, but never to the point of aggression or hostility. She back-talks the cowboy because she likes him, and he allows her cattiness because he is attracted to her. This rhetorical dance is as stilted and practiced as any Georgian waltz. She also risks her life, usually unintentionally and by accident of her nature, and may even succeed in pulling off a daring child-rescue. But she must never be seen rescuing the cowboy - or any adult man - and her femininity must be reinforced by the peril she inevitably finds herself in. The pioneer woman is still a damsel who must be rescued, and that assures the audience that she will be a worthy wife to the cowboy, who is more deserving of respect than perhaps any other figure in modern cinema. She is not so helpless that she will cling to her man, but not so frigid that she won't lick his wounds. The perfection of the pioneer woman is not unattainable, but her circumstances are. Just as no reasonable male spectator in the 1930s would have actually believed himself capable of becoming a cowboy, women weren't clamoring to pack their families and themselves up to migrate to the promised land.

Westerns are properly historicized and presented as fantasy; it was a time of heroes and villains so epic and final that it could have only existed in the past. southerners also attempt to navigate this imagined authenticity, toeing the line between reality and illusion, but the results are much less consistent. This is partially due to the

peculiar place the South occupies in the national consciousness, a space that is both not unlike and is distinct from the west. Both regions are strongly associated with the past, and with a mythology that centers on honor and land. Both regions are tied to the nation's founding principles of Jeffersonian democracy and self-reliance.²⁸ As politician Thomas Skidmore (1790 - 1832) expressed in reference to Jeffersonian democracy and the nation's founding ideals, the employer in a capitalist industrial economy robs the workingman of his independence, and therefore diminishes his access to the freedoms of democracy. All men, he argues, have a right to independence of freedom, based on the labour theory of value (i.e. the value of items are worth more than the materials that go into them, but also the cost is influenced by the cost of labour that goes into them). I cite Skidmore whenever the debate around Jeffersonian democracy is invoked; he is a centrally important figure who captured the anxieties of the workers during the early 19th century. Then, just as now, inequality of wealth had become so extreme that it affected the republic itself, and the rich controlled the means of production, as well as politics. This development was at total odds with the way masculine self-reliance was traditionally defined in the United States; a man should make enough to care for himself and his family, with a bit left over to contribute to material comfort. Excesses of wealth and leisure characterized the planters of the Antebellum, who were seen as threatening democracy by their political rivals in the north. It is telling - and indeed, indicative of the genre as a whole - that the diversity in opinion about whether or not planters were detrimental to American democracy was all but flattened by Hollywood. Men die in duels in westerns and southern, just as they did in colonial America. But

²⁸ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 340.

the South is also tainted with the history of violent conflict. And this is a conflict that mattered to most Anglo Americans during the early 20th century, unlike Native relocation and African slavery: the Civil War.

Even today, discussing the Civil War in polite conversation can be tricky. Where one reasonable person sees traitorous intent, the other sees nearsighted beliefs about economic independence and the role of the federal government. By the 1920s, the Civil War had been fully reconciled in American discourse, as a senseless case study in needless violence. (White) brother against (white) brother, fighting a war that did not matter - and, by implication, for people who did not matter. This revisionist history is so peculiar when viewed against the way the Civil War was cast during the 1860s. The Battle Hymn of the Republic and John Brown's Body made no bones about the gravity of the actions undertaken by the Union; the war was biblical in proportion and significance, where one side was fighting for go(o)d and the other for ungodliness. Mainstream abolitionism, as exemplified by Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Lloyd Garrison, was as unforgiving toward slavemasters and slavery apologists as it was unflinchingly Christian. Any opportunities for peaceful reconciliation were forfeited by the Confederacy when it wrote slavery into its constitution. But, as David Blight so adeptly describes, the burgeoning mass-market print industry successfully sentimentalized the war through the same manipulative techniques Hollywood screenwriters and pro-slavery academics would use to fashion their own propaganda.²⁹

²⁹ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 179.

This tension is what makes *The Texans* and *Santa Fe Trail* so interesting. The creators - screenwriters, directors, producers, researchers - crafted two charming and adept tales of the how the Civil War seeped into the west and affected the lives of people who were otherwise remote from mainstream American life. The reason for recasting what is ostensibly pro-Confederate propaganda to a cowboy story is apparent when the primary sources are pressed: southerners were inherently politicized in a way westerns were not. This is the argument Warshow makes in his loving examinations of the genre, and it is supported by the memos and ephemera left behind by the men who wrote these stories. But, in addition to that, the western was an adventure genre, and the opportunity to explore the themes of the Civil War in a swashbuckling mode are made present when it is slightly removed from the (sentimentalized) reality of the magnitude of human loss suffered because of the War. So the expensive and expertly choreographed action sequences in these two films are unabashed and unrestrained by the need for respecting the subject matter. In *The Texans*, especially, former Confederates and Unionmen alike are fighting the real enemy: “imperialist” (!) Mexicans. Brown men and their horses are cut down in droves, and the action feels real and immediate - many of the stunt horses did in fact die, and it feels like the extra might as well have, for how expendable they feel. When John Brown and his sympathizers are executed in *Santa Fe Trail*, they have been dehumanized to the point of redundancy; Brown is a crazed lunatic and his followers either share his lunacy or are irredeemable sycophants. There are no Union soldiers with whom the audience might identify, and no discernible regional markers beyond vague references to westward-ness and the shaky southern accents of the lead actors. The situation

feels both real and unmoored from reality, which is a defining characteristic of the Southern genre.

So, like the western, the Southern imparted on its audience the gift of removed aspiration. Wishing to be like a cowboy or pioneer woman in some respects was aspirational and attainable; wishing to be a cowboy or pioneer woman was not. American audiences during the depression watched stories that Dickstein has persuasively argued were escapism for escapism's sake; if this is the case, then women who were struggling to put food on the table were not leaving the theater in resentment of the over-abundance pictured in the barbecues that defined plantation pictures.³⁰ Instead, they saw the movies as an opportunity to make-believe, or to spectate. People who struggled to find work watched as planters sipped drinks and engaged in petty arguments with one another, seemingly never lifting a finger to make their own money - unless you count the lifting of a pen. Aristocratic women like Valette Bedford in *So Red the Rose* complained of boredom, and shrieked at her betters and pouted in gorgeous, expensive dresses that were wasted on black and white film. These were not aspirational images, but neither were they hostile. Just as westerns seemed so impossibly far in the past, so did southern. Just as cowboys were

³⁰ While critical response to *Dancing in the Dark* was relatively lukewarm, I did find Dickstein's insights about how the Great Depression transformed the way the American "everyman" saw himself to be illuminating. He most persuasively argues for this shift with regard to labor politics and the evolving rhetoric around sexuality. Perceived cinematic threats to traditional American social mores almost guaranteed the formation of a rigid, highly policed code of conduct (the MPPC); "many young people drifted into the orbit of the activism in the 1930s in search of casual, guilt-free sex", he argues, emboldened by pre-code films like *The Story of Temple Drake* and Cole Porter's witty, sexually frank musicals and their adapted counterparts (Dickstein, 514).

Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009).

mavericks who bucked gender politics (to an extent) and social niceties, so were planters. They both shoot to kill. But if the audience went home after watching a western and pushed it out of their mind or relegated it to the domain of pure fantasy, what did they do with the Southern? Popular culture has asked where all the cowboys went, but what of the planters? Were they displaced by War, like the Indians were? Were they still living on their plantations, now dank with decay? Did they continue to profit after the slaves freed themselves? The people in the newspapers and special reports dying of Pellegra - the "spring sickness" of severe malnutrition and skin disease caused by overconsumption of untreated cornmeal - were these southerners part of the history onscreen? Were they victims of the excesses of the planters, or of their own laziness? When politicians like Henry W. Grady spoke of a "New South", to what extent did Americans understand the old one? These are the questions form the impetus that drives this study. I seek to describe the connection between the movies and history, between what we see and how we remember, between the gap in experiencing and knowing.

Hollywood monetized the Antebellum and the Civil War periods in a way that gave precedence to these historical eras over the contemporary south, and this consistent foregrounding of the "Old South" stood in opposition to the socio-political discourse surrounding the "New South", therefore shaping the conceptualization of what it meant to be a southerner during the crucial sociocultural and economic development span of 1920s and 1930s. The old south was primitive, but romantic - violent, yet quaint - distinctly othered, but still undeniably American. This fragmentation, or manufactured binary, matters because it resulted in the further

marginalization of southerners during an especially critical time in the region's development. This was not a concerted effort from producers with a pro- or anti-south bias; instead, academia and audiences influenced image-conscious writers and directors, and the resultant pictures formed a pastiche of borrowed authenticities and manufactured realities interacting with a new technology - film - that was capable of widely transmitting cultural knowledge. Hollywood fed off of and into reality, and the mythos of the South we have today was formed during this period of intensive image-building and national dialoguing. Average American citizens who would have previously had little to no experience with academic arguments, such as those of the Dunning School, were suddenly confronted with films that took directly from those works in order to portray a so-called reality, an authentic historical vision. These same audiences then took their writing desks and penned letters either corroborating or refuting some aspect(s) of the films, and authenticity-obsessed studios took note and changed their characterizations accordingly. This is how the South was simultaneously ultra-visible in the national cultural dialogue during the interwar era, while also being generally maligned and forgotten in political discourse. This is how the old south - a new idea, at the time - was conceptualized and commoditized as nationalistic propaganda.

To properly contextualize this study, it is important to emphasize the pervasiveness of movie-going in interwar era culture. A large part of that culture was built around the experience of watching marquee films in conjunction with B movies. While it may be difficult for studios today to release objectively sub-standard films without facing considerable economic backlash from audiences to along with critical

panning, technically sub-par genre pictures were an integral component of interwar Hollywood's business. The fact that these movies, due to their inherent "unseriousness", are overlooked by historians helps partially explain why the Southern genre - which is composed largely of B films, with a few blockbusters bolstering the genre every couple of years - has been given little credence or examination academically. B films were typically identified with a set filmic type, following closely to the formula of "women's", western, historical or "issue pictures" (such as prison films). Additionally, any movies that might be categorized as largely action, horror or melodrama were among the least respected of these genre films, and southerns relied heavily on plot tropes that centered on family / relationship melodrama and action-heavy historical events, such as the Civil War. Civil War-era southerns were especially popular, but even more obscure B films like *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1920, 1928) and *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1914, 1916, 1923, 1936), which focused on the Antebellum era in Appalachia, were re-made and re-released several times, as an assured way to boost revenue. Historical epics in general became so popular over the course of the of the interwar decades that they outpaced every other genre in terms of production and distribution. The subjects of these movies ran the gamut of eras, from Colonial War dramas, to Civil War films, and Wild West legends. But beyond these well-known types, the Southern stood as a wildly popular template. This is why the lack of attention given to southerns makes for such a severe oversight in cultural history and communication studies, and a perplexing one at that; the motivations behind producing and consuming southern films are relatively transparent and reflective of the cultural zeitgeist.

The interwar era in the United States saw a remarkable increase in both the popularity of movie-going as a leisure activity, as well as the creative output of the film industry. Audiences flocked to theaters en masse during the 1920s, when the urban working classes began in earnest to take advantage of their meagre free time, and during the Great Depression, as a form of affordable escapism for the un(der)employed, as well as an acceptable activity for both men and women in an era of the joining of the once-separate sex spheres.³¹ ³² The interwar years also saw Hollywood at its most unregulated and unmitigated in both production and distribution, at the dawning of the Studio System (Hollywood's so-called "Golden Age"), when major film companies wielded enormous power over the content, production, and distribution of movies. Theater owners bought major motion pictures in bundles, with the "A" film heralded as an "event picture", paired with "B" films of lower production quality that could be shown continuously throughout the day, bookending the daily showing of the marquee movie. This style of movie spectatorship is more akin to the modern activity of "tailgating" before a football game; going to the movies was an event that lasted for the duration of the day, and typically movies were enjoyed with friends and/or family. This pattern of communal spectatorship benefitted both the proprietors of movie theaters as well as the film studios, although this top-down

³¹ Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Ross makes the argument that movie-going was the most popular activity among the working classes; significantly more so than with the wealthier population. I am not entirely convinced of this, as Dickstein *et al* have persuasively shown that movies appealed not only to the out-of-work, but also to more affluent people who were participating actively, especially, in dating culture.

³² Again, in Dickstein: He notes that, adjusting for population, movie-going was more widespread during the 1930s than any other time period. It is no exaggeration to describe going to the movie theater as *the* premier leisure activity for Americans across class, sex, and race lines.

distribution apparatus arguably valued the producers over the consumers, a structure that supports the conceptualization of “popular / mass” culture as an “industry”.³³

The tension between viewing popular culture, and movies specifically, as a mostly manipulative force from which audiences learn the cultural values producers want them to learn, versus popular culture as an industry that functions as a give-and-take between producers and consumers, permeates the historiography, and indeed this debate is central to the discipline of Film Theory. Marxist-Materialist scholars tend toward the latter interpretation, which allows the scholar to assign a considerably more generous amount of agency to historical actors, while most psychoanalytically-based methodologies rely on the assumptions inherent in the former. It is easy to allow oneself to become distracted by these esoteric, academic debates and disciplinary boundaries, but that urge to be pedantic must be resisted at some level, as to not lose sight of the big picture: audiences were seeing movies about the South at record-high rates during the interwar era, concurrent with a highly visible national discourse surrounding the New South. Even to the casual observer, these two facts are clearly related at least circumstantially, but the role of Hollywood in the New South discourse surrounding has been consistently overlooked in the historiography. This is perplexing, because it is objectively demonstrable that real, historical audiences were eager to revisit the South time and again at the movies, to revel in the grandeur of Antebellum plantation houses, or to pity the impoverished Appalachian Civil War veterans.

³³ In an essay entitled “Return of the Culture Industry”, James W. Cook argues that the idea of a ‘culture industry,’ as opposed to ‘mass culture’ is a more correct way of examining the culture that the population consumes. His argument is highly theoretical and attempts to make a place for historian Theodor W. Adorno’s conceptualization of popular culture as not being mostly produced by the corporations, but something that “arises spontaneously from the masses themselves” (Cook, 291).

Watching a southern allowed audiences to both perform patriotism by showing pride in America's past, and to pass judgment on the sins and triumphs of the Other, from slavery, to the Civil War, to prison chain gang "issue pictures" - a favorite contemporary subject for the socially-conscious movie executive. And make no mistake - the Southerner, whether white or black, male or female, was the Other, inherently different from the "average" American due to the particular intersectionalities of everyone from the South. These intersectionalities hinged upon the perceived proximity of blackness to whiteness, in home and church, and southerners depicted a region where the spectre of casual integration loomed large - where black men obeyed white women and white women learned to cook, sing, and sew from black women. This was a different and unknowable world indeed.

During the first part of the twentieth century, the South was still struggling to gain economic independence in a significant way. There was stagnation of industry, including agriculture, in which the South was traditionally productive. Additionally, southern women of formerly genteel classes found themselves in desperate economic straits that placed them alongside former sharecroppers in exploitative cotton mills.³⁴ Economically and psychologically abusive sharecropping communities, as well as the burgeoning cotton mills, were inefficient and oppressive forms of capitalist labor and, with equal importance, social control. The New South struggled against the mostly-correct public perceptions regarding the underdeveloped socioeconomic structure that characterized much of the South, and the co-morbid poverty and servitude in which most poor southerners lived. Consequently, states south of the Mason-Dixon sought to

become bastions of industrialism that would fully integrate them into American capitalism, with varying results. Yet with the onset of the Great Depression, images of destitute white people in the Dust Bowl and Appalachia once again cast the South as a burden to the rest of the union, where once-rebellious poor white trash begged the government they once scorned for help feeding their families.³⁵ The resentment in the South that resulted from this depiction, which was a mixture of genuine sympathy for the plight of the modern white yeoman and pity-mixed-with-disgust toward the plain folk, is palpable in many of the letters penned by the ladies and men who found cause for affront in almost every southern picture - even those starring Shirley Temple. There is a self-awareness on the part of the defeated Confederacy that may not have been obvious to the yankee producers and critics, but was a fact of life in the image-conscious south. The boundaries of the Southern genre are not absolute, but three recurrent themes emerge in nearly every film: the use of “regions” to delineate certain characteristics and situate narratives in a particular historical moment; the presence of blackness, be it in the form of black actors, blackface, or implication; and the omnipresence of Christianity as a central tenet of southern life. These tropes reemerged time and again in southern narratives, and the combination of all three was what made a film *authentic*, what gave audiences the distinct sense that these stories were based in a knowable historical reality. Americans who lived during the first half of the twentieth century were likely to see the history of the South as the most significant in the shaping of the modern U.S. nation-state, due to an intense revival of interest in

³⁵ This deep-seated class animosity was even reflected through black characters in these films, most notably when the faithful mammy in *Gone With the Wind* worries openly about Miss Scarlett being associated with “white trash”.

the Civil War, the development of the public discourse around the socio-political idea of the “New south”, and the cultural zeitgeist that valued both nostalgia for a “simpler time” and authenticity. So the Southern spoke to American audiences like no other genre before World War II, as evidenced by the watershed moment in popular culture that happened around release of *Gone with the Wind’s* film adaptation. The Southern genre was crafted through the cooperation of many different types of people, and studying its inception and development is valuable for those who want to gain a more robust understanding of the state of popular culture and the creation of public knowledge during the interwar era.

Speaking of the use of southerners as nationalist propaganda during the lead-up to WWII, the type of manliness the antebellum planter embodied the image of the righteous and imperial-minded warrior. Military prowess was an integral part of southern civilized manliness—although, even with all the soldierly excellence of these men, there are still many markers of moral decrepitude that generally affects their ability to function well as officers, quietly but pointedly reinforced as a cautionary tale, and a reminder of how these mighty men still faced defeat at the hands of Union troops. Confederate foot soldiers are depicted as rag-tag-but-in-a-heartwarming-way, utterly competent despite their lack of training, yet also as completely underprepared for the moral temptations of war, as evidenced by constant petty infighting and their love of gambling, which was common shorthand for emotional ineptitude and immaturity. Additionally, rank - which was supposed to be earned through valor - is literally granted in accordance class and family name, as depicted succinctly in an amusing scene from *So Red the Rose*, where the protagonist Walter Connelly, once he

has made up his mind to fight, simply pulls a major's uniform from his wardrobe, seemingly apropos of nothing.³⁶ This scene quietly reinforces the dichotomy of white trash and ruling class in the South, which would have read as authentic to audiences, and toes the line between sympathetic camaraderie with the antebellum soldier-gentleman, and judgmental vindication at his ultimate defeat - the perfect metaphor the time.

Natalie Ring has interpreted the South as a site where imperialist policies were thrust upon it by an experiment-minded legislature intent on imposing paternalism on its colonies - and the junior partner south was seen among these more primitive holdings, largely due to the feudal structure under which white men lived, and the captivity imposed upon kidnapped Africans and their descendants during the colonial and antebellum eras. The parallels with imperialist Japan and Germany are there, but slaveholders were still Americans, so they were chastised, rather than completely villainized. Racially charged propaganda was an important way the United States furthered its causes overseas, and I argue that much the same was happening in the South. The Philippines were seen as a project where much good could be done, and visual reinforcement and "evidence" were key to keeping the public supportive - photographs of both brutal repression side-by-side with villages being repaired, and Filipino schoolchildren sitting in classrooms in full European costume. A certain nostalgia was conjured by these images of the Pacific colonies, and that was mirrored

³⁶ Edward C Campbell, *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 16.

in Hollywood's depictions of the South, for both represented the triumph of whiteness and democracy over a "primitive" system.³⁷

Film was a relatively new medium that could propagate nationalistic, narratively-unified images of Good Americanism across a heterogeneous nation, uniting disparate spectators under the banner of "audience" - film has been called the democratic art form, and for good reason. Going to the movies was economically viable for most people, and filmmakers in no way took for granted this unprecedented access to the attention of millions. For example, the use of inter titles as a historical teaching tool by Griffith in *Birth of a Nation* was unique at the time (the 1910s), but became common thereafter as a "teaching tool". Griffith wrote the inter titles to enhance the historical narrative he was trying to achieve, and this forced the audience to take sides, with one side being obviously right (the Klan) and one side being obviously wrong.³⁸ He was invested in projecting an image of white solidarity, and his history was one of conflict

³⁷ On page 163, Ring writes, "The "wave of southern racism" could not be isolated from the expansion of a jingoistic imperial state. While [Herbert] Aptheker and [C. Vann] Woodward contended that this virulent racism developing at home was a cousin of the racism propelling the United States to conquer people of color overseas, they did not explain how these particular racial ideologies were constructed, contested, or renegotiated. How did people at the time understand the linkages between colonial strategies abroad and the race problem at home? How did the racial discourse of difference generate similar programs of "uplift" in both domestic and foreign locales? How did the identification of an intractable southern race problem undermine efforts to nationalize the American landscape?"

Ring's effort to elucidate on the national handling of the "intractable southern race problem" come into an interesting critical dialogue with Blight, along the well-worn lines of absence (of blackness) being a type of very purposeful presence. The race problem in memory, Blight argues, was dealt with by an aggressive dislocation, while Ring shows that, in actuality, the race issue in the South was tackled head-on, and came attached with unpleasant connotations regarding the very "other" primitiveness of the South - a notion that had no place in white American collective memory.

³⁸ J. E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema: From Cimarron to Citizen Kane* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 2.

against those who would threaten that god-given solidarity, in line with what Richard Hofstadter famously defined as *anti-consensus* history. Griffith, along with U.B. Phillips, George Bancroft, the Whig history of progress, and those associated historians who might be largely described as “reactionary”, were ushering in an era of white southern history. Griffith believed that, eventually, filmmakers would become the foremost historians, due to their capacity to project the historical image in such a way that anyone could understand - the ultimate casting of heroes and villains, more effective than a monograph, or a novel, or even a propaganda poster, with an image more sympathetic and universally-readable than regionally-specific media used as tools of reinforcing white supremacy — such as lynching photographs.

In addition to directors, producers, and screenwriters, the amateur and professional historians employed by in-house Research and Development departments became crucial in the creation of the Southern genre.³⁹ There is much disagreement over how Golden Age historical cinema may be interpreted - were these movies innovative and seamless stories, or were they hegemony-produced, capitalist, throw-away not-art?⁴⁰ This depends on the studio, and on the historian analyzing the films - while I argue that some southerns are clearly cash-grabs, as with the relentless cycle of remakes of popular adaptations, most were serious endeavors, even at the B-movie

³⁹ Twentieth Century Fox (headed at the time by Robert D. Zanuck) gave screenwriters and his R&D researchers the most autonomy, while MGM played it safe and gave their creative teams the least control, with the most censor (MPPC code) oversight. Warner Bros. had the best R&D department, headed by the immaculate if humorless keeper-of-records, historian Dr. Howard Lissauer.

⁴⁰ Smyth, 9. And to indicate the gravity of these issues to the studio heads themselves, one need look no further than a memo sent from Louis Gottschlak to Samuel Marx in 1935: “No picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticize and revise it.”

level, because the material they drew from was so rich with feeling and evocative imagery, be it the antebellum era or the chain gangs that proliferated in the 1930s. A related question that must be asked: do movies form a historiography? Without hesitation, I argue that they do, as (1) they function both as a primary source that speaks to the context in which a film was created and released, and (2) they tell the story of change over time between institutions, as studios constantly borrowed and outright stole narratives, marketing, and cinematic techniques from one other, and learned from the failures and successes of the past. Movies weave a complex and endlessly nuanced narrative thread just as well, and perhaps even better than the best historian. As Campbell notes, "While academic historians [...] were quarreling over what constituted "history" itself, popular historians such as Albert Beveridge, Walter Noble Burns, and Palsey; historical novelists such as Ferber and Mitchell; and filmmakers such as Zanuck and Selznick were dominating the nation's historical consciousness."⁴¹ All Americans were afraid of what a modern south might present as - what place in society would the white trash as well as the freed blacks have?⁴²

The film industry was keenly attuned to these issues, and the movies they created were meant to comfort audiences by presenting a past they very carefully re-shaped in the image of colonial America, or the best nation during the best of times. Indeed, the Research departments at Warner Brothers and MGM were preoccupied with presenting an image of the South rooted in a sort of universal Truth; the books they consulted had the weight of history behind them, penned by men with degrees in

⁴¹ Smyth, 14.

⁴² To be glib: these questions are answered, in small measures, by movies, which showed white trash gambling, and where freed blacks were conspicuously absent - the easiest narrative way to deal with a problem is to write it off.

the discipline from Ivy League schools. But this concern with authenticity - (un)reality presented in an oddly didactic way: a film might have period-accurate costume and interior decorating detail throughout, the prop guns might be historically sound, and the actors' dialects and idioms veritable, but the human situations were largely fabricated, and the emotional concerns manufactured to appeal to a distinctly non-Antebellum audience. This careful crafting of an illusion in no small way explains the success of the Hollywood version of southern reality; queerly antiquated and anti-modern ideas do not seem quite so queer when juxtaposed with quaint, non-confrontational imagery. For audiences becoming ever more accustomed to the reality of time-work discipline, eight-hours-a-day wage labor, and corporate deadlines, the almost anti-work ethic of magnolias and mint juleps appealed on a nostalgic level that transcended region and space.⁴³

Speaking of work, the issue of slavery in film is depicted in such a way that it appears less like segregation, and more positively paternalistic. Much has been written about plantation paternalism, perhaps most notably by Eugene Genovese; this particular understanding of the rigidly structured slavery institution was being projected on movie screens nationwide, decades before *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. The issue of segregation versus integration in early film is especially important when taken in context of the social upheaval being generated by the transformation of southern life in the early 20th century. Film is a modern industry, and industry in the New south worked vigilantly toward fully embracing the spirit of modernity, yet so much of the region as depicted on-screen is distinctly pre-modern. Early films produced by and for the South,

like *The Heart of Maryland* (1927) and *The White Rose* (1923), are invested in premodern social orders and mores, such as chivalry, slavery, ecstatic religious belief; it is obvious that the political, social, and economic unrest that plagued southern states were a fantasy flight factor, and the desire to portray a romanticized, or altogether mythological, grand past took hold. This is exactly the impetus that D. W. Griffith felt with the release of *Birth of a Nation*, and it was a sentiment echoed time and again by southern directors, an appeal to the supposed inherent goodness of Dixie.⁴⁴ In film, slaves not only ate well, and had single-family quarters that met general standards of subsistence, they also had ample free time, which they devoted to dancing, singing, and religion. Audiences loved it when slaves sang and danced, and it is worth noting that authentic spirituals served as the single signifier of true slave culture in otherwise whitewashed films. Both southern and non-southern directors and writers could claim a stake in the importance of portraying the South as a formerly integrated society where black slaves and their white masters could coexist peacefully, as Jim Crow violence had national repercussions politically, socially, and economically.

Alternately, there was no such equal nostalgic whitewashing concerning the interpersonal relationships between whites. This absence of racial tensions created room for the dramas played out amongst classes, between the sexes, and within families. White plantation mistresses fight amongst themselves for the affections of landed men; men challenge each other to duels over insults against their honor; sons and daughters are disinherited and disowned over their rebellion against tradition.

⁴⁴ “If in film the slave’s life was so pleasantly uncomplicated, it followed that the master must be kind. [...] The field-hands in silent film, particularly those of the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* remakes, were punished for transgressions real or imagined; but in the era of sound film, the worker remained unwrapped and generally un-rebellious” until the 1960’s (Campbell, 18).

While, in reality, antebellum and Reconstruction were eras of highly regimented social strata, films showed a variety of socially improbable conflicts, undertaken in the name of love, family, of the Confederacy. Ultimately, the most sympathetic and culturally correct character(s) prevail in early film; the evils of atheism, adultery and promiscuity, gambling, violence, and alcoholism are all punished, and the viewer would have left the theatre feeling as if the film had a just moral about race, class, and gender.

There was an idea of the South, during the interwar period, that was being engaged with by academics and laymen alike, and this idea was informed in a complex relationship by a mixture of historical fact and fantastic assumption about the region. For that ideological current, that constructed idea of what the South meant as a place, race and religion were an integral part of the cultural base that defined a place or person as southern. Movies reveal to historians a great deal about the progress and process of modernity, as they are a heavily mediated cultural artifact, created by those invested in not only the telling of a good story, but economic returns. The latter creates an incentive to be moderate; therefore, films released during the first few decades of the movie industry were crafted to appeal to the broadest possible population of people, without alienating any large number of paying moviegoers. Historian Edward C. Campbell notes that, "Movies reflect the way we are. *Roots* or *Mandingo* would have been as dismally out of place in the 1930s as, say, *The Littlest Rebel* would be now."⁴⁵ Keeping this in mind helps to put images in context of the racial, regional, and religious struggles in the New South; as the political landscape evolved, filmic portrayals followed suit.

⁴⁵ Campbell, 24

Film is, in general, an often neglected but ultimately integral component in the perpetuation of the idea of the "primitive" south, and that religion and race were used as indispensable visual descriptors of the discomfiting otherness of southerners. Since the evangelical, ecstatic Christianity stereotyped in film is deeply connected to blackness, this was an effective, racialized rhetorical tool for the arguments that the South should remain a junior partner, or a colonized region, in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. This exchange of ideas was not simply a one-way process, though - audiences, academic and layman alike, both directly and indirectly contributed to the creation of the mythic Hollywood south. In *Movie Crazy*, Samantha Barbas demonstrates that fans of Hollywood stars wielded considerable power of the creative process. By revealing this, the mutually dependent relationship between movie studios and audiences becomes clear, and it is possible to deduce that the exchange of ideas functioned both top-down and bottom-up.⁴⁶ By pressing the primary source materials to reveal the Southern genre, we may come to a more complete understanding of how the nation perceived the South as a region out of time and place in the twentieth century, and the ways in which Hollywood's meaning-making interacted with the self-consciously New South.

So what makes a movie southern? As previously shown, the parameters for southernness are not wholly without overlap in other genres; for example, a movie can be obviously both a southern and a film noir (*They Won't Forget* is the classic example of this genre-bending). And yet the Southern, as defined herein, is not simply a reductive category that may be subsumed within the history film genre, or any other. Instead,

⁴⁶ Barbas, 10

southerns are a product of their time in a particularly significant way, and by studying the evolution of the Southern genre we can come to understand the way audiences and cultural producers envisioned the South, as well as state of the nation.

There were primarily two schools of historians who studied the South, and they may be defined broadly along the lines of revisionary and reactionary, and also generally into the binary of professional and non-professional. The work of the *revisionist* historians like W.E.B. Du Bois went largely without notice, even by their fellow academics - Du Bois's revelatory and impeccably-researched vindication of black lawmakers during the Reconstruction era was hardly a bestseller, and was little-known outside of wealthy, educated black and communist circles. But history that corroborated the prejudices of the time were upheld by the academy, Hollywood, and fiction authors, even when they concurrently chastised the reactionary historians for their undeniably shoddy research work. There was a major literary movement by southern writers that transformed and developed significantly as the 20th century wore on. Many of these authors were influenced by the work of contemporary historians, and they in turn influenced Hollywood screenwriters, who adapted their works. There was what Campbell calls a "process of literary reconciliation" beginning in the 1870's.⁴⁷ southern writers were given outlets in magazines to write lifestyle and fiction pieces about "regional color and sectional forgiveness".⁴⁸ Northerners latched onto this trend, too, enthusiastically romanticizing the Southern past.⁴⁹ In theatre, the narrative precursor to film, minstrel shows were enormously popular during the late 19th and

⁴⁷ Campbell, 6.

⁴⁸ Campbell, 7

⁴⁹ Campbell, 10.

early 20th century, and the humor of these shows was derived primarily from the image of the darkie in a variety of situations that were bewildering to him. Reconciliation literature moved naturally from page, to stage, to screen.⁵⁰ Campbell claims that the Antebellum south was the perfect setting for very early (pre-1915) films, because it was “instantly recognizable”, which was critical for short films.⁵¹ Little narrative contextualization had to be done - audiences came with a set of preconceived notions about what the Antebellum era meant, and film makers exploited that. These were an implicit criticism of industrialization. Sectional pieces were written up in various periodicals, typically with the purpose of describing the variety of colorful and peculiar habits of southerners. Even when these pieces are sympathetic, they read with a distinctive tone of patronization that reduces the characters in these narratives to regional types - the backwater river boat gambler, the Appalachian hillbilly, the impoverished yet noble Carolinian planter. Archetypes were enormously important to the formation of a southern genre, in defining its boundaries and characteristics, and it is easy to see why: the South, no matter how that concept may be geographically defined,

There was a war for dominance among the images of the South, but nostalgia and racism colored the most popular depictions in literature and film, with anything straying from this image being received as an exception to the rule - pure entertainment, as opposed to historical realism - or too overtly denigrating in a way that pandered obviously to “Northern” tastes in the search for popular acclaim (Faulkner, Caldwell). In a time of severe social unrest, the image of the idyllic south -

⁵⁰ Campbell, 11.

⁵¹ Campbell, 12

the “Antebellum” - was reproduced with enthusiasm, as evidence of an idealized America where the races coexisted in peace and in their respective places - where immigrants were absent, where women were beautiful and amusing, but never stepped too far out of line, and where even the poorest (white) men owned land (yeomanry; Jeffersonian democracy). This is demonstrably untrue - large plantations accounted for only a tiny fraction of southern estates. Campbell writes, “The Old south even took on geographic boundaries distinct from those of the Confederacy. The Deep south in film included Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgie, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, plus Kentucky and occasionally Maryland. Other areas - Florida, Arkansas, Texas, and slave Missouri - simply did not fit the mold of the cavalier-planter image”. This deep-seated class animosity was even reflected through black characters in these films, most notably when the faithful mammy in *Gone With the Wind* worries openly about Miss Scarlett being associated with “white trash”. The above-mentioned regions, especially Florida and Arkansas, were heavily associated with this “white trash” class, as evidenced by the rhetoric of the time.⁵² This was not a little-known fact to amateur and professional historians by the early 20th century, but it was a willfully overlooked one, and for good reason - there was simply no significant precedent of romanticizing tenant farmers or small-land owners in the 19th century.

To find art or political speeches which called for empowerment of the yeoman farmer, you have to look to the Jeffersonian tradition of small-d democracy. And even

⁵² Campbell here cites Peter Soderbergh’s seminal essay, “Hollywood and the South” (1965). He elaborates, “The Old south even took on geographic boundaries distinct from those of the Confederacy. The Deep south in film included Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgie, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, plus Kentucky and occasionally Maryland. Other areas - Florida, Arkansas, Texas, and slave Missouri - simply did not fit the mold of the cavalier-planter image.” (15)

then, the independent farmer's worth is measured by how much land he owns, as financial freedom was directly linked to his ability to produce everything for himself; complete self-reliance came at an enormous personal cost even in the 17th century. The inherent classism of southerners imbued their very social mores, which called for the absolute defense of a man's honor and family name, at great personal risk. Poor men did not partake in the pageantry of the duel; if a man of no or low class status insulted a man of considerable status, then he was swiftly punished for being jumped-up from his place. The code duello was heavily romanticized, and figured prominently in film. This was a bit of local flavor, an exoticness particular to the better members of the Anglo race, a signifier of honor that in fact betrayed the choleric temperament of these men, an attribute that is clearly not unobjectionable.⁵³ Consistent and brutal reinforcement of class boundaries created a culture where whiteness was not alone enough to be accepted into respectable society, and it is from this environment that the category of "white trash" was legitimized and emblazoned in the psyche of the South, and later the nation.

Americans readily accepted the class category of "white trash" for a variety of reasons, and to fully address them is beyond the scope of this project. However, briefly outlining this history is crucial to understanding the impulse that fueled the romanticization of the South as eternally-Antebellum. Protestant Christianity in the 18th and 19th centuries emphasized the role of hard work in the making of a successful man, and Puritan traditions emphasized predestination - the idea that a person's lot in life was decided by God on the day of their birth. The protestant work ethic came to

⁵³ Campbell, 17.

coexist with work-time discipline, and those people who were unable to prosper in an increasingly competitive capitalist society were increasingly shut out of opportunities for real social mobility. The artisan class was fading, and with it the pre-capitalist and Republican forms of livelihood, such as apprenticeship. As men became more disconnected with their work, their masculinity was challenged; similarly, the masculinity of the planter and yeoman classes in the South was continually challenged by the system of deference and the question of land and property value in the face of rapidly cycling prices. So in light of major socio-cultural disruptions, young people - especially women - turned toward religion as a way to make meanings in a world rapidly evolving away from the one in which their parents were raised. Evangelical revivals provided the ideal outlet for this newfound desire to express religious piety, as it encouraged very public displays of feeling and profession of faith. The stress on self-discipline, salvation, and a personal affirmative relationship with God was also highly appealing to people who felt as if they were in the midst of a moral panic in the face of industrialization.⁵⁴ This deep-seated class animosity was even reflected through black characters in these films, most notably when the faithful mammy in *Gone with the Wind* worries openly about Miss Scarlett being associated with “white trash”. The above-mentioned regions, especially Florida and Arkansas, were heavily associated with this “white trash” class, as evidenced by the rhetoric of the time.

So, what was the role of culture, particularly film, during the process of nation-making in the post-reconstruction American south, and how was religion a critical element in the building of a popular representation of the region? And why, ultimately,

has a vision of a disinherited south won out, ahead of the pseudo-documentary ethic of early southern filmmakers, like D. W. Griffith, for whom religion was the most noble aspect of provincial life in an increasingly secular nation? I use the terms “nation-making” and “nation-building” to refer not exclusively to the post-Reconstruction south, but to the process of acculturation that took place with the admittance of the former slave states to the Union as junior partners. As Ring shows, the South was a colony, of sorts, well into the 20th century, and the infrastructural aspects of “nation making” continued into the New Deal era, and I see the WPA projects and union-targeted mills as representing the last time there was a large-scale movement to make the South a full partner in the Union. Excess and want are two defining factors for the cinematic idea of the South, and evangelical Christianity has provided a rich and effective source from which to craft provocative tales of a region lost to time.⁵⁵

southerners learned their societal roles through structured cultural exposure, such as minstrelsy shows and vaudeville theatre, as well as the Church, where hierarchies were reinforced with the name of god. By the 1920s, film gradually replaced traditional forms of theatre in the American south, and the democratic and accessible nature of pre-

⁵⁵ Although Christianity was a cultural and social touchstone for most Americans, with all denominations professing the profound importance of the Christ figure, southern sects were, at times, foreign-seeming enough to constitute another religion entirely, when filmed with an othering intent. The Southern mode of Christianity is defined visually by kinetic worship, in stark contrast to more austere branches of Protestantism in the North; dancing in the aisles made for exotic and visually interesting fare for early audiences. For example, King Vidor, the white director of 1929's *Hallelujah*, sought to replicate an “authentic” black religious experience on screen, but in such a way that would avoid racial politics - the result is a sound spectacle with dubious portrayals that left censors happy with their intact knowledge that, “African American religion had at best a tenuous connection to real Christianity”.

Judith Weisenfeld, “Hallelujah and the Politics of Racial Authenticity” in *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929 - 1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

major studio film was integral to its success as an instructional and reflective format. southerners, both black and white, took part in the making of movies, and their works reflect the way they understood the status of the tenuous southern social structure. Their image of themselves, however distorted, stands apart from the conventions foisted on them by non-southern filmmakers and audiences. Southern Gothic, while in no way romantic, still proclaimed for the South a distinct and proud pathos. That pathos eventually warped into an apathetic voyeurism, where the South became a place one saw but did not visit or think too deeply about - and the contemporary American idea of the South as a vaguely disquieting and not-quite-modern place fixed in time is influenced significantly by ideas about the type of fanatic Christianity practiced by southerners.⁵⁶

The importance of mass entertainment in the early 20th century south has been delineated by scholars, with theatre and music being singled out as the most significantly popular cultural activities. The accessibility of the outdoor vaudeville play, or the local touring of a family of musicians, meant that entertainment could be shared in communities where the majority of the population were living in relative poverty. The advent of film and the proliferation of movie theaters provided an additional outlet for southerners, especially once theatre had begun to decline as a popular past-time for the working classes. Film, during the interwar era, tells a story about the South's critical growing pains as an industrializing and modernizing region that other media, such as literature or radio, or traditional sources, such as business and census records, cannot; film was helping to conceal the unrest in Dixie, and promoted the triumph of a

reactionary worldview. Even as white workers in cotton mills were being forced into a paternal relationship with industry, they were spending their nickels to see the goodness of the slave institution retold; even as Jim Crow created a system of segregation that separated the races in a completely foreign apartheid, southerners lauded a past when blacks and whites lived in close quarters, as happy negroes and their masters, the mistress who went to her beloved Mammy for advice. The problem of modernism loomed more frightening for the South. Non-southern Americans, too, were afraid of what a modern south might present as; what place in society would the “white trash” and the freed blacks have? These questions are answered, in small measures, by film, which showed “white trash” gambling, and where freed blacks were conspicuously absent - the easiest narrative way to deal with a problem is to write it off.

Slavery in film is depicted in such a way that it appears less like segregation, and more positively paternalistic. Much has been written about plantation paternalism, perhaps most notably by Eugene Genovese; this particular understanding of the rigidly structured slavery institution was being projected on movie screens nationwide, decades before *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. The issue of segregation versus integration in early film is especially important when taken in context of the social upheaval being generated by the transformation of southern life in the early 20th century. Film is a modern industry, and industry in the New south worked vigilantly toward fully embracing the spirit of modernity, yet so much of the region as depicted on-screen is distinctly pre-modern. Early films produced by and for the South, like *The Heart of Maryland* (1927) and *The white Rose* (1923), are invested in premodern social orders

and mores, such as chivalry, slavery, ecstatic religious belief; it is obvious that the political, social, and economic unrest that plagued southern states were a fantasy flight factor, and the desire to portray a romanticized, or altogether mythological, grand past took hold. This is exactly the impetus that

D. W. Griffith felt with the release of *Birth of a Nation*, and it was a sentiment echoed time and again by southern directors, an appeal to the supposed inherent goodness of Dixie. “If in film the slave’s life was so pleasantly uncomplicated, it followed that the master must be kind. [...] The field-hands in silent film, particularly those of the Uncle Tom’s Cabin remakes, were punished for transgressions real or imagined; but in the era of sound film, the worker remained unwrapped and generally un-rebellious” until the 1960’s, Campbell estimates.⁵⁷ In film, slaves not only ate well, and had single-family quarters that met general standards of subsistence, they also had ample free time, which they devoted to dancing, singing, and religion. Audiences loved it when slaves sang and danced, and it is worth noting that authentic spirituals served as the single signifier of true slave culture in these whitewashed films.

The importance of religion in southern film becomes even more apparent when one takes into consideration that a primary goal of evangelicalism is to actively disseminate the Christian worldview, and convert nonbelievers into the faith. New technologies made this possible on a scale previously inconceivable to the small, local churches that comprised the bulk of evangelical congregations in the South. While not every southern Christian was open to the notion of modernity advancing into their sacred spaces, a surprising majority of evangelicals reacted positively to the medium.

⁵⁷ Campbell, 18.

As Terry Lindvall explains, “southern Baptists, who would come to radically denounce many amusements, were not as separatist and divisive as one would expect”.⁵⁸ Men were particularly interested in the medium, and in moviegoing, which, unlike other forms of worldliness or leisure, did not appear to be gendered. Evangelical women, for their part, were very active in Christian social movement during the early 20th century, perhaps most notably the temperance movement. They embraced film, as the moving picture was capable of displaying the purported effects of alcohol use much more vividly than public speakers or pamphlets were able to; *The Birth of a Nation* was, partially, an anti-drink screed.⁵⁹ The power of film to ideologically bind people has already been much discussed by historians, and therefore my intervention does not center on uncovering the communal possibilities of film, but rather making explicit that film functioned as a mirror by which southerners were shown themselves, and that reflection was profound.

Even film titles could serve as an emotional flashpoint, and not just owing to a desire to avoid litigation with regard to copyrighted material. An particularly apt example is provided by the 1932 Mervyn LeRoy film, *I'm a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*. The movie is sourced, primarily, from the Robert Eliot Burns autobiography *I Was a Fugitive From a Georgia Chain Gang* (later itself re-published as a full memoir under *The Last Mile to Freedom*), was titled eponymously. It was not long, however, until a great confederate backlash was imagined and prepared for. The Southern state specification was taken out of the title, and the script was toned down considerably,

⁵⁸ Lindvall, 30.

⁵⁹ John L. Silverman, “The Birth of a Nation: Prohibition Propaganda” in Warren G. French, ed. *The South and Film* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1981).

owing to the source material; “the book emphasizes a strong antagonism existing between the north and the South, [and the repetition of this in the film would] I believe would cause the Southern states to ban it.” Their fears were justified. The Department of Corrections in Georgia filed a libel lawsuit against Warner Bros., arguing that images and tag lines in promotional material for the movie presented an untrue and defaming image of Georgian prisons. A Mr. Morris Ebenstein, of Washington, D.C., wrote a letter of support on February 9th, 1934, to the studio, expressing his hope that Warner Bros. would prevail in the case. He details the actual “horrors” of southern chain gangs, citing investigative journalist pieces, and concludes that the “primitive” state of Georgia needs to be exposed for its “barbaric” penal practices. Indeed, Warner Bros. did prevail - the suit was dropped on the grounds that it was unsubstantiated, and the offending promotional materials were pulled. Importantly, those images were also removed from the film itself. Mr. Ebenstein’s hope that truths be exposed were left unfulfilled; *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang*, in its final form, is a melodramatic, misogynistic meditation on the psychological fortitude of the white man in the face of evil. This may be illustrated well by popular newspaper advertisements for the picture, which carefully avoids region, race and assigning blame or lawlessness on

protagonist.⁶⁰ In fact, one specifically reads, “A scorned woman sent him back to Hell”. This Hell, we find upon watching the film, is not the state of Georgia, as much as it is a psychological state.

The question of producer intentionality is central to any study of film, and this project attempts to address those issues by deploying the Communication framework of Audience Reception Theory (ART). Although ART was initially developed in the discipline of Literature as an alternative to close-reading analysis that claimed the meaning of the text was within itself, the framework transfers successfully to media studies. Indeed, the question of “meaning” is even more pointed when popular movies are involved, as the ubiquity of Hollywood results in unrivaled accessibility to art. The mechanism by which ART is deployed is *encoding* and *decoding*, terms that were coined by sociologist Stuart Hall.⁶¹ Hall posited that *active interpretation* was crucial to extricating the meanings of various forms of mass communication. In opposition to the view held by the Adorno school that mass media was a tool used by the producers to anesthetize the public, Hall posited that the making of meanings with regard to

⁶⁰ These findings are buoyed by a quantitative survey of newspaper reviews of the film. My findings are as follows: positive reviews of the film number at 12, negative at 1, neutral at 1. Of the positive reviews, 3 express discomfit toward the South as a whole, with one reviewer stating that the film, “carefully omits any mention of Georgia in the publicity [but we, the audience/ the general public know] about the barbarous south”.

The lone review which expresses sympathy for the South is more critical of the North than anything else: “Indeed, I suspect the film and its producers of playing to no small degree of popular superstitions, fears, and intolerances of the humanitarian northern public - among whose dandy assets are the gangsters, and worst of all, the recent horrendous vice squad!” The South may be brutal and draconian, but they are morally righteous, as opposed to the prostitution and mafia-ridden godless North.

⁶¹ Hall, Stuart & University of Leicester. Centre for Mass Communication Research & University of Birmingham. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies & Council of Europe Colloquy (1973).

television and film is a reciprocal process where the spectator maintains at least partial agency in the effect media has on their perception reality, history, and self. Hall's model is crucial for the project of determining the extent to which interwar audiences shaped, and were in return shaped by, southern.

One of the major functions of ART, as envisioned by Hall, is to elucidate that the same event (say, the Civil War) will inevitably be depicted in more than one way, due to a plethora of factors including but not limited to producer intentionality and access to at least an approximation of accurate qualitative and quantitative data. Within each of these disparate depictions of the same event (each film, for these purposes), a spectator may consequently make the same meanings about said event. For example, that the Civil War was about states' rights rather than the propagation of slavery, despite even possibly profound differences in producer intentionality. What I call "producer intentionality" is very close in definition to what Stuart termed the "dominant reading", likely decoded by the target audience. In opposition to the dominant reading is the "negotiated reading", or those unintended meanings that are gleaned by marginalized or at least un-targeted audiences. There is some disagreement among black film scholars, and indeed black film critics during the interwar era, regarding the use of negotiated readings, or the way oppressed groups in the dominant culture may be empowered by questionably empathetic / accurate portrayals of black persons in movies.⁶² This is due to the complex and sometimes unconscious action of encoding and decoding, which supporters of ART understand as an automatic mechanism by

⁶² This is best illustrated by the mixed reaction from the black community to Hattie McDaniel's Oscar-winning portrayal of Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* (1940), which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

which people process information. The difficult part for scholars is unravelling why and how people come to the conclusions they do from the media they consume. Sometimes, intentionality and meaning links up, as is often the case with partisan talk shows, for example. More often, however, when people are exposed to fictionalized accounts of historical events, the resultant beliefs do not necessarily line up with a particular worldview that is indicative of any bias. For example, an conservative-aligned, elderly, white female from Kentucky may watch a film that depicts the Civil War as a states' rights issue that pit brother against brother senselessly while the rich profited from their misery, but may reasonably come to the conclusion after watching that film that the Civil War was really about slavery.

This does not mean this women will suddenly recalibrate her understanding of history to jibe with the meaning she made - instead, the process by which she decoded the meaning differed from the encoding of the producers to such an extent that the intentionality became moot. This is exactly why producer defenses of “that meaning was not intended” ring hollow, and the question of intentionality in itself may well be a fruitless exercise.⁶³ While it is obvious that ART allows the individual to be

⁶³ Philosophically speaking. The question intentionality is central to this project.

understood as a relatively free agent, it does insist on the universality of the the position that media invariably has *some* effect on the spectator.⁶⁴

Understanding the philosophy behind ART is important because the question of agency is integral to defining the extent of the feedback loop between producer and consumer. Chapter two of this project focuses on the way producers of culture, in the guise of amateur and professional historians working in the Research and Development departments of major film studios, claimed objectivity in their “educational” work,

⁶⁴ Here I would like to mention that while ART is the primary framework I use to understand the relationship between producers of culture and consumers, and how that relationship shapes the public’s “common sense” of historical events, my mode of analysis is also influenced by emotional history. *Emotional Communities* is an idea that was first described by Medievalist Barbara Rosenwein, who proposes that historians understand groups of people as “emotional communities”. She writes, “[Emotional communities] are precisely the same as social communities . . . but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.”

Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History”. *The American Historical Review*, 107:3 (June 2002), 842.

In addition to Barbara Rosenwein’s definition of the boundaries of an emotional community, William Reddy’s concept of *emotives* is also helpful in attempting to understand the nature of the relationship between the men who made movies and the citizens who felt moved enough to pen a letter in response to those movies - both sides were hoping for a reaction from the other without explicitly defining their actions as a *relationship*, which abides by the unspoken boundaries of Hollywood - we produce, you consume - that is an apparatus I will dismantle by the simple revelation of said relationship. The emotional community of an audience is a very distinctive type of community, through which emotives are shared. Reddy defines an emotive as being created when a person is confronted with a trigger - such as the depiction of slavery, or the Civil War, of prison chain gangs - which gives rise to many conflicting feelings in an individual. Consequently, there is an attempt made to assign some logicity to the situation. This logicity may be expressed through predefined norms, and the actions taken by the individual in fact becomes the appropriate, socially-designated emotion - the emotive.

William Reddy. “Against Constructionism: the Historical Ethnography of Emotions”. *Current Anthropology*, 38:3. (Jun., 1997), 327.

When I describe the audience as an emotional community, or decoding as involving emotives, these are my definitions.

relying to some extent on their interpretation of primary sources and the findings of Ivy League historians. Still, these analysts sought the feedback of the general public, and integrated the self-reported, first person accounts of southerners who experienced the events they were depicting first-hand. Obviously, these eyewitness accounts were invariably from the viewpoint of white people, both men and women speaking for men, and those that have been preserved in the archive generally propagate the consensus of the period that life in the antebellum south was idyllic, that the Civil War was a ruse by the yankees to gain control over southern production, and that the Reconstruction era was a disastrous affront to white southern identity, infrastructure, and politics - no matter what W.E.B. Du Bois claimed. Some dissenting views of southern greatness have been preserved in the Warner Bros. archives at USC, but those accounts concern the contemporary issue of chain gangs.⁶⁵

The meanings decoded by audiences are not informed in isolation, of course. The sociocultural context in which a person lives necessarily informs their understanding of how the world works. Additionally, some spectators are *active* viewers, who think about what they are seeing and decode it simultaneous while viewing the movie, while some are more *passive*, or apt to receive the images without thought, so their decoding is more based in emotion rather than logic. If this model seems questionably quantifiable to historians, that is to be expected - passive / active

⁶⁵ This will be discussed further in Chapter III as case studies demonstrating how racialization manifested onscreen as a key component in the identities of the characters in a southern narrative, despite a plethora of evidence available to R&D departments that disputed these narratives. Racial conflict is present in all southern, as it is a marker of the genre, but these were encoded (suggested, implied) and it was left to the spectator to decode the meaning behind the whitewashing. These racist encodings are especially present in plantation pictures, such as *So Red the Rose*, race films such as *The Black King* and *Within Our Gates*, and contemporary issue pictures like *White Bondage*, about sharecropping, and *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* and *Hell's Highway*, about prison labor.

viewing has been debated endlessly in philosophical film studies, particularly by those scholars who describe themselves as Lacanian. These theories are not provable, per se, but the surveys, letters, and reviews produced by audiences after viewing a movie, in conjunction with scientific or even self-reported demographical information and contextual clues forms the basis of ART as a social science, rather than “just” a philosophical theoretical framework. It is easy to analyze a movie when the point of analysis is the text itself, but the issues becomes much more complex for historians who must historicize the reconciliatory relationship between the dominant and negotiated readings. The intent of *Jezebel* may have been to relate a tale of how a fallen woman was able to regain the dignity inherent to her white, southern womanhood, but the reception greatly depended upon the audience’s level of engagement with the picture - were spectators filling seats to view Ms. Davis’s dresses? Were they motivated by an interest in the spectacle of plantation films for nostalgic reasons? Did they consider themselves history buffs? The answers to these questions in relation to discrete individuals is impossible to glean on any statistically significant scale, but the thought experiment engendered by ART in conjunction with the limited primary sources produces a robust consideration of the historical questions that shape the boundaries of this project - what is a southern, where was the information that formed the backbone of these ostensibly historical pictures found, who were they targeted toward, how were they received, and why did they proliferate during the interwar era? Ultimately, these relatively simple questions will hopefully demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between producers and consumers, as well as the ubiquity and consequences of academic history texts in Hollywood during

the studio era, at what was arguably the height of the power and influence movies had over American audiences.

D.W. Griffith's bizarre and entirely conflicted eponymously-titled biographical picture of *Abraham Lincoln* (1930) provides an interesting case study for the question of dominant and negotiated meanings between producers and the audience. While it was Mr. Griffith's intention to depict a nuanced and complex man whose love of his country stood in stark relief to the pressure of his (shrewd) Republican party, the product was altogether flat, lifeless, historically inaccurate and invariably offensive. Griffith hired a "professional historical screenwriter" to assist him with the screenplay; unfortunately, this "historian" was Stephen Vincent Benét, the author of the schmaltzy and flawed (and Pulitzer Prize-winning) Civil War poem *John Brown's Body*. He rewrote Griffith's script several times before it was accepted by Griffith's own studio, United Artists. The film was near-universally panned for its sentimental and hokey treatment of the eponymous protagonist, who was portrayed as a hero of Grecian proportions, always shouldering the burden of his great destiny. Griffith's aesthetics were at fault, as was Benét's ghostwriting that blatantly glossed over the historical complexities, which contributed to the superficial quality of the film according to the majority of influential film critics of the period.⁶⁶ By the 1930's, American audiences held a more nuanced view of what Lincoln's legacy was than the rote "Great Emancipator" vision Griffith committed to screen - ticket sales were underperforming and reflected the general boredom that the film was greeted with.⁶⁷ In fact, critics appeared personally offended

⁶⁶ According to Smyth these were: Richard Watts at *The New York Herald Tribune*, Mordant Hall at *The New York Times*, and Harry Alan Potemkin at *The New Masses*. (Smyth, 29).

⁶⁷ Smyth, 32.

by the one-dimensional depiction of Lincoln, partially because they felt a great opportunity to use cinema for educational purposes was missed. Critics reacted similarly to Victor Fleming's romanticized re-telling of *The Virginian* (1929 - the third adaption of Owen Wister's historical novel), which featured a protagonist who epitomized the morals of a gentleman of the Old south - a man willing to die for his honor, and who felt he could recapture the glory of the unvarnished south by traveling westward.⁶⁸

To further demonstrate the shape of this historian-to-producer-to-audience feedback loop, let us once more consider the *cause célèbre* of issue pictures during the interwar era: chain gangs. RKO's answer to the hugely successful *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* was 1932's much less financially notable *Hell's Highway*, which is nonetheless the superior film.⁶⁹ It begins with the title screen: "Dedicated to an early end of the conditions portrayed herein - which, though a throw-back to the middle Ages, actually exists today", which is comically heavy-handed, but also indicative of the intentionality of the producers - they believed their movie was educating the public about an under-discussed issue of great public concern and historical significance. The use of inter titles is a marker for an active audience - instead of only receiving images, which may be taken passively without any level of analysis, the spectator must read, and in this case must read an opinion that implores the viewer to anticipate the events of

⁶⁸ Smyth, 30.

⁶⁹ On a related note, RKO is interesting because it was arguably the most audience-friendly studio and also the most interested in history pictures. The studio was generally thrilled by the prospect of adapting what they saw as a serious historical work, and not only because of the financial successes of earlier adaptations, such as the Southern musical *Show Boat*. RKO R&D department head Howard Estabrook, who adapted many works of historical fiction for the screen, shared RKO's vision of producing "authentic" films. (Smyth 35).

the film. The same technique is used today in film, from “based on a true story” titles in melodramas to setting cues like “New York, 2055”. The former is something to anticipate, and the latter is information to remember - this is the truth, this is the future, remember this or else the movie cannot be fully enjoyed.

Silent cinema encourages active viewing, as the actions of the actors must be interpreted in addition to dialogue titles and setting cues that must be read. It is easy to forget what an interactive experience going to the movies was - people cheered, booed, openly wept, criticized, applauded, and generally broadcasted their emotional reactions to the events on the screen as part of the show, in much the same atmosphere as historian Lawrence Levine describes at a Shakespearian play in 19th century New York City. The reactions of those around you were not distractions from the movie - they were part of the movie.⁷⁰ As Hollywood began to experiment with new technologies that discouraged extraneous commentary (that is, so the actors’ voices could be heard) and began to take itself more seriously as an educational enterprise beyond the pretentious of D.W. Griffith and Oscar Micheaux, active viewing needed to be encouraged with cinematic techniques. These techniques, which establish a veneer of respectability and gravitas to even the most shameless cash-grabs, are most present during the interwar era in historical films, and especially in southern, even if they are less serious offerings like *So Red the Rose* (1935) or *The Texans* (1938).

In self-consciously serious movies like *Hell’s Highway*, there is a loftiness to the use of titles that is suggestive of a knowingness of the part of the producers to

⁷⁰ This atmosphere is only retained in certain communities in appropriate social situations - such as camp midnight screenings of *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, or for modern day “race films”, such as those produced by Tyler Perry, in predominantly black neighborhoods.

motivate the audience to read between the images. The film has many off-color jokes that take varying amounts of mental work to unravel, like “It takes a lot of nerve to rob and bank” and “It takes a lot of backbone to keep three wives happy”. There are also coded characters who are presented both as comedic relief as well as objects of pity - or, depending on the readiness to empathize in the spectator - archetypes of real people who deserve to be afforded basic human dignity. One new prisoner, a boy who falls over from being worked too hard on the road chain, is called “soft” and thrown into the sweatbox - this suggests some of the prisoners are there for reasons not in proportion with the severity of their crimes, which in turn encourages an indictment of the system as senselessly cruel. This boy dies in the sweatbox, and the protagonist, infuriated that such a needlessly dangerous and mean-spirited punishment still exists, relates to his fellow prisoners with palpable disgust that “The contractor says the boy committed suicide”. Not only is the justice system in the South unjust in sentencing, but officials at these prisons are dishonest and intent on protecting the reputation of their institutions and states over actually taking care of people who are in their ward.⁷¹ There are even hints of a Communist agenda from the most marginalized - yet entirely sympathetic - character when Burgess lisps, “Passive resistance my eye! No food, no work.”⁷² Additionally, black prisoners are actually shown; they work together in the kitchens in one shot. This is only notable only because prison issue pictures

⁷¹ We see these themes again, even more explosively, in the film that set the enforcement of the Hayes Code in motion, 1933’s gothic melodrama *The Story of Temple Drake*, and 1937’s romantic noir *They Won’t Forget*. The “slandering” of any government officials, real or fictional, was prohibited by the Code.

⁷² Burgess is an interesting character - because *Hell’s Highway* is pre-Code, he is a stereotypical gay character who is in a semi-veiled same-sex relationship with another prisoner. In another scene, he has an on-the-nose gag: “I like funerals. Once, I went to a funeral where the casket was covered with a great big blanket. The blanket had pansies all over it.”

whitewashed the chain gang in order to engender more sympathy of their cause among a racist public. There is even the inclusion of a favorite device in the Souther - spirituals are lead by black prisoners (with white prisoners perfectly harmonizing, of course) on the road gang. At one point black man is called a “baboon” by guards, much to the righteous outrage of the white protagonist. The touchy-feely sentimentality is given a hard-nosed edge to it when viewed through a collectivist propaganda lens - all men deserve dignity, no matter their identity, and all men deserve the right to enjoy the fruits of their labor, and not to be exploited *like slaves* for the enrichment of the wealthy and greedy.

Hollywood’s powerful and hopelessly liberal producers were not finished with their pet issue yet - 1965’s *Road Gang* (also known as *Prison Farm*) was another attempt by Warner Bros. to expose the vicious southern prison system in what *Hollywood Reporter* called an “OK, not exactly entertaining, but nonetheless exciting, masculine screed against chain gangs. A routine check-up to let the world know that the Warners, collectively and individually, are opposed to cruelty in prison farms, are keeping a watchful eye on the penal system south of the Mason-Dixon line and are eager to protect innocent young men like Donald Woods from being framed by crooked politicians.”⁷³ This dim view of the effectiveness of the issue picture is made even more amusing when one considers the enormous amount of energy that went into editing the picture so the markers of the Southern setting would not be obvious to audiences - clearly, to no avail. In a letter from Joseph Breen to J. L. Warner on September 28th, 1935, Breen worried that,

⁷³ “Review Roundup”, *Hollywood Reporter*. Feb. 28th, 1936.

“[T]he story, as now written, is completely and entirely in violation of our Production Code, for the following reasons: corrupt judiciary, corrupt prison guards, corrupt law enforcement, corrupt public officials, excessive brutality [...] We also feel that the Sunday service, as set forth in your script beginning with Scene 143 in which a “hatchet-faced old evangelist” conducts a religious service and the prisoners sing hymns, is little more than a travesty on religion and will have to be considerably changed about before it can be acceptable under the code.

Breen was parroting a criticism he heard from professional concerned citizen, City of Atlanta secretary, and Daughter of the Confederacy Mrs. Alonzo Richardson. In a letter dated June 26th, 1936, and addressed to Mr. Joseph Breen, Mrs. Richardson claims that she is “extremely angry and riled” after seeing *Road Gang*, which she hated to much she could not finish, and walked out of. She writes,

The slur on the South made me mad - yes, that’s the word. The effort of the actors to talk like southerners alway rather riles me, if it does not amuse me, which amusement comes more often than ire, but to make southerners say the cruel things, to have one see one inhuman thing after another until nerves are stretched to the breaking is NOT what I consider entertainment. [...] Showing this picture in the South will cause a riot in small towns - in the cities the audience will walk out, and as I told the manager yesterday - he will have to hide, for what they will say to him when they walk out will be more than he can take.

It is unclear which Mrs. Richardson cares more about - “the slur on the South” or the depiction of “one inhuman thing after another”. She also finds time to remark on the substandard decorum of the picture:

One more complaint. For a time we got away from having to see men bathing. [...] Is bathing such an event in anybody’s life that it has to be photographed? I didn’t think so, not does the average audience. Female form MAY be beautiful, but “good Lord deliver us” from the naked male. Knock-kneed, many of these, certainly nothing beautiful in either of the aforesaid gentlemen whom we have had to see in the bathtubs recently.

Breen replied to Mrs. Richardson and apologized, noting how “offensive” the script initially was, and ensuring her that the final form, while still “despicable” was “much improved” over the initial versions. He also shares her view with regard to men bathing, but claims “these people out here seem to think that it is attractive and funny. We [at the Production Code offices], like yourself, think it is thoroughly obnoxious.” Nineteen cuts total were made to *Road Gang* before its release. To reiterate: southerners were not happy about their justice systems being depicted as so brutally repressive that they encouraged de facto communist labor unions in prisons, but the issue (pictures) would not die, and eventually chain gang labor systems did (for a time).

At its genesis, the Southern genre was shaped by the relationship between historians, studios, and audiences, all testing the boundaries of the medium for the purposes of both education and nostalgic entertainment. Black voices were largely omitted from the book-lists pored over by R&D historians, and Joseph Breen did not take the time to reply to black Americans who were concerned about the happy slave / adoring Mammy paradigm. But race was not absent from southerners, even when the issues depicted were whitewashed, or the “black” characters had their skin painted brown - it was a preoccupation, a place marker, an inevitability just as significant (and obviously morseso) as the accuracy of Georgia accent versus the Texan drawl. The South was an idea, more than a region, or a conglomeration of ideas that formed the boundaries of a genre and a history that was both uniquely American and inconceivably foreign to those out of the in-group, or the emotional community formed by all southerners, who felt abandoned and abused by the Union.

Film, during the interwar era, tells a story about the South's growing pains as an industrializing and modernizing region that other media, such as literature or radio, or traditional sources, such as business and census records, cannot; movies were helping to conceal the unrest in Dixie, and promoted the triumph of a white supremacist, yet ostensibly "progressive" worldview. Even as white workers in cotton mills were being forced into a paternal relationship with industry, they were spending their nickels to see the goodness of the slave institution retold; even as Jim Crow created a system of segregation that separated the races in a completely foreign apartheid, southerners lauded a past when blacks and whites lived in close quarters, as happy negroes and their masters, the mistress who went to her beloved Mammy for advice.⁷⁴ Indeed, in a perfectly telling film review, a critic writing about *Jezebel* (1938) for the *Chicago Herald*, highlights how the happy slave and adoring Mammy myth held a special, lasting appeal for people, well into the 20th century, stating that "The negro actors are a sheer delight; they are all so loyal, lovable, and friendly. Lou Payton's Uncle Cato is the idealization of the Southern house servant." So, the problems of modernism were at the forefront of every American's mind during the decades between the World Wars, and the creation of a national southern mythos was one way the culture sought to deal with the problem of history during a time national unity was an absolute necessity. The repercussions of this image-building are still felt today, with authentic class and race consciousness being obfuscated by stereotypes and status-quo supporting propaganda, which is exploited to great effect by politicians. Only through the careful analysis and rebuttal of the counterproductive boundaries and negative features of this

mythos, as exemplified by the Southern genre, can we move toward an honest attempt at national reconciliation.

Chapter II

Making History: Film Production During the Studio Era

*In the celluloid south reality plays a small role.*⁷⁵

Hollywood attempted to engage with certain aspects of historical reality, if not to improve the factual accuracy of their films, then to lend a veneer of credibility to their pictures, and to provide writers with a foundation to elaborate upon. The research and development departments (R&D) of film studios were tasked with a tall order: to assist the writers, set designers, and costume artists in their (re)creation of another place and time. R&D staff took their jobs very seriously, seeking out and consulting encyclopedias, official company histories, tourism pamphlets, and academic monographs. Subsequently, the writing of historians and those similarly invested in southern history served as the basis for the suggestions of R&D staff on set dressing and dialogue, which is evidenced by the countless correspondences between R&D and film production staff. These interactions sometimes yielded lengthy bibliographies that cited old folklore compilations and contemporary academic monographs alike. Screenwriters, directors, and actors alike were invested in releasing films that the audience would not only accept, but enjoy, as evidenced time and again by the checked-and-re-checked work of the R&D departments. Sometimes, these concerns about an audience outcry were legal, and sometimes they were financial, but they were

⁷⁵ Campbell, 4

always a very real concern, and how they were addressed through the use of R&D departments is a key component in cultural construction.

Herman Lissauer, the Head of Research with the Warner Brothers Studios R&D department during the 1930s and early 1940s, obtained a number of texts pertaining to the background investigation for the antebellum melodrama *Jezebel*, including one that alleged southern belles would smack themselves repeatedly with a hairbrush about the cheeks to mimic a blush - a dubious claim that is repeated in Lissauer's records and actually makes it into the film.⁷⁶ One of the books Lissauer's department borrowed was written by famed black folklorist Thomas W. Talley's *Negro Folk Rhymes* (1922), a book that was insisted on for its authority and authenticity, and is the only book written by an African-American that I was able to locate in the records I had access to.⁷⁷ R&D staffers at Warner Brothers and Universal often referenced the Encyclopaedia Britannica for general information, and then took it upon themselves to individually choose monographs for more detailed historical accounts, as evidenced by their marginalia, which further complicates tracking the exact sources and the underlying biases.⁷⁸ Writers also worked from source material, which was usually written by southerners who themselves understood the history of their region in ways that were prejudiced to their times and circumstances. Of the films I investigate, this process is most notably

⁷⁶ William Wyler papers, University of California, Los Angeles, Performing Arts Library. See bibliography for notes.

This primitive coding of southern women is and the classification of all belles into the whore/madonna archetype is discussed further in Chapter IV.

⁷⁷ *Negro Folk Rhymes* contains little in the way of historicization, and instead mostly serves as an encyclopedia of the titular rhymes.

⁷⁸ i.e. "See more"

present with D.W. Griffith and Thomas Dixon Jr.'s work, director David Butler's *The Little Colonel*, based on the novel by Annie Fellows Johnston, and with David O. Selznick and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.⁷⁹

During the interwar years, academic information about the historic south was heavily influenced by the work of southern historian U.B. Phillips, and by that of William Dunning and his students. Richard Hofstadter described U.B. Phillips as presenting a latter-day pro-slavery argument with his monographs *America Negro Slavery* and *Life and Labor in the Old South*. Phillips was preoccupied with the most elite class of planters, those men who held over 150 slaves, and his complete lack of explication on the lives of plain folk, including small slave holders, informs his heavily biased work. William A. Dunning's highly influential, and equally problematic, writings on the Reconstruction and "Redemption"-era south were informed by the same romantic, almost sentimental feelings toward the Old South, although for Dunning, the plain folk were the heroes who suffered at the hands of southern scallawags, northern carpetbaggers, and black Republicans. These ideas are imbued in the filmic texts of the "southern" genre, and this is evidenced not only on screen, but in the edited and unedited screenplays and filming notes, which are littered with statements such as, "in the manner typical of the time". These were people who were confident in their research and their own understanding of the South, which is why their vision was, in turn, so powerful and influential.

The central importance of extended visual analysis of a film is often overlooked by scholars who use movies as primary sources. Since a movie is mediated in every

conceivable fashion, they make ideal historical sources as they reflect the conventions of the time as well as reveal the mechanisms of Hollywood's contemporary socioeconomic apparatus (Independent era, Studio era, Franchise era). There is much to be said for analyzing script changes and scribbled-in margin notes, but *looking* is still the most important task must undertake in order to understand movies in their contexts. What content actually makes it from page to screen is the single most telling aspect of cinema, and every component must be considered carefully. Just as producers took exacting pains in casting and set-dressing even B-roll pictures, we too must take into account every detail. This approach necessarily engenders certain issues, the most important of which being, for the purposes of this project, the way visual analysis interacts with more traditional historical methods. The most effective framework appears to be one which superimposes historical context directly onto the visual analysis - that most traditional of historical methodologies, historicization. Everything must be interpreted as a product of its time is clearly the mantra of every historian, but when put into practice for interpreting movies, this becomes a task of truly Herculean proportions. The analysis of dialogue choices is obviously important, and doing so reveals great number of mitigating factors, including: common conceptions about the mechanics of how people spoke "authentically" as well as what might have been the content of their daily conversations, how which characters said what reveals the way writers both envisioned historical social roles and well as toed the line to conform to contemporary respectability, the process of adapting material from its source to a screenplay to a script to the screen, and the long chain of custody every movie goes through from the studio heads to the Production Code. Now, consider that

a similar process is present in the decision-making process for every aspect of a movie: the choosing of props, the cinematography, the casting, the acting direction, and the narrative itself. It is the historian's task to systematically analyze the each of these categories from the written inception to the finished product, and only then can a film be truly appreciated as a primary source. The extraordinarily involved circumstances of the making of a movie are unrivaled in popular culture - no such oversight apparatus exists in the publishing world, and even in television, there is considerably less at stake than with a full-scale Hollywood film production, hence the risk-taking that characterizes much of television throughout its history.

The integration of screen and page is necessary to form a complete picture; in order to properly place a film in its historical context behind-the-scenes activity must be considered in conjunction with the visual analysis. Taken together, this forms a complete picture that demonstrates the strength of film as primary source that is just as valid as written documents. The process that goes into the film is reflected on its very surface, and from the presentation we can draw conclusions about the way historical persons translated their ideas into image. Directors, especially, were convinced of the absolute power of the image to inform and imprint on the mind of the audience member in a more significant way than any other medium. This belief is reflected in the work R&D departments were pushed to perform, fact-checking the smallest details in an obsessive push to situate their fictional narrative within the parameters of "high realism".⁸⁰ Period-accurate set details were critical, because

⁸⁰ Wibur G. Kurtz collection, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

See bibliography for notes.

Hollywood producers were so invested in pushing audiences to believe their films reflected a historical truth, which was itself carefully crafted to reinforce contemporary ideologies. So, if an informed audience member was awed by the meticulously recreated pit BBQ in *Gone With the Wind*, they would be more easily convinced by the less historically accurate details, such as the unflagging loyalty Mammy showed to Scarlett, valuing the Belle's life above her own. When situated in an ultra-realistic world, points of propaganda became easier to accept.

Research and Development departments were a fixture of Hollywood during the studio era, and their purpose was manifold. Directors like D.W. Griffith had adopted the mantle of "educator" of (or, perhaps, "activist" for) the white American public in their capacity as producers of culture. In Griffith's case, his historicization was equal parts his own instincts about the rightness of "the way things were", informed by his own recollections and those of his slave-owning father, as well as his close study of the work of contemporary historians who were sympathetic to the most racially divisive interpretations of the history of the South. For example, the use of inter titles as a historical teaching tool by Griffith was unique, and was seen as the most problematic aspect of the film at the time by black critics.⁸¹ Griffith, ever the amateur historian, wrote the inter titles to enhance the historical narrative he was trying to achieve, using words in addition to images to guide the audience's interpretation of the events unfolding onscreen.⁸² This forced the audience to take sides, either adopting in the

⁸¹ Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion 'in American Film, 1929 - 1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 52

⁸² Smyth, 2

position of sceptic or accepting the proffered information as historical fact being disseminated by a trusted source.

There is much to unpack here, for either interpretation, as the notion of the skeptical viewer has been challenged consistently in film studies, especially in a Mulvian or Lacanian interpretation of the viewer as a mostly passive vessel through which films pass and make impression. If one views the audience in a more Materialist-Historicist light as taking a more active role in interpreting what they see on film and accepting certain portions as value-added truths and other portions as misinformation or otherwise unbelievable, then you must argue that the typical movie spectator has not the mindset of willful suspension of disbelief, but rather a notion of themselves as critic and interpreter. It is crucial to keep in mind the malleability of the notion of audience as consumer / audience as students, and not discount the possibility that any single viewer might occupy both roles, even within the same viewing. Indeed, R&D departments were built on the assumption that audiences may challenge the factuality of what was depicted on screen, so the sets and plots and dialogue must be meticulously vetted in order to head off any criticism. At the other end of the spectrum, the Hays Code censors took an active role in deciding which facts were fit for public consumption and which were better left unspoken - or undepicted. Audiences were certainly interested in taking an active role in culture, not only as consumers, but also as arbiters of taste, (not so) silently guiding the output of Hollywood by spending their money on movie genres they wanted to see more of. During the interwar era, they spent their money on southerners in much the same fashion as early 21st century audiences demanded the expansion of franchises by turning out in record numbers for

superhero films. But what motivates these shifting cultural interests? It is easily demonstrable that the South was a regular part of popular discussion during the 1920s and 1930s, but it is less obvious why Americans suddenly became re-enamored with comic books with an acuity rivaling the Golden Age of comics and pulp fiction during the 1940s and 1950s. The answer to this question depends heavily on how one interprets the role of the individual in the audience.

The Marxist approach to film theory and reception studies is a history-based materialist method that seeks to trace patterns of spectatorship, explore questions of identification, and analyze films. It is traditional in the social sciences, and was applied early on to the film theory, after that discipline emerged as a distinct entity from academic film criticism. As film theory matured in the 1970's, there was less emphasis on the Marxist approach, in favor of more philosophical and psychoanalytic-based methods. This trend accelerated with the ascent of feminist film theory in the late 1970's, which introduced a rigorous psychoanalytic framework to studies of representation and reception. The radical work of Laura Mulvey came to prominence over the more traditional interpretive work of V.F. Perkins, and the theories of mind originated by Lacan, Althusser, Kristeva, Derrida, and Foucault overshadowed the utilization of Marx and his students. New French thought, paired with Freudian theory, shifted the focus away from external, historical context, to become more reflective of the internal processes that connect humans to the moving image. While Marxist materialist scholars focused on the reception of "real" historical persons as consumers, and Hollywood as capitalist industry that commodified the human form, psychoanalysis placed the spectator as an ideological concept, and labeled the

process of “looking” (gaze theory) and interpreting film as largely unconscious.

Accordingly, the question of agency became contentious between the two camps, and both attacked the other’s methods - Marxism as being too empirically-reliant and analytically shallow, and psychoanalysis as being light on actual evidence and dismissive of agency.

The distinctions between Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches to film theory are so great that they nearly form two opposing disciplines. Feminist film theorist Jackie Stacey and Marxist scholar Janet Staiger have both taken pains to describe the differences between these approaches, and the results were terms that are often repeated as belonging under the umbrella of one approach or the other. The most notable of these are the terms “film studies” to refer to psychoanalytical-philosophical approaches, and “cultural studies” or “reception studies” to refer to Marxist-historicist approaches. Film studies is invested in questions of spectator-position, the passive/active viewer dichotomy, unconscious viewing processes, and textual analysis. Cultural studies/ reception studies refers to the use of ethnography, consumption-led meaning, and the conscious process of viewing and interpreting a film relative to ones social(ly constructed) identity. Staiger describes film studies as a hermeneutic or truth-finding activity, while reception studies is interested instead in how a film means, rather than what it means. Reception studies criticizes the idea of the reader as a-historical, is interested in the relationship between reader and text, and places an emphasis on the dialectic of evidence. At times, the dominance of one method over the other has been abrupt, such as when semiotic/ linguistic theories were appropriated by

psychoanalytically-informed film theorists; this resulted in the absolute interruption of the Marxist approach, as deconstructionist language theorists, like Derrida, deny the ability of the scholar, or any person, to describe any process with language. This is such an absolute break that it necessitates arguments that negate the usefulness of the opposing approach, often with strong language resulting in one method being dismissed as ludicrous or out of place in film theory.

In addition, scholars from both schools tend to voice political concerns, and disagree as to the effectiveness/ usefulness of opposite methods, with Marxist film theorists seeing the work of exposing the commodification process as important, while psychoanalytic theorists see the exposure of normative, manipulative images as critical to the remedying of social ills like misogyny and homophobia. Despite this, some scholars have attempted to make use of both methodologies, with varying degrees of success, although the results are still typically weighted toward one method. The integral antagonism between the two camps is still apparent; while such a rivalry is unnecessary and distracting, the absolute dissimilarity in overall world-view and methodology makes a truly integrative approach dubious. Both Marxist and psychoanalytic theories have much to offer film theory, albeit largely separately, and each offers a unique view into the uses of R&D and the importance of the concept of authenticity - what was the intentionality? What was the consequence - economically, psychologically? Perhaps the most important consideration with regards to the interpretation of the construction of authenticity in southern films is whether or not one believes that Studio System-era films were typically comprised of innovative and seamless narratives that genuinely sought to change the way audiences understood

the world in which they lived, or if films were largely hegemony-produced capitalist narratives that sought only to further the fortunes of the producers.

The notion of authenticity is intrinsically linked to the concept of the spectator's gaze - R&D departments aimed to draw the spectator's gaze to the individual details that worked together to characterize a film as a realistic depiction. Of course, the gaze is a totalizing concept that trumps the notion of individuals as historical agents, and the spectator is hypothetical and should be considered primarily in relation to the visual image - the text and the receiver can not be separated.⁸³ Linda Williams relates her notion of the gaze, slightly redefined from Mulvey, to the Freudian "corporeality of vision", or the insistence that the boundary between body and image, and body and machine for viewing, is blurred.⁸⁴ ⁸⁵ This is the antithesis to Staiger's spectator, who is often so disconnected from the image that they consciously refuse to receive it, i.e.

⁸³ Linda Williams, *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 2

⁸⁴ Williams, 7

⁸⁵ This type of argument is not convincing to all scholars. In *Moving Images*, Ib Bondebjerg agrees with Staiger, and argues that language theories like semiotics and postmodern frameworks, like phenomenology, obfuscate important questions of reception; he claims that the link between audience studies and postmodern philosophy and psychoanalysis is tentative. Cultural methods, on the other hand, are directly linked to the study of the spectator, as they focus on evidence and empirically-gathered responses, rather than textual interpretation. Viewers' relation to the moving image is externally constructed, based on cultural schemata that are common across social divides - there is no universal appeal to an innate state of the ahistorical individual. Reception-centered film studies draw from the dominant critical theories of the 1970s, just as psychoanalytic and philosophical film studies do, but the methods are not linked in execution or conclusions.

This sentiment mirrors Miriam Hansen's, and exemplifies the antagonism Marxist film historians sometimes have toward the very notion of studying the spectator outside of their social and cultural context. Focusing on the nebulous concept of the gaze, rather than reception, is, Bondebjerg writes, an ineffective means of drawing conclusions about spectatorship. This points to a fundamental disagreement about the definition of spectatorship, as a active process versus a passive one.

when audiences heckle and ignore the screen, or even walk out. Williams's spectators are still awed by the filmic image, on a visceral level, and she relates the modern film-goer to the "primitive" audience that understood movies as an attraction of "astonishment" and suspended disbelief.⁸⁶ Williams would analyze the event of a film walk-out by explaining it as a state of attachment so strong that the film physically repels the viewer, much how the primitive cinema-goer would cower in fear of the projected image of an oncoming train. This model is supported by the primary evidence, and in many instances I found notices for films that detailed the very loud reactions of spectators to the high-action sequences on-screen. To fully understand

⁸⁶ Williams, 12.

Additionally, theorist Richard Allen is concerned with this very issue, the impression of reality in cinema. Allen addresses the work of Staiger directly, and while he does not disregard its value, he makes no attempt to utilize empirical methods, and he qualifies Marxist conclusions in order to conform with his own "contemporary film theory" approach, which is in fact Lacanian-Althusserian psychoanalysis. The spectator is not duped by the filmic image, as Williams's thesis would conclude, but is aware of the illusion of cinema and allows themselves to be immersed, an act this is, in its universality, almost automatic. This is a process he describes as "projective illusion". Allen's agency-allowing apparatus is carefully crafted as fortification against Marxist criticisms, but this is a defensive tactic rather than cooperative one. Still, he takes more issue with students of Derrida than with Marxist film theorists, and finds their arguments implausible, while the materialist arguments are simply incomplete.

He also argues that gender is irrelevant for the projective illusion process of spectatorship, which is a problematic claim for feminist Marxist historians, like Miriam Hansen, who argue that spectatorship is fundamentally gendered, and the spectator's identity as a gendered consumer is integral to the Hollywood commodification industry. In fact, Hansen's 1994 monograph, *Babel and Babylon*, focuses on "the emergence of cinema spectatorship" as "profoundly intertwined with the transformation of the public sphere" in a gendered way from 1890 - 1929, which she claims are pivotal years for public/ private sphere interaction with regard to female discourses on sexuality. Hansen approaches spectatorship as a question of social and cultural history, and historical transformation. For example, early cinema, she argues, was an alternative public sphere, and certain social groups especially benefited from this newly-available sphere: city-dwellers, the working-class, new immigrants, and women. (Hansen, 2 -3, 5, 91, 125—see bibliography).

the motivations of the use of R&D, rather than totally fictionalizing, we must accept, as Williams does, that the spectator is totally immersed within the film and is not likely to engage in active viewing unless they believe something is at stake for them, as is the case with the critical southerners and black folks who were so moved to write in protest after viewing certain films.

As I will be discussing the central importance of the gaze in interpreting film, it is crucial to pin down some semblance of a definition. I fully endorse Laura Mulvey's thesis of film and visual pleasure, and indeed I believe accepting that the impetus to partake in film viewing is a pleasurable activity that appeals to the gaze is necessary to understand that southerners functioned as a conduit for the creation of a hegemonic understanding of "the South". The gaze, again, is an operation that makes use of the spectator's socially given identity in order to appeal to their "ideological interpellation of the subject", or the film.⁸⁷ The seeking out of visual pleasure stems from desire - in film that manifests as the desire to see, to experience, to learn, and this desire is exploited by filmmakers who want to appeal to the basest level of human cognition while also attempting to transmit images and ideas they feel are important, as I outlined in Chapter 1. Foucault, for example, hypothesized that no matter how much power one acquires to supplant one's desires, "one is always felt to be missing something: the object petit a"; for example, a slave has access to enjoyment that the master can not own, which leaves the master with an emptiness and feeling of not having complete power over his own slave.⁸⁸ Such is the relationship the spectator has to the moving

⁸⁷ Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (New York: State University of New York Press 2008), 2

⁸⁸ McGowan, 12

image - “the way which film deploys the gaze” — i.e. appeals to desire— is “the fundamental political, existential act of the cinema”.⁸⁹ This is why understanding the way R&D departments functioned as an appendage of reality and authenticity within the fantasyland of Hollywood is pivotal.

The cinema as a place of transgression, where politics may be performed as a way to supplement existence, is an important concept for Marxist historians as well. An understanding of both the demographics and desires of the audiences is essential to an accurate reading of audience behavior.⁹⁰ Viewers use films and their own reactions to them, as opportunities to display their cultural competence, and as forms of cultural capital that, indeed, enrich their experiences. Film historians Stokes and Maltby have explicated on this subject at length, and I concur with them totally with regard to the addressing the myth that Hollywood has no conception of what its audiences desire, by showing that Hollywood has in fact studied audience behavior, albeit for its own economic benefit, by focusing on the question of “satisfaction” rather than “desire”; that is, the difference between the audience’s expectations for a film and their ultimate reaction.⁹¹ Indeed, as an historian I believe that psychoanalytic film theory is essentially disconnected from understanding the capitalist production aspect of film-making, so scholars in that discipline do not address this critical issue, and instead focus on an intense study of the text. W. J. T. Mitchell’s oft-cited question, “what do pictures want?” is cited as psychoanalytic theory at its most “perverse”, as the real question for

⁸⁹ McGowan, 18

⁹⁰ Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds., *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perception of Cinema Audiences* (London: BFI Publishers, 2001), 3

⁹¹ Stokes and Maltby, 2

works focused on spectatorship should be “what do audiences want?”⁹² Being too heavily invested in ideological arguments like Mitchell’s results in erasures and can present a picture of Hollywood that misrepresents the industry; Stokes and Maltby use Mulvey as an example of this, stating that feminist film theory, by characterizing the female spectator as an idea(l) and not an individual underestimated the centrality of the female spectator to classical Hollywood (especially the woman’s film genre).⁹³ Stokes’s empirical research shows that the industry in the 1920’s and 1930’s actually assumed its audience to be white and largely female, so this complicates (at least the most basic incarnation of) gaze theory. An example of Stokes’s logical rebuttal of certain psychoanalytic theory is as follows: assuming the passivity of the female spectator without evidence is faulty, as there have clearly been examples of women being active spectators, as in fandom/ star cults. Responses to these claims that cite unconscious processes are agency-destroying, and should be avoided; therefore, a solid argument

⁹² Stokes and Maltby, 9

⁹³ For example, an authentic use of Derrida’s post-constructionism as a way to interpret how spectators read the language of film would be difficult to reconcile with a Marxist concern for context, as extratextual and extra-gaze-oriented processes are irrelevant to deconstructionism; i.e. interpretation is not shaped by language or experience, and therefore it can not be described by language or experience. Due to the rigorous frameworks that most psychoanalytic methods call for, fidelity to these ideals is a hinderance to the Marxist film theorist who seeks to describe events without repeated qualifications concerning the imprecise nature of language and lived experience.

Likewise, if a gaze theorist truly takes into account oral histories obtained via ethnography, then there would be a fundamental undermining of both, as gaze theory typically posits a passive viewer object, while cultural history argues for an active spectator subject. Film theorists working with disparate approaches can learn from one another, and have, but a truly integrated method might be beside the point, as each method offers unique additions to the discipline that are most potent when they are not compromised in service to diplomacy.

based on the passivity of the female spectator can not be made. Viewers negotiate their own position to the cinema.⁹⁴

To move back toward the intentions and desires of the producers of culture, Griffith was invested in projecting an image of white solidarity. Griffith, along with U.B. Phillips, George Bancroft, and those historians who abided the by the Whig notion of a “history of progress” were actively working to usher in an era of what Hofstadter refers to as antagonistic history, which is defined by struggle, and where one “side” emerges as the victor, while the other experiences a total loss. The interpretation of history as a strictly competitive pursuit (a “zero-sum game”) was crucial to white consensus history, in which the Confederates became sympathetic “brothers” who were more or less “forced” to defend slavery against their best judgement, in the interest of self-preservation.⁹⁵ Slavery was deeply unpopular in the north, which is not to say that northern whites were antiracist - in fact, many of the originators of what came to be known as the eugenics movement in the twentieth century were abolitionists - but rather, the associations of slaver-holding with sloth, greed, and wrath were intolerable for the largely Protestant upper classes who freely wielded their political clout. The Protestant Work Ethic continued to be a great importance to ministries well into the twentieth century, and historians like Phillips and Bancroft were faced with the daunting challenge of recasting slavers as sympathetic working men who had the best interests of their family, their slaves, and their country at heart. Rudyard Kipling’s *white Man’s Burden*, penned during the Philippine-American War, helped pave the way for the notion of the selfless white supremacist, and the interplay between the public

⁹⁴ Stokes and Maltby, 6

discourse surrounding the “responsibilities” of the white man in the American imperial age helped bolster conversations surrounding reconciliation which led to the Confederate apologist ethic that imbued so many southern films.⁹⁶ Griffith himself believed that, eventually, filmmakers would become the foremost historians, due to their capacity to project the so-called historical image, bringing to life narratives that were otherwise largely accessible - and interesting - to academics.⁹⁷ What is generally referred to as “the politics of representation” - a phrase heavily associated with the social movements of the 1970s - were present even during the interwar era, but those groups vying for representation were white men with whom the stigma of Confederate loss was inextricably tied to their identities.

During the silent era, R&D departments did not have the power, generally, to dictate what was written into the script for a film. For history pictures, the research submitted by R&D workers was left to the director’s interpretation; very few liner notes exist on most of the surviving primary sources, indicating that there were few concrete suggestions meant to guide the director or screenwriters.⁹⁸ This cherry-picking became especially problematic when directors chose to ignore basic biographical facts about a historical person - as was the case with Griffith’s Abraham Lincoln biopic, as well as with the depiction of John Brown in *The Santa Fe Trail* - while also dutifully incorporating less controversial but technically accurate details, such as dates, costume details, and a favorite of nit-pickering producers and consumers, accent

⁹⁷ Smyth, 3

⁹⁸ Smyth, 5

patterns. This behavior continued into the golden age of R&D departments during the 1930s and 1940s, but the voices of the researchers became more prominent, with mixed results in terms of racial sensitivity. As historical features became a “significant chunk of the A-feature output from RKO Paramount, Warner Brothers, MGM, and later Twentieth Century-Fox from 1930 to 1941 and by 1939 - 1940 [when] they easily outnumbered any other genre or cycle”, R&D experts like Dr. Harold Lisseur of Warner Brothers, the head of that company’s R&D department throughout the Studio Era, became more vocal with regards to the importance of their work, as evidenced by the increase in liner notes as well as the frequency of inter-office memos.⁹⁹ Due to the elevation in their status, researchers came into their own as “historians” - although most has no formal education in history - just as directors had earlier adopted that label as an attempt at legitimacy.¹⁰⁰ They became critical of the work of actual historians - especially “elitist” academics like WEB Du Bois - and they pieced together their own story from traditional narratives (oral histories and primary sources such as correspondence), revisionist history (as pioneered by the Phillips school), and original research into topics of modern interest (such as chain gangs in southern prisons).¹⁰¹ Even so, there were differences in the clout of R&D departments between studios, with Twentieth Century Fox’s Zanuck giving writers and researchers the most autonomy, while MGM gave writers the least, which is reflected in the quality of their output, which

⁹⁹ Smyth, 6

¹⁰⁰ All the while academic historians like Nevins were quarreling over what constituted “history,” popular historians such as Albert Beverage, Walter Noble Burns, and Palsey; historical novelists such as Ferber and Mitchell; and filmmakers such as Zanuck and Selznick were dominating the nation’s historical consciousness.

¹⁰¹ Smyth, 6

MGM favoring musicals light on historical drama (such as *Showboat*) while Fox experimented with the genre in artistically significant ways, as exemplified by their green lighting of the very first all-black musical with *Hearts in Dixie*.¹⁰²

The men who staffed major studio R&D departments were not, by and large, History majors or professional Historians, but they were history buffs who stood by the narratives conjured by sympathetic historians about the South. R&D departments were far more conservative than directors and producers, who often damned the burden of historical accuracy when negotiating a pivotal scene. But in the end studios believed in the importance of R&D for historical pictures, their say mattered. This is reflected exceptionally clearly in the plantation films *Jezebel*, *So Red the Rose*, *Way Down south*, and *Gone with the Wind*. Plantation films were popular with audiences, but oftentimes producers were more enamored with contemporary issues in the South; films that would become so-called “issue pictures” were the pet-projects of studio heads. These films typically dealt with the extreme oppression white people in the South faced, due to the draconian legal and economic systems there. The narrative of a New south was absolutely not present in the minds of these men; in fact, contemporary issue pictures actively worked against this idea. These films are typified by *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *Hell's Highway*, *Road Gang*, and *white Bondage*. In addition to the typical issues associated with southern genre films, issue pictures had the added complication of avoiding legal action, because the subjects - southern states - were very much

¹⁰² Indeed, as Louis Gottschlak wrote to Samuel Marx in 1935: “No picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticize and revise it.”

concerned with defamation. R&D worked to corroborate claims and cooperate with the studio's lawyers in order to toe the line between truth and whitewashing.

The tension between a desire to portray a real, authentic south and romanticizing the Southern past as a way to glorify white Americanism is especially present in the so-called "prison films" that defined the "issue films" genre during the 1930s. Two issue films exemplify this tension especially well: *Hell's Highway*, released in 1932 by RKO, and *White Bondage*, released by Warner Bros. in 1937.¹⁰³ ¹⁰⁴ *Hell's Highway* was a concerted effort from RKO, a struggling studio, to stir up controversy and, hopefully, ticket sales. It did the former in spades: the censorship office took offense to nearly every aspect of the film, and accused producers of releasing something more akin to torture-porn than a social issues picture.¹⁰⁵ In a letter from Jason S. Joy to David O. Selznick at RKO, Joy offers the suggestion that studio heads who contemplate "chain gang" pictures get together to discuss plans for the handling of the censorship matters in which we are bound to become involved, showing a self-awareness and shrewdness which characterized Joy's approach to censorship -

¹⁰³ Also known as *Chains*, *Liberty Road* and *Chain Gang* during production.

¹⁰⁴ Also known as *Lords of the Land* during production.

¹⁰⁵ "Torture porn", coined by film critic David Edelstein, is the informal designation for the hyper-violent and explicit horror films that emerged in the mid-2000s with James Wan's *Saw* franchise, but the reaction *Hell's Highway* garnered is so analogous to the outrage caused by *Saw* that the term is somewhat applicable here. Torture porn allegedly holds little value artistically, culturally, or socially, and instead glorifies the spectacle of meticulously depicting human suffering, mentally and physically. *Saw* presented challenges for MPAA censors in an age where rating a film "X" was largely unheard of outside of the baldly pornographic. Similarly, Production Code censors were faced with the task of rejecting the film altogether and injuring their relationship with the studio, as happened in Canada, Australia, and Italy, or demanding cuts that basically resulted in an entirely different film. The latter course was taken, and *Liberty Road / Chain Gang* was hastily renamed *Hell's Highway* after the cutting was done, just ahead of its release, undoubtedly without the input of the censors.

anticipate what the PCA will take issue with and avoid it altogether.¹⁰⁶ Selznick, who felt strongly about his duty as a social advocate and educator of the public, rejected Joy's austerity, and submitted *Hell's Highway*, then *Chains*, to the censorship bureau with no changes to the screenplay. The most pressing concern was that of lawsuit, with regard to the un-licensed use of portions of Robert Burns' *I Was a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* account, as well as Agnes Christine Johnson's sentimental short novel *Freedom*, and of course from the Department of Corrections in Florida.¹⁰⁷ RKO's Edward Montague replied to Jason Joy with, "I fully appreciate your problems and responsibilities, but I think you know me well enough to realize that if I make this picture I will endeavor to protect it in every way as regards censor boards and the South itself. In brief, the heavy will not be of the South or any part of the State, but an individual who will eventually be picked out by the people in this story, and one representative of the South and its higher ideals."¹⁰⁸

Studios often got around the PCA guideline that no region, state, or profession be slandered by using one villain as a stand-in for the stereotyped evils of a larger group. This is a relatively common technique in propaganda, and has been used to convict black, gay, and other "undesirable" people in the court of public opinion. In a

¹⁰⁶ Gil Kurland papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

See bibliography for notes.

¹⁰⁷As discussed in Chapter I: *Hell's Highway* was released in 1932, the same year of *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, but was in production for a much shorter period; Selznick undoubtedly observed the unfolding of the Georgia Department of Corrections lawsuit against Warner Bros. and wanted to both take advantage of the free press surrounding prison films as much as he wanted to protect his own studio from costly litigation. The role of a studio executive during Hollywood's golden age was nuanced, indeed.

¹⁰⁸ [USC WB files]

letter titled, “A Memorandum for Files Re: Chain Gang Story” from Lamar Trotti to RKO writers Ed Montague and Tamar Land on April 13th 1932 Trotti discusses that, “the chain gang story which is now in the formative stages.

We discussed the whole situation in regards to the chain gang picture, the necessity of avoiding giving offense to the South or to any particular state, by making the state heavy. The censorable matters were discussed, the brutality, escapes, etc. The story is pretty much that of individuals and has in it a very fine southern judge. The prison board is to consist of upright men, and the heroine is a nice southern girl. The boy is sent to the chain gang for a justifiable cause.¹⁰⁹

In a responding letter from Jason S Joy to David Selznick, dated May 31st 1932, Joy wrote,

A reading of your script of “CHAINS” leads me to believe more strongly than ever that you are in for more grief than you have ever had before. If you make this strong enough to draw people in because of its sheer realism you probably will have to make it too strong to get by the censors. Right now, despite the changes which have been made, the story is still an indictment of a system, and therefore of the state or section where the system prevails. There won't be any mistaking the locale as the South, even though you don't identify any particular state.¹¹⁰

The issue of stereotyping was especially distressing to Joy, who again wrote in marginalia on a script, “Perhaps you will want to dress Billings in some costume not identified with the theatrical costume of the Southerner, that is, give him something

¹⁰⁹ Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. FUGITIVE materials (Code record)

Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California. FUGITIVE materials.

See bibliography for notes.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

other than a black sombrero and a cutaway coat.”¹¹¹ At the same time, Joy was hyper-aware of the reaction of the spectator, and the notion of what constituted authentic details, and what would simply cause unneeded outrage. Joy’s opposition to the depiction of a lynching scene is extremely telling on this count, “The lynching scene should by all means be protected as this will not only be questionable in the eyes of the censors but has further significant because of the possible resentment in the South.”¹¹² This internal battle about the uses of authenticity appears the rage within Joy at an almost comical level, where he appears to play his own Devil’s Advocate, attempting to understand the gaze of a southerner and, crucially, how much authenticity would be needed in order for the spectator to decode any (un)intended anti-south propaganda: “We were at first somewhat concerned about the attitude of the South to the cycle of chain gang pictures which are imminent but after seeing this picture I am convinced that southerners won’t take it to heart because it will be difficult for them to believe it is the South. The terrain is not southern, and there are no definite identification marks to indicate that Florida or any other southern state is intended. Certainly no one who has ever seen Florida will think of it in connection with the rock piles and hills to be seen in the background of “Hell’s Highway”.”¹¹³ Clearly, the depiction of a real, authentic south was an obsession that manifested as a double-edged sword.

¹¹¹ Jason S Joy to David O Selznick on June 8th 1932 in reply to script.

Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. (XIV, *Hell’s Highway* script notes, 9. See bibliography for notes.)

¹¹² Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. Letter from Jason S Joy to Ned Depinet on August 22nd 1932. (*Hell’s Highway* script notes, 56; 57.)

¹¹³ Ibid.

Turning to another social ill in the South that studio executives sought to highlight, *White Bondage* concerned the sorry plight of “white trash” sharecroppers, those men who would have once perhaps been the yeomanry, but in the context of the South in the 1930s were merely tenant farmers with little say in their own economic determinism. Before the issues associated with the production and release of *white Bondage* are discussed, the degree of the exploitation of the white worker in the South must be historicized. In *Origins of the New south* (1951) by C. Vann Woodward is one of the most historiographically significant monographs in southern history, spawning an entire body of work by his students and others who replied to, elaborated on, and criticized his claims. In the book Woodward describes the formation of the racially oppressive political and racial conservatism that becomes synonymous with the South in the 20th century. He details what he argues are the failures of Reconstruction, the retrenchment of the “Redemption” period that followed, and the unprecedented persecution of black folk in the Jim Crow-era New south. He also focuses heavily on the plight of poor whites in the region, whom he sympathizes with and characterizes as significant victims of the incompetence of national and local political leadership.

Woodward states that “the evils of Redemption were not so gross as those of Reconstruction”, a view that, while less severe than the arguments of the earlier, ferociously anti-Reconstruction Dunning school of historians, would be seized upon later as problematic, perhaps most notably by Eric Foner. Woodward acknowledges the successes of Reconstruction, and he does not lay blame with the black legislators who attempted to enact socially-conscious policies, but he describes corruption in the period as being so widespread and severe as to practically necessitate an extreme

reactionary response, which came in the form of the “Redemption” era. During this time, any governmental programs which were seen as being beneficial to the black population, or “pro-yankee” crowd were either ended or made the victim of steep budget cuts. In addition, the salaries of all legislators were slashed, and taxes, poll or otherwise, were decreased or phased out; only spending that was perceived as absolutely necessary was approved. While this aided the economic recovery of the region, it came at a great social cost - literacy rates in the South plummeted as the quality of schools declined, racial hatred in the form of scapegoating became more prominent in the rhetoric of the public sphere, and poverty abounded as a living wage was not provided to the poorer classes. The tension these effects created was intense, and class antagonism, as well as racial hatred, divided the region. By highlighting this, Woodward debunks the claim of a “solid south”, where whites of all classes were united. Former planters were, he argues, purposefully oppressing poor whites, in favor of heightening their own political and economic fortunes. Turning black folk and “crackers” against one another provided the populace with a beneficial distraction from their souring standard of living.

The South soon became stagnant, and many white families migrated west, to states like Missouri, lured by claims of an opportunity at land ownership and self-sufficiency. There was little sympathy for the impoverished south from a northern congress, which emphasized the role of the free market in shaping the future of the South. Some yankees went so far as to colonize the South, with hopes of enlightening the region to contemporary capitalist mores - this movement was explored by Lawrence Powell, and will be discussed later. Woodward pushes back against claims

that the plantation system survived long after Reconstruction, but he does argue that cotton culture persisted and was a critical component in structuring the societal order of the New south. Cotton culture also allowed for abusive forms of wage slavery, likened by Woodward to “caste labor”, to appear in the guise of the lien system, convict leasing, and sharecropping, all of which Woodward describes as “a curse”; “as a producer [. . .] farmer[s were] subject to penalties of free trade [. . .] as a consumer he was deprived of virtually all its benefits”.¹¹⁴ He describes the interaction between white and black labor as interwoven, arguing that there was a reinforcing relationship insofar as the white place in labor was determined by the economic status of the black community; “it is one of the great paradoxes in southern history that political democracy for the white man and racial discrimination for the black were often products of the same dynamic”.¹¹⁵ Woodward argues that, ultimately, poor whites were the second biggest victim of New south policies. They were disenfranchised and abandoned by both the Republican and Democratic parties, their own Populist party failed spectacularly, and they were left vulnerable to the biased economic policies of the elitist whites, that stripped them of their little remaining property - and the importance of property as a signifier of class and manhood was still strong in the South, into the 20th century. The two marginalized classes, blacks and poor whites, were then set against each other, and the brutality of the lynching era manifested as a symptom of widespread poverty and the lack of quality education and social welfare systems available to the population.

¹¹⁴ C. Vann. Woodward, *The Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951),180-186.

¹¹⁵ Woodward, 211

White Bondage, a film about sharecropping, must be situated firmly within this historical context. The title at the beginning of the film reads: “The names of all the characters—the characters themselves—the story—all incidents and institutions portrayed in this production are fictitious—and no identification with actual persons, living or deceased, is intended or should be inferred”. The film begins with the sharecroppers bringing in their cotton to the graders, and the grader gives him an unfair price, but he has to accept the appraisal. The men at the company store leans on the scale to charge the men more than they owe - sentimental music signals to us that this is the regular lot of the honest man. The graders fee the men unfairly with surcharges like “crop insurance” and “plantation overhead”, and because many of the sharecroppers cannot read, and therefore cannot accept the figures or the contracts they sign. We, the spectators, take on the parental role and read for them, but our outrage is impotent - early on, we identify strongly in a paternalistic role with these sharecroppers. Despite their lack of education, it is hinted that the farmers know they are being taken advantage of, as evidenced by a brief attempt at rebellion when a sharecropper attempts to quit. He is quickly disabused of those notions, though, because the plantation owners explain to him that they have a “chattel mortgage” on everything the sharecroppers use, including their animals, tools, and furniture.¹¹⁶ Once the farmer accepts his plight and leaves, the owners gloat, claiming that the old sharecropper will create no trouble, but instead it’s the “younger men with a little learning to worry about”. This scenario reads as authentic, to the viewer, and a central

¹¹⁶ The use of the racialized chattel here on a white character is startling, but typical of the way southerners addressed racial issues without actually addressing them.

truth is reiterated: in a southern, the problems and solutions are primarily indigenous (or, perhaps, even essential to the people).

Later in the film, a Yankee newspaper reporter comes along and tries to assist the sharecroppers who are being taken advantage of, but it backfires when the sharecroppers accuse him of being one of the company men - the folly of prejudice, the burden of the enlightened white man, educating the darker races as well as his own primitive people, only to be accused of ill intent. Hal, a sharecropper, fights with him, and he is subsequently employed by the company men after the fight is broken up. During his tenure working for the man, Hal discovers the company is unfair, and the Yankee was right - he takes a page out of the labor union playbook and initiates a community protest. In a scene that can only be described as a "consciousness raising", the sharecroppers agree that they have been taken advantage of, and are called lazy by and disrespected by the planters even though, "we been workin' since we was eight". Hal's plan is to steal the cotton back and store it until the "federal government" comes to give it a fair weigh - the loaded connotations of a southerner admitting that not only was a Yankee right, but also that the South needs the federal government's help to succeed, are too obvious to delineate. The croppers organize and plan the heist, hooting and hollering in their barely literate dialects: "None of the planters any good!" The croppers take their cotton back and burn the store-barn, chanting in a manner that is typically associated with strike lines, but visually strikes the spectator as being rather like a stereotypically primitive campfire dance. After about twenty minutes of character-driven melodrama, even the town spinster is forced to admit that the "ruckus" was justified and that Hal does not, in fact, "deserve to be

lynched”, as she had earlier claimed.¹¹⁷ The federal government comes in and offers “adjusted claims” in a shockingly generous and ill-explained show of good faith and white brotherhood, and there is, of course, a happy end.

So what did the spectator learn from this educational romp about the plight of the sharecropper? They learned that there is a “white trash” accent that is barely legible, that “bark eaters” is an insult against aforementioned white trash, that the sharecroppers are quick to violence and fight amongst themselves and against the company men, which probably explains why they are still operating under a feudal structure. The gaze of a non-southerner puts them in the role of the benevolent if impassive god, watching and judging and hoping that the mortals work out their issues among themselves. This is highlighted by the way *white Bondage* highlights the religious nature of the sharecroppers - female protagonist Betsy’s father warns the plantation owner: “I believe what the good book says. As you sow, so shall you reap.” Later, Betsy herself makes a sign which reads: “What mean ye that ye crush my people and grind the faces of the poor”. The federal government is the avatar of the spectator-god, and we are ultimately satisfied in seeing divine justice meted out.

In another example of a thoroughly-researched historical southern, *The Texans* (1938), we see the R&D department hard at work in an attempt to weave a Reconstruction-era tale absent of all racial tension.¹¹⁸ Opening titles read: “There is no period in the life of any nation so disorganized as that which follows a great war.

¹¹⁷ The specter of lynching is ever-present in southerners, although very rarely are they against the actual, historical victims of lynching, black folk. The only black people in *white Bondage* are a handful of background characters with no lines. The one exception is a black couple that lives near the store barn sees the white croppers burn the barn. When the planters demand they tell them who set the fire, but the couple refuse, saying they “didn’t see” - allies, together.

¹¹⁸ Note: adapted from Emerson Hough’s short story, “North of 36”.

History call it the “Reconstruction Period.” Yet it is an era of lawlessness - of smoldering hates - oppression. The American Civil war was waged for a great ideal. But hardly had the smoke of battle cleared before that ideal was forgotten. The South was ruled as a conquered enemy. northern politicians wallowed in an orgy of power - of plunder by organized mobs - of tribute and tyranny and death.”

There is a scene at the very beginning of the film where a black Union soldier is calling “gangway” and runs white passerbys off the road. This was considered an especially offensive scene by the MPAA, and Breen wrote to Hammell three times requesting the scene be omitted, as to not shock southern audiences, but it stayed in - the only scene called for censorship that remained in the final cut.¹¹⁹ Interestingly, there was no request made by any of the Southern states to censor that scene before release - Breen’s hyper vigilance appears to have been unnecessary. Toward the beginning of the film, a Union solider shouts to the crowd, “you men [Confederates] are still considered the enemy until you get out of those uniforms.” The protagonist, Jordan, leads a chorus of “Dixie” in reply, which in turn results in his being questioned by the Yankee authorities - “Why, didn’t you pay your taxes?”, and then he proceeds to

¹¹⁹ On December 30th, 1937, Breen wrote, “We feel that the showing of the negro with the sign, shouting “Gangway for the United States Army”, forcing whites to step aside for him, will be found highly objectionable in certain parts of the South.” Breen was hyper-aware of the possibility that a spectator might find himself so immersed in the film that he would experience this as reality, or worse, a purposeful inclusion of racialized imagery. He continued, “Care should be taken, throughout, to avoid offending southern sensibilities in characterization or dialogue. In this connection, we call your attention to the reference, in scene K-55, to the Ku Klux Klan, and suggest that you assure yourselves that there will be no objection to such reference.”

Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

II, See bibliography for notes.

name several dubious-sounding taxes that all “Confederates” owe the Union. The headstrong female protagonist Ivy, a prototypical southern belle, shouts at the Union officers: “This war isn’t over yet!” It is 1870, so the war is indeed over, but she continues to carry the flame of conflict in her heart, the spectator assumes and, hopefully, sympathizes with her misguided rage, almost comical in its utter misguidedness. She rants that, “[The Yankees] were two to one against us. This time, we’re getting help, from Mexico, from the new emperor, from Maximilian. We’ll fight for him, and he’ll fight for us,” neatly introducing the plot of the film. Jordan, suddenly convivial and reasonable as soon as a hysterical woman shows up, insists that, “Not all Yankees are like these. I met good ones in the last four years. And now that we’re back in the Union, they’ll be helping us.” Ivy is furious at the implication - “Help from Yankees? Maximillian will give land to every man who fights for him.” Jordan, in the place of the spectator, balks at the idea of fighting for a king simply to win a fight they were probably in-the-wrong for anyway, replies, “I don’t need land from an emperor.” They cannot agree with one another before the scene’s close, and we are left wondering what events must have taken place for these poor, honest folks to consider asking a Mexican emperor for assistance.

Soon, we see the extent of the suffering: carpetbaggers over-tax the people and refuse to let them pay by note, so they are in danger of starving. When Jordan mentions that Yankees will pay much money for a head of steer, Ivy replies: “I am not concerned with anything that involves Yankees,” signaling again that she is the type of unreasonable, proud southerner who would rather starve than accept help.¹²⁰ The IRS

¹²⁰ Victims of circumstance, victims of their own hubris - this idea is explored later in the chapter.

levies a \$1 tax per head on cattle; the carpetbagger offers Ivy and her equally hot-headed Gramma that they should exchange their land in place of the \$10,000 they will owe due to the tax. Gramma threatens the carpetbagger by asking him if he remembers what happened in 1776 - "They threw the tea in the harbor, so there wasn't anything left to tax," again tying the history of the United States south to the history of the United States as a whole - a bit of pro-south rhetorical magic tailor-made for the not-fully-sympathetic spectator. The film commences with a cattle drive out of the contested territory and into a different part of Texas - there is no dealmaking with the Mexicans, and in the end, once again, the federal government intervenes to halt predatory oversight practices.

The Texans reinforces the conventions of the Southern genre, and the spectacular look of it with the realistic sets and costuming and high-action sequences, as well as the obscure historical source material, undoubtedly instilled no small measure of pride in the meticulous R&D researchers who poured untold hours of effort into crafting this southern. There is no attempt at creating discourse outside of the theater, even though the very premise of the film is rife with potentially contentious assumptions about the role of the Union in the Civil War. Any intentionality - or directorial individuality - the director may have had is quashed by the mawkish execution. Like all southerners, the film is subsumed within its genre, and it becomes another entry into the historical film canon without much historical examination at all; the truth of it is not questioned, so it is accepted as being probably-not-untrue.

The concern for the plight of poor whites would become a motif in the historiography of the South - Woodward's special concern for the poor white

population may be seen as an expansion upon the work began in the 1930s by WEB Du Bois, who did for Reconstruction-era black folk what Woodward would, two decades later, afford to poor whites. The people who are left not present in the narratives of southern suffering in these real, authentic issue pictures are the black population. In *Black Reconstruction* (1935) Du Bois provides historians with an unprecedented compilation of primary sources, comprising a long-ignored body of literature by white and black Republican politicians from the height of Reconstruction to its eventual failure. Du Bois details these legislative drafts and related ephemera, the content of which bolsters his claims about the cognizance of previously intellectually maligned individuals. He wields the massive amount of primary source material most pointedly against the Dunning school's claims of Reconstruction misgovernment by citing responsible black-penned budget and welfare program plans that were not aimed exclusively at black folk, but sought to improve the whole of the fractured south. Du Bois also contributes an innovative conceptual approach by analyzing the bourgeois capitalist economic system of the South with Marxist theory, describing black Americans as workers in an absolutist aristocratic regime that eventually "ruined democracy", and was the true cause of both the 1873 and subsequent economic depressions. Eric Foner, a historian who was more influenced by Du Bois than Woodward was, and whose work will be highlighted later, takes up these economic themes and discusses the slaveocracy, initiated by those white planters who owned the overwhelming majority of the black population. The structure of the slaveocracy economic and social system did provide an opportunity for slaves to use their labor power to protest and resist while held in bondage. This form of rebellion was very

powerful, and was crucial to the success of northern troops, who benefited from the displaced workers' manpower during their occupation of the Confederacy.

For Du Bois, Reconstruction was "a revolution comparable to the upheavals in France in the past, and in Russia, Spain, India and China today".¹²¹ In this vein, he devotes several chapters to an interpretation of white worker relations, in order to support his argument that, economically, equality was feasible due to the structure of labor in the South, but the essential racism of white people made a lasting socialist regime impossible. Woodward does not agree with this argument, which reads as essentialist, but it must be kept in mind that Du Bois sought to make a political point during the era of a burgeoning civil rights movement. He argues that Republicans wanted to remake the slaveocracy into a free market capitalist society, but they did not fully anticipate the depth of class tensions that the South was built on, and the way those tensions would be turned against the freedmen. These tensions were stoked by upper class whites, but Du Bois does not absolve poor whites of their integral participation in the the perpetuation of a racist economic system. Du Bois frames the post-emancipation south as a "dictatorship of the proletariat", where freedmen at first used their sheer numbers and the absolute necessity of their labor as they attempted to implement Republican anti-racist laws, rewriting the laws of conduct in state congresses to make the Houses more conducive to the inclusion of the black race, so

¹²¹ "The unending tragedy of Reconstruction is the utter inability of the American mind to grasp its real significance, its national and worldwide implications. It was vain for Sumner and Stevens to hammer in the ears of the people that this problem involved the very foundations of American democracy, both political and economic."

W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2014). Reprint.

they would be able to enact radical socialist policies that, for a time, crippled the capitalist regime. Eventually, these tactics failed, with tragic consequences for black folk during “Redemption” and the New south eras.

U.S. courts were in crisis after emancipation, struggling to decide the place of black people as citizens, and attempting to determine how the South would restructure itself economically and socially in order to become a productive component of the Union. The post-war Republican congress passed ambitious legislation that attempted to delineate the rights the black man, and provide him with full equality under the law; the most important of these maneuvers was the fifteenth amendment. Pro-equality measures, of any magnitude, formed a complete repudiation of pre-Civil War American values regarding racial relations and attitudes.¹²² This attempted sea change was a major cause of the backlash against Reconstruction efforts, as white Americans struggled to accept a congress that would often focus on black issues, and cried foul at what they perceived to be the stifling of the traditions and rights of white people and the invasion of governmental policies into the private sphere - the "politicization of everyday life". This claim was rooted entirely in racism and an overestimation of the extent to which the new Reconstruction laws would tangibly effect the social structure of the nation, especially the deeply classist south, which in fact easily subsumed the black workers into its underclass, while elevating white workers and yeoman as legally equal to the planter class. The immediacy and power of this change was not anticipated, but, as Foner and Du Bois both argue, northern politicians should been

¹²² Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 35.

Foner also argues that after the Civil War, class tensions disappeared completely from the white population, and the racist south bonded over the ideal of racial terror and mob law.

more sensitive to the restructuring of the region's most innate social infrastructures.

This is an early failure of republicans, one that re-emerges time and again in anti-Reconstruction southern rhetoric.¹²³

That is not to say that we should ignore the very real plight of poor white in the South, such as described by many southerners, and indeed Du Bois does at times acknowledge the "unselfish whites" who worked to implement Reconstruction policy, but a deep - and understandable - cynicism colors his narrative throughout, and the overall impression one is left with is that white northerners nailed shut the coffin of Reconstruction with their own gradual acceptance of southern 'sovereignty' in rule and

¹²³ Despite the many errors of congress, which were often informed by willful ignorance concerning the former Confederacy, Foner unequivocally does not view Reconstruction as a blunder in either execution or ideology, and argues vehemently against that view, which was once so prevalent in the historiography. He, like Du Bois, also recasts the black politicians who held office during radical Reconstruction as entirely capable men who went into local and state-level legislatures with clear and prescient goals toward the betterment of not only the post-slavery black condition, but the social, educational and economic welfare of all marginalized populations. In the chapter "The Meaning of Freedom", Foner details the accomplishments of black legislators, and the tremendous efforts taken by former slaves to position themselves as equal citizens of the United States, in spite of the ridicule hurled at them by not only southern whites, but by ostensibly racist northerners, who feigned concern and cited the lack of education of black activists and politicians as being evidence of their inability to govern themselves.

Indeed, pre-Du Bois historians detailed the 'horrors' committed by the Republican congress and black politicians against the constitution and law and order; this argument was a clear parroting of the contemporary anti-Reconstruction zeitgeist in the early 20th century, which blamed the expansive pro-equality actions of the 1860s and early-mid 1870s as part and parcel of the economic downturn and social unrest that followed for the nation as a whole. In the final chapter of black Reconstruction, "The Propaganda of History", Du Bois provides a numbered list of commonly-held falsities about the role of black people in Reconstruction, and he thoroughly counters each claim, in a bluntly direct response to his colleagues and fellow citizens. Subsequent historians, like Foner, have especially expanded on themes such as, "Negroes were responsible for bad government during Reconstruction."

Commonly-held beliefs about the supposed victimization of the South and its white population was coupled with a general lack of agency given to the majority of freedmen and women in academic works; not only were they inefficient in self-rule, they also magnified the repercussions white republican policies by violent and uneven enforcement in their communities. This is clearly at work in *White Bondage*.

enforcement of law. Foner, on the other hand, is careful to temper his analysis with consistent praise of Republican intentions which, while not outweighing or excusing the outcome, should still be understood as exceptional considering the historical context, and the lack of precedent for anti-racist legislation. He describes a "retrograde Republican racism" that was used as a "convenient excuse for Reconstruction's failure." For Foner, the failure of radical Reconstruction was specifically related to enforcement, and the defeat of the overall endeavor was made absolute by a shift in attention nationally toward Gilded Age industrialism. For Du Bois, the failure of Reconstruction was more simply rooted in racism and the collapse of an essential economic structure . His study ends with philosophical musings and a strongly-worded, and eventually historiographically important claim: the failure of enforcement ultimately served to set the stage for Jim Crow.

A decade later, another film about black issues that was totally whitewashed, *Santa Fe Trail* was plagued with the same issues with regard to authenticity and the role of R&D in promoting an authentic image without arousing sectional tensions. In a memo dated August 16th, 1940, Warner Bros. Pictures film producer Hal B. Wallis complains about the lack of authenticity in an emancipation scene for *The Santa Fe Trail*. He specifically criticizes the use of classical choir techniques for what is being presented as a spontaneous outpouring of worshipping expressed via a negro spiritual, writing,

Don't you realize that this is a wild and wooly Western, that this thing happens back in the '50s or the '60s and these are a lot of poor, old, illiterate negroes, and yet you permit them to stand up and sing in trained choral voice? [...] Also, let's cut out all of the ad libs — Thank Gods, praise be to God, and Halleluiahs [sic], and all of those ad libs. We're only going to have to cut them off the soundtrack later, so let's eliminate a lot

of grief and not have them say it on the set. It sounds like an Aimee Semple McPherson meeting.

Wallis further bemoans the “theatrical and phoney [sic]” singing, claiming that “it smacks very much of a performance at the Hollywood Bowl instead of a lot of poor, old niggers who are freed slaves. [...] It ruins the whole damned scene” to a Mr. Curtiz in a memo on the same date. “I don’t understand how the hell people do things like this.”¹²⁴

Further, there was, in particular, an issue with the depiction of Brown’s execution. The execution of John Brown is integral to his legend, and defines him in collective memory - our common knowledge -, but the censors forbade direct references to hanging, specifically. Screenwriter Robert Buckner, writing in a memo to Wallis on November 28 of 1940, literally “begged” him to convince the studio to leave the entire execution sequence intact, pleading “I don’t give any more of a damn about the “strict historical accuracy” than you do, if it hamstring story. But the execution of John Brown is the heart of this picture, the great climax to which every single scene leads.” He further clarifies his feelings: “I am convinced that such a cut would immediately destroy 50 percent of the picture’s greatness.”¹²⁵ Buckner here expresses an ethic that describes Hollywood’s relationship with the South during the Interwar era, which encompassed two decades of swift technological advancements in the industry that resulted in its boom and led in directly to the pre-WWII Golden Age. The South was a place, both idyllic and dangerous, where white men were at once martyrs and

¹²⁴ Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California.

See bibliography for notes (items XIX-XXI)

¹²⁵ Ibid.

sinner, black women were pious, yet dangerous, and everyone lived in the shadow of the War and the cross. The collective memory Buckner felt so strongly about was being shaped by his decisions, and the decisions of every person working in the film industry, as they crafted tales of the region that would persist with more tenacity in popular culture than even Twain's musing on life in the Delta.

Many historians have taken issue with the homogenization of "the South" as a place, and the desire to discuss the people or the region monolithically is understandable, given that there are a number of similarities socially, culturally, politically, and economically across the former Confederate states. That being said, region is a point of contention in film, especially, as the visual language of moviemaking relies heavily on cues to collective knowledge and memory about places that are removed from oneself spatially or emotionally. While I define the region component of my "southern" genre as having to include some mention of the former Confederate states, this does not at all exclude the west and midwest, and even the north. What is important is not the use of an actual location as a setting, but the presence of a person from a confederate state, or with significant ties to such a place. An excellent example of this is with Bud Pollard's *The black King*, a film that takes place partially in New York, but concerns many southern characters, and it is these characters' southernness that notably affects their identities. Langman and Ebner, in their genre definition, avoid grappling with the difficulties of that would be presented by engaging in an extended discussion of the impact brought on by the periodic mass migrations of southern people, black and white, to other parts of the United States. I position my framework in opposition to theirs on this point, and instead argue for the critical importance of

migration and southern people in not-southern states. In *southern Diaspora* and *American Exodus*, historian James N. Gregory details the significant cultural impact of those southerners who moved westward during the 20th century, especially in California, where remnants of southern culture, like country music, remained even after the originating populations moved on. The reality of these migrations complicate the defining of a boundary, geographically, for the Southern, but this history also broadens the horizons and possibilities of what films might be considered southern. Historicization is ultimately productive, and not flattening, when executed with deliberation.

The benefits of broadening region to include non-Confederate states, while also restricting genre admittance to only those films which meet the three components of my framework, is illustrated by the interaction of the Southern with the Western, in *The Santa Fe Trail*. This picture merges some hallmarks of a southern - choruses of slaves, proselytizing abolitionist madmen - with the very characteristic action sequences of an Errol Flynn Western film. The writers were keenly aware of their melding of regional tales, and were preoccupied with both appeasing southern audiences, by not presenting John Brown as overly sympathetic, while working to craft a thrilling tale of adventure that would not be overly concerned with the notion of authenticity. Yet, even as studio executives complained about historical fidelity, their lawyers worried about the possible repercussions of depicting real historical figures. The Hollywood western was a genre of fantasy, and the narratives in those films were largely divorced from the reality of the Old West. And yet, when Hollywood sought to depict the Old south, there was a desire to root the stories in at least some approximation of an authentic southern

past. And why would that be? I strongly concur with the view put forth by Tara McPherson, in *Reconstructing Dixie*, which suggests that there is a national involvement in the mythic southern past, she argues that Americans have a personal investment in myths of the Old south, most notably that of U.B. Phillips' plantation myth and the white brotherhood of the Civil War.

The obsession with historical realism is at the forefront of the curious case of the 1928 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* adaption and the imagined sequel *Topsy and Eva*, released the same year. Universal's interpretation of Beecher Stowe's genre classic set out to provoke from the first notices, which described the film as "the truth", and promised a hyper-realistic experience of the antebellum era. Mrs. Alonzo Richardson, secretary for the City of Atlanta, found time to pen her opinion on the subject of "the truth" with regard to the adaption, and she informed that, "I called three members of my board, two of whom are northern people — this after I had written by [sic] own opinion for I did not want to be biased. Every one agreed that to send this south would either increase sectional feeling where it already exists or create it where it does not, that the picture had no historical value, that it was founded on untruth, was written for money only, was published by Yellow Journals first, and was a precipitating cause of the war."¹²⁶

Mrs. Richardson, like so many of her fellow Georgians, felt strongly that Hollywood was biased against the South, and was actively attempting to sew discord

¹²⁶ Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. Letter from Lamar Trotti on May 13th, 1927, entitled "Memorandum to Governor Milliken":

See bibliography for notes.

between the regions, for their own economic benefit. This suspicion of intentions and preoccupation with the intentions of “Yankees” recalls the failed socioeconomic experiment of the “Yankee planters”. In *New Masters*, Lawrence Powell discusses the northern planter movement that directly followed the Civil War. This short-lived and ill-advised movement involved yankees adopting what they romantically believed was a southern lifestyle while attempting to bring free market ideology and wage labor to the former planter regions. Plantations were seized as contraband during war, and then offered inexpensively after the northern victory. These plantations were not sold to freedmen, and most typically the original planters who owned them did not purchase them back. Instead, outsiders staked claims for the land, unaware that they were being saddled with a largely non-productive piece of property that would be expensive to maintain. The new planters did not concern themselves with the nuances of economic viability, or the technicalities of raising crops; instead, they migrated to the South with the goal of transforming the “backward” south and speculating on the land while also enjoying living the cavalier myth, completely removed from the urban centers from which they hailed. These men who were lured by cheap, bountiful leases were mostly young professionals, or military officers, who were middle class and had little to no experience with rural life - less than 5% of them were farmers or laborers in their hometowns. Freedmen, Powell argues, commonly believed that the northerners were

there to assist them economically, and they bought into the rhetoric of uplift, invigorated by the idea of self-subsistence.¹²⁷

Southerners remained suspicious of carpetbagging opportunists, whether they were in the guise of New south industrialists, or studio executives hoping to exploit the perceived deep resentment between southerners and everyone else. Mrs. Richardson accuses Universal of doing just that when she writes, “I am so sorry that the film was ever made. There are as many ignorant and prejudiced people in the north as in the South and this picture will feed those prejudices. It has always amused me in visiting

¹²⁷ Lawrence Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1980.

Northern employers also provided better wages and a more generally pleasant subsistence, with superior food and housing. The new masters often hired ex-slaves, and the experience those individuals possessed concerning the working of the land proved critical for the green yankees. black labor sometimes took the form of sharecropping, but most often was in the form of wage work, although attempts to impose an industrial-style work time on them failed. White southerns were less enthused about the presence of these new masters. While local officials welcomed the cash influx and commercial interests that came with the movement, they were put off by the manners and ideology these young men espoused. Still, anti-yankee sentiments were often kept quiet, especially by white elites.

The old planter class took out advertisements in newspapers, actively seeking yankees to purchase their land; they knew their plantations, if they still owned them, were losing value rapidly - it was better to undersell the property than have to support a constant money-suck. Another major motivation that former planters felt to sell: creating a distance between themselves and the newly-free black folk. Emigration out of the South was frowned upon for the aristocratic classes, so those whites who owned large amounts of land were willing to sell it in order to sustain their living arrangements in their ancestral homes, removed from freedmen and the changes of Reconstruction. Disillusionment came quickly, and caused most who emigrated to return north. While the yankees found that they were willing to work through agricultural crises, such a drought and weevil infestations, they were frustrated with freedmen labor demands and the larger southern infrastructure that was unwilling to evolve or assist. Furthermore, many northern planters experienced fallings out with southerners, who began to form vigilante groups, and accused northerners of bringing moral decay to the region in what Powell terms as a "rehearsal for Redemption." (150)

northern towns — not cities — to see the amazement with which I am greeted. However well-bred the people are, they cannot hide their amazement that there would come out of the South culture and refinement and education. It is still a marvel to them. So why make a picture that the masses will see and which can but increase prejudice on both sides. You know the ‘red rag to the bull’ is a flag of truce compared to the mention of the name of Harriet Beecher Stowe to a southerner. We feel that no one person has ever done us the injury nor has been as unfair to us, as she. However, I will see the picture with the same unbiased mind I try to see them all and will do the best I can for it, but I am sorry that it was made. I am enclosing a picture which appeared in this morning’s Motion Picture World. Don’t you know I would not dare show this outside of my office?”¹²⁸

Lamar Trotti, writing to Milliken, enclosed a copy of Mrs. Richardson’s letter, and this own reply which expresses with a special kind of condescension and shrewd business acumen that,

“Mrs. Richardson expresses the view of a great many southerners. That is the wrong view, I know. It is not mine because the appearance of Uncle Tom’s Cabin could not possibly mean anything to me but an evening not to go to the movies. I’ve never seen it nor read it. It used to be a joke that no southerner would ever admit he had anyhow. I remember Colonel Joy giving a memorandum about it when the announcement was first made, expressing my belief that it would create antagonism in the South. He was shocked to think so. I was all wrong when I thought the South would not accept [Buster Keaton’s] The General and I suppose I am wrong again, but I think Universal should kind of soft pedal its southern business with this picture.”

This is a remarkable statement on several accounts. For one, it reveals a level of self-awareness between studio executives that is typically underestimated by

¹²⁸ Powell, 155

historians, as well as an underlying antagonism that mirrors the resentment some Americans felt toward the victimization of the South that was central to the government's rehabilitation of the region during the New south era. Much as the Filipinos were to be pitied due to their history and perceived inability to take agency over their own lives, southerners were similarly typed as hopelessly downtrodden and ultimately party to their own suffering. While the former was steeped in pseudo-science and white supremacy, the latter was informed by the protestant work ethic and bootstraps mentality that is central to the character of the American people - that is, you get what you pay for, literally. If a person, be they white or otherwise, does not have access to rewards of capitalism due to poverty, they are weak of character (lazy, unintelligent) and will ultimately get what they deserve. A severe aversion to the concept of the welfare state and a worship of material goods imbued the American public of the Interwar era even as the Depression spread to effect the most revered workers in America (the white, male laborer). There was far more outrage directed toward the alleged communist influences of WPA artists than there were toward the bankers whose greed precipitated black Friday.

Michael Denning's intensely detailed and far-ranging monograph *The Cultural Front*, makes the argument that the leftists who formed the majority of the WPA artist base were in fact successfully in ultimately integrating Marxist ideology into American culture. These same leftist artists were at work at Universal, Warner Brothers, and United Artists, so I disagree with his conclusion that any sort of "new order" was implemented as a result of their participation in the entertainment industry, which I believe is supported by the evidence here - no subversive ideas escaped the attention

of the censors during the Interwar era and, indeed, as we have seen, censors were sometimes overly vigilant. Denning explicitly states that he feels the focus on political organizing is much overexposed, considering that most Americans, including those who held Leftist views, did not join the Communist Party. The idea of plebeian artists working at a 'cultural front' at the same time as political protesting was happening is nothing new; in fact, the very term 'cultural front' was contemporary with 'popular front'. The amount of evidence and the myriad of sources presented is overwhelming, and perhaps the tone is implicitly defensive; focusing on forms of passive resistance as being as – and sometimes more – important than active resistance is not an idea that is easily digested. His ultimate argument is lofty – that the Leftist Cultural Front pioneers of the 1930s, which began as an Ethnic, avant-garde pipe dream, helped create much of what is seen as essential, and mainstream, American popular culture. Denning argues that the cultural front productions of the 1930s were comparable to the Modernism of the earlier decades of the Twentieth century, but unlike Modernism, by the time the Cultural Front faded away, it had completely reshaped American culture. Part of this sweeping restructuring was enabled by the Popular Front's deep involvement with, and favoring by, the highest office in the land. That may be true of journalism, with the rise of the exposé, and with jazz, but it is demonstrably not the case with Hollywood, where Colonel Joy and Joseph Breen served as an almost omniscient filter, effectively silencing political intentions across the board.

R&D researchers and Denning's covert communists had one thing in common: they were ultimately unable to successfully inject their own voice as an artist into their work. It is crucial to understand that while the historians active in R&D took enormous

pride in the accurate depiction of set dress details and naturalistic accents with minuscule regional differences, they were also bound by the conventions of the PCA, as well as their own biases. Much as the archive holds the biases of the archivist, and silences often reveal more than inclusions, the details omitted in otherwise historically realistic, if not entirely accurate, portrayals of southern life shed light on the motivations of the researcher. Unlike the socially progressive WPA and Disney artists of Denning's study, many of whom were recent European immigrants, there was little impetus for Hollywood writers to politicize their subject matter - although, of course, omissions are a political act as well. As for active politicking, the few instances of that in Interwar-era southernns are curious indeed in their execution and reception. Hollywood, as Dickstein argues, was largely uninvolved in social commentary during the Great Depression - Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin's tramp characters were everyone who were the victims of divine circumstance, rather than the flotsam chucked aside by the machinations of capitalism in the 20th century United States. What audiences read in these characters is debatable, and there are persuasive arguments for the embedded collectivist ideology in Chaplin's characters, especially, but in the context of the

Southern, politics were almost always racial, and very rarely focused on economics.¹²⁹

There are several plausible explanations for this seemingly contradictory apolitical nature of films that depict the most politicized region in the United States, the most prominent being that Hollywood is a business. There was - and still is, certainly - a reluctance to alienate the white population who formed the most sizable portion of the moviegoing audience in the South.

Judith Weisenstein argues in *Hollywood Be Thy Name* that certain films were transgressive not only in reception but in intention. Again, intentionality is difficult to suss out and generally beyond the scope of my argument, but I will herein contend that Weisenstein's argument about producer intention with regard to a film's implications is off the mark, and that the impetus behind studios funding "issue pictures" and "race pictures" was one part the vanity of the liberal elite who bankrolled the projects, and one part shrewd business decision. *Hearts in Dixie* (1929), a musical and the first all-black cast "race film" at Fox, and indeed the very first black-led film released by a

¹²⁹ Although, as we know, in the South race and class are inextricably linked. Communist labor organizations that sought to unite the poor working classes during the New South era appealed to the reality of circumstance both black and white sharecroppers experienced, but by the time the "politics of rage", as historian Dan T. Carter calls the racialized rhetoric of white populists like George Wallace, takes hold in the 1950s, the prospect of identifying the universality of the working class struggle was effectively quashed.

C. Vann Woodward describes the rise of the populist party in the 1880s and 1890s, which he characterizes as racially motivated. The alliance formed between workers of the poor white classes - sharecroppers, cotton mill workers, miners - created a substantial, powerful political movement, especially at the state level, that fought genuinely for the economic interests of its members. Populists were fiercely anti-corporate and anti-monopoly, and their ranks swelled with the election of Grover Cleveland - this was a turning point for the political structure in the South, which had gradually become increasingly insular and sovereign-minded. Some attempts at racial outreach were made by the populists early on, in the form of black delegates being elected to the national party, which was done in the interest of garnering more votes. Increasing the number of Populist voters was critical, but the issue of race was consistently divisive, and ultimately resulted in extensive internal fracturing that destroyed the party as a viable political entity.

major studio, was is presented before it begins, with a speech by William Fox about how he hopes the film will allow the audience to forget their troubles for an hour:

“To do this, it will show you the joys and sorrows of other people. [...] Our manners may differ, our style of dress certainly does, and even our skins vary in color: white, yellow, red, brown and black. [...] But we are all brothers and sisters in our emotions.”

The patriarch of the family, Pappy, is a hard-working, intelligent, respectable man who tries his best to teach his shiftless son and grandsons how to live properly. His “dummy” son, Gummy, is a typical shuck n’ jive character. There is a dance shown, and the less respectable people perform a slapstick pickaninny dance while Pappy sings a spiritual to the children in the cabin. Pappy’s daughter, Chloe, does not go to the party, and confesses that she is sick. She says she had a bad dream and then describes omens - a black cat and a cold wind through the window. She then says, “The voodoo woman say the doctor only for white folks”. Pappy replies, “The hoodoo woman gave Chloe a charm. I wonder if she can do any good?” and a mammy

conkurs, "The hoodoo woman always done good. Ain't it always been that way?"

Pappy affirms, "It has. I reckon it'll be all right."¹³⁰

Mammy later hears a screech owl and says, "I'd rather see the debil than hear that screech owl. It's a sho' sign of death." Pappy then leaves to get a doctor, with the hoodoo woman following behind him and admonishing: "Don't you get that white doctor in here. Might as well invite the debil himself. Don't you do it! Don't you do it!

¹³⁰ A note about the peculiar connotations of black voodoo religion with regard to Christianity in the South:

In a 1961 interview with Fernande Bing, Alfred Metraux stated, "This religion ['Vaudou'] is practiced by ninety percent of the Haitian people. . . . At the same time these people consider themselves Catholic, and while I affirm that nine-tenths of the population practice Vaudou, I do not mean that they are not Christian. All Vaudou believers are in effect excellent Catholics, extremely pious." Metraux's seminal 1972 text, *Voodoo in Haiti*, discusses the cohabitation of Catholicism and Dahomean ancestor worship at some length. Metraux was writing with the intention to further legitimize what he defined as the native religion of that island. His careful positioning of the Haitian people as excellent Catholics is obvious throughout the text; yet even as he does this, he is consistent in his assertion that Vudun is still essentially Dahomean. There is an implicit suggestion that Vudun is mostly a direct retention, with a superficial veneer of Christianity that increasingly deepens. This seeming conflict of ideas is dealt with delicately, as Metraux seeks to point out the obvious similarities to Catholic practice while always rooting them in an African past.

The actors in his narrative, too, perceive no contradiction or antipathy between the state religion and the Creole religion based in ancestral Africanisms. Vudun, and Voodoo, have been praised by the likes of Metraux, Sydney Mintz, Robert Farris Thompson, and Jason Young as being a towering achievement of Africans in the western hemisphere, a masterful synthesis of the Old World and New. Metraux attributes Louisiana Voodoo to Haitian influence, and Haitian Vudun to retentions of African snake worship, and he defines the rituals in terms familiar to the Christian tradition. "The worshippers are not merely a sect but in some ways, an order." He recounts the history of Vudun, stating that it most likely began immediately upon the arrival of slaves at Saint-Domingue in the second half of the seventeenth century. He describes West African religion as being "so bound up with every detail of daily life" that retentions of it in the New World were only logical. The only black islanders with access to Christianity in the early stages of Haitian slavery were house slaves, so the rapid intermingling of West African ancestral beliefs with Catholicism was more of a tempered process than an essential component of the belief system, in Metraux's narrative. For the author, the addition of Christian practices was genuine, hence his assertion that Haitians eventually became good Catholics. But his careful characterization should be duly noted, because when he does briefly discuss Voodoo in New Orleans, it is described as a derivative of the West Indian religion, that is essentially more Christian than Vudun.

Hoodoo woman heal 'em. Hoodoo woman always heal 'em. white doctor no good. No doctor no good." She repeats this and then says a hoodoo spell. Pappy then goes and finds a white doctor and the doctor says: "Why didn't you call on me sooner?" Pappy says "The hoodoo woman been sayin' words over 'em and tryin' to drive the evil spirits out." The doctor replies, somewhat sarcastically, "Well, then, maybe I should't interfere with your hoodoo woman." Pappy begs the doctor to see Chloe, and doctor concedes. Pappy admits, "Without charms, we'd all be better off." The hoodoo ritual is shown - the priestess chants the words, "Bring back the heart to the body, do your duty. Praise de lord, de heart is back in the body. The fever done break. Hallelujah, praise de lord." By the time the doctor gets there, he examines Chloe and the baby and he says, "Why, Nappus, they both been dead for some time. If you'd have gotten me sooner, I could've saved them." The hoodoo woman then says to Pappy, "I told ya you'd bring the devil back with that white doctor. I was healin' em. And now they're dead. It's your own fault."

As the film progresses, Chloe's son is attempting to read - Pappy does not know how to read so he can't teach the boy. Chloe tried to teach the boy, but she died before they even got to the letter Q. Pappy asks the boy if he'd like to learn to read and write, and when the boy affirms that he would, Pappy says there is a place where he can and "it's way up north". Mammy then admonishes Pappy and says he is a fool for selling his farm and mules in order to send his grandson to the north to learn. He says, "After Chloe died, I says to myself, you's wrong. And your people is wrong. And my boy gonna have a chance." On the train, the boy calls out to Pappy: "I never forget what you done for me. I'm gonna study real hard and when I become a doctor I'm

gonna come back and take care of ya.” Pappy affirms that he is already proud of the boy, and the story ends.

The South is implied to be the natural habitat for the black race, and the are shown to be happy there. The north is said to be a place where people have education. Most of the characters have stereotypical southern black accents. The workers are shown as full of joy and song while working, and they crack jokes constantly. One of the young men is shown as being clearly of a low IQ and extremely lazy, letting his grandfather care for his child and letting his sister (whom he abuses “comically”) do all the hard labor. The hoodoo/voodoo woman has a pronounced Caribbean accent, and all the people are extremely religious; especially Pappy. The people, despite their piety, do not conform to Christian morals: the quasi-villain, Gummy (played by Stepin Fetchit), is shown flirting with a woman and she admonishes him, “yo’ wife ain’t been in the grave hardly a month!” and tells him that “you forget you a widow”. She is easily persuaded by Gummy to marry him, although he immediately begins treating her poorly. Gummy then seeks out another woman. The people also indulge in petty crime, namely theft not for survival - “You know you couldn’t eat no chicken if you knew it was paid for!” The reception to the film by black audiences was, as you might surmise from the synopsis, entirely negative, to which the executives at Fox responded with a measure of outraged surprise.¹³¹ Mr. Fox himself insisted, in response, that the film’s intentions were wholly good, and that the movie itself had been meticulously

¹³¹ Audrey Chamberlin Scrapbooks, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

See bibliography for notes.

researched by the historians working in his R&D department.¹³² One wonders if Fox ever reached out to Fetchit for comment on the proceedings.

Around the same time Fox was attempting to diversify its southern portfolio and expand the audience for its genre films, UA and Universal were also entering the progressive-sympathetic market with *Topsy & Eva* (1927) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1928), respectively. Both these films are adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel, and both served the same rhetorical purpose, according to advertisements - to demonstrate the timelessness of the Stowe story and its themes of forgiveness and faith. Previous incarnations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - of which there were many by 1928, at least 13 if short films are to be counted - were relatively successful financially, and were also incredibly safe, material-wise. It was unfashionable and perhaps even unfathomable for a progressive-minded American to denigrate that ultimate tome of white guilt, despite the inherently political nature of the work. For the studio executives in Hollywood and the average Yankee moviegoer, slavery was an issue dead and done. But for southerners, the issue remained contentious even during the 1930s, as evidenced by the prominence of Denning school revisionist historians who claimed the evils of slavery had been greatly overstated by revenge-obsessed black historians elitist historians like WEB Du Bois. Ultimately, there was nothing transgressive nor genuinely affecting about these Stowe adaptations, because their ultimate purpose was self-congratulation without risk. It is this very lack of purpose that made southerners so accessible and enjoyable, generally, as well as successful conduits for a hegemonic understanding of the South. The familiar plots of southerners

¹³² Ibid.

lulled the viewer into a state of acquiescence during which active viewing, while not impossible, is improbable, because an impetus to reject passivity and instead decode the messages inherent within the film is absent. The messages of forgiveness and anti-discrimination allegedly conveyed by *Topsy & Eva* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are diluted, as the records show, through self-policing and the authority of the censorship apparatus, which made them palatable to the widest possible audience, including black Americans, as the studios naively believed as openly bragged in their advertisements for both films.¹³³ These films were also couched in terms of realism, as all southerners are, and the zero-sum nature of the premises - "while slavery is bad now, it was or was not bad during the Antebellum, which is only for God to judge" - consequently makes the point of any moral moot and therefore educational / documentarian only in name, which helps further assure the audience's acceptance of the premises.

These premises are the basis of the American understanding of the South as a real and historical place, an understanding that was forged during the interwar era, thanks largely in part to the involvement of Hollywood. southerners depicted the South as both pitiable and proud, the victims of insufficient will as well as of circumstance. This preoccupation with mythologization resulted in a bizarre neutering that audiences rejected, as with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Topsy & Eva*. In the former, white actors played black - without blackface, as ultra-light skinned "mulattoes" - which, as one critic noted, was distracting and ridiculous.¹³⁴ Indeed, the peculiar decision to have visibly white actors play black mulatto characters effectively counteracted the negative press

they might have received from the mainstream (rather than from the usual southern discontents) if they played out the miscegenation storyline with black, or even blackface, actors. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, generally, the institution of slavery is benevolent in the right hands - one inter title reads "Mr and Mrs Shelby, whose gentle rule of the slaves was typical of the South." Shelby is not a bad man for selling Harry and Tom, but the debtor system left Shelby with "no choice" but to sell or foreclose. The film begins with a quote attributed to Robert E Lee about the moral evil of slavery. The saintly, white-passing Eliza is like the Shelbys' daughter, and her wedding is a social event - Mammy women are discussing Eliza and George's marriage - one says, "Dey's gettin' married like the white folks - almost," and another replies, "Dey **is** white folks - almost." Eliza's son Harry ("Little Jim Crow") delights Haley and Shelby with his dancing, which he prefers to do instead of reading, as his mother wishes he would. The events follow almost exactly as in the book, with the added benefit of informational inter titles about the Dredd Scott decision and Honest Abe insisting that, "A house divided can not stand".

Again I must reiterate that the miscegenation was suggested, not made explicit, so the additional obfuscation of race-play rendered the entire affair without point.¹³⁵

The attempted veneer of accuracy was tarnished by ineffectual execution. Major studio

¹³⁵ Joy, in the censorship record, writes: "There is a serious problem of miscegenation, both as to Cassy, the older woman, and as to Liza, toward whom Legree is making overtures of an obviously sexual nature. Certain sub-titles can be changed in the latter part of the picture, to confuse the relationship of Legree and Cassy, particularly one which indicates that they have lived together for eighteen years. Certain scenes between Legree and Liza should be deleted entirely, among which are the scenes in the slave market, where Legree feels Liza's arm, and runs his hand over her breasts; and certain scenes at the Legree plantation, where Liza is sitting beside Legree and he is making advance toward her."

These "miscegenation" scenes between two white characters were subsequently scrubbed.

films like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which sought to transgress or challenge, were largely ignored or forgotten. And for all of Mrs. Alonzo Richardson's sound and fury, there was ultimately nothing.^{136 137}

Topsy & Eva is a further example of a sentimental antebellum southern masquerading as a provocative picture. This particular entry, an adaptation of Catherine Chisholm Cushing's play of the same name, and inspired by Beecher Stowe, was given the shine of consequence by the famously self-aggrandizing stars, Vivian and Rosetta Duncan, vaudeville actresses and women-about-town. Where there was "entirely too much brutality"¹³⁸ and the implication of miscegenation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, there is nothing scandalous in the Sunday sermon-ready *Topsy & Eva*. The titular characters are two sides of the same coin - Topsy, a slave child, is wild and animalistic, while Eva is

¹³⁶ Indeed, the film's director, Harry Pollard was "surprisingly, born south of the Mason-Dixon line", according to *Variety*, and he "took no place in the argument, insisting that both sides took part in the untrue propaganda that started a class war". This class war being, one assumes, the Civil War.

¹³⁷ It is important to note that, upon re-release, the only bit of authenticity in the film was scrubbed. In a letter from Joseph Breen to Maurice Pivar on May 16th, 1939, the censor writes,

"Dear Mr Pivar:

Today we had the pleasure of reviewing your picture *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and regret to inform you that, in its present form, it does not comply with the provisions of the Production Code. We feel that certain sub-titled can be deleted, or changed, and cuts made to unsatisfactory scenes, which might bring this subject in conformity with the Code. The following sub-titles should be changed, to get away from the word "nigger":

"I couldn't be nothin but a nigger if I was good."

"Nobody loves niggers nohow."

"Dis nigger's been making' trouble."

Gil Kurland papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. See bibliography for notes.

the very model of virginal southern girlhood, and the burden of the white child to educate her foil and idiot-like caretakers serve as a heavy-handed reinforcement of the white man's burden masquerading as a denouncement of slavery.

The film retains the raunchy characteristics that made the Duncan sisters such popular Vaudeville performers, and this comedy takes precedent over the supposed rigid authenticity of the story. For instance, while Eva is supposed to be a child she wears a very short dress and clings suggestively to her father - this is shown in stark contrast to his stern spinster sister Ophelia. Ophelia is herself consciously repressing her sexual desire, manifesting in literal pearl-clutching. As in the book, St Claire's son threatens Legree: "I'll thrash you if you don't stop abusing these poor devils!", and thereafter is a comical, extended fight sequence with Legree and St Caire's son, completed by Topsy hitting other slaves whack-a-mole style as they enter and exit the fight. black characters are afforded little to no sympathy, despite the sentimental inter titles about the suffering of slaves, and are shown gambling, having out of wedlock children, shirking all responsibilities, thieving, dressed in rags, hideously ugly, savage, diseased (and literally afraid of baths, generally cowardly, blood-thirsty even as children, and, of course, with exaggerated derrieres. One can only imagine the gaze at work with *Topsy & Eva*.

Meanwhile, white southerners are depicted as tradition-bound, southern women as exceptionally delicate and gentlemen as generally kind. Slavery is shown to be detrimental only when the slaveowner is abusive, or when families are broken up. Sympathetic to most slave owners - slavery as an institution is not bad, only individuals are bad (the "a few bad apples" argument so often applied to policing). Further, Eva,

the white child, was born on St. Valentine's Day. Topsy, the black child, was born on April Fool's Day. Topsy is Eva's pet, as is the gentle, adoring Uncle Tom, who is bought out of pity by St Claire, as a favor to his old owner, for \$1,000. When Topsy is put up on the auction block the title reads: "a bargain, folks! worth anything you pay for it — just to watch it grow and see what it turns into," a truly creative allusion to rape. She is bought for 200\$ (St Claire protests that this is too much, but Eva begs). Topsy's clothes are so dirty that the dog get fleas from them and buries them, and Topsy eats bugs off of flowers (a gag so hilarious that it was used in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as well). In a singular moment of poignancy, Eva asks Uncle Tom why Topsy is so "bad", and Uncle Tom replies: "I guess it's because all de goodness done been whipped out of her." Later, Topsy says: "I hates everybody in the world, and only wishes there wuz more people so's I could hate dem, too." This particular sequence was heralded as progressive and sympathetic, apparently so much so that the shocking degradation of the black race I just detailed was seen as relatively forgivable.¹³⁹

The Duncan sisters insisted that their picture was of the caliber audiences had come to expect from the arthouse United Artists studio - steeped in the educational realism so close to founder D.W. Griffith's heart. Yet the primary lessons of the film seem to be that slaves were treated with a not insignificant measure of paternalistic affection that, we are lead to believe, at least mitigated some of the harm of the peculiar institution. This conceptualization of slavery as paternalistic and misguided

¹³⁹ [UCLA T&E files]

rather than violent, systematic, and malicious became part of the “common sense”¹⁴⁰ of the American south. This imposition of antebellum morals on an audience contemporary to the interwar era forms a reversal of the much more common instinct, which is to impose a modern understanding of concepts onto historical persons. This relationship is largely descriptive of the way the South is rendered discursively - Americans from politicians to Hollywood executives claim to respect the South, and they mimic at giving southerners the benefit of the doubt with regard to the nature of their history, which results in inverted political correctness. This traps the discourse about the South in an unproductive feedback loop where no criticisms are seriously leveled against the prejudices of many southerners, and therefore no changes are

¹⁴⁰ “Common sense” is a concept that describes the way stereotypes become hegemonic forms of knowledge through a process of historical memory as transmitted through popular culture. This is television studies scholar Jason Mittell’s terminology, coined in “Representing Identity”, wherein he says, “Representations of identity help define what a culture thinks is normal for a particular group [with regard to traits and behaviors].”

Jason Mittell, *Representing Identity* (2010) 306.

made in behavior, and a stasis is reached where resentment characterizes the feelings of those on both sides.¹⁴¹

Topsy & Eva had a “juvenile appeal” that the critics sneered at, but this elitism was as much informed by misogyny leveled at the enterprising young starlets in the lead roles as it was actual film criticism, or a concern for the authenticity of the picture. While certain white critics in publications such as *Variety* were lavishing praise on the “sympathetic” depiction of a slave’s plight in both *Topsy & Eva* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the content of this praise is tellingly condescending, such as when one reviewer notes how “shockingly sad” it must have been for white-passing slaves to have been given the same treatment as “field” slaves. Black reception was much less warm toward both films, as evidenced by a snippet from the *Los Angeles Times*, which is titled “Uncle Tom’s Cabin Angers blacks” and describes therein the “angered blacks” who took

¹⁴¹ This dark mirror concept is explored at length in Chapter 3, as part of the Southern Gothic.

Along these lines, there is an interesting snippet that was saved by the African-American film historian George P. Johnson’s files at UCLA that houses he and his director brother Noble’s movie memorabilia. The snippet is unattributed, but it is attached to the critical reviews section of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It reads:

The Texas people have purified Uncle Tom’s Cabin, after all these years, by making Legree a Yankee. There will be no protest from the Yankees. We are the only folks in the world who are perfectly content to be villains in all the pieces. The Italians long since struck; the Mexicans won’t be mean guys any more; even the Turks and the Chinese have followed the example of the Irish in insisting upon being noble.

Unresolved sectional tension abounds.

umbrage with the way “black characters are portrayed with European stereotypes”.¹⁴² For all the lip service to racial progressivism paid by white R&D historians and directors like Harry Pollard and D.W. Griffith, there is no evidence that an actual effort toward understanding was put forth; Oscar Micheaux was not contacted for comment, much less the folks who protested the gross mischaracterization of slavery and the black race, a treatment that is largely a retention from the antebellum. Research and Development departments’ obsession with authenticity was tainted from the very beginning, because their notion of the authentic existed within the white supremacist superstructure of the United States.

¹⁴² [UCLA UTC notes] This small protest of just 70 black folks was, of course, described as a “rampage”. white reaction was much less mixed, if the records are to be believed. In fact, the success of 1928’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was so widespread that it engendered a “field trip to the Old south” for UCLA students, as advertised in a circulated flyer by Tom Reed, press representative of Universal City in Los Angeles. It is unclear how many students took up the offer to explore the antebellum plantations used on-location for the film with director Harry Pollard. [UCLA UTC notes]

Chapter III

Satire of the Abject: Race Pictures and the Southern Gothic

I perceived a Negro, suspended in the cage and left there to expire! I shudder when I recollect that the birds had already picked out his eyes; his cheek-bones were bare; his arms had been attacked in several places; and his body seemed covered with a multitude of wounds. From the edges of the hollow sockets and from the lacerations with which he was disfigured, the blood slowly dropped and tinged the ground beneath . . . I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror, my nerves were convulsed; I trembled . . .

In Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), the titular farmer, John, encounters the splendor of colonial America's wide-open spaces and he is awestruck by the natural majesty of the land. His appreciation for the solitude the American landscape instills within him is characteristic of the religiously-tinged prose that characterizes that era, and John's Quaker humility and gentle nature predispose him toward forgiveness in his narration. Yet John encounters an unknowably dark pit within the heartland, and his reverential musings morph into gothic horror when he encounters a slave who has been bodily tortured and left for dead by his vengeful master. After witnessing this scene, John's writing becomes less assured, less preoccupied with the over abundance of God's bounty in the American countryside, and more timid. The darkly atmospheric passages where he describes his trip to Charleston, South Carolina, are confrontational and engrossing in a manner that is more common to the romantic and Victorian fiction than de Crèvecoeur's contemporaries in genre essays. Eventually, John becomes overwhelmed by the death cult that forms around Revolutionary War heroes, and he doubts the righteousness of the war for independence. All of this second-guessing is tied to the horror John encounters in the Southern backwoods, in perhaps the earliest example of a trope that

would come to define southern gothic well into the 21st century. The relationship between gothic horror and blackness in southern films is at once seemingly coincidental and carefully constructed; black filmmakers alluded to the historical and contemporary physical terrors of the South even in their comedies, while mainstream melodramatic pictures fashioned a worldview colored with cynicism by setting their narratives in the heart of southern darkness, where anti-black terrorism was a backdrop used to enhance the psychological torment white characters were subjected to.

Henry Clay Lewis's *A Struggle for Life* (1850) is a case in point. The story describes a backwoods doctor summoned by a slave to treat a sick planter. The slave, a dwarf with a harelip and protruding teeth, leads the doctor on a short-cut across a swamp: the familiar pattern of a journey into the wilderness. Wading through the rising waters, the doctor makes the mistake of offering the slave brandy as a remedy against the cold and wet; but the guide becomes drunk, loses his way in the swamp and, at nightfall, as they prepare to camp, he attacks the doctor with a savagery and strength that the latter cannot resist. The strangled doctor loses consciousness, believes that he is dead, but revives later to find that the dwarf, 'maddened by the spirits, had rushed into the flames' of the campfire, and burned himself to death. The next morning the doctor finds his way out of the swamp, but "I would not for the universe have looked again upon the place." *A Struggle for Life* begs for interpretation as a fantasy of slave rebellion, the inner fear of all white people in the slave-owning south. The grotesque dwarf seems to arise directly from the subconscious of the doctor, compounded of all of the repressed guilt and terror of his class. The rebellious slave is a powerful figure,

one of the most potent, indeed, in American culture of the time, because he is based on a fear understood by both black and white Americans. Thus, he can be used to great effect even by a minor writer like Henry Clay Lewis.

Just as slavery came to be known as a peculiar institution, the South was a peculiar region, filled with Lovecraftian weirdness and the strangeness of a place which is both familiar and foreign. The purposeful division of America before the Civil War created two countries masquerading as one, and the cultural development of the South continued on a trajectory significantly distinct from that of the rapidly urbanizing and immigrant-rich north. The shadow the legacy of slavery cast over the region is unique, too, and the simple aberrance of owning human beings and treating them as property was unfathomable to Americans living outside of that region; even if they themselves would never consider an African as equal to an European, the thought of outsourcing all of one's labor to an unpaid hostage was almost satirically bizarre to the work-time accustomed north. While churches in the north preached the value of a good day's work, evangelical Christians in the South emphasized bible passages that praised obedience and filial piety. And it is this very culture of deference to a patriarch, or to one's family name, that defines the grotesque loyalty of southerners to the ideals of a defeated regime. That black hole of morality sucked in the children of planters and poor white trash alike. African American migrants seeking to escape that dark pull were left with unwanted cultural retentions, too, and unavoidable familial ties that rooted some part of their conscience to the fertile soil their ancestors were forced to sow. Oscar Micheaux was a master at narrative allusion to this alien force that invaded black bodies, never fully allowing his middle class, western migrant characters to fully sever

their ties to Dixieland. And just as Micheaux exploited the horrors of incest, forced miscegenation, and lynching for his own purposes as a social activist filmmaker, Faulkner, Griffith, and major studio heads grappled with that same irresistible abjection, banking on the amalgamation of shock, disgust, and pity that would create an explosive emotional reaction in the spectator. The voyeuristic pleasure and haughty superiority audiences feel when watching illicit acts unfold onscreen appealed to every audience during the interwar era. Black audiences patronized black comedies set in the South that were either critical commentaries on minstrels or minstrel shows themselves, depending on one's positionality. White southern audiences relished the florid violence depicted in *Birth of a Nation* and the plantation films, while white northern audiences made relatively small budget southern gothic melodramas like *They Won't Forget* and *The Black Legion* relative blockbusters. The evils of the South were every American's business, and the business, for movie studios, was good.

The efforts of black filmmakers went largely unnoticed by the mainstream. Indeed, even among black film critics, auteurs beyond Micheaux were treated as niche curiosities, and even Micheaux's films were received as sub-optimal by much of the black press, which after *Birth* was acutely aware of the effect great, artistically significant film had on shaping the hearts and minds of the American public. Even major film studios attempted to court the black audience—which was not insignificant in places like urban Illinois and Texas—with all-black movies like *Hearts in Dixie*, *Hallelujah*, and *The Black King*. And while those films were met with some critical success, they were dismal failures at the box office, with those same theaters that refused to screen Micheaux's anti-lynching masterpiece *Within Our Gates* shutting out

all black-oriented cinema on principle. *Hallelujah* and *Hearts in Dixie* are now little more than academic curiosities, white-produced films portraying an equally romanticized and condescending view of the South, but the black-produced comedies of the 20s and 30s, like *The Black King*, remain in the cultural consciousness of black film historiography to this day. It is beyond the scope of this project to trace the retentions of the Southern genre into the present day, but there is an undeniable narrative thread linking the second-tier short comedic films produced for and exclusively distributed to black theaters to the targeted marketing and release of Tyler Perry's *Madea* films. *The Black King* serves as an in-joke, a meditation on the futility and hypocrisy of Garveyism, and its status as a cult favorite among black film aficionados is understandable; it is an endlessly amusing, and keenly insightful, musing on the black urban experience after the great migration. There is a distinct sense of authenticity in the way the director, Bud Pollard, frames the film. The narrative is visually cohesive in a manner consistent with the cinematographic fashion of the time, but the jokes are far more pointed than those in *Hallelujah*. Both films lean heavily on race humor, but the wink-nudge with which they are related by Pollard stands in stark contrast to the minstrelsy in Vidor's film. This reliance on comedy that draws heavily from the well of minstrel shows was a flashpoint for black social criticism at the time, and the shamefacedness expressed by some audiences who patronized these movies mirrors the guilt black audiences felt laughing at Dave Chappelle's eponymous comedy show of the 2000s. Chappelle faux breaking character to lament, "this racism is killing me!" During his infamous sketch "The Niggars" is not so different from the comically satisfying yet wince-inducing behavior of the charming and exasperating preacher-

huckster protagonist of *The Black King*. The laughter these portrayals engender is sharp around the edges, equal parts purposeful familiarity and distancing from the subject matter. This tension is inherent to the Southern gothic, too, where a pride of place clashes with the dread of unseen.

The minstrel show, and southern comedy and theatre in general, is complex, and resists simple categorization. While the specter of the minstrel haunted Micheaux, it equally informed the work of some of the most prominent and successful black actor during Hollywood's pre-golden age. Whether or not one interprets the artistry of Stepin Fetchit as wholly offensive, or derivative, or deserving of some praise, his work cannot be extricated from the brutal history of Jim Crow, and the laughter his running away from the authorities elicits is heavy with the implication of what might happen to him if he was caught. Middle class black-owned Lincoln Motion Picture Company co-founder George Johnson—brother of notable silent film actor Noble—offers a typical evaluation of Fetchit that considers his work as an actor, and his success as a black American, on equal terms with the harm to the community his wildly popular minstrelsy engendered: “Look how Stepin Fetchit and some of those negroes were promoted. Stepin Fetchit probably made close to a million dollars being a monkey on the stage. Yet they wouldn't show a man like Poitier or Belafonte or an educated negro. They wouldn't at that time.” Johnson goes on to note that Fetchit shrewdly ignored all objections raised by his peers in the industry and by social justice organizations, especially the NAACP,

which Johnson considered a good move from a business standpoint, but a morally evil choice.¹⁴³

The pain of shame is felt so keenly here, because the power dynamics between the aggressor and the victim is loaded. Loaded with the weight of slavery, with the despair at the failure of Reconstruction, with the viciousness of white supremacy, with the mockery of the Christianity black southerners felt so tied to. In one act, the klansmen were able to isolate the anxieties and terrors that characterized the black existence in the 19th century. While the use of rape and sexual coercion as a weapon has been well-delineated by feminist scholars, and has been probed at length in the context of the domestic slave trade, far less has been said regarding the sexual

¹⁴³ George Johnson oral history, UCLA film archives.

The Johnsons' political consciousness characterizes much of the LMPC body of work, which explicitly promoted racial uplift in the vein of the Langston Hughes and W. E. B. DuBois. Johnson, on the topic of Fetchit and the undeniable appeal of his traditional southern minstrelsy, continued:

Well, they got too much of that on the other side. They were trying to show the negro as he lives, showing him that he lived and operated just the same as a white man. After all, it was just the color of his skin that was different, but he had the same ambitions and the same loves and same fights, he ate the same good and he lived in the same manner, in as good a home as a hell of a lot of them had. That's the idea there. It wasn't a propaganda picture to show racial troubles; they are tired of that, they got enough of that in the white pictures. Very few colored films that I know, that the negro has anything to do with the production of, were ever made on that basis. [That's a white point of view]. That's a white proposition. Some white people have the idea that that's the only thing. They didn't want to show life as it came out in white pictures.

Johnson's promotion of black excellence and his resignation toward the role of white people in the making of black-oriented films grows from his experience with attempting to run the LMPC on a shoestring budget and experiencing considerable critical success that was outweighed by utter commercial failure. Still, Johnson never blamed black audiences for not sufficiently supporting his films, which were deeply historical in nature, and focused on black achievement in military history. He was especially cognizant of how the limited entertainment value the movies of the LMPC offered in comparison to the spectacle of Griffith or DeMille, and expressed skepticism at the tactics employed at Fox, where black stories were pitched as universal, when the black lived experience in American is temporally and psychologically unique.

dynamics inherent to comedic minstrelsy. The “brutal black buck”, a character archetype which distills fears about black male sexuality to its essence, is rather different from the embarrassing naivety of the of the coon character. In *Hallelujah*, the male characters are either harmless philanderers, or sexless Uncle Toms; the two absolutes of the minstrel spectrum. Black male sexual aggression was not used for comedy unless the target of that aggression was a black (typically mulatto) woman. Even then, the aggression was more foolish and hopelessly inept than genuinely threatening, and the sexual harassment aspect was played for laughs at the expense of the black woman, who either fled from her aggressor, or flirted with him. This voyeuristic interaction recalls the history of sexual violence inflicted upon black women in the context of the domestic slave trade. There are accounts of the rape and forced “breeding” of “chattel stock” becoming a private spectacle for planters, where “fancy girls” were advertised as part of a barely-hidden sex trade fueled by the particular parameters of domestic slavery during the antebellum era, which emphasized numbers not only for labor purposes, but also for status.¹⁴⁴

Black filmmakers like Noble Johnson were all too aware of the implications inherent to sexualized comedy in the context of blackness. A tradition of dehumanization and commodification made the very viewing of black bodies by white audiences an act of domination. Mulvey’s male gaze transfers neatly to the idea of a white gaze in the early decades of Hollywood when black actors and creators existed either enmeshed in the (white) hegemony or on the outskirts of the industry. An audience member’s positionality as a white person necessarily and unavoidable

¹⁴⁴ Edward E. Baptist, “Cuffy,” “Fancy Maids,” and “One-Eyed Men”: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 106, No. 5 (2001).

colored their reception of black characters. The preconceptions a white, working-class man in New York brought to the movie theaters are only superficially distinct from those of a white, working-class man in Alabama. While one man undoubtedly has more experience with black people than the other, they would both be aware of the racial politics of the U.S., where the hierarchy of white supremacy relegated blackness to the bottommost positions. A person's positionality cannot be learned or unlearned; it is a fixed point of reference one carries through life. As with privilege, positionality can be mitigated in a person whose consciousness has been raised, but it cannot be totally removed. Therefore, the very fact of a person's whiteness renders their reception compromised. Just as the socially responsive intentions of a feminist-leaning directors does little good if the female bodies in their films are sexualized, the sympathetic sentiments of filmmakers like Vidor, and a good deal of Hollywood's Jewish creators, are not translated to the screen when the visual language they use to communicate draws upon the racialized imagery of the American minstrel show. For example, Adolph Zukor, an Hungarian Jewish immigrant who founded Paramount Pictures, wanted to appeal to the middle class with movies of a higher production value as a way to increase revenue as well as tutor audiences. This made him especially receptive to hearing criticism from the black community, and his thoughtful responses to letters from moviegoers are well-known. Similarly, David O. Selznick, the child of Jewish Ukrainian immigrants, took the time to explain why he did not cast ancient Babylonian kings as black men to an inquiry from a group of black citizens¹⁴⁵, and was thoughtful

¹⁴⁵ Samantha Barbas, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 42

in his framing of the South as discursively in his *Gone With the Wind*-era production letters.¹⁴⁶

The question of whether representation in itself is a net good is one academics and laypersons alike have been engaging since the genesis of narrative film. One school of thought argues that consistent representation, so long as it is not wholly antagonistic, will lead to eventual normalization. Others dispute this, contending that prolonged, inaccurate or undifferentiated representation eventually leads to the othering of marginalized groups. Actors like Stepin Fetchit and Hattie McDaniel aligned with the first argument, while later actor-activists like Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier avoided stereotypical roles at the expense of their finances and careers. Vidor's insistence that the black characters in *Hallelujah* are little different from the white audiences viewing them rings hollow when viewed from an activist stance, but when his words are considered as a sign of good intent, it is much easier to forgive the implications and chalk the representation as a net positive. But for Micheaux, the mere presence of blackness was not enough, nor was the mainstreaming of black actors. His body of work is vast and varied, but his output during the early 1920s is perhaps his most important. Although a full copy of *Within Our Gates* has not survived, a partial pressing of the film for Spanish release (retitled *Negrita*) and detailed accounts of the film from the time allows us to largely reconstruct the narrative. As Cripps notes in his praise of the film—which is notable, because Cripps mostly disdains Micheaux's work as sloppy and pedestrian—“Perhaps the most illuminating element in the black struggle for an indigenous cinema was the attempt of the negro press to create a black

aesthetic. Such writers and Lester Walton, Harry Levette, and half a dozen more wrestled with the duality—the twoness as W. E. B. DuBois put it—of American racial codes as they impinged on the cinema. Was the negro to be a unique american with an “eternal tom tom beating in his breast”¹⁴⁷ or is he to be a lamp-black Anglo-Saxon?”¹⁴⁸ *Within Our Gates*, undeniably, is of a singular black aesthetic, and the overtly political message of the film was immediately identifiable to the public as an outgrowth of the Wells-led anti-lynching campaigns.¹⁴⁹

Within Our Gates offers the perfect example of a southern gothic that mixes absurdist narrative structural tendencies with high melodrama. The tragic mulattress protagonist attempts to find a better life for herself in the west—as do most of Micheaux’s black characters—only to find that the mark of the South is inescapable, as it lives within her. The tragic mulatto trope here is not wholly dissimilar to Griffith’s use of that archetype in *Birth*, but Micheaux melds the actions of Griffith’s inherently, inescapably flawed but nevertheless admirable mixed-race politician with the white damsels of the film who would rather commit an heroic suicide than submit to interracial rape. Micheaux’s heroine is herself the product of incestuous rape, which recalls that southern institution of the half-white slave caste, and in a twist that rivals the very best of the horror genre, it is revealed that the man who has been pursuing

¹⁴⁷ This is from Langston Hughes’ seminal new negro essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900 - 1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 28

¹⁴⁹ Manthia Diawara, ed. *Black American Cinema* (London, England: Routledge, 1993), 49.

Which also made the film especially vulnerable to censorship. Dozens of theaters refused to screen the film, even after pressure from the NAACP.

her, and who eventually rapes her, is in fact her own white father. The ensuing psychological torment she endures is played for sympathy and pity in long-form; Micheaux's original cut of the film was over four hours long, to be played in two parts with one inter-session. She is doomed by her biology just as Griffith's mulattos are, but the tragedy of her circumstance is very carefully situated narratively in the South. Like an executioner's ax, the spectre of the South hangs suspended over her head, leaving the audience to wonder how much different her life would have been if she was born out west. Micheaux marks the South as the source of black America's trauma, "which continue to have profound effects on blacks despite their efforts to move forward with their lives via education and migration."¹⁵⁰ Micheaux's films encourage black audiences to cut all ties with the Southland, and there is very little sentiment toward southerners or southern culture in his movies. This is one reason why Cripps singled Micheaux out as a particularly egregious example of heavy-handed moralizing and politicized art; like the Johnsons, but without the artistry. Yet *Within Our Gates*, for all its titillating sexuality and over-the-top drama, is a powerful story that recalls *The Story of Temple Drake*, wherein a female protagonist is marked for death and humiliation by the simple circumstances of her being born into the deep south long after its glory days.

So, were black audiences interested in Micheaux's moralizing, (anti-)southern gothic pictures? That is difficult to discern from the available records—some theoretical forensic work has been undertaken on this very issue, and the results are

¹⁵⁰ Stewart, Jacqueline Najuma. *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 229.

inconclusive¹⁵¹—but there is notably more evidence than white critics favored his films. The same critics in *Variety* and the *Chicago Tribune* who sang the praises of Vidor’s minstrels also congratulated Micheaux on his technical and authorial feats. Perhaps this can be explained partially by the general enthusiasm early critics had for most well-shot movies, but the overt nature of the racial themes in Micheaux’s work makes dubious that claim that these critics are merely paying lip service to all directors equally. More convincing is the assertion that these critics are condescending. Still, the lukewarm reception to Griffith’s quasi-apology for *Birth*, the nearly-unwatchable *Intolerance*, dispels the argument that early film critics were unsophisticated. Cultural criticism obviously far predates the cinematic medium, and the melding of visual arts

¹⁵¹ Jacqueline N. Stewart, in *Migrating to the Movies*, describes the reconstructive process she undertook to probe what the contemporary reaction to Micheaux and the Lincoln Motion Picture Company by black audiences might have looked like. It is worth quoting at length here, not because it represents a tenable, evidentially rigorous, or even necessarily conceptually coherent framework, but because it elucidates on the borderline futile nature of engaging in spectatorship studies for films released before audience polls were widely distributed:

I want to explore how fictional descriptions of spectatorship, which amount in African American film and literature, open up facets of the moviegoing experience that tend to be overlooked by academic film criticism. These texts help to map out what Yuri Tsvian calls the “cultural reception” of cinema, the set of “active, creative, interventionist, or even aggressive” responses that reflect on films and bridge the gaps between “spectator” as a textual point of address and and “viewer” as an empirical unit. While grounded in a tradition of social observation and historical documentation, they offer imaginative mediation between realms in which the academic study of spectatorship tends to become fragmented—between the analysis of ethnographical/historical “facts” and psychoanalytic theoretical speculation.

By moving beyond emphasis on the individual, the textual, and the psychic to include a consideration of the collective, the contextual, and the physical dimensions of black spectatorship, we can develop a fuller picture of how African Americans have positioned and expressed themselves in relation to the cinema under particular historical conditions. According to Miriam Hansen, the “public dimension of cinematic reception” is a useful mediating concept that is distinct from both textual and social determinations of spectatorship because it “entails the very moment in which reception can gain a momentum of its own, can give rise to formations not necessarily anticipated in the context of production. (101)

and literary criticism that distinguishes pre-classical criticism from that of the Golden Age is as complex as one might expect from such an interdisciplinary approach. All this points to the conclusion that the white-authored columns reviewing Micheaux were in good faith. This is important because it positions him as a pioneer in the art on par with Griffith, which makes the deeply political art they both produced interesting from a sociohistorical lens. The possibility of theoretically reconstituting black audiences is complicated when placed in the context of the plethora of feedback we have from white audiences—especially white southern audiences. Relying too heavily on a theory-based reconstructive process feels intellectually dishonest at worst, or agency-compromising at best. The archives are indeed a deeply racialized institution in American academic history, but when evidence for spectator reaction is also largely absent from the newspapers, extrapolating too much from cultural patterns observed with regard to other public venues, like jazz clubs and churches, is beyond the scope of this project.

That being said, what we can and *should* infer about reception from the available primary sources is that black audiences—and, I argue to a certain and much less fundamentally significant extent, southern audiences—operated with a double-consciousness.¹⁵² To revisit the problem of comedy, black audiences were especially drawn to light-hearted portrayals of southern life because, as Jacqueline N. Stewart argues, “ebony films speak in two voices. They offer broad comic black types that might harken back to familiar minstrel figures, but they might also function as

¹⁵² Double-consciousness or “twoness” as defined by DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, is when “One ever feels his twoness,—an american, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

modernist critiques of black stereotyping and black middle class norms of propriety and decorum.”¹⁵³ This linking of traditional values and discursive modes with modern social and aesthetic possibilities is descriptive of the Southern gothic genre as a whole, which revels in the possibilities of community between and within the abject. Cripps argues that Micheaux exploits twoness to cheaply sentimental effect, just as Johnson argues that black minstrel performers relied upon it to explain away his own problematic career. Chicago’s black paper *Broad Ax* ran an opinion in 1918 that expressed dismay at how “engross laugh at themselves”, chastising black audiences for spending their money to see “[moving picture shows where] the scenario unfolds a story in which a negro is merely used to add color to the situation and peradventure tickle the risibility of of a race that seems to laugh at itself, and to take special pardonable pride in appreciating the damnable contempt some other races exercise for their insane and uncanny hilarity.” And yet the moralizing tone of black urban reformers did little to stall the rapid growth of black-owned theaters that made their money running comedy shorts.¹⁵⁴

That early narrative cinema was so deeply politicized and historically-driven should not be surprising, given the context of the cultural moment the early 20th-century United States. This was the era of temperance, female suffrage, and progressive activism. As discussed in chapter one, “progressive” here is not limited to equality concerns, as prominent activists like Margaret Sanger were associated with the social engineering movement, if not outright eugenics and racial science. The

¹⁵³ Stewart, 203

¹⁵⁴ Stewart, 220. When contrasted with the tremendous effort expended by the Johnsons to work with theaters so the Lincoln Motion Picture Company films could be distributed, the power of the black audience is sharply brought into focus.

utilitarian philosophy of these activists often saw the “common good” as being that which served the most native-born Anglo Americans. The exoticization of immigrants worked in tandem with the concern-mongering of progressive politicians and philanthropists who emphasized good mental and physical ‘hygiene’ as the common cure for all social ills. This Dickensian view of the poor was more Victorian than Edwardian, and recalls the numerous stringent dichotomies of that era. Griffith, who considered himself an activist as well as an historian and artist, framed his characters as heroes or villains and nothing in-between, while Micheaux focused on evil versus good acts, rather than actors. This black and white perspective on society colors both of their films in a way that leaves little room for emotional or narrative complexity or subtlety. The purpose of art during the progressive era - and then again during the Great Depression - was to advance societal development. The cultural front, then, had its genesis in the early years of Hollywood, rather than during the 1930s, and never ceased in its ultimate goal of raising the consciousness of the consumer.

That being said, most southern directors were not associated with the cultural front. In fact, it can be argued that pioneering artists like William Wyler and Michael Curtiz were reactionary, while Vidor, Le Roy, and John Ford were liberal populists. Victor Fleming was a true aesthete, and *Gone With the Wind* reflects his investment in visual pleasure over narrative heft. The non-confrontational nature of *Gone* partially accounts for its tremendous popularity with a world at war. The shift from viewing the South as a problem to viewing it with affectionate nostalgia did not significantly effect the way black characters were portrayed or received, which remained relatively stagnant until, perhaps, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. And even then, Poitier’s

character is, arguably, a reimagined Tom, a faultlessly and enduring polite and apologetic specimen of idealized black manhood. He suffers the indignities of his race with the careful stoicism of Ellison's *Invisible Man* before he attains awareness, and the mask he dons, although obvious when viewed in the context of Fanon or DuBois' paradigm, is not made visible to uninitiated white audiences. His angst is quiet and inoffensive, which is a characteristic missing from the overtly emotional black men of interwar cinema. Emotionality and expressiveness in acting was much more present for everyone during the silent year, for obvious reasons, but was toned down considerably by the 1940s. After that, the overwrought drama of a Scarlett O'Hara was a clear signifier of immaturity of character—or questionable skill in the actor.

Again, we probe the question of representation. Is the preternatural calm of Poitier progress, or does it recall the loyal Tom of *Topsy and Eva*? Did post-war audiences become more resistant to viewing ugly feelings manifested onscreen as evidence of their urge to conform, or was this movement toward minimalism in acting a simple reflection of the fashion in the art of the time? Can the actions of black actors be held to the same standards as white actors, or are they so distinct that they must be viewed as distinct, even in a mainstream movie? For black film critics, the answer is clear—postracialism is a fraud—but for their white counterparts, the urge to erase difference reflects their desire to read a film as a piece of art, rather than as a social tool. Southern traditionalists and black activists make strange bedfellows, but their shared view of film's importance as a medium for mass education reflects their desire to shape the national conversation around America's past, and the relationship between that past and the present.

An interesting case study that highlights the often-overlooked relationship between race and class within the black community is that of the New Negro movement participants, artists and students living in Harlem, versus the much more vast audience of migrants moving from the rural south to the urban centers of Georgia, Alabama, and the majority-black cities of the Midwest. To again cite Stewart, she details the myriad ways black artists in Chicago and other midwestern cities became involved with the film industry. Many of these migrant families made weekly pilgrimages to the cinema, giving their hard-earned profits to black-friendly theaters and the directors of race films. Stewart further argues that the participation in newspaper criticism and amateur, localized filmmaking highlights the centrality of the movies to the narrative of the great migration. Much as Dickstein argues that Great Depression audiences were comforted by the magical realism of Fred Astaire's musicals, Stewart posits that displaced migrants came to treat movie-going as a cultural cornerstone around which to organize. Indeed, to this day, modern race films like those of Tyler Perry and Ice Cube regularly draw in reliably large audiences of black, lower to middle-class families. These movies, although regularly lambasted by mainstream critics, are evidence of cultural retentions, a traceable lineage of black audiences from the 1920s to the present day.

Largely absent from Stewart's narrative, though, are the elite and culturally fluent denizens of New York during this same period. These folks, despite living in a city famous for moviegoing, typically avoided spending time in nickelodeons, instead attending plays, concerts, and club meetings. Much ink has been spilled on the Harlem Renaissance and the implications of the privileging of highbrow over lowbrow art, but it

is important to very briefly review the aesthetic prejudices that led to the marginalization of film as an acceptable genre of study and practice during the Renaissance. Anna Everett has offered the most probing and far-ranging examination of black film criticism during the first half of the twentieth century in her monograph, *Returning the Gaze*. Everett claims that "[it is apparent] that many of these black intellectuals understood clearly W.E.B. DuBois' (1926) statement that 'all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists'".¹⁵⁵ Consequently, all black art considered to be lowbrow or art-for-art's-sake was viewed with thinly veiled contempt for its unseriousness. And it is easy to understand the concerns of these writers, who saw themselves locked in a battle not only to control their own narrative, or to make the case for equality, but to defend their lives. When viewed in that context, the urgency behind their words comes into focus, and their biting criticisms seem less mean-spirited or pretentious than genuinely unsettled.

In films where blackness was absent, critics inserted themselves into the silences, commenting on the erasure of black folks from narratives they were most definitely a part of—which is a particularly common sticking point in southerners. Everett notes that Cripps' assertion that black critics simply discounted *Birth of a Nation* as hate speech is flawed, as many black film critics specifically discussed the technical splendor of the film *because* it supported their arguments about the possible harms of revisionist cinema. Still, Cripps is not totally wrong when he claims that black film critics panned Griffith's work, and saw it largely as propaganda rather than art. The suspicion with which black audiences have received arguments about *Birth's* alleged

¹⁵⁵ Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909 - 1949* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 14.

greatness is palpable, made visible by George Johnson's meticulous record-keeping of reactions to *Birth* in his archive. The project of posing as a contrarian on issues as seemingly settled as the artistic merits of Griffith's work is an important role to be filled in film criticism. What is even more remarkable is the discursive work present in less condemnatory essays from the time, such as the *Defender's* Sylvester Russel's infamous essay on *The Klansman* which claims that, in effect, Dixon's history of Reconstruction is so totally ahistorical and transparently racist that its possible use as white supremacist propaganda is compromised. Everett does not respond to his assertions so much as she posits her own alongside them, translating his language into contemporary jargon that allows her to better grapple with ideas at the core of his argument: "What must not be overlooked, however, in Russell's idiosyncratic decoding strategy is the notion that a specific text or discourse can be imbued with an unexpected use value separate and apart from an otherwise coercive exchange value."¹⁵⁶ This is obviously true, and much—most?— art has been reframed for transgressive purposes at one point or another, with film as perhaps the most highly legible and prominent art for this purpose. From spoofs to pointed satires, unexpected uses in cinema abound. Yet Russel's faith in the discernment and critical capacity of the American audience is tremendously overstated. Minstrel shows continued to rise in popularity, culminating with *The Jazz Singer*, despite the consistent campaigning against them by the NAACP and local-level activist groups. Historical fact never stood a chance against *Birth* and its spectacle, and this same problem emerged decades later with *Gone*. As Du Bois noted in the *Crisis*, "the real threat posed by [*Birth of a*

¹⁵⁶ Everett, 68.

Nation is the] making racial hatred artistically appealing, financially rewarding, and socially acceptable.”¹⁵⁷ So what use is discursive transgression in the face of overwhelming antagonism?

As for the relationship between southern gothic films and race films, some of the similarities are immediately obvious, as with the overzealous policing of both genres by the Code authority, and the deep ties to the South. I contend that these movies have much more in common than what is immediately apparent superficially, as they both draw on the tradition of comedy-as-tragedy and pathologize the fallacy of the American dream, investigating the malaise that myth creates as a doctor investigates a disease. The use of horror as social commentary is at the center of that genre, and gothic traditions mine the disquiet that comes with unfamiliarity. I do not mean to suggest that horror and blackness are intrinsically related—although that argument has been made [footnote]—but instead that the Southern is a malleable framework that allows room for many sub-genres, and gothic and race films draw from that same well of dread to drive home their social commentaries. Faulkner understood as well as Micheaux that the twentieth century common sense of Old South gallantry was a purposeful misconstruction of reality. Although Faulkner’s sympathies lie more with the yeomanry than the freedman, he makes a hero as well as a spectacle of his sympathetic characters, and minces few words when it comes to the targets of his ire. In *The Black King*, Pollard’s protagonist is as likable as he is flawed, and his misadventures are meant to read as slightly fantastic recreations of a reality the in-group (black audiences) would have been familiar with, i.e. the Garveyite movement.

¹⁵⁷ Everett, 103

Similarly, in *The Story of Temple Drake*, the hellion belle is a familiar archetype for southerners, a woman more full of pride than sense. While their behavior does provide an unfamiliar spectacle for the out-group audience, the visual pleasure offered to the in-group is vastly more significant, because it is less legible to the mainstream.¹⁵⁸

We have seen how filmmakers and R&D departments deployed the appearance of authenticity and historical realism to define the South as a place and concept in American culture. Sometimes, this involved the use of education / documentarian modes, either for issues pictures like *White Bondage* or *Hell's Highway*, or history pictures like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We have also seen how such an approach attracted negative press and reactions without the intention of controversy necessarily being central to the project. Yet there was a tension at play within this delicate web of censorship and intent, which is the real-life discourse surrounding the South during the interwar era. As Ring describes in *The Problem South*, this discourse centered around the issue of sending aid to the South and backing infrastructure projects, and in order to gain public support, the rhetoric surrounding the so-called New South was problematized as a colonial endeavor, with Southerners being cast as an almost racialized Other, a burden of the civilized white man, just as Filipinos were. As much as the PCA paid lip service to the feelings of Southerners, there was also an apparently, or

¹⁵⁸ Genovese argues that slaves used paternalism to their “limited advantage” and that they found self-affirmation and worth within the confines of slavery. The area in which they were most autonomous, he argues, was religion; Christianity was remade in their image, and appropriated for the needs of the community. That is, the enslaved, although partaking in segregated congregational worship, did not necessarily practice the same religion of as their masters. Genovese places emphasis on the emotionalism of all aspects of slave life, and religion in particular; he contends that they connected with the spirit of the religion more than they necessarily were partial to the theology. He provides an interesting analysis of the hybrid savior and liberator figure of Jesus/Moses, who was ‘created’ because the Old Testament figure’s message of Exodus was just as resonant as the New Testament Christ’s sermons of redemption and eternal glory.

at least thinly-veiled, desire to reflect the perceived primitiveness and particular strangeness of the fallen white man, vulnerable and reduced to, as was popularly believed, eating dirt. What could be more eldritch than the pitiable sight of white women and children, filthy and starving and half-wild with hunger, as Depression-era photographers captured? These photos, the discourse surrounding the New South, and the way the South was portrayed in popular culture all formed the basis of a cautionary moral tale for the American people, a warning to avoid the many Southern vices and hubrises and lead to their downfall. This is the Gothic facet of the Southern, just as important to the theoretical conceptualization of the boundaries of the genre as the plantation¹⁵⁹ or issue picture - this is also the sub genre that produced the films with the most lasting commercial and critical success, and the popularity of modern Southern Gothic television shows like *True Blood* and *True Detective* stand as a testament to the lasting impression the genre made on the American psyche.

There are a number of subtleties at work that must be extricated in order for the Gothic aspects of the Southern to be fully understood. There is a difference between the use of issue pictures, which often dealt in graphic images in order to elicit voyeuristic visual pleasure, and the Gothic, which while usually completely fictionalized was much more confrontational in execution and bluntly judgmental of the excesses and prolonged, unresolved decay which characterized the suffering of the (white) people in their stories. There are a number of reasons for the claustrophobic mise en scene and narrative structures utilized in Gothic films, chief among them being the conventions these films share with horror movies, the literary source material they are

¹⁵⁹ i.e. *So Red the Rose*, *Jezebel*, *Gone With the Wind* - discussed in Chapter 4.

adapted from, and the Southern identity of the creators. These all allowed for Gothic films to have more artistic license than the other Southern sub genre films that do not share these qualities Each go these aspects will be discussed herein, starting with the ultimate point. For the purposes of this paper, Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Ward Greene are the primary case studies for the Gothic genre. Indeed, in *Death in the Deep South*¹⁶⁰, later adapted into *They Won't Forget*, Greene cheekily surmises the peculiar perception of the South by Yankees by making reference to the subjects of issue pictures during the interwar era: "Another [Southern crime], huh?" Otis grinned. "Last time it was Arkansas share-croppers and before that the fugitive from the chain-gang and before that the Ku Klux Klan. The Old Man never misses a chance to take a poke at the South."¹⁶¹

Grapes of Wrath (1939) borders on being an issue picture, due to its timely release and and in how it was implemented and advertised by the studio, but I argue that it shares the key features of a Gothic film, in that its primary goal is to evoke horror, and not to inspire the moral outrage that might move a person to "do" something about the issue, like the chain gang films moved some concerned citizens to write their protests to their representatives. The semantics of emotion¹⁶² are beyond the scope of this work, but horror provides a voyeuristic visual pleasure for the audience, because the spectator is party to the inevitable, vicious end of the characters we serve as

¹⁶⁰ Ward Greene's novel was based on the Leo Frank trial of 1915. Greene covered the case as a reporter for *The Atlanta Journal*. In 1915, Circle Film Corporation produced *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, which was based on the Leo Frank trial. Reid also made a documentary short on the subject called *Leo M. Frank*, released a few months before the above film. Notably, another film based on the Frank case is the 1935 film *Lem Hawkins' Confession*, directed by Micheaux.

¹⁶¹ Greene, 138

omnipotent toward. Briefly, The semantics of “ugly emotions” like horror and outrage are effectively and impressively defined by Sianne Ngai in *Ugly Feelings*. In this work, she coins a number of terms to describe a combination of emotions that are effectively unspeakable in Western culture because they focus on the existential dread of the lived experience, which is not seen as productive or cathartic like more normalized emotions, such as rage, grief, and joy. She also describes the way art seeks to evoke emotion, as with her discussion on the “Sub-Subish role of art itself in late modernity, its social inefficaciousness in a market society,” which generates these ugly feelings precisely as a sense of irritation at one’s impotence. This is part of the crucial work of Gothic films, which expose real or imagined horrors that they, as art, or us, as individuals, are incapable of solving due to our social powerlessness in a capitalistic system. I agree with Ngai when she concludes that the important role of art in society, and for my uses the Gothic film in particular, is to “diagnose” and identify these ugly feelings in order to commence a reconciliation process.¹⁶³

Ngai also interestingly diagnoses the strange, detached over-exuberance that characterizes the performances of minstrels like Stepin Fetchit as “animatedness”, and then suggests that this can be effective (*affectively*) reclaimed by black actors who might confront the spectator with the ugly artificiality of their performance. I argue that Bud Pollard implemented this animatedness in directing his actors for *The Black King*, a film parody of Marcus Garvey and the performative aspect of religiosity and race-fidelity among black evangelicals in the interwar era.¹⁶⁴ The bodily sensations of fear and dread experienced by the audience are the horror manifest, and these sensations

¹⁶³ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 353,

¹⁶⁴ Ngai, 362

are thrilling as they force the viewer into an active role, while most cinema encourages passive, receptive viewing. The pleasure horror films elicit are heightened when the victims are those with whom we do not identify - the amoral, or the racial Other, or the unrealistically naïve, or the enviably virginal, or the moronic, or the helpless, or the wretched: the less-thans, the have-nots.

What was it about the situation of the 20th century southerner that made them the object? white men and women who came to rely on the government dole were seen as not-fully-white, or perhaps only white by omission. This definition of white as anything that is empathetically not-black is accepted by historians of race, such as David Roediger, who has closely examined how individuals and entire ethno-religious groups, like the Irish and the Italians, came to laying claim on a white identity, and having stake in the racial hierarchy of the United States.¹⁶⁵ While historians of racial formation sometimes have a tendency to discount the role of physiognomy in the definition of racial boundaries, I reject any analysis that discounts physical markers - even as the rhetorical and intellectual goalposts were repeatedly moved, the role of visible markers of racial otherness were emphasized in some significant way. This is crucial, because as the needs of maintaining white supremacy evolved over the course of the post-Reconstruction era, as white families fell into the same desperate poverty as their black counterparts, racial difference became more difficult to defend as an essential trait that had any value as a marker of success. It still, however, held power as the junk data in the dubiously evidence-based pseudoscience of eugenics, which promised that in the continued, long-term absence of blackness (and Jewishness),

¹⁶⁵ David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 2007), Introduction.

eventually the human race might be moved closer to physical perfection, and intellectual, social, and economic perfection would follow closely behind. This resulted in a scientific community from which empathy for non-white human beings was erased, allowing for the execution of the objectively horrific and barbarous events, such as the Tuskegee experiments; scientists claimed that they could accurately assess the value of a person's heart and mind based upon the circumference of their skull.

Interwar New South discourse variously casted Southerners in each of these roles, collectively forming the Other that is the subject of the Gothic film. *Grapes of Wrath* was not a story about the way capitalism stripped the working man of his livelihood and his dignity - instead, it was a tale of horror about the poverty the Other lived in, and the bottommost social positionally attributed to that poverty, the abject.¹⁶⁶ While Steinbeck's intentions may have been to relate a tale of the everyman's woe of biblical proportions during the Depression, the reception of his work was quite different in the highly polarized discourse surrounding the New South, and welfare state projects in general. Steinbeck, a Californian and the child of landed German immigrants, was sympathetic to the plight of the white plain folk who comprised the majority of the Okies who made the migration from the South to the West. This is a term I borrow from Owsley's *Plain Folk of the Old South*, which attempts to delineate "white trash" from

¹⁶⁶ Here I am using Sabrina Boyer's definition of the abject, which is derivative of Kristeva. In "Thou Shalt Crave Thy Neighbor", Boyer writes,

"For Kristeva, in her text *Powers of Horror*, the term abjection means something that does not 'respect borders, positions, rules' that which 'dis turbs identity, system, order.' In general terms, Kristeva is attempting to explore the different ways in which abjection works within human societies, as a means of separating out the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject'" (Creed 8). Arguably, the audience of horror and those fans of vampires are all partially formed subjects, searching for meaning, which is the appeal. It is the separation of human and non-human (abject) that defines our identities and societies, particularly for those individuals that Williamson states exist out of social norms, or in the margins/borders." (26)

“plain folk” in a dubiously useful rhetorical exercise. Owsley affords the yeomanry the legitimacy of a shared background with the plain folk, a technique that is again employed by later authors writing in the cotton mill historiography. At several points, Owsley pointedly mentions “herdsmens’ roots”, which he asserts extend back to Colonial times, and describes the ‘folkways’ and shared manners of the yeomanry, which “could be discerned by travelers from abroad or other parts of America” - these folkways included, according to the author, a “Gaelic temperament”, a preference for sweet potatoes and collards, and the distinctive “Southern drawl”. Steinbeck is drinking from the same intellectual well here with the proud plain folk that populate his narrative of white migration and trial.¹⁶⁷ These plain folk were overwhelmingly Evangelical Christians who brought their Southern religion, customs, and accents with them. This evangelical mode of worship was a direct export from the South, where it was also being displaced by more conservative and mainstreamed forms of Christianity. The poor were viewed as objects of pity and the designated recipients for Christian charity, but only if they agreed to convert, or at least vaguely accept an idea of god which was not directly contradictory to the theology of the beneficent church. There was no longer a place for the agrarian poor, the plain folk, to come into the pews and worship; instead, churches were more centrally located in urban areas, and the destitute were relegated to Christian “institutions”, like homeless or farm shelters.

Thus began the alienation of the Evangelical lower class, especially in rural areas, at the end of the Nineteenth century. And as the nation moved westward to fulfill its manifest destiny, the rural-agrarian White Christians who had become increasingly

¹⁶⁷ Owsley, 91

estranged from their Baptist, Wesleyan, Presbyterian and Methodist churches took their ideas about tent revivalism with them.¹⁶⁸ Steinbeck's protagonists were read as Southern despite the actual locations where the majority of the narrative action took place, because the South was coded as a place that was primarily ideological as well as spatial - that is why *I Was a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* and *Hell's Highway* were immediately read as being Southern stories despite the films not explicitly stating this.¹⁶⁹ "The story line was clear - the migration of a people forced from their homes. It is as old as the Bible. And, of course, the book was wonderfully simple, beautifully done. The only real change I made - and I had to make it - was in the ending. There has to be some ray of hope - something that would keep the people who saw it from going out and getting so drunk in utter despondency that they couldn't tell other people that it was a good picture to see. Steinbeck agreed on the necessity got a more hopeful ending. Yeah, he liked the script."¹⁷⁰

So the abject is inextricably linked with the appearance of blackness, and the Gothic Southern utilizes the motif of darkness extensively. As with the film noir, chiaroscuro is of vital import - the black-to-white ratio in each frame, the depth of light and shadow, the light framing an actor's face- these noir cinematic techniques are all

¹⁶⁸ Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: the Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 35.

¹⁶⁹ In an unmarked scrap from the "The Grapes of Wrath" Nunnally Johnson oral history, Johnson wrote that "Grapes was denounced as obscene and subversive. Generalizing the oppression - not specific oppressors. Man's inhumanity to man. But Zanuck sent private detectives to ascertain the accuracy of the novel and sound conditions even worse than described by Steinbeck."

Johnson history (120), RUDY BEHLMER PAPERS f.41. See bibliography for notes.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Index card of NYT Book Review September 1st, 1940 by Robert Van Gelder, speaking to Johnson.

present, although admittedly in an often-amateurish fashion in Gothic films. For a picture of its production values, *Grapes of Wrath* is a surprisingly ill-lit film. More often than not, Henry Fonda's comely face is caked with indeterminable dirt that, with its persistence, the audience slowly becomes to believe it is an integral part of not only his character, and his situation, but his person, essentially. He becomes white trash, through the performance of it. As with the visceral ugliness of blackface, the ugly appearance of Southernness in Gothic films is a reflection of their worth, or values, or characteristics. When there is an emphasis on the way a thing looks, we begin to look at it closely, to study it and to assign it, consciously or not, certain qualities based on its visual qualities. So directors like John Ford purposefully draw the viewer's eye to ugliness and filth in order to establish the *mise en scène*. This matters even more in films where the action takes place primarily in a single setting - we come to associate that place with those particular sets of visual characteristics. This is how a generic style is established - the dusty western, the chromatic sci-fi, the soft-focus romantic comedy, the super-saturated action hero film - and, now, the blackness of the Southern. This blackness is not primarily in reference to actual black actors, but instead refers to characters and settings that embody the qualities of blackness. That is, a lack of light, heavy shadows, shades of grey, uncleanliness, kineticism, viscerally of movement, over-pronunciation of sexuality - those crutches of the minstrel, translated into expression and dress and sets. Gothic films attempt to make the spectator experience the feeling of claustrophobia, even when the shot is wide and panning, or outdoors, or empty.

Blackness is the birth and the hiding place of the abject, and one who lives in abjection is made party to blackness by proximal association. The proud and protestant protagonists in *Grapes of Wrath* are the abject, occupying a space that they resigned themselves into, or actively sought out. By definition, one is abject when one continues to occupy the spaces between and outside of the bounds of social ways and means, without making apparent effort to hide their abjection or “better” their situation by passing or assimilating or sufficiently performing shame. The abject is different from someone who occupies a border status, which is important to note, because most of the displaced white folks who were hit hardest by the Depression were occupying a border status in American media and imagination. That means, because of their greatly diminished role in society their claim to whiteness, or at least full citizenship, was compromised, so they existed within a border stay of being not fully white, yet also empathetically not-black. These folks were pitiful, and understood as striving - the photographs circulated of their poverty during the farming crisis of the interwar years severed as shame-by-proxy - the public humiliation of having their validity as white people, as American citizens, as human being, challenged assured that their border status could possibly be remedied. The protagonists in *Grapes of Wrath* and other Gothic southerners do not crave nor seek out the normalcy that was lost to them. Instead, they feel righteous anger at their reduced positionality, and they set themselves out against those who allowed them to have their dignity stripped from them. The abject are communist sharecroppers, progressives, feminists, gay men and women — anyone who draws attention to their place in society and therefore challenges the societal mechanisms that push them there.

In *Grapes of Wrath*, the white men and women are angry, and that nebulous, loud anger frightened the censors, who - for good reason - believed the depiction of transient, unfocused anger could lead to the questioning of authority and perhaps eventually to a workers' revolt. This is, of course, the very reason why fascist and totalitarian states seek to control the media - the unregulated access of ideas, no matter the intentionality, encourages critical thought on one's circumstances, or at the very least a measure of self-reflection, and either might be enough to incite disobedience — *how did I get here? Am I happy where I am? Do I accept my situation, or do I seek to change it?* There is something peculiarly Southern about a pervasive, general mood of malaise, and Steinbeck was tapping into that deep well of discontent with his novel. Yet in the film adaptation, that faceless, nameless angst is personified and reflected in the exaggerated facial acting, the sneers of every antagonist - the average viewer probably does not actively identify with the abject, so they begin to find party with the oppressors, and this destabilizing, uncomfortable association, furthers the sense of strangeness that imbues the Gothic. There is the unknown thing, which we associate with the abject (i.e. the foreign customs of the Southerner), and the relationship of the abject to the unknowable thing. The specter's sense of self is displaced, and they gain pleasure from the uncommon sensations this disassociate experience engenders. This is why we read Poe, or watch horror movies, to be presented with a fictionalized situation which will elicit within us the primal fight-or-flight response, the release of the adrenaline that becomes less familiar to us as technology and capitalism alienates us from our own lived experiences.

Perhaps this explains why the Gothic genre endures while the women's film and the issue picture have fallen out of favor - why the Kentucky woods are still associated with the ominous banjo-players of *Deliverance*, rather than the wounded Civil War veterans of *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*. There is something irresistible in the unapologetic weirdness of Pentecostalism and plantation houses, in keeping human being in your possession, as you might an animal, in valuing personal property over personal liberty and reveling in defeat (the South *will* rise again). The focus on loss, rather than growth, on the past, rather than the present or future, is un-American, and those who align their values with un-Americanness are abject. Southerners are abject. If the goal of the minstrel show was to elicit laughter, the aim of the Gothic is the elicit horror, and the mechanism remains the same.

Cultural markers of Southernness abounded in Steinbeck. These pitiful people in his novel are subjected to a veritable gauntlet of biblical trials, and the reaction to their struggle was not only humanizing sympathy, of which there surely was some measure, but also horror, as evidenced by the censorship of the more graphic and shocking descriptions of their abjection in the script. As the censorship and studio correspondence records show, there were accusations of collectivist propaganda leveled against the film and novel, that was infinitely more threatening in nature than the empty chants of "sharecroppers unite!" repeated in *White Bondage*. In a letter from Eric Johnson, President of the MPAA, to Hedda Hopper, he wrote about the collectivist issue.

Dear Hedda: A friend told me in Chicago recently that you had been quoted as saying I had sold "The Grapes of Wrath" to the Soviet Union for two million dollars. I don't know whether you made this statement but I thought you might want the facts if the matter ever came up. It is true that

the Russians offered to buy "The Grapes of Wrath". As president of the Motion Picture Export Association, which handles these matters, I refused to sell the picture to them. As a matter of fact, the Export Association has sold no pictures to Russia and it certainly has no plans to." Hedda replied in an undated letter, "My dear Eric: When your friends report on my Chicago speech, they should get their facts straight. I didn't say the Soviet Union paid \$2,000,000 for "The Grapes of Wrath", cause even if I'd heard that I wouldn't have believed it. You yourself told me that Russia has bought some of our films, among them "The Grapes of Wrath", and that it backfired as a piece of propaganda when the Russians saw that the poverty-stricken people from the dust bowl were wearing shoes and driving their own automobiles.¹⁷¹

There was also a surprisingly amount of moral outrage at the depiction of the infamous breastfeeding scene, which was unnecessarily sexualized and sensationalized as titillating, despite the heavy-handed allusions to the bible that the scene is entrenched in. In a memo from D. Zanuck to Julian Johnson, dated July 14th, 1939, Zanuck wrote:

Study the Steinbeck book, and you'll find it has no dramatic climax - as, let us say, plays have a dramatic climax. Whether in an effort to remedy this, or just in an effort to give his book a sensational finish, Steinbeck wrote the mawkish, over-sentimental and slightly ridiculous episode of Rosaharn feeding the starving man in the barn from her own overflowing breast. Skipping this touch of blunderbuss emotion, the book shapes up not as a dramatic story of ups and downs, but a steady, high-key, one-level panorama of suffering and struggling humanity, getting nowhere fast in a desperate and pathetic effort to get somewhere.¹⁷²

Steinbeck felt that the dignity of his work was being compromised by the PCA cuts, and he defended it adamantly against accusations of politicization and moral vacuity. In a memo from D. Zanuck to Julian Johnson, dated July 14th, 1939, Zanuck

¹⁷¹ HEDDA HOPPER PAPERS f.1838

See bibliography for notes.

¹⁷² Ibid.

talks up how pleased he is with the Johnson script, which stays true to Steinbeck's philosophy while removing some "conversational dirt and obscenity.

He also writes: "Nunnally's dialogue is a new high in realism. It is better than Steinbeck's as an acting transcription, for it is absolutely true phonetic of the Southern illiterate's talk." He emphasizes, "The only thing I would eliminate [from Johnson's script] is the necessary horror and suffering. [...] And speaking of censorship. This picture must set up its own standard of censorship, different from anything that has ever been done before." He is adamant that the "American public" not be given a sanitized, "whitewashed" story. He ends the letter with saying he hopes that the Hay's office will not interfere with their "mollycoddling morality" and that "political influences" won't inspire any "social pussyfooting".¹⁷³ "According to Johnson, Steinbeck specified in the sale contract that his social philosophy would not be altered in the film. Steinbeck's speculation over possible revolution in California is being interpreted as a survival-of-the-fittest theme. Many letters of protest over filming the novel. Chambers of Commerce in the area treated in the book are reputed to be outraged by Hollywood's contemplated effrontery and are passing resolutions condemning the project. [...] Agricultural Council of California, a combination of farming industries of the state conducted a campaign against the film." The actual line from the sale contract reads: "The producer agrees that any motion picture based on the said literary property shall fairly and reasonably retain the main action and social intent of literary property."

¹⁷³ HEDDA HOPPER PAPERS f.1838

See bibliography for notes.

Apparently Steinbeck mentioned Ford as his ideal director for a film of the book.¹⁷⁴ Eric Johnson expressed his belief that:

There remains only a consideration of the book's general social significance. Like all profoundly stirring books of true conditions, the politically-minded will find it fuel for their arguments. The Fascists will say it is purely Communistic because it shows nothing but greed, villainy, and cruelty in the minds of all who are not paupers. The Communists will say it tends to Fascism, because it subtly shows that the country ought to be regimented, regulated, controlled from the top, so that such utter and crushing poverty in the midst of surplus and plenty could not take place. But that seems to me neither here nor there. This story had created a profound sensation by a presentation of dreadful inescapable facts and does not suggest any infallible answer. The author works on the great principle which animated Mrs. Stowe, Zola, Tolstoy and Dickens — the presentation of social injustice will eventually arouse the people to eradicate that social injustice, in their own way. Stowe, Zola, Tolstoy and Dickens had no perfect panacea to offer but their striking books had a great part in the elimination of slavery, labor abuse, serfdom and child labor—respectively.¹⁷⁵

Here, we can see the implication is clear: the goal of the film was to evoke horror, rather than to motivate individuals to action, so in execution, the film is a clear entry into the Gothic canon, ironically due to these very cuts, and to the outraged reaction of the South, which was seen as suspiciously defensive. Cripps has a notion of the “southern mystique”, or how “many blacks and whites had drifted from the South to California and found work in the studios, and their beliefs colored life in the movie colony”. Cedric Robinson takes issue with Cripps's notion of the Southern mystique, calling it misguided in attempting to find causation between a Hollywood creator's heritage and their work, but I fully endorse his view that one's life experiences and inextricably tied to their art. It should be noted that while sometimes Cripps

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., index card of NYT May 21st 1939 x 3:8, interview with Johnson.

¹⁷⁵ Nunnally Johnson transcript of interview by Ernest V. Heyn in Photoplay (8-29-35)

suggests that Hollywood was in the vanguard of change, at other times he stresses the anachronism of Hollywood's antebellum plantation mystique—the plantation films, specifically, which he argues are the most ideologically and actually detrimental to the race. Although he emphasizes the significance of a 1942 meeting between Walter White of the NAACP and studio heads, out of which came the promise, as *Variety* headlined, of "BETTER BREAKS FOR NEGROES IN H'WOOD," he also gives evidence that a few liberal directors and writers may have been the principal source of improvement, driven by their own economic interests in progressing being good business, as well as, perhaps, to be less cynical, their own sentiment toward Civil Rights. The two are not mutually exclusive, but the outcome was certainly more oriented toward the former than the latter.

There is a history of collectivism that informs the fears Johnson voiced. In *Breaking the Land* by Pete Daniel offers a narrative that deals with three separate agricultural juggernauts in the South: cotton, tobacco, and rice. He details the process by which each crop came to be mechanized, delineates the distinct cultures that formed around each plant, describes the peak and decline of the three staples, and the corresponding effects those processes had on farmers and workers. Daniel is, like the authors of the cotton mill books, concerned with the concept of modernity and its effect on southern culture, specifically for the making of the modern factory worker in the industrial south. The relative powerlessness of growers to influence the not-so-free market was a universal issue across all three crops, although rice farmers were often both the most wealthy, and most well-assisted by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration; if tobacco and cotton farms were similarly assisted, those growers

might not have been met with poverty en masse by the 1950s. After the cotton crop became 'modernized', cotton mill workers quickly became the most pro-union demographic in the South, forging a sense of family with other white factory laborers. Tobacco and rice workers were less inclined to organize, and were therefore quickly made victims of unevenly proportioned government policies, which succeeded in aiding only the largest and most profitable farms. Daniel is careful to note that the New Deal policies were enacted with the best of intentions, but were ultimately even more devastating to whites than Reconstruction-era farm legislation that sought to reapportion the land, He is sympathetic to the Roosevelt administration and unions, as well as to the small farm owners and workers. So, then, the only 'villain' in this history of modernity, the blunting tool of progress in the late 19th and 20th centuries, which was, in his view, inevitable. The old cultures and ways of life were destroyed by a process which had to take place, and the efforts made to soften or slow modernization were misguided, but not malevolent or classist – favoring of, for instance, those farmers who owned their own equipment. Southern agrarian culture, plagued by unsustainable methods since its inception, was particularly ill-suited to thrive in a mechanized society. The proliferation of farms was completely incompatible with demand and streamlined processing techniques, so smaller growers were made obsolete in a drawn-out process that involved a futile cycle of attempting to keep pace with modernization - a process that invariably resulted in failure.

Most Gothic films were purposefully provocative - in fact, it was a Gothic Southern that provided the initial impetus into actually enforcing the Production Code.

The moral outrage against the depiction of fallen women continued well into the mid-century. In a May 26th letter from Hedda Hopper to Eric Johnson, she writes,

My dear Eric: I don't know whether you have the power to stop a film from being made of "The Chapman Report", filthiest book I've ever read and I believe about the filthiest ever published. But there should be an organization in this country powerful enough to stop this story being filmed. After it is made it will be too late because even if it can't be shown here it will be in Europe. Richard Zanuck the producer is a nice boy and I'm fond of him. But I came out in my column dead set against this story being filmed and so did Louella. If there is any possible way it can be prevented I hope it will be.

Johnson replied to the above by saying he had "no intentions" of letting an adaptation of either "The Chapman Report" or "Lolita" being made, as they would not pass the standards of the Production Code. He also said he has "no intention of reading the book".¹⁷⁶ So what makes *Temple Drake* a Gothic tale rather than a "Women's picture" is the emphasis on not only the moral failings of the protagonists - that is apparent even in the heroine Scarlett O'Hara - but in the horrific absurdity of the situations they find themselves in. These absurdities - the KKK, the corrupt judicial system, the for-profit churches - are intrinsically Southern. Again, Southerners find themselves in a quagmire of situations of their making, due to their lack of self-control, sloth, wrath, and their sexual and material covetousness. At the beginning of the film, Temple's Aunt Jenny foreshadows how her niece will pay for her promiscuity: Temple, it is said "like many Drakes", has "Something bad in her. Something wrong."¹⁷⁷ Initially, nobody is concerned when Temple goes missing - they figure she eloped with some unknown man, perhaps a Yankee or someone even worse than that—a veiled reference to

¹⁷⁶ The film was, indeed, later made by Zanuck.

¹⁷⁷ An allusion to Faulkner's *Sound and Fury*, which details the inbornness of moral failings in an increasingly incestuous Southern aristocratic class.

miscegenation. Temple is a an archetypical whore in the whore/madonna dichotomy, and she is shown encouraging men who are hesitant to have sex with her (“no, stop, don’t - just as it was gettin’ good”). Men try to get Temple to “promise” them sex before they commit (“It ain’t fair, firing a man all up and then putting him out”).

After crying wolf one too many times, Temple is raped by her lover Trigger, and subsequently forced into prostitution by him. He manipulates her by insisting that she loves him, as well as the rough sex: “I could tell it from the minute I saw you. You’re crazy about me.” Temple, who is by this point in the film exemplifying abjection, replies by saying, “There’s something wrong inside me”. The audience is treated to the spectacle of Temple being further degraded, this time by women partaking in the victim-blaming: one gangster’s girlfriend scolds Temple for “playing the kitty” and acting like a tramp even though she is a virgin (“If they ever laid a finger on you, you’d faint”), and she suggests that her precociousness is why she was raped. She accuses Temple of attempting to steal her boyfriend, who saw Trigger rape her and then attempted to take part. As the spectator, our positionally as omnipotent gives us the power to judge the horrors as they unfold - Temple does deserve, to a degree, but the total lack of human kindness she is afforded is shocking to even the most cynical viewer. After this humiliation, she is again assaulted in the barn again by Trigger, after the boy trying to protect her is shot. Then, she herself shoots her abuser, which is the murder the story is centered on. Two violent rapes are depicted in whole or part, and we witness Temple’s free-fall into abjection. Throughout the film, she is selfish and would rather have an innocent man hung than admit wrongdoing on the stand, which defies our narrative expectations for the story. Still, the ending much more rosy than in

Sanctuary, wherein Temple allows the innocent man to be lynched - at the eleventh hour, she admits what she knows and, we assume, faces the consequences of her willful obfuscation and pride.

It is difficult to picture a woman like Temple who is not explicitly Southern - every one of her characteristics is so particular to her Southern identity that is difficult to picture this working as an adaption to some other place or culture. Like most Faulkner anti-heroines, Temple is not a good woman, in the traditional WASP sensibility, nor is she a likable character in her personality - she is not particularly amusing or intelligent or plucky. She is, though, brutally honest while being simultaneously emotionally withholding, which demonstrates the fortitude of her unshakeable, proud Southern womanhood. She takes pride in her abjection, explicitly, rejecting the morality of her peers and embodying her marginal position in society, on the far end of the virgin-whore spectrum. Faulkner is careful to only imply, with his script, that Temple has had sexual relations with men, but the audience assumes that she is promiscuous, due to her precocious, provocative behavior, and it is absolutely crucial to his narrative that the audience does not know for certain if she “really” is a loose woman - this element of misery works in the writer’s favor, when the rape device is introduced in the plot. Temple is paralyzed with fear and shame that prevents her from either affirming or denying her status as a whore-or-virgin, in a complete and total reversal of the role she took during the film’s opening sequences. Trigger is a monster, animalistic and peculiarly violent in a way we see time and again in Gothic narratives - again, think of *Deliverance* or *A Time to Kill* - and Temple’s rape is not dissimilar in beauty/beast quality to *King Kong* or *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (although,

obviously, the racial component present in the creature-features is mostly absent in *Temple Drake*). Indeed, the censors took particular umbrage with the rape scene for its alleged suggestive titillation - the scenes are clearly staged, which plays into the voyeuristic aspect that is so integral to the Gothic (seeing the abject while remaining unseen) and because there is a distinct lack of genuine terror in the way it is acted, the rape becomes a transgressive act, where one abjection joins another in a marriage of (literal) darkness. Temple and Trigger both have not been sufficiently humanized to successfully elicit real empathy from the audience, so they become like blackface minstrels - an impression of the real, while simultaneously being empathetically, even aggressively unreal. This explains why the Gothic was so successfully adapted for Southerners - the culture industry denied upon the suspension of disbelief in conjunction with begging the audience to accept its credentials as documentarian or at least plausibly realistic in the plots of the films. There was little call for fantasy or sci-fi outside of the horror genre before 1945 - the monsters of the interwar era were human beings.

White Southerners saw themselves as victims of a ruthless and amoral government that overstepped its bounds, but everyone else passed judgment on the white trash and plain folk and idle planting classes. Again, in the nation-building effort of the New South, rhetoric that championed the white people as a race and progress as a function of that race, little was done to actually implement this idea into action and to alleviate the sectional tensions that made this task difficult from the onset. Even during the tumultuous interwar years, talking politics publicly was impolite - primarily an activity for radicals and discontents like the huckster populists in an Upton Sinclair

novel or *All the King's Men* - Americans were supposed to champion their identity as Americans over any creeds or affiliations, political or otherwise.

Obviously, this ideal can never be put into practice when one of the participants in this nation building project is a junior partner who is othered and racialized in the very discourse that sought to unify. So why would a man like Faulkner, who was every bit as proud of his Southern roots as D.W. Griffith was, participate in this seemingly invalidating and humiliating narrative is difficult to understand, fully, although his correspondence and works of art hint at his complex motivations for cultural criticism and his participation the creation of a Southern Gothic canon. The Southern Gothic literary genre is best known as the vehicle for William Faulkner's provocative tales of the decaying planter class and the instructively grotesquities of "white trash" families. In "A Rose for Emily", the regional miscegenation of a once-revered southern belle and a yankee careerist ends with the insane Emily sleeping in a bed next to her long-deceased husband's rotting corpse which, "had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust."¹⁷⁸ In *As I Lay Dying*, an impoverished family from Faulkner's apocryphal Mississippi parish, Yoknapatawpha County, undertake the long journey to Jefferson in order to bury the matriarch. The trials the family faces over the journey are almost all preventable, having been caused by the family's hubris and misplaced pride - refusing to ask for help lest they be pitied, performing recklessly arduous tasks in order to save time, and forcing one of the boy children to endure riding atop his mother's coffin with a broken leg. Notably, one of the girl children is pregnant, and uses

¹⁷⁸ William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily", section V.

the occasion of her mother's funeral to attempt to obtain an abortion. Faulkner made the reader voyeur, witness to the deterioration - and degradation - of the once-proud South. He wrote out of a place of fantasy, but he also claimed a sort of documentarist's ethic, relating a version of reality that appealed to his own understanding of what it meant to be southern in a period regional decline, as well as to the public's common sense¹⁷⁹ of southernness.

Faulkner also approached screenplays with this documentarian sensibility, imbuing the scripts he wrote with a sense of horror and authenticity at once. He was incredibly adept with putting the audience at ease in unfamiliar situations, be they war zones or plantation houses, which helps explain his exceptional ability to convince the spectator of the authenticity of character, setting, and dialogue in films he worked on. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the un-produced script for a picture titled *Battle Cry*. In this document, Faulkner writes with authority about sectional quarrels and even deploys the "magical Negro" trope successfully, but perhaps so emphatically that film producers balked. This is best displayed in two portions of the script: on page three, Faulkner writes:

WISE OLD BLACK MAN: That's it. Freedom. Abraham Lincoln gave it to us, offered it to all the people, black, white, and yellow and brown. Because he was one of 'em. That's why he could speak for 'em, and all the people this side of the Big Water and the farther side of it too, could understand him. Because he was the people. He was their man. Sometimes you couldn't even tell where the people left off and Abraham Lincoln began.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Here I use "common sense" as it is deployed by Communication scholar _ Mittell, who constructs a framework wherein the American public's shared common knowledge of persons, events, or ideas - accurate and otherwise - form a cultural touchstone that may be spoken about broadly and construed in a way that "makes sense" to the typical person.

¹⁸⁰ *Battle Cry* script

These words were to be delivered by an ancient, yet distinguished, black man who serves ostensibly as the story's omniscient narrator. He reveals that these young soldiers, on the European frontline during the Great War, found common ground even though they hail from diametrically opposed backgrounds and hold opposite "common senses" about American history. And this gets at an interesting point that Faulkner and other Southern Gothicists repeatedly allude to: two Americas, one Southern and one Not, where the common sense of basic historical events is so disparate that polite conversation is made basically impossible. Progressivists like Faulkner sought to expose this severe disparity, and by so doing educate the public. He sets these ideas in action much later in the script, where one of the American soldiers, Battson, is relating to his European comrades a history of the United States:

BATTSON: [...] For the next 75 years there was section against section party against party, stupidity and blindness and greed and corruption while they still tried to interpret the first sentence [of the Declaration of Independence] as applying only to the rich and the ruthless and the shrewd whose skins were white. [The nation] was not born then, not until 1861-1865. 1776 was the half-moon. 1861-1865 was the confinement: the suffering, the agony, the blood and grief and travail out of which rose a nation which can become in reality the shape of a man's eternal hope and which, for that reason, must not and shall not perish from the earth.¹⁸¹

Perhaps it is not difficult to see why the heavy-handed moralizing that left studios cold, but for all this passage lacks in artfulness, it reveals to us that not all well-educated southerners were necessarily slavery apologists and antebellum romanticists. Still, Faulkner was a fierce defender of southern cultural achievements, and of the artistic singularity of the region itself. His sense of self as a southern gentleman was not effected by his clear-eyed—if slightly overwrought—assessment of the

¹⁸¹ *Battle Cry* script

shortcoming of the region. Interestingly, although Faulkner was artistically preoccupied by the excesses and peculiarities of his southern countrymen, he was not convinced that the nation building project of the New South was necessary. He decried all attempts at modernization that would come at the cost of regional singularity - to Faulkner, and to all proud southerners, the cost of innovation might outweigh socioeconomic benefits it might possibly bring. This gets at the root of the generalized antipathy so many southerners exhibited toward the nation-building promised by the project of the New South. The South had not lost the War - instead, both sides had lost so much, an incomprehensible amount, and therefore the only language that is appropriate to use when referring to that sectional struggle revolves around the terrible cost, and how it basically amounted to a (bloody, terrible) learning experience for both sides.

Despite the angst of the artist class and the suspicion of the common man, the infrastructure of the South continued to develop significantly over the course of the interwar era, booming even during the height of the Depression, helped along in part by the WPA efforts. The most visible centers of capitalist commerce were found in the manufacturing sector, where textile mills thrived. These mills amounted to a factory version of the tenant farming system that brutally exploited the yeoman at the turn of the century. The culture in mill villages expanded during these hard times, and the workers discovered coping strategies that helped them survive psychologically wearying times. Consumerist comfort was taken in the purchasing of products, and modern mores on dating and gender relationships eased generational tensions. In addition, "old time" Evangelical religion became enormously popular, and mill people

themselves came to exert cultural influence on the nation with their music and customs; outdated expressions of rural culture were becoming increasingly celebrated in the north, even as workers sought to broaden beyond tradition. Finally, regarding politics, the women interviewed discussed the National Recovery Act and FDR in largely positive terms, although the historians that do editorialize take a less sympathetic view of unions and the involvement of the federal government in mill labor crisis. Mill workers were ultimately able to “understand their world, but unable to change it”.¹⁸² This harkens back to their feelings of resentment at mill village paternalism, although it took a lot to revert back to that view; some millhands defended FDR and the union for years, instead blaming their bosses for the failure of the National Recovery Act and Textile Act. Simon ends his monograph by emphasizing that, although the millhands were ultimately stripped of their political clout, conservative politicians were not ever able to divide and conquer the lower white classes with simple-minded appeals to tradition and racism. These are the Southerners of American common knowledge - the actual mechanism by which the New South functioned was completely unknown to the vast majority of people, who viewed Southerners as being largely dependent upon the welfare state, rather than an exploited working class, which was the common knowledge associated with the working poor and immigrant populations north of the Mason-Dixon.

The films *They Won't Forget* (1937) and *Black Legion* (1937) share qualities with film noir and issue pictures, but like *Grapes of Wrath* and *Temple Drake*, they primarily elicit horror from the audience. Both films were seen as serious by critics at the time,

¹⁸² Simon, 239

and the praise for them was immense. Even more crucially, just as *Temple Drake* did, these pictures very carefully pressed the censorship board and put the censors in a position where they found themselves being forced to defend the indefensible - namely, the KKK. While Faulkner dealt in the personal shortcomings of his characters as a means by which to criticize the racial hegemony of the South, these films tackled a Gothic monster terrifying in its size, strength and ubiquity - the second Klan. The Klan is the Other, as gruesome as incest, bloody violence, and rape in Faulkner and Steinbeck, and as brutally repressive as any Southern government in an issue picture. The vigilante heroes in *Birth of a Nation* were nowhere to be seen in these Gothic films, which cast the terrorists of the Klan as perverse men who exemplified the manifold degradations inherent to Southerners. Clearly, the goal was not to encourage individual Americans to go out and challenge the Klan - indeed, race hatred has little to do with the horror the Klan evokes. Instead, the spectator is horrified by the primitivism of the Klan's tactics - brutal mob "justice" and the utterly bizarre mixture of murder and religious imagery.

The basic story for *They Won't Forget* is that on Memorial Day, in a small Southern town, during a holiday weekend, a woman is brutally murdered. An ambitious district attorney who has his eye on a Senate seat, seizes the opportunity to create a sensational case against the mild-mannered yankee who was the murdered woman's mentor. Ultimately, defense are unable to convince the jury of their client's innocence despite several outstanding character and eyewitness testimonies. Although the media accuses the Southern prosecutor of "fighting the Civil War in the courtroom", his tactics are successful, and the defendant is sentenced to death. The governor

eventually intervenes and commutes him down to a life sentence, but during the transportation to federal prison, the innocent yankee is lynched by a mob of men. This particular reframing—whitewashing—of lynching makes the topic much more palatable than Micheaux’s *Within Our Gates*. And, indeed, the film was showered with accolades from the mainstream press, and proved to be a commercial success. The *National Board of Review* named the film one of 1937’s “top ten” and the *New York Times* placed it on their “ten best” list. The other major southern gothic/issue picture amalgamation is *The Black Legion*. That film’s premise is also broadly drawn from a true story¹⁸³, wherein a powerful, extralegal, viciously anti-immigrant vigilante group, known as the Black Legion, commit hate crimes with the object of “eliminating all foreigners” from the United States. The protagonist is a hard-luck white American male, who becomes infuriated at what he perceives to be losing his job in favor of a lower-paid, more obedient Eastern European immigrant. He becomes entrenched within the Legion, tortures immigrants psychologically and destroys their property, and is ultimately involved in—and convicted for—a lynching. The Legion demands total loyalty, and second-guessing or pleas for mercy from the members are punished swiftly, and with brutal violence. That is ultimately their downfall when their line-holding makes it easier for the prosecutors to convict the entirety of the Legion’s membership for murder. This particular bit of fantasy is darkly amusing, as the Legion is a stand-in for the Klan, and the Klan was virtually un-prosecutable through the 1950s. Still, the censors insisted that the whole of the organization be held accountable, and the filmmakers complied. This detail does slightly damage the film’s seriousness, but more

¹⁸³ The film, which was made for a total cost of \$235,000, was inspired by the KKK, as well as an actual case involving an organization called The Black Legion in Michigan, the May 1935 murder of WPA worker Charles Poole.

importantly it emphasizes the pleasure the audience feels from witnessing the spectacle of defeat.¹⁸⁴ Joseph Breen informs Jack Warner that, in its initial stage, the film is completely unpassable from the Code standpoint. The film showed dishonest public officials, a rigged justice system, and no punishment for the offenders. Breen writes that all crooked public officials must be “punished by the processes of law” and drunkenness must be “entirely deleted”, as with the “brutalizing by the police.” Follows a list of deletions that numbers in three full pages.

In a letter from Mrs Alonzo Richardson to Joseph Breen on August 31st, 1937, she gave her thoughts about *They Won't Forget*:

You will be interested to know that we have succeeded in keeping THEY WON'T FORGET out of the state entirely. Written by an Atlanta man, recalling one of the darkest pages of the state history, capable of reviving conditions which would be ghastly in the tragedy of results; - exhibitors, newspapers, populace have joined us in asking that his thing not be done to our state. The common consent has been obtained, and we will not have the picture in the state. Nobody wants it! - not even the most morbidly curious.

Both of these films are discursively related not only to the abject positionality of the South and the whitewashing of anti-black racism, but also tapped in to a larger national conversation around southern populism during the 1930s. The case of Cole Blease and Olin D. Johnston is particularly instructive in this regard; *Fabric of Defeat* by Bryant Simon is a labor and political history of South Carolina from 1910 through 1948. Simon focuses on two political figures especially, Cole Blease and Olin D. Johnston, who represent the shifting political interests and fortunes of the mill workers. Blease

¹⁸⁴ Amusingly, the filmmakers were acutely aware of the way their story might be received in quarters where the Klan was not reviled. Robert Homans was at one time considered for the part of Mike Grogan, one of the protagonists. But, according to the AFI record, executive producer Hal B. Wallis had suggested Edward G. Robinson for the lead, but producer Robert Lord objected on the grounds that Robinson looked too "foreign." He felt they needed a "distinctly American looking actor to play this part."

was initially popular because he appealed to the authoritarian and patriarchal culture of the mill villages, and employed the usage of racist rhetoric that buttressed those beliefs. Conversely, Johnston, when running for governor, did not appeal to a politically charged idea about “tradition”, instead campaigning primarily on improving the economic and working conditions of millhands, as a Populist. Only in the aftermath of his disappointing and unproductive tenure as governor, when he runs for senate in 1944, does he begin to use extreme racist language that goes beyond even what the pro-lynching Blease would have typically invoked. The will of the mill workers shaped these shifts in a way that had a tangible, positive effect for them, but as the century wore on and national interests turned away from those of the worker, millhands found themselves politicians who gave them what increasingly became lip service, with little follow-through. Simon’s actors wield enormous electoral influence in the early twentieth century, and they vote with their class interests primarily. They were not anti-modernity, and they were never anti-racist. Simon recounts the failure of the popular mandate championed by Blease and Johnston, describing an inherent structural bias against workers at the state and federal level. Simon is especially critical of what he characterizes as the failure of FD Roosevelt’s millworker policies, and the lies of labor unions after the 1934 General Strike. The workers readily went from anti-statist to nearly socialist, and back again, although Simon notes that racist language was appealed to only when the entire national mood shift toward an anti-black fervor. Yeoman ideals were once again picked up by the 1940s, after massive nonfulfillment at the federal level, and a general disillusionment with consumerism.¹⁸⁵ The gruesome

“souvenir” photos of lynchings taking place at picnics were being circulated by the interwar era, and that macabre contrast of life and death, the casual relationship Southerners seemed to have with the taboo was truly horrific - recall Emily lying in bed next to her decaying beau. As Sabrina Boyer writes, the ultimate abjection is the corpse: “the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. ... It is no longer I who expel. It is expelled. This abjection of the corpse, defying the expulsion process, both fascinates and sickens.”¹⁸⁶

The relationship between black and white women as depicted in southern is largely demonstrative - the presence of blackness brings whiteness into stark contrast, in both complexion and implication. The dark exoticism associated with the Black handmaiden underlined the implied (virginal) virtue of the vastly more knowable White mistress.¹⁸⁷ But how does that relationship shift when two men are involved, rather than women? In the Southern, as generally in antebellum American culture, masculinity was contingent upon the notion of honor. In *Manliness and Civilization*, Gail Bederman describes the characteristics that defined masculinity in the turn-of-the-century United States - these are attributes we still readily recognize in our culture as manly, such as physical fitness, courageousness, sportsmanship, and an affinity for solitude. In

¹⁸⁶ Boyer, 23.

¹⁸⁷ Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

Blee estimates that around 32% of the female population in Indiana in 1920 were involved in the WKKK, demonstrating the scale and impact of the movement. In support of other revisionist claims, Blee writes how stereotypical depictions of Klan members as “ignorant, simplistic, brutal, and naïve—is historically and politically misleading” (10) and that far from being exceptional, beliefs of the Klan were “nested within the institutions and assumptions of ordinary life” of the majority population (11). Most importantly, Blee explains how, in order to attract such a large amount of support, activist groups often have a varied and even contradictory agenda.

contrast to this, Southern gentlemen during the Antebellum era defined their masculinity in terms of property (land, animals, and the enslaved) and family name. What is interesting about this dynamic is that hard work is not particularly emphasized. Indeed, having sufficient enslaved labor to complete all work - be it domestic, unskilled, or trade - was the ultimate demonstration of a man's capability as a provider. Indeed, the pseudosciences emerging in the 19th century even sought to medicalize this phenomena in a tradition dating back to Thomas Jefferson's tortured diaries - Black people were suited to hard work, were more physically fit and able, while White people were suited to supervising. Their burden was intellectual, as an orchestrator - deciding what to do with the raw power of the uncivilized races, to turn kinetic energy into profit. Why would a man be willing to concede his own fitness, to think himself incapable of doing his own work? The logic of Antebellum masculinity is as complex as it was short-lived, and understanding the reasoning behind this antiquated philosophy of gender is crucial to decoding the relationship between White and Black men onscreen:

At the same time, Ku-Klux performance expressed a new relationship to violence. Violence had always been constitutive of the Southern gentleman, but the war and white men's temporarily weakened grasp on the reins of mastery during the Reconstruction years made that violence stark and public. Ku-Klux performed violence to insist that it restored their mastery. Ku-Klux blended popular cultural tropes like minstrelsy and the carnivalesque with local traditions of violence and rituals of dominance to negotiate their new identities in relationship to freedpeople and to present their violence as constructive of a new and stable southern social order.¹⁸⁸

The enduring tragedy of American racial relations pervades the Southern gothic and race films, but it is largely absent from the better-remembered southern

filmography of history pictures and plantation films. *Within Our Gates* and *They Won't Forget* are not cultural touchstones like *Gone With the Wind* is, but the Emmett Till case and Ida B. Wells' lynching campaigns *are* remembered; if one learned about American history only from watching southern films, their impression of that history would exist totally outside of the common sense. So it is the interaction between popular culture and mass media with more traditional forms of knowledge transmission —books, newspapers, pamphlets and oral histories—that influenced the way Americans came to think about south during the interwar era. Gothicists and black filmmakers did not necessarily desire to vilify the South; instead, they were projecting their own image of the world, their singular lived experiences, through movie magic, that dark mirror of seemingly endless possibilities. To more fully understand the impulses motivating the creation of abject pictures, it is necessary to view them in conjunction with the more solidly pro-south films in this dichotomous genre. These history epics and plantation pictures were a product of the Lost Cause rhetoric that came to organize southern education during the first half of the 20th century. Lost Cause filmmakers participated in propaganda creation, rather than the generation of narratives that resonated with universal human themes and bravely probed ugliness. Lost Cause films are characterized by willful omissions, purposeful obfuscations, projection, and pre-emptive defensiveness. In short, they are the Confederate Catechism, projected twenty feet high.

Chapter IV

“White and black children played together:”

What the Southern Taught Americans About the South

The court of history admits only the same evidence as the courts of law. What a friend says in praise, or an enemy says in detraction has very little weight, unless supported by the record or other and disinterested evidence. The evidence freely admitted is the record and the confessions of the party under investigation and his friends, and the testimony of disinterested persons — all contemporary. It is on this kind of evidence that this Catechism is based. There has been no idle abuse or praise. The truth is everything.¹⁸⁹

Lyon Gardiner Tyler, the son of John Tyler, was an educational reformer and historian active at the College of William and Mary and several prominent private schools in Virginia during the latter half of the 19th century, and up until his 1935 death. Tyler was a rigorous historian, and was deeply serious about improving the education system in the South, which had deteriorated considerably after the Civil War. His reforms were austere in nature, and his primarily implemented measure which were both cost-cutting and credential-bolstering, by fostering relationships between the schools and prestigious southern social institutions. The money flowed in and, reciprocally, the “true and complete history of the Confederacy” flowed out of the classrooms and into society. Beyond his fundraising and reforming efforts, Tyler is perhaps best remembered for penning the Confederate Catechism and for his staunch anti-Lincoln criticism. While Tyler never explicitly defends slavery, in the Catechism—as well as in his many anti-Lincoln self-published pamphlets—he consistently minimizes the economic role of slaveholding in southern society, elides the centrality of the right

¹⁸⁹ Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *A Confederate Catechism*. From the enlarged edition, self-published in 1935 by Mrs. Lyon G. Tyler Holdcroft.

to own human being in the CSA Constitution, and engages in intellectually dishonest, bad-faith arguments about the nature of chattel slavery. But it is not his Dunning school racism that made Tyler an interesting figure; it was his promotion of the belief that southernness is distinct from and better than Americanness. The Lost Cause is a deeply flawed, ahistorical, racially regressive, and socio-politically reactionary theory of history that informed the curricula in southern classrooms for generations. The Lost Cause mythos imbued a southern teaching philosophy that not only applied to the teaching of history, but also influenced the way educators interacted with their students in classroom. Southern white students were seen as culture warriors—an ethic that held well into the latter half of the 20th century—and the fealty to their heritage that they recited in the Confederate Catechism explicitly set them apart as truth-tellers tasked with remaining vigilant in an unjust world. The structure of Tyler’s catechism was that of a “frequently asked questions” section, and it was easily memorizable to schoolchildren. The questions Tyler anticipated the Southerners having to answer is telling; about one-half of the 18 total answers discuss slavery, and in each he is sure to root the issue to original intent by invoking the constitution, and he often emphasizes that Lincoln was not always an ally to the abolition movement.

Was slavery the cause of secession or the war? No. Slavery existed previous to the Constitution, and the Union was formed in spite of it. Both from the standpoint of the Constitution and sound statesmanship it was not slavery, but the vindictive, intemperate anti-slavery movement that was at the bottom of all the troubles.” and “Did Lincoln carry on the war for the purpose of freeing the slaves? No; he frequently denied that that was his purpose in waging war. He claimed that he fought the South in order to preserve the Union. Before the war Lincoln declared himself in favor of the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, and he once figured as an attorney to drag back a runaway Negro into slavery. When he became President he professed himself in his Inaugural willing to support an amendment guaranteeing slavery in the States where it existed. Wendell

Phillips, the Abolitionist, called him a “slave hound.” Of course Lincoln’s proposed amendment, if it had any chance at all with the States, did not meet the question at issue. No one except the Abolitionists disputed the right of the Southern people to hold slaves in the States where it existed. And an amendment would not have been regarded by the Abolitionists, who spit upon the Constitution itself.

While the United Daughters of the Confederacy no longer holds sway over the local school boards that decide which textbooks are fit for their children, the impact of the Lost Cause has not been totally mitigated. Indeed, how can the myth of redemption be significantly challenged when the landscape of the United States is dotted with monuments honoring not only the veterans of the CSA, but also the founders of Ku Klux, and doctors like J. Marion Sims, who advanced their science by the mechanism of torturing black women. The suffering of black bodies, and the subsequent minimization of that suffering, came to the fore of 21st century American cultural discourse with the genesis of Black Lives Matter. The civil rights era and black power movement brought these same injustices into focus for a mid-20th century public. But for Americans during the interwar era, the erasure of blackness from the narratives of human sorrow—in World War I, or during the Great Depression—was near-total. The politics of respectability characterized much of the intragroup dialogue among black activists, and W. E. B. DuBois’ *truly* “true and complete history of the reconstruction era” went largely uncommented upon in the mainstream and was excluded as a secondary source by R&D departments. The implication that black history as told by black people is inherently untrue, or at least partially biased, is as clear in the wording of the questions plantation tour guides receive as it is in the words southerners wrote to movie studios when they took umbrage with some aspect of a movie.

One of the most striking examples of history being rewritten to fit the narrative white southern audiences felt was most fair and faithful to their history is *White Bondage*. The film, as toothless and apologetically political as it is, was seen as largely acceptable to the PCA. In 1936, Joseph Breen wrote to Bryan Foy % Jack Warner in regard to the film, which was a revisionist propaganda masquerading as an issue picture.¹⁹⁰ The framing of the film as a class-driven drama neglects to examine the impetus behind the release of the film, which was initially pitched as a way to foreground the apparent epidemic of white slaves. Indeed, the initial treatment had little to do with the particulars of sharecropping, and instead called for audiences to ponder the visceral reactions images of white women enchained stirred within them. The censor board, ever attuned to any tacit references to sexuality, was disturbed by the treatment, and called upon Warner Brothers to commission a re-write.¹⁹¹ And re-written it was, with a story more issue-forward than before, wherein the poor, illiterate, ignorant and easily radicalized white sharecroppers are cast as the heroes against yankee—or simply jumped up—company men.

This is, of course, a simple southern story of good versus evil, which by 1936 was no longer compelling enough to draw in audiences. So the re-write made up for

¹⁹⁰ “White slavery narratives—stories about women forced into prostitution—circulated in many formats. From 1905 to 1910, newspapers and popular magazines frequently published accounts of white slavery.¹ At the height of the agitation against white slavery from 1909 to 1910, at least eight books were published on the subject. Some recounted a single story about the plight of a white slave, while others contained several stories detailing the fate of different women abducted into prostitution. Many books about white slavery included essays from physicians, religious leaders, missionaries, and moral crusaders emphasizing different aspects of the problem. Some were explicitly fictional, but most books about white slavery claimed to have a factual basis.” (17)

Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917*. University of Illinois Press. (2006)

¹⁹¹

with violence what they lacked in sexuality, and three scenes of lynching were proposed. Breen was horrified by these inclusions, writing that, “any prolonged or brutal whipping will have to be considered in violation of the Code and would certainly not be allowed by official censor boards.” As per usual, he offered some advice as to how the scene should be played out, with “the whipping of Zach by Kip [...] portrayed indirectly and by suggestion.” Twice more, Breen took issue with lynching-related violence, demanding the omission of the lines, “get the rope,” and “let’s swing him,” which were, he assured Warner, were going to be deleted by censor boards upon submission. The very showing of the fastening of the noose around a neck was considered so thoroughly objectionable that it should be committed totally offscreen.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Warner Bros. Archive, University of Southern California. Folder heading: LORDS OF THE LAND - STORY MEMOS + SCHEDULE Number: 2034 B. Letter from Joseph I. Breen to Mr J. L. Warner, Warner Brothers, Burbank Calif. Date: Oct. 23, 1936. [“Bryan Foy” handwritten on copy]

“Dear Mr. Warner, We have received and read your final script entitled LORDS OF THE LAND, dated Oct. 21, 1936, and are glad to say that the basic story seems to us to be acceptable from the standpoint of the Code and of censorship. May we call your attention to the following details: Page 36 [38?]: The whipping of Zach by Kip should be portrayed indirectly and by suggestion. Any prolonged or brutal whipping will have to be considered in violation of the Code and would certainly not be allowed by official censor boards.

Page 51: The repeated exclamations “Fire! Fire”! should be omitted, for obvious reasons.

Page 89: The word “damnedest” in Lon’s speech should be omitted.

Page 109 to 111: In the Sequence showing the attempted lynching of Dave, the cries of “let’s swing him” and “get the rope” should be eliminated. In addition, such details as the actual dropping of the noose over Dave’s head and fastening it around his neck should not be shown. Political censor boards will delete such material.

Cordially yours,
Joseph I. Breen”

See bibliography for notes.

In the end, what was left after these omissions was a morality play so limited in its emotional scope that the posters for the film were the only retentions of the movie's original story.

While all this is mildly interesting from an historical perspective, it is not particularly noteworthy with regard to revisionist history. Until, that is, the lawsuit against the second treatment of the film is put into context. *White Bondage* is adapted from Coldeway's *Lords of the Land*, a short story that evinces little sympathy for the landed, or decorous concern for the constitutions of its readers. When Breen rejected the more faithful adaption, screenwriters appeared to turn to another source, *The Trials of Black and Tan*. In a lawsuit threatened against Warner Brothers studios by Herbert Skinner, Skinner's lawyer Norman A. Obrand, claims that Warner Brothers appropriated *The Trials of Black and Tan* from him, thieving key components of the story and amalgamating them with what remained of the initial *Lords of the Land* adaption. One of the lawyers retained by Warner Brothers, R. J. Obringer, responded with threats of a countersuit, explaining that their second treatment was purchased lawfully from the

copy-written literary property, “the Cabin in the Cotton,” by Harry Harrison Kroll.¹⁹³

Obrand was not satisfied by this brief explanation, and on March 16th, 1939, he demanded that Warner Brothers allow him and Skinner to view *White Bondage* before its release, as to “avoid litigation.” His request was ignored, and it appears that the suit

¹⁹³ Folder heading: LORDS OF THE LAND - STORY FILE (WHITE BONDAGE)
Number: 2882B Letter from R. J. Obringer to Norman A. Obrand, Date: March 16, 1939.

Norman A. Obrand, Suite 720 Washington Bldg., Spring Street at Third,
Los Angeles.

Dear Sir:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of March 6, 1939, wherein you advise that you have been retained by Mr. Herbert Skinner to prosecute a claim against this company and others for alleged appropriation of his story entitled “Trials of Black and Tan”; and that you have been advised by Mr. Skinner that our photoplay “White Bondage” closely resembles the outline of his aforementioned story.

Please be advised that the scenario used by us for our picture “White Bondage” was suggested to the scenario writers thereof, who were employed by us, from the copyrighted literary property entitled “The Cabin in the Cotton” written by Harry Harrison Kroll, published by Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, Inc., Publishing Company, and purchased by us in 1931. No part of the story “Trials of Black and Tan”, alleged to have been written by your client, Mr Herbert Skinner, is contained in our picture “White Bondage”, not was Mr. Skinner’s story ever used or referred to by our own writers in connection with the development of the story upon which our photoplay was based.

Therefore, we must necessarily deny and and [sic] liability and claims which have been or may be asserted by Mr. Skinner.

Yours Very Truly,

R. J. Obringer

See bibliography for notes.

was never filed.¹⁹⁴ What is interesting here is the actual content of *The Trials of Black and Tan* when viewed in connection with *Lords of the Land* and the final product, *White Bondage*. Coldeway was interested in both mimicking investigative journalism, a-la Upton Sinclair, and in crafting a Hollywood-ready narrative populated by good and bad and beautiful and hideous characters, all playing their respective parts. *Lords of the Land* does little to romanticize the illiterate sharecroppers the protagonist, a federal agent, encounters during his undercover operation to expose corruption among planters. These men and women are poor white trash, ignorant and unwashed, no better than the black folks they live amongst, in true southern gothic fashion. There are gruesome sequences of lynching and whippings, of rape and bondage, more akin to a pulp novel than Sinclair's similarly corruption-exposing *Oil!* Warner Brothers handpicked these moments of blood/lust for the screen, choosing to sensationalize the

¹⁹⁴ Folder heading: LORDS OF THE LAND - STORY FILE (WHITE BONDAGE)
Number: 2882B Letter from the law offices of: Norman A. Obrand, Suite 720
Washington Bldg., Spring Street at Third, Los Angeles. Date: March 16, 1939.

Warner Brothers' Pictures, Inc. 4000 S. Olive Avenue, Burbank, California
Gentlemen:

No reply having been received to my letter of March 6 in connection with the claim of Herbert Skinner that his original story, Trial of Black and Tan, was appropriated by your organization, I can only assume that you deemed it of insufficient importance to merit a reply.

However, yielding to a natural desire to avoid litigation wherever possible, I am again repeating the requesting made in my above mentioned letter for an opportunity to view your motion picture, White Bondage. Failing to hear from you within five days, I shall take such steps as I deem necessary to protect the interests of my client.

Yours very truly,
Norman A. Obrand

See bibliography for notes.

very real injustices sharecroppers faced at the expense of their story being taken seriously. When faced with the ultimatum to clean up the picture or abandon it, they undoubtedly struggled to piece together a story that would hold the audience's interest without provoking the censors, and vice versa. Perhaps this is why they turned to *The Trials of Black and Tan*, a tale as revisionist as Coldeway's was gothic. In *Trials*, it is the white sharecroppers who bear the brunt of the inequities of the planters while black folks are either totally oblivious to their situation, or actively participating in their own subjugation, due to their race-hatred of whites, putting their thirst for vengeance above their own well-being. Meanwhile, white men and women are being subjected to the tyranny of their betters, and the suggestion that they need their own redeemers, their own Ku Klux, is barely veiled. Yet they are alone, totally abandoned by an unfeeling and disinterested federal government that uses their severely underpaid labor mine the raw resources needed to build a nation that was rapidly leaving them behind.

The parallels are perhaps even too obvious to be stated. Yet rather than allow those allusions to inform the film, director Nick Grinde chose to expropriate this narrative so intertwined with blackness, and transpose it onto a story more about class than race. In the end, audiences were treated to a dull, paint-by-numbers movie with tone so uproariously preachy that it was immediately panned by critics as an underformed entry into the annals of southern issue pictures.¹⁹⁵ What the audience learned from this film, then was that in the South the white people were the ones who were oppressed, lynched, tortured, raped, and driven into wage slavery. The story of defeat and victimization continues on its path treading a double-edged sword, wherein the

heroes are utterly unheroic in any qualities beyond their color, and their primitivism¹⁹⁶ signals both a wholesomeness missing from the national discourse around industrialization and a grave reminder of the perils of sloth and ignorance to a nation deeply mired in a financial crisis caused by the speculation of the rich, and blamed on the idleness and witlessness of the poor, who overfilled un-fertile soil and reaped whirlwinds of starvation for their hubris. The final poster for *White Bondage* encapsulates this complexity with a single tag line: “PRIMITIVE her life! But GLORIOUS her love!”

Through films like *White Bondage*, audiences learned that southern sharecroppers were exploited and destitute, yes, but more importantly they came away with the impression that the working poor in the South were pitiful and helpless; an understanding that was consistent with the way the problem south was framed discursively.¹⁹⁷ In addition to the erasure of the agency of the sharecroppers and industrial workers of the new south, the promotion of yankee-savior tropes worked hand-in-hand with white-savior fantasies. Hollywood was interested in portraying the worker-as-hero, and many directors did not shy away from issue pictures, as we have seen. The implication that southerners were capable of organizing for themselves, interracially and on a massive scale, was discomfortingly loaded. But the reality of the situation for labor activists in the South is more dramatic than any film of the time depicted; and for good reason, because the most significant organizing was collectivist. The Communist Party (CP) easily took hold in Alabama, where the Sharecroppers Union had 12000 members in the black belt, at its peak, and the Labor

Defense League had 2000. While the CP itself only registered 700 members on its rosters during its most active period in the area, there were many related auxiliary organizations for communists, such as the Southern Negro Youth Congress; if you calculate the numbers taking into account these groups, then the Communist Party was a part of 20,000 black lives; the CP provided poor black workers a more politically available outlet that produced greater positive effects for the local community than the more elitist NAACP did, up through the second World War.¹⁹⁸ Black women had opportunities to rise through the ranks of the CP, which they were not able to do with white-led pro-women movements, such as those organized in the mill villages.¹⁹⁹ After 1935, the CP made claims for legitimacy, building its platform on the fight against poverty and an appeal to basic civil rights; in contrast, the NAACP at the time was a black middle class venture that was primarily a pro-small business organization. The local CP formed a social net in the community; they "maintained invisibility but were very present on behalf of the working class"; a relatively low profile remained important even after 1935, as the majority of white Alabamians opposed Communism, "read[ing] into basic struggles for social justice a threat to the edifice of Southern civilization."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

The CP branch in Alabama was founded in 1928 when Moscow sent two organizers to Birmingham, which was the most industrialized city in the South. The party was unable to evoke the interest of local whites, but black workers were eager to hear the party line, believing that "the yankees have come to finish the fight". From 1930, up through 1935, the CP was a deeply underground group, which "took advantage of the invisibility of black people to function".

¹⁹⁹ Black female communist labor activists met as part of "sewing clubs" and became as powerful as main branch offices in membership and advocacy work.

²⁰⁰ Kelley, 99

While the CP grew very popular with poor black communities, it proved ultimately unable to thrive in the oppressively racist society, especially without the economic and mobilization support of black elites.

In the South, there is a unique horror in landless poverty. While the yeoman farmer would rarely find himself with any disposable income left after tending to the needs of his family, he retained his honor as a man through his ties to the land he owned. As the impoverished classes in the South grew during the early 20th century, however, families of 'dirt-eaters' found no way to subsist on the land, either in deed or in their bellies. As the land no longer provided for them, poor men and women increasingly turned to the factories of the New south, pouring their labor into the very mills²⁰¹ that dumped toxicity into the water and made the earth they might have worked sour. These factories were little better than those which caught fire and employed children in the 19th century industrial north, transforming body-work into anonymous product. The commercial revolution of the Progressive Era imposed ever-stricter time-work discipline onto the malnutrition bodies of the Southern underclass, and the voracious mill bosses assured that the little leisure time left over was spent within the walls of the company town, at the company store or nickelodeon. The very idea of appointed leisure time was novel to most southerners, having come from a thoroughly agrarian culture, and this too was turned to the advantage of the industrialist, rather than the worker. The tenant farmer fared no better than the mill worker, economically, but true to southern tradition, the spirit of Jeffersonian democracy imbued them with a will to resist. And resist they did, unionizing themselves while cotton mill workers

remained firmly under the thumbs of their employers. But the fierce independence of the yeomanry was not a popular or prominent theme in the Southern genre; instead, that fiery demeanor was explored through the lens of the plantation film, where the passions of the planters were coded as evidence of way the South could never rise again. The plantation epics *Jezebel*, *So Red the Rose*, and *Gone With the Wind* are instructive case studies that demonstrate the way this sleight of discursive projection unfolded onscreen.

The contours of *Gone With the Wind* are familiar to most. It is a story with a strong sense of temporality, and the narrative is imbued with a distinct melancholy, nostalgia mixed with resentment birthing pity, anger, and pride. Yet this film marks the beginning of the end of the Southern genre because the most compelling aspects of the story are not particular to the Southernness of the narrative, but are instead the more universal arc of a bildungsroman shot through with a star-crossed romance. That isn't to say that the power of *Gone* is totally unrelated to its setting, because a heroine like O'Hara could only be, culturally, a product of the South. She is an aristocrat, spoiled and pampered to the point of learned helplessness; she is, concurrently, temperamentally volatile, and her absentee parents are exceedingly permissive of her precocious behavior. While a pioneer woman could be cast as an independent type, the aristocracy component would have to be omitted. Likewise, if a northern heiress was cast, her type was associated with decorum and a preoccupation with her legacy as a philanthropist. But a planter like O'Hara could be selfish, innately, and indeed by the very nature of her occupation, she was necessarily solipsistic; the white supremacist superstructure of the antebellum era took equally from racial science and

pro-slavery biblical interpretations. O'Hara felt ordained by god for her lot in life, and the implication is that by her very singular biology²⁰² she is set apart from the black bodies that surround and serve her.²⁰³ The development and production of *Gone* is unique; although *So Red the Rose* and *Jezebel* are also adaptations—as, we have seen, most southerners are—Margaret Mitchell's source material was an immediate bestseller that evolved into a cultural moment.

Mitchell approached the writing of her novel with an historian's curiosity about the details of the past, and a southern historian's particular defensiveness. Like Griffith, Mitchell felt strongly about the rightness of the *ancien regime* of the Old South, and she similarly implicitly defended that view by relying upon fear and untruths about the actions of freedmen and the Union. The novel is exceedingly violent; Mitchell wrote with a desire to communicate the viscerality of the conflict and O'Hara's struggle for survival. O'Hara is repeatedly sexually assaulted and bodily attacked, which is described in perhaps unnecessary detail—*Gone With the Wind* is characterized,

²⁰² O'Hara's tiny frame was a preoccupation for her creator, Margaret Mitchell, who wrote her protagonist the perfect product of good breeding and genteel manners. O'Hara is vain and deprives her body what she does not deprive her mind—she is quick-tempered and witted, if not especially intelligent, and her will to not eat, which is repeatedly emphasized, foreshadows her hardiness during the war. Thinness, for Mitchell, and increasingly in the cultural discourse of the United States, took in for discipline and grace. Famously, O'Hara's waist is a mere seventeen inches in the book; Vivian Leigh attempted to match that, but plateaued at 24.5". Mitchell was reticent about Leigh's casting, and declined to comment at length during her lifetime, but when she did comment, it was about Leigh's prepossessing good looks which were, to Mitchell, a fine example of Irish-Southern aristocratic femininity.

²⁰³ Hattie McDaniel, who famously played Mammy, stood in absolutely physical contrast to Vivian Leigh. Mammy is O'Hara's character foil at every turn in the film, as in the novel. She has no life of her own, no purpose beyond her service to the O'Hara family, and is cast as a properly servile type, in contrast to the "free niggers" who attack O'Hara. Her purpose in the film is to highlight and enhance the white characters, and her sassy-but-sweet demeanor became a cultural touchstone for the white audiences who adored—and rewarded—her portrayal. The black community's reception to Mammy was much less warm, because she reinforced the very worst misconceptions and lies about antebellum slavery, and to an extent white supremacists were disgusted by her presence. But for most, she was unremarkably remarkable, as much a mainstay of the plantation as mint juleps.

largely, but a proliferation of unnecessary detail, which accounts for the bloated size of the novel. Like Griffith, she casts the Klan as heroes for lynching the black men who attack her. But, more interestingly, Mitchell calls upon the admixture of anxiety and desire around blackness and sexuality by implying that Rhett is a mulatto, and O'Hara's hot-blooded desire for him is both monstrously unnatural (hence the violent nature of their intercourse) and situationally acceptable, because O'Hara is southern, and Rhett is beautiful, passionate, intemperate, and cannot help his nature. So Mitchell was operating from a slightly different, if related set of assumptions upon setting out to write the novel. In 1934, she wrote to Wilbur G. Kurtz, commonly cited by Atlanta residents as the foremost expert on the Atlanta Campaign and the city during Reconstruction, asking him to review her work on *Gone With the Wind*. From the start, historical accuracy—of a sort—was also an obsession of the producers who would buy the rights to her book in 1936. It is useful to examine the correspondences from all parties, because when taken as a whole, the record reveals that Mitchell and the Hollywood executives, as well as the lay sources they cited, were all operating from a very similar set of assumptions about the antebellum and reconstruction that align with the common sense of the time, as circulated by the Dunning school and two decades of southern films.

Gone With the Wind was special to southerners almost immediately upon its release, and it was especially resonant with southern white women. In a 1936 letter to David O. Selznick, the Atlanta chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy wrote: “[*Gone With the Wind*] is unique - Atlanta was unique at the period depicted in the book, and if this is brought out in the picture, instead of having “just another” war

picture like *So Red the Rose*²⁰⁴, you will have something that will go over big, just as the book has.” Because *Gone* and O’Hara were so special, there was a not-insignificant general nervousness among southern white women about if her singular character would shine through on film, or if she would be relegated to yet another hot-headed belle role. UDC representative Katharine Brown wrote to Kurtz on March 17th, 1938, “I am very anxious to know what Atlanta thinks of *Jezebel* and if the fact that this has a Southern background will take the edge off *Gone*. My feeling is that *Jezebel* has always been a phoney play with little reality and that it will in no way affect *Gone*.”²⁰⁵ Kurtz replies to her some months later, and expresses the opinion that he does not consider *Jezebel* a threat to *Gone* at all. He characterizes *Jezebel* as trite, and highlights that its story is completely dissimilar to *Gone*. The most notable difference, he argues, is that the element of the “epic” that is missing from *Jezebel*. He argues that *Jezebel* is still a drama about a little love triangle and a spoiled young woman, despite the dramatic backdrop of the yellow fever pandemic, while *Gone*’s backdrop of the Atlanta Campaign and Reconstruction favorably situates Scarlett’s human dramas, dwarfing her pettiness and amplifying her struggle. He also makes the point that technicolor will undoubtedly give *Gone* its edge, by noting that the impact of *Jezebel*’s infamous red dress is lessened by its black and white presentation.²⁰⁶

A Ms. Lucille Pratt of Atlanta wrote to Kurtz with the hope that the actors would not attempt to mime a southern accent; her request was concurred with by the UDC

²⁰⁴ More on *So Red the Rose* later in this chapter.

²⁰⁵ Herrick f.11

See bibliography for notes.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

and countless other individuals and groups, as later recounted in R&D material by Mitchell and Kurtz.²⁰⁷ In this same record, we see that the aesthetics begin to verify; Kurtz goes on at length about what slaves, especially mammys, wore, as informed by his own experiences as a southern man and a “child of the late ‘70s”. “I cannot speak with any absolute authority on dress, as I have not done any deep research on the subject - I can only tell what I recall as of my childhood in the ‘90s, when many of the old slaves still lived and served in one capacity or another.”²⁰⁸ Some first-person oral histories were also conducted. Will Hill, a “negro so old” he refused to say his age, was characterized by Kurtz as “his intelligence is greatly above that of the average negro.” He recalled how barbecue pits were constructed in the ‘70s, and what the atmosphere was like at a large outdoor party on a plantation. Kurtz also relates that “White and black children played together” at these parties, because most of the white children had a black “play child” companion from whom they were inseparable—we can see these ideas reflected in the cinematic language of the South, too, in films like *Topsy & Eva* and *The Little Colonel*. At one point, Kurtz describes slavery as a “a social system, feudal in its magnificence.”²⁰⁹ Here we can begin to understand how a film as content-rich as *Gone*, and as ultimately inaccurate and unfair, can be remembered so fondly by almost everyone who sees it: rather than being confrontational like most southerns this dissertation has described, *Gone* revels in sentiment not unlike that of *The Little Colonel*, if in a far more technically and narratively sophisticated manner.

²⁰⁷ Wibur G. Kurtz collection, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. Correspondence, f.23

See bibliography for notes.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Correspondence, f.28

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Correspondence, f.29

Speaking of magnificence, in a memo from Kurtz and Myrick to Selznick dated May 24th, 1939, re: “Scarlett shoes the horse and the paddock scene”, the former write that, “the spectacle of Scarlett O’Hara shoeing a horse, is in our opinion, a little on the grotesque side. Southern women, gently born and reared, met and overcame multiplied hardships after the war-period, but it isn’t likely any of them essayed any such masculine feats as shoeing a horse. Merely knowing how to drive a nail is a very small item in this task - and we all know the reputation Victorian ladies had for not knowing even how to drive a nail.” Kurtz and Myrick elaborate by providing supporting evidence from a contemporary writer: “Thomas Nelson Page’s stories of Southern girls faced with hardships during the reconstruction period, indicate that riding mule-back to and from school-teaching, with luncheon in a paper bag, was, for them, the depths of adversity.” Here we see the contours of misogyny informing the opinions of an exceedingly receptive audience; just as with Julie in *Jezebel* or Valette in *So Red the Rose*, Scarlett should be more independent-minded than the average woman, she must absolutely not be white trash—especially for Mitchell, who like Steinbeck was hands-off during the adaptation process, except when it came to her insistence that the basic characteristics of O’Hara remain unchanged. Kurtz goes on to advise a more acceptable change in scene that *realistically* relates the girl’s hardiness. He suggests she be pictured washing clothes, or hanging them, or “making soap over a great, black cast-iron pot.” He also disdained some of the more precious censor additions: “Scarlett actually said, “Free niggers” she, likely enough, did not call them slaves. The use of the latter word was confined largely to the Abolitionists in the North. She

could have said - “The Yankees and the freedmen and the carpetbaggers” but being Scarlett O’Hara she probably said “negroes.”²¹⁰

In a letter from Mitchell to the UDC’s Miss Brown, 6 October 1936, she suggests Kurtz as technical advisor, complaining about selling the movie rights to non-southern studio executives. “Lamar Trotti is an Atlantan, you see, knows the section and has made a deep study of this period. Everyone feels that he wouldn’t let a character say “you all” while addressing one person. (This one thing, I may add, so incenses Southerners that they want to secede from the Union every time they hear it in a movie.)”²¹¹ Following up, in a letter from Mitchell to Selznick on 30 January 1939, Mitchell writes that she does not necessarily think it is a good idea for Leigh to project a southern accent. “This is partly because Southerners have been made sensitive by the bogus Southern talk they have heard on stage and on screen so often. But it is also due to the fact that there is no one “Southern accent”. There are at least five different Southern accents in different sections of Georgia alone, and Georgians talk differently from other Southerners.”²¹² Mitchell does not name names, but a letter from Mrs Alonzo Richardson, of the City of Atlanta Board of Review, addressed to the Colonel Joy of the Code authority about the 1929 plantation film *River of Romance* immediately comes to my mind:

²¹⁰ Wibur G. Kurtz collection, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. Correspondence, f.30, begins “Scene 467 - Page 165B - 5th line from the bottom.”

See bibliography for notes.

²¹¹ Ibid., Correspondence, f.30

²¹² Rudy Behlmer papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. f.103

See bibliography for notes.

We have this week THE RIVER OF ROMANCE, a very lovely little picture, but in which there is an offense to southerners. A visit from the UDCs is the cause of the complaint. In the picture the only ones who speak correct English are HENRY WATHALL AND BUDDY ROGERS, both of whom say repeatedly they were "educated in Pennsylvania." The Southerner, Col. Patterson who aspires to the hand of a girl is uncouth, uneducated, talks like a negro, yet he is portrayed as typical. A southern gentleman.

Actually, one who had no more refinement[,] no more education [sic] or culture [sic] that [sic] this man[,] would not have [sic] been found in a typical southern home. We do not talk like negroes, we do not drop our gs, ds, and ts, at the end of our sentences, We [sic] do not say "ah" for "I" as Mart Pickford does in COQUETTE, in fact we feel that when the Industry wishes to portray the South, especially now that we have the talkies, that the true southern accent is as refined as any educated northerner speaks, and that the real southerner speaks more softly it is true, but quite as correctly as his northern brother (or sister).

Of course we are all ho[t] headed, proud to the point of amusement to some, but we are cultured and we are educated, and we do speak correctly. Now all this may be wide of the mark as you see it, but it is no laughing matter in the office this morning when dear UDCs march in (and out).

I am not in very good standing anyhow, tho the daughter of a confederate captain I have [sic] never been taught the bitterness, and I always refuse to fight the civil war over. The perspective of years is good for ones soul, and I am grateful to a dear father who began right, by teaching his children that we were "one nation indivisible" but as southerners we do plead for "justice for all" and WE DO NOT TALK LIKE NEGROES.

The request comes from the South, if we are to have southern talkies let them be truly artistic in that they represent the Southern gentlemen and ladies (when the script calls for such) as they really are. Let the representation be true to type. Put real southerners on the screen."

Surprisingly, Mr Richardson also wrote a letter, saying much the same thing. He added: "Of course this is offensive and I knew when I saw the picture Monday that I would hear from it, for no less than in the antebellum days is the pride in the Southland and her people. We are cultured, and refined and to hear ourselves on the screen talk

like the negroes is a thing we will all resent for all time." Jason Joy replied to Mr and Mrs Richardson on August 17th 1929 with the following: "I can readily appreciate everything you say about these two pictures and their nonSouthern pronunciation. I have taken the liberty of reading your letter before the members of our Studio Relations Committee, all of whom expressed a great deal of interest. I am sure that in the future every studio will do its utmost to characterize Southern people and their habits exactly as they are."²¹³

Kurtz also worked on script for a short film treatment entitled "The Old South," and this document highlights his particular fascinations with the particulars of antebellum culture, and how incidentally he excuses and explains slavery as a "necessary economic structure" that has little to do with either white supremacy or black inferiority; this distancing of slavery from the lived, human experiences of slaves to a more abstract notion of a type of labor little different from serfdom reflects the confederate catechismal party line.²¹⁴ The document begins with a long monologue about "King Cotton" and how it "mothered and fathered the old, old South." There is a bizarre scene that takes place in a slave cabin: "Pappy: Great day in the mawning. If we could grow this cotton without the seeds, we sho' would be rich ... uh-huh!" 20 year old boy: "Yas, suh, pappy, and if we could grow watermelons without seeds, I sho' would be happy!" This illustrates many things, but perhaps most critically it exposes the willful, fundamental misunderstanding and denial about slavery as literally unpaid slave labor, a misconception that is not foreign to the United States of the 20th century,

²¹⁴ Kurtz Collection: "The Old South" Script, f.40

either.²¹⁵ Unless Pappy is bemoaning the inability of his masters to make more money for themselves, apart from his own situation - which is unlikely, even in the often-trite narrative shorthand of 1930's Hollywood - then Pappy is suggesting that he profits from his and his family's own labor. This helps explain why there was consistently and persistently little to no sympathy for slaves in Hollywood at the time. Slavery, as it existed in the U.S. south, was simply a benevolent institution with benefits in relation to the fitness of its inhabitants. This institution, then, was not unlike the relationship between a child and a parent who has offered to them a small weekly allowance of "personal money" in favor for chores and good behavior. This mischaracterization is the ultimate parody of the slavery paternalism myth, and it is, in essence, the ethos of the Lost Cause boiled down to two lines of dialogue: "There come to the South an era of wondrous beauty... of moonlight and magnolias and mint juleps ... an era of chivalry and true hospitality ... a gallant race of Devil-may-care cavaliers and their lovely ladies faire."

The general ugliness of the treatment of O'Hara in the book did not go unnoticed by the censors, or the studio executives, who were very much more interested in lovely ladies faire than war orphans shoeing horses. The scenes dealing with Rhett and Belle's affair, and Scarlett's rape by Rhett, were initially considered

²¹⁵ Margaret Biser, "I used to lead tours at a plantation. You won't believe the questions I got about slavery." vox.com (2017).

"I'd often meet visitors who had earnest but deep misunderstandings about the nature of American slavery. These folks were usually, but not always, a little older, and almost invariably white. I was often asked if the slaves there got paid, or (less often) whether they had signed up to work there."

much too base to depict. There were seven full pages of initial eliminations²¹⁶, mostly having to do with, “character and behavior unbecoming to a lady and gentleman” and the repeated use of the words “god” and “lord” and “hell” and “damn”. At the end of the very first Code letter, Breen congratulates the first draft of the script as being a “magnificent job” in adapting the novel, and he closes the letter with an altogether uncharacteristic “more power to you!”²¹⁷ Unfortunately for MGM, Selznick’s screenwriters took the praise perhaps too literally, and their more explicit and altogether liberal second draft was altogether failed. Breen draws the attention of screenwriter Val Lewton to:

[T]hat portion of the Production Code, which deals with “the sacred intimacies of private life — either before marriage ... or after marriage [...] Please note the statement in the Code, referring to married love, that “the passion arising from this love is not the proper subject for plots”, and that the presentation on the screen of the sexual relationship of the married life “must not excite sexual relations, mental or physical”, and that the details of such material association are “outside the limits of safe presentation.

Breen also pushes for the removal of the madame character Belle, or the complete overhaul of her character. Breen was not, notably, concerned with the depiction of black aggression in the film, although there is evidence that he was repeatedly made aware of the injustice of Mitchell’s depictions of freedmen in her

²¹⁶ Most interesting is the deletion commentary for scenes 501, 502, 503: These scenes cannot be approved, as written, and should either be definitely changed, or omitted. We cannot approve the suggestion that Scarlett goes to Rhett and offers him her body. As suggested to you in our letter of October 14, 1937, it might be that you could save this scene, if Scarlett were to offer herself in marriage. It is quite definitely not acceptable that she offers her body in return for the three hundred dollars.

Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. *Gone With the Wind*.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

novel. For example, on a letter from Minnie Johnson and Arthur Waller of the Neighborhood Councils of Washington, DC to Will Hays on May 12th, 1939:

“Motion pictures form such a large part of our recreation and education, that it is essential to have them foster face tolerance and good citizenship. Unless the film, *Gone With The Wind*, is portrayed with this in mind, we fear that it will create race antagonism, race prejudice, and great humiliation to a minority group struggling to reach the high levels of democracy. Offensive words, statements, and scenes, such as the attack on Scarlett O’Hara when she was driving home from the mill, can be vicious propaganda. The story fails to show repentance for selling human beings as cattle, nor for poor food, clothing, and shelter given them during their many years of slavery. You will be doing this country a great service if you refrain from magnifying the worst actions and minimizing the best of faithfulness and devotion and self-sacrifice rendered by this unfortunate group.”

They write twice, wanting to know if the mill scenes showing Scarlett’s attack and the general laziness of freedmen will be deleted. They never received a reply. On the other hand, the Department of Ohio, Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War sent a letter²¹⁸ to Hays, saying they are protesting (boycotting) the film, due to a scene in which Scarlett kills a Union soldier who is acting poorly. They echoed a reply and the scene was cut / the uniform changed as to not suggest a Grand Army of the Republic. It is stated on the R&D *Analysis Chart* for the film that Scarlett is, at times, “unsympathetic”, while Rhett is never “unsympathetic”. The ordeal of balancing O’Hara’s framing to strike the sweet spot between *overly precious* and *bitch* was a delicate operation, mirroring the drama over how to characterize the confederacy and old south, as a whole.

The cultural discourse around *Gone* was not limited to southern defense and black criticism allied with a few union re-enactors. There was considerably more

²¹⁸ Dated July 20th, 1930

backlash before the film's release than after it. Much of this is explained by the cultural shift toward the war effort, and voices that were publicly critical of American culture or society were subject to scrutiny and possible persecution in this atmosphere of extreme jingoism. For example, a *Daily Variety* piece ran detailing how one Howard Rushmore, motion picture reviewer of *The Daily Worker*, "was out of a job yesterday because he refused to mould his criticism of *Gone With the Wind* to fit snugly on the Communist party line. Mr. Rushmore said he has been ordered by the Communist daily's editorial board to "blister" the film. When he viewed it recently, however, he was surprised to find it not so bad as *The Daily Worker* had described it in advance denunciations." Rushmore apparently wrote that the film was a "technical achievement" but a "dramatic bore". According the to *New York Times*, "the editorial board, and particularly Ben Davis, its Negro member, said Rushmore, directed him to re-write his review, turning it into a 100 per cent attack, and to call on the readers to boycott the 4,000,000\$ movie." Rushmore, it turned out, was a self-proclaimed "10th generation American" and a southerner who, although "not anti-Negro" found the direction to unequivocally criticize the film unconscionable. Rushmore says he left the Communist party after the incident.²¹⁹ This reaction, seemingly lifted directly from a draft for Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, is characteristic of the oft-conditional white southern ally-ship that was tested time and again by southern genre films; would a "not anti-Negro" southerner go out of his way to criticize the inaccurate depiction of the Klan during reconstruction? Would he write in to demand the nadir or racial relations in the United States not be called the Redemption Era? The evidence for these kinds of

²¹⁹ *New York Times*, February 1939

interactions is, unfortunately, very limited, but the absence of this kind of support provides good insight into how sensitive the topic of slavery and reconstruction was up until the Second World War.

Finally, although Rushmore's case is fairly typical of the contemporary criticism of *Gone* outside of black activism, but despite the general sense of wonder at the film, and affection for the fierce heroine Scarlett—an antebellum Rosie the Riveter—the studio kept on the defense, ready to provide evidence for the realism of the film specifically on the subject of slavery. This mirrors Lyon Tyler's catechism structure, and the *heritage, not hate* refrain of the Lost Causers. The supplementary document in the MGM production files entitled "Notes on GONE WITH THE WIND" lobbies for *Birth*-esque explanatory dialogue explaining that northerners used no slaves purely because there was no urgent necessity for them, and due because of any moral constraints:

The South, now provided with a rapid and economical method for the removal of seeds from the cotton, went into the cotton raising business on a vast scale. To meet the demand for labor, the slave traders re-opened slave-trade and imported thousands upon thousands of slaves from the African jungles. The African slave-trade had been stopped by the British Empire at about the beginning of the nineteenth century, so all shipments of slaves from the African coast for the West Indies or the United States were of the nature of running a blockade. The story of these bootlegged slave ships is as sordid and tragic a story as one could find in the annals of all history. Great slave markets were established at all the principle southern cities. It should be pointed out that the reason the institution of slavery was largely confined to the Southern states was because slavery was more in demand in lands where cotton and tobacco could be raised rather than in the northern states, particularly New England, where climatic conditions were not propitious to a large agrarian industry.

The rhetorical gymnastics performed on behalf of the peculiar institution are so couched in historical color that it is difficult to parse the meaning. But just as with *Birth*'s explanatory title-cards, the purpose here is clear: to excuse the actions of white

persons by burying the suffering of black persons under countless opaque layers of explication. There was no excuse for northern aggression, Kurtz assures us, but there are many perfectly reasonable and not racialized explanations for how and why chattel slavery proliferated.

Gone is the apotheosis of the Southern genre, and specifically of the plantation film, that opulent sub-genre that is, in deployment, an amalgamation of so-called ‘women’s pictures’ and history film like *Cimarron*. The distinctly feminine nature of these films resulted in them being taken less seriously than noirs (*They Won’t Forget*), issue pictures (*Road Gang*), or epics (*Birth of a Nation*). This makes *Gone* a special case in the filmography of the South, so it is instructive to contextualize the film in relation to its genre-mates. The film was released nearly-concurrently with the independently developed event film *Jezebel*. *Jezebel* is a little-remembered plantation film with a sordid production history that highlights both the challenges and opportunities that southerners posed for studios. The film was the subject of some excitement upon news of its production, but over time that initial buzz was intercepted by negative feedback comparing the film to *Gone With the Wind*—as we saw with Ms. Brown and Mr. Kurtz’s reactions to the movie. This is interesting because it proves a watershed moment for southern films in critical discourse. Critics began noting the proliferation of southerners, and began the work of defining the characteristics that tied each film within the genre together:

JEZEBEL has similarities to GONE WITH THE WIND due to unnecessary additions from GONE WITH THE WIND source material, not related to the JEZEBEL source material. Specifically: a scene detailing the superiority of the North over the South in matters of war (industry). This was the only mention of the war - in fact, JEZEBEL is set in the antebellum, some time

before the rumblings of war began. SELZNICK offers to “proof” JEZEBEL for similarities to GONE WITH THE WIND source material.²²⁰

Jezebel was accused repeatedly of being a cash-grab by Warner Brothers in an attempt to capitalize on *Gone* mania. And although the film was in pre-production even before the rights to *Gone* were purchased by MGM, Better Davis was allegedly offered the heroine’s role in order to promote her as a period-picture star. As David Selznick notes—accuses—in the above memo to Jack Warner, there were some additions to the original story of *Jezebel* in reaction to the studio’s ever-increasing anxiety about being compared unfavorably with the as-of-yet-unreleased *Gone*. This anxiety was compounded by the studio’s inability to secure a deal with Technicolor that would allow them to release *Jezebel* in color, much to the dismay of director William Wyler, who felt that much of the character of the film was in its aesthetics (as with *Gone*). *Jezebel* takes place during the antebellum, in the New Orleans of 1850. Much cinematographic attention is given to the distinctly foreign and anachronistic character of the French Quarter, and when we first see the protagonist, Julie (a typically campy Davis) is dressed as a creole prostitute, and her love interest Buck is depicted as shiftless in a way that was typically only used in comedy or race films; these are southern aristocrats of a very particular type, dangerously implicated by blackness in a manner rarely seen outside of gothic films. Instead of evoking horror or amusement, though, here mixed-race heritage and social miscegenation is a shorthand for the sexual liberties that Julie

²²⁰ FOLDER: JEZEBEL 2874 SPECIAL “STORY FILE 1 OF 2” CONFIDENTIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO MR. WARNER FROM DAVID SELZNICK. 8 March, 1938

See bibliography for notes.

and Buck take, which are then drawn as direct parallels to the biblical story of Babylon.

Wyler's original bound screenplay describes the opening scene as such:²²¹ -

2. "NEW ORLEANS 1850: in the characteristic type of the period, comes THROUGH the mass of flowers and DISSOLVES OUT as the camera PULLS BACK to show the basket being carried on the head of a young negro woman. It continues back to a: FULL SHOT EXT. STREET IN THE VIEUX CARREEE OF NEW ORLEANS." 6. BUCK CANTRELL is in his late twenties, tall, lean, with a smooth, ready smile and almost indolent manner, so typical of the young ingrown Southerner of the period." (Julie is dressed like a mulatress or a prostitute in the French quarter)"

Julie is not willfully independent like O'Hara—instead, she adopts the demeanor of an exoticized fantasy of mixed-race womanhood that would strike even Micheaux and Griffith as over-the-top. Throughout the first half of the film, Julie repeatedly voices her desire to be sexually submissive to her stoic and almost comically masculine beau Pres, "as a prostitute or mulatress might be."²²² Julie has an obsession with black culture and slavery that sets her apart from the refined Old World manners and demeanor of her peers.²²³ Julie is childish and headstrong, and she wields her sexuality like a blunt weapon against Pres, which culminates early in the film when she dons a red "jezebel" dress to the year's most important ball. Her punishment is swift: she immediately begins to regret her hubris, but Pres forces her to stay at the ball, wearing her dress like a scarlet A. Later in the film, Julie is clearly a changed woman, no longer consorting with the clothes of mulattoes and hookers, which cost her her venerable gentleman suitors. Accordingly, with Julie's change of heart comes a change

²²¹ William Wyler, bound screenplay for *Jezebel*. Dated 10/13/37

²²² *Ibid*, 61

²²³ *Ibid*, 107.

"NOTE: Singing in a group excites a kind of chanting ecstasy in country negroes. The lines in the foregoing should be more chanted than spoken."

in narrative tone toward blackness. Amy, the yankee interloper who dares to inject herself into men's political conversations, exclaims, "Please, Aunt Belle! We're not all Abolitionists at the North, you know. Most people I know are against slavery - that's true. But we still feel that the South can handle its own problems without Northerners mixing in."²²⁴ The references to the South and Julie's feelings toward the ancien regime are mixed; she is not a self-assured white supremacist like O'Hara or *So Red the Rose's* Valette, but she very carefully juxtapositions herself against many suggestion that her actions are in line with yankees mores: "Julie turns, her face flushes, her eyes bright with almost sadistic pleasure. JULIE: Come on — sing, Aunt Belle! (then with a mocking laugh at Amy) Get the little Yankee to join in! We have such charming customs down here! That's why I wore my white dress tonight! I'm being baptized!!"²²⁵ Even the men were not safe from Wyler's mixed messaging: Buck, obsessed with dueling and Dixie, had to die, because he was of the old order, which, as shown throughout the film, and said in Julie's monologue is "beautiful but deadly." Yet his death provides the emotional climax of the film, and is framed in a way that suggests the tragedy was entirely preventable, if not for the hubris of a few individuals, in a rhetorical sleight that

²²⁴ ²²⁴ William Wyler, bound screenplay for *Jezebel*, 187. Other incidences:

Discussing Uncle Tom's Cabin. The screenwriter seems to agree implicitly that Ms Stowe was incorrect in some of her assumptions, as he writes Zette, Uncle Cato, Ti Bat, and Gros Bat as relatively carefree and happy.) [231. partial] "OVER SCENE, during the above, we hear in the distance a mixed chorus of negro voices singing the first verse of "Aunt Dina Drunk", a primitive Louisiana blues - (See "Negro Folk Rhymes" by Thomas W. Talley, published by MacMillan Company)." (Scenes to follow of hysterical singing: 233. - 239.)

See bibliography for notes.

²²⁵ Ibid, 256

recalls the brother vs. brother framing of the Civil War that was popular by the 1930s.²²⁶

Perhaps because of this mixed-messaging, the response from audiences was largely underwhelming, and the critical consensus praised Davis while expressing an increasing fatigue with the Southern subject matter: “The film is beautiful, but empty. Poor characterization. In search of a “good author;”²²⁷ “Torturous melodrama which is not saved by the presence of Bette Davis;”²²⁸ “Melodramatic but interesting [...] Jezebel would have been more effective, in our opinion, if its heroine had remained unregenerate until the end.”²²⁹ Interestingly, many of the negative reviews were also filled with open disparagement of the South: “the deep south, suh;”²³⁰ “Southern ruthlessness;”²³¹ “Julie is good because she is defiant of old south misogyny;”²³² “only progressives kept south from being eradicated by yellow fever;”²³³ “romanticized.”²³⁴ It

²²⁶ Wyler was not easy to work with, either there were complaints about regarding Wyler as a director, especially his tendency to re-take scenes more than a dozen times.

FOLDER: JEZEBEL 2874 STORY - MEMOS AND CORRESPONDENCE 1 OF 2 10/6/37 - 4/15/38

Warner Bros Pictures, Inc Inter-office Communication. To: Mr. Blanke, From: Mr. Wallis, On: January 6 1938, Subject: “Jezebel”
“The only thing that bothers me on JEZEBEL is that the little nigger boy will be a full-grown man by the time Wyler finishes the picture.
- HAL WALLIS

²²⁷ Source: 4/12/38 *Journal of Commerce and Commercial*

²²⁸ 4/2/38 *Christian Science Monitor*

²²⁹ *New York Times*, 11 March 1938

²³⁰ CSM, 4/2/38

²³¹ WT 3/11/38

²³² *Minneapolis Journal* 22 May 1938

²³³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4/4/38

²³⁴ *New York Sun*, 11 March 193

was not all bad—positive reviews were primarily in the vein of that written by the *Chicago Herald's* movie reviewer: “The negro actors are a sheer delight; they are all so loyal, lovable, and friendly. Lou Payton’s Uncle Cato is the idealization of the Southern house servant.”²³⁵

Where *Jezebel* failed to cement a place in the national discourse due to its unfortunate timing against a cultural juggernaut and its wishy-washy messaging, *So Red the Rose* was a relative success due to its lack of pretensions and straight-forward racism. *Rose* takes place at the Portobello plantation in Mississippi, where the young mistress Valette is characteristically childish and in love with a man who is much more morally forthright than she is (her first cousin, Duncan). She is too emotionally immature to begin a healthy relationship with him, so she incessantly teaches him in an attempt to rouse his jealousy, just as Julie does with Pres, and Temple does, and Scarlett, to an extent, does. Through a series of related tropes masquerading as narrative development, Valette’s love for Duncan is tested against her love for her people, and she chooses the confederacy over her cousin. Duncan, parroting the same 1930s party-line about the Civil War being a needless conflict pitting brother against brother that Wyler has his character repeat, is framed as a coward and a villain for his views—his redemption arc is entirely reliant upon his renouncement of the view that yankees and confederates are brother. Moreover, *Rose's* slaves are more in the vein of *Birth* than the kinder-gentler views of the happy slave that were certainly not obscure by the time of the film’s 1935 release. News reaches the plantation’s slaves that General Ulysses S. Grant has taken Vicksburg, and their excitement leads them to revolt

²³⁵ *Chicago Herald* 4/10/38

against their work. The film was so thoroughly, offensively unapologetic that it had to be rewritten half a dozen times to meet code standards. This may partially be explained by who Paramount R&D advisors were. One was not particularly pro-south— confederate espionage expert William G. Beymer—but the other, more active advisors were the UDC and Civil War veteran William H. Hazell, whose remarks about the South in his research notes regularly cross the line from *indifferent* toward slavery to *pro-slavery*. Most importantly, the director, King Vidor, was a conservative Texan who expressed a deep connection to the source material, and who modeled himself after Griffith as an educator. Vidor also directed *Hallelujah* six years earlier, and by 1935 that film had already begun to age poorly, with George Johnson declaring it a minstrel film that same year. Vidor brought his minstrelsy to *Rose*, too: There is a scene in which slave jubilation intermixed with animal squawks and squeals. Then they proceed to, according to one of the white eyewitnesses, “steal everything” and “go wild” (which was not allowed to be pictured, per the Code’s moral requirements, because there was no moral lesson or direct retribution attached; it was simply a bit of racial nastiness). The slaves then join the Yankee army to help “Marsa / Massa Lincoln” and “the Army of de Lawd”. They look forward to “Not another day’s work” and “Just sitting’ in the sun!” Valletta warns them: “I - I don’t say you should be slaves, but I do say you must work if you want to eat. And - and if you want to be happy, you can’t go stealing things that

don't belong to you." and "The Yankees won't free you from work. You'll have to work whether you're free of not."²³⁶

Valette slaps a slave for accusing her of lying, calls the slaves "ungrateful", says they do not "know these Yankee people" and demands to know "why do you want to destroy your own home?" She then proceeds to guilt Cato by asking him if he remembers when he called her his "little white bird" and took care of her. In the screenplay, Valette is described as being "an archetype of the Old South" - "beautiful", fashion-conscious, "insincere" but her "candor" balances this insincerity and gives her the overall effect of being "charming". In addition, she is not of an uncultured south: "She speaks with a mannered accent, not too reminiscent of the Bayous and contriving to give the effect of a drawl without ever falling into the slow tempo of Southern speech". She is, in fact, a Belle made consumption-ready for audiences. The slaves are prone to laziness. Two "Negro maids" assisting Valette with her dressing "The two negro maids are more concerned with tacit admiration than with any real assistance". Duncan (in uncensored script) gives a rousing speech about how brother should not fight against brother "just because he's wearing a different uniform". Unfortunately, "This speech is beyond Valette's intellectual comprehension." In the uncensored script the freed slaves cavort with the animals and "laugh like schoolchildren released from

²³⁶ KING VIDOR so red the rose "CENSORSHIP DIALOGUE SCRIPT" 2 November, 1935

In the screenplay, disturbingly and seemingly without precedent, slaves are suddenly described as niggers; specifically in the scene with a "regulation mammy", a "little nigger girl" and a "yellow pine of a gal". In uncensored screenplay there is a "white prophet" clearly modeled on John Brown, warns "Judgement day is at hand, white folks! Run for your lives! Flee before it's too late! Vicksburg has fallen! (And then, with a broad gesture) The devil am just over the hill.

See bibliography for notes.

school". Cato, after claiming he will soon be "in the golden chairs in the big house", is slashed across the chest and neck with a buggy whip. A "half white negro" leads the slaves in their pillaging. Valette, in her work to eat speech, also claims "I've been working to ear. And everything tastes better because of it." In the uncensored script, in fact, Valette is generally most nasty. Instead of telling Cato that he once loved her, his "little white bird", she calls him a "Good-for-nothing, filthy ape". When she further admonishes him for calling her a liar, Cato gives in: "I didn't mean to say that, Miss Valette. (Begins to weep) I just a slave nigger that don't know nothin'." At one point, the chorus of slaves even acknowledges, in customary song-chant style, that "nobody can raise a blister like Miss Valette." They are respectfully terrified of her. The script ends, in complete revisionist style, with the slaves greeting the returned confederates and exhaling their gladness that things are back to the "old ways."²³⁷

Insecurity is an ugly feeling, and it is obvious, even when framed as a racial burden. The relationship between whiteness and womanhood in the U.S. has always been understood through the lens of race, and of racial proximity. For example, the ultra-feminine Southern belles were made all the more spectacularly girlish by their physical *differentness* from the discursively masculinized Black female body. The Southern belle of plantation films as much more a reflection of the qualities Americans during the first half of the 20th century valued, than she was a recognizable representation of the values held by privileged antebellum women. Her personal qualities may be enumerated as such: she is opinionated, strong-willed, vain, passionate, fiercely protective of Southern traditions, and above all, ultimately willing to

²³⁷ *Jezebel* uncensored bound script

to submit to her family's wishes. The belle play-acts at transgression, but always remembers her place as her father's daughter or husband's wife. She is leisured - that conspicuous hallmark of the planter class - and is proud of her learned helplessness. Those hobbies she does partake in, she does so with little affection, the very model of a bored Victorian. As with most other aspects of Southern history, there has been a conflation of the everywoman with that of the very privileged few - those women who toiled in the field alongside their husbands have had their narratives discursively erased. Instead, a woman she would never have socialized with is now the stand-in for her experiences. This flattening must be acknowledged, because in film, the Southern everywoman was conspicuously absent from most cinematic narratives. Indeed, the only non-belles to be given any significant screen time in Plantation Southernns are Black women, typically either the belle's handmaiden or mammy. Southern society on film, as in the antebellum reality, is rigidly patriarchal, but a good belle resists the oppressive, excessive submission required of her by committing minor acts of non-conformity.²³⁸ The belle is beautiful and tempts, courting lust and feeling the consequences of her overconfidence and hubris, in the form of sexual assault or social shaming. The belle is never a whore - she is promiscuous only in thought, not deed. This is an important distinction. She is redeemable, a virgin ripe for a redemption arc— see, the *bitch Jezebel*. Ultimately, the Belle conforms and is married off. The audience's desire to be provoked is satiated, the censor's need to tutor is met, and the perception of history is shaped. Even the most privileged and wealthy woman is made sympathetic to impoverished depression spectator, which is feat in narrative

engineering. She is complicit in slavery, and perhaps even treats her slaves with contempt, in contrast to the often gentle paternalism of the father or male heir; this also hints at proper gender roles for the viewer. Her personal struggles never put her in physical or economic danger, tangibly - instead, she counts the destruction of her own honor, which is one quality impoverished women, too, can identify with - having nothing to one's name except one's name, and maintaining dignity and pride in the face of adversity. This is how Scarlett O'Hara, over all belles, won the public's heart. Her motivations are clear, and her insecurity makes her sympathetic; she is not too forgiving of the Union in a way that reads as inauthentic like Julie, but she is not as needlessly cruel as Valette. She is the perfect picture of southern womanhood, and a relatively inoffensive—to white audiences—symbol of a time long since forgotten and best only hazily remembered. It was an impossible act to follow.

So what happened after the Civil War? Here, let us end as we began, with *Birth of a Nation*. *Birth* was a cultural event of tremendous magnitude, as one *Daily Variety* critic noted: "Some people drove all the way down from Sacramento to get another glimpse of the film. The only picture that drew an equal crowd was Rudolph Valentino's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*." To fully understand why the Southern genre faded into relative obscurity so quickly, it is crucial to contextualize the arc of its popularity. The genre first came to national prominence with *Birth*, which was in wide release by 1920. The reconstruction era was still recent enough in history that many Americans lived through it, and almost all heard about it in some capacity from those who were alive during that time. Yet as the genre ages over the course of the interwar era, the subject matter becomes more removed from a specific temporality, instead

harkening back to a mythologized time and place, rather than seeking to educate audiences on how they should feel about events that directly impacted the national course. When *Birth* was released, the New South was at the foreground of the American political consciousness; by the time *Gone* was released, the romantic ethics of the old south were tremendously more appealing to ponder than a fraught infrastructural project.

Birth was re-released a dozen times during the interwar era, and with each release came a new slew of protest letters. For example, Will Alexander at the Commission on Interracial Cooperation on July 23rd, 1930 wrote to Will Hays to express his disappointment that the film was being re-issued, possibly as a *talkie*, at a time when the nation needed unity in the face of extreme economic hardship:

I have noticed in the press that the film, "The Birth of a Nation", is to be made into a talking picture. As one who for a long time has been interested in race relations, and as a southerner who has been interested in the development of a spirit of nationalism in the South, I regret this very much. The film version has undoubtedly helped to keep alive sectional bitterness and has tended to arouse and intensify race prejudice, and of course the talking version would do even greater harm in this regard.

The film undertakes to deal with an abnormal period in American history - a period which the most careful historians find it difficult to interpret. Just now, many historians are engaged in trying to untangle and interpret those troubled years. If historians, themselves, cannot agree as to what happened, it would of course be impossible for a motion picture to give an accurate interpretation. It is inevitable, therefore, that in making the film certain lurid, dramatic, and probably exaggerated situations would be played up.

I am sure that the showing of this film has helped to intensify the feeling out of which lynching grew and that it has also been very useful in promoting the Klan in the South. The difficulty is so fundamental to the structure of the film that I doubt changes in certain details would correct its faults. Before anyone would be capable of undertaking the change, he would have to have a thorough understanding of the Southern psychology. This, I am sure, is not available among those who are

professionally interested in making these pictures. It would be particularly unfortunate to give this picture a new lease on life at the present time. Because of the financial depression and the political situation, race feeling in the South is very acute. Lynchings this year have gone beyond what they have been in previous years and we are having almost weekly outbreaks of racial antagonism. The injection of a talking version of "The Birth of a Nation" would greatly intensify this.

I must say that my family have been in the South since before the Revolutionary War. I was brought up in a family that did not have a United States flag until after the Spanish-American War. I know southern traditions and southern psychology, and I have had some training in social psychology. There is a large section of public opinion in the South, especially among the uneducated, that is pathological and dangerous, particularly in regard to the race question. I am sure you will use your influence. I hope that something may be done to prevent the reproduction of the picture. It should be allowed to rest in peace."²³⁹

The response to this plea was swift. On July 28th, 1930, a response from an unnamed secretary read, "In the absence of Mr. Hays I have the privilege of acknowledging your letter of July 23rd." She goes on to say that there were no definite plans for a talkie *Birth*, and she includes for him a copy of the Production Code, and information with how to contact Colonel Jason Joy, head of the Studio Relations Committee. The letters didn't stop there. On August 2nd, 1930: David Jones of the Bennett College for Women

²³⁹ This letter echoes the Minnesota *Spotlight's* open letter to Griffith, dated January 11th, 1923:

The Ku Klux Klan has become a serious matter to American institutions. A careful investigation has revealed that the ease with which Klan solicitors are able to sell membership is directly attributable to the romantic solo cast about the Klan name by your motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*. Whatever we may think of the Klan of 1865, we must agree that the Klan of 1923 is far from romantic or heroic. We feel that it is your duty to use your tremendous power to undo the damage unwittingly done to our country when your *Birth of a Nation* was shown and we call upon you to cooperate with all good American citizens to stamp out this growing evil. May we have an expression of your personal opinion of the Klan and such assurance as you feel necessary that you will take steps to tear away the mantle of heroism in which you once dressed the night riders.

wrote personally to Colonel Joy, an old school friend of his, urging to take Alexander's letter seriously: "All of us who have the best interest of the South at heart, whether Negro of white, would sorely deplore seeing "The Birth of a Nation" revived at this time." Joy replies to him and says he regrets that he has nothing to do with the re-production or distribution of the pictures, as the rights are privately owned by United Artists, Griffiths production company. In a letter from Hays to Milliken on August 4th, 1930 he writes that *Birth* will be released with sound in San Francisco, shortly. "It seems to me that inasmuch as this picture has continued through the years to be one of the outstanding and most successful photoplay ever made, the criticism of Mr. Will Alexander is somewhat ill taken. Surely no one is better qualified to understand the Southern temperament than D. W. Griffith, sincere by birth he is a southerner, keenly alive therefore to sectional sentiment." Similarly, R. E. Plummer on December 18th, 1930, wrote about the opening of the film in New York: "There was a good deal of laughter during the most "dramatic" moments and at times the audience went decidedly "Hoboken" - cheering the heroes and hissing the villains. Our files already contain newspaper clippings dealing with the "race hatred" shown in the film, but inasmuch as it has already had a wide release, and judging by the New York audience reaction, it is possible to assure that no great amount of trouble will ensue from its revival."²⁴⁰

Did things change over time? In a letter from Francis to Joseph Breen on May 13th, 1938, for another re-release.

²⁴⁰ Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. *Birth of a Nation*.

See bibliography for notes.

Mr. Hays talked to Quigley while I was in his office. Quigley was surprised that we found the film unsatisfactory. Hart is not much worried about it either under the Code, but I cannot accept that idea that such a glorification of the Klan and of extra-legal action, is in accord with the section quoted. In my opinion this picture was more responsible than any other single factor in the resurgence of the Klan in the years following its general exhibition. Furthermore, I think our decision here should be in line with the course adopted in *GONE WITH THE WIND* and other stories of the period.

So Breen did find the film to have a few objectionable qualities. In the memo response to *Birth of a Nation* (sent after Griffith applied for an MPAA seal), Breen wrote:

The picture presents one major and one minor Code problem. The major problem is in connection with the portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan. One sequence, for example, shows the klansmen in regalia "on a visit to terrorize a negro barn burner and peace disturber". Another title refers to the fact that "over 400,000 costumes were made (by southern women) and not one trust betrayed." Another sequence following the attempt of the negro "Gus" to rape the white heroine, shows the cross of the Klan being dipped in blood while in the next scene the dead body of "Gus" is thrown against the door of the negro leader Lynch as a crowd of horsemen gallop by.

One section of the code states: "Crimes against the law shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation." It is my opinion that regardless of any justification which may have existed for those activities of the original Ku Klux Klan, which were without legal sanction, this portrayal creates sympathy for those who take the law into their own hands and approbation for their unlawful acts and tends to inspire in others a desire of imitation. The fact that the victims of the Klan's vengeance are members of another race, accentuates the problem and makes the Code violation more serious. Another section of the Code states that miscegenation is prohibited and defines this as "sex relationship between the white and black races." While no actual sex relationship of the prohibited kind is shown, the film contains two references to it, the first in a title referring to Lynch which says: "The

mulatto's love looks high" and the other Lynch's statement to Elsie Stoneman's father: "The young lady I want to marry is your daughter."²⁴¹

Hays replies,

While it is my opinion that the last mentioned item could be easily limited through a bit of judicious cutting, the other Code problem is of major importance and for this reason I do not feel that the Association's seal of approval should be placed upon this picture. It is understood that this film if one of the epics of the screen and constitutes a very important part of the documentary history of the motion picture industry and as such, should be preserved intact. In view of the fact that this film is identified in the public mind in its unapproved form which is in my opinion unsatisfactory under the Code, I recommend that the letter as per the attached be sent to this distributor, stating that the circumstances appear to be such that the PCA cannot service this film for the reasons stated therein.²⁴²

The PCA sent Mr. Mayer a letter directly which states that no seal of approval from the Code is required on *Birth*. *Birth* apparently was exempt from the MPAA PCA as it is "one of less than a dozen masterpieces." Still, there was legal trouble for those who deigned to show *Birth* at their theaters, such as one proprietor, Robert E. Allen, in Denver who was fined 1400\$ and sentenced to 120 days in jail for showing *Birth* six times in April 1930. The Judge presiding handed down the verdict on the basis that the showing violated a city statute which prohibited the showing of any films which are

²⁴¹ Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. *Birth of a Nation*.

See bibliography for notes.

²⁴² Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills. *Birth of a Nation*.

See bibliography for notes.

“Contrary to good order and goals and the public welfare and which tend to stir up or engender race prejudice or as calculated to disturb the peace.”²⁴³

Yet Griffith’s reputation as an auteur of unparalleled skill was undiminished.²⁴⁴

Birth was perceived as so masterfully crafted and persuasive as an educational tool that he was sought after by all manner of amateur filmmaker:

Dear sir: — You are the master film producer of the world, and I am writing to you with the view of interesting you to the extent that you will take up and produce a scenario I have written and given the name or title: “BIRTH OF THE U.S.A. or HOW THE AMERICAN COLONISTS DIVORCED KING GEORGE, III IN 1776.” This was followed by a long list of projected “expenses” for the “scenario.”²⁴⁵

Something from with urges - D.W.Griffith! D.W.Griffith! therefore I cannot help but feel - you are the man, with the - ‘Know How’ to produce the

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ His personal records house hundreds of long-form fan-mail letters, my personal favorite being:

To: D. W. Griffith
From: Lincoln H. Casewell on Cornell Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church
(NYC) letterhead
Undated

“Dear Mr. Griffith:
Again I have been swept into realms supernal by the witchery of your art— such artistry— such scenes picturesque beyond expression. [...]

With what marvelous subtlety but with no less certainty are we made to see the wrong way and the right. [...]

With what artificiality is the so called double standard of morals clearly set forth —insisting that the fallen man shall wear the scarlet letter as well as the fallen woman.

Yes, a hundred pulpits could not preach as effective a sermon as your preachment on the screen of these fundamental facts of love and life, truth and destiny. [...]

(Griffith papers, Reel 9. See bibliography for notes).

²⁴⁵ My Old Kentucky Home Commission
“A State Shrine”
Dated: September 6th, 1923
To: D. W. Grffith

kind of an 'Original' I have just completed. Therefore I write to state the kind of a photoplay it is, - "Human interest Drama in 7 — 8 reels" and ask, should you care to consider same? - if so, I shall be glad to send Manuscript to you by return mail. It has a Ku Klux theme - with a 'Dope' teaching, - an American play - for American people, has good entertainment value, and ought to bring 'big' box office receipts - as the drawing card is the Ku Klux, - and at the present day, it is needless to state that - human curiosity is quickly aroused on this subject, therefore the demand for such a picture- will bring patrons to the box office. Shall I send it for your consideration? and incident'ly [sic] approval.(?)²⁴⁶

Griffith rarely replied to these types of letters, but he obviously kept track of them, to later reference in one of his many editorial pieces. His files contain several

²⁴⁶ REEL 11

Typewritten letter To: D. W. Griffith From: Mrs. V. C. Macdonald Date: November 1st 1923.
Another characteristic example:
Date: Dec. 5, 1923
From: Robert F. C. Minner

Dear Sir:—

Granting that the present day motion-picture productions tend toward and are grounded upon cultured historical facts and events, does it not seem reasonable to suppose that there must soon develop [sic] a broader field of Research for those details, through which the Cinema may become, more and more, a far-reaching truth and authentic reality?

With this belief in mind, as to the motion-picture expansion along lines of historical research, I desire to submit my capabilities for your approval, with a possible position in your Research department in view.

I studied Philosophy and National Economics in the University of Hamburg, obtaining the degree of Cand. Phil. er Rer. Pol. (equal to American B.A. and B.S.).

As an assistant to Professors Dr. Thilenius, director of the Institute of Ethnology in Hamburg, I had the opportunity of having published an Ethnological study, under title of "The Idea Of Art Of The Mexican Indians."

My natural inclination toward the study of History, Culture, Esthetics, Ethnology and Anthropology has, I believe, enabled me to be educated in a right measure for your purposes. Also, my efficiency in the English, French, German and Latin languages must naturally make it possible for me to delve into the literature of every age.

Trusting that you will consider me for any opening you may have in your department, or that you will, at least, allow me to place my theories before you, I am, Very truly yours [signed]

drafts of an essay he was penning that at once discusses the importance of authenticity in films, compliments his own auteurial vision, and promotes the sort of pro-southern mankind's sentimentality that he became known for, in a style clearly modeled after the yellow journalism he was so fond of:²⁴⁷

In the spring of 1930, while filming the production "ABRAHAM LINCOLN" we were on location shooting the battle of Cedar Creek. The stage of the battle we were taking at the time depicted the defeat of one section of the Confederate forces and the Confederate flag bearer was to have fallen with the flag. When the scene had progressed to this point, and before the Confederate colors has touched the ground, one of the Federal soldiers ran out, grabbed the flag, and waving it aloft proceeded to lead the Confederate troops, and in making this switch he ran the risk of great injury because of the number of ground explosions that had been set.

This action was not, of course, in accordance with either history of our story and since the cost of re-taking such a scene was an expensive procedure, I called the actor responsible for the error to me and proceeded to berate him prior to discharging him. Suddenly, in a broad, southern manner of speech, he said: "Mr. Griffith, I'm from Virginia. Both my grandfathers were killed defending that flag and when I saw it fall out there just now I forgot that we were making a motion picture. I am sorry." I am a southerner myself, and my own father defended that same flag, and when this young man told me what he did, my mingled emotions only

²⁴⁷ Griffith was exceedingly sympathetic toward the white immigrant, especially the Irish.

permitted me to say to my assistant "Put this man in a Confederate uniform and get ready to re-take the scene. It will be great this time."²⁴⁸

So what did American audiences learn about the South from the way it was portrayed onscreen by the Southern genre's most characteristic and significant films? The beginning of the interwar era saw Hollywood still in its relative infancy, a wildly experimental medium that was pitched high and low; for a nickel or a quarter you could

²⁴⁸ REEL 18. Also stored with these drafts, interesting, is a 1930 letter to Griffith from Will Hays himself, where he thanks Griffith for making *Abraham Lincoln*, and said his 14 year old son knows history due to it. He also says the film is good for the welfare of the motion picture industry. We can see Griffith's process at work, because he makes another of another item in his filed, entitled: "Pictures Create Reality: Here You See and Head a Deed that Filled the Nation with Grief", which is worth replicating in at length:

Every school child knows that Booth shot Lincoln as the great President sat in his box at Ford's Theatre on April 14th, sixty-six years ago. Every child and adult, looking at this picture from Griffith's "Abraham Lincoln," sees the dreadful calamity as a picture more vivid than it could've possibly made in words. This picture explains the hold of moving pictures on millions of human beings in makes clear the importance of utilizing pictures and education. The day is coming when films for schools and churches will be more important even than films for theaters. A child who sees the life of Lincoln and moving and speaking pictures will never forget it and we'll learn more in two hours than he could possibly learn into months for 10 years from books.

Men have been reading only for a short time they have been seeing for millions of years they and their lower animal ancestors. What we see reaches the brain immediately. This picture shows Lincoln and his wife unsuspecting looking at this stage. In the background stand John's Wilkes Booth murderous fanatic determined to rid the world of one whom he called a monster. Seeing this your imagination tells the rest. You see the president falling to the floor beside his terror-stricken wife. You see Booth jumping from the box to the stage shouting "thus ever the tyrant", injuring his leg and limping off to mount the horse left at the stage door.

The great power of moving pictures is to make real that which is indistinct, dull and uninteresting when presented and written words only. A child sees Lincoln studying as a boy and the little hut with a dirt floor and no windows seize the other Lincoln cutting down trees splitting logs sees Pres. Lincoln bearing the burden of the nation. He sees the sorrowful death and knows that life story for all time. Moving talking pictures dealing with the 100 most important men and women in the world history would do more to teach history writing it indelibly on the brains of children that could be done by all the books ever written.

(New York *Evening Journal* editorial dated March 30, 1931)

be amongst your brethren in the working-class watching a moving picture show with a primitive plot, or you could sit in decorum with your family and become educated via a new technology. It was with Griffith that these two modes of spectatorship merged, where the low met the high with thrill-seeking stuntmen mixing with avid historical re-enactors, all filmed by an auteur with an extremely distinct sense of himself as an artist and an historian. With the consolidation and monopolization of the film industry, the room for dissenting, distinctive voices was significantly reduced. Consequently, the aesthetics of the marginalized were silenced within the mainstream, replicative discursive language of film industry. Southerners proliferated as the South became more prominent in the national discussion about industrialization and economic development evolved, and movies disseminated southern images, rhetoric, and ethics as discursive currency. Popular culture and films becoming social touchstones allowed for the possibility that every American might feel privy to the lived experiences and histories of others.

Not every filmmaker saw themselves as educators, but the movies became a serious endeavor as the industry became more profitable, so *seeing* became *believing*. Those with a stake in how the South was depicted—white supremacists, black folks—wrote to studios and demanded authenticity, and studios employed academics and academically-inclined laypersons in their Research & Development departments to field these concerns and suggest details that might enhance the accuracy of movies. Yet most Americans had little personal stake in the way the South was depicted, so they were more receptive to images without necessarily questioning the intent or consequences. Hollywood during the studio era was hierarchical, yet vulnerable to

scrutiny from the government and powerful special interests groups, so the power was relatively dispersed across a number of individuals or organizations—studios, congressional oversight committees, the Catholic League, the Daughters of the Confederacy. Access to entry into Hollywood power structures was as limited as any other industry, which meant that black folks created a largely separate and parallel movie-making world, and the films these independent artists produced were as structurally limited as any other artifacts of blackness. The same applied to the poor, working white classes which were not yet, by the interwar era, totally united against progressive causes, having retentions from that era present in labor unions and social reformers. Thus the loudest voices were those with the most socioeconomic power, which is why Mrs. Alonzo Richardson of Atlanta, wife of a wealthy bureaucrat and active member of the UDC, wielded more influence over the production of movies than the leaders of the NAACP chapter in Atlanta. Yet the American perception of the South as a place not only of once-great national pride but also of shame could never be totally erased by the outrage of concerned white citizens, so southerners were not propaganda, exactly, either. Resultantly, the Southern genre provides insight into the motives of many groups, and the triumph of auteurial vision and the conventions of contemporary public discourse over heterogeneity and censorship. Rhett's parting phrase to Scarlett, which was included against the repeated objections of the censors, echos the general feeling of audiences toward the Southern genre by the start of the Second World War. The project of the New South was nationally abandoned, the Civil War was re-settled in the court of public opinion, black Americans used mass media technology to widely expose the regime of Jim Crow racial terror for the first time, and

when it came to the particulars of Reconstruction or regional accents, frankly, who would give a damn?

Conclusion

The cultural relevance of the Southern genre into the 21st century is not immediately apparent, but it does come into focus when the primary texts are investigated as artifacts of a political climate, rather than solely relics of Old Hollywood. A modern viewer may not be particularly moved to any emotional or intellectual reaction when viewing *The Texans* or *Road Gang*, but they will immediately recognize the cultural signifiers those films popularized. The belle out of place and time, the corrupt southern prison guard, the men and women who proclaim that the South will rise again (and believe it.) The retentions from the dialogue that emerged around the Southern still very much influences the way Americans understand the South culturally, politically, socially, and economically today.

Culturally, in the American imagination, the South is segregated. Segregated racially, yes, but also separate and different from the rest of the Union. The customs of southerners are perceived as quaint, or inauthentic, or anachronistic—depending on your positionality. In news coverage, the economic crises of the South are highlighted in a way that is not so different from the colonial language used during the New South era; the opioid epidemic is tragic, yes, and white men and women are the primary victims, but resentment at the irresponsible behavior of poor, white trash is still palpable. The agency of southerners is erased in rhetoric concerning nation-building; all southerners are oriented one way, politically homogenized, ignorant and helpless and hopeless. Their accents are used as signifiers beyond regional origin, and the small-town real-Americanism populist politicians of the 21st century emphasize is only

discussed during campaign season. The Southern education system is still mired in reactionary thinking, assigning heavily processed history as required reading for schoolchildren, while feeding them food that is not so different, nutritionally, from the corn mush sharecroppers subsisted on. Conservative morality is championed at the cost of the social safety net, leading impoverished and working poor white folks to vote against their own economic interests in favor of imposing fundamentalist morality on their neighbors. Black folks, meanwhile, are shut out of the system entirely by gerrymandering and voting restrictions that recall the black codes. And this is the general mood—that southerners do it to themselves, that they haven't changed since the antebellum, significantly—they have only become less refined, and more vulgar, a burden in a junior partnership with the rest of the United States. Blackness and the tremendous diversity of the population is erased, in favor of presenting a neat, coherent narrative about the South as a monolith.

William Faulkner and Oscar Micheaux spent their artistic careers grappling with what it means to be southern. Their conceptions of self were tied to their respective racial identities, and Micheaux's was complicated by an acute awareness of the twoness inherent to all black Americans, as was articulated by the New Negro movement. He struggled as an auteur with whether he should present the reality of the race, in all its facets, or if he should focus on uplift; if he should correct the lies of the Dunning school and the segregationists, or if he should rise above it. Faulkner's dilemma was not so different, as a proud southerner who felt deep shame at the corruption and hatred that was becoming synonymous with the South. Faulkner's portrayals of his countrymen, both satirical and dramatic, are shot through with an

intimacy that is present, too, in Micheaux's filmography. These tropes are retained in our culture as the Southern gothic, which has emerged as the dominant narrative of the South in American popular media. Contemporary plantation films, like Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*, Civil War pictures like Sophia Coppola's *The Beguiled*, and antebellum movies like Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* are all unified by a sense of horror and absurdity tied directly to the alienness of a place that seems so strange, so unchanged, so unknowable, that just about anything could, and would, and *did* happen there, in the past, with repercussions felt into the present. Southerners are just removed enough from the rest of America to be easily depersonalized in fiction. The murderous women of Gillian Flynn's 21st century thriller *Sharp Objects* are obsessed with their southern heritage, and literally victimize themselves through the recreation of Civil War atrocities, and through violence against themselves and others. The child rapists and religious fanatics of *True Detective* seem outlandish until they are contextualized as bayou-dwellers. Then, it begins to make sense—then, unreality bends into a simulacrum of reality. It's the heat; it makes them crazy.

Audiences today do not go to the movies to see a southern, like they might go to see a western revival. It is a genre not so much dead as hidden; the draw of going to see a movie about the South is not particularly significant, but going to see a movie about slavery, or war, or crime is, and setting it in Dixie allows for an additional layer of removal between the spectator and the subject matter without veering into the realm of fantasy. So, would *Gone With the Wind* be released to tremendous acclaim and cultural identification today? Not in its current form, but with some tweaking, a dose of weirdness and irreverence, it might. Or it might find an audience with the alt-right, or

the white nationalists. But it is specific to its place and time, and represents a transient era in American history when the South was central to political and cultural discourse. Through the studio system—the R&D departments, the censors, the producers aiming to please—white southerners found a voice, another outlet through which to air their grievances. Hollywood listened, to an extent, and Americans learned, up to a point. D.W. Griffith did succeed in normalizing the terrorism of the first Klan, but prison films also pushed successfully for progress at the opposite end of the political spectrum.

Not since the Civil War was the South so prominently featured in the national imagination, and the give-and-take of a truly vast array of voices resulted in a *moment*. The Southern film is the most tangible remnant we have of that national moment. As the world moved on with the start of the war, the South faded once as a topic of discussion once again, and after the civil rights movement, the South became synonymous with political turmoil. There is no going back to *The Little Colonel*, but the South is still worth a visit every so often, if only to remind the spectator of how very lucky they are they escaped the terrible fate of being left behind.

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- IV. 38 THE HEART OF MARYLAND scrapbook #38 (pages 10-67). Lloyd Bacon; 1927 (Warner Bros., 1927).
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- VII. 4 THE PRODIGAL scrapbook #4 (pages 13-36). Harry Pollard; 1931 (MGM, 1931).
- VIII. 22 THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME scrapbook #22 (pages 62-65). Alfred Santell; 1928 (First National Pictures, 1928).
- IX. 32 MAMMY scrapbook #32 (pages 8-13). Michael Curtiz; 1930 (Warner Bros., 1930).
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²⁵¹ Cited: assistant director's report; lists of people and equipment for Southern trip; contract with Delta Line Steamers for hire of the river steamer, "Kate Adams," October 15, 1926; miscellaneous papers.

²⁵² Cited: notebook containing information as to scenes, camera setups, and continuity.

²⁵³ Cited: release dialogue script by Grover Jones, February 14, 1936, 125 pages.

²⁵⁴ Cited: censor reports, 1937; correspondence, 1937; carbon of letter from Joseph Breen to S.J. Briskin saying the script cannot be approved because the Code precludes "the portrayal of groups of ordinary citizens taking the law in their own hands, while the police are idle," April 28, 1937; PCA synopsis of script; reviews, 1937; MPAA certificate letter, June 18, 1937; credits.

²⁵⁵ Cited: censor reports, 1937-1940; correspondence, 1936-1937; carbon of letter from Joseph Breen to J.L. Warner saying that the outline could not be approved because of "our policy not to approve stories which raise and deal with the provocative and inflammatory subjects of racial and religious prejudice," but that if that was removed the story was acceptable, June 18, 1936; PCA review and synopsis by Eugene O'Neil; reviews, 1936-1937; MPAA certificate letter, October 20, 1936; monthly report by Joseph Breen to Will Hays, October 31, 1936; copy of letter from Marie W. Presstman of the Maryland State Board of Motion Picture Censor, November 13, 1936; copy of letter from F.L. Smith [sic] to F.L. Herron saying the film passed the French censors without any official cuts, but that the Minister of the Interior unofficially asked for changes in some of the dialogue and Warner Bros. complied, July 2, 1937.

²⁵⁶ Cited: censor reports, 1934; correspondence, 1931-1935; monthly report by James Wingate to Will Hays, October 25, 1933; monthly report by Joseph Breen to Mr. Hays, February 1, 1934; mimeo of letter from Mr. Breen to John H. Gain saying the picture could be approved for a seal if the word "nigger" was eliminated from the film, August 22, 1935; MPAA certificate letter, September 5, 1935.

- VI. LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME. Alfred Santell; 1928 (First National Pictures, 1928).
- VII. MOUNTAIN MUSIC. Robert Florey; 1937 (Paramount Pictures, 1937).
- VIII. ROAD GANG. Louis King; 1936.
- IX. STORY OF TEMPLE DRAKE. Stephen Roberts; 1933 (Paramount Pictures, 1933).
- X. THE TEXANS. James Hogan; 1938 (Paramount Pictures, 1938).
- XI. THEY WON'T FORGET. Mervyn LeRoy; 1937 (Warner Bros., 1937).
- XII. THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE. Henry Hathaway; 1936 (Paramount Pictures, 1936)
- XIII. UNCLE TOM'S CABIN Harry Pollard; 1927 (Universal Pictures, 1928).²⁵⁷
- XIV. VIOLENT ROAD 1957-1958. Howard W. Koch; 1958 (Warner Bros., 1958) contains: correspondence, 1957; PCA analysis; credits and synopsis; certificate letter, November 4, 1957; reviews, 1958; censor reports, 1958. Note: Variant title: HELL'S HIGHWAY.
- XV. WAY DOWN SOUTH. Bernard Vorhaus; 1939 (RKO Radio Pictures, 1939)
- XVI. BIRTHRIGHT, Oscar Micheaux; 1938.
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²⁵⁷ Cited: correspondence, 1927-1939; letter from Maurice McKenzie to Jason Joy with attached copy of 2/9/27 letter from Will Hays to Carl Laemmle saying [Joe] Schenck was willing to hold back the release of TOPSY AND EVA, April 15, 1927; letter from Carl Milliken to Mr. Joy with attached memo of 5/13/27 by Lamar Trotti where he quotes from a letter from Mrs. Alonzo Richardson, May 14, 1927; carbon of letter from Mr. Joy to Mr. Milliken discussing the production of the film, May 18, 1927; PCA analysis, May 16, 1939; carbon of letter from Joseph Breen to Maurice Pivar saying certain changes needed to be made to get a rerelease certificate, particularly problems of language, miscegenation and brutality, May 16, 1939; reissue reviews, 1958; censor reports, 1928-1933.

²⁵⁸ Cited: correspondence, 1937-1940; letter from Mrs. Alonzo Richardson to Joseph Breen urging that Miriam Hopkins get the role of Scarlett O'Hara, January 21, 1937; 7page letter from Mr. Breen to David Selznick with requested changes, one of the most important being no suggestion of rape, October 14, 1937; letter from Val Lewton with final copy of screenplay, January 17, 1939; letter from Mr. Breen to Mr. Lewton stating that the final half of the screenplay was unacceptable under the Code, January 24, 1939; 3page memo by Islin Auster listing changes agreed to by Mr. Selznick during a meeting (including dropping the word "damn"), February 9, 1939; letter from the Neighborhood Councils of Washington D.C. to Will Hays worrying about the impact of the film on race relations, May 12, 1939; letter from Mr. Breen to Mr. Selznick saying that "damn" had to be removed from Rhett's line, June 6, 1939; PCA analysis; MPAA certificate letter, September 27, 1939; letter from Mr. Breen to Mr. Hays saying that Mr. Selznick wanted to use "damn" and was going to appeal, October 21, 1939; preview questionnaire; clippings; reviews, 1939-1940; censor reports, 1940-1968.

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- XX. I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG. Mervyn LeRoy; 1932 (Warner Bros., 1932).²⁶⁰
- XXI. JEZEBEL 1933-1948. William Wyler; 1938 (Warner Bros., 1938).²⁶¹
- XXII. LAZY RIVER. George B. Seitz; 1934 (MGM, 1934).
- XXIII. THE LITTLE COLONEL. David Butler; 1935 (Fox Film Corp., 1935).
- XXIV. THE RIVER OF ROMANCE. Richard Wallace; 1929 (Paramount Pictures, 1929).
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- I. O GIRL OF THE OZARKS pressbook, 1935- 36 William Shea; 1936 (Paramount Pictures, 1936)

²⁵⁹ Cited: correspondence, 1928-1939; memo by Jason Joy saying he advised the studio against making the preacher a weak character who succumbs to various temptations and against using the word "nigger," October 4, 1928; memo by L. Trotti to M. McKenzie reviewing the script and saying "(i)f the characters were whites, I would think very definitely that Vidor was treading on very dangerous grounds that of a renegade parson running off with a strumpet, seeing her die, and brutally murdering her lover. But such is the influence of my rearing in the South, I can't get excited about this in the lives of negroes," October 19, 1928; memo by Mr. Joy listing changes he recommended to King Vidor, February 22, 1929; review by F.L. Herron, August 22, 1929; National Board of Review reports, September 6, 1929 and November 19, 1929; censorship report listing suggestions during production and remarks after viewing print, October 15, 1929; copy of memo by C.E.M. to Will Hays saying he saw revised print with MGM executive who accepted further suggestions for cuts, March 18, 1930; MPAA certificate letter, April 21, 1939; censor reports, 1929-1939.

²⁶⁰ Cited: synopsis of novel; correspondence, 1932-1938; carbon of letters from Jason Joy to Darryl Zanuck and Irving Thalberg warning about the Southern reaction to the story and "whether we are willing to incur the anger of any large section by turning our medium of entertainment to anything which may be regarded as a wholesale indictment," February 26, 1932; letter from Mr. Zanuck to Mr. Joy saying he did not want to meet with the other producers making chain gang stories, March 30, 1932; clipping, 1932; carbon of letter from Mr. Joy to Mr. Zanuck saying he should be prepared for criticism from the South and reiterating that he is not "suggesting that you refrain from making the picture or that you depart from the story itself as you have it," July 27, 1932; carbon of letter from Mr. Joy to Mr. Zanuck saying how impressed he was by the film and listing the few items which he thought censor boards might delete, October 17, 1932; PCA review by Geoffrey Shurlock, October 17, 1932; weekly report by James Wingate to Will Hays, October 21, 1932; carbon of letter from [Will Hays] to Sam E. Morris at Warner Bros. discussing the history of censorship in Finland and the reason the film was banned there, July 5, 1934; censor reports, 1932-1940.

²⁶¹ Cited: correspondence, 1933-1938; review of play by E.E.B., December 22, 1933; credits; PCA review by E.R. O'Neil; PCA analysis; MPAA certificate letter, February 1, 1938; press preview program; reviews, 1938; censor reports, 1938-1948.

- II. 0 RIVER OF ROMANCE pressbook, 1928-29 Richard Wallace; 1929 (Paramount Pictures, 1929)
- III. 0 THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE pressbook, 1935-36 Henry Hathaway; 1936 (Paramount Pictures, 1936)
- IV. 2 THE STORY OF TEMPLE DRAKE pressbook, 1932- 33 Stephen Roberts; 1933 (Paramount Pictures, 1933).
- V. 5 MOUNTAIN MUSIC pressbook, 1936-37. Robert Florey; 1937 (Paramount Pictures, 1937).

Paramount Pictures production records, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 191.f1 SO RED THE ROSE assistant director's reports 1935. King Vidor; 1935 (Paramount Pictures, 1935).
- II. 191.f4 SO RED THE ROSE production 1934-1935. King Vidor; 1935 (Paramount Pictures, 1935).²⁶²
- III. 84a.f3 GIRL OF THE OZARKS production 1935-1936. William Shea; 1936 (Paramount Pictures, 1936).²⁶³
- IV. 210.f2 THE TEXANS production 1937-1938. James Hogan; 1938 (Paramount Pictures, 1938).²⁶⁴

Paramount Pictures scripts, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 362.fG168 GIRL OF THE OZARKS script 1936. William Shea; 1936 (Paramount Pictures, 1936).²⁶⁵

²⁶² Cited: memo outlining deal for Maxwell Anderson to write a first treatment, September 20, 1934; memo stating Laurence Stallings had been hired to write a treatment, April 23, 1935; music requirements, June 1, 1935; memo regarding Margaret Sullivan's contract, June 15, 1935; opening and closing notices; synopsis by Marion Valentine, June 29, 1935; memo listing times King Vidor arrived on the set in the morning, July 1, 1935; retake requests; memo regarding use of live ammunition, July 19, 1935; main title billing; breakdowns of time lost during production, September 27, 1935, and September 30, 1935; memo from Sam Frey asking that Randolph Scott's name be given more prominence in the title, November 4, 1935.

²⁶³ Cited: carbon of memo from Jeff Lazarus regarding purchase of story rights, November 20, 1935; opening and closing notices; cast and bit list.

²⁶⁴ Cited: copy of memo from A.M. Botsford to Lucien Hubbard saying that the role for Frances Dee in MARCHING HERDS would be similar to that of WELLS FARGO and it would be better if she played something different, December 18, 1937; memo from Hubbard to Botsford saying he would be sorry to lose Dee as "we certainly need all the boxoffice strength we can get as Randolph Scott is no whirlwind," December 20, 1937; title suggestions; artist engagement authorizations; opening and closing notices; main title billing; cast and bit list.

²⁶⁵ Cited: screenplay, March 25, 1936, with changes of March 26, 1936, 126 pages; synopsis by LaVerne Cooper, March 31, 1936, 12 pages.

- II. 654.fM901 MOUNTAIN MUSIC script 1937. Robert Florey; 1937 (Paramount Pictures, 1937).²⁶⁶
- III. THE STORY OF TEMPLE DRAKE. Stephen Roberts; 1933 (Paramount Pictures, 1933).²⁶⁷
- IV. THE TEXANS. James Hogan; 1938 (Paramount Pictures, 1938).²⁶⁸

Mary Pickford papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 21.f205 THE HILL BILLY script, undated. George Hill; 1924 (Allied Producers and Distributors, 1924).
- II. 21.f207 THE HILL BILLY correspondence, 1923. George Hill; 1924 (Allied Producers and Distributors, 1924).
- III. 21.f210 THE HILL BILLY publicity, 1923-1927. George Hill; 1924 (Allied Producers and Distributors, 1924).

Turner/MGM scripts, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 2338.fP1066 THE PRODIGAL Harry Pollard; 1931 (MGM, 1931).²⁶⁹
- II. 357.fB1581 BLACKMAIL H. C. Potter; 1939 (MGM, 1939).²⁷⁰
- III. 1184.fH38 HALLELUJAH King Vidor; 1929 (MGM, 1929).
- IV. 1414.fI451 IN OLD KENTUCKY John M. Stahl; 1927 (MGM, 1927).
- V. 1656.fL458 LAZY RIVER George B. Seitz; 1934 (MGM, 1934).

Warner Bros continuity scripts, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 3.f33 MAMMY script, 1930. Michael Curtiz; 1930 (Warner Bros., 1930)

²⁶⁶ Cited: screenplay by John C. Moffitt, Duke Atteberry, Russel Crouse and Charles Lederer (story by MacKinlay Kantor), February 26, 1937, 109 pages.

²⁶⁷ Cited: 1. first script by Maurine Watkins and Oliver H. P. Garrett, December 22, 1932; 2. final script by Maurine Watkins and Oliver H. P. Garrett, January 7, 1933; 3. release dialogue script, May 1, 1933.

²⁶⁸ Cited: 1. synopsis, "Marching Herds," by Paul Sloane, October 26, 1937, 15 pages; 2. synopsis, "Marching Herds," December 28, 1937; script, March 10, 1938 [handwritten on cover, "W. W. Haines, changes by B. Millhauser"; with changes through April 14, 1938]; 4. release dialogue script, July 11, 1938.

²⁶⁹ Cited: temporary incomplete screenplay (The SouthERNER) by Bess Meredyth and Wells Root, September 10, 1930, 139 pages; complete OK screenplay (The SouthERNER) by Bess Meredyth and Wells Root, October 4, 1930, through October 24, 1930, 178 pages [also 28 page synopsis by W. F. Willis, November 3, 1930]; dialogue cutting continuity (The SouthERNER) by Margaret Booth (editor), February 2, 1931, through March 7, 1931, 79 pages and 76 pages [2 copies, one "no changes" copy].

²⁷⁰ Cited: synopsis dictated by Robert Grey of I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG (used for research), October 21, 1938, 11 pages [2 copies, with different handwritten notes].

Marty Weiser papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 16.f543 THEY WON'T FORGET promotion 1937. Mervyn LeRoy; 1937 (Warner Bros., 1937).²⁷¹

Rudy Behlmer papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 12.f103 GONE WITH THE WIND Margaret Mitchell 1936-1996.²⁷²

Mary Brian papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 4.f13 RIVER OF ROMANCE clipping 1929. Richard Wallace; 1929 (Paramount Pictures, 1929).

William Faulker scripts, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 56.f502 BATTLE CRY script 1940-1943.²⁷³

Gladys Hall papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 12.f481 Walthall, Henry article, "The Little Colonel!" by Gladys Hall, 6 pages

Joseph and Jeanne Henabery papers, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

- I. 1.f15 THE BIRTH OF A NATION miscellaneous 1937-1949. D. W. Griffith; 1915 (Epoch Producing Corporation, 1915).²⁷⁴

Wibur G. Kurtz collection, Margaret Herrick Library for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.

²⁷¹ Cited: publicity gag of telegrams of praise from major Warner Bros. stars, typed list of messages, and eight individual mock telegrams, June 12, 1937, through June 26, 1937; news release, July 8, 1937.

²⁷² Cited: photocopies of correspondence from Margaret Mitchell, October 6, 1936, through March 24, 1939.

²⁷³ Cited: revised temporary screenplay by William Faulkner, August 5, 1943, approximately 250 pages; day player agreement for Marie Farnum, May 14, 1940 [in envelope marked "dialogue for Marie Farnum"; for DIAMOND FRONTIER, Universal, 1940].

²⁷⁴ Cited: article "The Birth of a Nation" by Milton Mackaye, November 1937; two articles about Lincoln on the screen; an article about Lincoln; program for the rerelease of the film at the Stanton Art Theatre.

- I. 1.f11 GONE WITH THE WIND correspondence 1935-1938.²⁷⁵
- II. 2.f23 GONE WITH THE WIND production 1938-1939.²⁷⁶
- III. 2.f28 GONE WITH THE WIND research 1938.²⁷⁷
- IV. 2.f29 GONE WITH THE WIND research 1939.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Cited: letter from Margaret Mitchell Marsh to Wilbur Kurtz requesting Mr. Kurtz to read two and a half chapters of "Gone with the Wind" for historical accuracy, November 19, 1935; letter from Mr. Kurtz to Eugene Harrington, Atlanta Chamber of Commerce president, regarding Mr. Kurtz's desire to direct the historical setting for GONE WITH THE WIND, December 7, 1936 [incomplete, page two missing]; letter from Harrington to F. A. Rohrs at United Artists, Atlanta, recommending Mr. Kurtz, December 24, 1936; reply from William H. Wright, assistant to David O. Selznick, January 11, 1937; letters from the Atlanta Ladies Memorial Association and the Atlanta Chapter of United Daughter of the Confederacy to George Cukor and Mr. Selznick endorsing Mr. Kurtz as technical adviser, March 24, 1937; telegram invitation from Katharine Brown to Mr. Kurtz regarding meeting Cukor, March 27, 1937; letter from Ms. Brown to Mr. Kurtz regarding payment and timetable for services, May 26, 1937; handwritten letter from Mr. Kurtz to Ms. Brown regarding his reaction to JEZEBEL, circa March 25, 1938, 7 pages; correspondence regarding Mr. Kurtz's continued services and compensation, October 24, 1938, through November 18, 1938; letter from Mr. Kurtz to C. F. Palmer regarding the filming of the burning of Atlanta scene, December 1938.

²⁷⁶ Selznick International Pictures, Inc., personnel list, September 24, 1938; Margaret Mitchell's endorsement of the cast from the "Atlanta Constitution," January 16, 1939; memo from David O. Selznick to Daniel O'Shea regarding GONE WITH THE WIND and REBECCA, February 8, 1939; miscellaneous script breakdown pages [for discarded and replacement pages], January 23, 1939, through May 12, 1939; E. G. Boyle montage, May 22, 1939; montage notes, August 10, 1939; Wilbur Kurtz comments on text of titles, September 20, 1939; Mr. Kurtz annotated handwritten calendar for 1861-1864 with GONE WITH THE WIND events, September 25, 1939; memo from Annie Kurtz to Marion Dabney regarding Mammy costume, undated; one handwritten and two typed lists of title cards and artwork for premiere, undated.

²⁷⁷ Cited: Wilbur Kurtz research on artillery battalions, November 19, 1938; songs, November 25, 1938; articles used in a confederate hospital, December 2, 1938; barbecue at Twelve Oaks [with drawings], December 5, 1938; bazaar sequence, December 14, 1938; details obtained from Margaret Mitchell, December 17, 1938; environs of Tara research with plot plan of Tara, December 20, 1938; Federal army equipment, December 23, 1938; letter from Kurtz to Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad regarding use of "The General" locomotive, December 28, 1938.

²⁷⁸ Cited: correspondence regarding possible use of "The General" locomotive, January 3, 1939, through January 21, 1939; Wilbur Kurtz research on the Atlanta car shed, January 3, 1939; Negro labor battalion, January 3, 1939; back yard at Tara, January 14, 1939; artillery data from U.S. War Department, January 28, 1939; field artillery, February 8, 1939; memo regarding proportion of men to women extras, March 13, 1939; Negro labor battalion costume and tools, March 17, 1939.

- V. 3.f30 GONE WITH THE WIND research 1939.²⁷⁹
- VI. 3.f31 GONE WITH THE WIND research 1939.²⁸⁰
- VII. 3.f40 THE OLD SOUTH script 1939-1940.²⁸¹

D.W. Griffith papers, 1872-1969. ca. 60 cubic feet. Frederick: University Publications of America, 1982.

- I. Reel 1 (1900-1936)
- II. Reel 10 (*The White Rose* materials)
- III. Reel 11 (*The White Rose* materials)
- IV. Reel 17 (*Abraham Lincoln*; "The Birth of Texas" materials)
- V. Reel 18 (*Abraham Lincoln* materials)
- VI. Reel 19 (Draft of speech defending *Birth of a Nation*)
- VII. Reel 32 (*Abraham Lincoln*, *The White Rose* materials)

Warner Bros. Archives, University of Southern California.

- I. FOLDER: JEZEBEL 2874 SPECIAL "STORY FILE 1 OF 2"
- II. FOLDER: JEZEBEL RESEARCH 1 of 3
- III. FOLDER: JEZEBEL J-20 2014 SPECIAL STORY - MEMOS AND CORRESPONDENCE 2 OF 2, 2/15/35 - 8/16/37
- IV. FOLDER: JEZEBEL PICTURE FILE 2874A SPECIAL. Number: 191
- V. FOLDER: JEZEBEL 2874 STORY - MEMOS AND CORRESPONDENCE 1 OF 2 10/6/37 - 4/15/38
- VI. FOLDER: JEZEBEL PICTURE FILE 2874A SPECIAL
- VII. FOLDER: JEZEBEL J-20 2014 SPECIAL STORY - MEMOS AND CORRESPONDENCE 2 OF 2, 2/15/35 - 8/16/37
- VIII. NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS: JEZEBEL
- IX. FOLDER: I'm a fugitive from a chain gang: comment 1994, February 19th 1932
- X. FOLDER: I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG - STORY LEGAL
- XI. FOLDER: I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG
- XII. FOLDER: I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG - STORY FILE
- XIII. NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS: I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG

²⁷⁹ Cited: letter from Wilbur Kurtz to Sally Washington Maupin regarding Confederate battle flags controversy, April 8, 1939; letter from Mr. Kurtz to Annie Pye regarding Georgia cotton press, April 21, 1939; letter from Walter McElreath to Mr. Kurtz regarding convict labor for Scarlett's sawmill, May 1, 1939; memo from Mr. Kurtz and Miss Myrick to David O. Selznick regarding Scarlett shoeing the horse scene, May 24, 1939; speech of the soap box orator, May 30, 1939; letter from Wilbur Kurtz, Jr. regarding Confederate battle flags, June 9, 1939; memo from Mr. Kurtz regarding the battlefield across which Scarlett and the escape wagons move, en route to Tara, June 20, 1939, and June 22, 1939.

²⁸⁰ Cited: Wilbur Kurtz comments on text of titles, September 20, 1939; Confederate army uniform research, undated.

²⁸¹ Cited: notes [labeled "notes on GONE WITH THE WIND"] dictated to a stenographer in Fred Zinnemann's office, November 10, 1939, 6 pages; final narration, January 2, 1940; narration, undated, 7 pages.

- XIV. FOLDER: HEART OF MARYLAND STORY SUMMARY Number: 1956B
- XV. FOLDER: HEART OF MARYLAND STORY CHANGES Number: 1956B
- XVI. FOLDER: LORDS OF THE LAND - STORY MEMOS + SCHEDULE Number: 2034 B
- XVII. FOLDER: LORDS OF THE LAND - STORY FILE (WHITE BONDAGE) Number:
2882B
- XVIII. FOLDER: WHITE BONDAGE Number: 1019 A
- XIX. FOLDER: SANTA FE TRAIL Story file 2879
- XX. FOLDER: SANTA FE TRAIL Story memos and correspondence 1-4 2226
- XXI. FOLDER: SANTA FE TRAIL 683

George P. Johnson Negro Film Collection, University of California, Los Angeles,
Performing Arts Library.

King Vidor papers, University of California, Los Angeles, Performing Arts Library.

- I. Box 1 (SO RED THE ROSE)
- II. Box 3 (HALLELUJAH!)
- III. Box 4 (SOUTHERN STORM)
- IV. Box 5 (Production and Correspondence, 1937-1959)
- V. "Interview of King Vidor" (local: 584; OPAC: 2723063)

William Wyler papers, University of California, Los Angeles, Performing Arts Library.

- I. Box 43 (Folder 7) Bound script. 10/13/37, final.
- II. Box 56 (Folder 3) Clippings. Major U.S. newspapers, regional U.S. newspapers,
trade papers.
- III. Box 57 (Folder 7) Interviews. 1947 - 1975.
- IV. Box 58 (Folder 1) Interviews. 1976 - 1981.
- V. Box 58 (Folder 2) Congratulatory and personal letters; letters relating to interviews.
- VI. Box 58 (Folder 3) Clippings on W.Wyler's career. 1942-1960.
- VII. Box 58 (Folder 4) Clippings on W.Wyler's career. 1961-1980.
- VIII.Box 58 (Folder 5) Critical essays and articles on W.Wyler's films.

Filmography

The Birth of a Nation (1915, 1918, 1923, 1932). D. W. Griffith, Inc.; United Artists. Silent, Black & White.

Within Our Gates (1920). Micheaux Film Co.; Micheaux Film Co.; Quality Amusement. Silent, Black & White.

The White Rose (1923). D. W. Griffith, Inc.; United Artists. Silent, Black & White.

Body and Soul (1925). Micheaux Film Corp.; Micheaux Film Co. Silent, Black & White.

In Old Kentucky (1927). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp. (Loew's Inc.); Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corp. Silent, Black & White. Based on the play *In Old Kentucky* by Charles Turner Dazey (1893).

The Heart of Maryland (1927). Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.; Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. Silent, Black & White. Based on the play *The Heart of Maryland* by David Belasco (1895).

Hallelujah (1929). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp. (Loew's Inc.); Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Distributing Corp. (Loew's Inc.) Sound, Black & White. Also released in silent version.

Hearts in Dixie (1929). Fox Film Corp.; Fox Film Corp. Sound; Black & White.

River of Romance (1929). Paramount Famous Lasky Corp.; Paramount Famous Lasky Corp. Sound, Black & White. Based on the play *Magnolia* by Booth Tarkington (1923).

The Black King (1932; also known *Empire Inc, Harlem Big Shot*). Southland Pictures Corp.; Southland Pictures Corp. Sound, Black & White.

I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932). Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.; Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.; The Vitaphone Corp. Sound, Black & White. Based on Robert E. Burns's autobiographical book *I Am a Fugitive From a Georgia Chain Gang!* (1932).

Lazy River (1934; also known as *Bride of the Bayou, Dance Hall Daisy, In Old Louisiana, Louisiana, Louisiana Lou, Ruby*). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp. (Loew's, Inc.); Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp. Sound, Black & White. Based on the play *Ruby* by Lea David Freeman (undated).

The Little Colonel (1935). Production Company: Fox Film Corp. A B. G. DeSylva Production; Fox Film Corp. Physical Properties: Sound, Black & White with Color Sequences. Based on the novel *The Little Colonel* by Annie Fellows Johnston (1895).

So Red the Rose (1935). Paramount Productions, Inc.; Paramount Productions, Inc. Sound, Black & White. Based on the novel *So Red the Rose* by Stark Young (1934).

White Bondage (1937; also known as *Lords of the Land*). Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.; Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. Sound, Black & White.

Jezebel (1938). Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. A William Wyler Production; Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. Sound, Black & White. Based on the play *Jezebel* by Owen Davis, Sr. (1933).

Santa Fe Trail (1940; also known as *Diary of the Santa Fe*). Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.; Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. Sound, Black & White.

Gone with the Wind (1940). Selznick International Pictures, Inc.; In association with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp. Loew's Inc. Sound, Technicolor. Based on the novel *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell (1936).

Grapes of Wrath (1940). Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. A Daryl F. Zanuck Production; Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. Sound, Black & White. Based on the novel by John Steinbeck (1939).